

A Critical Examination of the Ecclesiology of John Nelson Darby

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Abstract

This thesis examines the ecclesiology, or doctrine of the church, of John Nelson Darby (1800-1882), who was one of the leading and most prominent members of the Plymouth Brethren in the nineteenth century.

The thesis systematically outlines the structure of Darby's thought on the subject of ecclesiology. It explains how Darby defined the church and understood its nature. His ecclesiology is shown to be foundational to the system of Dispensationalist theology in that the church is seen in occupying a period of time unforeseen in biblical prophecy. Darby's ecclesiology is also shown to be an ecclesiology of crisis in that he believed that the church had fallen into such a state of ruin that no bodies existed that could truly be described as churches.

The thesis considers Darby's solution to the ruin or failure of the church found in 'meeting in the name of the Lord.' It examines how Darby's view of how the church should meet successfully synthesized the conflicting concepts of unity and separation. It suggests that other writers have not always recognized how Darby distinguished between separation from individuals and separation from institutions. Nevertheless while arguing that Darby's ecclesiology achieved a stable synthesis between unity and separation, it presents a number of practical problems with Darby's ecclesiology. Attention is given to Darby's teaching on discipline, ministry, church government and sacraments.

The thesis considers his ecclesiology within a number of contexts. First, its place within the development of ecclesiology in theological history and in relation specifically to modern ecclesiologies. Second, in his life and involvement with the Brethren movement. Third, his role in the development of American fundamentalism, a major proportion of which has adopted significant aspects of his theology, particularly Dispensationalism, a form of millennial theology that makes a strong distinction between the church and the nation of Israel within salvation history. This thesis argues that while some American fundamentalists adopted Darby's dispensational views, they found very different practical applications for them in their ecclesiastical activity. A number of reasons are considered as to why they did not adopt Darby's ecclesiology in its entirety. Fourthly, the thesis considers the place of Darby's ecclesiology in relation to other ecclesiastical movements in nineteenth century Britain. It argues that Darby's ecclesiology shared similar themes to three ecclesiastical movements, Evangelicalism, the Oxford movement and Edward Irving's restorationist movement.

This thesis is entirely the student's own work. It has not been submitted for any degree other than that of Doctor of Philosophy. The thesis has not been presented to any other educational institution in the UK or Overseas.

Any views expressed are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University.

Signed

Date 8/11/09

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Chapter 1: Introduction to Ecclesiology

Jesus said “I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

Since then, many leading theologians in the history of Christianity have articulated an understanding of the church, among them Cyprian of Carthage, John Calvin, Richard Hooker and Hans Kung. This thesis concerns John Nelson Darby, a figure who is not often considered in any list of leading theologians, but who is justifiably well known for two reasons. The first is his role in shaping the history of the Plymouth Brethren movement¹ worldwide and the second is his role in developing a system of Premillennial² theology that became known as Dispensationalism, a theology that has enjoyed much support amongst American fundamentalists. Particularly with regard to the latter, Darby is better known for his views on eschatology; his theology of last things. However, his ecclesiology or doctrine of the church was of equal importance within his thought and had an impact on both the Brethren and Dispensational theology.

Towards an understanding of ecclesiology

The word ecclesiology comes from the Greek word *ekklesia*, which means assembly, a word frequently translated as ‘church’ in English Bibles. Ecclesiology is that part of theology that deals with the subject of the church or the Christian community. In whatever place Christianity is found, it is accompanied by some form of church.

¹ The Plymouth Brethren are a movement of conservative Protestant Evangelicals who began in Dublin in the 1820s. They are characterised by a lack of formality in their meetings and a refusal to accept denominational structures. The Brethren are divided into two main groups, the Open Brethren and the Exclusive or Closed Brethren (who are themselves divided into different parties). The Open Brethren sided with George Muller in the 1849 Bethesda controversy (see chapter two) while the Exclusive Brethren took the side of John Nelson Darby.

² Holding that Christ’s coming precedes the establishment of a thousand-year kingdom.

Ecclesiology concerns itself with the nature, purpose, government and activity of the church. This does raise the question of what is meant by the *church*. The definition of the church is in itself a key question of ecclesiology. What will suffice for the purpose of this introduction is S.J. Grenz's fairly basic definition:

Fundamentally, the church of Jesus Christ is neither a building nor an organisation.³ Rather, it is a people who see themselves as standing in a relationship to the God who saves them and to each other as those who share in this salvation.⁴

This definition captures the notion of the church as a community of people who belong to Christ and share in a common salvation. While the student of ecclesiology will look into the theology of Old Testament and God's relations with the nation of Israel and may see a good deal of continuity between that and the church, he or she is chiefly concerned with the Christian church that is found in the New Testament and which had continued into church history. Moltmann adds a further dimension, by recognising a *kerygmatic* or apologetic purpose in the field of ecclesiology:

But the church is at the same time under obligation to men (Rom 1:4). Consequently it will at all times render an account to men about the commission implicit in its faith and the way it is fulfilling that commission. It will reflect on its life and the expression of its life in the forum of the world.⁵

The Nicene creed confesses belief in one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.

Traditionally, theologians have spoken of unity, catholicity, apostolicity and holiness

³ This part of the definition would be challenged by traditionalist Roman Catholics who view the institution of the Roman Catholic church as identical with the church of God.

⁴ S.J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, Carlisle, Cumbria, Paternoster, 1994, p.605

⁵ J. Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, translated by M. Kohl, London, SCM, 1977, p.1

as the marks of the church.⁶ These are core characteristics that have been held to define the essence or nature of the church. This raises the key question of how these marks should be understood. For instance, should the apostolicity of the church be understood in terms of an apostolic succession of bishops by handing down the spirit of the apostles through the laying on of hands, or should it be understood as the continuity provided by the preaching of the apostles' doctrine? This issue was of crucial importance in the Reformation era. While not rejecting the creedal markers, the Reformers introduced an alternative way of defining the church. They held that the church is found where the Word of God is preached and where the sacraments are correctly administered.⁷

Ecclesiology in history

It was not until the 15th century that ecclesiology began to be treated by a significant number of writers as a separate theme in theology.⁸ In the patristic era, works on the church, such as the epistles of Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, were occasional polemics arising out of controversy. Likewise, in the scholastic era, theologians had little to say on the subject of the church, despite the importance of the institution of the Catholic Church in medieval society.⁹

Amongst the early church fathers, there was almost no attempt to systematically define the church. However, there was a strong trend towards the establishment of

⁶ H. Kung, *The Church*, translated by R. and R. Ockenden, Tunbridge Wells, Kent, Search Press, 1968, p.263

⁷ L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 1958, p.560

Some of the reformers, such as Calvin, also added the faithful administration of church discipline.

⁸ W. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol.3, Gottingen, Germany, Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1993.

⁹ Berkhof, 1958, p.559

external unity.¹⁰ The one most important writer on the subject of the church in the patristic era, Cyprian bishop of Carthage (d.258), held that Jesus Christ had established through the apostles a succession of bishops with authority over the church. The external unity of the church was centred on these bishops and to reject them was schism. As Cyprian put it:

Whence you ought to know that the bishop is in the church, and the church is in the bishop; and if any one be not with the bishop, that he is not in the church.¹¹

This understanding of ecclesiology in north Africa underwent something of a crisis in the fourth century. A faction that came to be known as Donatists, after their leader Donatus (d. 355), insisted that those who denied the faith in times of persecution should be put out of the catholic church. If they were not, then schism was justified in their view.¹² The Donatists required the re-baptism of those who had been baptized under compromising clergy. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo (354-430) countered their view by arguing for a distinction between the visible and invisible church.¹³ He argued from the parable of the wheat and tares that the visible, external church necessarily contained a mixture of good and evil:

Now the Lord Jesus Christ explained this parable also; and said that He was the sower of the good seed, and He showed how that the enemy who sowed the tares was the devil; the time of harvest, the end of the world; His field, the whole world. And what saith He? "In the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first tares, to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn." Why are ye so hasty, He says, ye servants full of zeal? Ye see tares among the wheat, ye see tares among the wheat, ye see evil Christians among the good; and ye wish to root up the evil ones; be quiet, it is not the

¹⁰ E.D. Radmacher, *What the Church is all about*, Chicago, Moody, 1978, p.31

¹¹ Cyprian, *The Epistles of S. Cyprian* 68.8

¹² A.E. McGrath, *Christian Theology*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1997, p.463

¹³ Radmacher, 1978, p.47

time of the harvest. That time will come, may it only find you wheat! Why do ye vex yourselves? Why bear impatiently the mixture of the evil with the good? In the field they may be with you, but they will not be so in the barn.¹⁴

This laid the foundation for the distinction between the visible and invisible church which became important during and after the Reformation era, as Protestants sought to justify their own secession from the Catholic church. It will be shown in this thesis, that the concept of a visible church was strongly rejected by Darby, who insisted on the fundamentally visible nature of the church as a body.

The commitment to external unity continued in the west, leading to the development of the papacy as the central governing organ of the Catholic church. In this process, Augustine's teaching played a major part. The western Roman Empire had collapsed, leaving the Catholic church as the dominant force in the west, led by the bishops of Rome. Augustine helped to establish the western church's new status through his major work, *The City of God*, in which he had identified the church as the new empire or "City of God." This change was also accompanied by an increased distinction between clergy and laity and an identification of the church as an institution with the kingdom of God.¹⁵ This concept of the medieval church was challenged by the 16th century Reformation movement, which had soteriology at the forefront of its concerns. This in turn had real implications for ecclesiology. The reformers rejected the notion of a mediatorial church dispensing salvation through its sacraments.¹⁶

¹⁴ Augustine, *Sermons on selected lessons in the New Testament* 23.1

¹⁵ Berkhof, 1958, p.559

¹⁶ K. Rahner "Church" in *Encyclopaedia of Theology*, London, Burnes and Oates, 1975

Ecclesiology in the modern era

In order to fully understand the implications of the ecclesiology of John Nelson Darby, it is impossible for us to forget the huge developments that have occurred in ecclesiology over the last century. It is from this basis of new developments that we must contextualize the theology of a historical figure such as Darby.

Three issues have been of particular importance in the development of modern ecclesiology; the ecumenical movement and the problem of denominational division, the relation of the church to the world, particularly the world's politics and the implications of historical criticism, particularly for the origins of the church. One important difference between the ecclesiologists of the modern era and those of the past is their tendency not to seek a theoretical essence of the church, but rather to focus on the mission of the church and to see it in more dynamic terms.¹⁷

Karl Barth (1886-1968)- The Church as bearer of the Word of God

One of the most important theologians of the modern era was Karl Barth. Barth tended to speak of the Christian community, rather than the church, reflecting his deep criticism of much of the institutional church, both Protestant and Catholic.¹⁸ In his commentary on Romans, Barth took a somewhat apophatic approach to the subject of the church; where he considered the church, he viewed it as an empty vessel

¹⁷ Grenz, 1994, p.604

¹⁸ J.J. Buckley, "Christian Community, Baptism and the Lord's Supper" in *Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. J. Webster, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p.195

through which the Word of God is made known.¹⁹ However, in his later work *Church Dogmatics*, he took a more positive approach to ecclesiology.

In *Church Dogmatics*, Barth examined the question raised by historical criticism about the founding of the church. He argued that the lack of material in the synoptic gospels dealing with the subject of the founding of the church should not lead to the conclusion that the church had no connection with the narrative of the synoptic gospels and the Jesus story, a view taken by some critical scholars. Instead the synoptics should be seen as the story of the Christian community and the Christ event that forms its background.²⁰ The formation of this Christian community was a key part of the ministry of Jesus. This community was to be his witnesses. Barth argued that the implications of discipleship included membership of this new community, as all Christians were to be witnesses of this same Christ event.²¹ The knowledge of Christ's saving work and his coming kingdom distinguished the church from the world.²² Barth therefore identified the witness and proclamation as central to the life of the church. He also attached great importance to the visible dimension of the church, as he argued, "We start off with the general observation that it is not improper, but proper to the Christian community to be visible, and indeed virtually to be so to every eye in every possible aspect of human affairs."²³ Barth develops the theme of the church's visibility by speaking of its worldliness. The church's mission to the world, as he puts it, requires that it must be in the world, identify with the world and communicate to the world, for "It can be faithful to Him only in exact and honest

¹⁹ H.V. Von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. E.T. Oakes, San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1992, p. 104

²⁰ K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol.IV.3.2, trans. GW Bromiley, Edinburgh, T and T Clark, 1962, p.684

²¹ *Ibid*, p.683

²² *Ibid*, p.715

²³ *Ibid*, p.722

sober correspondence to His coming in the flesh. In accordance with His example, it can meet the world only on its own level, as itself visible to the world and wholly and utterly worldly.”²⁴

Just as Christ entered the world and identified with it, so must the church, in Barth’s view. Such a view provides a helpful basis for developing a theology of mission. Barth denied however, that the church was a continuation of the incarnation of Christ,²⁵ in his view this would have compromised what he saw as the invisible dimension of the church, namely its relation to the risen saviour ontologically distinct from itself. This relationship was fundamental to the church’s existence, hence, “we can and must venture to say that the being of the community is a predicate or dimension of the being of Jesus Christ Himself. In this full and strict sense it belongs to Him and is His property. This is the source of its life and existence.”²⁶

Barth viewed the church as having a distinct role in relation to salvation as an event.²⁷

The church is the location of this event:

It is in the community first, and in the life of the men called to it and gathered in it, that salvation, reconciliation, the covenant, the justification of men before God and His sanctification for Him, can and should be expressed de facto, that the peace of God which passeth understanding should be experienced, tasted and felt as an event.²⁸

In the church, the Word of God is encountered and it is this that brings salvation and constitutes the community as the church. It has been argued that Barth focused too

²⁴ Ibid, p.725

²⁵ Ibid, p.729

²⁶ Ibid, p.754

²⁷ Radmacher, 1978, p.97

²⁸ Barth, 1962, p.764

much on the activity of the church and its experience of the Word at the expense of developing the idea of the church's essence as the body of Christ.²⁹ It may be questioned whether the notion of one universal church can be sustained under Barth's ecclesiology of word-centred preaching communities.

Jürgen Moltmann (b. 1926)- the Church as the Citizens of the Kingdom

Jürgen Moltmann developed an ecclesiology that was focused on the eschatological coming of the Kingdom of God. This is reflected in his varying descriptions of the church as the 'Exodus community', the 'vanguard of the new humanity' and the 'beginning of the reconciled cosmos.'³⁰ Moltmann's most important work on the church was *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*.³¹ This was written in the context of his concern for the suffering of Christians worldwide and his involvement in a number of political movements.³² Thus, the work had concern for the liberation of suffering humanity at its heart. Moltmann gave his qualified support to Latin American liberation theology and identified liberation as a key concept in defining ecclesiology.³³ One novel feature of the work is Moltmann's re-definition of the marks of the church in politicised terms. Thus, he described the church's unity as freedom, its holiness as poverty, its catholicity as its partisan support for the poor everywhere and its apostolicity as its readiness to suffer as the apostles did.³⁴ In describing unity as freedom, Moltmann identified the importance of recognising diversity in restoring unity to the church:

²⁹ A. Dulles, *Models of the Church*, Dublin, Gill and Macmillan, 1976, p.80

³⁰ A. Rasmussen, *The Church as Polis*, Notre Dame, Indiana, Notre Dame University Press, 1995, p.76

³¹ J. Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, translated by M. Kohl, London, SCM, 1977

³² G. Müller-Fahrenholz, *The Kingdom and the Power: The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann*, London, SCM, 2000, p.81

³³ Moltmann, 1977, p.16

³⁴ Müller-Fahrenholz, 2000, p.82

The unity of the congregation is a unity in freedom. It must not be confused with uniformity, let alone uniformity in perception, feeling or morals. No one must be regimented or forced into the church. Everyone must be accepted with his gift and tasks, his weaknesses and handicaps.³⁵

Therefore Moltmann positioned his ecclesiology in support of an inclusive ecumenical agenda. He contributed to this by arguing that individual churches represent the universal church in microcosm:

If the whole church is present in every individual church, then they all participate in problems of this kind (*such as papal infallibility as an obstacle to ecumenism*). The ecumenical concept of the church leads to an inclusive interpretation of the one church of Christ which will become a critical and liberating force in the history in the hope of the coming kingdom of God.³⁶

Moltmann seemed to urge in this passage, greater dialogue between different denominations. However, his emphasis on the congregation and the local church³⁷ could be seen as running counter to such an ecumenical project.

In Moltmann's view, ecclesiology could not be separated from Christology:

If for the church of Christ, Christ is the "subject" of the church, then in the doctrine of the church, Christology will become the dominant theme of ecclesiology. Every statement about the church will be a statement about Christ. Every statement about Christ also implies a statement about the church; yet the statement about Christ is not exhausted by the statement about the church, because it also goes further, being directed towards the messianic kingdom which the church serves.³⁸

³⁵ Moltmann, 1977, p.343

³⁶ Ibid, p.15

³⁷ Müller-Fahrenholz, 2000, p.100

³⁸ Ibid, p.6

Thus, Moltmann holds that, while the church is ontologically distinct from Christ and is not a continuation of the incarnation in any metaphysical sense, the church is to reflect the character and mission of Christ as a continuation of the divine purpose through the Holy Spirit.³⁹ The church therefore arises out of a Trinitarian engagement with the world through all of the members of the Trinity:

In the movements of the Trinitarian history of God's dealings with the world, the church finds and discovers itself, in all the relationships which comprehend its life. It finds itself on the path traced by the history of God's dealings with the world, and in it discovers itself as one element in the movements of the divine sending, gathering together and experience.⁴⁰

In Moltmann's view, the church is founded on the messianic mission of Jesus.⁴¹ It is a response to God's intervention into human history in Christ. Moltmann's eschatology centres on the risen Christ as the one who will establish the Kingdom of God on earth; the 'Lord of Glory.' Moltmann held that the risen Christ would consummate his kingdom in the eschaton, a kingdom that would renew the cosmos and unite all mankind. Believers are citizens of that coming kingdom and are refugees from the kingdoms of this world.⁴² Hence, Moltmann described the church as the 'Exodus Community', a people who have experienced deliverance, but who also look towards a greater deliverance in the future.⁴³ The mission of the church was to herald the coming of the new kingdom:

³⁹ R.J. Bauckham, "Jürgen Moltmann," in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. SB Ferguson and DT Wright, Leicester, IVP, 1988, p.440

⁴⁰ Moltmann, 1977, p.64

⁴¹ Müller-Fahrenholz, 2000, p.185

⁴² J. Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, translated by M. Kohl, London, SCM, 1996, p.310

⁴³ Müller-Fahrenholz, 2000, p.186

It follows from this that the church understands its world-wide mission in the Trinitarian history of God's dealings with the world. with all its activities and suffering, it is an element in the history of the kingdom of God. The real point is not to spread the church, but to spread the kingdom. The goal is not to see the glorification of the church, but the glorification of the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit. The missionary concept of the church leads to a church that is open to the world in the divine mission, because it leads to a Trinitarian interpretation of the church in the history of God's dealings with the world.⁴⁴

Moltmann saw a political dimension to this mission to the world:

The church against world horizons does not mean only 'mission in six continents'; nor is it confined to the ecumenical unification of scattered and divided churches. The church against world horizons also means: the church's existence against the background of the world's increasing interdependence and its growing tension, the struggle for world domination and the fight against exploitation and oppression.

There seems to be a certain tension in Moltmann's thought when it comes to the political dimension of theology. He has been involved in many political movements and sees a clear role for the church in supporting the cause of the poor and oppressed. Yet in his work, *The Coming of God*,⁴⁵ he advocated a supernatural eschatology with a future consummation of the cosmos as a divine work. It does not seem entirely clear how the expectation of a triumphant kingdom of God in the future relates to the present political involvement of Christians. Presumably the supernatural establishment of a perfect kingdom in the future would render irrelevant present political involvement by Christians. A strong belief in a future kingdom of God on earth often goes hand in hand with a quietist, non-political stance, as it did with Darby's Brethren.

⁴⁴ Moltmann, 1977, p.11

⁴⁵ Moltmann, 1996

Wolfhart Pannenberg (b. 1928)- The Church as a Sign of the Kingdom

Like Moltmann, Wolfhart Pannenberg has emphasised the eschatological position of the church in relation to the kingdom of God. He views the church as the partial or imperfect realisation of the kingdom of God:

The formation of the primitive community itself was also as such a partial aspect of the dawning kingdom, namely, the provisional gathering of the fellowship that, awaiting God's future, would find its definite realisation in the fellowship of men and women in the consummated kingdom of God.⁴⁶

Pannenberg acknowledged the role of historical criticism and exegesis in dispelling the more traditional idea that the church and the kingdom of God could be equated as one entity.⁴⁷ The church stands in relation to the kingdom, but it is not the kingdom itself.⁴⁸ Instead the church points to a future in which humanity is joined under God's reign.⁴⁹ This unity is reflected in the liturgical act of communion, in which all different kinds of people are brought together as one.⁵⁰ The church is the beginning of a new united humanity:

By its very nature, then, the Christian mission has transcended the boundaries of the Jewish people, and the particularity of its

⁴⁶ Pannenberg, 1993, p.28

⁴⁷ Ibid, p.35

⁴⁸ Pannenberg wrote:

The kingdom and the church are not herewith simply identical. We are not to view the church even as an incomplete form of the kingdom. Like God's people in the old covenant, the church does indeed stand in a relation to the kingdom that is constitutive to its existence. There is a difference in the relation, but neither in the case of Israel or the church does it take the form of simple identity or even partial identity.

Ibid, p.30

⁴⁹ Ibid, p.31

⁵⁰ Ibid.

institutions in order to become the church of Jews and Gentiles united by faith in the appearing of Jesus as the in-breaking of a new humanity that will be consummated in the future of God.⁵¹

Pannenberg took a somewhat sacramental approach, though understood in Protestant terms as a sign rather than a channel of grace; arguing that the church is a sign or representation of the kingdom.⁵² A sign is distinct from the thing signified.

Pannenberg acknowledged that the church was at times a poor representation of the new humanity. It was broken by division and was often guilty of prejudice. However, throughout its history there were renewal and reformation movements that sought to call it back to its roots:

Inasmuch as the church is “in Christ” in its faith and liturgical life, forces of reconciliation have constantly developed in its history to bind together Christian members from many peoples and cultures into the unity of Christ’s body, and to make them for others a sign of humanity’s destined unity in the kingdom of God.⁵³

While emphasising the missionary role of the church,⁵⁴ Pannenberg denied that the church can itself establish the kingdom through its own activity:

Nevertheless, the church cannot transform the world into the kingdom of God. If in its relation to Jesus Christ, the church is the sign and tool of the kingdom, this does not mean that by means of it, Christ and the Spirit hasten the actualising of the kingdom of God in world history, or explicitly and more intensely, in the church’s own sphere. The kingdom of God comes only from God himself.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Ibid, p.32

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid, p.43

⁵⁴ Ibid, p.45

⁵⁵ Ibid, p.48

As regards the distinction between the universal church and the local church, Pannenberg argued that local churches manifest the unity of the one universal church of God:

We are not, then, to see the fellowship of local congregations as if they were subsequently brought together in a federation. As local churches, they are always manifestations of the one church of Christ. This one church is not secondarily made up of local churches. Instead, the fellowship of local churches rests on the unity in the one Lord that is already there, and that is present in a special way in the celebration of the eucharist.⁵⁶

Pannenberg's emphasis, like that of Barth and Moltmann, is on the local congregation. Pannenberg holds that supercongregational structures can be beneficial and can find their foundation in the unity of the church, but these structures do not constitute the unity of the church.⁵⁷ In his work, *The Church*,⁵⁸ he explored some issues relating to the ecumenical problem. In his view, seeing the Lord's Supper as displaying the future unity of mankind is a vital step in realizing church unity.⁵⁹ In more practical terms, he suggested a future ecumenical council to resolve doctrinal disagreements.⁶⁰ However, he stressed that the catholicity of the church will only have its true realisation in the eschatological kingdom of God.⁶¹ While Pannenberg might be accused of defeatism, any theology that places an emphasis on future realisation of the kingdom must defer its hopes to the future.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p.106

⁵⁷ Ibid, p.108

⁵⁸ W. Pannenberg, *The Church*, Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1977

⁵⁹ Ibid, p.20

⁶⁰ Ibid, p.35

⁶¹ Ibid, p.68

Karl Rahner (1904-1984)- Christianity as Church

Karl Rahner was amongst the most important of Roman Catholic theologians to address the question of ecclesiology in the Twentieth century, as he was the first prominent Catholic theologian to articulate Catholic theology within the language of Karl Barth's insights. While taking into account many of the ideas of modern theology, Rahner showed a strong desire to defend the institution and traditions of the Roman Catholic church.

Rahner argued that the social interconnectedness of human existence entailed that the human relational aspect of salvation in the church was a fundamentally important part of Christianity:

Looked at from the perspective of the Christian understanding of existence, what we are calling church, that is, the institutional constitution of the religion of the absolute mediator of salvation, is obviously not accidental to man's essence as a being orientated towards God. If man is a being of interpersonal communication not just on the periphery, but rather if this characteristic co-determines the whole breadth and depth of his existence, and if salvation touches the whole person and places him as a whole and with all of the dimensions of his existence in relationship to God, and hence if religion does not just concern some particular sector of human existence, but concerns the whole of human existence in its relation to the all-encompassing God by whom all things are borne and towards whom all things are directed, then this implies that the reality of interpersonal relationship belongs to the religion of Christianity.⁶²

However, Rahner maintained that the doctrine of the church was still secondary to other truths:

⁶² K. Rahner, *Foundations of the Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, translated by W.V. Dych, New York, Crossroad, 1989, p.323

Vatican II says in its Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis redintegratio*, that there is an ordered structure or a “hierarchy of truths” in Catholic doctrine. If we reflect upon this, surely ecclesiology and the ecclesial consciousness even of an orthodox and unambiguously Catholic Christian are not the basis and the foundation of his Christianity. Jesus Christ, faith and love, entrusting oneself to the darkness of existence and into the incomprehensibility of God in trust and in the company of Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen one, these are the central realities for a Christian. If he could not attain them in the innermost depths of his existence, then basically his ecclesiality and his feelings of belonging to the concrete church would only be an empty illusion and a deceptive façade.⁶³

Rahner argued that while there may be aspects of the essence of the church that are found in Protestant churches, it is the fundamental claim of the Roman Catholic that his or her church is the true church of Jesus Christ and he attempted to set forth a case for this claim.⁶⁴ The first obstacle to such a claim is the doubts raised by historical criticism of Jesus Christ founding a church. Rahner argues that Jesus predicted a period of time before the establishment of his kingdom. This was to be an age of discipleship and witness:

Jesus sees a period of time lapsing between his death and the coming of the fullness of the kingdom of God. It is not only a period of waiting, but also a period for gathering and preparing the people of God who have been formed on this new foundation. Someone can deny that these presuppositions are found in Jesus only if he denies that Jesus had a clear intention and acted reasonably up to and including his death. A new people of God exists through him. He gathers it together, and hence he must come to terms what has to happen to this following which has gathered around him if the people of Israel reject the offer to enter into this new people of God and to be its basis.⁶⁵

⁶³ Ibid, p.324

⁶⁴ Ibid, p.325

⁶⁵ Ibid, p.328

Rahner argued that while the Catholic church has a history in which it has developed structures that cannot be found in Jesus' teaching, it has its ultimate origins in the work and ministry of Christ.⁶⁶

In Rahner's view, the church cannot be seen as a mere religious organisation that meets political needs. He entitled a chapter of *Foundations of the Christian Faith* as *Christianity as Church*. Thus, despite all its failings, the church is of the very essence of Christianity:

The question about the church is not merely a question of human Expediency, but rather it is a question of faith in the proper sense. By the very nature of Christianity, church must be understood in such a way that it springs from the very essence of Christianity as the supernatural self-communication of God to mankind which has become manifest in history and has found its final and definitive historical climax in Jesus Christ. Church is a part of Christianity as the very event of salvation. We cannot exclude Communal and social intercommunication from man's essence even when he is considered as the religious subject of a relationship to God.⁶⁷

The centrality of the church in the Christian life entails that every Christian must make an individual choice as to whether they will accept the Roman Catholic church as the church of Christ or some other denomination. Rahner stressed this was a free and individual decision which must be made in good conscience.⁶⁸ It may be asked

⁶⁶ Ibid, p.331

⁶⁷ Ibid, p.343

⁶⁸ Rahner wrote:

In pointing out that by the very nature of man as an existent who actualizes his transcendentality in history, and because of the autonomous character of the claim of Christ's message, a Christian has to be an ecclesial Christian, we may not of course obscure the obvious fact that the free acceptance of the church and its authority is itself once again an act of freedom and decision for which every Christian including a Catholic Christian has to take responsibility in the loneliness of his own conscience. Nor can he depend on the authority of the church as such at *this* point in the history of his

whether the individual nature of this decision is not problematic for the Roman Catholic theologian. If the church is needed as an authoritative judge over doctrinal questions, how is the individual believer in a position to make a judgement over the capacity of the Roman Catholic church to be the true church? Rahner's comparison with the authority of Scripture for the Protestant⁶⁹ does not necessarily help, because most Protestants do not believe that a teaching magisterium is necessary to interpret Scripture for the believer.

Rahner addressed the question of how the Catholic can be sure that his church is the true church. He suggested that the tradition of attempting to establish the Catholic church's authority historically was not necessarily the best approach.⁷⁰ Rahner then considered possible criteria for determining the validity of the Catholic church. He argued that a visible unity must be a characteristic of the church:

freedom. Moreover, the fact that the authority of the church does become effective for an individual Christian always remains based upon this "lonely" decision. There is no essential difference on this point between a Catholic Christian and an Evangelical Christian who recognises any authoritative instance at all, for example, Holy Scripture, as coming "from without" and hence as binding.

Ibid, p.346

⁶⁹ Ibid. Quoted.

⁷⁰ Rahner wrote:

The normal method of fundamental theology, and one which is entirely justified in its understanding of methodology, usually aims at furnishing a direct historical proof for the fact that in the concrete the Roman Catholic church is the church of Christ, that it was willed by him as it actually exists in its own understanding of itself and of its essential constitution, and that it comes from Jesus Christ in historical continuity. We do not think that this approach is impossible in principle. But it is without doubt extraordinarily difficult for a concrete Christian today who is separated from Jesus by an interval of two thousand years. In other words, it would involve so many difficult historical questions and proofs that in view of the knowledge which is really possible and at the command of the "normal" Catholic, it is not a *practically* feasible way to satisfy the demands of conscience and truth.

Ibid, p.346

If and insofar as church is not something which pious and Christ-inspired Christians form as a society for the further development of their own religious subjectivity, but rather is the coming of salvation history in Jesus Christ, then it is clear that church cannot be constituted by the fact that arbitrary groups of Christians form pious religious communities...It is in fact the case that in the New Testament the unity of the church is required and is presupposed in Paul as well as in John.⁷¹

Thus, while Protestant writers like Moltmann and Pannenberg emphasise the congregation, Rahner maintained this was not enough. The local churches must in some more concrete way reflect the unity of the universal church. Rahner did, however, concede that this did not necessarily go far in demonstrating that the unity of the Catholic church was the unity presupposed in the New Testament.⁷² Rahner went on to argue that an historical continuity should exist between the church of today and the church of the New Testament:

Given this presupposition (*that the true church will not contradict the substance of Christianity*), the method which we are suggesting here means that we can rely upon the concrete Christian church which has come down to us and in which we find ourselves *if it has the closest possible historical approximation to the original Christian church of Jesus Christ*. The closer the concrete historical connection is between our Christianity and the original Christian church, the greater is the prospect and the presumption that the Christian church which has come down to us is the church of Christ.⁷³

Rahner rejected the view that all Christian communities had a claim to legitimacy. He argued that the Reformers held no such sentiment:

There are those among Evangelical as well as Catholic Christians today who presuppose that the ecclesial communities, churches, and confessional denominations which in fact exist are to be

⁷¹ Ibid, p.348

⁷² Ibid, p.349

⁷³ Ibid, p.352

regarded as more or less equally legitimate. Consequently, the question to which church a specific Christian wants to belong is more a question merely of historical accident and individual taste. For us, however, this kind of ecclesiological relativism is out of the question. Among other reasons, this is so because this ecclesial relativism was also completely foreign to the early churches of the Reformation period, and hence to the evangelical understanding of the church among the reformers of the sixteenth century. They held the dogmatic opinion and view that the concrete church of Jesus Christ had to exist in their own time.⁷⁴

Rahner acknowledged the Reformation marks of preaching and faithful administration of the sacraments as the reformers' criteria for the church, but he maintained that this did not diminish their recognition of the Catholic church as a true, but corrupted continuation of the apostolic church. In Rahner's view it was unthinkable to attempt to set aside the continuity that the Catholic church possesses with the early church. Although the Catholic church has undergone considerable historical changes, its historical continuity is undeniable. In his view, the Protestant is on weak ground when it comes to the testimony of history:

Perhaps, for example, the Petrine office might also have gone through an extraordinarily great development in juridical explicitness and clarity when we compare the beginnings at the end of the first century or in scripture with the papacy of the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that there was a Roman episcopacy in the church before the Reformation, and there is therefore a closer, more immediate and more self-evident continuity between post-Reformation Catholic Christianity and the ancient church. For Evangelical Christianity to prove its own historical and theological continuity with the ancient church, it must declare a good deal in this earlier, pre-Reformation church to be either superfluous or even un-Christian or anti-Christian.⁷⁵

The Protestant, as Rahner argued, can only reject the Catholic church because he or she views it as compromising essential facets of the Christian faith. In responding to

⁷⁴ Ibid, p.353

⁷⁵ Ibid, p.358

this central objection, Rahner considered the three “onlys” of the Reformation, Sola Gratia, Sola fide, and Sola Scriptura and argued that the substance of these assertions was found in Catholic teaching when rightly understood.⁷⁶ Hence, the Protestant should have no fundamental reason for forsaking the Roman Catholic church. Of course, many Protestants would not be convinced by his claim that the Catholic church does hold to the five “solas.” On this hinges the resolution of the Protestant/Catholic divide. It is arguable that Darby was in a better place to defend himself from the assertion of Roman Catholic historical primacy. It will be shown in chapter six that he held that the church had fallen into a ruined state before even the early church fathers and hence any Catholic claim from history would be superfluous.

In his defence of the Roman Catholic teaching office, Rahner made use of Christology. He argued that the church was a means of the actualising of Christ’s eschatological revelation of himself:

Therefore we must recognise a really Christological reason for this teaching authority of the church and formulate it. And this consists ultimately in the fact that Jesus Christ himself is the absolute, irreversible and invincible climax of salvation history. The fundamental self-communication of God upon which the whole history of man’s salvation is based has reached such a historical tangibility in Jesus Christ that as a result in this eschatological phase the victory of God’s self-communication as truth, as grace and as holiness is irreversible, and indeed even in the dimension of its historical manifestation. Jesus Christ is the fact which makes it manifest that God’s self-communication is present in the world as the truth of ultimate love, that God’s loving truth and his true love are not only offered to man and his history, but also that they have really triumphed in this history and can no longer be abolished by man’s rejection.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Ibid, p.359-365

⁷⁷ Ibid, p.379

In the church's teaching office, the self-communication of God is actualised and localised as a phase in the kingdom. The church is an authoritative mediator of this revelation.⁷⁸ Rahner, hastened to add that the infallible teaching authority of the church is only invoked upon vitally important matters.⁷⁹ The ascription of the authority of Christ to the institution of the Roman Catholic hierarchy necessarily presumes that this hierarchy is true and valid. If there are doubts about the validity of this hierarchy, then it might be better to seek the self-communication of God as a final revelation in the preached Word in general, rather than localised in a hierarchy. Rahner's reasoning as regards the teaching office seems to reflect a tendency amongst Roman Catholic writers to make a close identification of Christ with the church as his body, an opinion detected by the Reformed theologian, G.C. Berkouwer.⁸⁰ It also demonstrates a view of the church as a kind of sacrament. A number of Catholic theologians have suggested that the church is indeed a sacrament that not only represents, but actualises the presence of Christ in the world, making him immanent.⁸¹ Rahner affirmed a strongly sacramental ecclesiology:

When a Christian understands the church as the historical tangibility

⁷⁸ Ibid, p.381

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Berkouwer wrote:

In the Roman Catholic church and theology, various expressions refer to the *actuality, stability, and continuity of the *corpus mysticum**. According to Brom, here is the secret of Roman Catholicism. Continual appeal is made to Paul's epistles to show that the divine truth is embodied in the church, and that wisdom has built its house here, The characterization of the church as the mystical body of Christ expresses the deepest essence of the church. The communion between Christ and his church is pictured in such a way that we need not be surprised when the identity between Christ and the church is spoken without hesitation.... The church "as the flesh of Christ" is one with Him, and necessarily fed and cherished by Him." It is like "the continued incarnation of the heavenly Lord."

G.C. Berkouwer, *The Conflict with Rome*, trans. H. De Yongste, Philadelphia, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1958, p.23

⁸¹ A. Dulles, *Models of the Church; A Critical Assessment of the Church in all its Aspects*, Dublin, Gill and MacGillan, 1976, p.58

of the presence of God in his self-communication, he experiences the church as the place for the love of both God and neighbour.... And insofar as the church is the concreteness of Christ in relation to us, and insofar as Jesus Christ is really the absolute, irrevocable and victorious offer of God as the absolute mystery who gives himself to us in love, the church is the tangible place where we have assurance and the historical promise that God loves us.⁸²

This is perhaps a fruitful approach to ecclesiology from a Roman Catholic perspective.

Hans Kung (b. 1928)- The Church as the People of God

Hans Kung, another important Catholic theologian of the Twentieth century, differs from Rahner in being less keen to defend the Roman Catholic hierarchy. In fact, his criticism have made him subject to ecclesiastical discipline. He began his substantial work on ecclesiology, *The Church*,⁸³ by examining the difference between *form* and *essence*. By form he meant the essential unchanging spiritual nature of the church, while by form he meant the changeable historical shape of the church. These distinctions are very helpful in clarifying the subject of ecclesiology. In using these two terms, Kung maintains that the essence and form of the church cannot be separated:

The distinction between form and essence is a conceptual, not a real, distinction. There is not and never was, in fact, an essence of the Church by itself, separate, chemically pure, distilled from the stream of historical forms. What is changing and what is unchanging cannot be neatly divided up; while there are permanent factors, there are no absolutely irreformable areas.⁸⁴

⁸² Rahner, 1989, p.398

⁸³ Kung, 1968

⁸⁴ Ibid, p.5

Thus, it is impossible to throw away history and to attempt to re-create some original pure form of the church. However, Kung suggests an alternative danger, which is to view essence and form as identical:

Even if the distinction between form and essence is a conceptual one it is none the less necessary. How else can we decide what is permanent in the changing form of the Church? How else can we judge its actual historical form? How else can we establish a criterion, a norm, which will enable us to decide what is legitimate in any historical and empirical manifestation of the church?⁸⁵

This provision guards against the tendency to recognise some historical form of the church as absolute, which would be a great obstacle to the ecumenical project. Kung saw a church that is embodied in history, which was subject to change and which must change. Hence, his willingness to critique the Roman Catholic church from the standpoint of history and refusal to see its institutional as an absolute and final expression of the church.

As regards the invisible/ visible distinction, Kung insists upon the unconditional visibility of the church:

A real Church made up of real people cannot possibly be invisible. The believing Christian least of all can harbour any illusion about the fact that the Church he believes in is a real one and therefore visible. There is no place here for fantasies about a Platonic idea. The Christian's starting-point, which he may sometimes accept reluctantly, but he can surely also accept thankfully, is real Church. The Church he believes is visible as a human fellowship and through its acts as a community, through its confession of faith and its baptism, its works of mercy and consolation. The Church is more or less visible- preferably less than more in most cases- in its sermons and its worship, in baptism and the Lord's Supper, in its teaching and theology, its constitutions and

⁸⁵ Ibid.

orders.⁸⁶

For Kung, the church is an entity which is composed of human beings that exist in the course of history and which are subject to historical and sociological enquiry.⁸⁷ He rejected the notion of two churches, visible and invisible.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, the church still has an invisible dimension in the inner working of the Spirit within her:

But the Church will be heading for disaster if it abandons itself to its visible aspects and, forgetful of its true nature, puts itself on the same level as other institutions. It would be fatal for the Church to see itself primarily as a powerful factor in public life, as a high-powered combine, as a cultural or educational force, as the guardian of culture (western culture, of course), as the bastion of "tradition" or the establishment, as a slightly more pious pressure group among many pressure groups competing with others for power in politics, the arts, education, or economics. If it did this, the Church would be abdicating as a Church, forgetting the crucial element which alone can make its visible aspects into a true church: the Spirit, which invisibly controls the visible Church, making it spiritually alive, fruitful and credible.⁸⁹

Like the other modern ecclesiological authors examined here, Kung spent a good deal of time examining the relationship between Jesus' preaching of the kingdom and the church. Kung saw the foundation of the church, not in the pre-easter ministry of Christ, but in the soteriological implications of the resurrection of Christ.⁹⁰ The

⁸⁶ Ibid, p.35

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid, p.38

⁸⁹ Ibid, p.37

⁹⁰ Kung wrote:

Thus in many ways the new group of disciples may be seen as the *eschatological community of salvation*. More and more clearly and profoundly the coming of Jesus is recognised as the single decisive event, as the truly eschatological event. The faith born of Easter overcomes the stumbling-block of the cross and renews its decision for Jesus by seeing his death as a death for sinners. Through faith in the risen Christ, the disciples can interpret what appeared as a curse- this is how the Jews understood crucifixion- as an event of salvation, as *the* saving event. The death and resurrection of Christ are seen as the decisive eschatological action of God. The earthly past of him

church is a new community that lives in the joy of the salvation found through the death and resurrection of Christ and which lives in hope of the coming of Christ.

Kung made use of a 'here, but not yet eschatology', seeing the church as living out the results of an already present kingdom reign of Christ.⁹¹ This idea of the church as an eschatological community relates to the creation of the church by the Holy Spirit.⁹²

The church is founded upon a whole new divine revelation of God's person.

Having considered the idea of the church as an 'eschatological community of salvation,' he moved on to consider the church as the 'people of God' comparing the role in salvation history of the church and Israel. He saw in the notion of the church as the people of God an important implication for ecclesiology:

who came and the future of him who was to come was seen in a new light. But the power of the risen Christ does not reveal itself to the community only in a future not yet present, but already in the new present, the time which dates from the resurrection. Jesus, whose earthly ministry the community now sees in a new light, whose coming as the Son of Man it looks forward to, this Jesus already reigns as the Christ glorified by God.

Ibid, p.81

⁹¹ Kung wrote:

For Paul too, what the reign of God is becomes clearer in the light of Easter: it is the present reign of Christ, in which the coming completed reign of God- which for Paul unequivocally includes the final and revealed victory of Christ, the conversion of Israel and the resurrection of the dead- is revealed and becomes effective in the present: for his preaching too, the central element is Jesus as Christos and Kyrios. This is the reason why in preaching the "Lord Jesus Christ" the concept of the reign of God becomes of secondary importance; because the glorified Kyrios shows in himself the meaning of the reign of God in which the Church lives.

Ibid, p.89

⁹² Kung wrote:

The ecclesia is the eschatological people of God, the people of God for the last days: we have been looking at this fact from an entirely new perspective. God has not called and gathered his people simply as an alien being, an outsider. He has not made a new covenant, with his people as a distant party to an agreement, completely uncommitted in his personal existence. No, God has revealed himself in his entire living power, and it is through his self-giving power that he makes his claim to reign over his people. He himself is, through his Spirit, which is at the same time the Spirit of Jesus Christ, present and efficient in the ecclesia. There are no limits to his self-giving power, which has been revealed to his people and has transformed its whole existence, indeed recreated it anew.

Ibid, p.168

If we see the church as the people of God, it is clear that the Church can never be merely a particular class or caste, a group of officials or a clique within the fellowship of the faithful. The Church is always and in all cases, the *whole* people of God, the *whole* ecclesia, the *whole* fellowship of the faithful. Everyone belongs to the chosen race, the Royal priesthood, the holy nation. All members of the people of God have been called by God, justified by Christ, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. All members of the Church are equal in this. And all members of the people of God have been called by the message of Jesus Christ to faith, obedience and complete devotion in love; in this too, all members of the Church are equal. The fundamental parity is more important than the distinctions which exist in the people of God and which it would be foolish to deny.⁹³

Thus, Kung saw the concept of the church as people of God as a potential corrective to the tendency of churches, particularly his own Catholic church to view the church in terms of its hierarchical structures. He also argued that this view of the church prevented it from being viewed as a mere voluntary society, as one does not choose to belong to a people or nation.⁹⁴ Likewise, it also entails rejecting an overemphasis on the invisible dimension of the church, abstracted from historical realities.⁹⁵ He insisted that the concept of the people of God should not be contrasted radically with the concept of the church as the body of Christ, as though the body could be abstracted from Christians in their historical location:

Both concepts seek to express the union of the Church with Christ and the union of its members among themselves. It is, however, important that in seeing the Church as the Body of

⁹³ Ibid, p.125

⁹⁴ Kung wrote:

If the Church sees itself as the people of God, then clearly it can never be merely a free association of like-minded religious people. The Church is always and everywhere dependent on the free choice and call of God, who wills the salvation of all men. Without God's free grace and love, there can be no Church.

Ibid, p.126

⁹⁵ Ibid, p.130

Christ we should not base our view on an abstract of the body, but see it as the people of God placed by Christ in history. It is fundamental from every point of view to see the Church as the people of God; this idea is not only found in Paul, but is the oldest term to describe the ecclesia, and it emphasises the crucial unity between the Church and Israel and the Old Testament. Only by seeing the Church as the people of God can we understand the Church as the body of Christ; then we shall find that the concept "body of Christ" describes very fittingly the new and unique nature of this new people of God. The Church is only the body of Christ insofar as it is the people of God; but by being the new people of God constituted by Christ it is truly the body of Christ.⁹⁶

Kung's emphasis on the church as a visible body makes it vital to know which bodies of Christians have the right to be called churches. On this point, Kung combined the Protestant marks of preaching and sacraments with the creedal marks of unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity. It is the practical realisation of both that gives the church its identity:

What is decisive is not the formal presence of certain characteristics, but their use and practice. The word of the Gospel must be faithfully preached, heard and followed, the sacraments must really be used, oneness, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity must be lived by living men in a living Church, and the *notae Ecclesiae* must become in one way or another *notae Christianorum*. To bring about a living realization of its own signs is a big enough task for each Church, whichever of them it places most emphasis on. And if every Church strives to realize its own signs in fundamental agreement with the one same New Testament message, it will in time come about that none can exclude the other as the untrue Church.⁹⁷

Kung argued that differences between churches were not in themselves an evil. They often reflected sincere convictions about the nature of the faith. In his view, it is not the differences between churches that are harmful, but an exclusive attitude:

⁹⁶ Ibid, p.225

⁹⁷ Ibid, p.269

The co-existence of different Churches does not, therefore, in itself jeopardize the unity of the Church; unity is only endangered by co-existence which is neither co-operation nor support, but basically a hostile confrontation. It is not the differences in themselves which are harmful, but only excluding and exclusive differences.⁹⁸

Kung seems to have side-stepped the question of how a true church may be defined.

He has rather set out the possible criteria in the marks and left churches room to outwork those marks in differing ways. This reflects his commitment to engagement between Protestant, Orthodox and Catholic churches. Dealing with the difficult question of the unity of the church, he favoured viewing it in terms of the uniting message of the Gospel.⁹⁹ It may be said that Kung's approach to ecclesiology was a thoroughly pragmatic and practical one. His concern was not with defining an abstract essence of the church and measuring structures and congregations against it, but to assume the ecclesial reality of present congregations and structures and to define the essence of the church in relation to them and as a critique of them. This approach provided room for a diversity of different ecclesial polities and forms while still establishing a means of evaluating them.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 276

⁹⁹ Kung wrote:

The basis for the unity of the Church, and for the unification of the Churches, lies in their obedience to this one message given by their one Lord. If therefore we begin our quest for unity by examining our own Church, we must examine it, not according to its present ecclesial reality, taking its *status quo* as an absolute norm; we must measure it against the original message of Christ which it claims as a foundation.

Ibid, p.292

Avery Dulles (b.1918)- Models of the Church

Avery Dulles, son of John Foster Dulles, an American secretary of state, and a cardinal in the Roman Catholic Church, made an important contribution to the methodology of ecclesiology. He argued that different concepts of the nature of the church should be considered as models, rather than definitions or totalizing schemes. He argued that this was necessary because of the fundamental theological difficulty in defining the essence of the church:

The term mystery, applied to the Church, signifies many things. It implies that the Church is not fully intelligible to the finite mind of man, and that the reason for this lack of intelligibility is not the poverty but the richness of the Church itself. Like other supernatural mysteries, the Church is known by a kind of connaturality (as Thomas Aquinas and the classical theologians called it). We cannot fully objectify the Church because we are involved in it; we know it through a kind of intersubjectivity. Furthermore, the Church pertains to the mystery of Christ; Christ is carrying out in the Church his plan of redemption. He is dynamically at work in the Church through the Spirit.¹⁰⁰

Viewing the church in more dynamic terms and recognising the church's mysterious character entails moving away from trying to establish the objective essence of the church, in Dulles' view.¹⁰¹ He suggested that images might be a helpful way of

¹⁰⁰ Dulles, 1976, p.16

¹⁰¹ Dulles wrote:

The mysterious character of the Church has important implications for methodology. It rules out the possibility of proceeding from clear and univocal concepts, or from definitions in the usual sense of the word. The concepts abstracted from the realities we observe in the objective world about us are not applicable, at least directly, to the mystery of man's communion with God. Some would therefore conclude that ecclesiology must be apophatic; that we can have only a *theologia negativa* of the Church, affirming not what it is but only what it is not. In a certain sense this may be conceded. In some respects we shall in the end have to accept a reverent silence about the Church, or for that matter about any theological reality. But we should not fall into the negative phase prematurely, until we have exhausted the possibilities of the positive.

Ibid.

conceiving of the church. They provide aesthetic communication of non—conceptual ways of understanding the church.¹⁰² He explained that a model is an image that is used in a theoretical context.¹⁰³ The concept of model is more familiar to the physical and social sciences:

The term “model” has for some time been in use in the physical and social sciences. I.T. Ramsey, among others, has shown its fruitfulness for theology... They are realities having a sufficient functional correspondence with the object under study so that they provide conceptual tools and vocabulary; they hold together facts that would otherwise seem unrelated, and they suggest consequences that may subsequently be verified by experiment. As I.T. Ramsay has said, “In any scientific understanding a model is better the more prolific it is in generating deductions which are then open to experimental verification and falsification.”¹⁰⁴

Models are not incompatible with each other; they suggest different aspects of ecclesiology and many different models are suggested in the New Testament. However, each one is inherently limited, because it states only an aspect of the doctrine of the church.¹⁰⁵ Dulles recognised the tendency of theology to favour one model over others. On that point he made use of Thomas Kuhn’s theory of paradigms:

¹⁰² Dulles wrote:

Such images communicate through their evocative power. They convey a latent meaning that is apprehended in a non-conceptual, even a subliminal, way. Symbols transform the horizons of man’s life, integrate his perception of reality, alter his scale of values, reorient his loyalties, attachments, and aspirations in a manner far exceeding the powers of abstract conceptual thought. Religious images, as used in the Bible and Christian preaching, focus our experience in a new way. They have an aesthetic appeal, and are apprehended not simply by the mind but by the imagination, the heart, or more properly, the whole man.

Ibid, p.18

¹⁰³ Ibid, p.21

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Dulles wrote:

The gospel parables of growth, such as those of the wheat and the tares, the mustard seed, and the leaven, have been valued because they give intelligibility to phenomena encountered in the Christian community since its origins, for example its capacity for rapid expansion, the opposition it encounters from within and without, the presence of evil even in the midst of the community of grace, and so forth. These images suggest how it is possible for the Church to change its shape and size without losing its

At various times in the history of the Church it has seemed possible to construct a total theology, or at least a total ecclesiology, on the basis of a single model. Such a dominant model is, in the terminology of this book, a paradigm. A model rises to the status of a paradigm when it has proved successful in solving a great variety of problems and is expected to be an appropriate tool for unravelling anomalies as yet unsolved. I am here employing the term “paradigm” in approximately the meaning given to it by Thomas S. Kuhn. He speaks of paradigms as “concrete puzzle-solutions which, employed as models or examples, can replace explicit rules as a basis for the solution of the remaining puzzles of normal science.”¹⁰⁶

Thus, a systematic ecclesiology, like that of Karl Barth or Jürgen Moltmann is an extended application of a model of the church in a series of different areas of the subject. In these ecclesiologies, a particular model of the church is given prominence over the others and allowed to direct the development and treatment of ecclesiological themes. In *Models of the Church*, Dulles considered five different paradigms, the Church as Institution, the Church as Mystical Communion, the Church as Sacrament, the Church as Herald and the Church as Servant. He considered possible theological advantages of these paradigms, as well as possible problems. Of these, he most favoured the models of the Church as Sacrament and the Church as Mystical Communion. He was most critical of the Church as Institution and felt such a model was largely unfruitful. Dulles provides a methodology for evaluating ecclesiological theories that is very helpful and constructive. However, not all theologians would

individuality. They point to a mysterious life principle within the Church and thus harmonize with the biblical and traditional doctrine of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. These botanical models, however, have obvious limits, since they evidently fail to account for the distinctively interpersonal and historical phenomena characteristic of the Church as a human community that endures through the generations. Thus, societal models, such as that of God’s People on pilgrimage, are used to supplement the organic metaphors.

Ibid, p.23

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p.26

share his apophatic view of religious language and would favour a more realist view of theological language.¹⁰⁷

Modern ecclesiologies in relation to J.N. Darby

The ecclesiology of John Nelson Darby, unsurprisingly given the historical context, differed significantly from these modern theologians. However, many of their concerns can be found addressed in Darby's ecclesiology. In some areas, Darby was working on the same problems as more modern ecclesiologists, though using a different methodology. Appreciating these concerns enables us to understand better the significance of Darby's ecclesiology.

For the modern ecclesiologists, the question of whether Jesus had founded the church during his pre-Easter ministry was not a straightforward issue. They could see a clear distinction between Pauline material on the church and the kingdom teaching of Jesus in the synoptic gospels. Likewise, it will be demonstrated in this thesis that Darby denied that the church had been founded during the ministry of Jesus. He held that the founding of the church occurred at Pentecost. Christ was occupied with the kingdom during his earthly ministry, a theme which Darby separated from that of the church. Modern ecclesiologists for the most part, distinguish between the church and the kingdom, a distinction that was fundamental to Darby's theology. The occupation of modern theologians, such as Moltmann and Pannenberg with eschatology is not dissimilar to Darby, who viewed the church as existing in the hope of Christ's coming. While Moltmann's political concerns contrast strongly with Darby's

¹⁰⁷ For instance, the Reformed theologian, Gordon H Clark (1902-1985).

apolitical stance, both men saw the church and the kingdom in opposition to the powers of this world. It is not surprising that Moltmann (and to a more moderate extent, Kung) was positive in his evaluation of radical counter-ecclesiological movements (for instance the Anabaptists),¹⁰⁸ a category which would certainly include Darby's Plymouth Brethren.

The modern ecclesiologists that this chapter has examined were deeply concerned about the divisions within the church, a concern that was central to Darby's motive in developing a new ecclesiology. Separation was also at the heart of Darby's ecclesiology, a theme which is not valued by the ecumenically-minded modern ecclesiologists. However, it will be argued that unity was just as important as separation in Darby's ecclesiology. Darby was motivated by a desire for fellowship with all true Christians and his ecclesiology, was in part inspired by the ecumenicalism of contemporary Evangelicalism.

Nevertheless, despite sharing a number of concerns and dealing with similar themes, Darby's ecclesiology differs strongly from the modern ecclesiologists mentioned above in his emphasis on articulating an essential definition of the church and his univocal application of this definition, regardless of its radical implications. Darby advocated an unique doctrine known as the 'ruin of the church', by which he meant that the visible unity of the church had been permanently lost and there were no longer any bodies in existence which could claim to be true churches. This crisis ecclesiology sets his views apart from all other ecclesiologies and this in itself is a reason why Darby's ecclesiology needs to be re-visited by scholars.

¹⁰⁸ Müller-Fahrenholz, 2000, p.98, Kung, 1968, p.195

Dulles' concept of 'Models of the Church' provides a helpful means of recognising positive features of Darby's ecclesiology. Of the five models Dulles considers, Darby's ecclesiology is closest to the 'Mystical Communion' model that Dulles considers to be highly positive. However, Darby differs from Dulles in holding a more realist conception of religious language and thus offers an essentialist definition of the church. Darby's ecclesiology stands or falls on his understanding of the essence of the church. It made no claim to be a model which might be compared to other models. One must either accept or reject his conclusion as to the nature and state of the church.

Evaluating Ecclesiologies

In evaluating an ecclesiology, the ultimate question to be asked is 'how Christian is this ecclesiology?' In considering a particular ecclesiological system, the theologian is seeking to discover how it reflects the heart of the Christian religion in its approach to the subject of the church.

The creedal marks form a part of the criteria which must be used, not only because of their historical importance, but also because they are broad enough to allow a good deal of flexibility in the development of ecclesiology. These marks may be understood in different way, yet they are characteristics of the church that must be seen in an ecclesiology. A sound ecclesiology must find in the church the unity that comes through a common salvation in Christ and the uniting power of the Gospel. It must in some way reflect the holiness of God's character. It must be catholic in its

universal openness to all. The church cannot be defined in a way that excludes it from the diversity inherent in humanity. It must also be apostolic in maintaining some form of continuity with the apostolic mission and witness.

The Reformers' marks of a true church, 'where the gospel is preached and the sacraments rightly administered', is also useful in showing what the church is to do, though it does not address the question of what the church is. Thus, a sound ecclesiology must consider what the objective essence of the church consists of. The modern ecclesiologists considered above placed less emphasis on the essence of the church, yet they did not ignore it. If the truth of Christianity has an objective foundation in the reality of Christ, then it is necessary to understand what is meant in speaking of the church as the 'body of Christ.'

As the Trinity plays such a central role in the Christian religion, a sound ecclesiology must be a Trinitarian ecclesiology. The church must be shown to be in relation to the economy of the Trinity. The church must be grounded in the work of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The modern ecclesiologists discussed above raise help to identify important themes that should be seen in ecclesiology. First, they relate the church to historical circumstances. Thus, the concerns of these writers with the problem of denominational division and situations of oppression across the world, particularly in the ecclesiology of Moltmann. A sound ecclesiology will have relevance to historical circumstances. Second, they seek to identify the position of the church in salvation history. The modern ecclesiologists closely considered the relation of the church to

the kingdom of God and the church's eschatological role. Thus, a sound ecclesiology will show the eschatological role of the church and will be able to define the place of the church in relation to the kingdom of God. The Christian religion is a historical religion and ecclesiology must demonstrate the place of the church in the history of the cosmos and its salvation. Third, the church will have the quality of inclusiveness in some way. It will be open to the diversity of humanity and in its common fellowship break down the barriers of race, sex and class. If the gospel is for all people, then so must the church be open to all people. Fourth, the modern ecclesiologists were concerned with the church's engagement with the world. Whatever its divine character, the church exists in the world and so any ecclesiology must be able to show how the church can relate to this world in which it finds itself. Fifth, it was noted that some of the modern ecclesiologists such as Moltmann and Küng celebrate radical ecclesiological movements. A sound ecclesiology may well offer challenge to existing ideas about the church's purpose and activities. This radicalism reflects the spontaneity of God's purposes in history and the radical call of the gospel. These criteria should be used in evaluating the ecclesiology of John Nelson Darby.

Historical contexts for studying Darby's ecclesiology

There are three historical contexts in which Darby's ecclesiology must be placed. The first is his own involvement with the Brethren movement he helped to create. Darby was not the founder of the Brethren, he was nevertheless one of its early members and became its most influential writer and foremost exponent. The second chapter of this

thesis provides a biographical treatment of Darby and identified his role in the Brethren. The second context is his influence on the development of Dispensationalist theology, most importantly amongst the fundamentalists in the United States. The fifth chapter will consider the influence of Darby's ecclesiology on American fundamentalists and will consider why it did not have the same influence as his views on eschatology. Thirdly, it is necessary to consider Darby's ecclesiology within the context of other developments in ecclesiology in 19th century Britain. The sixth chapter considers three other ecclesiological movements in 19th century Britain, Evangelical Ecumenism, the Irvingites and the Oxford movement, which formed the backdrop to Darby's ecclesiological writing and helped to shape it.

Chapter Two: The Life of John Nelson Darby and its influence on his

Ecclesiology

John Nelson Darby has received relatively little biographical attention when compared with other figures in Church history.¹ Krapohl points out that at the beginning of the twentieth century, Darby was largely a forgotten figure, except among the Brethren who revered him as one of their founders and amongst American fundamentalist Christians who respected him for developing the Dispensational system of theology.² However, Darby is of great interest to the student of 19th century Church history, not so much because he was one of the great leaders of Evangelicalism in that century, but because of his intellectual interactions with so many of the most well known religious thinkers of the period, such as Francis and John Henry Newman, Edward Bouverie Pusey, Dwight L Moody and Samuel Prideaux Tregelles.³

Biographies of John Nelson Darby

The earliest biography of Darby is that of W.G. Turner.⁴ This was first published in 1901. This provides some useful background information about Darby, such as his education and his early years as a clergyman, though it is not as up to date as some later works. Turner spent little time explaining the theology of Darby. It is generally

¹ For instance there are several biographies of Darby's contemporary in the early Brethren, George Müller. Though Müller is perhaps more widely regarded than Darby, the latter arguably had more influence on Church history than the former.

² Robert H Krapohl, "A Search for Purity: The Controversial Life of John Nelson Darby," unpublished PhD thesis, Baylor University 1988, p.18

³ *ibid*, p.5

⁴ W.G.Turner, *John Nelson Darby*, London, Chapter Two, 1990 (Originally published 1901)

taken to be a highly unbalanced work; Krapohl describes it as an hagiography⁵. Rather than providing any evaluation, Turner gives us many flattering anecdotes of Darby's personal qualities.⁶ Even by the standards that might be expected of an Exclusive Brethren biography (Turner was in the Kelly party⁷) this was excessive in its praise of Darby.

Also written from an Exclusive Brethren perspective is Max Weremchuk's biography.⁸ This provides more thorough factual details than Turner. It also offers a little more explanation of Darby's theological principles, though at a fairly basic level. This work, as might be expected, makes very little criticism of Darby.

Robert Krapohl's 1988 PhD thesis provided an intellectual biography.⁹ He was of the view that previous biographies and historical treatments of Darby were generally too partisan.¹⁰ His thesis filled this gap to a large extent by examining not only the facts of Darby's life, but closely examining Darby's intellectual career. Krapohl admitted to some sympathy for Darby in his conclusion though he stated that he did not agree with all of Darby's positions in controversies.¹¹ With regard to factual information,

⁵ Krapohl, 1988, p.17

⁶ For instance this incident:

An old Christian woman sought fellowship at Islington, and was visited in view of this. Her account was that several young gentlemen came to see her, whose learned talk she hardly understood. But a dear old man visited her, with whom she felt quite at home: "He was so plain" It was JND (John Nelson Darby).

Turner, 1990, p.38

⁷ Those Exclusives who had sided with William Kelly in the Ramsgate Controversy of 1881 against Park Street and Darby and came to form a distinct fellowship.

⁸ M Weremchuk *John Nelson Darby*, New Jersey, Loiseaux 1992

⁹ Robert H Krapohl, "A Search For Purity: The Controversial Life of John Nelson Darby", PhD thesis, Baylor University, 1988

¹⁰ *ibid*, p.3

¹¹ Krapohl writes: 'While this student certainly must take issue with the divisive controversy that attended Darby's polemical efforts, it is difficult to fault the intentions of a man who laboured unceasingly as a teacher of the Scriptures, a herald of the Gospel, and a defender of the faith.' Krapohl, 1988, p.457

the work is detailed, though not as up to date as Weremchuk. This work reviews and analyses the arguments in much of Darby's literature. Krapohl identifies eight characteristics of Darby's theology- moderate Calvinism, Supernatural cosmology, Dispensationalism, a secret Rapture of the Church, the Ruin of the Church, anti-clericalism, a polemical methodology and an unstable synthesis between ecclesiastical unity and separation.¹² These features present a good overall characterisation of Darby's theology, though Krapohl's description of Darby's ecclesiology as unstable will be challenged in chapter four. Krapohl's identification of Darby's supernatural cosmology could also be more detailed in terms of the importance of Darby's heaven/earth dualism, as identified by Henzel.¹³ This thesis will discuss the importance of that dualism in relation to his ecclesiology.

A recent study of the life of Darby is a joint biography with his protégé and eventual rival, Benjamin Wills Newton, written by J.D. Burnham, the minister of an Evangelical Church in Florida.¹⁴ Burnham goes to some length to explain the complex relationship between the two men and the reasons for their conflict. Burnham attempts to be even-handed in his analysis of the conflict between Newton and Darby, however, although he finds fault with Newton's leadership of the Ebrington Street assembly, he is a little more sympathetic to Newton than to Darby. The book is more useful to those studying Newton, rather than to those studying Darby, since much of the information on Darby can be found elsewhere.

¹² *ibid*, p.441-453

¹³ R.M. Henzel, *Darby, Dualism and the Decline of Dispensationalism*, Tucson, Arizona, Fenestra, 2003

¹⁴ J.D. Burnham *A Story Of Conflict: The Controversial Relationship between Benjamin Wills Newton and John Nelson Darby* Carlisle, Cumbria, Paternoster 2004

The most recent work on the subject of Darby is *For Zion's Sake: Christian Zionism and the role of John Nelson Darby*.¹⁵ This is not a biography of Darby, but relates him to the phenomena commonly described as 'Christian Zionism', where Evangelical Christians express support for the state of Israel on the basis of Bible prophecy. Wilkinson traces the history of Christian interest in the Jewish people and identifies Darby as an important figure in promoting the belief that the Jewish people would be restored to Palestine. This work is somewhat partisan in its support for 'Christian Zionism' and makes some arguably biased political assertions.¹⁶ It may be argued that it is somewhat misleading to describe Darby as a 'Zionist' given that Zionism is generally thought of as a political movement and Darby took no active political interest in helping the Jewish people to go to Palestine. Wilkinson makes a somewhat arbitrary distinction between Christian Zionism (by which he seems to mean what is generally called Dispensationalism- see chapter 5) and Restorationism, which he does not clearly define. The work is useful in placing Darby within the context of Christian interest in the Jews and in presenting a more favourable treatment of the man, but adds little that is new.

A brief entry for J.N. Darby is provided in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*.¹⁷ This offers minimal biographical details and a little history of the Brethren. The entry concentrates on Darby's eschatology and his role as founder of Dispensationalism, rather than his informal leadership of the Plymouth Brethren. It points out that most of those who were influenced by Darby on his visits to America did not leave their

¹⁵ P.D. Wilkinson, *For Zion's Sake: Christian Zionism and the role of John Nelson Darby*, Milton Keynes, Paternoster, 2007

¹⁶ Such as his denial of a Palestinian national identity (Wilkinson, 2007, p.41-42). He bases his argument on the lack of any history to the Arab inhabitants of Palestine. However, he ignores the fact that many nations such as the Australians or New Zealanders are of recent origin.

¹⁷ W.A. Hoffecker "Darby, John Nelson" in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* ed. W. Elwell, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker Books, 1984

denominations, but promoted Dispensationalism within them. The emphasis of this article reflects American Conservative Evangelicalism in which Dispensationalism is commonly followed, and in which the Plymouth Brethren are a minor force. However, it does illustrate the curious fact that, while Darby's eschatology is very influential, his ecclesiology is generally ignored. The reasons for this are not easy to ascertain and are discussed in chapter 5. It may be due to the conservatism of some, particularly American denominations, where there might have been less feeling of worldliness in Churches than in Britain. It may be due to the fact that accepting Darby's ecclesiology, unlike his eschatology, calls for action, namely separation, which has consequences. As explanations of this, Ward offers the emphasis on freedom of conscience in American Christianity, which enabled individuals to accept Darby's eschatology without leaving their denominations and also the lesser strength of the Reformed tradition in America than Europe, which is generally hostile to Premillennial theology.¹⁸ It is also arguable that the main interest in Darby's eschatology to American Christians was the Pre-Tribulational rapture doctrine, which enabled them to emphasise the immanency of Christ's coming for the Church, aside from any prophetic events preceding His appearing to the world.¹⁹ The issue of Darby's influence on American fundamentalism is discussed in chapter five.

¹⁸ J.P. Ward, *The Eschatology of J.N. Darby*, Unpublished PhD thesis, University of London 1976, p.4

¹⁹ Charles Ryrie, an important American, non-Brethren exponent of Dispensationalism wrote: 'PreTribulationalism has become a normative part of Dispensational eschatology. Originally this was due to the emphasis of the early writers and teachers on the immanency (sic) of the return of the Lord; more lately it has been connected with the dispensational conception of the distinctiveness of the Church.'

C.C. Ryrie *Dispensationalism* Chicago, Moody, 1995, p.148

Darby's Early Life

John Nelson Darby was born in 1800 in Westminster, but spent his early childhood at Leap Castle in King's County, Ireland.²⁰ The Darby family had inhabited Leap Castle since the Middle Ages. Darby was the eighth of nine children and the sixth youngest son.²¹ His father was John Darby (1751-1834), a wealthy merchant with business in Russia and elsewhere in Europe.²² Darby's mother was Anne Darby (her maiden name was Vaughan²³) and there is little information about her life. Darby revealed in his writings that he had never known his mother, having lost contact with her at an early age.²⁴ However, her gravestone reveals that she died in 1847. Her place of residence during most of Darby's life was Markly, Sussex in a house owned by her husband. Weremchuk suggests that she may have left her husband as a result of the emotionally cold atmosphere of the Darby home²⁵. Her grave, in Markly, was separate from that of her husband.²⁶ Despite her apparent separation from her husband, he left her the Markly property in his will. One of her sons, George Darby (1796-1877) resided there after her death and after his parliamentary career. Ann Darby's father was Samuel Vaughan (1720-1801), a wealthy businessman who owned large estates in America.²⁷ Significantly, the Vaughan family were Unitarians. Stunt suggests Darby's decision to follow the Anglicanism of his father's family instead of the rationalism of his maternal roots might have set him on a course of reactionary

²⁰ Turner, 1990, p.14

²¹ Burnham, 2004, p.14

²² Weremchuk, 1992, p.21

²³ Burnham, 2004, p.14

²⁴ Burnham, 2004, p.15

²⁵ Weremchuk, 1992, p.22

²⁶ Burnham, 2004, p.15

²⁷ TCF Stunt "Influences in the Early Development of Darby" in *Prisoners of Hope: Aspects of Evangelical Millennialism in Britain and Ireland 1800-1880* Carlisle, Cumbria, Paternoster, 2004, p.50

religious conservatism.²⁸ Darby's following of conservative Anglicanism might also have put him in conflict with his father's own views, as it is probable that a man who married into a rationalistic Unitarian family might have some rationalist sympathies.

Darby was educated at Westminster School. The Anglican religious orientation of this institution may have had some influence on Darby.²⁹ His intellectual prowess was not identified while he was at school; when Darby later achieved a degree of minor fame around the world, his schoolmaster could remember nothing of him³⁰. However, when he went on to attend Trinity College in Dublin, he achieved great academic distinction, being awarded a gold medal in Classics.³¹ He then embarked upon a promising career as a barrister through Lincoln's Inn at London in 1822.³²

Weremchuk, in an unpublished paper³³ provided evidence that Darby had been enrolled at Lincoln's Inn of court at the same time as John Henry Newman (1801-1890).³⁴ Weremchuk declines, however, to make any assertions as to how this might have influenced Darby. He does suggest that Newman might have been the cause of Darby's interest in Catholicism, an interest that conflicted strongly with his background. It is highly possible that the two young men may have had similar doubts about the legitimacy of Anglican succession.

²⁸ Stunt, p.52

²⁹ Krapohl, 1988, p.32

³⁰ Turner, 1990, p.14

³¹ Ibid, p.15

³² Weremchuk, 1992, p.32

³³ M.S. Weremchuk, Unpublished paper on J.N. Darby, 2005

<http://www.mybrethren.org/bios/by02indx.htm>

³⁴ One of the leaders of the Oxford movement in the Church of England and later a cardinal in the Roman Catholic church. Discussed in chapter six.

For unknown reasons, Darby decided to terminate his career in law and seek ordination as an Anglican clergyman not long after that.³⁵ Darby was made a deacon in 1825 and ordained as a priest in 1826.³⁶ The precise reason for this change of direction is uncertain.³⁷ Darby certainly did not have a sense of assurance of salvation until many years later, in a crisis experience.³⁸ Weremchuk argues that Darby had some inclination towards Catholicism, but was dissuaded through studying Hebrews 9-10, the influence of the Evangelical writer Thomas Scott and loyalty to his oath, as a barrister, to oppose Popery.³⁹ Stunt suggests that it is possible that Darby may not have practiced law for very long, if at all. He argues that given Darby's knowledge of patristic writings and church history, he must have engaged in some theological study between his studies at Trinity College (in Classics, not theology) and his ordination.⁴⁰

Darby as a Clergyman

After Darby had been ordained as an Anglican priest by Archbishop William Magee⁴¹ of Dublin, he carried out his duties as a parish priest in the parish of Calary, in the Wicklow Mountains of Ireland with great zeal and austerity of lifestyle.⁴² Darby's convictions as a clergyman were those of the High Church; he emphasised the importance of the sacraments and the authority of bishops. He wrote:

Let me be forgiven for a moment for speaking of myself, as what I say has a bearing on these points. I know the system. I knew it and walked in it years before Dr Newman (as I learn from this book) thought on this subject; and when Dr Pusey was not heard of. I fasted in Lent so as to be so weak in the body at the end of it; I ate no meat on week days- nothing till evening on

³⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶ Burnham, 2004, p.18

³⁷ Krapohl, 1988, p.34

³⁸ Weremchuk, 1992, p.33

³⁹ *ibid.*, p.35-36

⁴⁰ Stunt, 2004, p.52

⁴¹ W.B. Neatby *A History of the Plymouth Brethren* Stoke-On-Trent, Tentmaker Publications 2002 reprint (Originally published 1901), p.24

⁴² J.S. McPhail, *The History and Doctrines of the Plymouth Brethren by an Irish Clergyman*, Unpublished B.D. Thesis 1935, p.13

Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays, then a little bread or nothing; observed strictly the weekly fasts, too. I went to my clergyman always if I wished to take the sacrament, that he might judge of the matter. I held the apostolic succession fully, and the channels of grace to be there only. I held thus Luther and his followers to be outside. I was not their judge, but I left them to the uncovenanted mercies of God. I searched with earnest diligence the evidence for apostolic succession in England, and just saved their validity for myself and my conscience. The union of Church and state I held to be Babylonish, that the church ought to govern itself, and that she was in bondage but was the church.⁴³

However, he held that the union of Church and state was essentially 'Babylonish.'⁴⁴

This conviction brought him into a controversy that changed the direction of his life.

Archbishop William Magee of Dublin (1766-1831), the head of the Church of Ireland had delivered a charge in 1822 in which he condemned both Catholics and dissenters and upheld the established Church.⁴⁵ This led to an increased climate of religious tension in Ireland. In 1826, Magee made a second charge, petitioning the British government for increased protection for the Church of Ireland and demanding a requirement that converts to the Church of Ireland be required to take an oath of loyalty to the crown.⁴⁶ Darby claimed, on publishing his response to this petition, 38 years later, that a revival in Ireland, which had involved the conversion of many Catholics to Protestantism, was cut short by Magee's charge.⁴⁷ Darby was particularly grieved by this petition, and felt disturbed by the willingness of Evangelicals to support it.⁴⁸ Darby sent his response by private letter to Magee, though his opposition

⁴³ J.N. Darby *Analysis of Dr Newman's Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (1865) in *Collected Writings* vol. 18, p. 156

⁴⁴ Neatby, 1901, p. 24

⁴⁵ Burnham, 2004, p. 20

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 25

⁴⁷ I may mention that just at that time the Roman Catholics were becoming Protestants at the rate of 600 to 800 a week. The Archbishop (Magee) imposed within the limits of his jurisdiction, the oaths of allegiance and supremacy; and the work everywhere instantly ceased.

J.N. Darby *Considerations Addressed to the Archbishop of Dublin* (1827) in *Collected Writings* vol. 1, H.L. Heijkoop, Winschoten, Netherlands 1971 p. 1

⁴⁸ Burnham, 2004, p. 27

to the archbishop became well known.⁴⁹ Darby's views were ignored by the archbishop, though he could do nothing to discipline Darby, except to deny him promotion, which did not interest Darby.⁵⁰ In substance, Darby's opinion was that the oath and Magee's petition brought the Church and state into an unhealthy allegiance. Though Darby continued in his curacy for at least a year after his protest,⁵¹ he must have become increasingly dissatisfied with the established Church. He began to travel more widely during his curacy, indicating his unrest.⁵²

Darby's letter of protest to the Archbishop was remarkable, since it recorded signs of the direction his ecclesiology was to take. The letter identified the Church as an heavenly body in opposition to the world⁵³ (later a major theme of his ecclesiology); it presented the Protestant Churches, as well as the Roman Catholic Church as being in a state of corruption and showed concern about formal restrictions being placed on fellowship.

The Beginning of the Brethren

Some time after Darby's protest, a spiritual crisis occurred in his life. A riding accident invalidated him for several months in 1827.⁵⁴ In this period, he had more time for reading and reflection on his theological views. He moved away from his previous

⁴⁹ R. Baylis, *My People: The History of those Christians sometimes called the Plymouth Brethren* Wheaton, Illinois, Harold Shaw Publishers 1995, p.6

⁵⁰ Krapohl, 1988, p.74

⁵¹ F.R. Coad *A History of the Brethren Movement* Exeter, Paternoster 1968, p.29

⁵² *ibid.*

⁵³ The result is that they (the Church) are formed into a spiritual community; they are raised by their head and centre and source of heavenly hope and object of allegiance being in heaven, to be heavenly. They are delivered in spirit out of this present evil world, and become heavenly, spiritual in their connections, thoughts and prospects; while their habits on earth are those, by necessary consequence, of pilgrims and strangers,

J.N. Darby *Considerations Addressed to the Archbishop of Dublin* (1827) in *Collected Writings* vol.1, p.5

⁵⁴ Burnham, 2004, p.30

Sacramentalist views in favour of a Calvinistic, Evangelical position. He felt an assurance of salvation and began to see the believer as free from the Law of the Old Testament.⁵⁵ Henzel argues that Darby's conversion to Evangelicalism was quite distinct from other famous conversions to evangelical thought, such as those of John Wesley and Martin Luther.⁵⁶ He quotes Darby's reminiscence of his apprehension of a new apprehension of the heavenly nature of the Christian's salvation, "I came to understand that I was united to Christ in heaven and that, consequently, my place with God was represented with Christ by His own."⁵⁷

Henzel acknowledges that this is not the complete account of a conversion, however, he highlights the fact that unlike most descriptions of the new consciousness in conversion, Darby emphasises assurance being grounded, not in the death and resurrection of Christ, but in His presence in heaven as a representative.⁵⁸ Henzel argues that this unique conversion experience laid the groundwork for a complex cosmic dualism in Darby's thought that was later of great importance. Central to Darby's hermeneutical system was the distinction between God's heavenly and earthly government; that heavenly and earthly aspects of God's dealings should be distinguished. Darby identified the Church as a part of God's heavenly dealings and thus separated it completely from God's dealings with Israel. This hermeneutic laid the groundwork for Dispensationalism.

Clearly, his ecclesiological conflict with the Archbishop of Dublin had led him to distinguish between the true Church and Christendom. Darby later reflected, "The careful reading of Acts afforded me a practical picture of the early Church, which

⁵⁵ Weremchuk, 1992, p.49

⁵⁶ R.M. Henzel, *Darby, Dualism and the Decline in Dispensationalism*, Tucson, Arizona, Fenestra, 2003, p.74

⁵⁷ J.N. Darby, (1847) *Letters* Vol.1, Winschoten, Netherlands, H.L. Heijkoop, 1971, p.344

⁵⁸ Henzel, 2003, p.74

made me feel deeply the contrast with its actual present state, though still, as ever beloved by God.'⁵⁹

During his recuperation, Darby stayed in Dublin with his brother-in-law at 20 Fitzwilliam Square.⁶⁰ Residing in Dublin led Darby to come into contact with a number of individuals who shared his dissatisfaction with the established Church. There were initially three groups meeting in the city for prayer, worship and Bible study, one of which was led by Edward Cronin (1801-1882).⁶¹ The second group included a man by the name of John Gifford Bellett (1795-1864)⁶² and the third was led by John Parnell, who later became Lord Congleton (1805-1883), the brother of Charles Parnell, the Irish nationalist. At some point in the late 1820s these three groups merged into one meeting. This group moved toward free worship without a fixed order and abandoned a fixed eldership.⁶³ Coad suggests that there was some feeling of friendliness between Anglicans and dissenters, before the emergence of the Brethren, as a result of their being a numerical minority in a predominantly Catholic city.⁶⁴

There is much disagreement among historians as to the role of particular individuals in the group. These differences sometimes divide on party lines, with Exclusive historians emphasising the role of Darby⁶⁵ and some Open Brethren historians⁶⁶

⁵⁹ J.N. Darby (1855), *Letters* vol.3, p.298

⁶⁰ Weremchuk, p.47

⁶¹ A medical student and convert to Evangelicalism from Roman Catholicism who had frequented various dissenting chapels in Dublin. He was forbidden to take the Lord's Supper in one chapel because he was not a member of a particular denomination. This led him to independently meet with a group of Christian friends for fellowship.

⁶² Like Darby, John Gifford Bellett was an Anglican minister who was disillusioned with the state of the Church of Ireland.

⁶³ Coad, 1968, p.30

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p.19

⁶⁵ For instance N.L. Noel *The History of the Brethren* 2 Vols 1936 WF Knapp, Denver, Colorado

seeking to minimize his influence and to emphasise the role of Anthony Norris Groves (1795-1853).⁶⁷ The majority of historians hold that the distinctive principles of the Brethren were established before they came under Darby's influence to any extent.⁶⁸ Cronin's experience of being rejected by dissenting chapels on account of his lack of denominational membership undoubtedly impacted the Dublin group. Anthony Norris Groves was significant in persuading Bellett that the group should break bread together. Bellett recalled:

That it appeared to him (Groves) from the Scriptures that believers meeting together as disciples of Christ were free to break bread together as their Lord admonished them to do, and that, in so far as the practice of the apostles could be a guide, every Lord's Day should be set apart for thus remembering the Lord's death and obeying his parting commands.⁶⁹

Some historians have attempted to draw a connection between the Dublin group and two earlier movements in Ireland, the Walkerites and Kellyites.⁷⁰ These two small factions were 19th century Irish dissenters who rejected clericalism and worshipped informally. However, there is no documentary evidence to indicate any connection

AJ Gardiner, an Exclusive writer of a different party, maintains that no one individual can be identified as the founder of the Brethren, though he goes on to describe the role of Darby and only mentions the names of other individuals involved (AJ Gardiner *The Recovery and Maintenance of the Truth* London, Stow Hill Bible and Tract Depot, 1951, p.2).

⁶⁶ The term Open Brethren is somewhat misleading, as some of the assemblies to whom this term applies hold to forms of restricted communion. Open Brethren includes any Brethren who identify with the Bethesda side of the schism of 1849 against those who identify with Darby's position (see below).

⁶⁷ Anthony Norris Groves (b1795) was a Plymouth dentist who felt called to serve as a missionary. He decided against ordination and became associated with the Brethren, holding very similar ecclesiological views. He was deeply critical of Darby in the split of 1849 over Bethesda Chapel (see below). F. Roy Coad argues that he was the true founder of the Brethren movement (see F.R. Coad *A History of the Brethren Movement* 1968 Paternoster, Exeter).

⁶⁸ R. Baylis *My People: A History of those Christians sometimes called the Plymouth Brethren* Wheaton, Illinois, Harold Shaw, 1995, p.26

⁶⁹ J.S. McPhail, 1935, p.12

⁷⁰ For instance J.S. McPhail, *The History and Doctrines of the Plymouth Brethren by an Irish Clergyman*, Unpublished B.D. thesis, Trinity College, Dublin 1935

between those groups and the Brethren. According to Callahan, historians have failed to give account of the Brethren movement's origin.⁷¹

The formation of a distinct fellowship in Dublin was followed by the appearance in Ireland and England of meetings of Christians who were in contact with the Dublin group.⁷² This development resulted in the movement that came to be known as the 'Brethren.'⁷³ Important new congregations or assemblies, as they were known, began at Plymouth, Barnstable and Bristol. A number of new assemblies began in London.⁷⁴ While, these assemblies were in contact with each other, there is little evidence of any specific strategy behind their rapid expansion.⁷⁵ In this emerging movement, Darby took on what has been described as an almost apostolic role; acting as an itinerant minister across England and Ireland and writing much correspondence to the new assemblies and preaching.

During this period between 1828 and 1834, Darby wrote two works that were significant in the development of the ecclesiology of the Brethren. The first was a

⁷¹ J.P. Callahan, *Primitivist Piety: The Ecclesiology of the Early Plymouth Brethren* Lanham, Maryland Scarecrow Press 1996, p.22

⁷² Coad, 1968, p.81

⁷³ The acceptance of the this name by all the parties of Brethren stems from the desire to avoid any sectarian identity. Andrew Miller, a 19th century Exclusive wrote-

Some have raised objections to the title 'The Brethren', as giving the idea of a sect; others as arrogating to a particular community that which is equally true of all Christians. Such thoughts never occurred to me while writing the book, and were not suggested by those to whom I spoke of it. Expressions such as 'the writings of Brethren', etc, are in common use among themselves; which simply mean a convenient designation, and which cannot be misunderstood. In no other sense is it used here. To be obliged to make use of a *description* instead of a *name* would greatly encumber the style and embarrass the writer. (Andrew Miller *The Brethren* Dillenburg, Germany, Gute Botschaft Verlag 1992 reprint, originally published 1879, introductory note)

Hence, Miller sees the name Brethren as convenient in identifying those of his movement, yet lacking sectarian connotations.

⁷⁴ Baylis, 1995, p.8

⁷⁵ *ibid*, p.9

pamphlet entitled, *Considerations on the Nature and Unity of the Church of Christ* (1828).⁷⁶ This was described by Andrew Miller, a 19th Century Exclusive Brethren writer, as 'the first Brethren tract.'⁷⁷ It particularly addressed the Dissenting denominations. Its main target was the practise of formal membership that insisted on specific doctrinal beliefs and mode of worship, which Darby argued was an affront to the essential unity of the Church:

The bonds of normal union are such as separate the children of God from each other; so that, instead of (itself an imperfect state) unbelievers being found mixed up with them, the people of God are found as individuals, among bodies of professing Christians, joined in communion upon each other and different grounds; not in fact the people of God at all.⁷⁸

The true unity of the Church was to be found in the purposes of Christ. The solution to the problem that Darby gives was not simple. It could only come through the leading of the Holy Spirit in calling believers to meet solely in the name of the Lord outside of formal membership structures.⁷⁹ In practical terms, Darby was somewhat vague in outlining this strategy.⁸⁰ *Considerations* reads more as a call to reflection than a call to action. However, Darby received many enquiries from individuals who had read this work and who desired to implement the ideas contained in it.⁸¹ The result of this interest was the formation of many new gatherings.

⁷⁶ J.N. Darby *Collected Writings*, Winschoten, Netherlands, H.L. Heijkoop, 1992

⁷⁷ A. Miller, *The Brethren Dillenburg*, Germany, Gute Botschaft Verlag 1992 (1879), p.17
Miller suggested that had Darby written this tract later in his career, he would have used 'Church of God', rather than 'Church of Christ', as the latter is not a Scriptural term.

⁷⁸ Darby's *Collected Writings*, vol. 1, p.22

⁷⁹ *ibid*, p.24-25

⁸⁰ Neatby disputed the notion of the work being the 'first Brethren tract', as Miller claimed, arguing that the Brethren were not a distinct movement at the time the paper was written. Neatby rather argued that *Considerations* was the work of man whose ideas were not yet fully formulated (Neatby, 1901, p.29).

⁸¹ H.A. Ironside *A Historical Sketch of the Brethren Movement* Grand Rapids, Michigan Zondervan, 1942, p.20

The second important work written by Darby in this period was entitled *The Notion of a Clergyman Dispensationally the Sin Against the Holy Ghost* (1829).⁸² This work was a fierce attack on the very concept of ordained clergy. Darby argued that the erroneous notion of a clerical class was an indictment against the entire Christian dispensation, from the end of the apostolic era until the present day. In this paper, Darby introduced in embryonic form the doctrine of the ruin or apostasy of the Church. This was a central aspect of Darby's ecclesiology that will be examined later in this thesis.

A matter of historical debate in Darby's life is the date of his complete separation from the established Church. This is most likely to have occurred some time between 1827 and 1834. Neatby claimed that Darby did not terminate his membership of the Anglican Church until 1834.⁸³ Krapohl contrasts the 'bold Darby' of *Considerations on the Nature and Unity of the Church of Christ* with the Darby of Bellett's recollections, who was slow to conclude that separation from the Anglican Church was necessary. Weremchuk, arguing from an Exclusive perspective, argues that greater weight should be given to what Darby actually said for himself in his writings.⁸⁴ While conceding that Darby held some 'Anglican sentiments', Weremchuk argues that no Anglican clergyman would have made the comments that Darby wrote

⁸² J.N. Darby *Collected Writings* vol. 1 Winschoten, Netherlands, H.L. Heijkoop 1972, p.36

⁸³ Neatby, 2001, p.28. Neatby wrote:

Darby's churchmanship did not, in the judgment of such warm friends and supporters as Bellett and Cronin, terminate with his resignation of his curacy. Bellett brings it down to 1834, when he says Darby was 'all but detached from the Church of England'. This did not imply, in those early days, that he was not also one of the Brethren.

According to Rev. Canon N.D. Emerson, Darby never formally resigned from the Anglican Communion. He suggests that Darby could have resumed his ministry at any time provided he confirmed to a bishop his adherence to the Thirty-Nine Articles (Note on the Church of Ireland Diocesan succession list of Glendalough). While we may wonder why Darby did not take the formal step of renouncing his clerical status, this tells us little about his thinking that should lead us to question the sincerity of the principles of his published rejection of clericalism.

⁸⁴ Weremchuk, 1992, p.62

between 1828 and 1834, but this does not seem entirely satisfactory. Coad argued that the turning point for Darby in renouncing the Church of England was not his conflict with Magee in 1827, but a conflict he had with his successor, Archbishop Whately of Dublin in 1832.⁸⁵ Whately had approved measures to restrict Scriptural education in schools in order to appease Roman Catholics. Making personal accusations of doctrinal heresy against Whately, Darby claimed that infidelity and Popery had united.⁸⁶ This event turned Darby irrevocably against the established Church. If Darby was a little slow in resolving to separate from the establishment, this did not put him especially at odds with the Dublin group. Callahan points out that in the early days of the Dublin group, meetings were held at times that did not coincide with the services of the establishment and dissenters.⁸⁷ Given that the central emphasis of the early Brethren was the unity of all believers,⁸⁸ it should not be a surprise that for many, recognising the necessity of secession from the established Church may have been a difficult step.

⁸⁵ Coad, 1968, p.31

⁸⁶ The unholy marriage between Infidelity and Popery- the devil's apostate counterpart of the union between the bride the Lamb's wife and the great head of the Church- whose banns have been first published in this unhappy country, if not adequately exposed (as I think none can feel its evil sufficiently), has yet given occasion to so loud an expression of principle as I trust will, under God, give stability to those who might otherwise have been entangled, and maintain the public expression of the right, here at least, before God, when all principle and allegiance towards Him have been so atrociously invaded.

(J.N. Darby *A Letter on a Serious Question connected with the Irish Education Measures of 1832* in *Collected Writings* vol.32 Winschoten, Netherlands, H.L. Heijkoop, 1972 p.306)

The Archbishop of Dublin is a Sabellian. Of the painful situation in which this places the clergy it is not for me to judge. What the laity will feel in thinking of their association with him, on the general superintendence of the establishment, they must consider for themselves.

(*ibid*, p.307)

⁸⁷ Callahan, 1996, p.79

⁸⁸ *ibid*, p.99

In 1834, Darby made his rejection of the established Church clear with the publication of a tract, *Separation from Evil God's Principle of Unity* (1834).⁸⁹ Darby argued in this work that the unity of the Church stemmed from union with Christ. As Christ is holy, any union with evil is impossible⁹⁰. Therefore unity went together with complete separation from evil. Darby condemned two distinct errors in this work. The first error was sectarianism, where unity is grounded in a system of doctrine instead of the work of Christ⁹¹ and the second, clericalism, where unity is grounded in ecclesiastical structures.⁹²

Darby participated in a series of conferences at the home of Lady Theodosia Powerscourt, a young, aristocratic widow in Ireland, in the Wicklow mountains, near Calary. Lady Powerscourt had taken some interest in Edward Irving, a Church of Scotland minister who later founded the Catholic Apostolic Church. He gained much public attention through publication of his Premillennial prophetic views. There are some who have argued that Darby's eschatology was heavily derived from Irving.⁹³ The first Powerscourt conference was in 1831.⁹⁴ The early Powerscourt gatherings included many Anglican clergymen, but with the passing of time, they came to be

⁸⁹ J.N. Darby *Collected Writings* vol.1, Winschoten, Netherlands, H.L. Heijkoop, 1971, p.350

⁹⁰ *ibid*, p.355

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There is a constant tendency in the mind to fall into sectarianism, and to make a basis of union of the opposite of what I have here just alluded to: that is, of a system of some kind or other to which the mind is attached, and round which saints or others are gathered; and which assuming itself to be based on a true principle of unity, regards as schism whatever separates from itself- attaching the name of unity to what is not God's centre and plan of unity.

(*ibid*, p.354)

Those Presbyterian Churches that require adherence to the Westminster Confession of Faith is a condition of membership would be an example what Darby is condemning here.

⁹² *Ibid*, p.365

⁹³ See T.G. Grass, *The Church's Ruin and Restoration: The Development of Ecclesiology in the Plymouth Brethren and the Catholic Apostolic Church 1825-1866*, Unpublished PhD thesis, King's College, London

⁹⁴ H.A. Ironside, *Historical Sketch of the Brethren Movement* Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan 1985 (Originally published 1942), p.23

dominated by those wholly committed to the Brethren. Darby's involvement gave him stimulation and a platform enabling him to refine and develop his views on prophetic subjects.⁹⁵ During the 1830's he came to espouse belief in a future period of tribulation on the earth, preceded by Christ's coming in the air to remove the Church from the world. This tribulation would be followed by Christ's coming to establish His Millennial rule upon the earth, a time during which the nation of Israel would be restored to Palestine and would enjoy divine blessings.⁹⁶ This was the beginning of the Dispensationalist view of prophecy, which would later come to achieve enormous popularity outside the Brethren, as well as among them, particularly through the influence of the Scofield Reference Bible⁹⁷ and the Niagara Prophecy Conferences in the 1870s (see chapter 5).⁹⁸ It was during this period that Darby developed a very close personal relationship with Lady Powerscourt, a relationship that came close to marriage, according to most accounts.⁹⁹ There is no clear documentary evidence for the real nature of Darby's relationship with Lady Powerscourt. We are dependent on the testimony of those who knew Darby for this.

⁹⁵ The social context of the development of Brethren eschatology has been a subject of much discussion. The 1830s followed the rise and defeat of Napoleon. It was a time of political discontent in England and actual revolution in many European countries. It has been suggested that these troubles may have contributed to the apocalyptic eschatology of the Brethren. Callahan is somewhat critical of this view (Callahan, 1996, p.131). Political events only fuel apocalyptic speculation when the practice of apocalyptic speculation is in operation as a medium of thought. Prophetic speculation was already a fashionable intellectual pursuit some time before the Brethren emerged.

⁹⁶ Baylis, 1995, p.31

⁹⁷ C.I. Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1909

An annotated edition of the King James Bible, edited by C.I. Scofield, an American Congregationalist preacher. Its notes taught Dispensational doctrine. They were widely used amongst American fundamentalists and also among the Brethren. The Scofield Reference Bible is credited by most writers with popularising Dispensationalism.

⁹⁸ These non-denominational conferences in the 1870s were focused on the study of the Bible. They departed from traditional Evangelical expository preaching in favour of themed 'Bible Readings'. Notable participants included Nathaniel West, H.M. Parsons, A.J. Gordon, A.T. Pierson and James H Brookes. Premillennialism became dominant at these conferences. These conferences enabled the spread of Dispensational views in various conservative denominations.

See T.P. Weber, "Niagara Conferences" in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* ed. W.A. Elwell, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker Books 1984

⁹⁹ Burnham, 2004, p.121

Darby's ministry quickly took on an international character in the late 1830s, while the Brethren movement in England and Ireland was still young and growing. In 1837, Darby left Britain to go to Switzerland.¹⁰⁰ Darby's motives for going to Switzerland are not certain.¹⁰¹ It may have been his intention to propagate Brethren views or he may have desired to investigate the Swiss dissenters from the established Reformed Church in that country. Anthony Norris Groves had already brought Darby's reputation for inspiring teaching to Switzerland.¹⁰² Darby became involved in controversies over the Wesleyan doctrine of Perfectionism, which had caused much controversy and division within the Swiss dissenters and it seems he acted in the role of peacemaker, for which he earned the gratitude of Church leaders among them.¹⁰³ However, it was not long before Darby became involved in disputes over his distinctive ecclesiological doctrines. This period of Darby's writing has been wrongly characterised by some as innovative, when in actual fact, Darby consolidated, defended and refined his already formed views.¹⁰⁴ Much of the material written during his stay in Switzerland in the late 1830s to the early 1840s¹⁰⁵ focuses on liberty of ministry, the impossibility of ordaining a modern eldership and the ruin of the entire Church of God on earth. The subject of separation is strangely absent from much of this material. This is a little surprising, given that he had already written *Separation from Evil God's Principle of Unity*. Perhaps this reflects the lack of separation inherent in Darby's mission. He had gone to Switzerland to involve himself in the affairs of what to him was essentially a sect, a body that failed to

¹⁰⁰ Ironside, 1942, p.24

¹⁰¹ Burnham, 2004, p.149

¹⁰² *ibid*, p.151

¹⁰³ Coad, 1968, p.88

¹⁰⁴ Burnham, 2004, p.152

¹⁰⁵ For example, J.N. Darby *On the Formation of Churches* (1840), *Some Further Developments on the Formation of Churches* (1840), *Remarks on the State of the Church* (1843), *Remarks on the Pamphlet of Mr. F. Olivier* (1843) in *Collected Writings* vol.1 Winschoten, Netherlands, H.L. Heijkoop, 1971

embrace the unity of the Church of God yet claimed to be a Church, part of the apostate state of the Church in general. Darby's lack of courtesy offended many in the Swiss Churches¹⁰⁶ and many of those who heard him thought that his teaching was vague and lacking in logical coherence,¹⁰⁷ nevertheless, he established many small Brethren assemblies, some of which remain today. It is likely that the disappointing response of the Swiss dissenters directed him back to a heavy emphasis on separation. The conflict with the leaders of the Swiss Churches also increased Darby's resolute opposition to Clericalism.¹⁰⁸ Darby was forced by political upheaval to leave Switzerland in 1845.¹⁰⁹

Conflict at Plymouth

When Darby returned to Britain, he was faced with controversy over the assembly at Ebrington Street Plymouth. This was the most prominent assembly in the country; not only was it the largest, but the headquarters of the main Brethren magazine, *Christian Witness*, was in Plymouth, first edited by Henry Borlase (1806-1835),¹¹⁰ and after his death by Benjamin Wills Newton.¹¹¹ The misleading description of 'Plymouth Brethren' was due to the prominence of this assembly. The most prominent personality in this assembly was Benjamin Wills Newton (1806-1899).¹¹² He had come under Darby's influence while studying at Oxford and had been recognised by

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Neatby, 1901, p.92

¹⁰⁸ Krapohl, 1988, p.238

¹⁰⁹ McPhail, 1935, p.23

¹¹⁰ Henry Borlase was the former curate of St. Keynes, Cornwall before joining the Brethren. His ministry was prominent in Plymouth, where he edited the *Christian Witness* magazine until his untimely death in 1835.

¹¹¹ Coad, 1968, p.66

¹¹² Born in Plymouth of Quaker parents, Newton studied at Exeter College, Oxford. He contemplated becoming an Anglican minister, but was dissuaded from this course by his encounter with members of the early Brethren.

Darby as having potential.¹¹³ Darby appears to have seen himself as Newton's mentor.¹¹⁴ However, some tension had been developing between the two men prior to Darby's first visit to the continent in 1837. Newton was unconvinced by Darby's doctrine of the Pre-Tribulational rapture or coming of Christ to earth to remove the Church to the heavens. This doctrine was intrinsically connected to the division of much of the New Testament teaching into parts that related to the Church and parts that related to the Jewish remnant. In order to defend his theory, it was necessary for Darby to argue that Matthew 24, which was held to deal with events connected with Christ's appearing, was addressed not to the Church, but to the Jewish nation. This line of argument entailed that other parts of the Gospels, such as the Sermon on the Mount, were also addressed to the Jewish nation, as opposed to the Church. Newton was deeply unhappy with this arguably novel hermeneutic.

When Darby returned to Plymouth, he saw much evidence of authoritarianism. The freedom of all to minister was enormously restricted and a group of men who were recognised as elders exercised much control over affairs in the assembly.¹¹⁵

According to Samuel Prideax Tregelles (1813-1875),¹¹⁶ Newton's cousin and closest confidant, Darby had asked Newton to act as a president of the meetings in Plymouth and to supervise the ministry there.¹¹⁷ Whether this claim is true is difficult to judge in the light of the inconsistency of Newton's position on leadership in the assembly.

¹¹³ Baylis, 1995, p.45

¹¹⁴ Burnham, 2004, p.147

¹¹⁵ Ironside, 1942, p.40

¹¹⁶ Of Quaker parents, Tregelles was an elder at Ebrington and after that ministered in the same independent chapel as his cousin and also wrote a number of hymns. Newton. He is better known, however, for his critical edition of the New Testament and his research into Hebrew grammar.

¹¹⁷ S.P. Tregelles, *Three Letters to the Author of 'A Retrospect on Events that have taken place amongst the Brethren,'* London, Houlston and Sons, 1894 (Originally published 1849), p.7

Tregelles claimed to have seen transcripts of letters confirming this.

Newton had decided in 1835 that appointments were unscriptural¹¹⁸ and that the power to appoint elders had been lost, although those who were sufficiently gifted might act in that capacity and those who were so gifted should be recognised by the congregation as elders.¹¹⁹ Newton and others who were given informal recognition at Ebrington Street took on a substantial leadership role there. They exercised control over who was allowed to speak in meetings. Whatever Darby's initial feelings about Newton's role at Ebrington Street, he was deeply dissatisfied about the state of affairs that had risen during his residence on the Continent. He was particularly grieved by the custom of arranging the choice of speaker before meetings.¹²⁰ Darby felt that Newton had set himself up as a clergyman.

In correspondence in 1845, Darby made vague protestations against Newton, accusing him of 'behaving very badly toward many beloved brethren and in the sight of God.'¹²¹ A public meeting was convened, which used a system of arbitration that Darby described as 'worldly.'¹²² The elders who judged this meeting cleared Newton, though William Trotter (1818-1865),¹²³ one of Darby's party pointed out that at least

¹¹⁸ Burnham, 2004, p.82

Newton's position on elders was not radically dissimilar to Darby's. The key difference was that Newton saw eldership as a gift and gave great importance to the role of elders in the Church. Darby, however, both in his writings and in the practises of assemblies under his influence, gave only a minor role to informal elders (see chapter 4).

¹¹⁹ Newton wrote:

The Corinthians greatly needed government, yet the Apostle did not direct them to a 'presidency of the Spirit', but said 'I beseech you, brethren, ye know the household of Stephanas... that ye submit yourselves unto such.' The way in which they were expected to own the Holy Ghost (and it is the only way we can own Him) was by recognising those qualified by Him, whether by rule or to instruct. We are responsible for owning the pastors, teachers, evangelists whom we in our consciences believe to be qualified by the Holy Ghost. If we refuse to own them, we reject the order of the Holy Ghost.

B.W. Newton *On Ministry and Order in the Church*, Ashford, Middlesex, Pearl Publications, 1997 reprint (Taken from material written in 1861), p.53

¹²⁰ Ibid, p.161

¹²¹ Ibid, p.164

¹²² W. Trotter *The Origins of the So-Called Open Brethren* Whitstable, Kingston Bible Trust, 1987 reprint (Originally published 1860), p.11

¹²³ A former Methodist preacher who had joined the Brethren after contact with Darby.

one of these elders would have been implicated by Newton's guilt.¹²⁴ According to Darby, Newton actually admitted that he was guilty of attempting to form a party against Darby:

Mr Newton broke out in great anger, saying that he waived all formal objections that he did seek to make a focus of Plymouth, and that his object was to have union in testimony there against the other brethren (that is, as explained and is evident their teaching), and that he trusted to have at least Devonshire and Somersetshire under his influence for purpose; and that it was not the first time that I had thwarted and spoiled his plans.¹²⁵

Darby and many other Brethren then departed from Ebrington Street and began meeting at Raleigh Street.¹²⁶ A good deal of pamphleteering occurred between the two parties. This became even more heated when handwritten notes of a lecture by Newton were passed to the wife of J.L. Harris, a prominent defector from Ebrington Street. These notes suggested that Newton had taught that in the Incarnation, Christ was placed under the same sentence of guilt of both Adam and the nation of Israel for their rebellion, though Christ's sinlessness was maintained.¹²⁷ This would have been seen by most orthodox Christians as heresy and not dissimilar to views that had been taught by Edward Irving in the 1820s that were considered heretical.¹²⁸ It is difficult not to describe Darby's discovery of these notes as a 'smoking gun.' Darby publicly

¹²⁴ *ibid*, p. 12

¹²⁵ J.N. Darby, *Narrative of Facts* (1848) in *Collected Writings* vo.20

¹²⁶ Trotter, 1987, p.12

¹²⁷ Burnham, 2004, p.188

A number of writers are very critical of Harris for not approaching Newton to clarify the accuracy of these notes. As Newton gave a public response to the charge, this is not really relevant.

¹²⁸ A. Dallimore, *The Life of Edward Irving* Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 1983

In an interview with an Anglican minister, Irving is reported to have said "No, No! I admit imputation to its fullest extent, but that does not go far enough for me. Paul says, 'He hath made him to be sin, who knew no sin.'Not 'into captivity', but Christ experienced everything the same as Paul did, except captivity." (Dallimore, 1983, p.78)

condemned the teaching in several papers.¹²⁹ Newton responded by publishing a number of tracts in which he attempted to distance himself from some of the views expressed in the lecture. However, none of Newton's critics were satisfied by his response. In particular, Newton had not made it clear that he had renounced the teaching that Christ was identified with the guilt of Israel.¹³⁰ Newton was severely discredited in the eyes of the majority of the Brethren. He left Plymouth in 1847 and maintained a preaching ministry in chapels outside the Brethren movement. The assembly at Ebrington Street was severely reduced in numbers and came under the direction of Tregelles. Darby made it clear that any who remained in fellowship with Ebrington Street were guilty of partaking of Newton's evil.¹³¹

Krapohl is critical of Coad's portrayal of Darby's role in the controversy with Newton.¹³² Coad seems to present Darby as a villain determined to discredit Newton. Krapohl argues that Coad failed to understand Darby's mindset. Darby saw Satan and other evil beings as being constantly active in the world and in apostate Christendom. Therefore it was inevitable that Darby would suspect that Newton had come under evil influence when he had displayed signs of authoritarianism and made heretical statements.¹³³ Darby's opposition to Newton must not be understood as a personal opposition to the man. Darby's charges against Newton were by no means groundless.¹³⁴ Seeking to take a more objective view on Darby, Krapohl suggests that his fierce rhetoric has led many to misunderstand the conflict, when Darby always

¹²⁹ J.N. Darby, *Observations on a Tract entitled 'Remarks on the Sufferings of the Lord Jesus' and A Plain Statement on the Sufferings of our Blessed Lord* (1848) in *Collected Writings* vol.15

¹³⁰ McPhail, 1935, p.31

¹³¹ Baylis, 1995, p.47

¹³² Krapohl, 1988, p.290

¹³³ *ibid*, p.291

¹³⁴ *ibid*, p.292

professed only 'kindly feelings' towards Newton.¹³⁵ Newton was certainly not left without the opportunity to make his case; in fact Newton refused to attend a number of conferences intended to discuss the situation at Ebrington Street.¹³⁶ Krapohl might be accused of naivety. It is certainly possible that Darby's opposition to Newton might have been due to baser motives such as self-aggrandizement. However, it is perhaps reasonable to allow that he may have been very sincere in his concerns.

Burnham identifies freedom in worship and ministry as the centre of the dispute between Darby and Newton.¹³⁷ Though Newton accepted some degree of freedom for others to minister, he favoured a more ordered style of worship and ministry. His Quaker background had made him suspicious of spontaneity. Tregelles claimed that spontaneity in worship was a deviation from the original Brethren principles. Darby rather argued that spontaneity was grounded in an increased recognition of the role of the Holy Spirit in the Church.¹³⁸

Krapohl contrasts the personalities of Darby and Newton; Darby was from a privileged, aristocratic background and yet lived an austere and humble lifestyle¹³⁹. He made no claim to leadership over others, except by the urge of his moral and doctrinal teaching (as well as through his charismatic personality). In contrast, Newton was from a middle-class background and by the admission of his own mother, a spoiled child. Newton consistently acted as though he was a person of privileged standing and special ability. Krapohl seems harsh in his judgment towards

¹³⁵ *ibid*, p.293

¹³⁶ Ironside, 1985, p.40

¹³⁷ Burnham, 2004, p.168

¹³⁸ Krapohl, 1988, p.228

See J.N. Darby *On the Presence and Action of the Holy Ghost in the Church* (1844) in *Collected Writings* vol.3, p.206

¹³⁹ Krapohl, 1988, p.239

Newton, however, even Coad holds that Newton was far more authoritarian in his outlook than Darby.¹⁴⁰ There is plenty of anecdotal biographical material to testify to the strength of Darby's personal qualities, which cannot be seen in what is known of Newton.

The Controversy over Newton Spreads to Bristol

In 1848, a conference of Brethren had affirmed Darby's *Narrative of Facts* (1848),¹⁴¹ an account of the controversy and had condemned the leadership of Ebrington Street, Plymouth.¹⁴² However, a number of assemblies had adopted a 'neutral' position on the matter.¹⁴³ The most notable of these was Bethesda Chapel in Bristol, which was lead by George Müller (1805-1898), the famous founder of Bristol Orphanage, together with a former Baptist preacher, Henry Craik (1805-1866).¹⁴⁴ Unlike Darby, they believed in appointing elders and they themselves acted in that capacity.¹⁴⁵

In 1848, several individuals from Ebrington Street were received to the breaking of bread at Bethesda Chapel.¹⁴⁶ However, some in Bethesda were followers of Darby and objected to this. The ten elders of Bethesda released a document clarifying their position, a document that became known as the *Letter of the Ten*. The letter maintained that it was not necessary to make reception of the individuals in question subject to the judgment of Newton's views.¹⁴⁷ It argued that judgment of Newton's

¹⁴⁰ Coad, 1968, p.66

¹⁴¹ J.N. Darby, *Collected Writings*, vol.20

¹⁴² Trotter, 1987, p.27

¹⁴³ Baylis, 1995, p.47

¹⁴⁴ Coad, 1968, p.154

¹⁴⁵ Coad, 1968, p.155

¹⁴⁶ Callahan, 1996, p.xvi

¹⁴⁷ McPhail, 1936, p.34

tracts and papers would involve the elders in difficult and distracting controversy. The position taken was deeply objectionable to supporters of Darby because it was a denial of the necessity of the Church judging evil and separating from it. In their eyes, the document made light of the seriousness of Newton's error.¹⁴⁸ William Trotter argued that the *Letter of the Ten* was wrong to limit exclusion from fellowship of only those 'upholding, maintaining or defending' error. This did not take full account of the subtle dangers of heresy.¹⁴⁹

While visiting Bristol, Darby did not preach at Bethesda and sent a letter to Müller issuing his condemnation of Bethesda.¹⁵⁰ Despite Bethesda's influential position, most assemblies were ready to follow Darby's opposition to Bethesda. Under this pressure, Müller made an unambiguous condemnation of Newton's doctrines.¹⁵¹

However, Darby's supporters were dissatisfied with this, as there had been no withdrawal of the principles of the *Letter of the Ten*.¹⁵² It was a question of ecclesiology as well as Christology. The Brethren movement became divided between the majority who accepted Darby's opposition to Bethesda, the 'Exclusives', and the minority (but who later became the majority through increase of numbers) who upheld Bethesda, the 'Open Brethren.'¹⁵³

¹⁴⁸ Noel, vol. 1, 1936, p.218

¹⁴⁹ Trotter, 1987, p.40

¹⁵⁰ Coad, 1968, p.157

¹⁵¹ Baylis, 1995, p.48

¹⁵² Miller, 1992, p.95

Ironside argues that the *Letter of the Ten* had never been intended for circulation or to be a precedent (Ironside, 1942, p.65). However, this analysis seems to detract from the seriousness of Church discipline. Why should this case have been dealt with exceptionally and why does it set no precedent?

¹⁵³ Coad, 1968, p.159

The schism over Bethesda is complicated by the claim of Müller that Darby visited him in 1849.¹⁵⁴ According to Müller, Darby offered reconciliation to him and to Bethesda, but Müller claimed he rejected this declaring that:

I have this moment only ten minutes time, having an important meeting before me; and as you have acted so wickedly in this matter, I cannot now enter upon it, as I have no time.¹⁵⁵

The two men never again met and the schism between those opposing and accepting Bethesda was set in stone. This meeting is denied by Exclusive writers, as it appears to cast doubt upon the consistency of Darby. If he was prepared to be reconciled, yet departed without resolving the situation, the implication is that he was motivated by personal feelings.¹⁵⁶ On the other hand, it may be that Darby suspected that if Müller had condemned Newton's error he had perhaps also rejected the principles of the *Letter of the Ten*. Darby perhaps concluded from Müller's angry response that this was not the case. Hence, this incident, if it is true, need not throw into question the Exclusive case against Bethesda.¹⁵⁷

The controversy with Bethesda and also with Newton underlines an increased emphasis in Darby's thought on the subject of separation. Darby had identified the importance of separation in 1834 and in his secession from Anglicanism. However, it had been only one of a number of themes in his ecclesiology, and one that was largely absent from his agenda in Switzerland. The controversy with Newton and Bethesda placed separation at the forefront of Darby's ecclesiology. The Bethesda question

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Neatby, 1901, p.163

¹⁵⁶ Coad, 1968, p.158

¹⁵⁷ In his biography of Anthony Norris Groves (*Anthony Norris Groves*, London, Thynn and Co, 1939) GH Lang devoted an appendix to the question of whether the interview between Darby and Müller took place in 1849. Lang concluded that Darby did not deny that an interview had taken place, but denied the report of what was said between them. It is an open question of whose account is to be believed, either Müller was lying or Darby was lying, unless of course, Müller's recollections are highly faulty (p.439).

remains for the Exclusive Brethren a test of fellowship for those within Brethren circles. Those in fellowship with the Open Brethren are not admitted to communion with Exclusives until they have judged the 'Bethesda Question' and separated from the 'evil' of the Open Brethren.¹⁵⁸ This does raise the question of why there is no 'expiry date' on a matter concerning individuals who are now dead and which is probably not known or understood by large numbers within Open Brethren circles. Geographical distance evidently does not affect the relevance of the Bethesda question, as the controversy was even imported to Indian Brethren circles in the 1990s.¹⁵⁹ Another result of the Bethesda controversy was the reduction of the influence of Darby's thought in the Open Brethren. Most Open Brethren assemblies in Britain followed Bethesda in appointing elders, although in the United States, Darby's rejection of formal eldership was pursued.¹⁶⁰

After the Division

Darby continued to find polemical battles in which to engage, both within the Brethren and outside it. He attacked the theology of the Oxford Movement in *Remarks on Puseyism*,¹⁶¹ he made several polemical assaults on Roman Catholicism¹⁶² and joined in the outcry against the publication of the Broad Church publication, *Essays and Reviews*¹⁶³ and the conclusions of Bishop Colenso on the

¹⁵⁸ M. Brown *Aspects of some Exclusive Doctrines* Glasgow, Gospel Tract Publications, 1996, p.5
¹⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p.28

¹⁶⁰ Baylis, 1995, p.119

¹⁶¹ J.N. Darby *Collected Writings* vol.15, p.290

¹⁶² J.N. Darby *The True Character of Romanism* (1863) in *Collected Writings*, vol.15, *Familiar Conversations on Romanism* (1860) in *Collected Writings* vol.22, p.79, *Analysis of Dr Newman's Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (1865) in *Collected Writings* vol.18, p.45

¹⁶³ J.N. Darby *Dialogues on the Essays and Reviews* (1862) in *Collected Writings*, vol.9

Pentateuch.¹⁶⁴ Darby's first controversy within the Exclusive party began when he published the views on the sufferings of Christ.¹⁶⁵ Darby adopted a position that was surprisingly similar to that of Newton, holding that some of the sufferings of Christ were in identification with the sufferings of the Jews for their apostasy. Darby was quick to point out that his view identified these sufferings as voluntary, rather than through the incarnation, as Newton had taught.¹⁶⁶ However, a number of Brethren, most notably, W.H. Dorman (1802-78), a former minister of an Independent chapel, were dissatisfied and left the Exclusive party as a result.¹⁶⁷ Darby, however, had offered to withdraw himself from fellowship, so as not to be the cause of controversy.¹⁶⁸

A far more fundamental split occurred in 1881 between supporters of William Kelly, one of Darby's closest confidants, and supporters of Darby himself. This split began when a member of an assembly in the Isle of Wight went abroad to marry his deceased wife's sister.¹⁶⁹ This caused much disagreement in the assembly, so much so that Darby described it as 'rotten.'¹⁷⁰ A former Anglican minister by the name of Charles Finch wanted to join the Brethren, along with his former congregation, but would not join this assembly.¹⁷¹ When Edward Cronin, one of the early Brethren visited the island he broke bread with the assembly there, but found the state of affairs there to be objectionable and so broke bread with Finch and his former

¹⁶⁴ J.N. Darby *Dr Colenso and the Pentateuch* (1834) in *Collected Writings*, vol.23, p.82

¹⁶⁵ J.N. Darby *The Sufferings of Christ* (1858) in *Collected Writings*, vol.7, p.139

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p.158

¹⁶⁷ *Ironside*, 1942, p.77

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p.78

¹⁶⁹ McPhail, 1935, p.42

As noted in chapter three, Darby was ambivalent as to the morality of marrying one's deceased wife's sister.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid*.

congregation.¹⁷² When Cronin returned to his own assembly in London he faced only disapproval, but later, after a period of six months was excommunicated. The assembly at Park Street, by this time the most prominent assembly in the country, convened a meeting at which Darby was present.¹⁷³ The result of this meeting was that Cronin was excommunicated along with his own assembly for their delay. However, an assembly in Ramsgate became divided between those who accepted the excommunication and those who refused to recognise it.¹⁷⁴ William Kelly and his supporters decided against it.¹⁷⁵ The Exclusives in Britain were divided in half, between Kelly's supporters and those who stood with Darby and Park Street.¹⁷⁶ The majority of Brethren abroad sided with Darby.¹⁷⁷ This division was related to an increasing centralist tendency in the Exclusive party. Darby had approved with George Vicesimus Wigram, a prominent brother, the setting up of a central meeting in London to discuss discipline.¹⁷⁸ William Kelly had concerns that the Brethren were moving from a Biblical family model for ecclesiology towards a militaristic command structure. Krapohl holds that Darby was more an observer than a participant in the division of 1881;¹⁷⁹ however, this is an analysis that is not accepted by Exclusive writers, such as Noel.¹⁸⁰ Krapohl points out that Cronin's behaviour in renouncing the assembly on the Isle of Wight was little different from Darby's actions in disowning Ebrington Street before the revelation of heresy. Darby, according to Krapohl, was

¹⁷² Ironside, 1985, p.84

¹⁷³ Noel, 1936, vol.1, p.302

¹⁷⁴ McPhail, 1935, p.44

¹⁷⁵ Ironside, 1942, p.90

¹⁷⁶ Noel, 1936, vol.1, p.302

¹⁷⁷ *ibid*, p.95

¹⁷⁸ B.R. Wilson, "The Exclusive Brethren" in *Patterns of Sectarianism* ed. B.R. Wilson London, Heinemann, 1967

¹⁷⁹ Krapohl, 1988, p.436

Ironside maintains that because of his trusting nature, Darby was manipulated in this controversy, particularly by J.B. Stoney (Ironside, 1942, p.98), one of the early Brethren and after Darby's death, the informal leader of the Darbyite Exclusives.

¹⁸⁰ Noel, 1936, vol.1, p.302

'caught between opposite poles of his theology', that is separation and unity.¹⁸¹

However, whether Darby or Kelly was right in this controversy has little bearing on the validity or reasonability of Darby's ecclesiology, as Kelly slavishly followed Darby's theology, despite their disagreement over this matter of ecclesiastical discipline. However, it does seem difficult to see how schisms of this kind might be avoided under Darby's ecclesiology. It does seem that Darby regretted the 1881 division, as the last words of his correspondence before his death are 'I should particularly object to any attack being made on William Kelly.'¹⁸² A further rift was beginning around the time of Darby's death in 1882. F.W. Grant, an influential Bible teacher in the Canadian brethren, asserted that believers are sealed with the Holy Spirit at conversion (as believed most by Evangelical Christians) and that Old Testament saints were saved in Christ in the same manner as believers in the Christian dispensation. The majority of assemblies in North America supported F.W. Grant against Darby's party, who contended that sealing with the Holy Spirit was a post-conversion experience.¹⁸³ After Darby's death further splits occurred in the Exclusive Brethren parties over both doctrine and ecclesiastical discipline, such as the Stuart division (1882) regarding sanctification, and the Lowe division (1889) over the teachings of F.E. Raven, the most prominent Brethren teacher at the time. In evaluating Darby's ecclesiology, it will be necessary to ask whether the tendency towards schism is an inevitable consequence of it.

¹⁸¹ Krapohl, 1988, p.432

¹⁸² quoted in N.L. Noel, 1936, p.49

¹⁸³ Ironside, 1942, p.99

Darby made trips to the United States in 1862, 1864, 1866, 1870, 1872-73, 1874, 1876, where he made some converts to Brethrenism.¹⁸⁴ However, many other Christians in the United States were very interested in Darby's Dispensational eschatology without having any desire to leave their denominations for the Brethren.¹⁸⁵ Darby was somewhat dismayed at this. However, the spread of Dispensationalism to the United States is perhaps one of Darby's greatest legacies to the world, perhaps even more historically significant than the spread of the Brethren movement worldwide. This will be discussed in chapter five. One of those in the United States with whom Darby interacted was Dwight L Moody (more on Moody in chapter five), the American evangelist who was greatly enthusiastic about Darby's eschatological scheme and had much admiration for the Brethren.¹⁸⁶ However, Darby was deeply critical of Moody's rejection of Calvinist Soteriology¹⁸⁷ and felt his evangelism to be shallow.¹⁸⁸

Darby died in 1882 at the home of a friend, Henry A Hammond, in Bournemouth.¹⁸⁹ He was buried in Bournemouth cemetery, his funeral being attended by many from around the world. No obituary was published in the *Times*, however, presumably because of his lack of recognition outside Brethren circles.

¹⁸⁴ L.E. Dixon, "The Importance of J.N. Darby and the Brethren Movement in the History of Conservative Theology," in *Christian Brethren Review*, 1990 vol.41

¹⁸⁵ Hoffecker, 1984, p.293

¹⁸⁶ Dixon, 1990, p.45

¹⁸⁷ Dixon, 1990, p.46

¹⁸⁸ J.N. Darby (1875), *Letters* vol.2, p.329:

The mere excitement (of Moody's revivals) will soon be over, a matter to be talked of as past. But Brethren have something that is permanent, and the word of God abides for ever. Only they must live it.

¹⁸⁹ T.C.P. Stunt "John Nelson Darby" in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* ed. H.G.G. Matthew and B. Harris, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004, p.117

In terms of evaluating the ecclesiology of John Nelson Darby, it will be vitally important to recognise the subtle change of emphasis in Darby's theology from a focus on unity that recognised the necessity of separation to an ecclesiology that placed its primary emphasis on separation. This was not the result of any change in his theology, but simply in the main content of his writings. The third chapter will demonstrate that unity was in fact, a central and consistent aspect of Darby's ecclesiology. The few biographies of John Nelson Darby contain considerable information on the details of his life, but most do not identify the ways in which significant events of his career impacted his ecclesiological thinking. In particular, insufficient attention, as this chapter has demonstrated, has been paid to ways in which Darby's conflict with Newton may have resulted in his growing emphasis on separation as a principle of unity.

The next chapter provides a systematic examination of Darby's doctrine of the church and his theory of its ruin.

Chapter 3: Darby's Views on the Nature and Ruin of the Church

Church and Churches

The word *Church* comes from the Greek word *Kyriakon*, which means “belonging to the Lord.”¹ This word is frequently used in English translations in place of the Greek word *ekklesia*. The word refers to those called out to gather or assemble. In common parlance, the word church can refer to the universal Church (as in ‘one, holy, catholic and apostolic church’), a congregation, a denomination, a number of congregations in a geographical location (as in ‘the Church in Rome’ or ‘the Church in Japan’) or a building. The use of the word Church to refer to a building, while not favoured by modern theologians seems to have occurred in the Anglican *Homily on the Right use of the Church*.²

J.N. Darby consistently translated the word *church* as *assembly* in his *New Translation Bible*.³ Darby believed this was a more accurate translation and avoided the confusion inherent in the general understanding of the word *Church*:

We must consider at length the word *Ekklesia*, usually rendered ‘congregation or church’, but by us ‘assembly’. Though we might in general be indifferent about this expression, we dare not be so ever about a false rendering of the word of God. *Kirche* is by origin a Greek word, and signifies ‘belonging’ to the Lord’, whilst it is used in the parlance of the day to indicate a building devoted to preaching

¹ R.L. Omonson, “The Church” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. W. Elwell, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker Books 1984, p.231

² “It remaineth now to be declared that the church or temple, is the place where the lively word of God (and not man’s inventions) ought to be read and taught, and that the people are bound thither with all diligence to resort; and this proof likewise to be made by the Scriptures as hereafter shall appear.” *Book of Homilies* London, SPCK, 1846, p.166

³ J.N. Darby *The Holy Scriptures: A New Translation from the Original Languages* 2000 reprint (Originally published 1890) Bible and Gospel Trust, Middlesex, England

and other purposes of worship. The Scripture likewise uses it with regard to Sunday and the Lord's supper; where one might read 'church day' instead of Lord's-day, and 'church supper' instead of 'Lord's-supper.' The Greek word *Ekklesia* means 'assembly'; and especially denotes an assembly of those who in Greek states, as also in some modern republics, had the rights of citizenship in contradistinction to those inhabitants who had them not, and who bore the not easily translated name *Tapoikos*, which we have rendered 'foreigner' or 'without citizenship.' We have not translated *Ekklesia* by 'congregation' (*gemeine*), because this designation does not represent the true meaning of the word in its original character. In order therefore to obviate any embarrassment of understanding, we have translated it by assembly; and the reader will find it used unmistakably in this sense in Acts 19:41 where we read, 'The town clerk dismissed the assembly'.⁴

Some early translations of the Bible into English had used the word *congregation* in place of *Church*, for instance William Tyndale's translation of the Bible. Darby agreed with Tyndale that *church* was unhelpful. He argued that the word *Church* was too associated with the concept of the Church as a building:

take as for instance, this word, Church. It is applied, as we all know, to buildings appropriated to ecclesiastical services. But the church is the house of God, though God has expressly declared that, under the Christian system, He will not dwell in temples made with hands; that where two or three are gathered together in His name- the true church so far, and so called in the passage- there Christ is in the midst.⁵

Darby did not make clear why he rejected the word *congregation*. Arguably, the word assembly suggests meetings with a more purposeful character. Darby referred to the rights of citizenship in the passage quoted above the last.⁶ It may be that Darby wanted to emphasise this political meaning of the word assembly. That is a group of citizens meeting on the basis of their shared privilege. This would complement Darby's strong emphasis on the Christian's heavenly citizenship and the judicial

⁴ J.N. Darby *Preface to the German Testament* (1855) in *Collected Writings* vol.13, Winschoten, Netherlands, H.L. Heijkoop, 1972 p.180

⁵ J.N. Darby, *The House of God, the Body of Christ and the Baptism of the Holy Ghost* (1852) in *Collected Writings* vol. 14, p.16

⁶ J.N. Darby, *Preface to the German Testament* (1855) in *Collected Writings*, vol.13, p.180

character of the assembly in exercising discipline (see the next chapter). Despite using *assembly* in his Bible translation, he did use the word *church* and *churches* in his writings with great frequency. This political aspect was seen in terms of the church identifying with God's judgment on the world (and believers who acted in tandem with the world) and the church's relation to God's heavenly government. The church bore no political relation to society apart from judicial condemnation of it.⁷

Darby was unambiguous in his rejection of the use of Church to mean a building. However, he sometimes used the word Church or Churches to refer to denominations. For instance, he refers to the Roman Catholic Church, the Greek Orthodox Church⁸ and the dissenting churches.⁹ He uses the word Church in the context of historical periods, for instance the Medieval Church¹⁰ and the Primitive Church.¹¹ Darby referred to geographical churches in a New Testament context, for instance the church of Galatia.¹² He did not, however, use the word church in its local or geographical expression in a more contemporary context.

⁷ J.N. Darby, *Christ's Desire for the Christian* (1841), Collected Writings, vol.384-387, *The Purpose of God*, Collected Writings, vol.2, p.275-276

⁸ J.N. Darby wrote "The Roman Catholic church and the Greek church are large bodies of persons in professing Christianity" (J.N. Darby, *Church and Privileges* (1881) in *Collected Writings*, vol.31, p.281).

⁹ J.N. Darby wrote "Why, we actually see the Dissenting churches using the advocacy of actual unbelievers," (J.N. Darby *The Nature and Unity of the Church of Christ* (1828) in *Collected Writings*, vol.1 , p.32)

¹⁰ J.N. Darby *Christianity and the Education of the World* (1840) in *Collected Writings* vol.9, p.51-53

¹¹ J.N. Darby *The House of God, the Body of Christ and the Baptism of the Holy Ghost* (1852) in *Collected Writings*, vol.14, p.68

¹² J.N. Darby wrote:

What were churches or assemblies? These were local. The apostle could say, "To the church of God which is at Corinth." It represented the whole unity of the body in that place. "Ye are the body of Christ and members in particular." Two bodies of Christ, even in one place, representatively there could not be. In Galatia, which was a large province, we read the churches of Galatia. So in Thessalonica, a city of Macedonia, we have the assembly of the Thessalonians.

Churches and Church (1846) in *Collected Writings*, vol.20, p.320

Darby's Definition of the Church

Darby's earliest definition of the Church was articulated in his letter to Archbishop William Magee of Dublin, in 1827. He wrote:

What is the Church of Christ in its purpose and perfection? It is a congregation of souls redeemed out of 'this naughty world' by God manifest in the flesh, a people purified to Himself by Christ, purified in the heart by faith, knit together, by the common bond of this faith in Him, to Him their Head sitting at the right hand of the Father, having consequently their conversation (*commonwealth*) in heaven, from whence they look for the Saviour, the Lord of Glory; Phil. 3:20.¹³

In this early polemic, a number of very important themes in Darby's ecclesiology emerge. Darby here used the word congregation; probably for the reason that he had not yet adopted the use of the word assembly as a technical term. Nevertheless, the use of the word congregation indicates his early emphasis on the Church as a gathering. Secondly, Darby's conception of the Church here is soteriological. They are a 'redeemed' people, 'purified by faith.' Thirdly, he identifies them as heavenly in character, joined to their heavenly head and awaiting his return. Their heavenly position is seen here in opposition to the world, 'this naughty world.' All of these aspects would take on major significance as Darby's ecclesiology developed. These will be discussed in this and subsequent chapters. It is significant that at this early stage in his career, before other aspects of his theology had developed, his ecclesiology had taken a firm direction.

¹³ J.N. Darby *Considerations Addressed to the Archbishop of Dublin (1827)* in *Collected Writings* vol. 1, P.5

As Darby judged it, the Church needed to be understood in a primarily soteriological context. It was composed of those who were saved through faith in Jesus Christ; the principle of the Church's union was union with Him:

This ends in the same thing; for instead of bringing them to graft them into the vine, the liberty and security of Christ, to pledge their souls to that which (if the civil Sovereign should choose wrong) would be Popery, and is in fact a denial of union with Christ being the vital principle and bond of the true Church, that general assembly of the first-born whose names are written in heaven, which *is* the true Church, the fullness of Him, that filleth all in all.¹⁴

Rejecting the Sacramentalism of the Roman Catholicism and High Anglicanism,

Darby contended that the Church is not the means of salvation, but is composed of those who are the recipients of it:

This is one of the essential differences between the truth of the word and the idea of the Church as it is viewed by the Romanist; who, making ordinances a means of salvation, attaches salvation to the being of the Church, instead of making the Church the assembly of those who are saved. If but one individual were saved, his salvation would be equally perfect and sure, but *he* would not be the Church. This (the Church) includes an additional thought, an additional relationship, to that of the saved individual.¹⁵

This statement is important, because not only does Darby reject the notion of the Church as a dispenser of salvation, but he makes clear that the Church is an assembly of the saved who are bonded together in a special relationship, as opposed to being merely a sum total of saved individuals. There is an additional relationship formed on

¹⁴ Ibid, p.19
See also:

Now our union with Christ, as His body, forms a definite part of this work, and indeed, that in which the positive work and power of God operating in us, as in Christ, when it raised Him and set Him at His right hand. Thus the body is composed of the true members of Christ, united to Him by the power of God and the effectual presence of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, while He is sitting at the right hand of God; and they are sitting there in Him.
The House of God; the Body of Christ and the Baptism of the Holy Ghost (1852) in *Collected Writings*, vol.14, p.30

¹⁵ J.N. Darby, *What is the Church?* (1862) in *Collected Writings*, vol.3, p.359

the basis that the Church is assembled or gathered together, both spiritually, through the union of all believers to Christ and physically, through the unity of the assembly on earth. Such an understanding of gathering is central to the existence of the Church¹⁶. In past and future dispensations individuals were saved outside of this relationship, but in the present dispensation, all believers were bonded together in this relationship.

The Church in a worldwide context is one assembly of God on earth. Darby was keen to stress that the Church was one assembly on earth, as opposed to being in heaven:

I do not speak of a particular local church formed in each city, because I recognise them in the word; I suppose as nearly all do. When the question is about sects and denominations, this subject becomes, it is true important. I speak of the *Church* on earth. Now what I find in the word is an assembly on earth formed in the unity of one body by the Holy Ghost *come down from heaven*, the Head being in heaven.¹⁷

Darby's point in this quotation is that there exists one church on earth that stands in relation to heaven. Local churches were manifestations of this one church. They were not local expressions of a unity existing in heaven, but were part of a united body that was formed on earth and existed on earth. The Church was not composed of many

¹⁶ J.N. Darby wrote:

The salvation of the elect was as certain before His advent, though accomplished by it afterwards. The Jewish dispensation which preceded His coming into the world had for its object, not to gather the church upon earth, but to exhibit the government of God by means of an elect nation. At this time the Lord's purpose is to *gather* as well as to *save*, to realize unity, not merely in the heavens, where the purposes of God shall surely be accomplished, but here upon earth, by one Spirit sent down from heaven. By one Spirit we are all baptized into one body. This is undeniably the truth concerning the church as it is set before us in the word.

On the Formation of Churches (1840) in *Collected Writings* vol.1, p.139

¹⁷ J.N. Darby *On the Character of the Religious Movement of the Day* (1849) in *Collected Writings* vol.4, p.100

local churches, but rather all of the believers in a locality constituted the Church of God in that area, being part of the one universal Church.

Darby drew a distinction between the terms *Church* and *Churches* in that the Church is the one universal body and its administrative form is in local Churches.¹⁸ Darby did not define what he meant by that term, but it is most likely he meant the visible structures of the church made manifest in a locality.

Biblical Metaphors for the Church

Darby explained the Church's assembling using two Biblical metaphors; the bride of Christ in heaven and the habitation of the Holy Ghost on earth.¹⁹ The former designates the Church's assembling in union with Christ, while the latter designates the Church's assembling in union with one another. Darby derived the teaching that the Church is the bride of Christ from Ephesians 5:23-27 and Revelation 19-20.

Explaining the importance of Ephesians 5, Darby wrote:

Let us notice the three chief points presented by Ephesians 5 which has suggested these reflections. First, Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it. It is redeemed at the cost of His blood, of His life, of Himself. Having thus purchased it exclusively for Himself, He begins, secondly, to fashion it, to sanctify it, that it may be according to His own heart's desire; that it, may, in the third place, present it to Himself a glorious Church, without the least thing unbecoming the glory, or that might offend the eye or the heart of her divine Bridegroom. There is here a testimony to the divinity of Jesus, so

¹⁸ J.N. Darby wrote "Still there is a difference, because churches were the administrative form, while the church, as a body on earth was the vital unity." (*Fragmentary Remarks* (1836) in *Collected Writings*, vo.27, p.323)

¹⁹ T.G. Grass, *The Church's Ruin and Restoration: The Development of Ecclesiology in the Plymouth Brethren and the Catholic Apostolic Church 1825-1866*, unpublished PhD thesis, King's College, London 1997, p.63

much more the remarkable as it is only by the way; and the allusion is made as to a known truth. God, having formed Eve, presented her to the first Adam; but Christ Himself presents the Church to Himself; because if He be the Second Adam, He is at the same time the One who can present it to Himself as being the author of its existence, or of its beauty, and of the perfection in which it must appear in heaven, to be worthy of such a Bridegroom, and of the glory that is there.²⁰

In this passage Darby drew on the bride/ bridegroom to show Christ as the one who is the author and perfecter of the church. He also utilises Christ's work as the redeemer so as to place a strong emphasis on the continuing relationship between the bride and the bridegroom. The uniting of bride and bridegroom are a testimony to a work greater than that of the creation of Eve for Adam and are here given a central point in the eschatological consummation to come, which would be heavenly glory. Darby held that this metaphor would not be fully realised until the eschaton:

When the spirit of the risen Saviour is in me, I am so far united unto Him, and so ought I to keep myself: I am vitally and everlastingly one with Him; but the Church corporate is not so married unto Him, for indeed it is not yet formed. To assume the privileges of a wife does not become her position; not to have more than the modesty of her deportment as ill suits her state.²¹

In Ephesians chapter 5, Paul related the metaphor of the Church as the wife of Christ to the metaphor of the Church as the body of Christ. Likewise Darby identified the Church as the earthly body of Christ:

Also Christians are not members of a church, but of the church: namely: the body of Christ. God has set the members every one of them in the body; the members are only one body (1 Cor.12:12).²²

²⁰ J.N. Darby *What is the Church?* (1862) in *Collected Writings* vol.3, p.361

²¹ J.N. Darby *Scriptural Criticisms* (1851) in *Collected Writings* vol.13, p.13

²² J.N. Darby *On the Formation of Churches* (1840) in *Collected Writings* vo.1, p.164

Darby viewed the Bride of Christ as an eschatological realization of the Church, but the body of Christ as a present reality. Darby recognised a concept of local *churches*, however he subordinated this to the doctrine of one body of Christ as a present reality. Darby held that this body was not a sum total of churches, but was composed of individual Christians, and not simply assemblies of Christians, as he wrote in a tract replying to Mr Olivier in Switzerland:

Mr. O. will have it that the totality of the churches, that is to say of the assemblies, constituted the church or the assembly. Not at all. Numerically speaking, it is not true. Many Christians were scattered here and there preaching the gospel, converted without being connected with a flock, like the treasurer of queen Candace, like Paul and Silvanus and Timothy and Titus in their labours. But, what is more important, the principle is entirely false, and the question which occupies us is altogether that. The assembly or the body was composed of individuals, and not churches or assemblies.²³

Thus, in Darby's view, all Christians were part of one assembly on earth. Darby argued that this entailed that local churches were manifestations of that one body. In principle, a local assembly was a meeting of the whole body, even if not all members were present. He wrote, "If notice was given that the assembly would meet for a particular purpose, it would still be the assembly, though all did not come; it is the assembly when they come together as such."²⁴ If two or three met in the name of the Lord, they had the claim to represent the one body of Christ, providing they were meeting consistently with the unity that this expressed:

But the church is the house of God; and the building is treated as the house of God, though God has expressly declared that, under the Christian system, He will not dwell in temples made with hands; that where two or three are gathered in His name- the true

²³ J.N. Darby *What is the Unity of the Church?* (1862) in *Collected Writings* vol.20, p.297

²⁴ J.N. Darby, *Notes on Readings on 1 Corinthians* (1850) in *Collected Writings* vo.26, p.258

church so far, and so called in the passage- there Christ is in their midst.²⁵

As the church was composed of believers, two or three Christians meeting together could be a manifestation of the church, and thus an assembly. Local churches are not associations of Christians, but a true local church would be composed of all believers in a locality, even those who were only present in that area temporarily. A denominational church could not claim to be a true local church, as it would only include Christians that were affiliated with it within that locality. This raises the question of church locality, which is addressed in the next chapter.

The other Pauline metaphor that was important in Darby's ecclesiology was that of the Church as the temple of the Holy Spirit on earth. This metaphor was used in a number of passages in the New Testament, one of which was Ephesians 2: 19-22. Darby commenting on this passage identified the temple metaphor as having reference to the future, but with a present reality that existed in the unity of Christians on earth.²⁶ The church was in the present dispensation as the tabernacle in the wilderness, the presence of God manifested amongst God's people before reaching the rest of the promised land. It might be argued in reply to Darby that if the fullness of the church's existence as a temple was future, then perhaps the present absence of unity was not the tragedy which he believed it to be. However, Darby seems to have viewed these metaphors as ideals whose realization in the present existence of the

²⁵ J.N. Darby *The House of God; the Body of Christ in Collected Writings* (1852), vol.14, p.16

²⁶ Darby wrote:

Verse 22 describes what we are now; we are the habitation, the tabernacle, where God dwells by His Spirit, as of old, in the midst of the camp of Israel; hereafter we shall be a glorious temple. Whilst waiting, we are the habitation of God. The blessedness of the church flows out of that nearness. If we have the consciousness that we are the habitation of God, how can we defile that tabernacle?

J.N. Darby, *Notes on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, Collected Writings, vol.27, p.22

church in its fellowship was crucial. Either the church existed in the state it was called to be or its failure was total.

Darby's tabernacle metaphor also entailed that the presence of God in the church at present was as real and vital as its future realisation as a glorious temple of God. The temple metaphor was also used by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 3: 16.

Commenting on this passage, Darby emphasised the church as being a body that was in danger of being defiled, but which was holy in its nature.²⁷ This threat of defilement called for separation. Darby may be charged with taking this metaphor in too literal fashion. Nevertheless, he identified a core meaning in it and viewed this meaning as having practical consequences. Darby concluded his paper, *The Presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church*, by yet again drawing attention to the unity of the church as a body, writing "That the body is one, and one on earth, though belonging to heaven, consequent on the exaltation of Christ as its Head, and acted in by one Spirit operating in members set every one of them in the body, that is, in the whole assembly of saints, and that on earth."²⁸ Just as the tabernacle was a manifestation of heaven on earth, the church was a manifestation of heaven on earth. Darby traced the history of this concept of the presence of God on earth in redemptive history, arguing for the precedent of a divine presence on earth.²⁹ Thus, although Darby emphasised

²⁷ Darby wrote:

"Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are," 1 Cor 3:16, 17. Here it is clearly that the Church of God, the building of God which some might corrupt by false doctrine. They were God's building.

J.N. Darby, *The Presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church* (1844) in *Collected Writings*, vol.3, p.349

²⁸ Ibid, p.357

²⁹ J.N. Darby wrote:

I now turn to the main point- God's dwelling with man. This I believe to be the peculiar and special blessing of man, and the highest honour that could be conferred upon him, unless it be his actual glory with the Lord,

the discontinuity between God's dealings in the Old Testament with his dealings with the church, the church was seen in type and shadow through Old Testament redemptive history.

Writing of the importance of the temple metaphor, Darby wrote:

If God was in His holy temple then, God is in His holy temple now—most truly, though after another manner: not merely in individuals, the aggregate of whose individual blessing is the blessing of the whole, but in His spiritual temple, the Church of the living God.³⁰

For Darby, the Holy Spirit had come to dwell in the Church at Pentecost, in manner distinct from his indwelling in individuals. For Darby this had important practical consequences. It meant that the Church had direct access to the power and leading of the Holy Spirit in its ministry, as we shall see in the next chapter.

Darby complicated this metaphor somewhat by talking about the House of God in two aspects. In the preface to a later edition of the paper, *The Presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church*, he explained that he had not elaborated in it the distinction between the body of Christ and the house as a body composed of both believers and unbelievers

when something more is added, viz. being like the Lord and with Him. God came to walk in the garden, but Adam, a sinner, was not there to meet Him. But this deeply important truth is much more distinctly stated in Scripture. Redemption is the true ground of God's dwelling with man. He did not dwell with Adam; He did not dwell even with Abraham; but as soon as Israel was brought out of Egypt, and the Spirit inspired the song of triumph, what was the leading thought? "He is my God and I will prepare Him an habitation." So in God's own preparation of it: "In the place, O Lord, which thou hast made for thee to dwell in, in the sanctuary, O Lord, which thy hands have established."

J.N. Darby *The Presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church* (1844) in *Collected Writings*, vol.3, p.345

³⁰ J.N. Darby *The Presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church* (1844), in *Collected Writings*, vol.3, p.346

united in profession of the Christian faith.³¹ The church was God's building as he believed Matthew 16 taught,³² yet there was also man's work of building, by which unbelievers might become incorporated into the house. Darby argued that these two aspects should not be confused:

The character of the house and the doctrine of the responsibility of men are still more clearly taught in the word of God. Paul says, "Ye are God's building. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master-builder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereupon." Here it is men who build. The house of God is manifested on earth. The Church is the building of God; but we find there not only God's work (that is those who come to God moved by the Holy Ghost), but also the effect of the work of men, who have often built with wood, hay, and stubble. Men have confused together the exterior house built by men and the work of Christ, which may indeed be identical with the work of men, but it also may differ widely. False teachers attributed all the privileges of the body of Christ to the great house composed of every sort of iniquity and of corrupt men. But this fatal error does not destroy the responsibility of men as regards the house of God, His habitation through the Spirit; any more than it is destroyed in respect of the manifestation of the Spirit in one body on earth.

Arguably in this concept, Darby introduces the most confusing and problematic aspect of his ecclesiology. Having rejected the notion of an invisible and a visible church, he here reintroduces a similar concept under different terminology. There was the

³¹ J.N. Darby wrote:

In correcting this tract for a third edition, I have not entered onto the distinction to be made between the body of Christ and the habitation of the Holy Spirit- in that the one is composed of members livingly united to the Head, the other built (see 1 Cor. 3) by the instrumentality of responsible men on earth: I have treated it elsewhere. It is an important practical point in connection with the present *state* of the Church of God, but does not affect the fundamental principles which govern the whole enquiry, as here pursued. I have corrected the passages in which there may have been so far confusion between the two as to lead to any practical obscurity of the mind on the subject.

Ibid, p.341

³² J.N. Darby wrote:

Besides, the keys are given to Peter. He had nothing to do with the building: Christ was to do that. "I will build," says Christ. The Father had revealed Christ's character. On that rock Christ would build; Peter might be the first stone in importance, but no builder.

The Church- The House and the Body (1852) in *Collected Writings*, vol.14, p.96

church, the body of Christ made up of the redeemed who were visible, yet also heavenly in their relation to Christ. However, there was also a purely visible body, in the house of God, an external appendage of the church composed of both the redeemed and the unredeemed. Darby seems to have admitted this:

Another point may require more development- the visible and invisible church. We have already seen that Christ declared He would build His church, and that both Peter and Paul speak of that progressive work, by which the building is carried on, to be completed only in glory; set up no doubt, perfect at first, but carried on by the Lord by the addition of living stones, and this without recognising any human hand in it; nay, speaking so as to exclude man's work, whatever wood, hay, and stubble might be put by man into the manifested building on earth. But there was also, as we have seen, an external visible, called withal "God's building," into the formation of which day by day, the responsibility of man entered, built with gold and silver, and with wood and hay or stubble, yea defiled, corrupted by man.³³

However, Darby's concept of the external house was different from that distinction in two important ways. First, Darby did not view the House as the Church or even as a manifestation of the Church. Secondly, he believed that the Church or Body of Christ, distinct from the House, was meant to be an external visible body. Darby believed that the House had fallen into ruin and judgment:

What Christ builds will not fail; but when man builds, responsibility and its effects come in. Judgment begins at the house of God. And if the evil servant say, My Lord delays His coming, and beat the men-servants and maid-servants, and eat and drink with the drunken, his portion would be with the unbelievers.³⁴

³³ J.N. Darby *Remarks on "The Church and the World"* (1866) in *Collected Writings*, vol.15, p.348

³⁴ J.N. Darby *Familiar Conversations on Romanism: Apostolicity and Succession* (1860) in *Collected Writings*, vol.22, p.236

This idea of an external professing body in the house ran parallel to Darby's view that the parables of Matthew 13 presented an external sphere of profession which could be seen in Christendom. Darby dealt with the subject of the Kingdom of Heaven separately from the subject of the House, however, his view of the parables of Matthew 13 (see below) reveals that he viewed the House and the Kingdom of Heaven as overlapping spheres visible in Christendom. Darby connected the House with the Parable of the Wheat and Tares.³⁵ This external professing body could also be seen in Paul's comment about the great house (2 Timothy 2:20-21). That text in particular enabled Darby to harmonize his views on separation with this concept which was so similar to the classic Protestant idea of a visible church. As will be shown in the next chapter, Darby made use of the concept of the house in defending infant baptism.

It must be asked why it was necessary for Darby to introduce a concept that complicated his ecclesiology to such an huge extent. This concept of the house was probably in part a response to his parabolic interpretation. It was also needed in order to make Christianity a subject of prophecy, because the church, in his opinion could play no part in prophetic revelations (see below). The house could furthermore be the subject of ruin and apostasy, as will be shown below. This concept may also have been prompted by non-ecclesiological concerns. Some of the Biblical texts that Darby quoted in discussing the house might be used to prove that believers might fall away, a concept that Darby rejected, owing to his Calvinism. Arguably, a problem with Darby's theory of the house is that he made two assumptions about the New Testament texts that he used in support of it. In 1 Corinthians 3, he assumed that the

³⁵ *ibid*, p.324

wood, hay and stubble referred to people as opposed to works or conduct. Secondly, he assumed that Paul's metaphor of the great house in 2 Timothy was related to the notion of God's building in 1 Corinthians 3. That assumption depended upon a rather literal reading of Paul's metaphor.

Introduction of the Dispensational View of the Church

Darby is generally credited with being the founder of the system of Dispensational theology.³⁶ Fundamental to this system is the clear and consistent distinction between the nation of Israel and the Church.³⁷ Darby indeed drew such a distinction.³⁸ He viewed the whole of Israel as having a separate national election³⁹ (though this was distinct from the election to salvation of individuals, within which some of those within the nation of Israel had a part⁴⁰) and calling. Along with later Dispensationalists such as Thiessen,⁴¹ Darby argued from Matthew 16:18 that the Church was a new entity distinct from God's dealings in the Old Testament:

³⁶ V.S. Poythress *Understanding Dispensationalists* New Jersey, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1994, p.14

³⁷ Charles Ryrie, a leading exponent of Dispensationalism, said of the distinction between Israel and the Church, "This is probably the most basic theological test of whether or not a person is a dispensationalist, and it is undoubtedly the most practical and conclusive. The one who fails to distinguish between Israel and the church consistently will inevitably not hold to dispensational distinctions; and one who does will."

C.C. Ryrie *Dispensationalism* Chicago, Moody Bible Institute, 1995, p.39

³⁸ T.G. Grass, 1997, p.63

³⁹ J.N. Darby wrote, "Israel, I repeat, was a national election; Christianity is not. The laws of the country were God's own laws, the presence of God was there, and the abuses and corruptions did not alter that."

The Church of England Considered in Collected Writings vol.14, p.197-198

⁴⁰ J.N. Darby wrote in 1878:

Election supposes a large number out of whom God chooses; and if we take it as eternal, or no time with God, still a number are in view out of whom a choice is made. Predestination is the proper purpose of God as to these individuals: even supposing there were no others, God had them in His mind- surely for something, which is thus as we see connected with it; but it is a blessed idea that God had His mind thus set on us without thinking of others.

Letters of J.N.D., Winschoten, Netherlands, H.L. Heijkoop, vol.3, p.476

⁴¹ Henry C Thiessen wrote:

Admittedly, there are marked similarities between the church and the synagogue,

Therefore he says, 'On this rock [the confession that He was the Son of the living God] I *will* build my church.' Had he been doing it before, when it was not, and could not be confessed that Jesus was the Son of the living God? Both Christ and the apostles speak of the Church and the gathering the children of God as a distinct and newly introduced thing.⁴²

Darby goes on to reject the term, commonly used in his day, of a 'Jewish Church':

All of the reasoning relative to a Jewish church comes from judaizing Christianity, or rests on the utterly fallacious idea that, because men are saved in the same way, they therefore form a visible community, and even the same community. Why so? Men could be saved without forming a community. Individuality is quite as important as community- nay more so in divine things. The Jews were a community, but not of saved persons; but a national community of the sons of Jacob.⁴³

Thus, Darby maintains that the Church's formation into a community, or spiritual society is a not necessarily the same thing as salvation. Though many among Israel were saved persons, they were not gathered into the Church before its formation. Responding to the possible argument that Christians are the seed of Abraham on the basis of teaching in Galatians 3, Darby pointed out that the Church is more than this; it is the Bride of Christ.⁴⁴ Though the metaphor of marriage to Jehovah is used of

but there are also marked dissimilarities. Jesus said, 'I will build My church' (Mat. 16:18). This could not refer to the synagogue because the synagogue was already in existence.

Lectures in Systematic Theology, Revised by V.D. Doerksen, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Eerdmans, 1979, p.310

Also on p.315:

Jesus said to Peter, 'And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church' (Matt 16:18). It is clear from this passage that the church is the Lord's, for he calls it 'my church'. It is the church of God which he purchased with His own blood.' (Acts 20:28). It is called the church of Jesus Christ, and he is the head over it (Eph. 5:23; Col. 1:18).

⁴² J.N. Darby *Law* (1868) in *Collected Writings* vol4, p.33

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ J.N. Darby wrote:

People insist that the children of God are Abraham's children, which is true; but they wish to place them at this level, in order to deny the position of the

Israel, the Church's heavenly relationship to Christ was on altogether different ground, namely its union with the risen Christ and spiritual blessings in the heavenly realm.

In agreement with later Dispensationalism,⁴⁵ Darby held that the Church had its beginning at Pentecost.⁴⁶ At Pentecost, believers are dispensationally (as opposed to individually) baptized into one body.⁴⁷ It is this work of God that enables the Church to be corporately indwelt by the Holy Ghost and thus to become his temple. Hence, the Church did not exist, in Darby's view, until Pentecost.

The event of the formation of the Church at Pentecost enabled the incorporation of Gentiles into the body,⁴⁸ though this actually took place later in Acts. Through the

bride of Christ. They will have it that they are branches grafted in, in place of the Jews, so as to reduce them to the level of the blessing and principles of the Old Testament, and this, in order to avoid the responsibility of the position in which God has set us, and thereby, the necessity of a confession of our fall. They allow, in a general sense, that we are the house of God, which is true; a house in which there are vessels to dishonour: and they make use of this truth to justify a state of things which has left outside everything that can belong to the affections and heart of a bride.

A Glance at Various Ecclesiastical Principles (1867) in *Collected Writings* vol.4, p.33

Darby makes a direct connection here between the failure to recognise the Church/ Israel distinction and the attempt to avoid the conclusion that the Church is in a state of ruin.

⁴⁵ R.E. Showers wrote:

In contrast with the Covenant theology view, Dispensational theology declares that The Church did not begin until the Day of Pentecost of Acts 2. Thus, the Church did *not* exist in Old Testament times. Radmacher wrote that 'the church did not come into functional existence until the day of Pentecost.' Although the Church was an essential part of God's plan for history which He determined in eternity past, God did not put that part of His plan into effect until ten days after His Son ascended from the earth to heaven.

There Really is a Difference: A Comparison of Covenant and Dispensational Theology, New Jersey, Friends of Gospel to Israel Ministry, 1990, p.169-170

⁴⁶ J.N. Darby *The House of God; the Body of Christ and the Baptism of the Holy Ghost* (1852) in *Collected Writings* vol.14, p.23

⁴⁷ J.N. Darby *Baptism Not the Communication of Life* in *Collected Writings* vol.20, p.268

⁴⁸ J.N. Darby wrote:

The assembly now formed and publicly inaugurated by the descent of the Holy Ghost: the Jews, as a nation, reject its offered blessings in the persons of their Chiefs. Another truth now shines out: God accepts every nation. There is no word of the unity of the body here yet; but Gentiles could be received.

The House of God; the Body of Christ and the Baptism of the Holy Ghost (1852) in *Collected Writings*, vol.14, p.23.

baptism of the Holy Spirit, the Church becomes one body that includes both Jew and Gentile, a thing unknown in the Old Testament. This teaching of the entry of the Gentiles into one body was only to be revealed at the close of the Jewish dispensation at the stoning of Stephen.⁴⁹ After this pivotal point, Saul or Paul was called to be an apostle to the Gentiles bringing them into the Church.⁵⁰ Prior to this, the Church was a Jewish body and God was still dealing with the nation of Israel, despite the creation of an entirely new work in the Church.⁵¹ During the transitional stage of the first few chapters of Acts, the church existed, but its true character had not yet been revealed. The new work of Pentecost could only take place after Christ's ascension into heaven and His sitting at the right hand of the Father:

Thus, as soon as the Son of man is gone into heaven to sit down at the right hand of God, having accomplished the work of redemption, the Holy Spirit descends according to His promise of the Comforter, and the baptism of the Spirit is realised. Sent from the Father, He cries, "Abba, Father," in the hearts of those who have received Him. Sent by the Son from the Father, He reveals the glory of Him, the man in heaven; and more than that, forms the body of Christ, joining the members to the head, so that he "that is joined to the Lord is one spirit," dwelling in the believer, and also in the universal congregation of believers, so that they are together the habitation of God.⁵²

The work of the Holy Spirit from Pentecost, not only brought persons into a new relationship with God, but formed a connection between them and other believers.

The Church was also grounded in the resurrection of Christ:

Resurrection puts us there consciously; without resurrection and the power of the Spirit one is not of the church. On the earth I am not said to be dead; I have a right, it is true to count myself dead; still, the flesh is in me; whilst

⁴⁹ J.N. Darby *Meditations on the Acts of the Apostles* (1877) in *Collected Writings*, vol.25, p.332

⁵⁰ J.N. Darby *The Character of Office in the Present Dispensation* (1834) in *Collected Writings*, vo.1, p.98

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p.96

⁵² J.N. Darby *Meditations on the Acts of the Apostles* (1877) in *Collected Writings*, vol.25, p.320

in heaven my life is hid with Christ in God, and this by virtue of His resurrection and ascension. With the flesh I am not in heaven, for I am not united to Christ by virtue of the flesh. In resurrection the church is there, where is neither Jew nor Greek.⁵³

In this passage, Darby closely connects the personal union of Christ with believers with the Church as a corporate entity. Both unions are grounded in the resurrection and ascension of Christ. Thus, the Church could only come into existence in New Testament times after the ascension of Christ. It was in a completely different position to that of Israel in the Old Testament, which did not experience this union with God through Christ.

Henzel, a critic of Dispensationalism, argues that modern Dispensationalism has become increasingly focused on the anthropological and ecclesiological dualism between Israel and the Church and has moved away from the original context in which Darby set this distinction.⁵⁴ Darby's distinction between the Church and Israel was part of a wider cosmic dualism between heaven and earth.⁵⁵ Darby distinguished the earthly and heavenly government of God. Henzel quotes Darby:

Why then do I long for His appearing? Because Christ will then have His rights... We have the liberty of grace now, but not His glory. We wait for that. The great centre of all is Christ taking His rights. He has not these now. He has all His personal glory and in His Father's and of the holy angels. This is the heavenly government of God, but there is that on earth which also will be the manifestation of God's power to put everything in order where Christ has

⁵³ J.N. Darby *Thoughts on the Church in Collected Writings*, vol. 20, p.340

⁵⁴ R.M. Henzel *Darby, Dualism and the Decline of Dispensationalism* Tucson, Arizona, Fenestra, 2003, p.151

Henzel writes:

But even among them (Plymouth Brethren writers) we see a shift away from Darby's practise of reading *all* scripture in light of a heavenly/ earthly dualism and toward that of reading it in the light of an Israel/ Church dichotomy, and viewing the dualism primarily as a feature of the dichotomy.

⁵⁵ Henzel, 2003, p.68-69

been crucified and cast out. Government also applies to the church, to the saints. Are we not under government? To be sure we are responsible.⁵⁶

In this quotation, a distinction is drawn between the establishment of the Messiah's kingdom rule and the church's place in the present dispensation. Henzel went on to point out Darby's distinction between the terms 'God of the whole earth' and 'God of

⁵⁶ J.N. Darby *The Freshness of Faith, 1 Thessalonians 1* in *Collected Writings* vol.21, p.361

Henzel says of this passage:

So we see from this that since Darby posited a heavenly government of God and an earthly government of God, that even his government of God concept was governed by an antecedent heavenly/ earthly dualism, including the Israel/ Church dichotomy, was the product of his government of God concept throws his logic into reverse gear. This is because, as we shall soon see, Darby's dualistic outlook conditioned his entire theology.

Henzel, 2003, p.69

Henzel argues that later dispensationalists deviated from Darby's idea of a distinct and heavenly government. While Henzel seems to be correct in arguing that later dispensationalists departed to some extent from Darby's language of heaven/ earth dualism; he does ignore the continuance of the notion of dual government in dispensationalism. Henzel's failure to acknowledge this probably results from his lack of attention to the subject of the kingdom of God in his book. Significantly, he did not reference *The Greatness of the Kingdom* by Alva McClain (1888-1968. McClain taught at Philadelphia School of the Bible before going on to found Grace Theological Seminary), which is arguably one of the most significant works of Twentieth-century dispensationalism.

McClain argued that divine government had two forms, universal and mediatorial. The universal kingdom was the providential reign of God to which all things were subject, while the mediatorial was the historical manifestation of this reign through intermediaries who exercised theocratic authority (A. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, Chicago, Moody Press, 1959, p.22, 41). This idea of two kingdoms is endorsed by other dispensationalists such as Dwight Pentecost (J.D. Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Kregel, 1995, p.18. Blaising provided an helpful taxonomy of dispensational views of the kingdom- Blaising, 1993, p.9-56).

McClain says of his 'two kingdoms' view:

In one sense it would not be wholly wrong to speak of *two kingdoms* revealed in the Bible. But we must guard carefully against the notion that these two kingdoms are absolutely distinct, one from the other. There is value or instruction in thinking of them as two *aspects* or phases of the one rule of our sovereign God. In seeking for terms which might best designate these two things, I can find nothing better than the adjectives "universal" and "mediatorial." These are not exactly commensurate terms, of course, but describe different qualities; the first referring to the *extent* of rule, the latter referring to the *method* of rule (McClain, 1959, p.21).

Henzel argued that the mediatorial kingdom, being located in history (primarily in the kingdom of Israel) could be interrupted, "The historical Kingdom of God in Israel may be interrupted; the nation may abide for many days without a mediatorial king; but there is nevertheless a Kingdom of God which continues without any hiatus or diminution." McClain went on to argue that in the present church age, there was no mediatorial kingdom in any form, though at present persons in the church were being prepared to receive an inheritance over the kingdom in the future (McClain, 1959, p.439-440). McClain's view that the mediatorial kingdom was suspended is not altogether unlike Darby's view that the present dispensation was a 'timeless heavenly gap' in history.

the heavens.⁵⁷ Darby identified Israel as an earthly people, concerned with earthly promises.⁵⁸ In contrast, the Church has its 'portion' and 'interests' in heaven.⁵⁹ As Ward argues, though, Darby recognised that the church was a body on earth, he made no distinction between the Church as the heavenly bride united to Christ in heaven and the company of men and women on earth, hence the Church was essentially a heavenly body on the earth.⁶⁰ Protestantism had tended to downplay this mystical aspect of the Church by making a distinction between the Visible Church, made up of faithful congregations and the Invisible Church, composed of all true believers.⁶¹ Darby rejected such a distinction.⁶²

People talk about an 'invisible' church. The word says nothing about this. It is a notion which quite denies the force of the passages we have just quoted. The scattering of the children of God has hid them. Would anyone venture to maintain that individuals should be invisible; that is, that they should conceal their Christianity? 'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.' It is clear then, that individuals should not be invisible. Now, if that be true, to say that the Church may be invisible means nothing short of this, that these individuals ought not to be united. Yet it is certain that the Lord says that they ought to have been one, that the world might believe.

Thus, the unity that Christ spoke of had to be a visible unity.

⁵⁷ Henzel, 2003, p.80

J.N. Darby wrote "The expressions: "God of the heavens," and "God of the whole earth" are never confounded in prophecy."

An Introduction to the Bible (1875), Collected Writings, vo.34, p.23

⁵⁸ J.N. Darby *The Character of Office in the Present Dispensation* (1834) in *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.95

⁵⁹ J.N. Darby *To the Archbishop of Dublin* (1827) in *Collected Writings* vol.1, p.5

⁶⁰ J.P. Ward, *The Eschatology of J.N. Darby*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 1976, p.80

⁶¹ A.E. McGrath *Christian Theology: An Introduction* Oxford, Blackwell, 1994, p.485

⁶² J.N. Darby *What is the Church?*(1862) in *Collected Writings*, vol.3, p.391

Darby's system of prophetic hermeneutics meant that the Church was not a subject of prophecy. In his view, prophecy concerned the earth, not heaven.⁶³ Darby wrote:

Prophecy applies itself properly to the earth; its object is not heaven. It was about things that were to happen on the earth; and the not seeing this has misled the church. We have thought that we ourselves had within us the accomplishment of these earthly blessings, whereas, we are called to enjoy heavenly blessings. The privilege of the church is to have its portion in the heavenly places; and later blessings will be shed upon the earthly people. The church is something altogether apart- a kind of heavenly economy, during the rejection of the earthly people, who are put aside on account of their sins, and driven out among the nations, out of the midst of which nations God chooses a people for the enjoyment of heavenly glory with Jesus Himself. The Lord having been rejected by the Jewish people, is become wholly an heavenly person⁶⁴. This is the doctrine which we peculiarly find in the writings of the apostle Paul. It is no longer the Messiah of the Jews, but a Christ exalted, glorified; and it is for want of taking hold of this exhilarating truth, that the church has become so weak.⁶⁵

Prophecy dealt with God's relations with the earth. The church, however, was not connected with the earth; its portion was in heaven. The Christian was a citizen of heaven who was blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ *in heavenly places*.⁶⁶

Of course, Darby held that the Church was a body on earth and not in heaven. Israel, not the church, was central to prophecy.⁶⁷ We might therefore ask why Darby did not see the Church as a fit subject for prophecy. However, he would probably have

⁶³ Henzel, 2003, p.109

⁶⁴ This does not imply that Darby denied the humanity of Christ after the resurrection. Rather, he means that Christ assumed a heavenly position.

⁶⁵ J.N. Darby *The Hope of the Church* (1840) in *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.376

⁶⁶ Ephesians 1:3

⁶⁷ J.N. Darby wrote:

Finally, Israel had been the centre and keystone of the system that was established after the judgement upon Noah's descendents for their pride at Babel. In this system the throne and temple of God at Jerusalem were:- the one, the seat of divine authority over all nations; and the other, the place where they should go to worship Him who dwelt between the cherubim. Israel having failed in that obedience which was the condition of blessing and the bond of the whole order recognised by God in the earth, another system of human supremacy is set up in the person of Nebuchadnezzar. Prophecy treats, therefore, of this unitary system also, and of its relationship with the people of God on the earth.

J.N. Darby, *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible* (1881), vol.2, p.349

replied that the church's essential character was heavenly and in consequence did not fall within the sphere of God's earthly governmental dealings. This passage relates to a vital concept, not just to Darby's ecclesiology, but to the Dispensational system that he introduced. The Church is identified as being unrelated to the events of prophecy, thus completely separating it from God's prophetic plan for Israel. Not only was prophecy not concerned with heaven, but the Church, in Darby's view, was not a subject of prophetic revelation (presumably Darby regarded Matthew 16:18 as a statement of intent rather than a prophecy).⁶⁸ Darby's exclusion of the church from prophecy had the result that Christendom as an earthly entity could be distinguished from the church. As will be seen below, Christendom or professing Christianity was regarded by Darby as a subject of prophecy.⁶⁹ The external house of God as a building of man (see above) was really a part of the world.⁷⁰ However, Darby was not consistent in his exclusion of the church from prophecy. In a paper entitled, *The Purpose of God* (1839), he appears to have identified the church as one of two subjects of prophecy, the other being the Millennial glory of Israel (though this is one of his earliest works).⁷¹ It is not at all clear how Darby could separate future events

⁶⁸ Denying that the Church is mentioned at all in New Testament prophecy seems at first glance a difficult position to sustain. Most modern-day Dispensationalists would only deny that the Church is the subject of Old Testament prophecy.

⁶⁹ Henzel, 2003, p.81

⁷⁰ J.N. Darby wrote in a letter to Professor Tholuck in 1855:

It then became clear to me that the church of God, as He considers it, was composed only of those who were so united to Christ, whereas Christendom, as seen externally, was really the world, and could not be considered as "the church," save as regards the responsibility attaching to the position which it professed to occupy- a very important thing in its place.

Letters, vol.3, p.298

As stated argued above, Darby's idea of the Christendom as an external visible body seems to be identical to the more common idea of the visible church.

⁷¹ J.N. Darby wrote:

Two great objects are presented to our contemplation by the prophecies and testimonies of the Scriptures, which refer to the millennium: on one hand, the church and its glory in Christ; on the other, the Jews and the glory which they are to possess as a nation redeemed by Christ.

The Purpose of God (1839) in *Collected Writings*, vol.266

concerning the church, such as the rapture and their position of heavenly government in the kingdom from prophetic revelation. Did he view these events as only the realisation of present realities? There are also problems in sustaining the premise that prophecy does not concern heavenly things. Henzel points out that 1 Kings 22:19-22 appears to be a prophetic revelation about a heavenly event and observes that Darby made no comment reconciling this with his insistence that prophecy did not concern heaven. Perhaps Darby distinguished between revelation and prophecy, viewing prophecy as concerned with future events. On the other hand, Darby certainly did place one future event within the scope of prophecy, that of the expulsion of Satan from heaven.⁷² It is difficult to see clearly how Darby dealt with the implications of his own hermeneutical system. In fact the whole basis for his methodology is left rather vague. Darby comes to many conclusions about the meaning of biblical texts, but he does not explain clearly the methods and principles of interpretations behind them. While Darby knew the original languages, there is a serious lack of exegetical rigour in his writings.

Darby said of the absence of the church from prophecy in a letter:

Prophecy gives the career of *earthly* events, the wickedness of man, or the dealings of God. But the church is not earthly; its life is hid with Christ in God; it has the place with Christ while He is hidden; when He appears it will appear; we await the manifestation of the sons of God. Hence it was hid in God from the foundation of the world (Eph.iii), and the prophets do not speak of it. Only it is true that it maintains (or ought to have maintained) the testimony to the kingdom, during the interval of the rejection of the Jewish witness. As inheriting the promises as being in Christ the seed of Abraham, it comes in and maintains by divine wisdom their constancy and unfaillingness. But the age is the same age as that in which Christ was upon earth- 'the harvest is the end of the age.' Hence the church cannot be the subject of prophecy. It was not- as being a kind of wisdom hid in God and now made

⁷² JN Darby, *The Hopes of the Church of God* (1840) in *Collected Writings*, vol.2, p.370

known to principalities and powers, and is not- the subject, but the depository of prophecy, not earthly but heavenly, and of a hidden Christ with whom it is as one. Hence what relates to it is, as I have said, only seen when it comes down out of heaven having the glory of God. Hence it has no place in prophecy.⁷³

Darby here relates the Church to the concept of the mystery in Ephesians 3:3, as a more contemporary Dispensationalist would.⁷⁴ However, he attaches this concept to this system of dualism, whereby the Church is intrinsically connected to the things of heaven. Darby goes on in this same letter to show the dispensational implications of this:

We are properly nowhere, save in the extraordinary suspension of prophetic testimony, or period, which comes in between the sixty-ninth and seventieth week of Daniel, or at the end of the age which was running on when Christ was here, the close of which was suspended by His crucifixion; His return to establish it then, according to Acts iii, being precluded by the rejection of the testimony of the Holy Ghost, which followed- finally declared at Stephen's death.

Thus, Darby maintains that God's dealings with the Jews as a nation were temporarily suspended at the death of Stephen and their dispensation closed as a result of their apostasy, though individual Jews continued to be saved. God had now introduced a new work in the Church. Darby's statement that 'we are properly nowhere' raises the fact that he denies that there is in fact a Church age or any kind of dispensation in this period. As the Church forms no part of God's earthly government, it is not in fact a

⁷³ J.N. Darby (1848) *Letters* vol.1, p.131

⁷⁴ For instance Ryrie wrote:

There is proof from the mystery character of the Church (that the Church is distinct in God's programme). This is the natural corollary of what has been discussed in the preceding *Section*. If the distinctive character of the church as a living organism indwelt by Christ in which Jews and Gentiles are on an equal basis is described as a mystery unknown in Old Testament times, then the church must not have been constituted in those Old Testament days.

Ryrie, 1995, p.125

dispensation.⁷⁵ The Church age is an “heavenly timeless gap in world history,”⁷⁶ but not a dispensation of its own. It might be suggested that there is an incongruity in claiming that the church occupied a timeless gap in history while also holding that it formed before the beginning of this gap (God was still dealing with the Jewish nation in the first few chapters of Acts on Darby’s view). However, the church was essentially related to heaven, not to the earth and so even while in her early Jewish state in the period immediately after Pentecost, she was unrelated to the events of earthly salvation history.

This view that the Church was unforeseen in Old Testament prophecy has become a very important part of Dispensational theology outside of the Brethren.⁷⁷ The usual term that is used to refer to the period of the Church is *parenthesis*, a literary term that refers to an interruption in the flow of a narrative.⁷⁸ Darby himself used this term with

⁷⁵ Henzel. 2003, p.123

⁷⁶ J.N. Darby *Brief Remarks on the Work of Rev. David Brown DD, entitled ‘Christ’s Second Coming: Is it Premillennial?’* (1857) in *Collected Writings* vol.11, p.344

⁷⁷ Tan, a popular Dispensational writer wrote:

The doctrine of the church is also described by Paul as ‘hidden in God’ (Eph. 3:9). Paul does not say ‘hidden in the Scripture’, otherwise, his readers would be searching for the Christian Church in the Old Testament.

P.L. Tan *The Interpretation of Prophecy* Hong Kong, Bible Communications Ltd, 1974, p.51

⁷⁸ Ryrie wrote:

Classic Dispensationalism used the words parenthesis or intercalation to describe the distinctiveness of the church in relation to God’s program for Israel. An intercalation is an insertion of a period of time in a calendar, and a parenthesis in one sense is defined as an interlude or interval (which in turn is defined as an intervening or interruptive period). So either or both words can be appropriately used to define the church age if one sees it as a distinct interlude in God’s program for Israel (as clearly taught in Daniel’s prophecy of the seventy weeks in 9:24-27).

Ryrie, 1995, p.134

The term *intercalation*, was introduced by Lewis Spencer Chafer, arguably the most important Dispensational theologian after Darby (Henzel, 2003, p.165). Chafer wrote:

In fact, the new, hitherto unrevealed purpose of God in the outcalling of a Heavenly people from Jews and Gentiles is so divergent with respect to the divine purpose toward Israel, which purpose preceded it and will yet follow it, that the term *parenthetical*, commonly employed to describe the new age-purpose, is inaccurate. A parenthetical portion sustains some direct or indirect relation to that which goes before or that which follows; but the

reference to the Church Age, in place of *dispensation*.⁷⁹ Later Dispensationalists differ from Darby on this point primarily in using less heaven/ earth dualism in their terminology⁸⁰ and in their application of the term *dispensation* to the Church Age.⁸¹ Darby sometimes did apply the term 'dispensation' to the present Church Age,⁸² however, it is clear that his theology did not recognise the Church as having a true dispensational position in the way that preceding dispensations had. Thus, it is necessary to understand that when Darby applied the word *dispensation* to the Church Age, he used it in the non-technical broad sense of 'period of time.'

The Church and the Kingdom of God

Darby held that the kingdom of God was distinct from the church:

Besides, it is not true that the church is itself the spiritual kingdom; not one of the passages quoted by Mr. Oliver says so.... We find nothing in the word to bear out the thought that Christ exercises royal authority over the church, and the teaching of Matthew 13

present age-purpose is not thus related and therefore is more properly termed an *intercalation*. The appropriateness of this word will be seen in the fact that, as an interpolation is formed by inserting a word or phrase into a context, so an intercalation is formed by introducing a day or a period of time into the calendar.

L.S. Chafer *Systematic Theology* Dallas, Dallas Seminary Press, 1976, vol.4, p.41

⁷⁹ J.N. Darby wrote:

Thus, until the end of the age, judgment is not to be exercised by the Lord's Servants; whereas, in the end of it, judgment will gather out of the kingdom of the Son of man all scandals. And hence it is also that the present time is called (not I judge a dispensation, but) a parenthesis.

The Dispensation of the Fulness of Times in *Collected Writings* vo.13, p.155

⁸⁰ Henzel, 2003, p.189

⁸¹ For instance, Mal Couch entitles a chapter, 'The New Dispensation: The Church' (Mal Couch *The Biblical Theology of the Church*, 1999, Grand Rapids, Kregel Publications, 1999).

However, the Church Age is identified with the dispensation of Grace. Thus, the free offer of the Gospel is viewed by Dispensationalists as the defining character of this period, rather than the Church as a body (the Church will of course continue into the Millennium and beyond on the Dispensational view.

⁸² J.N. Darby *The Character of Office in the Present Dispensation* (1834) in *Collected Writings* vol.1, p.92, *Evidence from Scripture of the Passing Away of the Present Dispensation* (1835) in *Collected Writings* vol.2, p.89

Both of these papers were written fairly early in Darby's career.

renders this distinction important. Mr. Oliver does not pretend to apply here the passages from the Old Testament such as King in Zion... We have simply the "kingdom of heaven," which is not the church at all. The church has no relation, nor any contact with the kingdom, save that it exists down here in the field over which the authority of that kingdom is exercised. Later on, the church will reign with the Lord over that same field.⁸³

Here Darby's heaven/ earth dualism came out. The kingdom existed in the sphere of earthly relations, hence the church was in a programme of divine activity quite separate from it. Christ was seen as the bridegroom of the church, and not its king.⁸⁴ The kingdom of heaven was the sphere over which Christ possessed rulership.⁸⁵ This was meant to be manifested in the millennial reign of Christ, but it also had a present dimension, a 'mystery form,' in Christendom, the professing mass of Christians on earth (essentially the same body as the external house).⁸⁶ The distinction between the church and the kingdom has been emphasised by later Dispensationalists.⁸⁷

⁸³ J.N. Darby, *Remarks on the Pamphlet by Mr. F Oliver* (1843) in *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.286

⁸⁴ J.N. Darby, *Psalms 72*, in *Collected Writings*, vol.30, p.97

⁸⁵ J.N. Darby wrote:

What is the kingdom? It is very simple, if we take the word as it is. It is the sphere where the King reigns. If I take the word church as 'assembly,' which it really means, I can never confound 'church' and 'kingdom.' Compare the word 'reign' with 'assembly,' and the difference is easily seen.

Ibid, p.94

⁸⁶ J.N. Darby wrote:

The field is not the Jewish people, but "the world." God goes outside guilty Judah to begin a fresh work everywhere. The time of the harvest is the judicial time of the kingdom- not the sowing time. Christ lets all go on as if at the beginning, and He saw nothing of the corruption; but then He begins a judicial character. Personally He deals with it on earth. This is the kingdom in the mysteries of it, or hidden. Its outward character is a great tree; the sowing is in the world. Pharaoh was a great tree, and the Assyrian was another. Christendom is now a great tree- an influential power in the earth. It is ruled from heaven, if it be the kingdom of heaven, but the sphere is this earth.

Ibid, p.95

⁸⁷ See McClain, 1959, p.438-439, Ryrie, 1995, p.135-136, Tan, 1974, p.249-250.

Anglican Influence on Darby

Grass views Darby's understanding of the Church as an heavenly entity as rooted in his Anglican background. He quotes Darby in his letter to the Archbishop,⁸⁸ identifying the similarity between Darby's description of the Church and the statement of the 39 Articles that the Church is a 'congregation of faithful men.'⁸⁹ Grass argues that Darby developed this idea of a 'congregation of faithful men' by stressing their powerlessness and otherworldly character. Grass writes:

Already, before the culmination of the 'deliverance', a sharp disjunction was evident between the church's true heavenly character and its apparent weakness and powerlessness on earth. Because the church belonged as a body to heaven, it had no power in this world; with their Head, Christians would share humiliation here, but faith saw His humiliation as the source of spiritual life, and so eschewed all prospect of earthly glory.....Although his opposition to anything which smacked of Erastianism has been compared with early Tractarian insistence upon the church's independence from state interference. Darby later contrasted the two movements, asserting that Brethrenism had arisen as a result of seeing the church as a body of those united to Christ in heaven, rather than as a result of dissatisfaction with Anglican apostolic succession.⁹⁰

Grass has done a great service in tracing the connection between Darby's Anglican thought and his heavenly ecclesiology. With regard to Darby's attempt to disentangle his ecclesiology from Tractarianism, it is interesting that he makes an appeal to High

⁸⁸ Grass quotes Darby:

..a congregation of faithful souls redeemed out of 'this naughty world by God manifest in the flesh, a people purified to himself by Christ, purified in the heart by faith, knit together, by the bond of this common faith in Him, to Him their Head sitting at the right hand of the Father, having consequently their conversation in heaven, from whence they look for the Saviour, the Lord of Glory; Phil.3:20. As a body they belong to heaven; there is their portion in the restitution of all things, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord. On earth they are as a people, necessarily subordinate; they are nothing and nobody; their king is in heaven, their interests and constitution heavenly.

J.N. Darby *Considerations Addressed to the Archbishop of Dublin* (1827) in *Collected Writings* vol.1, p.5

⁸⁹ Grass, 1997, p.64

Article 19, *Of the Church*, states "the visible church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men."

⁹⁰ *ibid*, p.65

Churchmen in his early writings.⁹¹ While many comparisons between High Anglicanism and Darby's ecclesiology are unfair, it is clear that Darby's High Church anti-Erastianism⁹² played some role in directing him against the Established Church. The following chapter will examine the validity of comparisons between Darby's ecclesiology and the High Church.

The Problem of Unity

Darby's belief in one universal church of God on earth assembled in unity posed an empirical problem. The reality of church history was that the church was divided up into various denominations. While Protestants generally harmonised the concept of one universal church with the division of the denominations through the distinction between the visible and invisible church, Darby believed that the doctrine of an invisible church was a deliberate attempt to evade the necessary implications of the unity of God's assembly on earth:

The gathering together of all the children of God in one body is plainly according to the mind of God in the word.

To escape from this anomaly, believers have sought to shelter themselves under the distinction between a visible and an invisible church. But I read in Scripture, "Ye are the light of the world." Of what is an invisible light? "A city on a hill cannot be hid." To say that the true church has reduced to the condition of being invisible is at once to decide the question and to affirm that the church has lost its original and essential standing, departed from the purpose of God, and from the constitution it received from Him; for God did not light a candle that He might put it under a bushel, but that He might put it upon a candlestick to give light to them that are in

⁹¹ J.N. Darby wrote:

I ask high churchmen in particular, is it not iniquity that pastors, chief pastors, should be appointed, not by the church, by Christ, but by men, be they what? Is not this the fact? And if so, do they not depart from it? Is it the church that appoints them?

Parochial Arrangement in Collected Writings, vol.1, p.82

⁹² Opposition to any supremacy of state over church.

the house.⁹³

Darby frequently quoted these verses from Matthew 5:14-15⁹⁴ and Luke 11:33⁹⁵ in order to refute the idea of an invisible church. It is interesting and perhaps a little perplexing that Darby used them, as they form part of the Sermon on the Mount. Darby held that the Sermon on the Mount was teaching that was applicable primarily to the Jewish remnant before the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth.⁹⁶ At the time that Jesus gave that teaching, the Church did not exist, nor was it revealed in Darby's view. It would have been quite consistent with Darby's hermeneutical system to argue that the Church was not a visible body, as its standing was heavenly, not earthly.⁹⁷ However, Darby did not take this approach. Instead he firmly maintained the original unity of the visible body of Christ and thus the ruin of the Church doctrine was necessitated to explain the Church's present state of division.

The Doctrine of Ruin

Darby seemed to present the doctrine of ruin in connection with a number of different themes. It is thus difficult to pin down exactly what he meant by this term. The closest Darby came to defining it is in a letter written in 1847. He wrote, "But ruin is found in this that the church, such as God fashioned and formed it, *does not exist at all*

⁹³ J.N. Darby, *On the Formation of Churches* (1840) in *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.140.

⁹⁴ "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid."

⁹⁵ "No man, when he hath lighted a candle, putteth it in a secret place, neither under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that they which come in may see the light."

⁹⁶ J.N. Darby wrote "The sermon is not the rich grace preached to sinners any more than redemption, but the path traced for the faithful who would have part in the kingdom which was going to be established."

On the Gospel of Matthew in *Collected Writings*, Vol.24, p.93

⁹⁷ Perhaps Darby avoided that conclusion by the Church's participation in the spiritual aspect of the Kingdom. Darby held that the Sermon on the Mount had in view the heavenly aspect of the Kingdom (*On the Gospel of Matthew*, *Collected Writings*, vol.24, p.94). It is difficult to follow the reasoning behind Darby's application of parts of the Synoptics to the Church in spite of his Dispensational hermeneutics.

(Darby's italics) save as He sanctions two or three meeting in the name of Jesus."⁹⁸

Thus, the ruin of the church lies in the fact that it no longer exists in its original condition. Darby's qualification is a little misleading. Darby did not hold that a meeting of two or three in the Lord's name possessed the same kind of existence as the early church in apostolic times. They could not be regarded as churches, in the way that the Church of Ephesus or Corinth were. Nor did he deny that believers who were not meeting in the name of the Lord were part of the Church. Rather, he held that the Church had ceased to be the organised visible body that it was in the time of the apostles. In a sense Darby actually upheld the idea that the Church was invisible, only that this was not the condition in which the Church was meant to be found. The Church ought to have always manifested the truth of the one assembly, but had failed to do so.⁹⁹ The Church in Darby's view, had failed to keep and maintain the principles on which it was established:

If this (the *principle of Christ's judgment on the "things which are"*) be set aside, and on which I do not now rest, then I say it was the Lord's judgment on the things that were, and the removal of them, because they did not conform to the principles on which the Spirit of God in the apostles, etc. had founded them, and which thereupon ceased to exist and made room for the apostasy; and that no subsisting church rests, or can pretend to rest, on the ground on which this judgment rests at all, for they are founded on the union of the Church and the world, which is the moral principle of apostasy, which resulted from the failure of the judged churches to maintain the principles on which they were founded.¹⁰⁰

This is Darby's response to the argument that the Seven Churches of Revelation were true churches, despite their low moral state. Darby here argues that churches today had removed so far beyond their original principles that they could no longer be

⁹⁸ J.N. Darby, (1847), *Letters*, vol.3, p.245

⁹⁹ J.N. Darby wrote "The assembly of God, then, has been formed on earth and ought always to have been manifested, Alas! It has not been so." (1878) *Letters*, vol.2, p.435

¹⁰⁰ J.N. Darby "Our Separating Brethren" (1850) in *Collected Writings* vol.14, p.170

considered churches in the way the Seven Churches were. Darby applied this to the Church of England, arguing that the established church had never been set up on the principles of the true Church.¹⁰¹ Likewise, there were no other bodies that could claim to be the Church of God:

Were the apostle to address an epistle to the Church of God which is at Liverpool, or London, there is no gathered body distinct from the world that could receive and act upon his letter...Where is the body, then that could act thus, when you are preaching to an indiscriminate heap of unconverted people? In a word, there was a known body which could act by the leading of the Spirit of God. There was no direction to leave these churches because they were churches.¹⁰²

Darby's hypothetical letter to the church of God in Liverpool might have been received by Methodists, Baptists or any other denominational church; but there would have been no united entity which could receive it. It is a little difficult to understand exactly what Darby meant in denying that there were true churches today. After all, he believed that it was possible that believers could meet in the provisions God had laid down for the church.¹⁰³ The quotation indicates the heart of Darby's objection to the idea of speaking of churches today. Darby pointed out that there was no body in any geographical area which truly embraced all Christians in that location. The Church included all believers and therefore a local church, being a manifestation of that body, must also include all Christians (except those put out), otherwise it is not a true gathering of the body. The fact that not all Christians met in the same building in the local churches of New Testament times did not affect Darby's position; in New

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*

¹⁰² J.N. Darby *The Claims of the Church of England Considered in Collected Writings*, vol.14, p.198

¹⁰³ C.B. Bass *Backgrounds to Dispensationalism: Its Historical Genesis and Ecclesiastical Implications*, Michigan, Erdmans, 1960, p.109

Testament times, individual meetings were part of an identifiable local body acting in unity.¹⁰⁴

Though Darby wrote about apostasy in the Church, he did not see ‘apostasy’ of the Church as an exactly equivalent term for its ruin. He wrote:

I have consented to lay aside the word ‘apostasy’, because I do not attach myself to words, provided the truth be admitted. ...I think that the expression is thoroughly applicable, according to its scriptural sense, to the state of things around us. I consent to abandon it, in order to render more easy, the discussion of these subjects with such as are sincere, because, in fact, the falling away which will take place at the end is a more open falling away, more undisguised. But the word of God applies this term to a moral and real abandonment of the true principles of Christianity and to men who call themselves Christians, act under the influence of Satan (1 Tim 4), who corrupts everything which he cannot hinder. The abandonment of the true principles of Christianity, by the very persons who pretend never to have abandoned it, is called apostasy in the word; and it is most important that this should be understood, in order that the outward form of Christianity may no longer deceive the simple, but that they may fully know that the apostasy is none the less real for being hidden.¹⁰⁵

Thus, there is apostasy in the Church, but it is currently a hidden apostasy, while the ruin of the outward form of the Church is manifest. The Protestant churches would only fall into the fullness of moral apostasy in the last days. Darby distinguished between the giving up of Christian principles and the more open apostasy of Roman Catholicism:

You ask for a few words about the apostasy. It expresses the open renunciation of Christianity, rather than the abandonment of its principles by those who have made profession of it. But the thing, as to the reality of it, is of all-importance for heart and conscience. So long as the word was applied only to the votaries of Romanism, one would have had no difficulty

¹⁰⁴ J.N. Darby *Remarks upon "The British Churches in relation to the British people"* (1867) in *Collected Writings*, vol.14, p.311

¹⁰⁵ J.N. Darby *Remarks on the State of the Church* (1840) in *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.246

about using it; but when it is understood that if this falling away of Christendom has come, the effect of it has been universal, one is shocked by the use of the word.¹⁰⁶

Grass points out that the term 'Ruin of the Church' is misleading. It was not the body of Christ that was ruined, but rather Christendom.¹⁰⁷ Originally, Christendom and the Church had been inseparable.¹⁰⁸ However, the organised structure of the Church had fallen into ruins, despite the body remaining. Grass writes:

For Darby, Christendom- the house- was originally coterminous with the universal church. This body had lost the marks of unity, holiness, Catholicity and apostolicity traditionally accorded to it.¹⁰⁹

It is necessary to understand that the notion of Christendom had a distinct place within Darby's ecclesiology. Christendom was not merely an historical reality, but was also a Biblical concept in his view. Early on in his writings, Darby had viewed Christendom as occupying a special position of privilege and responsibility due to its profession of Christ.¹¹⁰ It had failed in this responsibility and abused the privileges it had been granted.

¹⁰⁶ J.N. Darby (1870), *Letters* vol.2, p.94

¹⁰⁷ T.G. Grass, *The Church's Ruin and Restoration: The Development of Ecclesiology in the Plymouth Brethren and Catholic Apostolic Church 1825-1866*, Unpublished PhD thesis, King's College, London, 1997, p.106

¹⁰⁸ Christendom is frequently understood in a political sense. The Oxford dictionary defines Christendom as "Christian countries."

It is important to recognise that Darby used the word *Christendom* in a less conventional sense. By the word he meant the mass of persons on earth who professed to be Christian.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*

¹¹⁰ J.N. Darby wrote:

Let us look now at that great western body, which is called the church, the Christendom of the world- the vine of the Christian profession.

The Notion of a Clergyman (1829) in *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.42

In calling Christendom 'the vine' he is referring to the metaphor of the vine and the branches of John chapter 15, Christendom representing the severed branches which bore no fruit; branches that were to be cast into fire.

The doctrine of the ruin of the Church was not a doctrine that was unique to Darby or the Brethren. Neatby pointed out that all Protestants must believe that Christendom is in ruins to some extent.¹¹¹ Luther wrote a short work entitled 'The Babylonian captivity of the Church' concerning sacramental teaching that he objected to.¹¹² Calvin had taught that at certain times in history, the church's existence could only be in an hidden or invisible state.¹¹³ The idea of the church falling into major apostasy is common in sectarian religion. The Seventh-Day Adventist church had a very different theological background and emphases to the Brethren, nevertheless, its founder, Ellen G White articulated a view of the Church's ruin.¹¹⁴ The Churches of Christ, another sectarian movement, distant in origin from the Brethren maintained that the Church was in apostasy.¹¹⁵ As sectarian religion diverts from mainstream religion in some way, it generally holds that mainstream religion is inadequate.

Where Darby's view of the ruin of the Church, and also that of the majority of the Brethren, differs from other expressions of this concept, is in his conviction that there

¹¹¹ W.B. Neatby *A History of the Plymouth Brethren* Stoke on Trent, Tentmaker Publications, 2001 (Originally 1901), p.89

¹¹² Martin Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, translated by ATW Steinhauser, in Luther's Works vol.36, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1959, p.11

By this term, Luther referred to the sacramental theology of medieval Catholicism.

¹¹³ Grass, 1997, p.100

¹¹⁴ E.G. White wrote:

Thus the churches came to consist, to a considerable extent, of unconverted persons; and even in the ministry were those who not only held errors in doctrine, but who were ignorant of the renewing power of the Holy Spirit. Thus again was demonstrated the evil results, so often witnessed in the history of the Church by the aid of the state, of appealing to the secular power in support of the Gospel of him who declared: 'My kingdom is not of this world.' John 18:36

Thus, the spirit inspired by the Reformation gradually died out, until there was almost as great need of reform in the Protestant churches as in the Roman Church in the time of Luther.

The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan Ontario, Pacific Publishing, 1889, p.297-298

¹¹⁵ Alexander Campbell its chief founder wrote in 1832, "The Christian religion has been for ages interred in the rubbish of human invention and tradition."

R.T. Hughes *The Churches of Christ* student edition, Westport, CT, Praeger Publishers, 2001, p.17

was no hope of restoring the Church to its original condition. Callahan assembles much evidence that this was the conviction of the majority of the Brethren and that this was central to their ecclesiology.¹¹⁶ Darby wrote on the subject of restoration:

We all acknowledge (for to such only am I writing) that God established churches; we confess that that Christians (in a word, the church generally) have sadly departed from this original settlement by God, and are guilty therein. To undertake to re-establish it all on its first footing is (at any rate, it may be) an effect of the working of that very spirit which leads one to seek to set up again his own righteousness when it has been lost.¹¹⁷

Darby's argument here is that if the failure of the church involved self-righteousness, to attempt to restore the church from ruin would actually involve the same self-righteousness in ignoring its ruined condition. Darby further argued that dissenting denominations were involved in a dilemma. If the church was not in ruins, there was no place for forming new churches, but if it was in ruins, then only God was able to restore what He had begun:

I press this argument on those who are endeavouring to organise churches. If real churches exist, such persons are not called upon to make them. If, as they say, they did exist at the beginning but have ceased to exist, in that case the dispensation is in ruins, and in a condition of entire departure from its original standing. They are undertaking in consequence thereof to set it up again. This attempt is what they have to justify; otherwise the attempt without anything to warrant it. It will be objected that the church cannot fail, and that God has given to it a promise that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I acknowledge it, if we understand by that promise that the salvation of the elect is secure, that the glory of the church in the resurrection will triumph over Satan, and that God will secure the maintenance of the confession of Jesus in the earth until the church be taken away.....On the other hand, if it is intended to affirm that the present dispensation cannot fail, it is a pernicious error so to say: indeed, if such be the truth, why have you separated yourselves from the state in which it was?

¹¹⁶ J.P. Callahan, *Primitivist Piety: The Ecclesiology of the Early Plymouth Brethren* Lanham, Maryland, Scarecrow Press, 1996

¹¹⁷ J.N. Darby *On the Formation of Churches* (1840) in *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.142

If the economy or dispensation of God in the gathering of the church on earth still subsists according to the original standing, how is that you are making new churches? It is a point upon which Popery alone is consistent with itself.¹¹⁸

Darby's main complaint against the dissenting churches seem to be that they claimed to be churches, while meeting on the grounds, not of the unity of Christ, but of their own principles.

Darby's ideas about the error of forming new churches seem problematic if we consider the Church in a missionary context. If individuals are converted in, for instance, a remote town in Burma, where there are no other Christians, is a new local church not formed? How would such a company of Christians be affected by the ruin of the Church? There seems to be a significant lack of any kind of missiology in Darby's ecclesiology. Darby devoted little attention to idea of church planting and the process of forming assemblies, despite his involvement in setting up assemblies; he seems almost to have viewed the Church as falling from heaven. He maintained that churches could not be formed for want of power, but he never actually made clear exactly what power was absent. Darby was not opposed to missionary endeavour.¹¹⁹ The Brethren were among the most active missionary supporters in the nineteenth century.¹²⁰ Nevertheless, the anathema against forming *new churches* seems deeply rooted in its context of there being true Christians meeting in different professing churches. The idea of the Ruin of the Church is a concept that is grounded in Christendom.¹²¹ The lack of any kind of missiology in Darby's thought is a

¹¹⁸ *ibid*, p.144

¹¹⁹ J.N. Darby wrote "The path we follow has spread to a considerable extent in the British Colonies, and more recently in the United States, in Asia, in Africa, and elsewhere." (1850, *Letters*, vol.2, p.438)

¹²⁰ Ironside, 1942, p.71

¹²¹ Today, numerous denominations can be found operating in Africa and Asia. Darby would no doubt have seen this as the fruit of the Ruin of the Church. However, the concept seems very difficult to

considerable weakness that will be discussed later. Perhaps this lack of systematic thought about mission had its historic results in the Raven/ Taylor party of Exclusive Brethren abandoning all missionary effort and attempts to plant new assemblies.¹²²

The Development of the Doctrine of Ruin in Darby's Thought

One of the most likely influences on Darby's doctrine of the Ruin of the Church was the Historicist view of Bible prophecy.¹²³ This view came to prominence in the Reformation and was important to the Puritans in England.¹²⁴ Protestant teaching had established a widely held view that the Papacy was the Antichrist of Bible prophecy. Krapohl suggests that Darby would have been exposed to this teaching at a relatively early age at the Anglican Westminster School.¹²⁵ Perhaps surprisingly, those of the High Church party in the Church of England were strongly committed to the Papal Antichrist belief.¹²⁶ It is likely that the High Church Darby of Calary would have taken that view.

Darby came to reject the view that the Papacy itself was the Antichrist.¹²⁷ However, he saw the Antichrist appearing in various forms, despite his final manifestation in the

apply in a situation where only Brethren or non-denominational missionaries have seen success in non-evangelised areas.

¹²² Shuff, 2005, p.171

¹²³ The view that events of New Testament prophecy are fulfilled throughout history, as opposed to *Futurism*, that holds that they are fulfilled primarily in the future or *Preterism*, that holds them to have been fulfilled in the first century after Christ.

¹²⁴ R.G. Clouse *Views of the Millennium in Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* ed. W. Elwell, Grand Rapids, Baker Books, 1984, p.717

¹²⁵ Krapohl, 1988, p.447

¹²⁶ P.B. Nockles *The Oxford Movement in Context: Anglican High Churchmanship 1760-1857* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p.167

¹²⁷ J.N. Darby wrote:

With the design I have pointed out, Mr. Gaussen seeks to shew that it is

last days.¹²⁸ He saw *Popery* as playing a major role in the end times.¹²⁹ Darby did not hold Roman Catholicism to be part of the true church (though individual Roman Catholics might be true believers). Roman Catholicism was instead part of Christendom, the earthly body that was a subject of prophecy. He viewed the Whore of Babylon in Revelation 17 as having particular reference to the Roman Catholic Church.¹³⁰ In the short term, Darby saw great political danger in Popery.¹³¹ This may have had much to do with his background as an Irish Protestant, but it reflected contemporary prophetic thought just as much.

a question of Papal succession in the little horn of Daniel 7 and in other passages. We shall examine in a few words the grounds he lays down for the support of his proposition. First of all, he will have it that it is a theologian king. It is on this he greatly insists, and, in effect, it is the main point of his system. Where is the proof of it? He thinks "to change times and laws." But why should the one who changes times and laws, be a theologian or even an ecclesiastic? Jeroboam did change the times and the law, and he was not a theologian. The French Revolution abolished Christianity and established decades in the place of weeks. Was that theology? This proof, which is the basis of his whole system, is no proof at all.

Examination of Mr Gaussen's 'Daniel the Prophet' (1850) in Collected Writings vol.11, p.69

¹²⁸ J.N. Darby (1851), *Letters*, vol.3, p.264

¹²⁹ Darby criticised B.W. Newton for playing down the role of Catholicism in prophecy:

In the following note we again find this effort to screen Romanism from being the designated corruptor of the earth, guilty of the blood of the saints. "Some peculiar system of evil, such as Romanism or the like." All the Christians in the country have betrayed their ignorance of God's mind in the matter. The author, that is, alone possesses it. Universal consent is not worth a great deal here it appears.

Examination of the Statements made in the 'Thoughts on the Apocalypse' (1838) in Collected Writings, vol.8, p.265

¹³⁰ J.N. Darby wrote:

It is not when Babylon is destroyed that the kingdom is given to the Son of Man. It is given then to the beast. The effect of the destruction of all this corrupt Influence of outward nominal Christianity, of the awful corruption of the Papal System, which was the centre of it all, that "mother of abominations of the earth" the effect of the destruction of that, through the hatred and disgust of those connected with it, will be to put the power of the world into the hands of the beast.

Lectures on the Second Coming (1870) in Collected Writings, vol.11, p.297

¹³¹ J.N. Darby wrote:

They (dissenters) look to set aside the Protestant Establishment, having joined the Papists and infidels for the purpose. When they find the height to which Popery will pretend, they will set themselves against it, but on infidel grounds. Indeed, some, two or three years back, avowed this to me in conversation, that they would join the Roman Catholics in pulling down the Establishment and then fight it out with Popery....The Roman Catholic clergy are not and never can be gentlemen. I do not speak of this as a religious motive, but simply as a religious fact.

Disendowment-Disestablishment (1869) in Collected Writings, vol.20, p.289

Darby's opposition to Roman Catholicism played a role in shaping his view of the Church being in a state of ruin. In his first ecclesiological statement, his letter to the Archbishop of Dublin, he identifies the Papacy immediately after identifying the true church in God's purposes:

What is the Papacy? Satan's fiction to answer all this....In short, the system of Popery I look upon as an entire counterpart of the Christian scheme, set up by Satan on the decay of faith to hold its place, uniting men to an earthly head and to each other by those interests from which Christianity delivers, and keeping the world in bondage, instead of leading men to heavenly things out of those interests, to be humbled in the presence of the world's dominion. The members of the Papal system will accordingly be found in their interests, objects and activities, such as would result from such a system. We know, blessed be God! That in result, the kingdom of His Son will be glorified in the splendour of its great Head, and the destruction of that antichristian counterpart, by which Satan has deceived the nations under pretence of Christianity.¹³²

Thus, Darby viewed the Roman Catholic Church as a Satanic counterpart to the true Church. The Church was made up of individuals united to Christ in heaven; *Popery* united men to the world and to earthly institutions. Historically, this movement towards worldly heads began at the 'decay of faith,'¹³³ at the Church's fall into ruin. *Popery* was not a movement external to the Church, but a corruption from within.¹³⁴ The identification of the Roman Catholic Church as a devilish counterfeit church reflects the tendency of Dispensationalism to present Satan as a kind of counterfeit deity, who set himself up as a god of this world. Darby seemed to take such a view of Satan.¹³⁵ Michael Williams argued that this view of Satan as a counterfeit deity is a

¹³² J.N. Darby *To the Archbishop of Dublin* (1827) in *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.6

¹³³ *ibid.*

¹³⁴ J.N. Darby *The Church-The House and the Body* (1852) in *Collected Writings*, vol.14, p.91

¹³⁵ J.N. Darby wrote in 1872:

Further Satan is the prince of this world, and its god, and he governs

novel idea peculiar to Dispensationalism¹³⁶ and is a subtle form of Gnosticism.

Williams somewhat overstates his case in comparing the Dispensational view of Satan to Gnosticism.¹³⁷

Having established Catholicism as the great counterfeit enemy of the Church, Darby argues that the Church cannot resist such a foe through the support of the state and submission to its authority. Such resistance was contrary to the spirit of Christianity:

But to give up the rightful dominion of the Son of God, in order to avoid the imputation of seeking civil power, or rather to preserve ourselves from the inroads of one who seeks it on apostate grounds, is surely very inconsistent, I do not mean in intention but in fact, with fidelity to the glory of the great Head of the Church, humbled for our sakes, and resulting (where taken as a principle of conduct) either in opposition, however mitigated or modified, or at least in the dread of

the world by means of the passions and lusts of men; and he is able to raise up the whole world against Christians, as he did against Christ and so try their faith.His influence in the world is very great through each other; likewise, from the rapidity of his operations and actions, he appears to be everywhere; and then he employs a great multitude of servants who are all wicked; but in fact he is not present everywhere.

Letters, vol.2, p.158-159

¹³⁶ Michael Williams wrote:

Satan's intention (according to Chafer) is not to be a fiend, but rather to imitate God, indeed, to supplant God. He is, therefore, about the business of the construction and propagation of all that is moral and good. In his imitation of the divine he is working toward a universal kingdom of morality, brotherhood, justice and peace upon the earth.Satan works under the ultimate goal that mankind will draw away from reverence of God in order that the usurper may be worshipped as divine....Scofield also believed that Satan's power of imitation or deception is so great that those who are his own actually suppose themselves to be the children of God....

But Chafer's affirmation of these Biblical assertions is pressed beyond all Biblical bounds. Indeed, Chafer's understanding of Satan as an incompetent substitute for God comes perilously close to the creation myth of ancient gnosticism, in which the demiruge in clumsy imitation of the high deity fashions the material universe and inspires human culture.

Michael Williams *This World is Not my Home: The Origins and Development of Dispensationalism* Ross-shire, Scotland, Christian Focus Publications, 2003, p.49

¹³⁷ He does not present very much of an alternative to the Dispensational view of Satan, or supply alternative interpretations of the Biblical texts supporting it. He refers to Bible verses that seem to support the Dispensational view, but he does not engage with them.

the spiritual energies by which that kingdom of eternal blessing is maintained and promoted.....And am I, because Satan has imitated this in an apostate earthly dominion carried on under its name, to give this up (could Satan wish better?) and to dwindle Christianity into a system harmonised with a particular community, for the purpose of its moral happiness? ...The apostate dominion of the Papacy is not therefore to be met on the part of the clergy calling on the aid of the state to resist its temporal dominion, but by their overcoming the strong man armed as the active, forward ministers of Him who is stronger than he; not by waiting till they are attacked, as if their interests were the thing in question; but now that God has been pleased to shed forth His Spirit, in their due places ministering the spiritual sword.....¹³⁸

Darby argued that this unsatisfactory state of affairs was sought in the charge of

Archbishop Magee:

While it is on the part of the Clergy a natural consequence of the Charge and Petition; for if they propose themselves as candidates in favour of civil government, in order to maintain its protection, and then seek for its aid in the character in which they have proposed themselves, it is at once their interest, and I must add, their obligation to support its interests in their ministry, and bind others to the same system: but how will this consist with their duty to Christ and the souls which He has purchased with His own blood, and gathering them for Him?¹³⁹

Thus, in this writing, Darby's High Anglican anti-establishment views lead him to view not only the Roman Catholic Church as in apostasy, but also Protestantism as being in departure from true Christianity. Likewise in another early work, he saw the failure of the Reformation in the development of established national churches:

The operation of the Reformation was to introduce a statement of individual faith, and to break off, generally, all without the limits of the Roman Empire, from the immediate power of Rome and Popery. It in no way separated the church from the world, but the contrary; and while it changed the relations, left the principle of the structure just where it was.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ J.N. Darby *Considerations Addressed to the Archbishop of Dublin* (1827) in *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.10

¹³⁹ *ibid*, p.18

Thus, the Church was left in a state of ruin despite the Reformation; Protestantism had failed to free the Church from the world. While the apostasy of Roman Catholicism was manifest in its idolatry and the papal institution, Protestantism had failed in becoming connected with the world, particularly the state. The heavy emphasis on the damaging effect of union with the world reflects Darby's insistence that the Church is a heavenly body.

Darby's paper '*The Notion of a Clergyman Dispensationally the Sin against the Holy Ghost*¹⁴¹', of 1829, was an important stage in the development of his doctrine of Ruin. This pamphlet was the first of his writings to use the term *dispensation* and to put the apostasy of the Church into a dispensational context. The paper attacks the concept of clergy. In a rather involved argument, he attempted to show that if a person believes in the concept of clergy, he must logically condemn those who do the work of Christian ministry outside of the clerical system. However, as it was apparent to Darby that some lay preachers and evangelists outside of the clerical system were genuinely empowered by the Holy Spirit, this involved the supporter of clergy in the sin against the Holy Spirit, because to be consistent with the clerical system, he or she had to condemn that which was operating outside of it.¹⁴² He thus concluded that the

¹⁴⁰ J.N. Darby *The Notion of a Clergyman Dispensationally the Sin against the Holy Ghost* (1829) in *Collected Writings*, vol. 1, p.49

¹⁴¹ *Collected Writings*, vol. 1, p.36-51

¹⁴² J.N. Darby wrote:

They cannot deny that the work going on in the country is from God, though it be not by clergymen; but they condemn it as evil, and therein sin against the Holy Ghost- and do so as clergymen: and their only ground of so charging it is this notion of a Clergyman.

Ibid, p.41

If we go to India, the difficulty to be got over, the persons to be soothed and won, so that the gospel should not be hindered, are the clergy; I speak of nominal Christianity in India, as on the Malabar Coast and their Catanars.

entire dispensation of the Church was involved in the sin against the Holy Spirit.¹⁴³ The notion of the Church being involved in corporate sin was a radical idea, but one that seemed to be much in favour amongst the early Brethren,¹⁴⁴ as well as with Darby. *The Notion of a Clergyman* is clearly targeted at the Establishment; it followed immediately after Darby's attacks on Archbishop Whately of Dublin.¹⁴⁵ Darby did not mention the dissenting churches in that paper. Whether he believed his charge against clergy applied to dissenters is not clear, though he made clear his opposition to dissent in *Considerations on the Nature and Unity of the Church of Christ*¹⁴⁶ in 1828. Darby's arguments in *Notion of a Clergyman* seem somewhat difficult to reconcile with the widespread acceptance and use by Anglican Evangelicals of lay ministers in all aspects of church life except the administration of the sacraments.

It is common for historians of the Brethren to draw attention to the worldliness and materialism in the established church in the 19th century as a key factor in the

Go to Armenia; the difficulty would arise from precisely the same quarter. Carry the Gospel in its power, where would difficulty be anticipated? - from what quarter? From the clergy. At best, they must be conciliated. Go to Egypt amongst the Copts: the same thing just is true. Go to the churches in Palestine, and wherever the Armenian Church is spread, the facts are the same. I do not say, they may not in any case be conciliated; but the opposition to the truth, when it exists, arises from them. Go to the Greek Church: it is precisely the same. Their Papas, or Priests, the ministers and sustainers of all the corruption and evil of the church, are the great hindrance to all missionary and spiritual exertion. Their churches are fallen; *therefore* they proportionately estimate the clergy, and they do not the gospel. But the opposers and hinderers, the persons whose influence is dreaded are the clergy.

Ibid, p.42

¹⁴³ J.N. Darby wrote:

Now I believe the whole principle of this is to be contained in this dispensation in the word *clergyman*, and that this is the necessary root of that denial of the Holy Ghost which must, from the nature of the dispensation, end in its dissolution.

Ibid, p.39

¹⁴⁴ Callahan, 1996, p.190

¹⁴⁵ See previous chapter.

¹⁴⁶ *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.20-35

development of Brethren ecclesiology.¹⁴⁷ Callahan argues that this emphasis on negative discontent is not the most helpful approach to understanding Brethren ecclesiology. He writes “Without a positive estimate of the Brethren’s Primitivist convictions, one is left with a series of random, antagonistic estimates of every facet of the contemporary church.”¹⁴⁸ Thus, it is more important to understand the positive elements of Darby’s ecclesiology and their contribution to the development of his doctrine of ruin. These certainly include his emphasis on the unity of all believers and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within the church as a body. However, Darby also identified clear evidence in the New Testament for the doctrine of the Ruin of the Church. Darby saw inductive and cumulative evidence for the ruin of the church throughout the New Testament. This included the failure of the apostles to fulfil the Great Commission, some of the parables of Jesus, a dispensational interpretation of Romans chapter 11, the Mystery of Iniquity of 2 Thessalonians 2, the warnings of apostasy in 2 Timothy, 1 John and Jude and the teaching of the Seven Churches of the Revelation.

Darby argued that the initial failure in the Church had been that of the apostles. They had failed to carry out the Great Commission to which they had been entrusted. The Lord had commanded them to go to the whole world, and yet they had remained in

¹⁴⁷ For instance G.S. McPhail, 1935, p.8-9. McPhail identifies considerable worldliness in the early 19th century Irish church and argues that its view of Church-State relations was deeply Erastian. He describes the Irish church as “little more than a department of the civil service (p.9).

Also, see E.H. Broadbent, *The Pilgrim Church*, London, Pickering and Inglis, 1931, p.347, J.D. Burnham, 2004, p.5

Bebbington argues that the early 19th century was a period of crisis and pessimism in the Evangelical movement (D.W. Bebbington *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980’s* London, Unwin Hyman, 1989, p.103).

¹⁴⁸ Callahan, 1996, p.33

Jerusalem, even when the church was scattered through persecution.¹⁴⁹ Thus, it had been necessary for the Lord to call Saul or Paul to be an apostle to the Gentiles. Darby wrote:

But where is the fulfilment of the twelve apostles? Scripture affords it not. There is no account of the twelve in Scripture going into all the world and preaching the Gospel to every creature: nothing which Scripture recognises as the accomplishment of this command. This in itself would be sufficient to show that the command on which the dispensation hung was, in the revealed testimony of God, unfulfilled by those to whom it had been committed.¹⁵⁰

Nevertheless, despite their failure, the apostles remained a check against evil while they were alive:

As long as the apostolic energy remained, though the evil was there, it was met and restrained; but after that was gone, after his decease, the evil would break out and in; for he knows of no apostolic succession, but that his absence would open the door to evil.¹⁵¹

Darby viewed some of the parables as having in view the corruption of Christendom. The parables of the kingdom in Matthew 13 did not have the Church in view, but the kingdom in the absence of the king, in Darby's view.¹⁵² Thus, they concerned the sphere of Christ's moral authority on earth during His absence. This was

¹⁴⁹ J.N. Darby *The Apostasy of Successive Dispensations* (1833) in *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.128

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁵¹ J.N. Darby *What the Christian has Amid the Ruin of the Church* in *Collected Writings*, vol.3, p.277

¹⁵² J.N. Darby wrote:

In the six following parables (of Matthew 13) we find similitudes of the kingdom.

We must remember that it is the kingdom established during the rejection of the

King, adding to this, in the explanation of the first parable, the effect of His return.

Synopsis of the Books of the Bible (1881), vol.3, Kingston on Thames, Stow Hill Bible and Tract Depot, 1958, p.69

Christendom.¹⁵³ The parable of the Wheat and Tares revealed the intermingling of false brethren into the professing church:

The result was the kingdom here below no longer presented as a whole the appearance of the Lord's own work. *He* sows not tares. Through the carelessness and the infirmity of men, the enemy found means to sow these tares. Observe that this does not apply to the heathen or to the Jews, but to the evil done among Christians by Satan through bad doctrines, bad teachers and their adherents. The Lord Jesus sowed. Satan, while men slept, sowed also. There were judaisers, philosophers, heretics who held with both the former on the one hand, or on the other opposed the truth of the Old Testament.¹⁵⁴

In the next parable of Matthew 13, Darby argues that the growth of the Mustard seed into a great tree represents the growth of the Gospel witness into the great worldly system of Christendom:

That which had been sown as a grain of mustard-seed becomes a great tree; a symbol that represents a great power in the earth. The Assyrian, Pharoah, Nebuchadnezzar, are set before us in the world as great trees. Such would be the form of the kingdom, which began in littleness through the word sown by the Lord, and afterwards by His disciples. That which this seed produced would gradually assume the form of a great power, making itself prominent on the earth, so that others would shelter themselves under it, as birds under the branches of a tree. This has, indeed been the case.¹⁵⁵

Darby maintains that the tree is not presented as morally evil in this parable.¹⁵⁶ The next parable of Matthew 13, the parable of leaven revealed the corruption of Christendom more directly:

¹⁵³ Ibid, p.70

¹⁵⁴ ibid.

¹⁵⁵ ibid, p.72

¹⁵⁶ J.N. Darby wrote "The figure in the parable does not raise the question whether it was good or bad, but simply represents that it was a great public power in the world." (*Lectures on the Second Coming of Christ*, 1870, in *Collected Writings*, vol.11, p.283).

We next find that it would not only be a great tree in the earth, but the kingdom would be characterised as a system of doctrine, which would diffuse itself- a profession, which would enclose all it reached within its sphere of influence. The whole of the three measures would be leavened. I need not dwell here on the fact that the word leaven is always used in a bad sense by the sacred writers; but the Holy Ghost gives us to understand that it is not the regenerative power of the word in the heart of the individual, bringing him back to God; neither is it simply a power acting by outward strength, such as Pharoah, Nebuchadnezzar, and the other great trees of scripture. But it is a system of doctrine that should characterise the mass, pervading it throughout. It is not faith properly so called, nor is it life. It is religion; it is Christendom. A profession of doctrine, in hearts which will bear neither the truth nor God, connects itself always with corruption in the doctrine itself.¹⁵⁷

This parable revealed the doctrinal corruption of Christendom. Darby took the view that the yeast represented evil and its influence. Darby saw this doctrinal corruption taking hold of the professing church in the time of the Church Fathers not long after the deaths of the apostles. Darby also viewed the failure of the Church in the parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25. The wise virgins represented true believers, but they, like the foolish virgins, had failed to maintain an attitude of watchfulness for the coming of Christ:

What characterised the state of the kingdom, is that *all* had forgotten their vocation; it was not that there were no faithful ones; the wise virgins had their oil in their vessels. But all, wise or foolish in the kingdom, whether the sincere and pious or whether they deceived themselves, all had lost the sense of their vocation. This great truth, the coming of the Master, had its influence; they are awakened, but to be separated by the arrival and the judgment of the Master.¹⁵⁸

Darby believed that Romans chapter 11 taught the failure and closure of the present dispensation. Romans 11:20¹⁵⁹ taught the apostasy and cutting off of the Jewish

¹⁵⁷ J.N. Darby, *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible* (1881), vol.3, p.72

¹⁵⁸ J.N. Darby *The Gospel according to Matthew in Collected Writings*, vol.24, p.55

¹⁵⁹ "Well, because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear."

dispensation.¹⁶⁰ However, verses 21-22¹⁶¹ indicated the possibility of the Gentile dispensation falling into apostasy:

In short, our brother says, that he sees a threat to the Gentiles. I ask, a threat of what? Is it not being cut off? And now let us look around and see if the Gentiles, who have been grafted into the place of the Jews- if Christendom- has continued in the goodness of God. It is unnecessary to speak of the Roman system, although doubtless, there are souls saved under that system. Neither will we speak of the Greeks, who barely subsist under the domination of the Mohammedans- that scourge sent by God, or who are plunged in the superstition of a reigning hierarchy. Let us consider the countries where the light of Protestantism has penetrated. For the most part they are sunk in unbelief; and barely an individual believer here or there is found, who fights against the general unbelief. The greater part of those who are called ministers are not converted. They are unconverted pastors, who are set over flocks of unbelievers, or who pretend to feed even the true sheep of the Lord, but who drive them away. These ministers are nominated, not by the Spirit of God, nor by the church, in any way whatever, but by the civil authorities, who have no office in the church. What do we see in short? The Lord's sheep dispersed and scattered. It is an assembly of unbelievers administered and governed by persons who perhaps have not even the profession of Christianity, which is called the church. Believers generally find themselves confounded with this assembly, and those who are at the head are invested with the pre-eminence as with a civil right.¹⁶²

In this passage, Darby combined a dispensational reading of Romans 11 with observation of contemporary circumstances. He identifies there a range of different historical phenomena that reflects the apostate circumstances of the dispensation. He saw in Romans 11 the possibility of apostasy and he saw historical circumstances

¹⁶⁰ J.N. Darby wrote:

Many of the Israelite branches had been branches, the natural heirs of the promises, had been cut off because of their unbelief; for when the fulfilment of the promises was offered them, they rejected it....But if they abandoned this principle, they should lose their place in the tree of promise, even as the unbelieving Jews had lost theirs. Goodness was to be their portion in this dispensation of God's government, with regard to those who had part in the enjoyment of His promises, if they continued in this goodness; if not, cutting off. This had happened to the Jews; it should be the same with the Gentiles if they did not continue in that goodness.

Synopsis of the Books of the Bible (1881), vol.4, p.145-146

¹⁶¹ "For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also not spare thee.

Behold thou therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but towards thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou shalt be cut off."

¹⁶² J.N. Darby *Further Developments on the Formation of Churches* (1840) in *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.184

confirming that this apostasy had indeed taken place. The dispensation had not yet been cut off,¹⁶³ but its failure was manifest and it was ripe for judgment. The parable of the Tares prophesied the judgment that would fall upon corrupt Christendom.¹⁶⁴ Christendom's doom could also be found predicted in Revelation chapter 17.¹⁶⁵ One of Darby's opponents, Mr F Olivier of the Swiss dissenters responded to Darby's view of Romans 11 by arguing that the warning of the cutting off concerned the apostasy of individuals and not the dispensation.¹⁶⁶ Darby responded by arguing firstly that it manifestly concerned peoples, rather than individuals. Secondly, he argued that individual believers could never be cut off.¹⁶⁷ Darby's suggestion that individuals are not in view in this text might be supported by the references to Israel

¹⁶³ J.N. Darby wrote:

He (Mr. Rochat) insists upon it that the dispensation has not been cut off. Neither do I believe that it has. Like him I distinguish between the abolition of a state of things by the Lord 'and the case where this state of things has ceased to exist through the negligence or the wickedness of man.'

Further Developments on the Formation of Churches (1840) in *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.160

¹⁶⁴ *The Hopes of the Church of God* in *Collected Writings*, vol.2, p.311-312

¹⁶⁵ J.N. Darby wrote:

But, it is said that the secular power of corrupted Christendom has disappeared by judgment, and that the destruction of its influence will give place to the Gospel. But the Spirit says, "The ten horns (kings) which thou sawest upon the beast (the Roman Empire), these shall hate the whore (ecclesiastical power), and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled," Rev. 17:16,17.

Ibid, p.314

¹⁶⁶ J.N. Darby wrote:

If it is simply an individual warning, could he that had been cut off (according to Hebrews 6 and 10) be grafted in again? And if the apostle speaks of individuals only, why says he that they can be grafted in again? Is it not evident that he speaks of Jews as Jews, and that this would be accomplished if the Jews were admitted to the enjoyment of the promises at the end of the ages, although the apostle says *they* (that is to say, quite other individuals than those of that day, but yet Jews) *can be grafted in again?*

Thoughts on Roman 11 (1841) in *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.312

¹⁶⁷ J.N. Darby wrote:

Moreover, although an individual stands by faith when he believes, such nevertheless is not all the apostle means; it is the principle upon which he stands, and not the possession of the thing which is in question. He who possesses faith will never be cut off.

Ibid, p.312-313

and the Gentiles there, but one fears that Darby's finding the ruin of the church in Romans 11 is eisegetical.

Darby further connected the apostasy with the Mystery of Iniquity in 2 Thessalonians 2:7.¹⁶⁸ This force or agency is connected in the passage with the coming of the Man of Sin or Antichrist. Darby identified the Mystery of Iniquity as apostasy, writing "The mystery of iniquity, which had already begun at the time of the apostle, ends in the revolt of Christianity, the professing church."¹⁶⁹ Verse 3 of that passage refers to an apostasy occurring before the coming of the Man of Sin.¹⁷⁰ In his earlier writings while in Switzerland, Darby viewed the apostasy as having past fulfilment:

Mr Rochat says (p.22), that scripture places the moment of the apostasy at the time of the appearing of the Antichrist. He mistakes; scripture says nothing of the kind. The passage quoted only says, that the day of the Lord will not come unless the apostasy have first come and the man of sin be revealed, etc. But the falling away may take place long before the revelation of the man of sin.¹⁷¹

In later writings, he viewed the fullness of the apostasy as a future event, but saw it in the process of development.¹⁷² This change of view can probably be accounted for by

¹⁶⁸ "For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way."

¹⁶⁹ J.N. Darby *Notes on the Apocalypse* (1842) in *Collected Writings*, vol.5, p.80

¹⁷⁰ "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come except there be a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition."

¹⁷¹ J.N. Darby *Remarks on the State of the Church* (1843) in *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.246

¹⁷² J.N. Darby wrote:

The open apostasy then, has not yet come; but the giving up of the authority and efficacy of the word, and of faith in the presence of the Holy Ghost, the substituting the authority of the clergy for the immediate rights of the Lord over the conscience, the denial of justification by faith, and the putting the efficacy of the sacraments in the place of the work of the Holy Spirit- in a word the full development of "the mystery of iniquity"- shews us an abandonment of the first condition of the church, and of the principles upon which it was founded, which is moral apostasy.

Letters, vol.2, p.94

the development of his prophetic views (though this may be one of the few examples of change in Darby's theology. It progressed comparatively little after the mid-1830s).

Darby found much evidence for the advance of apostasy in the later epistles. He cited the warnings of false teachers in 2 Timothy 3,¹⁷³ in 2 Peter 2,¹⁷⁴ in the many antichrists of John's epistles,¹⁷⁵ and in Jude he found an 'history of the apostasy.'¹⁷⁶ Darby also viewed the message to the seven churches in the Revelation as evidence for the Ruin of the Church. The majority of the seven assemblies in the book of Revelation were in a state of failure which would result in judgment if not corrected and in the case of Laodicea, would not be corrected at all.¹⁷⁷ Darby believed that none of the churches had responded favourably to the warnings:

¹⁷³ J.N. Darby wrote:

As to 2 Timothy 3, I have not quoted it in the thought it could by itself shew the existence of an apostasy; but to shew that the word of God always presents to us the picture of the ruin of the state of things established by God- a ruin which the presence of a few faithful ones cannot prevent- a ruin which will terminate by complete apostasy, and the manifestation of Antichrist, and which will be closed by cutting off.

Further Developments on the Formation of Churches (1840) in *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.174

¹⁷⁴ J.N. Darby wrote:

The two characters of the last days are, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness, and the apostasy or giving it up. These are all going on to this day; they crept in then.

Reading on 1 Peter and 2 in *Collected Writings*, vol.28, p.167

¹⁷⁵ J.N. Darby wrote:

Again "ye have heard that Antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time." And this note, not by the moral evil of the world, but by apostasy: "they went out from us," whereby it was proved they were not of us. This proves that in John's time the apostasy had set in, whereby the Christians knew, said he, that it was the last time; not by infidelity but by apostasy (that proved the last time should come)- not wicked people, but antichrists.

On the Apostasy in *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.119

In this paper, written during his time in Switzerland in the 1830s, Darby views the apostasy as a primarily past event.

¹⁷⁶ J.N. Darby wrote "The book of Jude may be taken as the history or revelation of apostasy." (*On the Apostasy* in *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.121)

¹⁷⁷ J.N. Darby wrote:

As to Laodicea, we shall find that the threat of the Lord to spue it out of His mouth is unconditional; because it was lukewarm, it was to be spued out. It is true that the Lord is long-suffering; that Jesus stands at the door and knocks; but it is in order that he that

As to judgments, or rather warning threats:- in the case of Ephesus, which presents the general fact of the assembly's decline, the warning is given that the candlestick would be taken away unless they repented: that the assembly did not, we know from Scripture and fact, and these assemblies looked at as a successive history.¹⁷⁸

The judgments on the Seven Churches would be realised in the cutting off or ruin of Christendom:

Was popery continuing in God's goodness? If not, *Christendom will be cut off*, Laodicea spued out of God's mouth as, as Thyatira punished with grievous plagues, both to give place as you may see, to the throne and sceptre of Christ, and, it is added in Thyatira, heavenly possession of "the morning star." The mystery of iniquity predicted in the apostle's days, would continue till it resulted in open apostasy, and the man of sin to be destroyed at Christ's coming. Evil men and seducers would wax worse and worse.¹⁷⁹

Darby compared the ruin of the church age with the ruin of previous dispensations in Biblical history. The Christian dispensation was to be dealt with as any other dispensation.¹⁸⁰ Darby introduced the principle in his Swiss writings, central to Dispensationalism, that God places man in a particular arrangement of responsibility that closes in judgment after failure:

The detail of the history connected with these dispensations brings out many most interesting displays, both of the principles and patience of God's dealings with the evil and failure of man; and of the workings by which He formed faith on His own thus developed perfections. But the dispensations themselves all

opens may sup with Him: this is an individual promise. It is not added, as to other churches called to repentance, "or else I will come", for the threat was absolute.

Remarks on the State of the Church (1843) in *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.271

¹⁷⁸ J.N. Darby *Synopsis on the Books of the Bible* (1843), vol. 5, p.378.

¹⁷⁹ J.N. Darby *Review of a Sermon Preached by Rev. G.M. Innes* (1868) in *Collected Writings*, vol.14, p.270. The Rev. G.M. Innes was an Anglican minister who had defended the Anglican church in a sermon at Quebec.

¹⁸⁰ J.N. Darby *On the Formation of Churches* (1840) in *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.154

declare some leading principle or interference of God, some condition in which He has placed man, principles which in themselves are everlastingly sanctioned of God, but in the course of those dispensations placed responsibility in the hands of man for the display and discovery of what he was, and the bringing in their establishment in Him to whom the glory of them all rightly belonged.¹⁸¹

Then Darby reveals the principle that a fallen dispensation is never restored:

It is not my intention to enter into any great detail, but to shew simply how, in every instance, there was total and immediate failure as regarded man, however the patience of God might tolerate and carry on by grace the dispensation in which man has thus failed in the outset; and further, that there is no instance of the restoration of a dispensation afforded us, though there might be partial revivals of it through faith.¹⁸²

Grass argues that it is possible to view Darby's conviction about the inevitability of dispensational failure as a development of his Calvinistic belief in human depravity.

Grass wrote:

His view that each dispensation was doomed to failure may be seen as an application of radical Calvinist Soteriology, and in particular of the doctrines of divine sovereignty, original sin and human inability, to the realms of salvation-history and ecclesiology, a point which has not hitherto been recognised.¹⁸³

The Calvinist belief in the depravity of humanity gave inspiration to the idea that each dispensation must inevitably fall into ruin. However, Grass points out that this does not explain Darby's insistence that the Christian dispensation could not be restored. Grass finds no obvious explanation for the origin of Darby's conviction on this point. It seems quite possible that Darby came to this conclusion because his interpretation of the Bible and his views on eschatology pointed in that direction. He saw in

¹⁸¹ J.N. Darby *The Apostasy of Successive Dispensations* (1834) in *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.124

¹⁸² *ibid*, p.124-125

¹⁸³ Grass, 1997, p.96

prophecy the approach of judgment upon Christendom and events in his experience confirmed that this judgment was imminent. He saw no evidence in prophecy for any hope of a restoration and revival of the power and glory of the Church in the last days, but instead the coming of antichrist. Perhaps also the idea of a restoration of the power of the Church did not sit well with his expectancy of the imminent appearing of Christ. While the Calvinist view of depravity seems clear in the belief in the inevitable failure of each dispensation, it might be argued that the view of God responding to each failure of man by instituting a new dispensation suggests a rather more reactive view of God's sovereignty; a more Arminian than Calvinist theology.¹⁸⁴

Conclusion

Darby viewed the Church as an indivisible organism made up of all Christians. It was formed at Pentecost and was entirely separate from God's dealings with the believers of previous and future dispensations. This reflected his hermeneutical methodology, which was grounded in a cosmic dualism between God's heavenly and earthly government. It was therefore not a subject of prophecy and was fundamentally distinct from the kingdom of God. Darby's belief in the unity of the Church entailed that there could only be one true local church in an area, made up of all believers. The absence of such circumstances lead to the need for the doctrine of the Ruin of the Church. This doctrine taught that Christendom had been so corrupted that there were no longer any true local churches, though the one Church remained in existence. Many writers have focused on how this doctrine was inspired by particular historic circumstances of Darby's era. However, it is equally derived, if not more so, by the

¹⁸⁴ However, Darby would have seen the hidden counsels of God behind each interaction between God and man.

particular interpretations that Darby placed upon the New Testament texts. Darby's doctrine of apostasy or ruin was grounded in a complex system of dispensational hermeneutics that were applied to his interpretation of historic circumstances. The extent to which this system was derived from other writers is extremely difficult to determine, as Darby almost never gave credit to other writers for their influence on him. It must be said that the doctrine is not really defined by Darby, but seems more a sum total of a number of themes (doctrinal error, prophetic speculation and evaluation of the state of the church) that point to a conclusion in the non-existence of any true local churches. It must be said that at in arguing for the ruin of the church from the New Testament, Darby does seem to fall into eisegesis and most modern exegetes would be doubtful of Darby's conclusions on this subject. As regards the significance of the doctrine of ruin, while many Christians, if not most Christians would feel that the division and weakness of much of the Christian church is lamentable, it must be asked whether Darby's idea of total ruin is not overly pessimistic. It is also highly idiosyncratic, whatever the merits of his analysis.

Darby's denial of the idea of a visible/ invisible distinction is made more complicated by the fact that he distinguished between the church as a work of God and the 'house' as a work of men. In order to sustain some aspects of his interpretation of biblical texts, it was necessary for him to re-introduce the visible/ invisible distinction in a different form. This redefining of terms only draws the reader's attention to the haphazard nature of his exegetical method.

The next chapter examine how Darby's ecclesiology was worked out in practice. It examines what kind of congregational life his doctrine of the ruin of the church entailed.

Chapter 4: Praxis in Darby's Ecclesiology

This chapter will examine Darby's belief about the practical issues involved in the church's earthly existence. This includes practical expression of the central themes of unity and separation, the nature of the church's meeting together, church discipline, Darby's opposition to ecclesiastical independence, the church's ministry, spiritual gifts, church government and sacraments. It will also consider the validity of describing Darby's ecclesiology as High Church.

Centrality of the themes of Unity and Separation

Krapohl identifies as a central theme in Darby's theology, *an unstable synthesis of unity and separation*. Krapohl wrote:

Two of the most important principles in Darby's theology were: (1) an insistence on the unity of the elect within of Christ in one Church; and (2) the conviction that Christians must separate themselves from the evils of Christendom during this dispensational age in order to avoid sharing in the guilt associated with the evil. Darby's problem was that he often found apostate "wolves" hiding within the fold of Christ's elect "sheep." What was done with those who demonstrated by their lives and teachings that they were "children of Christendom?" Darby's remedy to this dilemma was simple: expose the apostate; give them the opportunity for repentance; and drive them away from the Body of Christ if they did not ask for forgiveness. Thus, the two poles of Darby's theology, unity and separation, were at perpetual war with each other.¹

The themes of unity and separation are certainly central to Darby's ecclesiology. There are probably few theologians in the history of the church who have written more on these two themes. However, it should be asked whether this synthesis really

¹ Krapohl, 1988, p.453

is unstable as Krapohl claims. Krapohl's criticism of Darby is problematic. First because he has provided no preferred ecclesiological model to compare Darby's ecclesiology to. Secondly, Krapohl overlooks the fact that it might be argued that all Evangelical Christians must propose some sort of synthesis of the concepts of unity and separation. After all both are arguably Biblical concepts which must be taken into account in developing a truly Biblical ecclesiology.² Thirdly, it seems that Krapohl has identified the wrong element of Darby's theology as 'unstable.' There are a number of areas of tension and instability in Darby's theology- his slightly vague doctrine of the ruin of the church, his dualistic hermeneutical method, his distinction between the house and the body and his dispensational interpretation of the synoptic gospels. Arguably, Darby synthesises the concepts of unity and separation better than some of the other facets of his theology.

Meeting in the Name of the Lord

The Ruin of the Church raised the question of how believers should respond. What should they do? How should they meet? Darby first addressed these questions in his early paper *Considerations on the Nature and Unity of the Church of Christ* (1828).³

Having identified the lack of unity in Christendom as a problem, Darby raised the question of solutions. He firmly rejected the solution of a united denomination.⁴ He

² The Apostle's creed affirms that its adherents believe in One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. The unity of believers is found in the New Testament, in John 11:52, 17:11, 1 Corinthians 10:17, 12:12. Separation is mentioned in Matthew 18:17, 1 Corinthians 5:9-13, 2 Timothy 2:20-21. While Darby's model of unity and separation may not appear as the best one, Christians must surely engage with the different texts in the New Testament that deal with the two concepts of unity and separation and find some form of synthesis.

³ J.N. Darby *Collected Writings*, vol. 1, p.20

⁴ J.N. Darby wrote:

In the first place, it is not a formal union of the outward professing bodies that is desirable; indeed it is surprising that reflecting Protestants should desire it: far from doing good, I conceive it would be impossible that such a body could be at all

gave some faint praise to para-church co-operation between denominations, for instance the British and Foreign Bible Society.⁵ Darby was a little vague in this paper as to the true solution, however, he identified the promise of Matthew 18:20⁶ as the basis for meeting. If believers met in the name of the Lord, they would be able to know the presence and working of the Holy Spirit, even amidst the ruin of Christendom.⁷

In later papers, Darby clarified what was involved in meeting in the name of the Lord. Darby denied that Matthew 18:20 related only to discipline; it was rather an unconditional promise of blessing on those meeting in the name of Christ:

It is a mistake to restrict to discipline the scope of this promise. It is, on the contrary, one reason for which discipline thus exercised is recognised by God; and that reason is, that Jesus is there. But this precious declaration is applicable, and more directly applicable, to requests made in similar circumstances to discipline. It is a fact always true that, where two or three are met in the name of Jesus, Jesus is there. It is a general declaration given as a reason for which discipline is valid. *For*, says the Lord, where two or three are met in my name, there I am in their midst. Nothing is more

recognised as the Church of God. It would be a counterpart to Romish unity; we should have the life of the church and the power of the word lost, and the unity of spiritual life utterly excluded.

Considerations on the Nature and Unity of the Church of God (1928) in *Collected Writings* vol.1, p.24

⁵ J.N. Darby wrote:

We may remark that the people of God have found, since the increased outpouring of His Spirit, a sort of remedy for this disunion (manifestly an imperfect, though not an untrue one), in the Bible Society, and in missionary exertions; which gave- the one, a sort of vague unity in the common acknowledgment of the word, which if investigated, will be found to have partially inherent in it, though not recognised in its power, the germ of true unity- the other an unity of desire and action, which tended in thought towards the kingdom, the want of the power of which was felt.

Ibid, p.23

⁶ "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them."

⁷ J.N. Darby wrote:

Where two or three are gathered together in His name, His name is recorded for blessing; because they are met in the fullness of the power of the unchangeable interests of that everlasting kingdom in which it has pleased the glorious Jehovah to glorify Himself, and to make His name and saving health known in the person of the Son, by the power of the Spirit.

The Nature and Unity of the Church of Christ (1828) in *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.25

simple.⁸

Meeting in the name of Jesus did not create any permanent institution; instead those meeting benefited from the results of Christ's promise.⁹ Meeting in the name of the Lord did not involve forming churches. He wrote on the subject of forming churches, "Such brethren have no promise authorising them to set up again churches that have fallen, whilst there is a positive promise that, where two or three are gathered together in the name of the Jesus, He is in their midst."¹⁰ In fact, Darby argued that if a meeting claimed to be meeting as a Church, it ceased to be meeting in the true spirit of the Church and so lost the privilege of meeting in the name of Jesus. Such a meeting would either be a sect, that is a body whose unity was not found in the unity of Christ but in some particular teachings or practices¹¹ or if it claimed to be the Church in a locality, it had denied the unity of all believers.¹² Darby's comments about 'not forming churches' seems puzzling. When he complained of 'forming

⁸ J.N. Darby *Scriptural Views upon the Subject of Elders* (1849) in *Collected Writings*, vol.4, p.205

⁹ J.N. Darby wrote:

As regards the promise of the presence of Jesus in the midst of two or three met in His name, it is not I who institute anything, if I meet with others. It is Jesus who accomplishes that which He promises.

Ibid.

¹⁰ J.N. Darby *On the Formation of Churches* (1840) in *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.151

¹¹ J.N. Darby wrote:

The spirit of a sect exists when we see disciples unite outside this unity, and when it is around an opinion that those who profess it are gathered, in order that they be united by means of this opinion. The unity is not founded on the principles of the unity of the body nor of the union of the brethren. When such persons are united in a corporation, and mutually recognise each other as members of this corporation, then they constitute formally a sect, because the principle of the gathering is not the unity of the body; and the members are united not as members of the body of Christ, when they are even such, but as members of a particular corporation.

What is a Sect? in *Collected Writings*, vol.14, p.363

¹² J.N. Darby wrote:

But though wherever two or three are gathered together in Christ's name, He is in the midst, and the blessing and the responsibility, of the church are, in a sense also, if any Christians now set up to be the church, or did any formal act which pretended to it, I should leave them as being a false pretension, and denying the very testimony to the state of ruin which God has called us to render.

A Letter on Separation (1850) in *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.350

churches', he certainly did not mean the formation of particular Brethren meetings. He never made explicit his understanding of what it meant to 'form a church.' It seems that it is simply the word *church* that he objected to. True local churches were the visible expression of the one true church in Darby's view. A meeting of Christians in a locality which contained other meetings of Christians could not truly claim to be a local church because it did not represent the unity of all believers in a locality, even if it recognised that unity, as did the meetings of Brethren. A meeting of Brethren could claim they were meeting as the church ought to meet, but as there would be other members of the church meeting in the same locality (and probably more of them), they could not truly claim to represent in themselves the church of that locality.

Meeting in the Lord's name meant meeting in the provisions the Lord had established for the Church.¹³ Thus, there needed to be a reliance in the life of the meeting on the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, who indwelt the church. This entailed avoiding making regulations for the ministry and the organisation of the assembly:

Never make regulations; the Holy Spirit will guide you, if you rest on Him, and if you rely upon God who is ever faithful. Seek to be imbued with the spirit as well as the letter of the word; and act in each case under the direction of God, always trusting His word. He will know how to raise up helps, if it be necessary: only believe.¹⁴

To 'make regulations' would have been to imply that the meeting had some kind of authority that it had never truly been given. Not making regulations therefore entailed

¹³ C.B. Bass, *Backgrounds to Dispensationalism*, Michigan, Erdmans, 1960 p.109

¹⁴ J.N. Darby wrote:

Never make regulations; the Holy Spirit will guide you, if you rest on Him, and if you rely upon God who is ever faithful. Seek to be imbued with the spirit as well as the letter of the word; and act in each case under the direction of God, always trusting His word. He will know how to raise up helps, if it be necessary: only believe.

Remarks on the State of the Church (1843) in *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.274

endorsing open ministry, that is having no fixed order in meetings, which will be discussed below.¹⁵

Meeting in the name of Jesus entailed meeting in identification with the existing unity of the body of Christ, that is the unity of all believers. The consequence of this was that it entailed a commitment to open reception of all believers to meetings and to the communion. Darby held that requiring some level of doctrinal commitment from a Christian was a denial of the Lord's name through denying one that He owned. Every Christian had the privilege of breaking bread:

The unity of Christ's body being the ground assumed, all Christian's have, in principle, a *title* to be there, the Lord's name being maintained as to doctrine and discipline. If you insist on a certain standard of intelligence beyond Christ, before receiving them, you prove that *you* are not intelligent, and you abandon your own (namely, God's) principle.¹⁶

Therefore, a diversity of views could be tolerated in the Brethren on subjects such as predestination and the Millennium, even though Darby and other Brethren writers and teachers had decided views on those subjects. Darby dealt with this issue in writing to a critic, the Rev. James Kelly, an Anglican minister:

You charge us with having Baptists, Paedobaptists, Arminians and Calvinists, Millenarians and Anti-Millenarians, and even Quakers. Well, are there not Paedobaptists, Arminians, Calvinists, Millenarians, Anti-Millenarians in the Establishment too? And Quakers have been received there too: also they have been with us, and have been baptized as became them from the circumstances they were placed in. The only difference, then, on the point, is as to the existence of these views in the minds of those amongst us. They being real Christians, we should undoubtedly feel it wrong to shut them out, and rejoice we can walk together in love. There is only this additional

¹⁵ McPhail, 1935, p.61

¹⁶ J.N. Darby (1864), *Letters*, vol.1, p.370

difference, that there is not, through mercy, amongst us a vast body of members who have no faith at all.¹⁷

In particular, Darby, who supported the baptism of infants was keen to maintain that there was no official Brethren position on the age and mode of baptism:

The 'Record' speaks of its objection to the 'Brethren's' dogma on baptism. I do know what is its object in this; but I must be allowed to say, the 'Brethren' have no dogma on baptism. Had they, they would have given up their first principles, and I for one could not be among them: first, because they would be at once sectarian, united on a particular opinion; and, secondly, that I have no such dogma. I know well that many have Baptist views on this subject; but many, very many, have not: many are decidedly opposed to it; I for one.¹⁸

Darby held that it was not possible to combine unity over doctrinal truth beyond the basics of Christianity¹⁹ with unity as the body of Christ. This required a policy of open communion. Darby insisted that all believers had a right to partake of the communion, the Lord's Table, as it was known in the Brethren. It was not at all necessary for them to commit themselves to the Brethren first. Darby gives the example of a Baptist who had been admitted to communion:

I remember a case, where one growing in the truth came to help sometimes in a Sunday-school, and from the other side of London, and asked the brethren if he might not break bread when there-time did not allow of him to get back to his Baptist service- and he enjoyed the communion of the saints. Brethren allowed him gladly; and if my recollection is right; his name was not given out when he came afterwards. Very soon he was amongst Brethren entirely, but his fellowship was as full when he was not; and had he given occasion, he would have been refused in discipline, just as if he had been there every Sunday.²⁰

¹⁷ J.N. Darby, *The Claims of the Church of England Considered in Collected Writings*, vol.14, p.216

¹⁸ J.N. Darby, *A Letter on the Righteousness of God* (1862) in *Collected Writings*, vol.7, p.343

¹⁹ Darby never defined the minimum doctrinal orthodoxy that was needed for fellowship. Most likely, it was little more than affirmation of creedal positions on the Trinity and Christology.

²⁰ J.N. Darby *Fellowship and the Right State for it in Collected Writings*, vol.31, p.367

Darby mentioned in that excerpt the possibility that the young Baptist might have been disciplined and thus excluded from the fellowship, even while being only an occasional communicant. This was because if an individual had broken bread, even once, he or she had been recognised as being a member of the body of Christ and was therefore subject to the discipline of the assembly.²¹ While individuals could take communion who had not committed themselves to the Brethren, Darby considered it unacceptable for a person to switch between ecclesiastical systems at will.²² One could be either a 'member' of the Brethren or a member of the denominations; alternating between the two without some commitment could not be done in good conscience. One could be forgiven for being reminded of Edward Cronin (see chapter 2), one of the first of the Brethren, who was refused admittance to communion at a chapel because he needed to commit himself to one particular congregation.

This stress on the unity of all Christians and its realisation in the practice of open communion was tempered by Darby's heavy emphasis on separation. Darby's first paper on the subject of separation was *Separation from Evil God's Principle of Unity* (1834)²³. However, there had already been some tendencies in Darby's earlier writings that might have directed him towards a separatist stance. In his letter to the archbishop of Dublin (see chapter 2), Darby had emphasised the Church's opposition

²¹ J.N. Darby (1870), *Letters*, vol.2, p.109

²² J.N. Darby wrote in 1869:

If a person came and made it a condition to be allowed to go to both, he would not come in the simplicity of the body; I know it to be evil and I cannot allow it, and he has no right to impose any conditions on the church of God.....Nor, indeed, do I think a person regularly going from one to another systematically can be honest in going to either; he is setting up to be superior to both, and condescending to each.

Letters, vol.2, p.11-12

²³ J.N. Darby, *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.353

to the world,²⁴ in particular, he defined the Church as 'a congregation of souls redeemed out of this naughty world'.²⁵ Having identified the ruin or apostasy of Christendom in *Considerations on the Nature and Unity of the Church of Christ*²⁶ and *The Notion of a Clergyman Dispensationally the Sin against the Holy Ghost*,²⁷ advocating separation was a logical conclusion. *Separation from Evil* was written after Darby's conflict with Archbishop Whately of Dublin and his final break with the established church.

The title of the paper, *Separation from Evil God's Principle of Unity* draws attention most clearly to Darby's synthesis of the concepts of unity and separation. Krapohl argued that such a synthesis was highly problematic when it entailed separation from fellow Christians. However, Krapohl had not considered this seeming contradiction in reference to Darby's advocacy of open communion. Darby's intention in developing his doctrine of separation, was to provide a means for Christians to meet in unity, even those who were not completely separated from the denominations. Darby did not consider lack of separation from the denominations of Christendom to be an evil that required exclusion, provided that it was in good conscience. Darby's position on separation was very subtle. Darby did not see separation from evil as a moral precondition for meeting, instead he saw separation from evil as a fundamental part of true meeting in unity in itself. A group of Christians could not truly meet in unity

²⁴ J.N. Darby wrote:

There is a spiritual supremacy independent of civil government, the spiritual supremacy of Christ, of which the clergy are ministers- not an earthly dominion, but the very contrary. But when our Lord was brought before Pilate and charged with being a king, He did not affirm the harmlessness of His religion, by stating its amalgamation of interests with the State, or that it was merely "another aspect of the same body," but unqualifiedly assented to the position, "witnessed a good confession," that it was a kingdom, but not of this world.

Considerations Addressed to the Archbishop of Dublin (1827) in *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.8-9

²⁵ Ibid, p.5

²⁶ J.N. Darby *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.20

²⁷ ibid, p.38

unless it was meeting in separation from evil. Separation and unity were not contradictory concepts because they were essentially two sides of the same coin. To describe Darby's synthesis of separation and unity as 'unstable' or contradictory is to fail to understand Darby's doctrine of unity, as will be demonstrated below.

In *Separation from Evil*, Darby demonstrates his concern with the mode of gathering by addressing what he took to be wrong principles of church unity:

The plea of unity may then be, in measure, the latitudinarianism which flows from the absence of principle; it may be the narrowness of a sect formed on an idea; or it may be, as taken by itself, the claim to be the church of God, and hence in principle secure as much indifference to evil, as it is the convenience of the body or its rulers to allow, or is in the power of Satan to drag them into.²⁸

Darby then went on to argue that true unity must find its centre in God:

Now, it will be at once admitted, that God Himself must be the spring and centre of unity, and that He alone *can* be in power and title. Any centre of unity outside God must be so far a denial of His Godhead and glory, an independent centre of influence and power; and God is one- the just, the true and only centre of all true unity. Whatever is not dependent on this is rebellion.²⁹

Unity that was not centred on God was unity in rebellion against God. Darby identified the original unity and holiness of creation with its unity to God:

This great principle is true even in creation. It was formed in unity, and God its only possible centre. It shall be brought into it yet again, and centred in Christ as its Head, even in the Son, by whom, and for whom all things were created, Col.1:16.³⁰

²⁸ J.N. Darby *Separation from Evil God's Principle of Unity* (1834) in *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.355

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ *ibid*, p.356

There could thus be no holiness without unity centred in God. As a result of the presence of evil, any restoration to unity with God required a separation from evil:

For God must be the centre and power of that unity, and evil exists: and from that corruption they must be separate who are to be in God's unity; for He can have no union with evil. Hence, I repeat, we have this great fundamental principle, that separation from evil is the basis for all true unity.³¹

Darby then argued that the revealed presence of God in the world was always judicial in character;³² the eschatological revelation of God would result in the separation of good and evil, as shown in the parable of the Wheat and the Tares:

It is not now the time of this judicial separation of the evil from the good in the world, as the field of Christ, by the cutting off and destruction of the wicked. But unity is not therefore given up out of the thoughts of God; nor can He have recognised union with evil. There is one Spirit and one body. He gathers together in one the children of God scattered abroad.³³

Augustine had used the parable of the Wheat and Tares to argue that separation from evil in the church was unnecessary, by asserting that the field represented the church and that evil would be judged in the eschaton.³⁴ This argument was occasionally used by critics against Darby's position. However, Darby interpreted the parable quite differently, viewing the field as the world.³⁵ The eschatological judgment of evil heightened the need for separation from evil in the present dispensation. Moving from

³¹ *ibid.*

³² One might be surprised by Darby's description of the presence of God as being 'judicial' in character. Presumably by this he meant that revelations of the presence of God always directed persons to repentance from sin and renewed holiness or else resulted in immediate judgment on sin.

³³ *ibid.*, p.357

³⁴ Serge Lancel *St. Augustine*, translated by Antonia Nevile, London, SCM, 2002, p.283

³⁵ J.N. Darby *The Wheat and the Tares in Collected Writings*, vol.12, p.43

eschatology to soteriology, Darby then argued that Christ, in His saving work reflected the importance of separation in God's purposes. He wrote on the subject of Christ:

And, yet more than this, He is the separating power of attraction because He is the manifestation of all this, and the fulfiller of it in the midst of evil; and this is what we poor miserable ones want who are in it; and it is what, if we may so speak, God wants for His separating glory in the midst of evil. Christ sacrificed Himself to set up God in separating love in the midst of evil.³⁶

Coming to the subject of the Lord's Supper, he argued that it represented the unity of the body of Christ and hence must be celebrated in separation from those outside the body.³⁷ Of course, those who were members of the body of Christ could be excluded, in Darby's system if they were walking in evil and were under discipline, as will be examined below. Darby argued that the presence of God could only be known where there was separation from evil, as the presence of God was judicial in character:

But this principle, flowing from the very nature of God, that He is holy cannot be set aside. Separation from evil is the necessary consequence of the presence of the Spirit of God under all circumstances to conduct fellowship. But here there is a certain modification of it. The revealed presence of God is always judicial when it exists; because power against evil is connected with the holiness which rejects it.³⁸

³⁶ J.N. Darby *Separation from Evil God's Principle of Unity in Collected Writings*, vol., p.359

³⁷ J.N. Darby wrote:

And then addressing the saints, the Holy Ghost adds, "For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them and be ye separate." Otherwise we provoke the Lord to jealousy, as if we were stronger than He. Of this unity and fellowship, I may add, the Lord's Supper is the symbol and expression. For we, being many, are all one bread (loaf), for we are partakers of that one bread.

Ibid, p.361

³⁸ Ibid, p.362

Thus, without separation from evil, believers could not know the presence of God secured in meeting in the name of the Lord. Separation was a necessary aspect of true unity. Thus, Darby introduces towards the end of the paper the duty of separation from evil.³⁹ To fail to maintain such separation brought dishonour to God:

Further, the unity which is maintained after such separation, becomes a testimony to the compatibility of the Holy Ghost and evil: that is, it is in its nature apostasy; it maintains the name and authority of God in His church, and associates it with evil. It is not the professed and open apostasy of avowed infidelity; but it is denying God according to the true power of the Holy Ghost, while denying His name. This unity is the great power of evil pointed out in the New Testament, connected with the professing church and the form of piety. From such we are to turn away.⁴⁰

Separation from evil involved separation from the ruined and apostate church. Darby believed it was necessary to separate from any body that professed to be a church:

But though wherever two or three are gathered together in Christ's name, He is in the midst, and the blessing and the responsibility, of the church are, in certain sense also, if any Christians now set up to be the church, or did any formal act which pretended to it, I should leave them as being a false pretension, and denying the very state of ruin which God has called them to render. It would have ceased to be the table of the people and testimony of God, at least intelligently.⁴¹

It is important to understand that this separation from institutions was not the same as separation from their members. As explained above, Darby would not have excluded from communion members of those denominations provided that they were not involved in some form of moral evil or false doctrine. Individuals did not remain

³⁹ *ibid*, p.363

⁴⁰ *ibid*.

⁴¹ J.N. Darby *A Letter on Separation in Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.350

tainted by virtue of remaining in apostate denominations. Renunciation of apostate denominations was not a condition for fellowship with the Brethren. If they were believers, they were clear for fellowship regardless of their affiliation. Failing to understand the distinction in Darby's thought between separation from institutions and separation from individuals leads to the notion that his concepts of unity and separation were mutually contradictory.

Though Darby advocated open communion, it was not an unrestricted communion. Individuals could be refused admission to communion or could be put out if they were engaged in moral evil or believed heresy. Exclusion for an immoral act like adultery calls for little explanation, but naturally there were circumstances of greater uncertainty in some cases. Prior to the 1881 division over the excommunication of Edward Cronin and the separation of William Kelly's supporters (see chapter 2), there was some difference of opinion over whether marriage to a deceased wife's sister constituted moral evil. This was not permitted in Britain, but a member of the Brethren had visited France in order to marry his deceased wife's sister. Darby argued that differences in laws between countries did not invalidate the institution of marriage and so this was not a ground for exclusion.⁴² What seems remarkable about this stance is the fact that Darby made no attempt to consider the morality of such marriages. Darby perhaps felt this was a matter of conscience. Darby approved of the non-admittance of a man who refused to leave the Oddfellows, a fraternal society.⁴³

⁴² J.N. Darby wrote in 1879:

But in principle, to make human laws the measure of Christian right or wrong is in my judgment a total subversion of Christ's and the word's authority. There may be extreme cases, but if the principle be true it is true everywhere.... You cannot make a *bona fide* marriage before God vary with the law of the land.

Letters, vol.2, p.493

⁴³ J.N. Darby wrote in 1878:

I do not know much about 'Oddfellows,' but from what I do know

Such an exclusion might seem harsh, but it is possible that Darby and the assembly concerned felt the individual knew enough Brethren theology to have known better than to remain a member. It may be that a different decision would have been reached if the man was a practising member of the established church.

With regard to exclusion on doctrinal grounds, this had to be due to serious heresy, and not just incorrect doctrine. As mentioned above, a variety of doctrinal views were tolerated in the Brethren. Heresy was primarily seen in terms of denial of Christ or rather Christological heresy. Inadequate concern about such heresy was the main grounds for Darby's separation from Bethesda and the Open Brethren. However, Darby also felt that the denial of the immortality of the soul was serious enough to warrant exclusion.⁴⁴

Individuals might also be excluded if they were involved in what might be termed 'ecclesiastical evil.' While individuals who remained in fellowship with the denominations of Christendom might be welcomed to fellowship, those who had come to embrace the Brethren view of the unity of the body could not be permitted to return to the institutions of ruined Christendom for communion. Their walk was

I am surprised that a Christian could be a member. It is a thoroughly worldly society. They could not be there in the name of the Lord. You say- 'nothing against his walk'; but this was part of his walk. I could understand giving him time to think over it, if he were in before taking up the case. His refusal to give it up till he saw fit, when it was brought before him, was a proof of his state of soul, and brings up another point: that the conscience of the individual is to judge of right and wrong, not the assembly.

Letters, vol.3, p.458

⁴⁴ J.N. Darby wrote in 1873:

In this country (Canada) we have acted on the principle of refusing those belonging to bodies who allowed heresies, having nothing to do with Bethesda, but denying the immortality of the soul; and the results have been blessing, and the state of things around us every way confirmed us in the need of faithfulness.

Letters, vol.2, p.220

expected to be consistent with their confession of the unity of the body of Christ. Thus, if a person in regular fellowship with the Brethren took communion in a dissenting chapel, he or she would be acting contrary to the unity of the body and his or her conscience would be defiled. This was considered to be an evil that required discipline. Darby would not recognise as a true meeting an assembly that did not judge immorality:

Suppose the fornicator, or even those maintaining his continuing in the meeting (and another allowance thus of sin), to be commended, or to come in communion from the supposed meeting; and if they receive him deliberately at home, they must of course give him, so far as they are concerned, the same title abroad, and he is received every where; and thus the deliberate wickedness of a majority of the meeting to which he belongs, or of the whole of it, if you please, obliges thus every Christian meeting, and when the church of God was in order, we might say every church of God in the world, to put its seal on communion with sin and evil, and say that sin could be freely admitted at the table of the Lord, and Christ and Belial get on perfectly well together; *or* break with the meeting or church, that is, disown its being such at all.⁴⁵

Darby argued in this quotation, that tolerating evil in one meeting defiled the rest of the church, because if the meeting was a true meeting, other meetings would be forced by the principle of unity to admit the offending member. It made no difference whether an unbeliever had been admitted by mistake and had gone unnoticed, but the assembly would be defiled if sin went unjudged.⁴⁶ The charge of refusing to judge evil was levelled against the Open Brethren and was the reason for their exclusion. Darby wrote in a letter later entitled *Indifference to Christ: Or Bethesdaism* (1849):

Bethesda has received blasphemers and laid it down as a

⁴⁵ J.N. Darby *Discipline and Unity of the Assembly in Collected Writings*, vol.20, p.252

⁴⁶ J.N. Darby, *Collected Writings*, vol.20. p.256

principle; and they are according to scripture partakers of their evil deeds, as are others who boast themselves clear. It is, I think, the grossest indifference to the honour of Christ I ever met with. That is no light word. It is the pith and gravamen of the whole matter....It is the principle of indifference to the doctrine of Christ that such blasphemies are to be uninquied into, so that communion with them is legitimate; that is, that the church of God is *not* the pillar and ground of your truth. Once accepted that (and accepting you is accepting it), and the whole standing of the church is gone.⁴⁷

It was essential under Darby's system to separate, not only from those who had adopted heretical views, but also from those who rejected them but remained in fellowship with the heretics. William Trotter, an influential member of the Exclusive party and a defender of Darby's position commented on the subject of the combination of a stance of open communion and an exclusion of supporters of Bethesda chapel:

It is often said that in declining fellowship with those who come from Bethesda in its present state, we treat them worse than we do Christians in the denominations generally. It has been asked again and again, whether we would not receive a godly clergyman remaining in the Church of England, where all indiscriminately are received to communion. I answer, unhesitatingly, yes, we should, as always receive a brother in the Lord who is in the Establishment or among the Dissenters, without requiring him beforehand to separate from the body of which he is a member. But what has this to say to the case in hand? Does a clergyman's reception of unconverted people at the table of the Establishment accredit them to us as Christians? Not in the least. But is this the case with Bethesda? The profession is, that none but Christians are received there; and any one coming heretofore, has come fully accredited as a Christian. If, then, Bethesda admits those who are unsound in the faith, the result is that all confidence is destroyed, and we should never know in admitting persons thence, whether we were not receiving under

⁴⁷ J.N. Darby, *Collected Writings*, vol.20, p.208

the guise of a “dear brother or sister” an enemy of the faith, and a subverter of souls. This is the position in which Bethesda has placed itself; a position altogether unlike that of the Establishment, or of any evangelical Dissenting body.⁴⁸

Trotter provided here a far more lucid explanation for the exclusion of Bethesda and the Open Brethren than Darby ever did. The ecclesiastical policy of denominations made no difference to suitability of their members for fellowship with the Brethren. However, because the Open Brethren professed to be meeting as assemblies in the unity of the body of Christ on the right principles, there supposed failure to judge evil affected the position of other assemblies in the Brethren.

It might be argued that there ought to be some sort of expiration date on the power of an historical incident like the Bethesda controversy to block fellowship. Brown, a contemporary Open Brethren apologist refers to how the Bethesda controversy divided Brethren in India in the late twentieth century:

It was my great joy and privilege to minister among these assemblies and teach the word of God to them. Never did I so much as mention anything to do with Bethesda or any Exclusive wrangling and divisions of a long gone generation as I did not, and still do not, feel it has the slightest relevance to these simple believers gathering as a result of the Spirit’s work in India in these end days of the 1990s! Yet no sooner did the German Darbyists (supported, and reported also in their *Truth & Testimony* magazine by the English ‘Chapter Two’ Exclusives) come on the scene than they financed a large printing press in the midst of that assembly area, and commenced printing and selling their ultra low-priced Exclusive literature. This included books which condemned ‘Open’ brethren so-called, and introduced to simple central Indian peasants the whole sad history of the Exclusive division of 1848 in England and the ‘Bethesda question’ in

⁴⁸ W. Trotter, *The Origin of (so called) Open Brethrenism* (1860), Lancing, Sussex, Kingston Bible Trust, 1987 reprint, p.48-49

particular.⁴⁹

Despite the geographical and historical distance, the Darbyite party insisted that the dispute was still vitally relevant. Darby argued that no matter how many times removed the evil was from an assembly of Christians, they had an obligation to judge it:

All that is said of "*ad infinitum*" is merely the repetition of what we have too often heard, and has no real sense moment the Church is known to be one. The question is, does the person come from a place which has identified itself with the refusal to judge evil? It matters little how many steps a person is from the first who had the Typhus fever in the country, five or fifty is all alike, if a man has got it. Evil is judged as evil wherever it is, and the argument is simply a denial of the church and the unity of the body. If a gathering accepts fellowship with these one or fifty who have refused to maintain the glory of Christ, it is contaminated as such.⁵⁰

The consequence of Darby's position on separation from those who are unwilling to separate is that potentially, disputes in the Brethren could last forever. The only apparent solution would be to argue that historical circumstances make it impossible for believers to satisfactorily examine the facts relating to incidents such as Bethesda. However, as the Exclusive Brethren groups continue to publish accounts of the Bethesda controversy, this does not appear to be their approach.

The Practice of Excommunication

The act of excommunication or putting out was the ultimate means of discipline.

Darby viewed restoration as a central goal of discipline. However, he did not view it

⁴⁹ M. Brown *Aspects of Some Exclusive Doctrines* Glasgow, Gospel Tract Publications, 1996, p.28

⁵⁰ J.N. Darby (1873), *Letters*, vol.2, p.219

as the sole goal of discipline. Maintaining the purity of the assembly was just as much a reason for putting out.⁵¹ The decision to excommunicate a person had to be the decision of the whole local assembly,⁵² though the validity of the decision would not be affected if some members were absent,⁵³ however, if there was active dissent to an excommunication, it was not valid.⁵⁴ Putting out was seen as a solemn act that invoked shame and humiliation on the assembly.⁵⁵

Darby insisted that after excommunication, there should be as little communication as possible between the excommunicated person and members of the assembly, however Darby seemed to have maintained that excommunication need not require marital separation if one spouse was put out.⁵⁶ The Raven/ Taylor party of Exclusives became

⁵¹ J.N. Darby wrote in 1877:

Discipline is not merely for restoration, though it be one object.
It is to keep the Table pure.

Letters, vol.2, p.414

⁵² J.N. Darby wrote:

Moreover, if it be a question of excommunication, all ought to take a part in it, not because they have a right to it (for what would be the spirit of a child who could insist on his right to take a part in the exclusion of one of his brothers!), but because the conscience of all must be purified, and because the whole assembly must be, through this act, separated from a sin which demands putting away.

Remarks on the State of the Church (1843) in *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.274

⁵³ J.N. Darby (1878) *Letters*, vol.3, p.458

⁵⁴ J.N. Darby wrote in 1871:

Now you are aware that a great number of the gathering protested against this excommunication after it was declared, which with other facts to which I have already alluded, clearly shewed that it was not the act of the assembly.

Letters, vol.2, p.133

⁵⁵ J.N. Darby, *Notes and Jottings*, Winschoten, Netherlands, H.L. Heijkoop, 1971 p.450

⁵⁶ J.N. Darby wrote "Take a wife whose husband is put out. It may seem awkward, but her action is not keeping company with him as a matter of will; it is one of subjection to authority." (*Notes of readings on 1 Corinthians* in *Collected Writings*, vol.26, p.220) This is a very difficult statement, but I take it to mean that the wife must remain with the husband because she is under his authority. Darby wrote on the subject of separation (not excommunication specifically):

This separation applies to everything. Not to those who *are* married; we have instructions elsewhere about such, not to leave one the other: "for what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? Or how knowest thou, O man,

notorious in the Twentieth century for their rigid requirement of marital separation after a spouse was put out and even the withdrawal of normal intercourse between parents and older children in the family home.⁵⁷

Many years after Darby's death, the Raven/ Taylor party of Exclusive Brethren modified their teaching on excommunication. James Taylor Sr, the principal Bible teacher in the Raven/ Taylor party taught that because of the ruin of the Church, it was impossible to put away the wicked person, instead, believers withdrew from the offender. This doctrine was taught in a reading meeting in 1918:

J.S.: If the Church was in power, there would be no need for withdrawal. There would be power to deal with evil by putting away those who practice it. Now it is a question of withdrawing from it.

J.T.: That is the principle now. Whatever words we may use we make it clear that while we do not pretend to be the assembly of God,⁵⁸ we must maintain the order and holiness which marks it.⁵⁹

Darby would not have agreed with this position. Though the assembly could not claim to be a church, it had to act in the responsibility of the church.⁶⁰ Meeting in the name of the Lord, and thus in His presence secured the necessary authority to carry out discipline. Darby rejected *purging away from* as an alternative to *putting away*, as was suggested by an Open Brethren writer. Darby wrote:

whether thou shalt save thy wife?"

J.N. Darby, *Notes of Readings on 2 Corinthians* in *Collected Writings*, vol.26, p.347

⁵⁷ R. Shuff, *Searching for the True Church: Brethren and Evangelicals in Mid-Twentieth Century England*, Carlisle, Cumbria, Paternoster, 2005, p.181

⁵⁸ The use of the word *assembly* may seem confusing because the Exclusive Brethren sometimes used the word *assembly* to refer to their own meetings. Here the word is used in the sense of the Church or body of Christ on earth.

⁵⁹ Extract from a reading meeting in Rochester, USA 1918, quoted in A.J. Gardiner, *The Recovery and Maintenance of Truth*, London, Stow Hill Bible and Tract Depot, 1951, p.191

⁶⁰ Ironside, p.76

But of two things one: either they are to put it out of the gathering which is not the assembly, or they are not. If they are, then we have a voluntary association and membership as the sphere of action, which A.R.D. tells us is characteristic of apostasy; or if not, we have membership of a voluntary organisation without any possibility of putting it out.....But supposing an ungodly walking member of Christ's body comes where one of these precious gatherings which must not seek to put out evil is assembled, and wishes to be of it, what is to be done now? Not let him in? Here you are doing the same thing. You can shut him out- not put him out! Or are you to let him in, and then walk out yourself, purging yourself from the evil, and leaving the poor gathering in sore danger (if it does not break up) if being in principle apostate, and bound to do so?⁶¹

Darby's teaching on separation was tempered not only by his stance on open communion, but also by his behaviour. Darby was active in ministering amongst the Swiss dissenters. He also preached in Strict Baptist chapels, even those that he believed were ignorant of the Gospel.⁶² Ironside⁶³ claimed that Darby preached in the church of James H Brookes, a Presbyterian minister who helped to introduce Darby's eschatology to the United States. However, he produced no evidence to support this claim.⁶⁴ If it is true, it would not be in any way be a departure from his principles. Darby did not hold that visiting churches and chapels to hear different preachers was a grounds for excommunication, but he felt such action was unhelpful.⁶⁵ There is an

⁶¹ J.N. Darby, *The Church which is His Body* in *Collected Writings*, vol.20, p.219

⁶² J.N. Darby wrote in 1855:

I had an opportunity of preaching to a large assembly of strict Baptists, who are most dreadfully under the law- the first time I spoke to a large company of strangers. They were assembled on all sides on Easter Monday, and I was able to set a full Gospel before them, forgetting the assembly and only thinking of the Lord's love in His work.

Letters vol.1, p.242

⁶³ H.A. Ironside (1876-1951) was a popular writer who was active in the Open Brethren, Exclusive Brethren and also the wider Fundamentalist movement in the United States. He wrote commentaries on most books of the Bible and acted as pastor for Moody Memorial Church.

⁶⁴ L.E. Dixon, "The Importance of J.N. Darby and the Brethren Movement in the History of Conservative Theology" in *Christian Brethren Review* vol.41, 1990

⁶⁵ J.N. Darby wrote in 1865:

obvious difficulty here in that Darby was simply giving his own opinion as to what actions are serious enough to merit exclusion. By what principles are such decisions to be made? Darby believed that an action merited exclusion, but perhaps others might feel differently. While the decision of the assembly was held to be the primary authority, doubtless Darby's opinion must have carried a lot of weight. It is easy to see how such loose constitution might have lead to abuses.

Opposition to Independence

In holding to the unity of the Body of Christ on earth, Darby rejected the concept, favoured by the Open Brethren, of the independent local assembly.⁶⁶ He held instead that the church must act in unity and geographical distance did not make this impossible.⁶⁷ Darby saw this unity primarily manifested in discipline.⁶⁸ He argued that any assembly had the right to input into the disciplinary action of another assembly:

But whilst a local assembly exists actually in a personal responsibility of its own, and while its acts, if they are of God, bind the other assemblies, as in the unity of the one body, this fact does not do away with another which is of the highest importance, and which many seem to forget, namely, that the voices of brethren in other localities have liberty equally with those of the local brethren, to make

Going about to hear preachers I believe a very unprofitable and positively injurious thing, but you could not make it a term of communion unless it was subversive of Christianity; but souls never make progress who do so. They hear what is inconsistent with truths they know, or a path they are bound to by God, and they lose their hold on truth instead of going on to more.

Letters, vol. 1, p.401

⁶⁶ The Open Brethren assemblies were perhaps not as independent as Darby implied; they tended to recognise each others discipline, preferred letters of commendation from potential communicants and often shared visiting preachers.

⁶⁷ Ironside, p.38

⁶⁸ Ward, p.43

themselves hear in their midst, when discussing the affairs of a meeting of the saints, although they are not locally of that meeting. To deny this would, indeed, be a serious denial of the unity of the body of Christ.⁶⁹

In this quotation, Darby mentioned that the decision of one assembly binds other assemblies. Darby believed that the judgment of an assembly that was meeting in the name of the Lord had divine approval on its decisions. Therefore a decision by one assembly could not be rejected by other assemblies or individuals:

There is another question connected with it- one assembly's act binding another. I do not admit, because scripture does not admit, independent assemblies. There is the body of Christ and all Christians are members of it; and the Church of God in one place represents the whole and acts in its name.....I may reason with an assembly of God, I cannot assume Christ is not there. It is simply denying it is an assembly of God.⁷⁰

Darby goes on to say that he could not ignore the judgment of an assembly, even if he believed it to be mistaken:

Suppose I am of an assembly, and I think they judge something in a mistaken way. Am I to *impose* my individual way of thinking *on them*? If not, what am I to do? Leave the assembly of God if it be such (if not, I do not go there)? You cannot help yourself. If I do not continue in an assembly, because it does not agree with me in everything, I can be of no assembly of God in the world.⁷¹

Darby sometimes used an analogy with Freemasonry to demonstrate the necessity of unity in action:

Supposing we were a body of Freemasons, and a person were

⁶⁹ J.N. Darby (1872), *Letters*, vol.2, p.199-200

⁷⁰ J.N. Darby *On Ecclesiastical Independency* in *Collected Writings*, vol.14, p.302

⁷¹ *ibid.*

excluded from one lodge by the rules of the order, and instead of looking to the lodge to review the case, if it was thought to be unjust, each other lodge were to receive him or not on their own independent authority, it is clear the unity of the Freemason system is gone. Each lodge is an independent body acting for itself. It is vain to allege a wrong done, and the lodge not being infallible; the competent authority of lodges, and the unity of the whole is at an end. The system is dissolved.⁷²

Darby denied that the judgment of assemblies was infallible.⁷³ He wrote to an assembly on one occasion, urging them to reverse an excommunication on the grounds that there was dissent to it within the assembly.⁷⁴ While Darby is correct in stating that there can be authority without infallibility, the common solution to a fallible authority in most situations is appeal to an higher court of appeal. This was of course absent in the Brethren. This gives support to Neatby's view that the lack of a system for resolving decisions was a problem for the Brethren.⁷⁵ The only recourse in

⁷² J.N. Darby *On Ecclesiastical Independency in Collected Writings*, vol.14, p.305

⁷³ J.N. Darby wrote:

Confounding authority with infallibility is a poor and transparent piece of sophistry. In a hundred instances obedience may be obligatory where there is no infallibility, Were it not so, there could be no order in the world at all. There is no infallibility in it, but a great deal of self-will; and if there is to be no obedience where there is not infallibility, no acquiescence in what has been decided, there is no end to self-will and no existence of common order. The question is of competence, not infallibility. A father is not infallible, but he has a divinely given authority; and acquiescence is a duty. A police magistrate is not infallible, but he has competent authority, in the cases submitted to his jurisdiction. There may be resources against abuse of authority, or in certain cases a refusal of it when a higher authority obliges us, as a conscience directed by God's word. We ought to obey God rather than man. But there was never in scripture liberty given to the human will as such.

Ibid, p.304

⁷⁴ J.N. Darby (1871), *Letters*, vol.2, p.133. Quoted above.

⁷⁵ W.B. Neatby wrote:

They had no constitution of any kind. They repudiated congregationalism, but they left their communities to fight their battles on no acknowledged basis and with no defined court of appeal... The Brethren were never weary of denouncing 'system' but they made haste to demonstrate that the worst system can hardly compare to no system at all.

Neatby, 1901, p.121

the face of unresolved disagreement between assemblies was schism. This explains schisms that occurred over discipline, such as the 1881 division over Ramsgate and William Kelly (see chapter 2).

To assist in the organisation of discipline, Darby approved of G.V. Wigram's suggestion⁷⁶ of setting up a central administrative meeting in London.⁷⁷ This was necessitated by the size of the London assembly. Though there was considered to be one London assembly, it was found in various smaller meetings.⁷⁸ The supporters of William Kelly came to believe that this meeting introduced an unhelpful element of authoritarianism into the Brethren, when the church was meant to be modelled on

⁷⁶ Baylis, 1995, p.31

⁷⁷ J.N. Darby wrote, in a letter, in 1875:

I do not at all want to weaken the Saturday meeting, but to make it real. For the meetings in London, it was very useful, it did maintain the consciousness of unity, difficult in such a place as London..... In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the local gatherings must form the judgment, but if they are to walk in unity in one place- in such a place as London, where people slip about not to be known, mention of cases in all the gatherings ought to take place. I have known a case where a person was known far from the place where he sought entrance, and the brethren spared the admission of a bad person.

Letters, vol. 2, p.338

⁷⁸ J.N. Darby wrote in 1863:

London is not as large as Galatia. It is utterly false, and there was no agglomerated population, where a person could walk on a Sunday morning to another part of the town, perhaps when under questions of discipline, where he resided... The difficulties are practically great in London, but with cordial co-operation they disappear; and I believe in the power of the Spirit of God to overcome the difficulties which arise from the immense size of the town, and produce common action. If every one will go his own way it cannot be; but you have independent churches and members of them. In Galatia a man was of a local church, and if he went to another place took a letter of commendation. Could I take one, say from the P., every Sunday morning I went down to P. or K.? We are necessarily one body in London and with grace can so walk.

Letters, vol.1, p.358

family relationships, not military command.⁷⁹ This ethos continues in the Raven/
Taylor Exclusive party.⁸⁰

Ministry and Gifts

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Darby's firm belief in the Holy Spirit's indwelling of the Church entailed his firm commitment to open ministry, that is the freedom of all male members of the assembly to speak or preach. The presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church required submission to His leading, instead of making formal arrangements in worship and ministry. Darby argued this point in several papers⁸¹. McPhail, an Anglican critic of the Brethren in the 1930s was unable to

⁷⁹ Coad, 1968, p.211

⁸⁰ Shuff, 2005, p.67

⁸¹ J.N. Darby, *On the Presence and Action of the Holy Ghost in the Church* (1844), *The Presence and Operation of the Spirit of God in the Body*(1865) and *The Presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church* (1845) in *Collected Writings*, vol.3, p.206-357

Darby wrote:

If God was in His holy temple then, God is in His holy temple now- most truly, though after another manner: not merely in individuals, the aggregate of whose individual blessing is the blessing of the whole, but in His spiritual temple, the Church of the living God. And here I would remark further, that His personal presence as acting in any power in the Church is wholly denied. It may not be in words (this I should think much less of; the faith of simple saints might at once meet it); but it is undermined and taken from us without our being aware of it. It is vain to cry out about its not being fair to impute to a person what he denies. Are the saints to be robbed of their heritage and blessing, because he who does so denies he is doing it? It may be through ignorance, but it is much fairer to detect than to deny it, if the thing be so. Man may speak of the Spirit, may use Him, may act under His gracious influence, but He, the Holy Ghost does not act. That would be impulse. No one pretends to inspiration in the way of new revelation, but simply that the Holy Ghost acts in leading, guiding, filling and using the vessel. That is, He acts by us. The distinction, however, is wholly unscriptural. The Holy Ghost speaking by a man and a man speaking by the Holy Ghost are used as equivalent terms; as Acts 1:16; ch.6:10; ch.20:24; ch.21:4, 11; compare chapter 11:28, ch.28:25; Mark 12:36; compare Matthew 22:43. The difference of the expression most clearly amounts to the lowest Arminianism as to the Holy Ghost. That is, man acts by it, but the Holy Ghost does not act by man. And I beg the attention of brethren to this- it is just simply not believing in the personal presence and actings of the Holy Ghost.

The Presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church in Collected Writings, vol.3, p.347-348

understand why the Brethren did not consider meetings that lacked open ministry to be meeting in the name of the Lord.⁸² The reason, would have been that if a church did not rely on the Holy Spirit to lead their meetings, they were acting outside of God's provisions for meeting.

Darby believed that it was unscriptural for a person to preside over a meeting for worship or edification.⁸³ One of his earliest arguments for liberty of ministry was the fact that women were forbidden to speak in the Corinthian church (1 Cor.14). He argued that if only ordained ministers had the right to speak, then it would be quite unnecessary to forbid women to speak.⁸⁴ Individuals could not be chosen to take the lead in meetings.⁸⁵ Darby was uncomfortable speaking of anybody having a right to speak in church.⁸⁶ Gifts should only be used for the purpose of edification. Darby wrote:

If the gift you have does not edify, you must be quiet. If there is no interpreter, you are not to speak. That is, we have power, but power subject to the ordering authority of the Lord in the

⁸² McPhail, 1935, p.61

⁸³ J.N. Darby *On the Formation of Churches* (1840) in *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.153

⁸⁴ J.N. Darby wrote:

There is a line drawn there, but it is not between ordained and unordained. 'Let your women keep silence in the churches'; a direction which never could have taken place, were the speaking confined to a definitely ordained person, but takes quite another ground; and which implies directly, not that it is right for every man to speak, but that there is no preclusion of none, because of their not being in a stated office. Women were the precluded class; there the line was drawn.

Christians Liberty of Preaching and Teaching the Lord Jesus Christ (1840) in *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.70

⁸⁵ J.N. Darby, *Further Developments on the Formation of Churches*(1840) in *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.189

⁸⁶ J.N. Darby wrote:

Thus the idea of *having a right* to speak in the Church could never enter into the Christian mind. It has no place in the scheme of Christianity, which begins its moral existence by breaking Down the human will as evil. The Holy Spirit has the right, which He exercises sovereignly, of distributing 'to every man severally as *he will*'; and hence responsibility subject to the purpose of the Holy Ghost in all.

Operations of the Spirit of God(1845) in *Collected Writings*, vol.3, p.127

Church of God. They were speaking two or three at a time. They said they were all speaking by the Holy Ghost, and they thought they must utter what they had got to say. 'No,' says the apostle, 'the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.' There must be order. There was power, but this power was restrained and authorised by the God of order. The possession of power was no proof that the person possessing it was to exercise his power; he was only to exercise it when it would edify the church.⁸⁷

Darby believed that it was unwise for new converts to take a lead in worship.⁸⁸ Darby also admitted that open ministry had at times had quite unsatisfactory results. However, the principle behind it, namely the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church, was of such importance that could not be abandoned:

And here I begin by admitting that what is called open ministry has given occasion to the flesh. But I do not think the remedy for it is to deny the presence and operation of the Spirit of God: which, as far as it goes, is the principle of the Tract.⁸⁹

Individuals could abuse their gifts; they were under a responsibility to use them in a way that edified the assembly.⁹⁰ Darby believed that unedifying ministry could be restrained by the church, but it had no authority to dictate the content of individual contributions.⁹¹

⁸⁷ J.N. Darby *Substance of a Reading on Ephesians* in *Collected Writings*, vol.27, p.72

⁸⁸ J.N. Darby *Further Developments on the Formation of Churches* (1840) in *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.161

⁸⁹ J.N. Darby, *The Presence and Operation of the Spirit of God in the Body* (1865) in *Collected Writings*, vol.3, p.319

⁹⁰ J.N. Darby wrote:

The flesh in the most true Christian must everywhere be kept down; and it needs to be so in the use or abuse of gifts real or supposed, as in other things. The flesh is never a gift of God. I cannot think, that to strengthen the sense of individual responsibility is to open a door to the flesh.

On Ministry in *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.226

⁹¹ M.R. Hagan "J.N. Darby, the Brethren Movement and Lay Ministry," in *Religion and Life*, vol.44, 1975, p.356

Examining Darby's view of preaching, Hagan concludes that Darby's view of ministry contrasts strongly with that of most denominations:

In essence, while the churches focused on tests of a would-be preacher before he entered the ministry, Darby concentrated on tests of those already ministering. The system he advanced allowance for this type of test, for one would preach much as a layman before becoming a full-time minister, rather than choose the ministry as a profession before having much opportunity to preach. In a sense, Darby believed in giving a brother the benefit of the doubt in allowing him to prove to the assembly his ability to minister. As long as the assembly found no objections to this preaching as to the scriptural tests of correctness of doctrine and value for edification, he would be allowed to continue preaching. In this sense, Darby went even further than John Wesley, who appointed laymen before they preached.⁹²

Some of the dissenting denominations contemporary to Darby certainly did encourage lay preaching, however, the Brethren were relatively distinct in allowing individuals to freely contribute to the preaching ministry.

Darby's commitment to open ministry is seen in his initial rejection of B.W. Newton. One of Darby's principal objections to Newton's ministry at Plymouth, before the discovery of his peculiar christological doctrines, was his restrictions on open ministry. Darby refers in *Narrative of Facts* to the restriction of preaching at the Ebrington Street meeting to its leaders.⁹³ This was not the sole issue; Darby's stated

⁹² *ibid*, p.361

⁹³ J.N. Darby *Narrative of Facts* (1848) in *Collected Writings*, vol.20, p.21, 22
Darby wrote:

But thus things went on. A poor brother gave out a hymn. Nobody would raise it. He felt it, spoke of it in private. The simple were disheartened. They feared to give one out. Whose fault was it? Nobody's, and the point was gained. When tolerably disheartened it went farther: for Mr. Newton himself, at a prayer meeting, got up and went and sat down by the side of a young brother who gave out a hymn, and laid hold of his book. The hymn, was I believe, raised, but he was asked if he meant to pray too. The young man left and goes to a free church where the gospel is preached.

reasons for separating from Newton were his dishonesty, his cancelling of Friday business meetings and his refusal to allow the whole assembly at Plymouth to hear the charges against him⁹⁴. Burnham, a biographer of both Newton and Darby, argues that Newton was mistaken in thinking that the Darby's objections to his ministry stemmed from differences over prophecy.⁹⁵ The differences resulted from Darby's strong ecclesiological views. Burnham suggests that Darby, in his belief in the free action of the Holy Ghost in ministry, had been influenced by Quakers who had joined the Brethren. Newton who had experienced Quakerism in his youth, would have reacted strongly against this. Grass, however, is cautious of attempts to trace Darby's views to Quakers.⁹⁶ The Quakers who had joined the Brethren were reacting against Quaker ecclesiology and Grass suggests that in general, the ex-Quaker contingent in the Brethren tended to side against Darby's ecclesiological tendencies, like Newton.

According to Tregelles, Newton's chief supporter, spontaneous ministry was not a characteristic of the early Brethren, but was largely Darby's innovation. He claimed to have learned this from many of the early members that he had spoken to.⁹⁷ Tregelles also claimed to have seen the transcript of a letter in which Darby urged Newton to

Brethren have been hindered speaking; and not only so, but there is not a person resident at Plymouth who frequented Ebrington Street but (as Mr. R.H has remarked) knew when it was Mr. Newton's and when Mr. H's day: and it became *the common language* to speak of it so by all, rich and poor; and people took their measures for going accordingly. I speak of Sunday mornings at breaking of bread. Now it may happen that there may be only one habitually able to edify in a body; though it is a sad thing if there is no diversity of gift in a large body. But a regular alternation of two, and if absent or sort of manager left, for so it really was, and the speaking prepared as previously considering the state of the congregation and preparing a discourse (as such was the ground avowedly taken with me as the right thing, when I arrived), is certainly not that dependence on the Spirit which characterised the profession of the brethren.

Ibid, p.22-23

⁹⁴ J.N. Darby *Narrative of Facts in Collected Writings*, vol.20, p.35, 41

⁹⁵ Burnham, 2004, p.170

⁹⁶ Grass, 1997, p.100

⁹⁷ S.P. Tregelles *Three Letters to the Author of 'A Retrospect of Events that have taken place amongst the Brethren'* London, Houlston and Sons, 1894 (Originally published 1849), p.4

take oversight of meetings and repress unedifying ministry. We are reliant on Tregelles word for this. Both Darby and Newton came to view such appointments to office as impossible in the contemporary state of the church.⁹⁸ Tregelles' claim that liberty of ministry was not characteristic of the early Brethren is doubtful. Coad, who was critical of Darby, claimed that the early Brethren meetings adopted liberty of ministry very early on and moved away from settled eldership very quickly.⁹⁹ Noel also argued that the regulated ministry of Plymouth was not characteristic of the early Brethren.¹⁰⁰

While Darby emphasised the use of gifts in ministry, he did not believe that Christians should seek such miraculous gifts as speaking in tongues, prophecy and healings. Darby did not spend long arguing for the cessation of miraculous gifts. Darby had encountered the advocacy of miraculous gifts in the followers of Edward Irving, later the Catholic Apostolic Church. The extent to which Darby interacted with the Irvingites is a matter of much debate.¹⁰¹ His relationship with the Irvingite movement is discussed in chapter 6. Darby seems to have been more concerned with refuting the peculiar doctrines of the Irvingites than with challenging their expectancy of spiritual gifts. He believed the fact that the Irvingites were in error doctrinally showed the falseness of their charismatic manifestations. Darby seems to have assumed that the miraculous gifts had ceased was an empirical fact that needed little defence.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Burnham, 2004, p.82

⁹⁹ Coad, 1968, p.30

¹⁰⁰ Noel, 1936, vol.1, p.33

¹⁰¹ Dave MacPherson argued in the *Rapture Plot* (Simpsonville, SC, Millennium III Publishers, 1995), that Darby had derived his doctrine of the Pre-Tribulational rapture from a prophecy by Margaret MacDonald, a follower of Irving. No well-known historians of the Brethren have accepted this conclusion.

¹⁰² J.N. Darby, *On Lay Preaching* (1831) in *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.133

Prophecy was no longer needed as revelation was full given in the Scriptures.¹⁰³

Darby said of the cessation of gifts:

Some of these gifts are called sign-gifts, because it is said they were a sign to unbelievers. They were for the inauguration of Christianity, but there is no intimation of their continuance. The church continues, if you take the secret wisdom of God; if you take the revealed statement of God, there is no intimation of remaining here. You will never find the church contemplated as remaining, so as to put off the coming of the Lord. In the parables with reference to it, though we have "After a long time," yet the servants to whom the talents were entrusted are the same as those who are judged; the virgins who slept are they who are roused and so on. So with the Seven churches, all was existing then, and yet it has been all going on.

As to the signs, we read, "confirming the word with signs Following," as a promise. Moses wrought miracles, and Elijah too, in the midst of apostate Israel. But not so the other prophets. Isaiah and Jeremiah worked no miracles, nor John Baptist. When God is introducing something new, you have them- wherever the thing was to be made good in testimony for our poor hearts to sanction the truth. I see no restoration of miracles, or of anything indeed. There will be miracles at the end on the devil's part: power and signs and lying wonders. There was no statement to the church that she must lose them at a certain time, nor that they must go on for a certain time. Some ask as to the continuance of apostles and elders. This was what they said to me in Switzerland: "How can you Think of God setting up a church with elders and apostles and yet Making no provision for their continuance?" I said, It is so, because God did not mean the church to continue¹⁰⁴. We see this to be the way God used miracles. Of course, He could work a miracle at any time.¹⁰⁵

This is Darby's most definite statement as to the cessation of miraculous gifts. Here he denied that the cessation of gifts was taught in Scripture. Rather, the present weak state of the church was not a subject of prophecy. The church, as was mentioned in the previous chapter is a parenthetical period in the history of the world and salvation.

¹⁰³ J.N. Darby *On Ministry* (1832) in *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.224

¹⁰⁴ Darby did not mean by this that the church had ceased to exist

¹⁰⁵ J.N. Darby *Notes of Readings on 1 Corinthians* in *Collected Writings*, vol.26, p.278

It is a 'timeless heavenly gap' (see chapter 3). Signs and wonders had a role in confirming the new dispensation, but were not needed now that it was in progress.

One argument that Darby sometimes used against miraculous gifts being given today was appropriateness. He argued that it would be inconsistent with the character of God for new miracles to be given today.¹⁰⁶ Darby wrote:

But suppose God should confer this power, say on Romanists, or on the 'Broad Church,' He would be putting a seal upon that state of things. And so, too with Independents, or any others. It would be putting in some shape or other a [kind] of testimony upon that which was out of the way. As long as there was unity in the church, if there was a rush of people to power there, they would find Christ behind it.

Suppose it were given to brethren, it would be like saying 'you are right,' 'you are the church and no one else is.'¹⁰⁷

Thus, God would not confer the miraculous power on churches in error, as that would have overlooked their faults, and God would not confer miraculous power on the Brethren, as that would not have increased their humility. It might be argued in reply that God conferred miraculous power on the Corinthian and Galatian churches, despite their faults. However, Darby would have countered this by arguing that the miracles in those churches did not confirm the local churches, but the new entity of Christianity. Any new miracles would have given approval to the bodies in which they were performed. Peculiarly, Darby seemed to allow for the possibility of some

¹⁰⁶ J.N. Darby wrote:

If God were to exhibit His power now in the church by giving it the gifts it once had, He would be acting inconsistently with His own righteousness in identifying Himself with that which has lost its moral character; for surely it is not now the exhibition of what Christ was in the world. But, on the other hand, if the Lord did not now minister the gifts mentioned in the Ephesians, He would fail in maintaining the blessedness of His character, and the steadfastness of His love to the church.

Power in the Church in Collected Writings, vol.31, p.302

¹⁰⁷ *The Christian Position in Notes and Jottings*, p.283

miraculous healing in certain circumstances, though he did not give any details.

Darby's position on the matter of supernatural spiritual gifts is problematic in that he was advocating a cessation of gifts, yet denied that the Scriptures taught a cessation.

In his defence it may be said that there is strong historical evidence that the supernatural gifts have been absent for the major part of church history.¹⁰⁸

Unlike the followers of Edward Irving, Darby denied that there could be apostles in the church today. Gifts were attached to the person who held them, hence if there were no apostles, there could be no gift of apostleship given today.¹⁰⁹ The apostles did not expect their ministry to continue in the church.¹¹⁰ The ministry of the apostles was foundational to the Church:

We find that, in one sense, apostolic ministry precedes the Church, the Church being gathered by it. Its character being, then, gathering by the authoritative revelation of the will of Christ (as the testimony to Christ in the power of the Spirit, whether by themselves or others, draws and quickens souls). Under this evangelists came, another testimony of their gift being of God, and that He could do it to others; but the apostolic service found its place also in the Church, where

¹⁰⁸ See T.R. Edgar, *Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Kregel, 1996, p.201-226

¹⁰⁹ J.N. Darby wrote:

I notice here, that the apostle does not speak of the gifts, but of the persons who possessed them. "He gave some pastors and teachers." The gift, without doubt, was in the vessel. But God had attached it to the person, and this person, known by his gift, was given to the church. We cannot be united to a gift, but to a person. God has given not a mere apostolate, but an apostle.

On Ministry (1831) in *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.225

¹¹⁰ J.N. Darby wrote:

That the apostles expected no continuance of their ministry is Clear, for the apostle Paul declares the evil that would come in after his decease, and commends them to God and the word of His grace; and Peter says he will take care that they have the things in remembrance. And, indeed, one familiar with the New Testament will see that the character of the Church's responsibility is founded on the departure of direct apostolic authoritative care.

Operations of the Spirit of God (1865) in *Collected Writings*, vol.3, p.140

the participated evangelist's gift did not (that is the regulating authoritatively the gathered, according to that revealed will).¹¹¹

However Darby did allow the possibility of a sort of limited apostolic and prophetic ministry in the post-apostolic church:

Hence, though subsisting not in authoritative revelation of the will of God, nor power in the Church, in a subordinate sense, it seems to me that the gift of apostle and prophet has not passed away. Barnabas was an apostle: Junius and Andronicus were of note among the apostles: and it was praise to a church that they had tried certain whether they were apostles, and they were not, but liars. Doubtless, these pretenders set up for the highest form of the apostolate. But the Church could not have been commended for trying them, if it had been only a question of the twelve and Paul. In truth, the word 'apostle,' though now of definite force, has it not properly; it just amounts to one sent, a missionary. The messenger of the Church is called "your apostle," in the original.¹¹²

Darby gave examples of such a ministry:

We may cite as examples, without pretending to justify all that they did, a Luther, a Calvin or a Zwingli, and perhaps others. So for prophets; although there be no new revelations of truth, there may be, as proceeding from God Himself, a power of applying to the circumstances of the church, or of the world, truths hidden in the word; such as, in practice, might render the ministry prophetic.¹¹³

Grass argues that Darby may have seen himself as falling into this category of second-class apostles. Grass wrote:

Darby's ministry and self understanding would have given him

¹¹¹ Ibid, p.141

¹¹² ibid.

¹¹³ J.N. Darby *On Ministry in Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.224

reason to cite himself as an apostle in this sense, although he stopped short of accepting such a designation, he seems to have had an increasing sense of having been given a quasi-apostolic ministry for the last days, manifest in the way that he functioned as an evangelist, authoritative teacher, troubleshooter and consultant. This may explain his intense reaction towards opposition. Darby' life mirrored that of his hero Paul, whom he considered more Christlike in public ministry than anyone else on earth, rejected by men and yet aware of his heavenly position.¹¹⁴

Grass refers to the fact that Darby was called an apostle by B.W. Newton, however, it is important to note that Darby was disturbed by this description.¹¹⁵ It is difficult find fault with Grass's theory of Darby's apostolic tendency, though any attempt to analyse the psychology of an historical figure is speculative. While Darby's zeal in opposing error may be partially due to his apostolic mentality, it is also due, as Krapohl argued,¹¹⁶ to his conviction of Satan's working in the church and the necessity of opposing Satan's devices.¹¹⁷

Full time pastors are absent from many assemblies in the Open and Exclusive Brethren. The Brethren have never been opposed to full time pastoral ministry, however. Darby was very keen to see the ministry of pastors within the Brethren¹¹⁸.

¹¹⁴ Grass, 1997, p.157

¹¹⁵ J.N. Darby wrote:

While abroad (I cannot here give the date) Mr. Newton wrote to me that I was an apostle. This did not, I confess, inspire me with confidence.

Narrative of Facts in Collected Writings, vol.20, p.19

¹¹⁶ Krapohl, 1988, p.291

¹¹⁷ J.N. Darby wrote:

In my judgment, where the matter is brought forward and at work, where the doctrine of Satan is at work, it would be sin and unfaithfulness to withhold the proofs that it is of Satan. It is true this will not be done when it is not called for the service of God. It only occupies the mind with evil. If some prefer acquiescence in Satan's work to delivering God's people from it, and call that charity, I do not.

Summary of the Meetings in London (1849) in Collected Writings, vol.20, p.180

¹¹⁸ J.N. Darby wrote:

I here repeat, with all my heart, what I said in this little tract: that is, that with earnest and continual supplication I do pray

He did not believe they were essential to the life of the assembly, however.¹¹⁹ Darby firmly maintained that pastors should not be paid a fixed salary:

The apostle asks for liberality “in all good things” towards those who teach: this is a precious thing. But why seek to attach an idea of payment, and destroy that of love, and of honour, of attachment and of affection? Mr Wolff has not been bold enough to translate the Greek word by “salary”; he has translated it by “honour”; and I think, with Calvin, Luther and the English translators, he is right.¹²⁰

In *Narrative of Facts*, Darby refers to a preacher who received an allowance for his ministry.¹²¹ In a footnote added after publication, the reader is informed that this allowance was not a fixed sum.¹²² This appears to be an almost comical oversight. Had Darby overlooked a state of affairs that he would not actually have approved of? We cannot be certain. It seems a little odd that an allowance should not be a fixed sum. Perhaps at the time of publication, Darby was uncertain whether or not the money was a fixed sum and so opted to use the word ‘allowance.’ We might ask why

that God may raise up pastors and teachers according to His own heart for the wants of His dear sheep, in order that the church of God may be preserved, cared for, instructed, rendered capable of resisting the snares of Satan, and that the little ones of the flock may be sheltered from every wind of evil doctrine.

Further Developments on the Formation of Churches (1840) in *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.162

¹¹⁹ J.N. Darby wrote:

But we are not to suppose that the ‘great Shepherd’ cannot take care of his own sheep because there are no under-shepherds. If there were those who met together and hung on the Lord, if they did not pretend to be what they were not, though there no pastors among them, there would be no danger; they would infallibly have the care of that Shepherd.

On Discipline in *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.349

¹²⁰ J.N. Darby *The Holy Ghost in the Church* (1844) in *Collected Writings*, vol.3, p.309

¹²¹ J.N. Darby *Narrative of Facts* (1848) in *Collected Writings*, vol.20, p.39

¹²² J.N. Darby wrote in the footnote:

As regards the brother alluded to, whom I have seen since the publication of this narrative, he assures me that the supplies which he received he did not receive as a fixed weekly sum; and that as to the villages in which he went to preach, he went at the request of those to whom they had previously been allotted, and did not consider himself by the leaders of Ebrington Street, I may add, that he has since ceased speaking in Ebrington Street.

Narrative of Facts (1848) in *Collected Writings*, vol.20, p.39

Darby felt so strongly about preachers not receiving an agreed sum of payment. Surely an agreed salary was simply a more practical way of ensuring the support of the preacher. It did not necessarily mean a lack of liberality or the development of a clerical class. The latter was probably the overriding concern in Darby's mind. It was also very important to Darby to identify pastors as those who held a gift and not the holders of an office.¹²³ In harmony with the infrequency of full time pastors in the Brethren, Darby held that the gift of a pastor was a 'rare gift.'¹²⁴ Darby was somewhat uncomfortable, however, with what is today called 'bi-vocational ministry', where a person combines being a part-time pastor with a secular career.¹²⁵ He believed that such a practice showed a lack of faith and focus.

Church Government

The Evangelical theologian, Wayne Grudem, distinguishes several historical models of church government.¹²⁶ He lists Episcopalian,¹²⁷ Presbyterian¹²⁸ and

¹²³ J.N. Darby *Substance of a Reading on Ephesians in Collected Writings*, vol.27, p.80

¹²⁴ *ibid.*

¹²⁵ J.N. Darby wrote in a letter in 1869:

I am anxious about a rumour I heard of your becoming a doctor, and I am sure you will forgive my anxiety for the Lord's sake and yours.... I look to the principle. Christ has ordained that they that preach the gospel should live by the gospel, and it is the clear duty of the church of God to aid those who are given up to the work. If a man can give himself wholly up to the work, and as an extra support himself by a trade he has already- all well. I have known a brother, an evangelist much blessed, who so lived, when at a certain period of the year the people (from work) could not get on weekdays to meetings- and he being a good watchmaker, mended all the watches in the country- the rest of the year was helped by the brethren. This is all well.... But when I set out to learn a profession or trade, it is not merely the time, but Christ, and Christ's work, is put in a second place, and faith is set aside as to that, and the church encouraged in want of devotedness. All this seems to me evil. If you were not working for the Lord, your setting to do something would be perfectly right; but you are at the work, and it is saying, I fear- not in your heart perhaps, but as a testimony- "I have put my hand to the plough," etc.

Letters, vol.2, p.6-7

¹²⁶ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, Leicester, Intervarsity Press, 1994, p.923-928

Congregational.¹²⁹ Wayne Grudem subdivides Congregational church government into Single Elder, Plural Elder, Pure Democracy and *No Government, but the Holy Spirit*. It is difficult to apply such models to Darby's ecclesiology, but the closest to his model of church government would be either the Pure Democracy model or *No Government but the Holy Spirit*. This is because Darby believed that decision-making power resided in assemblies as bodies (with the possibility of input from other assemblies).

Arguably, one of the most radical aspects of Darby's ecclesiology was his denial of the possibility of appointing elders in the contemporary church. The Brethren were almost unique in church history for their lack of formal elders. Some of the Open Brethren, following the actions of Muller and Craik in appointing elders have taken a different position from Darby.¹³⁰

Darby argued from the New Testament that elders were appointed by apostles.¹³¹ The common response to this is that Timothy and Titus were charged with appointing apostles. Darby questioned whether Timothy had in fact, any part in choosing elders. He denied that there was any evidence that Timothy chose elders:

There is no evidence that Timothy was left for such a purpose. The apostle states it to have been to guard doctrine, not for the purpose of appointing elders. It is a general instruction as to his conduct in church, and it does not appear that laying on of hands was peculiar to such an office. It may have been used in it: they are never so connected in scripture. When elders are spoken of,

¹²⁷ Groups of local churches fall under the government of a single bishop. As found in the Anglican, Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches.

¹²⁸ Government of groups of local churches by a synod of elders.

¹²⁹ The local church acts as a self-governing body.

¹³⁰ Coad, p.154

¹³¹ J.N. Darby *On the Formation of Churches* (1840) in *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.167

laying on of hands is not; when this is spoken of, they are not.¹³²

With regard to Titus, Darby argued that a specific commission to appoint elders was given to Titus by the apostle Paul. Darby argued that if it was necessary to confer upon Titus the power to appoint elders, there was evidently no power in those churches to appoint elders:

To say that Titus was sent to Crete because the churches had not yet made for themselves bishops, is to wrest the word by adding to it one's own inventions. If authority was needed to set right those things which remained unordered and to establish elders, why not write to the churches? To dispute the necessity of that authority, is to admit an argument or an insinuation which destroys itself.¹³³

Thus, Titus's authority to appoint elders was due to his apostolic commission. Darby suggested that there may have been other delegates who had authority to appoint elders, perhaps even after the deaths of the apostles.¹³⁴ However, he rejected the Anglican belief in apostolic succession. Darby condemned the entire Episcopal system in a paper.¹³⁵ On the basis of the historical and Scriptural evidence, he concluded that it was a system entirely based on tradition, not the teaching of the Bible:

I have gone through the traditions which are alleged for it, I believe fairly, and admit the system was generally established in the latter part of the second century; but it was not established by God.¹³⁶

¹³² J.N. Darby *The Character of Office in the Present Dispensation* (1834) in *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.108

¹³³ J.N. Darby *The Church and its Friendly Subdivisions* (1849) in *Collected Writings*, vol.4, p.157

¹³⁴ J.N. Darby *A Letter to Count De Gasparin* (1855) in *Collected Writings*, vol.4, p.342

¹³⁵ J.N. Darby *Episcopacy: What Ground is there in Scripture or History for Accounting it an Institution of God?* in *Collected Writings*, vol.20, p.307-317

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, p.317

Darby also argued elsewhere, that apostolic succession would have caused ecclesiological problems for the Anglican church.¹³⁷ If Protestantism was valid, then Roman Catholicism must have failed as a church, but if the apostolic succession was genuine, then Roman Catholicism was validated.¹³⁸ Darby also rejected the practice of voting for elders, as used in many contemporary dissenting denominations:

Take Acts 10:14, where the same word is met with in the original, and let us give it the meaning which it is desired to put upon it in Acts 14:23, and the absurdity will appear: "Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God *by the suffrage of the assemblies,*" "or *by way of suffrage.*" Although in the word used here there is an allusion to the custom of raising the hand in voting, it is employed simply to signify the choice, or rather the designation of some person. The translation "by the suffrage of the assemblies" is quite false, for if it be insisted that the Greek word means to vote by raising the hand, then according to that translation, they voted by the opinion of the same assemblies; but it is impossible to attribute, by means of this same word, the choice to the apostles and the opinion of the assembly. If it were a case of vote, the assembly should have raised their hands and thus made the choice. This expression, to chose by the opinion (*avis*) of assemblies, I repeat, it is false in every case....I reply, that there is no trace in God's word of *election of pastors*; we have only the single choice of elders; and, moreover, this selection was made by apostles or their delegates.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Grass, 1997, p.162

¹³⁸ Grass writes:

Apostolic succession was a tacit admission that the economy had not continued; therefore either God's purpose had been frustrated, or God did not actually intend it to be so. Darby believed the latter, but gave his argument a novel twist by setting it in a dispensational context: "if the Scriptures plainly testify the apostasy of the dispensation, that which professes to provide and secure its successional continuance must be a lie of the enemy." Succession was the mark of apostasy sanctioned and therefore perpetuated, "for if the church has failed... the provision for its perpetuation becomes the provision for the perpetuation of the failure, and the maintenance of the object of the Lord's sure judgment." Protestantism could not prove its title to an apostolic ministry without at the same time *a fortiori* validating that of Roman Catholicism, a conclusion which had proved unacceptable to others before him.

ibid.

Grass points out in the footnotes that Calvin had denied that apostolic succession could guarantee apostolicity.

¹³⁹ J.N. Darby *Further Developments on the Formation of Churches* (1840) in *Collected Writings*, vol. 1, p.166

Arguments for election of elders failed the exegetical test in Darby's view. Darby believed that there was simply no authorisation given to the Church to appoint elders:

What we ask of you is the command to make elders. We quite recognise the biblical command to obey them. But at this time the elders whom we ought to obey do not exist, and that is the point on which we are all agreed. So to demand, as you do, that we should shew a Biblical command to reject the institution of elders, when that institution is no longer in existence, is really to say nothing. I repeat, I reject nothing. Where are the elders? Ah! says the author, there are none. How then reject them? But we want to make them, says he. I answer, That is another question. Has God sent you for that? What is his command? I await it.¹⁴⁰

Darby saw no recognisable elders in the church and he denied that it was possible to make new elders. Darby compared eldership with speaking in tongues and miracles:

You tell me the institution subsists. Where? In the word, you tell me. Doubtless, there were elders then; but as for you (the Evangelical Church at Geneva), say what you please, you are not an institution. Who is it that placed you in the position to which you pretend? That is the question. Tongues we find in the word, and apostles also. Do those things now subsist because we find their existence in the word? As a fact, the institution of elders does not subsist; this one cannot deny.¹⁴¹

According to Darby, eldership as a feature of the apostolic church, could not be separated from other aspects of that apostolic church. Attempts to restore elders were an usurpation of apostolic authority that resulted from the will of man.¹⁴² Such attempts could only restrict the ministry of the Word:

Let us suppose a Christian, blessed by God as an evangelist for the conversion of ten times more souls than all your elders

¹⁴⁰ J.N. Darby *Scriptural Views upon the Subject of Elders* (1850) in *Collected Writings*, vol.4, p.204

¹⁴¹ J.N. Darby *Examination of a few passages of Scripture* (1850) in *Collected Writings*, vol.4, p.231-232

¹⁴² J.N. Darby *Scriptural Views upon the Subject of Elders* (1850) in *Collected Writings*, vol.4, p.184

together, because of the gifts God has imparted unto him. Never mind: it is not ministry; and he is not a minister of the word, because he is not amongst your consecrated elders. Perhaps he is a young unmarried man, who has not the qualities required of God for a bishop, possibly not even the gift of teaching, for one can be a good evangelist without having that gift. It does not matter. He cannot be a minister of the word. He is not in the number of your elders.

Darby did recognise an informal eldership made up of those that had the moral qualities of an elder and who were characterised by experience in the Christian life.

Darby says of this class:

The Apostle Peter speaks of elders in a way which by no means implies the idea of an official nomination. "The elders who are among you I exhort, who am also an elder". In like manner he adds, "Likewise ye younger submit yourselves unto the elder," 1 Peter 5:1,5.

In Acts 15, we find also in the assembly at Jerusalem elders, whose appointment is nowhere related, but who are there on the same footing on which Peter expressly put them in his epistle.

I find in the Epistle to the Hebrews, leaders recognised in their work. So that I doubt not at all, that in the midst of Christians of a Jewish origin the eldership was but a moral Matter.¹⁴³

Such men were suited to take the lead in worship and ministry, though not exclusively.¹⁴⁴ Darby was willing to give recognition to any who did the work of an elder:

¹⁴³ J.N. Darby, *Scriptural Views upon the Subject of Elders* (1850) in *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.224

¹⁴⁴ J.N. Darby wrote:

Nature as well as the word teaches us that young men, that new converts, are little fitted to take the lead in any way, and that the elders, if God has raised up any, have their proper place in the house of God.

Further Developments on the Formation of Churches (1850) in *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.162

Meanwhile I obey the word in recognising those who have the rule over us; and I do not pretend to do that which you are pretending to do, without even being agreed amongst yourselves on what the word has said as to this subject, without even being agreed as to whether what it says has any authority.

Although they may not have been named, I can recognise those who do a good work, and I would even recognise them in the work, although they had entered thereon irregularly, and although the pretension of reconstituting the Church places them in a position which we cannot recognise as belonging to them.¹⁴⁵

Elders could be recognised by the work that they performed in the assembly.¹⁴⁶ These elders had the duty of taking oversight of meetings.¹⁴⁷ Darby was not very specific in his writings as to how elders should carry out their duties. It appears that unofficial elders played only a minor role in the Exclusive Brethren following Darby. Noel's history of the Exclusives makes very little reference to the activities of elders. Decisions tended to be made by meetings of the assembly, in which all were given collective responsibility for decision making.¹⁴⁸ This is unsurprising given Darby's emphasis on the judiciary action of whole assemblies. The Open Brethren writer, G.H. Lang argued that Darby's opposition to formal eldership enabled his 'universal domination' of the Brethren.¹⁴⁹ This view depends upon the assumption that Darby did seek universal domination of the Brethren, a valid question. Certainly, the lack of formal eldership probably made it easier for particular individuals, for instance J.B.

¹⁴⁵ J.N. Darby *Scriptural Views Upon the Subject of Elders* (1850) in *Collected Writings*, vol. 4, p.227

¹⁴⁶ J.N. Darby *On Gifts and Offices* in *Collected Writings*, vol.14, p.11

¹⁴⁷ J.N. Darby wrote:

The duty of elders is that of oversight. In Acts 20 the apostle gives them this name (in our language, bishop, in Greek *episkopos*). We find this title again in the epistle to the Phillipians. In Acts 20:28, 31, we see in what their duty consisted- to nourish with sound doctrine, to be watchful against false teachers, and attentive to everything. The passage in 1 Peter 5:1-3 speaks the same thing.

J.N. Darby *On Gifts and Offices in the Church* in *Collected Writings*, vol.14, p.11-12

¹⁴⁸ M. Brown, p.8-9

¹⁴⁹ G.H. Lang *The Churches of God*, London, Paternoster, 1959, p.88

Stoney and F.E. Raven, the leaders of the Exclusives after his death, to have a large influence.

As with elders, Darby denied that deacons could be appointed in the contemporary church:

These two public offices (elder and deacon) then are now entirely wanting to us; no one can restore them officially according to holy scripture, after a divine sort, because no one has received, in order to do so, authority or commission on the part of God to do so. But the Scripture provides morally for subjection to those whom God raises up to service: and inasmuch as Christ is infallibly faithful toward His body, and inasmuch as the Holy Spirit is always in the Church upon earth, the gifts necessary to the edification of the assembly are always in the Church upon earth, the gifts necessary to the edification of the assembly are always there.¹⁵⁰

Just as elders could be found in the church today in those qualified to do their work, so could those able to do the work of deacons be found in the contemporary church.

The presence of those carrying out those offices was part of God's ministration to the Church through the Holy Spirit. Although Darby mentions gifts in this paragraph, he did deny that the offices of elder and deacon were essentially connected to the gifts of ruling and serving respectively.¹⁵¹ Darby seemed to think that acting deacons would have a more manifest presence than elders:

Take the case of deacons. Suppose you have a large gathering, and there is difficulty in distributing; I see no objection to certain ones taking the charge of it. But I could not say so of elders, because there are no apostles to appoint them. But in such a case as I have supposed, I see no difficulty for two or three, at the wish

¹⁵⁰ J.N. Darby *On Gifts and Offices in the Church in Collected Writings*, vol.14, p.13

¹⁵¹ J.N. Darby *Remarks on the State of the Church* (1843) in *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.266

of the others, to undertake this service.¹⁵²

Grass introduces an unnecessary element of ambiguity into Darby's position on eldership. He points out that Darby implied the possibility of elders being appointed after the deaths of the apostles.¹⁵³ However, Darby was merely acknowledging the possibility that delegates such as Timothy and Titus might have appointed after the deaths of the apostles.¹⁵⁴ Darby was quite consistent in maintaining the impossibility of appointing elders in the contemporary church. While Darby's opposition to formal eldership is a unique element in his ecclesiology and is probably the most controversial element, it is arguably the most logical. Darby's argument against eldership is not dependant on any problematic concepts such as the Ruin of the Church or distinctions between the house and the body, but simply an argument from authority. He raised the question of the Biblical means to appoint elders and challenged those who advocated appointing elders to justify their own systems of appointment. A possible problem with Darby's position on eldership is that it does not sit easily with his notion of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the church as a source of power for ministry. If the indwelling Holy Spirit continues to equip the church with power for ministry, why does this not include the power to appoint new elders for the work of that ministry? Darby would no doubt reply that the appointing of elders had always been a work associated with the apostles. However, this argument assumes

¹⁵² J.N. Darby *The Christian Position in Notes and Jottings*, p.284

¹⁵³ Grass, p.114

¹⁵⁴ J.N. Darby wrote:

It is by no means impossible that Paul may have sent several delegates. It is possible that he may have commanded them to do so (appoint elders) after his death. The word tells us what he did, so far as is profitable for the Church at all times, and not all that he did- far from it. What I believe therefore is not precisely that it was impossible to ordain elders after the deaths of the apostles.

A Letter to Count De Gasparin (1855) in *Collected Writings*, vol. 4, p.343

that the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit operates within the church in a rigidly dispensational fashion.

Darby's rejection of formal eldership demonstrates that he was neither a Restorationist¹⁵⁵ or a Patternist.¹⁵⁶ Darby has been identified as both. Krapohl identified Darby as a Restorationist.¹⁵⁷ Baylis denied that Darby was a Restorationist, but identified him as a Patternist.¹⁵⁸ Coad, however, argues that Darby was not a Patternist. Coad would seem to be correct. While Darby made use of Scriptural principles, it would not be accurate to say that he consistently followed any particular Scriptural pattern. Darby was applying New Testament teaching to circumstances which he believed were unforeseen in the Bible, a period of ruin. The norms of apostolic church life could not be applied to this period. Darby selectively applied those New Testament teachings that could be applied, such as liberty of ministry in Corinthians and rejected literal application of those that he believed could not be applied, such as formal eldership and miraculous gifts. In Darby's view following the apostolic model of the church required actual apostles:

But to what degree the pretension of such Christians has reached, who ascribe to themselves the ability to restore to its old state whatever the power of the apostles wrought and set up, I leave to the judgment of the reader. Christians need apostolic power in order to be able to do apostolic works. They are able by grace to be faithful, amidst the circumstances in which they are found as the result of the continuous power of evil. They can abandon the evil, but as we have said, to be able to do what the apostles did, they need apostolic power. Why do they not restore

¹⁵⁵ A Restorationist seeks to restore the norms of ecclesiology in the apostolic era, as revealed in the New Testament.

¹⁵⁶ A Patternist believes the New Testament reveals a pattern for church activity, that should be followed as loosely as possible.

¹⁵⁷ Krapohl, 1988, p.447

¹⁵⁸ Baylis, 1995, p.30

apostles? Why not gifts? Why not prophets and miracles?¹⁵⁹

In Darby's view those who believed that the apostolic church model could be copied were themselves selective in what they tried to imitate. The followers of Edward Irving had, of course, attempted to restore apostles and miracles, but Darby believed that those restored elements of apostolic Christianity were quite inauthentic. As Grass argues, Darby shared with Edward Irving and his followers the view that the Church could not be apostolic without possessing apostles. The essential difference was that Darby denied that any elders were to be restored to the Church. Darby gave an analogy to demonstrate his view on the impossibility of restoring elders:

A father desires that his children should go and shew to their grandfather in their clean clothes and in a proper manner, and he orders them strictly to walk on the footpath and to by no means leave it, for fear of dirtying their clothes. The eldest of the boys, whose pride is hurt at the idea of going and showing himself to his grandfather as a little child, goes and splashes himself with mud whilst on the road thither, and then begins to insist on the duty of walking on the footpath in order to keep himself clean. Is that obedience?¹⁶⁰

It might be responded to this analogy by arguing that those who wanted to appoint elders were not necessarily responsible for the ruin of the Church. However, Darby did not accept this conclusion. He believed in the collective failure of the whole Church with consequences for all Christians. This called for humiliation and the end of attempts to restore the Church's original condition.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ J.N. Darby, *Reply to an Article in the "Zionsbote" upon "Darbyism"* in *Collected Writings*, vol.33, p.14

¹⁶⁰ J.N. Darby *Scriptural Views Upon the Subject of Elders* in *Collected Writings*, vol. 4, p.195

¹⁶¹ *ibid*, p.194

Darby was deeply conservative on the subject of women's ministry. He held that women were to be silent in meetings of the assembly¹⁶² on the basis of 1 Corinthians 14:34.¹⁶³ Darby believed the prominence of women in religious life was a sign of a very negative state of affairs.¹⁶⁴ Darby probably believed that women were more susceptible to false teaching than men. He believed that women should make use of their gifts within their family or in the company of other women.¹⁶⁵ Darby did not think that women should be active in evangelism.¹⁶⁶ Women might speak in a Bible reading meeting at a private home, but Darby felt that a meeting which took place in the normal meeting place of the assembly was too close to being an assembly meeting for women to speak.¹⁶⁷ He did not even accept the idea of a woman regularly giving lectures even just to women.¹⁶⁸ In response to the argument that women could prophesy, based on 1 Corinthians 11:5-10. Darby argued that nothing in this text

¹⁶² J.N. Darby, (1874) *Letter*, vol.2, p.264

¹⁶³ "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted for them to speak; but they are commanded to be in obedience, as also saith the law."

¹⁶⁴ J.N. Darby *Narrative of Facts in Collected Writings*, vol.20, p.12

¹⁶⁵ J.N. Darby wrote "A women's gift ought to be confined to women or to her own family." (*Notes of Readings on 1 Corinthians in Collected Writings*, vol.26, p.254)

¹⁶⁶ J.N. Darby wrote:

I do not accept a woman's going out to evangelise. I never saw a woman meddle in teaching and church matters, but she brought mischief upon herself and everyone else. If she sits down with a company before her to teach them, she has got out of her place altogether. We read of Tryphena and Tryphosa, who laboured in the Lord, and the beloved Persis too- each in her own place of service. You find all honour done to women in the Gospels; but the Lord never sent a woman out to preach; neither did a man ever go and anoint Christ for burial. The woman's prophesying was not preaching.

Ibid, p.255

¹⁶⁷ J.N. Darby wrote in 1874:

I believe that comeliness will restrain them where brethren are, but as in private house they have liberty of speech. The moment brethren assemble as such in the Lord's name, then their place is silence; also asking a question, maybe as you say, covert teaching. A meeting in the meeting room of the assembly takes more or less the character of the assembly, if it is open to all to come.

Letters, vol.2, p.264

¹⁶⁸ J.N. Darby wrote "If she sets up a regular lecture, even if there were only women present, I should hold it to be teaching in the apostle's sense." (*ibid*, p.265).

indicated that the prophecy was being done in the assembly.¹⁶⁹ It might be argued that the context of this teaching concerns ministry in the church. However, it is clear that some parts of 1 Corinthians concern activities outside the assembly¹⁷⁰ and so Darby's view of prophecy in 1 Corinthians 11 is exegetically plausible. Women were, in Darby's view, to be included in the judicial action of the assembly in excommunicating individuals.¹⁷¹ They might only be excluded from meetings that examined the facts of cases.¹⁷² In his history of the Brethren in Scotland, N.T.R. Dickson traces the decline of female preaching among the Scottish Brethren.¹⁷³ He identifies the influence of Darby's thought in the rejection of female preaching.¹⁷⁴ In recent years, a body of literature has emerged that argues that the New Testament prohibition of female leadership can be explained in terms of the first century cultural context and should not be viewed as mandatory for the church in all ages.¹⁷⁵ Whether Darby would have been persuaded by these scholars can never be known, however many who follow him in the Open and Exclusive Brethren are clearly not persuaded, as they continue to reject female preaching.¹⁷⁶

¹⁶⁹ *ibid*, p. 264

¹⁷⁰ For instance married relations, eating of meats sacrificed to idols and lawsuits.

¹⁷¹ (1871) *Letters*, vol.2, p.132

¹⁷² (1877) *Letters*, vo.2, p.415

¹⁷³ N.T.R. Dickson *Brethren in Scotland 1838-2000: A Social Study of an Evangelical Movement* Carlisle, Cumbria, Paternoster, 2002

¹⁷⁴ *ibid*, p. 152

¹⁷⁵ See MJ Evans, *Women in the Bible*, Exeter, Intersivity Press, 1983, P. Gundry, *Neither Slave nor Free: Helping Women Answer the Call to Church Leadership*, San Francisco, Harper and Row, 1987 and A. Mickelsen, ed. *Women, Authority and the Bible*, Downers Grove, Illinois, Intersivity Press, 1986.

For an opposing view, see J. Piper and W. Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, Wheaton, Illinois, Crossway, 1991 and S. Foh, *Women and the Word of God: A Response to Biblical Feminism*, Philadelphia, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980.

¹⁷⁶ Grass, 2006, p.305, 421

An Open Brethren publication featured this comment:

It is not for us to question the decisions of God. He has decided that when the local church comes together women must not lead the worship or speak, because man had priority in creation and women led the way in the Fall. We must accept this as we accept the fact of everyone's involvement in Adam's disobedience.

The Ordinances of Baptism and the Eucharist

The subject of the ordinances or sacraments of the church was not a major theme in Darby's writings. This is perhaps unfortunate, given the rich source of theological meaning in the sacraments and their historically important role in theology. They ought to have been given a greater prominence in Darby's theology, given his belief that communion was central to Christian worship.¹⁷⁷ This belief was reflected in the Brethren practice of weekly celebration of communion. Darby denied that the Scripture provided any official ceremony for the celebration of this ritual and believed that any brother had the right to offer worship and prayer during its celebration.¹⁷⁸ With regard to the theological meaning of communion, Darby seems to have been most inclined to the Zwinglian view¹⁷⁹ that the Lord's supper was a symbolic memorial of Christ's work.¹⁸⁰ Perhaps surprisingly, Darby allowed for private

F. Holmes, "The Place of Women", in *Church Doctrine and Practice*, ed. J Heading and CE Hocking, Neath, West Glamorgan, Precious Seed Publications, 1970 (2004 reprint), p.252

¹⁷⁷ J.N. Darby wrote "I admit the Lord's supper to be the centre of true worship." (*Remarks on "The Church and the World"* (1866) in *Collected Writings*, vol.15. p.356

¹⁷⁸ J.N. Darby wrote:

The scripture is ignorant of any official ceremony for the administration of the Lord's supper, as men speak; for God nowhere therein declares, that it is the privilege of a person consecrated, or set apart, to administer it.

On Gifts and Offices in the Church in *Collected Writings*, vol.14, p.14

¹⁷⁹ Berkhof, p.653

¹⁸⁰ J.N. Darby wrote:

But it has pleased the Lord to give us a physical means by which we may be reminded of Him, so that I am authorised to speak of a portrait by way of comparison. I have still further authority to repel the idea of any physical change in the bread and wine, in that the Lord has said, in John 6, which you have quoted, "Te Spirit quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing."

Extract from a Letter on the Lord's Supper in *Collected Writings*, vol.20, p.282

celebration of the Lord's supper.¹⁸¹ In his view, a husband and wife might break bread together in their own home.¹⁸²

Darby was keen to oppose the teaching of baptismal regeneration.¹⁸³ He viewed that teaching as a vestige of *Popery*. Darby wrote to papers specifically on this subject, *A Reply to the Defence of the Doctrine of Baptismal Regeneration and Baptism not the Communication of Life*.¹⁸⁴ Much as Darby admired John Calvin, he believed that the Genevan theologian had fallen into the alleged error of teaching baptismal regeneration.¹⁸⁵

Darby strongly favoured the baptism of infants. His preferred mode was by pouring or immersion using the Trinitarian formula in Matthew's Gospel.¹⁸⁶ The Baptist view was strong in the Brethren. Darby responded to Baptist arguments with his own defence of infant baptism, almost entirely by correspondence. Darby denied that baptism was an act of obedience, as taught by Baptists:

Ordinances are never the subjects of commands. They are ordained and rightly used, but never obedience in him who profits by them; it would deny the very nature of Christianity, and destroy the blessing for him who partakes it.¹⁸⁷

Darby was a little unclear as to the nature of this argument. It is perhaps unfortunate that he wrote so little in his collected writings on this subject. It would seem he was

¹⁸¹ J.N. Darby *Notes of Readings on 1 Corinthians* in *Collected Writings*, vol.26, p.258

¹⁸² J.N. Darby wrote "A man and his wife being alone, I see no objection to their breaking bread, if they themselves feel free and disposed."(ibid, p.286)

¹⁸³ The teaching that spiritual life was imparted to persons through the rite of baptism.

¹⁸⁴ *Collected Writings*, vol.20, p.266-281

¹⁸⁵ J.N. Darby *The Sufferings of Christ* in *Collected Writings*, vol.7, p.206-207

¹⁸⁶ J.N. Darby (1865), *Letters*, vol.1, p.409-410

¹⁸⁷ J.N. Darby, (1869) *Letters*, vol.2, p.49

arguing that baptism reflected the gracious character of salvation, and so it should not be connected with obedience. Darby further argued that the Baptist position left the children of Christian parents spiritually in the world, in Satan's sphere.¹⁸⁸ Darby seemed to argue for a concept that was superficially similar to the Reformed concept of a Covenant of Grace. However, this idea was connected with the concept of the dispensational ruin of Christendom. As is demonstrated in the previous chapter, Darby held that the house of God in 2 Timothy 2:20 represented Christendom. It was a sphere of blessing and privilege that dispensationally included all those who had been baptized and professed Christianity:

Another important principle destroyed by the Baptist system is the existence of a divinely instituted place in which blessing is, independently of the question of personal conversion, and to which responsibility is attached according to the blessing: as the olive tree in Romans, whose branches are broken off and grafted in again or replaced by others who are broken off afterwards, branches where the root and fatness of the olive tree is, yet they come to nothing; so Hebrews vi., x. So 1 Corinthians x., where, the sacraments so-called, are shewn to be the ground of this in Christendom, and so the house in 1 Corinthians iii., where wood, hay and stubble are built in with false doctrines, but it is God's building. And in 1 Peter iv. 17 judgment was to begin at the house of God, alluding to Ezekiel, so we see it as a principle in Romans iii.: "What advantage then hath the Jew?... much in every way." But he was condemned, not converted. So the wicked servant who ate and drank with the drunken: was "*that* servant" the same as the faithful one and Christ His Lord?¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ J.N. Darby wrote:

If baptism be the reception of children where the Holy Ghost is, and where they can be brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and taught to obey, which till they are Christians as to position they cannot be, the question is, Is a Christian parent obliged to leave his child outside with the devil, or allowed to bring him in where the Holy Ghost and the care of God's house is?

Ibid, p.50

The statement that children are 'left outside with the devil' might seem rather puzzling given Darby's rejection of baptismal regeneration. Darby probably meant this only in a nominal or symbolic sense.

¹⁸⁹ J.N. Darby (1869), *Letters*, vol.2, p.49

Thus, baptism did not bring the believer into the church of God or make the child regenerate, but instead, it brought the child into a distinct sphere of blessing, privilege and responsibility. Darby saw the distinction between the house as the outward sphere of professing Christianity and the body of Christ as central to his case for infant baptism.¹⁹⁰ Darby believed that the word christening effectively conveyed his understanding of baptism as the introduction to Christendom.¹⁹¹

A High Church Ecclesiology?

Some writers have described Darby's ecclesiology as *High Church*¹⁹². Neatby wrote:

The Exclusive Brethren were High Churchmen of the most pronounced type. No Anglo-Catholic could have a greater contempt for such a phrase as 'denominational preferences'; and the Anglo-Catholic is a very fortunate person if he ever attains an equally lofty and serene confidence in the exclusive claims of his own system. The moderation of Protestants has put them at a disadvantage. They have no substitute to offer for the fascinating claim to an exclusive possession of Divine warrant. But the Brethren, hampered by no such drawback, have confronted the highest claims of High Anglicans with claims at least as lofty, and a confidence much more disdainful.¹⁹³

¹⁹⁰ *ibid.*, p.284

¹⁹¹ J.N. Darby wrote:

To a scriptural judgment you cannot be baptized now, because you have been; for I affirm according to scripture, baptism is just *christening* – that is, the introduction into Christianity and nothing else.

Ibid.

¹⁹² McPhail, p.39

Grass, 1997, p.63

Neatby, 1901, p.183-204

¹⁹³ Neatby, 1901, p.183

Neatby identified Darby's High Church claims in his conviction that the Brethren had the exclusive claim to be acting within God's provisions for the church.¹⁹⁴ More recently, Grass wrote:

Although he could be considered to have a very low doctrine of the church in view of his belief that it had been irreparably ruined, it can be shown that his belief derived its significance in his ecclesiological scheme precisely because as a high-churchman he saw the concept of a visible and universal earthly church as important, a belief which contrasted with the practice, if not the theory, of many later Open Brethren.¹⁹⁵

It is certainly undeniable that Darby's ecclesiology was significantly shaped by his High Anglican background (see chapter 2). However, it is necessary to question whether it is helpful to impose this description on his system. The ordinary usage of the term High Church refers to Anglicans who emphasise the visible structures of the church, the authority of bishops and the sacraments.¹⁹⁶ To apply the term to the ecclesiology of Darby and the Exclusive Brethren, outside of the Anglican churches, is to deviate from the normal meaning of the word. Darby's denial of an invisible church and his belief in the need for apostolic authority in ordination are certainly characteristic of the High Church. However, it is misleading to describe Darby as High Church given the contrasting elements of his theology; his belief in the Church's ruin, his Calvinistic Soteriology and his lack of emphasis on sacraments. While there is a superficial similarity between Darby's ecclesiology and High Church ecclesiology, Darby was writing from a fundamentally Evangelical framework of Biblical interpretation in which the Bible had a central role in determining ecclesial principles, structures and activities and the role of tradition was minimised, if not

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, p.184

¹⁹⁵ Grass, 1997, p.63

¹⁹⁶ P. Toon "The High Church Movement" in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. W. Elwell, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker Books, 1984, p.510

discarded. It is also worth noting that A.N. Groves, a contemporary Brethren critic of Darby's ecclesiology, shredded Darby's High Anglican background.¹⁹⁷ While Darby was probably influenced by the High Church, he radically re-interpreted those influences in a wholly creative way to form a distinctive ecclesiology that was both Evangelical and reflective of a high view of the Church.

Krapohl argued that Darby's ecclesiology was closer in practice to Ultramontane Catholicism¹⁹⁸ than High Anglicanism.¹⁹⁹ He pointed out the enormous power wielded by individuals in determining the outcome of discipline over all of the assemblies in unison. While the lack of structure in the Exclusive Brethren did lead in practice to individual influence, this was not an intention of the system. It is important not to confuse practical outcome with theological praxis. Darby certainly expressed concerns about the dangers of individuals having too much influence.²⁰⁰

Conclusion

Darby's ecclesiology was a coherent system. It was not as Krapohl claimed, an 'unstable synthesis' between the contradictory concepts of unity and separation. Krapohl's failure to recognise the consistency of Darby's ecclesiology results from a lack of examination of ecclesiological praxis as presented in Darby's writings and correspondence. In particular, Krapohl did not identify Darby's practical distinction between separating from institutions and separation from individuals.

¹⁹⁷ G.H. Lang, *Anthony Norris Groves: Saint and Pioneer* London, Thyman and Co Ltd, 1939, p.31

¹⁹⁸ A form of traditionalist Catholicism that emphasised the authority of the Papacy.

¹⁹⁹ Krapohl, p.427

²⁰⁰ J.N. Darby (1876), *Letters*, vol.2, p.381

Central to Darby's ecclesiology were those two principles of unity and separation. On the one hand, all Christians were united and were thus welcome to participate in the unity that was central to the Brethren. On the other hand, there was a clear duty to separate from professing Christians whose conduct was considered to be morally evil and also from those who consciously had fellowship with evil persons. These two principles were not in contradiction to each other, but they shaped a very distinctive pattern of ecclesiological behaviour.

Darby's belief in the unity of the church as one body of Christ led him to reject the idea of independent local assemblies. Instead, he maintained the principle that assemblies must act in unity. The lack of a structure to operate this united system led to problems such as the dominance of individuals and the perpetuation of disputes over generations. It is very doubtful that there is any benefit to be seen in his rejection of independence in favour of a loose confederacy dominated by a few individuals, who make decisions that for all intents and purposes, were binding on all assembly members. Darby's emphasis on the visible unity of the church has resulted in his ecclesiology being described as High Church. While Darby was probably influenced by his High Church background and the emphasis on the visible unity of the church suggests a superficial similarity between Darby's eschatology and the High Anglican position.

Darby was not a Restorationist or a Patternist. He denied that the pattern of New Testament church life could be imitated. He held that apostles, miraculous gifts and appointed officers had been lost from the church and could not be restored. Darby

supported his belief that the gifts had ceased by reference to the notion of the church age as a 'timeless heavenly gap' in history. This rejection of both Restorationism and Patternism entailed a rejection of appointed elders and deacons in the church. While this is perhaps the most distinctive and controversial element in Darby's ecclesiology, Darby raised strong arguments in its favour. It must be asked, however, whether this view of eldership does not overlook the power and dynamism which the indwelling Holy Spirit might impart to the church.

Darby spent little time developing a sacramental theology. Perhaps this is a reflection of the Evangelical Protestant context of his theology, though it is unfortunate because of the rich theological meaning in the sacraments and their centrality to the life of the church, especially in the Brethren, which held weekly communion. He took a Zwinglian position on the Eucharist. While rejecting Baptismal Regeneration, he advocated a uniquely dispensational argument for infant baptism.

Having outlined the key elements of Darby's ecclesiology, it is necessary to consider the influence of that ecclesiology on American fundamentalism, arguably the most historically significant group to be influenced by him.

Chapter 5: Darby's Influence on American Fundamentalism

Introduction

Fundamentalism is a loosely defined movement of opposition to theological liberalism which is most clearly seen in Twentieth-century American church history. Sometimes Fundamentalists are distinguished from Evangelicals,¹ however, attempts at such a distinction sometimes fall into vagueness and caricature.²

The word *fundamentalism* is frequently applied to religious movements outside not only Protestantism, but also Christianity itself. Such applications of the word may be lacking in historical or theological precision and have the effect of making it difficult to define the term. This chapter is concerned only with a specific group, perhaps the easiest to attach the word fundamentalist to, that is, those who originally called themselves fundamentalists and those who were associated with them. This group consists of those twentieth century Protestants in the United States who believed in the necessity of opposing higher Biblical criticism and who upheld such orthodox doctrines as the Trinity, the deity of Christ and his substitutionary atonement, the

¹ For instance, A.E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, Oxford, Blackwell 1994, p.123

The Evangelical writer, John Stott somewhat caricatured fundamentalists without clearly defining what groups he had in mind:

The fundamentalist seems to me to resemble a caged bird which possesses the capacity for flight, but lacks the freedom to use it. For the fundamentalist mind is confined or caged by an over-literal interpretation of the Scripture, and by the strict traditions and conventions into which this has led him. He is not at liberty to question these, or to explore alternative, equally faithful ways of applying Scripture to the modern world, for he cannot escape from his cage. ...The evangelical seems to me to resemble a kite, which can also take off, fly great distances and soar to great heights, while all the time tethered to earth. For the evangelical mind is held by revelation.

J. Stott, *Evangelical Essentials*, Downers Grove, IVP, 1989, p.106

² H.A. Harris *Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998, p.8

verbal inspiration of Scripture and the Virgin Birth. Many, possibly the majority of these conservative Protestants would have been Dispensationalists.

Fundamentalism in America

The arrival of Dispensationalism in America, through the influence of Darby and other Brethren writer, preceded the emergence of the Fundamentalist movement by over fifty years. The history of American Dispensationalism and American Fundamentalism are distinct, as will be shown below, but they cover much common ground. The word 'fundamentalist' is derived from *The Fundamentals*, a series of magazines defending orthodox Protestant theology. *The Fundamentals* were published between 1910 and 1915.³ The authors were drawn from a wide variety of denominations and included C.I. Scofield (see below). Many were Premillennial, but by no means all of them.⁴ Marsden says that *The Fundamentals* represented a symbolic point of reference for the Fundamentalist movement, though it was part of an early moderate phase in its development.⁵ *The Fundamentals* effectively defined the issues that the fundamentalists were concerned about and identified the key leaders of the movement and its parameters. According to McIntire, the term *fundamentalist* was first used in 1920, in the Baptist *Watchman-Examiner* magazine; after this the word was used frequently in the early 1920s⁶. In 1919, William Riley, a Baptist Premillennialist had been inspired by the *Fundamentals* to form a

³ C.T. McIntire "Fundamentals, The" in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. W. Elwell, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker, 1984, p.436

⁴ For example, James Orr and Benjamin Warfield rejected Premillennialism.

⁵ G.M. Marsden said "They (the *Fundamentals*) represent the movement at a moderate and transitional stage before it was reshaped and pushed to extremes by the intense heat of controversy." *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1980, p.119

⁶ C.T. McIntire, "Fundamentalism" in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. W. Elwell, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker, 1984, p.433

Premillennial organization, World's Christian Fundamentals Association, which was committed to opposing theological modernism.⁷ However, the fundamentalist movement as a whole was not committed to Premillennialism. Key allies of the Premillennial fundamentalists were Presbyterians connected to Princeton Seminary, most notably two leading theologians and professors, Benjamin Warfield (1851-1921) and John Gresham Machen(1881-1937).⁸ The Calvinism of Princeton Seminary was characterised by a commitment to the verbal inspiration of Scripture and the absence of factual errors in the Bible's reporting of factual events. Machen was unhappy with the term 'fundamentalist'⁹ and he and Warfield advocated Postmillennialism and a moderate approach to the question of Darwinism;¹⁰ however, they shared with the Premillennialists a firm opposition to theological liberalism. Another Postmillennialist who was central to the Fundamentalist movement was William Jennings Bryan (1860-1925). Bryan was a three-time Democrat presidential candidate and secretary of state to Woodrow Wilson between 1912 and 1915.¹¹ Bryan is most famous for his part in the Scopes Trial of 1925, where he prosecuted a young teacher for advocating evolutionary science, after which he died just a few days later.¹²

The fundamentalists aimed in the twenties to gain control of seminaries, mission boards and the leadership of the major denominations. In this they were unsuccessful and the publicity given to the Scopes trial brought further discredit to the fundamentalists. Nevertheless the fundamentalists had succeeded in winning the

⁷ H.A. Harris *Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998, p.28

⁸ Sandeen, p.170

⁹ He said it sounded like 'some strange new sect.'

D.G. Hart, "J. Gresham Machen" in *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*, ed. W. Elwell, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker, 1993, p.135

¹⁰ Hart, 1993, p.136, TL. Boettner, "Postmillennialism" in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, ed. R.G. Clouse, Downers grove, Illinois, Inter-Varsity Press, 1977, p.103

¹¹ Marsden, 1980, p.132

¹² *ibid*, p.187

sympathy of the Southern Baptist denomination, which had largely been unaffected by liberalism. In the thirties, the fundamentalists changed their strategy and began forming new denominations.¹³ J. Gresham Machen formed the Orthodox Presbyterian church in 1936, which preserved the Reformed orthodoxy of the 'old school.' Two fundamental Baptist denominations were formed in this period, the General Association of Regular Baptists (1932) and the Conservative Baptist Association of America (1947), both of which had a strong Dispensational element.¹⁴ A loosely knit body of Dispensationalist churches was formed in 1930, under the umbrella title of the Independent Fundamental Churches of America. This group was the only denomination in the United States to make Dispensationalism a part of their doctrinal statement.¹⁵ During the period between the Great Depression and the end of the second world war, radio preachers such as Charles Fuller were very successful at attracting members of the public to fundamentalism. Christians in a wide variety of bodies, such as the Dutch Reformed and the Lutherans were affected by the movement.¹⁶ In particular, a Swedish-American denomination, the Evangelical Free church re-defined its identity as a Premillennial fundamentalist church. It may seem surprising that the fundamentalist movement should have experienced a period of growth after its poor public image in the Scopes Trial and its failure to influence the direction of the mainstream church. This growth may be accounted for by the uncertainties created by war and depression and by enthusiastic evangelism by fundamentalists.

¹³ C.T. McIntire, "Fundamentalism" in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. W. Elwell, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker, 1984, p.434

¹⁴ Blaising and Bock, p.11

¹⁵ C.C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, Chicago, Moody, 1995, p.73

¹⁶ M.A. Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2001, p.17

In the 1950s, the fundamentalist movement began to splinter. A number of writers, most notably Carl F Henry and Harold Ockenga began to question tendencies within the fundamentalist movement and abandoned the label, in favour of the older word *Evangelical*.¹⁷ The main objection of the Evangelicals or Neo-evangelicals to fundamentalism seemed to be to the separatism that had developed in the fundamentalist movement since the Thirties.¹⁸ They were also unhappy with the lack of engagement by fundamentalists with social and political issues. The new Evangelicalism was associated with the popular evangelist, Billy Graham and with the publication *Christianity Today*. Some fundamentalists rejected this new development and continued in a separation from those advocating the new Evangelicalism.¹⁹ Although individuals from Dallas Theological Seminary and Moody Bible Institute had connections to the Neo-evangelical movement,²⁰ those institutions continued to identify with the fundamentalist label.

In the seventies and eighties a prominent part of the fundamentalist or evangelical movement were the television preachers or televangelists.²¹ One of them, Jerry Falwell had come from the separatist fundamentalist movement and was committed to Dispensationalism (though his policy of making common political cause with those outside of separatist fundamentalism alienated many separatists).²² Pat Robertson, a Southern Baptist was more closely affiliated with the Neo-evangelical movement.

¹⁷ R. V. Pierard, "Evangelicalism" in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker, 1984, p.381

¹⁸ *ibid*, p.382

¹⁹ McIntire, 1984, p.435

²⁰ G.M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Eerdmans, 1991, p.69

²¹ McIntire, 1984, p.435

²² Harries, 1998, p.45

Robertson was not dispensational,²³ but was Premillennial and arguably Zionist in his approach to Israel. The televangelists Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart were Pentecostal, a tradition that was aligned with fundamentalism, but which had never truly been accepted by the movement.

Darby and American Fundamentalism

It is arguable that Darby's influence on American fundamentalism is of far greater historical significance than his role in establishing and spreading the Brethren movement. The dispensational theology derived from Darby has played a major role in American fundamentalism and evangelicalism, becoming a recognisable part of American cultural life.²⁴ This can be seen in recent years in the enormous popularity of the *Left Behind* novels, by Jerry B Jenkins and Tim LaHaye, which are based on dispensational eschatology. Some writers, such as Grayson Carter of Fuller Theological Seminary,²⁵ would argue that the eschatological views associated with Darby play a major role in influencing current United States foreign policy in its support for Israel.²⁶ Crutchfield says of Darby's influence on American Premillennialism:

²³ L.D. Hart, *Truth Aflame: A Balanced Theology for Evangelicals and Charismatics*, Nashville, Tennessee, Nelson, 1999, p.456

²⁴ M. Williams, *The World is not my Home: The Origins and Development of Dispensationalism*, Fearn, Ross-shire, Christian Focus, 2003, p.18

²⁵ Grayson Carter, Foreword to *A Story of Conflict: The Controversial Relationship between Benjamin Wills Newton and John Nelson Darby*, Jonathan Burnham, Carlisle, Cumbria, Paternoster, 2004

²⁶ This analysis is questioned indirectly by a recent article by W.R. Mead. He argues that contrary to the notion that American support for Israel is due to the influence of fundamentalists and Jews, both minority lobbies, the general public of America are supportive of pro-Israel policies. Mead argues that American support for Israel has much deeper roots, stemming back to a shared heritage in the Judeo-Christian history and shared historical circumstances of the nations of America and Israel.

That Darby's teachings had a tremendous influence upon the formation and systematisation of many dispensational concepts is beyond dispute. His employment of the hermeneutical principle of literal interpretation for all of scripture, including prophecy, naturally led to the distinction between Israel and the church. And this in turn led to the conclusion that the hopes of Israel and the church were of a different nature.²⁷

It is of great significance that while Darby's Dispensational eschatology and his views on the nature of the church made a considerable impact on conservative Protestants in the United States, many aspects of his ecclesiology were ignored and he failed to generate a Brethren-style movement of numerical significance in the United States. This raises questions, not only as to why this separation of Darbyite theological elements occurred in the American Dispensational movement, but also as to the interrelation of eschatology and ecclesiological praxis in Darby's theology.

Darby in America

Although Darby's writings may have been available in the United States in the mid to late 19th century, his views were established there propagated there more effectively through his personal visits.²⁸ Darby made seven visits to north America in 1862, 1864, 1866, 1870, 1872-73, 1874 and 1876.²⁹ Darby's correspondence gives only hints of his American activity,³⁰ though it suggests that it differed little from his work in

W.R. Mead, "The New Israel and the Old: Why Gentile Americans back the Jewish State", in *Foreign Affairs*, July/ August 2008

²⁷ L.V. Crutchfield, *The Origins of Dispensationalism: The Darby Factor*, Lanham, Maryland, University Press America, 1992, p.205

²⁸ E.R. Sandeen, *The Roots of American Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism 1800-1930* Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1970, p.70

²⁹ L.E. Dixon, "The Importance of J.N. Darby and the Brethren Movement in the History of Conservative Theology" in *Christian Brethren Review* Vol.41, 1990, p.45

³⁰ Sandeen, 1970, p.74

Europe, being centred on delivering lectures and reading meetings. He was quite dismayed by what he saw of Christianity in the United States.³¹ Darby was not without success in encouraging the development of Brethrenism in the United States and this occupies a significant chapter in the history of the movement; by the time of his last visit, eighty-eight regular Brethren meetings had been established in the United States.³² However, Darby's impact on a number of individuals outside of Brethren circles was to have a far greater impact on the wider American church.

At the time of Darby's first visits to the United States, Premillennialism was not a part of mainstream American religion, but it was far from unknown. Premillennial views had been expressed by some within the Disciples of Christ,³³ a sect, which like the Brethren, desired to recover the unity of the primitive church.³⁴ A major movement of prophetic expectation had emerged under the leadership of William Miller (1782-1849). Miller was a Baptist and former farmer who had advocated an Historicist³⁵ form of Premillennialism.³⁶ His repeated attempts at predicting the timing of the return of Christ lead to much scorn being poured upon Premillennialism.³⁷ Sandeen

³¹ J.N. Darby wrote in 1862:

Here and in the U.S. the church and the world are even more mixed than even in England, so that the testimony of brethren is more definite and important as far as the sphere goes, and things seem to point to an awakening as to this in the States. I have been invited to more than one point: how the Lord will lead, I know not. In this place there is no very apparent fruit in the meeting.... The American habit of joining a church for respectability makes the church regularly worldly, but there are a good many Christians, but in a dead state.

Letters, volume 1, p.336

³² P.R. Wilkinson, *For Zion's Sake: Christian Zionism and the role of John Nelson Darby*, Milton Keynes, Paternoster, 2007, p.246

³³ Founded between 1804-1832. The movement took some time in forming a distinct identity.

³⁴ R.T. Hughes *The Churches of Christ*, student edition, Westport, Connecticut, Praeger Publishers, 2001, p.10

³⁵ Historicism views the events of prophecy as relating primarily to events in the entire period of church history, as opposed to Preterism, which sees them as fulfilled primarily in the first century and Futurism, which sees them as fulfilled primarily in the future.

³⁶ H.J. Berry, *Seventh-Day Adventists* Lincoln, Nebraska, Back to the Bible, 1987, p.4

³⁷ Sandeen, 1970, p.59

compared Miller to Edward Irving (see chapters two and six); both were pariah-figures who were discredited by their failed prophecies.³⁸ The Millerite movement was similar to the Irvingites in its Historicist approach to prophetic speculation. It differed from British Premillennialism, however, in its lack of interest in the role of the Jews in unfulfilled Bible prophecy.³⁹ The British form of Premillennialism had been imported into America between 1842 and 1844 by a magazine entitled 'The Literalist', a publication which attracted little interest, however.⁴⁰ Credit is undeniably due to Darby for popularising non-Millerite Premillennialism in the United States, that is a system of prophetic interpretation that was futurist, avoided making specific chronological predictions and which expected a restoration of the Jews.

One individual who came into contact with Darby was Dwight L Moody (1837-1899).⁴¹ Moody was after Finney, the most significant American evangelist and revivalist of the 19th century. Moody advocated Premillennialism, though it is uncertain the extent to which his ideas were consistently formulated.⁴² Moody had been brought to England under the aegis of William Pennefather, an Anglican clergyman of Premillennial views.⁴³ Darby and Moody had contact with each other, both in England and the United States.⁴⁴ Moody invited Darby to speak at a number of evangelistic events, but Darby refused because of Moody's Arminian views as to the

³⁸ *ibid*, p.42

Of course, Irving's reputation was arguably damaged not just by his prophecies, but also his heterodox views on the incarnation and his advocacy of speaking in tongues.

³⁹ *Ibid*, p.52

⁴⁰ G.E. Ladd *The Blessed Hope*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Eerdmans, 1956, p.42

⁴¹ JN Darby had met Moody, for he wrote in 1874, "Nor do I doubt Moody's earnestness, for I know the man well." (Letters, vol.2, p.257)

⁴² H.D. Foos, "Moody, Dwight Lyman" in *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, ed. Mal Couch, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Kregel, 1996, p.273

⁴³ I.S. Rennie, "Fundamentalism and North Atlantic Evangelicalism" in *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America and the British Isles and Beyond* ed. M.A. Noll et al, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994, p.135

⁴⁴ Unfortunately, the archives of Moody Bible Institute do not possess any correspondence between the two men.

salvation of man.⁴⁵ Darby considered Moody's evangelistic methods to be worldly.⁴⁶ Moody also came under Darbyite influence through C.H. Mackintosh, a popular Exclusive Brethren writer. Moody was so impressed by Mackintosh's commentaries on the Pentateuch that he purchased all of Mackintosh's writings.⁴⁷ Moody was foremost an evangelist and not a writer of theological works. It is therefore not easy to determine the full extent to which he had accepted Dispensational teachings. He certainly advocated Premillennialism, seeing it as a view that encouraged evangelism and he expected Christ's return to be imminent, suggesting that he also believed in a Pre-Tribulational rapture.⁴⁸

Another individual who came under the influence of Darby was James H Brookes (1837-1897). Brookes was a Presbyterian minister who did much to promote dispensational ideas, particularly through the magazine he edited, *Truth or Testimony for Christ*.⁴⁹ Brookes seems to have had a lasting friendship with Darby.⁵⁰ Darby

⁴⁵ H.A. Ironside, *Historical Sketch of the Brethren Movement* Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan, 1993, p.81

⁴⁶ J.N. Darby wrote in a letter in 1874:

I rejoice and am bound to rejoice in every soul converted- must do so- and saved for ever. Nor do I doubt Moody's earnestness, for I know the man well. I see too that God is using extraordinary means to awaken His sleeping saints, and the different systems are so steeped in darkness, that it is only by such means they can be roused up a little. But I am not carried away by it: as to the result of it as a whole, it will not last. If a soul is converted, it is converted, and that is a good thing, and will last, but no work it produces will last. I fully judge it will foster worldliness in saints; it will foster heresy and false doctrine. This may surprise you, but I am satisfied it is so. And beside this, the work will be superficial. I do not trust myself in my natural dislike to what is excited and dramatic in religion, but I cannot conceal from myself what I have just said.

Letters, vol.2 p.257

⁴⁷ Crutchfield, 1992, p.12

⁴⁸ H.D. Foos, "Moody, Dwight Lyman" in *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, ed. Mal Couch, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Kregel, 1996, p.273

⁴⁹ T.Demy "Brookes, James Hall" in *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, ed. Mal Couch, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Kregel, 1996, p.65

⁵⁰ R.M. Henzel, *Darby, Dualism and Dispensationalism*, Tucson, Arizona, Fenestra, 2003, p.41

referred to a number of 'old school'⁵¹ Presbyterians who were favourably disposed to his teachings⁵² and it is likely that Brookes was of that company.⁵³ Interestingly, Brookes had met Benjamin Wills Newton on his only visit to Europe in 1862.⁵⁴ Brookes taught Darby's doctrine of a Pre-Tribulational rapture.⁵⁵ He also held that the church dispensation was a "dateless timeless period or parenthesis during which the Holy Spirit is gathering out from all nations the elect, who are to be the body and bride of Christ".⁵⁶ Brookes did not give Darby and the Brethren any credit for his ideas (though he did quote Brethren writers, without indicating their denominational background). He did, however, praise the Brethren saying that they were "a people who are on the whole the soundest in faith and most intelligent in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ".⁵⁷

James Brookes was a participant in the Niagara Lake Bible Conferences, which were later described as the Bible Conference movement.⁵⁸ These were annual summer gatherings that were held in various locations in the United States and Canada between 1868 and 1901.⁵⁹ The conferences involved worship, Bible exposition and lectures on missionary work. Moderately Calvinistic in doctrine, they became strongly

⁵¹ 'Old School' Presbyterians in 19th century America defended Calvinist orthodoxy against the developments of the 'New School.'

⁵² J.N. Darby wrote in 1872:

This is American work: some new gatherings round Boston, but I believe of emigrants. The native population is extremely difficult to reach; conscience has little power- activity, organisation, man. In most places grace is hardly known and mostly opposed: a few old school Presbyterians hold it, otherwise I know none- the state of things deplorable.

Letters, vol.2, p.197

⁵³ Sandeen, 1970, p.74

⁵⁴ Sandeen, 1970, p.139

⁵⁵ Demy, p.65

⁵⁶ C.N. Kraus, *Dispensationalism in America: Its rise and Development*, Richmond, Virginia, John Knox, 1958, p.39

⁵⁷ Crutchfield, 1992, p.13

⁵⁸ C.A. Blaising and D.L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Bridgepoint, 1993, p.10

⁵⁹ Sandeen, 1970, p.71

Premillennial in orientation in consequence of the majority of Premillennial speakers. The conferences introduced Dispensational theology to Christians of many denominations.⁶⁰ There was however, no Brethren involvement in the conferences.⁶¹ Darby himself claimed that heretics were in attendance at the conference of 1878.⁶² Darby did not specify who these heretics were, most likely they were annihilationists, a doctrine Darby had found to be common in the United States.

C.I. Scofield

Even more important than Brookes and the Bible Conferences in spreading Dispensational Premillennialism was Cyrus Ingerson Scofield (1843-1921). Scofield was a Congregational minister who had come to adopt Dispensational views. His major contributions to Dispensationalism were three works, a short pamphlet, *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*, a Bible correspondence course and the *Scofield Reference Bible*. The latter is arguably one of the most influential Dispensationalist books ever written. It was a heavily annotated edition of the King James Bible, published by Oxford University. Vern Poythress, a critic of Dispensationalism, wrote "Within this movement, the Scofield Reference Bible contributed more than any other single work

⁶⁰ T.P. Weber, "Niagara Conferences" in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. W. Elwell, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker, 1984, p.775

⁶¹ Sandeen, 1970, p.156

⁶² J.N. Darby wrote in 1879:

Thus in the congress at New York there was the positive good of bringing the coming of the Lord publicly forward; but there were all sorts of heretics there, and persons deliberately hindering the truth in seeking to connect it with the world and the camp- avowing it, if the account is to be believed- leaving out the essential point of the presence of the Holy Ghost.

Letters, vol.2, p.499

to the spread of Dispensationalism in the United States. Because of its widespread use, it has now in effect become a standard.’⁶³

Crutchfield argued that comparisons between the Scofield Bible and Darby’s *New Translation* are unjustified; while Darby’s Bible had many annotations, these were entirely related to textual and translation issues, without providing any doctrinal input, unlike the notes of the Scofield Bible, which provided explanations of Dispensational interpretations of the Biblical texts.⁶⁴

While there is much similarity between the Dispensational theology of Darby and Scofield, there is no evidence that Scofield had read Darby for himself.⁶⁵ However, it is clear from his writings that he had at least indirectly been influenced by Darby. It is possible that Scofield may have picked up some Darbyite theology through Moody, though the fact that Scofield corrected Moody on some doctrinal points⁶⁶ makes this a little doubtful. A more likely influence is James H Brookes. Scofield said of Brookes “During the last twenty years of his life, Dr Brookes was perhaps my most intimate friend and to him I am indebted more than to all other men in the world for the establishment of my faith”.⁶⁷

The influence of Arno Clemens Gabelein (1861-1945)⁶⁸ on Scofield was probably even greater than that of James Brookes. Gabelein was one of the consulting editors to

⁶³ V.S. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists*, New Jersey, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987, p.19

⁶⁴ Crutchfield, 1992, p.8

⁶⁵ *ibid*, p.15

⁶⁶ A.C. Gabelein *The History of the Scofield Reference Bible*, Spokane, Wichita, Living Words Foundation, 1991 reprint, p.26

⁶⁷ Crutchfield, 1992, p.13

⁶⁸ A former Methodist and an evangelist among the Jewish community in New York.

the Scofield Bible and it is probable that he had a major impact on its theology.⁶⁹

Gabelein was open about the influence of Darby on his thought.⁷⁰ Gabelein said in a footnote of *Conflict of the Ages*:

We have special reference here to the mighty men of God, real scholars and at the same time humble men who were used in the recovery of these truths over a hundred years ago in the beginning of the movement known by the name of 'Plymouth Brethren.' The most outstanding of these was John Nelson Darby.⁷¹

Scofield also had other connections with Darbyite influence. A number of wealthy Open Brethren were financial supporters of the Scofield Bible.⁷² While staying in England between 1901 and 1909, Scofield and his wife had fellowship with Open Brethren.⁷³

L.S. Chafer

Scofield developed a teacher-disciple relationship with Lewis Sperry Chafer (1871-1952). Chafer was a Presbyterian minister, who had been much involved in evangelism and who had helped Scofield to found the Philadelphia School of the Bible.⁷⁴ Williams argues that Chafer was not an original thinker, having derived his

⁶⁹ Henzel, p.34

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

⁷¹ A.C. Gabelein, *The Conflict of the Ages*, Spokane, Wichita, Living Words, 1988 reprint, p.62

⁷² Crutchfield, 1992, p.15

⁷³ *ibid.*

⁷⁴ C.A. Blaising "Lewis Sperry Chafer" in *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*, ed. W. Elwell, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker, 1993, p.84

theology from Scofield and Brethren writers.⁷⁵ Chafer was open in acknowledging his huge theological debt to Darby:

It was given to J.N. Darby of England to achieve this distinctive ministry (recovery of doctrines of the church). From the teachings of Darby and his associates, what is known as the Brethren movement sprang; and these highly trained men have produced an expository literature covering the entire sacred text which is not only orthodox and free from misconceptions and disproportionate emphasis, but essays to interpret faithfully the entire field of Bible doctrine- that which theology confined to the Reformation failed to do.⁷⁶

This eulogy to Darby and the Brethren does raise the question of why Chafer and others who shared his views did not join the Brethren or why they did not advocate more of the ecclesiological distinctives of the Brethren. This question is considered below. His contribution to Dispensationalism is in his rigorous systematisation of its theology, exemplified in the eight volumes of his systematic theology.⁷⁷ His other achievement was the establishment of Evangelical Theological Seminary in 1924, later known as Dallas Theological Seminary. The goal of this institution was to train its students in dispensational theology that they might enter mainline denominations. However, this initial goal was largely unsuccessful, as mainline denominations did not welcome ministerial candidates from Dallas Theological Seminary. Nevertheless it became a central focus of the later separatist movement within fundamentalism.⁷⁸ Despite its influence being limited to separatist denominations, Southern Baptists and laity within mainstream denominations, the establishment of the seminary was a major step in the development of American Dispensationalism. Although Moody

⁷⁵ M. Williams *This World is not my Home: The Origins and Development of Dispensationalism*, Fearn, Ross-shire, Christian Focus, 2003, p.23

⁷⁶ L.S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol.4, Dallas, Dallas Seminary Press, 1948, p.37

⁷⁷ L.S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 8 volumes, Dallas, Dallas Seminary Press, 1948

⁷⁸ J.D. Hannah, "Chafer, Lewis Sperry" in *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, ed. Mal Couch, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Kregel, 1996, p.69

Bible Institute was already providing training in Dispensationalism,⁷⁹ the seminary in Dallas gave the movement a more academic foundation. American Dispensationalism now had its own academic seminary, its own writers, its own history. It could no longer be described as a sectarian peculiarity of the Brethren. John Flipse Walvoord (1910-2002), who succeeded Chafer as president of Dallas Theological Seminary and a major American Dispensational theologian said:

The seminary was really a carryover from the Bible institute movement, with emphasis on Bible content. Chafer's goal was to raise this to the seminary level and produce teachers who could go back to the Bible institute and train others. So many of the Bible teachers in that era were self-trained men and Chafer felt the need for gaining respectability in the teaching of the Bible.⁸⁰

The seminary has retained Dispensational teachings in its doctrinal statements. On the subject of dispensations it says:

We believe that the dispensations are stewardships by which God administers His purpose on the earth through man under varying responsibilities. We believe that the changes in the dispensational dealings of God with man depend on changed conditions or situations in which man is successively found with relation to God, and that these changes are the result of the failures of man and the judgments of God. We believe that different administrative responsibilities of this character are manifest in the biblical record, that they span the entire history of mankind, and that each ends in the failure of man under the respective test and in an ensuing judgment from God. We believe that three of these dispensations or rules of life are the subject of extended revelation in the Scriptures, viz., the dispensation of the Mosaic Law, the present dispensation of grace, and the future dispensation of the millennial kingdom. We believe that these are distinct and are not to be intermingled or confused, as they are chronologically successive.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Blaising and Bock, 1993, p.12

⁸⁰ J.D. Hannah, "John F Walvoord" in *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*, ed. W. Elwell, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker, 1993, p.238

⁸¹ Article X, Doctrinal Statement, Dallas Theological Seminary
<http://www.dts.edu/about/doctrinalstatement/>

Similarities and Differences between Darby's Ecclesiology and American Dispensational Ecclesiology

It is necessary to consider how the ecclesiology of the American Dispensationalists differed from that of Darby. It must be noted that much of Darby's ecclesiological thought was maintained. American Dispensationalists followed Darby in distinguishing between the Church and the nation of Israel. According to Charles Ryrie, one of the most well known exponents of recent years, claimed this as the central element of the dispensational system, arguing that "this is probably the most basic theological test of whether or not a person is a dispensationalist, and it is undoubtedly the most practical and conclusive. The one who fails to distinguish Israel and the church consistently will inevitably not hold to dispensational distinctions; and one who does will".⁸² They also followed Darby in identifying the church age as being a parenthesis between God's dealings with Israel that was absent from Old Testament prophecy. On the revelation of the church, Chafer wrote:

Because the concept of the church formed of Jews and Gentiles alike- all of whom are saved and joined together by eternal life- is not found in the Old Testament, only the New Testament gives the divine revelation on this important subject. In the plan of God it was necessary for Christ to come first, to die on the cross, to be raised from the dead and to ascend into heaven. With the day of Pentecost, however, it was possible for God to fulfil His purpose of having a special company of believers disregarding the distinction between Israel and the Gentiles and having their own place in the eternal purpose of God.⁸³

⁸² C.C. Ryrie *Dispensationalism*, Chicago, Moody, 1995, p.39

⁸³ L.S. Chafer, *Major Bible Themes*, revised by J.F. Walvoord, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan, 1974 (originally 1926), p.237

Clarence Larkin, an American Baptist Dispensationalist wrote in 1920:

The "Mystery" was that God was going to form an entirely "New Thing" composed of both "Jew" and "Gentile", to be called the "Church." The purpose of this Dispensation is seen in the "Divine Program" outlined by the Apostle James in his address to the First Council held at Jerusalem (Acts 15:13-18), where he declares that God has visited the Gentiles to "take out of them "A People" for His Name." The purpose of this

The American Dispensationalists do not seem to have adopted Darby's theory of the ruin of the church (see chapter 3). They wrote of apostasy, though the falling away of 2 Thessalonians was primarily seen in a future, rather than a past sense, and so had not yet befallen the church.⁸⁴ Charles Ryrie acknowledges a present dimension to the apostasy, however:

Beyond any question, apostasy is both present and future in the church. It was present when Paul wrote to Timothy, and Paul looked forward to a future great apostasy distinctive enough to be labelled '*the apostasy*.' This present-future concept is similar to that of the present-future antichrist. There were antichrists in the church in John's day, but still he looked forward to *the* coming great Antichrist (1 John 2:18). Apostasy is something that plagues church in every generation, though at the end of the church age *the* great apostasy will come on the scene before the Day of the Lord. Dispensationalists, therefore, are not crying wolf when they speak of the great apostasy or when they may see indications of apostasy in every generation. This is entirely Scriptural.⁸⁵

Darby would have agreed with this present-future view of the apostasy, however, unlike Ryrie, he developed it into a distinct doctrine of apostasy or ruin that had major ecclesiastical implications beyond simply separating from false teachers.

Dispensationalists tended to be hostile to Roman Catholicism; Chafer identified the whore of Babylon of Romans 17 as the Roman Catholic church,⁸⁶ as Darby did.

However, the hostility of American Fundamentalists to Catholicism probably owed little to Darby and more to traditions already present in Protestantism. Chafer and

Dispensation then is not the bringing in of the Kingdom, or the conversion of the world, but the gathering out of an 'elect body', the Church.

Rightly Dividing the Word, New York, Cosimo, 2005, reprint, p.45-46

⁸⁴ Mal Couch et al's entry level work of Dispensational ecclesiology deals with apostasy in a primarily future sense, though it does make reference to theological liberalism (Mal Couch et al, *A Biblical Theology of the Church*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Kregel, 1999, p.107-117)

⁸⁵ Ryrie, 1995, p.140

⁸⁶ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol.4, p.354

Scofield both shared Darby's view that the parables of Matthew 13 revealed in mystery form the corruption of Christendom,⁸⁷ however, this was not developed into a doctrine of ruin. As they did not share Darby's belief in the ruin of the church, the American Dispensationalists were slow in adopting the strategy of separation, with the exception of a few such as A.C. Gabelein, who left the Methodists.⁸⁸ They attempted to oppose liberalism within their denominations, until they came to believe that this course was unsuccessful and then many of them switched to the strategy of forming separate denominations.

One of the most substantial works on ecclesiology by a Dispensationalist is E.D. Radmacher's *What the Church is all about*, which recognises the contribution made by Darby's ecclesiology, but accuses him of being unbalanced in his approach to apostasy in the church, "Although there was evident justification for alarm, it seems that in his reactionism against apostasy in the organised churches he went to the opposite extreme and developed a system that minimized the organisation."⁸⁹

Radmacher was unable to accept the conclusion that the pattern of New Testament church organisation could not be restored in the contemporary church. His strategy in this work is to identify those patterns and to urge that they be applied.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Chafer, *ibid*, p.353, C.I. Scofield *The Old Scofield Study Bible*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1917, p.1015-1016

⁸⁸ Sandeen, 1970, p.163

Methodists were in a minority among the Niagara conference participants. The majority were Calvinist Presbyterians and Episcopalians.

⁸⁹ E.D Radmacher. *What the Church is all about*, Chicago, Moody Press, 1978, p.22

⁹⁰ Radmacher wrote in his conclusion:

This, then, is the doctrine of the nature of the church, both in its universal and in its local aspects, as patterned in the New Testament. Deviation from the pattern can bring nothing but failure. Adherence to it will make known the manifold wisdom of God unto the principalities and powers in the heavenlies (Eph 3:10).

Radmacher, 1978, p.384

Despite the delay in developing a strategy of separation, the charge of separatism has been raised against Dispensationalism and this was seen by some writers as a result of the influence of Darby. This was one of the central arguments of C.B. Bass' critique of Dispensationalism.⁹¹ Bass wrote "Perhaps it is too broad a summary to say that Darby's personality influenced directly the spirit of contemporary Dispensationalism, but certainly the pattern which he set into motion is reflected in it."⁹² Some early Dispensationalists hinted that Darby's influence in that area might not be altogether positive.⁹³ Ryrie defends Dispensationalism against this charge of separatism. He

⁹¹ C.B. Bass, *Backgrounds to Dispensationalism: Its Historical Genesis and Ecclesiastical Implications*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Eerdmans, 1960

⁹² *ibid*, p.63

C.B. Bass also wrote:

It is safe to say that seldom in the history of the church has there been such sharp division over ecclesiastical practice as there was in the Darby movement. The significant fact to note is that these practices grew out of principles in interpretation which form the very essence of Dispensationalism, namely the identification of the blessed hope of the church with a particular chronology of eschatology.

Ibid, p.90

Bass did not present any evidence that splits in the Brethren, let alone in the wider American church, resulted from Dispensational teachings.

Daniel Fuller, another critic of Dispensationalism wrote:

Ignorance is bliss, and it may well be that this popularity (of Dispensationalism) would not be so great if the adherents of this system knew the historical background of what they teach. Few indeed realise that the teaching of Chafer came from Scofield, who in turn got it through the writings of Darby and the Plymouth Brethren.

D.P. Fuller, "The Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism," unpublished ThD thesis, Northern Baptist Seminary, Chicago, 1957, p.136

⁹³ Scofield wrote "I gather that the Brethren are emphatic for separation- with their idea of which Mrs. Scofield and I are not in accord." (Crutchfield, p.15)

Those who identify Dispensationalism with separatism overlook Scofield's own denial that he favoured separatism.

Chafer wrote "Even the Plymouth Brethren movement which started with such high Biblical ideas and with the fullest recognition of the great unifying factors, specially the one Body of Christ, has not been able to save itself from many unhappy divisions with attending bitterness and strife; nor are these

argued firstly, that sometimes schisms and separations could be justified⁹⁴ and secondly that there has never been a schism over the issue of Dispensational teachings⁹⁵ (though there have been schisms over Premillennialism, which is of course a central tenet of Dispensationalism). Ryrie's defence of the necessity of separation in certain circumstances reveals the quite different nature of his separatism to that of Darby's. Darby saw separation as a central part of his ecclesiological system. Christendom was ruined and thus it was absolutely necessary to meet in a principle of separation from that apostate body. For Ryrie, separation is simply a response to a set of circumstances that occur in the history of the church. Christendom

brethren inclined to re-unite when conscious of their great wrong in separations." (Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol.4, p.148)

⁹⁴ Ryrie wrote:

One can be a schismatic and still remain *within* a group, which does not make his schism right simply because he did not break away from the group. And one can be a separatist and break away from a group *and be right*.

To say that ecclesiastical separatism is always wrong is to condemn some of the most beneficial movements of church history. To try to classify the Reformation as "an eviction" in order not to have to classify it as a separatist movement is wishful thinking. The plain, unvarnished fact is that Martin Luther broke with the Roman Catholic church and formed a new fellowship of believers. Therefore, he was a separatist, but he vigorously denied that he was a schismatic. A man can abhor schism and be separatist- as many of the Reformers did and were.

C.C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, Chicago, Moody, 1995, p.72-73

⁹⁵ C.C. Ryrie wrote:

The second premise underlying the charges against the divisive nature of Dispensationalism is that it alone, or chiefly has been the cause for divisions in the church. In none of the examples just cited from history was Dispensationalism a factor in the separation. But, someone may say, those examples were not from the recent modern period when Dispensationalism had gained some prominence in theological discussion. That is true, but even in the contemporary scene Dispensationalism has not been an issue at all in many of the separatist movements....The separatist Baptist groups did not originally separate from the larger denominations because of Dispensationalism. The issue was modernism and that the symptoms of modernism were departures from very basic doctrines, such as the Virgin Birth and the deity of Christ. Even in this present hour the only separatist group that officially makes Dispensationalism a part of its doctrinal basis is the Independent Fundamental Churches of America (although modernism, not Dispensationalism was the original cause of the separation of churches in this fellowship).

Dispensationalism, Chicago, Moody, 1995, p.73-74

as a whole system is not identified by Ryrie as being in a state of ruin, though particular bodies and fellowships might be.

Perhaps the largest influence of Darby's ruin theory was on the idea of dispensations themselves. Dispensationalism presents a framework of history in which humanity consistently fails in each area of responsibility he is assigned. Chafer wrote on this pattern:

Each dispensation therefore begins with man being divinely placed in a new position of privilege and responsibility, and each closes with the failure of man resulting in righteous judgment from God. While there are certain abiding facts such as the holy character of God which are of necessity the same in every age, there are varying instructions and responsibilities which are, as to their application, limited to a given period.⁹⁶

Here Chafer introduces the idea of dispensational responsibility and failure. The idea of dispensational responsibility was developed by Darby in expounding his theory of the church's ruin. This is seen most clearly in the paper *The Apostasy of Successive Dispensations*,⁹⁷ in which Darby compared the failure of the present dispensations to the present church age. Darby wrote:

The details of the history connected with these dispensations brings out many most interesting displays, both of the principles and patience of God's dealings with the evil and failure of man; and of the workings by which He formed faith on His own thus developed perfections. But the dispensations themselves all declare some leading principle or interference of God, some condition in which He has placed man, principles which in themselves are everlastingly sanctioned of God, but in the course of those dispensations placed responsibly in the hands of man for the display and recovery of what he was, and the bringing in Him to whom the glory of them all rightly belonged. It is not my

⁹⁶ Chafer, *Major Bible Themes*, p.127

⁹⁷ J.N. Darby *The Apostasy of the Successive Dispensations* (1833) in *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.1124-130

intention to enter into any great detail, but to shew simply how, in every instance there was total and immediate failure as regarded man, however the patience of God might tolerate and carry on by grace the dispensation in which man thus failed at the outset; and further there is no instance of the restoration of a dispensation afforded us, though there might be partial revivals of it through faith.⁹⁸

Thus Darby's notion of the repeated historical moral failure of man was adopted by American Dispensationalism. Darby's dispensational system was inspired by his conviction that the church age was in a state of failure. This ecclesiastical context was lost almost completely in American fundamentalism. While there was belief in apostasy, the failure of the church was not defined in the ecclesiastical terms of Darby. Chafer identified the failure of the present dispensation in the failure of historic missionary activity and the present-future apostasy of Thessalonians.⁹⁹ Darby would have agreed with that assessment, but having advocated a radical theory of the ruin of the church, he went further and as explained in chapter 3, he saw a complete loss of any recognisable local church. Chafer came close to using these terms. He said of the state of the church, "The true church is not divided, nor could it be; yet the visible church is a broken and shattered attempt at the manifestation of a scriptural ideal."¹⁰⁰ This seems remarkably similar to Darby's own teaching of a ruined church. Yet the difference between this and Darby's ruin theory reveal the importance in Darby's ecclesiology of very specific terminology. Chafer's statement is quite different from Darby's ruin theory simply because Chafer insists on a distinction

⁹⁸ *ibid*, p.124-126

⁹⁹ Chafer wrote:

Under grace, however, failure also was evident as grace produced neither worldwide Acceptance of Christ nor a triumphant church. Scripture in fact predicted that there Would be apostasy within the professing church (1 Tim 4:1-3, 2 Tim 3:1-13, 2 Pet 2-3, Jude). Although God is fulfilling His purpose in calling out a people to His name from Jew and Gentile, the professing but unsaved portion of the church left behind at the Rapture will be judged in the period between the Rapture and Christ's coming to set up His kingdom (Matt. 24:1-26, Rev 6-19).

Chafer, *Major Bible Themes*, p.135

¹⁰⁰ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol.4, p.149

between the visible and invisible church. Chapter 3 argued that Darby managed to retain something of the visible/ invisible church distinction, nevertheless his rejection of those terms was fundamental to his ecclesiology. If the visible church is ontologically distinct from the invisible church, then it is not of such fundamental consequence that it is in a state of ruin, however much that division might be lamented. For Darby, external unity of the visible and invisible body of Christ was not a fact at present, but had been a fundamental facet of the church, for Chafer external unity was not to be so expected because the visible church was ontologically distinct from the invisible body of Christ. Chafer saw no need to seek any external unity in the church by practical measures, but only by a spirit of love for believers.¹⁰¹ Having rejected attempts to establish an external unity of the church, it is unsurprising that most American Dispensationalists favoured the independence of congregations.¹⁰² No

¹⁰¹ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol.4, p.149

Robert Lightner, a contemporary Dispensationalist writer, in charting the history of ecclesiology also seemed uncomfortable with ecclesiologies that emphasise the external unity of the church:

Augustine, in his City of God, gave added impetus to the stress on the unity of the visible church, enlarging on Cyprian's concept. The result was a confusion of the scriptural teaching on the church and the churches. As we shall see later, this same confusion characterizes the modern ecumenical movement.

R.P. Lightner, *Handbook of Evangelical Theology*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Kregel, 1995, p.219

¹⁰² Robert Saucy, a Dispensationalist and professor at Talbot Seminary wrote "In viewing the authority of the local church (in the New Testament), we discover that not only was each church organizationally autonomous, but this authority rested with the people who elected ministers and chose their own delegates and messengers". (R.L Saucy, *The Church in God's Program*, Chicago Moody, 1972, p.117).

Robert Lightner writes:

There is in the New Testament no hierarchy with authority over the local church. Each of the churches referred to were completely independent, self-sustaining, and self-perpetuating. Each local church chose its own leadership. Each one conducted its own affairs and made its own decisions. Each one also, of course, was to allow Christ to be the head and the Holy Spirit the teacher. Voluntary fellowship between churches and joint efforts to promote the work of the Lord was encouraged in the New Testament.

R.P. Lightner, *The Nature and Purpose of the Church in The Fundamentals for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Mal Couch, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Kregel, 2000. p.336

L.S. Chafer, being a Presbyterian, was an exception to this tendency. He pointed out that while the Bible did not indicate the necessity of federation of churches in governmental unity, it did not oppose them either (Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol.4, p.152).

doubt this had much to do with the influence of Baptist ecclesiology. A dispensational fundamentalist church manual, edited by the popular writer, Mal Couch, says:

The history and development of Roman Catholicism is a lesson in how central power and authority destroys the autonomy over local assemblies. It also dulls the local leadership as to theological and doctrinal issues. Authority is automatically given over to the hierarchy so that the local elders and pastors appear to cease thinking and leading.

If church rules and doctrine are all decided in central locations, you have denominational control. If the church is expected to use only the curriculum of that central authority, you have denominationalism. If the central authority tells the local church who they may hire for pastor, or what seminary he must graduate from, you have denominational control. If the central authority dictates the Sunday church readings, you have denominational control.¹⁰³

Like Darby, Couch et al believe that denominations are a problem and that there is failure in Christendom, but unlike Darby, they see the solution in the independence of congregations.

The distinction between the visible and invisible church leads Dispensationalists to advocate a doctrine of the local church, a doctrine not far removed from the Reformed idea of the 'marks of a true church.' Robert Lightner a contemporary Dispensationalist defined a local church in the following lines:

A local church is a group of professed believers in the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour, organised with the New Testament offices of elder and deacon, observing New Testament ordinances, united in covenant to engage in the public worship of God, educate and edify the members with the Word of God, and evangelise the lost.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Mal Couch et al, *A Pastor's Manual on Doing Church*, Fort Worth, Texas, 21st Century Press, 2002, p.56

This definition would have been quite unacceptable to Darby. Firstly, for Darby, a true local church would embrace all members of a body of Christ in a locality, unless they had been excommunicated. A Christian in Southport would be a member of the local church in Southport, even if he were only visiting for a few days. Secondly, Darby would have viewed the mention of offices as superfluous. He had argued that elders were absent from the Corinthian, Roman and some other New Testament churches. Thirdly, the definition, in particular the clause ‘united in covenant’ suggests the practice of ‘forming new churches’, which Darby denied was possible in a true sense in the church’s ruined state.¹⁰⁵ To simplify the matter, Lightner has defined the local church in terms of the things a church does or should do, Darby argued that a group of Christians doing those things does not make a church.

American Dispensational ecclesiological praxis was Patternist. It looked to the New Testament to provide patterns for how to organize the contemporary church.¹⁰⁶ This is reflected in Lightner’s definition of the local church, quoted above (“organized with the NT offices of elder and deacon”). Unlike Darby, nearly all American Dispensationalists believed in the necessity of eldership in contemporary churches

¹⁰⁴ R.P. Lightner, *The Nature and Purpose of the Church in The Fundamentals for the Twentieth Century*, ed. Mal Couch, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Kregel, 2000, p.335

¹⁰⁵ J.N. Darby, *On the Formation of Churches* (1840) in *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.138-155

¹⁰⁶ Robert Saucy indicated his dissatisfaction with Patternism somewhat in his work on ecclesiology:

This is not a plea to reproduce in detail the New Testament churches. From the picture we get of some of them, it would be preferable to be different. Times have changed and so have the circumstances; nevertheless, to hold to the revealed Word of God as the norm for the principles of the church and to observe the course on which the church was set in its foundational period is the only hope of building on a firm base.

R.L. Saucy, *The Church in God’s Program*, Chicago, Moody, 1972, p.8

At least in the area of church government, Saucy seems to assume that the New Testament presents norms to be followed.

and assumed that there was legitimate power to ordain them.¹⁰⁷ Darby would probably have criticised these writers for not presenting a clear explanation of how elders could be ordained in the absence of apostles, a question they do not address.¹⁰⁸

Factors that may have affected the deviation from Darbyism

It is necessary to consider possible reasons why the American Dispensationalists remained in their denominations and why later, when many did separate, they formed denominations that deviated little from their parent denominations in ecclesiological praxis. One explanation that seems very inadequate is the suggestion of Ward that the wide acceptance of Darby's eschatology in American churches without ecclesiastical separation was due to the weakness of the Reformed tradition in the United States, in contrast with Europe.¹⁰⁹ The significance of Reformed theology being its non-Millennial eschatology and its unified system of covenants for understanding redemptive history in a way that was radically distinct from Dispensationalism. The problem with Ward's suggestion is that it is doubtful that the Reformed tradition was weaker in the United States. It is true that Charles Finney and the New School Presbyterians had caused much deviation from Reformed orthodoxy in the United States,¹¹⁰ nevertheless it is doubtful that such deviations represented a greater threat to Calvinism than theological developments in Europe or competing Arminian, Liberal or High Church theologies in Britain. It is quite possible that contrary to Ward's

¹⁰⁷ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol.4, p.268, *Major Bible Themes*, p.268 Couch et al, 1999, p.175, Lightner, 1995, p.242-243, Saucy, 1972, p.105

¹⁰⁸ Robert Saucy argues that elders possess the power to ordain, but he does not provide an in-depth defence of this assertion (R.L. Saucy, 1972, p.164).

¹⁰⁹ J.P. Ward, *The Eschatology of J.N. Darby*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 1976, p.4

¹¹⁰ W.A. Hoffecker, *New School Theology in Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. W. Elwell, Grand Rapids. Michigan, Baker, 1984, p.767

argument, the Reformed tradition was in fact stronger in the United States than in Europe.¹¹¹

One explanation that would explain patterns of Dispensational ecclesiology in the later period of its development would be the gradual independence of the tradition. Moody, Scofield and Chafer may have been influenced by the writings of Darby and Brethren pamphlets, but once American Dispensationalists had their own reference Bible, Chafer's eight-volume of systematic theology, seminaries at which to learn their doctrine, there was less need for them to turn back to the literature of the Brethren. In developing their own canon of doctrinal works and means of instruction in them, the American Dispensationalists had established the independence of their tradition. Thus, American Dispensationalists might well be unaware that their theological system originated with John Nelson Darby and would be quite unaware of the peculiarities of that system beyond what had been adopted by its American exponents. This of course does not explain why the earlier American Dispensationalists were selective in their use of Darby, merely why the development of the tradition did not change its course.

It might be suggested that the American fundamentalists rejected Darby's ecclesiology because they found it incoherent. This is unlikely. Firstly, because dispensational writing on ecclesiology gives little evidence of engagement with Darby's thought. Secondly, although there are elements within Darby's ecclesiology that do show some incoherence, such as his doctrine of ruin, his distinction between house and body and his dualistic hermeneutics, there are other elements which do not

¹¹¹ The Pilgrim Fathers of the America were Congregationalists and Presbyterians were a part of the American religious mainstream in the 19th century, leaving aside the presence of immigrants of continental Reformed background.

have the same incoherence, such as his stance on eldership, his synthesis of unity and separation and his advocacy of open worship. Furthermore, this explanation does not explain why the American fundamentalists also rejected the Open Brethren model of ecclesiology. The Open Brethren shared with the American Dispensationalists a patternist approach to ecclesiology, yet also had many elements, such as open ministry in common with Darby's ecclesiology.¹¹²

Another explanation must be the difference of concerns that lead many conservative Christians in the United States to adopt Dispensationalism. Darby's concerns at the beginning of the Brethren movement were fundamentally ecclesiastical. Later after 1849, he wrote many polemical works against liberal ideas,¹¹³ but in the 1830s, Biblical criticism had made less impact on Britain and the pressing issue was the state of the professing church. In Darby's view, the established church was worldly, the dissenters were narrow and an even more open apostasy in Catholicism dominated the continent. This analysis of the ecclesiastical situation fuelled the development of Darby's dispensational system. In contrast, the American Dispensationalists had concerns that were unrelated to ecclesiology. The American Dispensationalists' apocalyptic expectations were prompted by a world that was changing. These changes were coming from outside the church, rather than from within it; the American Civil War, the increase in immigration from Europe which threatened to weaken the Protestant hegemony, the secularisation of universities¹¹⁴ and finally and most importantly the entrance of liberal theology into America. Dispensationalism offered them an eschatology which lacked the weakness of Millerism in its tendency to make

¹¹² Neatby described the Open Brethren as "a kind of incomplete Darbyism" (Neatby, 1901, p.285).

¹¹³ For instance-

Dialogues on the Essays and Reviews, (1862) in *Collected Writings*, vol.9, p.1-355

Dr Colenso and the Pentateuch, (1834) in *Collected Writings*, vol.23, p.82-114

¹¹⁴ Marsden, 1991, p.14-15

failed predictions¹¹⁵ and which avoided the apparently unrealistic optimism of Postmillennialism.¹¹⁶

Another explanation might be that ecclesiology was only of minor concern to American Dispensationalists. R.A. Torrey (1856-1928), an extremely influential Dispensational fundamentalist wrote a work *What the Bible Teaches*,¹¹⁷ providing hundreds of Bible quotations that supported propositions about doctrine. Remarkably, none of the propositions dealt directly with the subject of the church. The Dispensationalists were concerned to oppose modernism and to teach their new eschatological system; teaching about the church was a secondary matter. This downplaying of ecclesiology had ramifications for their strategy. The American Dispensationalists were keen to foster greater fellowship between conservatives of differing denominations. Blaising and Bock see a distinct form of evangelical ecumenicity in American Dispensationalism:

What was lost in Brethrenism was pursued anew in the American Bible Conference Movement. But it required a different vision of the church. While the Brethren had focused their attention on the local church, the leaders of the Bible conferences sought to draw out the practical significance of the universal church, that one body of Christ which transcended local churches and denominations. The Bible conference was a visible, tangible Christian communion based solely on the reality of the universal church. It could not and did not try to replace local church communion and ministry.¹¹⁸

Blaising has probably not fully understood Darby. Darby did not focus his attention on the local church so much as attempt to revision the local church in the light of the

¹¹⁵ Sandeen, p.59

¹¹⁶ Poythress, p.19

¹¹⁷ R.A. Torrey *What the Bible Teaches: Over 50 basic Bible doctrines explained*, London, Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1982 reprint (originally 1898)

¹¹⁸ Blaising and Bock, 1993, p.17

doctrine of the universal church. Nevertheless, Blaising has identified a significant aspect of American Dispensational ecclesiology that is sometimes overlooked, particularly by critics who emphasise the separatist aspect of American Fundamentalism. Blaising goes on to explain the importance of parachurch ministries within the fundamentalist movement and within evangelicalism. The emerging fundamentalist movement became centred not on denominations (those came only in the Thirties, before then the old denominations were satisfactory to the fundamentalists.) but on the interdenominational Bible schools and institutes, most notably, Moody Bible Institute, Philadelphia School of the Bible and Dallas Theological Seminary. These institutions formed the infrastructure of the fundamentalist movement and were central to its organisation and mobilisation¹¹⁹. Williams, considering Dispensationalism from a far more critical perspective, argues that the Dispensational view of the church as an heavenly body, disconnected with God's ordinary dealings in history lead to a de-emphasis on the visible church:

What we see in the Dispensationalism of Scofield and Chafer is a fully spiritualised notion of the church as the body of Christ....The church of Christ is a spiritual community which neither affects nor is itself qualified by its pilgrimage in the world...Because the Christian's existence is metaphysically separated from the world, it only stands to reason that once that relationship is effected with Christ it cannot be qualified by the believer's this-worldly experience.¹²⁰

The church is thus seen not as an organised institution on earth, but rather a collection of individuals who are spiritually united to Christ on an ethereal plane that is separated from earthly realities. Williams goes on to argue that this Dispensational

¹¹⁹ D.G. Hart, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism: Conservative Protestantism in the Age of Billy Graham*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker, 2004, p.115

¹²⁰ Williams, 2003, p.70

ethereal ecclesiology is only a more radical development of trends that were already present in Evangelicalism:

The dispensationalist de-emphasis on the 'visible' church is typical of evangelical ecclesiology in general. From the time of George Whitefield on, American evangelicalism has tended to pit the individual believer's association with Christ against the historical, creedal, and institutional. It is often the case that the distinction between 'visible' and 'invisible' is thought of in terms of a neo-Platonic distinction between heavenly and earthly. Thus the visible church is the cultic-ecclesiastical-institutional manifestation of the people of God, and the invisible church is, well, invisible.¹²¹

In his assessment of Dispensational ecclesiology, Williams says little about Darby and the Brethren. This is interesting, because Darby's ecclesiology is radically different to Williams' interpretation of the ecclesiology of Scofield and Chafer. Given that Williams' assessment of Scofield and Chafer does not seem to be incorrect, it seems that the Dispensational idea of the church as the heavenly body of Christ is open to two possible interpretations. That of Darby, which saw the visible church as the Body of Christ on earth and was therefore committed to external unity and rigorous purity or that of American Dispensationalists who insisted on a radical separation of the visible and invisible church, with a resulting under-emphasis on ecclesiological praxis and an ambivalent attitude to denominations. For American Dispensationalists, the doctrine of the Body of Christ was a mandate not for separatism, but for interdenominational co-operation and fellowship (within the limits of their doctrinal orthodoxy). Furthermore, it has been argued that American Christians tended to take a far more positive view of denominations than was characteristic of European Christians. George Beddel argues that Americans took a democratic view of

¹²¹ *ibid.*

denominations, seeing them as 'sanctified competition', hence they were not in themselves an obstacle to a spirit of unity.¹²²

It is also necessary to appreciate the effects of the strong evangelical hegemony in American society. In Britain, Evangelicals, whether in the established or dissenting church, were one among a number of competing forms of Christianity. In the United States, the whole Protestant culture had been affected by the revivals of the 18th and 19th century. Thus, it was possible for American fundamentalists, unlike the Brethren of Britain and Europe to look back with nostalgia at a predominantly Evangelical culture. American Fundamentalism, despite its otherworldliness, Dispensationalism maintained its links with the ideal of a Christian society. This had the effect of weakening any notion of a ruined church and also allowed the possibility of political involvement on the part of fundamentalist Christians, even though some of the more radically separatist fundamentalists rejected that course until the 1980s. Williams says of American Dispensationalists:

While they stood four-square against the course of modern American society, they were at the same time affirming ideals for society which they felt had been lost by the development of autonomous culture... Scofield and Chafer were attempting to preserve notion of American society that they saw as being under attack at all times. As they saw it, God-fearing Protestant America had fallen under the domination of forces that sought her defilement and ruin. The same men who preached a radically otherworldly message of cultural renunciation also spoke in favour of doing what they regarded as good and moral things.¹²³

Thus, the cultural circumstances of American Dispensationalists prevented them from moving in the sectarian direction of the Brethren and enabled them to make alliances

¹²² G. Beddel et al, *Religion in America*, New York, Macmillan, 1982, p.9

¹²³ Williams, p.56

with conservative Protestants who took a different view of eschatology. This also made the traditional praxis of their denominations more acceptable. This accommodation of American culture by Dispensational fundamentalists may be seen in the tendency of many fundamentalists to engage in politics, thus rejecting Darby's rigid insistence on a total separation from the world. Certainly, many fundamentalists followed Darby in rejecting political engagement. The early Dispensationalist magazine *Our Hope*¹²⁴ and the Baptist preacher John Rice took this apolitical stance.¹²⁵ However, the evangelist Billy Sunday¹²⁶ and the founder of the Bible Presbyterian denomination, Carl McIntire promoted Right-wing politicians.¹²⁷ In the late Twentieth century, Jerry Falwell, the television evangelist, established a broad coalition of conservative political activists, thus disavowing the apolitical stance of his mentor, John Rice.¹²⁸

Conclusion

Although Dispensationalism was introduced to the United States by Darby and the Brethren, it rapidly became an independent tradition within America that played a major role within the events of the Fundamentalist movement in the twentieth century and the early twenty-first century. American Dispensationalism followed Darby in its insistence on the distinction between Israel and the church and that the church was an heavenly body, but it interpreted the implications of these in such a way as to develop a radically different ecclesiastical praxis from that of the Brethren, one that was characterised by interdenominational co-operation and fellowship and an ambivalent

¹²⁴ Marsden, 1980, p.144

¹²⁵ Marsden, 1991, p.101

¹²⁶ *ibid*, p.100

¹²⁷ *ibid*, p.101

¹²⁸ *ibid*.

attitude to denominations. This deviation may be explained by the differing circumstances that prompted the American interest in Dispensationalism and by the cultural circumstances in which they found themselves. Darby has been blamed for leading American fundamentalism in a separatist direction, however, in fact this was a late development in the history of the movement which occurred long after the dispensational influence of Darby had been absorbed.

The development of American Dispensationalism indicates that it is quite possible for Darby's eschatology to be separated from the practical aspects of his ecclesiology.¹²⁹ However, this required a downplaying of the importance of ecclesiology beyond the basic truths of the church's nature. Had American Dispensationalists placed more emphasis on the local church as an expression or reflection of the one Body of Christ, they might well have had to move in a similar direction to the Brethren who saw the need for some realisation of the external unity of the church and radical separation.

It must be asked whether Darby could be charged with leading American fundamentalism in an altogether sectarian direction. It is certainly true that Darby introduced to American Protestantism teaching that can be distinguished on several points from what the majority of Christians have believed. However, it seems doubtful whether the doctrines of Dispensationalism are any more harmful than

¹²⁹ Sandeen wrote:

The emotional level found in the literature attacking the Brethren would be difficult to match in any age, though it must be admitted, much of it was written by disenchanted or excommunicated Darbyite disciples. Yet the particular set of millenarian doctrines enunciated by Darby escaped this censure. The eschatological sections of Darby's theology seemed to exist as free elements in the religious atmosphere and were welcomed or banished according to criteria of verification that took no notice of the putative source. For whatever reason, the association of Darby with Dispensationalism was not enough to destroy its attractiveness for non-Plymouth Brethren.

Sandeen, 1970, p.90

Wesley's teaching on sanctification or Luther's doctrine of the Lord's Supper. Perhaps Dispensationalist eschatology may have lead some American Christians to be strongly supportive of the state of Israel. However, this is not an inevitable consequence of dispensational views. Darby would probably have considered the more overt political support for Israel shown by some Christians today as a symptom of worldliness and as a preparation for a coming Jewish antichrist.¹³⁰ Furthermore, as mentioned above, there is evidence that American public support for the state of Israel has deeper roots than Twentieth century fundamentalism and is not necessarily religious in character.

This chapter has argued that Darby can in no way be charged with leading American fundamentalists towards separatism. The first generation of American fundamentalists who were most familiar with Darby had no interest in separatism, regardless of Darby's disposition towards it. When American fundamentalism finally moved towards separatism, it was because of their opposition to liberalism, rather than because of their inclination to Dispensationalism. While Darby might have offered them the example of separatism, it is doubtful that his influence played a major part in leading them in that direction. What Dispensationalism did offer American fundamentalism was a set of teaching that transcended denominational barriers. A Dispensationalist Presbyterian had much in common with a Dispensationalist Baptist. The Niagara Bible Conferences and other parachurch activities provided a sphere in which fellowship could be enjoyed by like-minded Christians of many denominations. To a large extent this element of parachurch fellowship continues in the wider Evangelical movement, even after its move away from fundamentalism.

¹³⁰ Darby expected the antichrist of prophecy to be a Jewish power (*Enquiry as to the Antichrist of Prophecy* (1849) in *Collected Writings*, vol.5, p.221).

Having outlined Darby's ecclesiology in detail and having compared it to its immediate successor in American Dispensationalism, the next chapter will examine the relationship between Darby's ecclesiology and other contemporary movements in ecclesiology.

Chapter 6: Darby's Ecclesiology in its Nineteenth Century Context

Introduction

This chapter examines the ways in which Darby's ecclesiology related to other significant ecclesiological movements in 19th century Britain. Among those who have traced the history of the Brethren, William Blair Neatby set the historical context of that movement writing:

Developing side by side with the three great movements of the last two thirds of the nineteenth century, Brethrenism was linked with them all- with the Evangelical, with the High Church, and strange as it may seem, with the Broad Church- by important affinities; and yet it retained unimpaired the intense individuality impressed on it almost from the first by one powerful genius; and it challenges attention now as furnishing a fourth independent conception of the church- a conception which, comparatively narrow as the extent of its acceptance may be, does nevertheless, by the immense force of its intensive influence, deserve consideration side by side with its more famous competitors.¹

In this passage Neatby alluded to the fact that the Brethren were related in different ways to a number of ecclesiastical movements in the nineteenth century. The nineteenth century was a time of major transition in the history of the churches of Britain. The repeal of the Tests and Corporation Act in 1828, a change that relieved dissenters of their civil disabilities, allowing them to take public office, and the emancipation of Catholics in 1829 ended Hooker's conception of the church and state

¹ W.B. Neatby, *A History of the Plymouth Brethren*, Stoke-On-Trent, Tentmaker Publications, 2002 re-print (Originally 1901), p.15.

This work is the first published history of the Brethren. Originally published in 1901.

forming one society.² While the Church of England remained the established religion, it no longer had the privileged place that it had been previously guaranteed. Religion had changed from being a determining factor in the shape of society to becoming an individual and voluntary choice.³ This shift in the nature of British Christianity posed a major ecclesiological problem. During this period many members of the Church of England, such as John Nelson Darby and others in the Brethren had a crisis of faith in the ecclesiology of the established church. Some, such as the Calvinist Joseph Charles Philpot (1802-1869)⁴ became Baptists, others like John Henry Newman (1801-1890) joined the Roman Catholic Church.⁵ The nature of the church was no longer clear, nor was its relation to society. In varying ways, three separate movements attempted to provide what they considered to be an ecclesiology relevant to the needs of their day. These movements were Pan-Evangelicalism, Irvingism and Tractarianism. It is part of the argument of this chapter that the ecclesiology of John Nelson Darby was developed out of common themes within these three movements.

The final part of this chapter will assess how Darby's interaction with his opponents shaped the development of his ecclesiology. A number of ways are suggested in which opponents may have given rise to some developments in Darby's ecclesiology.

² A.R. Vidler, *The Church in an Age of Revolution*, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, Penguin, 1971, p.45

³ O. Chadwick, "Great Britain and Europe" in 'The Oxford History of the Church' ed. J. McManners, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993, p.350

⁴ J.C. Philpot was a fellow of Worcester College and became a curate at Stradhampton before seceding from the Church of England in 1835. He joined the Gospel Standard Baptists, a rigidly Calvinistic denomination, becoming editor of their magazine.

⁵ T. Grass, "The Church's Ruin and Restoration: The Development of Ecclesiology in the Plymouth Brethren and the Catholic Apostolic Church 1825-1866", unpublished PhD thesis, King's College, London, 1997, p.19

The Pan-Evangelical Movement

The Evangelical movement arguably began in the eighteenth century through the work of the preachers John Wesley and George Whitefield. It included those within both the established church and dissenting bodies. Bebbington identified four characteristics of Evangelicalism, conversionism, activism, biblicism and crucicentrism.⁶ The revivalists professed what became known as the 'catholic spirit', meaning a desire for fellowship with all Christians.⁷ Wesley and Whitefield deplored sectarian hostility between Christians. While both Anglicans, they were not concerned to convert dissenters to their ecclesiastical position.

The evangelical revival of the 18th century led to the formation of a distinct evangelical party within the Church of England. These Anglicans viewed the church as embracing all who were converted and regenerated believers⁸. Hence, while they might disagree with the secession of the dissenting bodies, they could not consistently condemn them. Most evangelical Anglican clergy did not in principle object to preaching in nonconformist chapels,⁹ indicating their desire for a wider association with all Protestant Christians. During this period of evangelical enthusiasm, many non-denominational religious organisations were formed, such as

⁶ D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, London, Unwin Hyman, 1989, p.3

We might challenge Bebbington's four characteristics as a definition of Evangelicalism. They are somewhat vague and a little too broad to represent any theological system. We might also question whether Evangelicalism was a new movement emerging in the 18th century and not a continuation of the theology of the Reformers. However, they are useful in identifying the common features of a loose, but clearly identifiable movement that began in the eighteenth century.

⁷ R.H. Martin *Evangelicals United: Evangelical Stirrings in Pre-Victorian Britain 1795-1830*, New Jersey, Scarecrow Press, 1983, p.3

⁸ Martin, 1982, p.16

⁹ Neatby, 1901, p.42

the *Religious Tract Society*, the *London Missionary Society* and the *British and Foreign Bible Society*,¹⁰ all of which endorsed a broad based ecclesiology, which was beyond traditional denominational lines. The re-emergence of Roman Catholicism after its legal emancipation in 1829 led to the formation of the *Evangelical Alliance* in 1846, which encouraged further co-operation between Evangelical Anglicans and dissenters¹¹.

This Evangelical ecumenicalism was not without weaknesses. There were theological tensions between the various factions of Evangelicals over the issue of election and predestination, as well as over the mode of baptism, the nature of the Lord's Supper and the right means of church government.¹² The tension over predestination was partially solved by the dominance of moderate Calvinism amongst Evangelicals. More problematic was the tension between Anglicans and dissenters over the relation between state and church. Many dissenters at times called for the disestablishment of the Church of England, to which the Evangelical Anglicans were firm in their commitment.¹³ The French Revolution also weakened the sense of fellowship between them, as many dissenters were sympathetic to revolutionary and radical feeling, in contrast to the conservatism of the evangelical Anglicans.¹⁴ There was a continuing anti-pan-evangelical tendency amongst the dissenters. Many Baptists were proud of being Baptists and had no desire for greater fellowship with Anglicans or other dissenting bodies.¹⁵

¹⁰ Vidler, p.38

¹¹ Chadwick, 1993, p.382

¹² Martin, 1983, p.6 See also Bebbington, 1989 on this topic.

¹³ Grass, 1997, p.19

¹⁴ Martin, 1983, p.27

¹⁵ *ibid*, p.72

A more fundamental weakness in the pan-evangelical movement was its failure to articulate an ecclesiology that could unite it. While the Pan-Evangelicals saw a basis for their common unity in the doctrine of one invisible church, there was no engagement with the phenomena of the disunited visible church. There was little attempt to critically deal with the differences that set apart Anglicans and the various dissenting bodies¹⁶. There was a powerful tendency toward individual endeavour, rather than corporate identity and action among the Evangelicals. This was epitomised in Anglican Evangelical employment of lay workers and in their flexible approach to church order.¹⁷ It was also encapsulated later in the century, by the famous Baptist preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon when he wrote:

We are always talking about the church doing this and that today – what is the church? I believe there is a great deal too much said, both of good and bad, about that abstraction; the fact is, we are individuals. The church is only the aggregation of individuals, and if any good is to be done, it must be performed by individuals.¹⁸

This abandonment of any corporate notion of the church seems scarcely worthy of the word ecclesiology. That no ecclesiology developed to sustain ecclesiastical developments in Evangelicalism should not be a surprise given the theological climate of nineteenth century Britain. There was very little systematic theology during this period.¹⁹ Unlike the Puritans, the Evangelical revivalists attached little importance to

¹⁶ D. Beales, *From Castlereagh to Gladstone 1815-1885*, London, Thomas Nelson, 1969, p.73

¹⁷ Bebbington, 1989, p.10

¹⁸ M. Hopkins, *Nonconformity's Romantic Generation: Evangelical and Liberal Theologies in Victorian England*, Milton Keynes, Paternoster, 2004, p.149

¹⁹ *ibid*, p.63

There were some exceptions such as William Burt Pope's *Compendium of Christian Theology* (London, Wesleyan Book Room, 1880 reprint), published 1875-1876

the study of theology.²⁰ In a later chapter discussing American fundamentalism, it will be shown that a lack of ecclesiology was also characteristic of that movement.

It may be argued that the Pan-Evangelical movement was in its own way a response to the ecclesiological crisis facing modern Britain. The Church of England was becoming less central to the life of the nation. Adherence to any Christian church was becoming increasingly a matter of choice. In such a situation, an individual's own experience was far more significant. The evangelical party responded to this situation with their emphasis on individual conversion and individual relation to God, while downplaying the role of the church as a visible institution.

John Nelson Darby's ecclesiology was clearly formed against the background of the Pan-Evangelical movement. Darby's time as an Anglican clergyman saw the rise of a powerful evangelical movement in Ireland. This was manifested in the growth of Sunday schools, home Bible studies and the distribution of tracts.²¹ It was in this atmosphere of Evangelical co-operation and interdenominational friendliness that the first meetings of the Brethren began in Dublin. Grass suggests that the emergence of the Brethren in Ireland was as much a response to positive tendencies in the Irish church as a reaction to negative ones:

The negative estimate of the state of the Church of Ireland which has been popular among Brethren should not, therefore, be accepted without significant qualification, and we should guard against the impression that the secession of the early Brethren was simply a response to spiritual deadness; in some ways, it came about because of the life which was manifest and which was (to some extent) the result of its ministrations, and which sought new channels for its

²⁰ *ibid* p.2

²¹ O. Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, part I, London, A and C Black, 1966, p.49

expression.²²

Grass' comment is an important challenge to a tendency in Brethren historiography. It also makes a connection often missed between the ecumenical tendencies in contemporary evangelicalism and Darby's emphasis on the unity of the church. The failure to make this connection reinforces the tendency to emphasise the separatist aspect of Darby's ecclesiology at the expense of his emphasis on the unity of the church.

The Irish Evangelical movement saw the establishment of an Anglican evangelistic organisation, the Home Mission.²³ The work undertaken by this organisation and its difficulties concerning relations with the Anglican establishment seems to have played some role in shaping the direction of Darby's ecclesiology. In 1833, around six years after his secession, Darby wrote a paper entitled *Thoughts on the Present Position of the Home Mission* (1830).²⁴ Darby argued that the Episcopal and parochial system was incompatible with the ministries of evangelism and church planting:

Episcopal and parochial labour, in its sound state, is the supervision of those already brought within the pale of Christian care, as having Christian principles, though it may be accompanied by doing "the work of an evangelist." Missionary work, in its ordinary sense, assumes a contrary state; that is, the necessity of a general preaching of the gospel, because men are not as yet brought under the influence of Christian principles, and in order, under grace, to their being so brought. The recognition of local Episcopal and parochial authority, as such, on the part of the Home Mission, is simply denying its first principle, and destroying itself.²⁵

²² T. Grass *Gathering to his Name: The Story of Open Brethren in Britain and Ireland*, Milton Keynes, Paternoster, 2004, p.14

²³ J.D. Burnham *A Story of Conflict: The Controversial Relationship between Benjamin Wills Newton and John Nelson Darby*, Carlisle, Cumbria, Paternoster, 2004, p.130

²⁴ J.N. Darby, *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.52

²⁵ J.N. Darby, *The Present Position of the Home Mission*, (1830) in *Collected Writings*, vol.1 ,p.53

The Home Mission had incorporated these structures into its activities and had also prohibited the use of lay preachers. Darby argued that the parochial system forced faithful preachers into becoming schismatics:

We put another case, one not so uncommon. A large tract of country is destitute of the gospel. A layman goes, preaches there, and is blessed- gathers out of darkness into light many souls. The district is already full of clergy, who are not shepherds. What is the layman to do? Leave them for Socinians or enthusiasts to catch, or unheeded altogether? There is no godly righteousness in this. But the man is made, if he be faithful into a schismatic in spite of himself by a system that sanctions, or has sanctioned, the idle shepherds by whom he is surrounded. Which would the Home Mission recognise? It would recognise those idle shepherds, and it would not recognise the faithful man of God. But it has placed itself in a position in which it must be wrong either way; for if it did not own those shepherds, it would be acting in dereliction of its own responsibilities as churchmen; and the truth is, that, while they assume to be lords over God's heritage, or, as the original is, over God's clergy, they are in a position in which, though individually blessed in preaching, they must act unrighteously.²⁶

Darby's concerns about the limitations of the Home Mission at least in part reflected the failure of Church of Ireland Evangelicalism to develop an ecclesiology that would reconcile dissent and establishment. The Evangelicals had tried to embrace the concept of the unity of all believers while sidestepping questions of corporate ecclesiology. Darby believed this strategy was hollow and bound for failure and thus developed an ecclesiology that recognised the unity of all believers, but which also had a strategy for incorporating those believers into a distinct ecclesiastical polity. While Darby's emphasis on the unity of all believers reflected the spirit of Pan-Evangelicalism, he was not himself a part of that movement, by virtue of his separatist opposition to denominations, which he viewed as symptoms of the ruin of the church. In his 1828 pamphlet, *The Nature and Unity of the Church of Christ*, he mildly

²⁶ Ibid, p.61

commended interdenominational mission societies and the Bible society, but he saw these as inadequate as a model for ecclesiology:

We may remark that the people of God have found, since the increased outpouring of His Spirit, a sort of remedy for this disunion (manifestly an imperfect, though not an untrue one), in the Bible Society and in missionary exertions; which gave the one, a sort of vague unity in the common acknowledgment of the word, which, if investigated, will be found to have partially inherent in it, though not recognised in its power, the germ of true unity- the other, an unity of desire and action, which tended in thought towards the kingdom, the want of the power of which was felt²⁷.

Had Darby written this comment later in his career, when separatism was paramount in his thought, he might have been even milder in his praise. A footnote indicates that Darby later came to consider the expression 'increased out pouring of His Spirit' to be incorrect. If Darby was mildly complementary towards the Bible Society, he had no fondness whatsoever for the Evangelical Alliance, claiming that it was firmly opposed to the cause of the Brethren:

As to the doctrines owned by the "Alliance," they comprise too much or too little to serve as a common ground for all those whom it is designed to unite. It is of little use to enter into other details; for except a great annual meeting, a great deal of talk, and some local reading-meetings, from which are excluded the Quakers, those called Plymouth Brethren, and, through one cause or another, the *greater part* of Christians, this "Alliance" does next to nothing.²⁸

However, one must be careful not to overemphasise separatism within Darby's ecclesiology. As has been argued in Chapter 3, separatism has sometimes been overemphasised as a theme in Darby's ecclesiology at the expense of his genuine and

²⁷ *The Nature and Unity of the Church of Christ* (1828) in *Collected Writings*, vol.1, p.23

²⁸ *A glance at various Ecclesiastical Principles*, in *Collected Writings*, vol.4, p.77-78

practical belief in the unity of all believers. In his advocacy of open communion and his occasional preaching among groups outside the Brethren, for instance among the Swiss dissenters, Darby was essentially in affinity with the spirit of Pan-Evangelicalism. Chapter 5 also underlines the spirit of interdenominational co-operation that was later seen in those American Protestants who came under the influence of Darby.

Edward Irving and Restorationism

According to Bebbington, in the 1830s there was something of a move away from the pragmatic emphasis on human methods, such as systematic social work and individual endeavour that had characterised the movement at the beginning of the century.²⁹ The confidence that organisation and co-operation were the greatest needs was diminishing. In 1821, James Haldane Stewart (1778-1854),³⁰ an Anglican clergyman, wrote *Thoughts on the Importance of Special Prayer for the Outpouring of the Holy Spirit*.³¹ This argued that the church needed the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit to give it a new vitality and energy. Stewart also had distinctive views as to ecclesiology. Although he upheld the theology of the Westminster Confession, he rejected the authority of creeds and believed that the church had to look solely to

²⁹ Bebbington, 1989, p.75

³⁰ James Haldane Stewart was rector of Limpsfield, Surrey. He was an active supporter of the London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews.

³¹ Ibid, p.76

Scripture for guidance as to its organisation and activities.³² He emphasised the separation of the church from the world, and thus the state. He also advocated government by plural eldership in local congregations. Stewart's views reflected a new desire for a more supernatural Christianity and a desire to imitate the ecclesiology of the early church.³³ Bebbington argues that this new approach to pneumatology and ecclesiology was due to the influence of the Romantic movement, which influenced so much of 19th century culture.³⁴ Romanticism encouraged longings for the irrational, supernatural and archaic.

A series of prophetic conferences were held at Albury Park in Surrey, between 1826 and 1829, organised by Henry Drummond (1786-1860), a wealthy banker, with the support of the parish rector, Hugh McNeil. The participants included individuals from a number of different denominations. Notable participants included Lewis Way, Joseph Wolff and William Cunninghame.³⁵ There was a feeling among those attending that Evangelicalism had become too individualistic.³⁶ Some of those involved believed that the supernatural gifts of tongues, prophecy and miracles could

³² Grass, 1997, p.21

³³ Grass, 2006, p.11

³⁴ Bebbington wrote:

The leading Romantic characteristics, as expounded by Dr Kitson Clark, were the importance of emotion and imagination, with a consequent emphasis on moments of intense experience, a profounder appreciation of the values of the past and a spirit of escape and revolt from present conditions. All these, however, far from being part and parcel of the Evangelical Revival, were novelties in the years around 1830. Reason, not emotion, had been the lodestar of the Evangelicals; many of them looked to the millennium of the future, not to the past, for their ideal of a Christian society; and far from wishing to flee from existing conditions, they used contemporary methods, whether in business, politics or religion, to accomplish their aims. So the outburst of imaginative energy represented by Irving constituted a revolt against the conventions of the Evangelical world. There was a new appreciation of the dramatic, the extraordinary and the otherworldly element in religion.

Bebbington, 1989, p.81

³⁵ P.R. Wilkinson, *For Zion's Sake: Christian Zionism and the Role of John Nelson Darby*, Carlisle, Cumbria, Paternoster, 2007, p.177-178

³⁶ Bebbington, 1989, p.94

be restored to the contemporary church³⁷. The restoration of these gifts was viewed by them as a sign of the approaching return of Christ³⁸. The most significant individual involved in the Albury Park conferences was a Church of Scotland minister, Edward Irving (1792-1834). He achieved a degree of fame through his eschatological preaching at Caledonian chapel in London and by his speech at a London Missionary Society conference, in which he condemned mission societies as unscriptural, because he believed they were a departure from the New Testament pattern of independent apostolic workers who lived by faith and were sent out by individual local churches.³⁹ While presiding over Caledonian Chapel, Irving and some within the congregation began to speak in tongues and receive new prophecies. After his condemnation by the Church of Scotland for heresy over the nature of Christ,⁴⁰ he formed his own denomination, the Catholic Apostolic church, which included apostles and prophets.⁴¹ This movement combined liturgical ritual with charismatic manifestations. It was under the leadership of twelve new apostles (of which Irving himself was not numbered). At its height in the 19th century, it had a membership of some thirty thousand in Europe and America. However, as the twelve restored apostles (the last died in 1901) died, it went into gradual decline and is almost entirely inactive today.⁴²

On the whole, the Brethren remained aloof from the movement generated by Irving, whose followers were sometimes known as Irvingites. Some in the Brethren did come

³⁷ Grass, 1997, p.26

³⁸ Chadwick, 1966, p.36

³⁹ A. Dallimore, *The Life of Edward Irving*, Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 1983, p.48

⁴⁰ As mentioned in chapter 2, Irving argued that Christ, though not sinful in his actions had taken on sinful flesh in the incarnation.

⁴¹ I.S. Rennie, *Edward Irving*, in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. W. Elwell, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker Books, 1984, p.571

⁴² A. Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom: The Radical Christianity of the House Church Movement*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1985, p.230

under the influence of Irving,⁴³ most notably the former naval officer, Percy Francis Hall (1801-1884)⁴⁴ for only a brief period.⁴⁵ However, the expectation of miracles and tongues-speaking did not become mainstream among the Brethren.⁴⁶ Darby made uncritical references to Irving in an early work of prophecy,⁴⁷ but later wrote two tracts condemning Irvingite teaching on Christology and soteriology.⁴⁸ As is argued in chapter 4, Darby's ecclesiology was not restorationist. He did not believe miraculous gifts were available in his day and he did not believe that the order of the apostolic church could be restored. Darby agreed with the Irvingites that the church had fallen into a state of ruin and apostasy, nevertheless he diverged from them in holding that there was no possibility of the church recovering from this state. However, there are similarities between Irvingism and Darby's ecclesiology. Both were unsatisfied with the state of the present-day church and believed that contemporary ecclesiastical structures were unbiblical. Darby was inspired as to the unsatisfactory state of the church of his day through reading Acts. Both movements rejected human methods

⁴³ Burnham, 2004, p.92

⁴⁴ Percy Francis Hall was the son of a Dean of Christ Church, Oxford. He had resigned from the navy after adopting pacifist views. He was part of the early Plymouth assembly, and like many within it adopted a simple, austere lifestyle. His fondness for Irving cooled somewhat after Irving criticised his pacifism (Grass, 2006, p.36).

⁴⁵ Grass, 1997, p.36

⁴⁶ Grass, 2006, p.90

⁴⁷ Darby wrote "In the third and fourth sermons on Daniel's vision of the four beasts and of the Son of man, by Mr. Irving, Zephaniah is stated to have prophesied before the carrying away of Israel captive; and it is assumed that they carried the book of that prophet to Ninevah, whereby Ninevah would know of its threatened judgments." (*The Prophetic Inquiry and the views advanced upon it*, in *Collected Writings*, vol. 2, p.6)

⁴⁸ J.N. Darby, *Remarks on a tract circulated by the Irvingites entitled "A Word of Instruction"*, in *Collected Writings*, vol.15, p.1-15

J.N. Darby *A letter to a Clergyman on the claims and doctrines of Newman Street*, in *ibid*, p.16-33

Darby wrote:

Thus if false prophecies, and false doctrine as to the foundations of Christianity, and the spirit of concealment, and the slighting of the word, and with the terrifying with false fears those to whom the Lord has given peace, be not the way of the Spirit of our blessed God, their way we safely reject, and are bound to reject, however we may pity the immense pretensions of those who assume to be sent by divine authority, without sign or scripture to warrant them.

The Claims and Doctrines of Newman Street, p.33

and unbiblical structures as a source of direction in the life of the church. This is seen in the fact that both Irving and the Brethren rejected mission societies. Both movements were a response to the crisis of ecclesiology in the 19th century, seeking a new form of purer Christianity. In their belief that Christendom was in an apostate state, Darby and Irving were alike. Nevertheless, Darby's response to this crisis was, perhaps surprisingly, more similar in spirit to that of the Pan-Evangelical movement. Instead of seeking a return to apostolic and primitive church order, he advocated a response based on present fellowship and profession of Christ, that is meeting simply in the name of the Lord regardless of sectarian beliefs and denomination differences, though separating from that which was considered manifestly heretical. This approach is explained in chapter 4. Darby, in what might be described as a novel manner, combined both the separatism of the Irvingites with the desire for unity and common fellowship of the Pan-Evangelicals.

The Oxford movement

The Oxford movement was a group of Anglican clergymen who sought to recover the divine nature of the church and its theological essence, which they saw in its continuity with the early church through the apostolic succession of bishops.⁴⁹ The

⁴⁹ B.G. Worrall, *The Making of the Modern Church: Christianity in England since 1800*, London, SPCK, 1988, p.26

J.H. Newman wrote:

Oxford movement's members, also known as Tractarians on account of the tracts they published, were associated with the High Church party of the Church of England, but they departed from traditional High church theology significantly. Traditional High church theology had an element of Erastianism, tending to see the church's continuity and authority in the state and emphasised the sacral role of the monarchy.⁵⁰ In contrast, the Oxford movement placed a far greater stress on the apostolic succession as the security and guarantor of the church's divine authenticity.⁵¹ The Tractarians also placed a far heavier emphasis on the communication of divine grace through the sacraments. They also, to varying extents, repudiated the heritage of the Reformation and rejected the label *Protestant*. Newman in particular had attempted to argue, in *Tracts for the Times* nos.38 and 41,⁵² that the Church of England was a *via media* between Protestantism and Catholicism.⁵³ Hence, their opponents regarded them as an influence that tended toward 'Popery.'

The birth of the movement is generally taken to be 1833, when John Keble preached his assize sermon, published under the title *National Apostasy*.⁵⁴ This sermon was

CHRIST has not left His Church without claim of its own upon the attention of men. Surely not. Hard Master He cannot be, to bid us oppose the world, yet give us no credentials for so doing. There are some who rest their divine mission on their own unsupported assertion; others, who rest it upon their popularity; others, on their success; and others, who rest it upon their temporal distinctions. This last case has, perhaps, been too much our own; I fear we have neglected the real ground on which our authority is built,—OUR APOSTOLICAL DESCENT.

Tracts for the Times, no.1, <http://anglicanhistory.org/tracts/tract1.html>

⁵⁰ Grass, 1997, p.15

⁵¹ C.P. Allison, "Anglo-Catholicism," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. W. Elwell, Grand Rapids, Baker Books, 1984, p.49

⁵² *Tracts for the Times*, <http://anglicanhistory.org/tracts/>

⁵³ P.B. Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context: Anglican High Churchmanship 1760-1857*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p.112

⁵⁴ J.H. Newman wrote:

The following Sunday, July 14th, Mr Keble preached the Assize sermon in the University Pulpit. It was published under the title of 'National Apostasy.' I have ever considered and kept that day, as the start of the religious movement of 1833.

Apologia Pro Vita Sua (1865), London, Oxford University Press, 1964, p.36

provoked by the Church Temporalities Bill, which was a measure to reduce the number of bishoprics in Ireland. Although this particular piece of legislation appeared to many to be a very reasonable measure, it was viewed by the Oxford movement as one of a series of attacks on the established church by the government, which included the emancipation of Roman Catholics and the lifting of disabilities on dissenters. The movement was characterised by anti-Erastianism. Though it did not advocate disestablishment, it was opposed to interference in the church by secular government, as it viewed the church as a sacred institution formed by Christ.⁵⁵ The Tracts for the Times were the means by which they hoped to make this theology known to a wider public.⁵⁶ The early tracts were quite short, but some of the later tracts were lengthy treatises.

In common with the Pan-Evangelicals and Irvingites, the Tractarians sought a new ecclesiology that would replace the secularised ecclesiology of the established church. The removal of discriminatory legislation against Roman Catholics and Protestant dissenters meant that the church could potentially be affected by a government which was in part led by those who were not members of the established church. The Oxford movement sought to protect the church's authenticity and divine character from this possibility. It could be argued that the Oxford movement was influenced, like the Irvingites and other radical evangelicals, by reactionary Romanticism, as Bebbington maintained. It sought to recover the heritage of the lost purity of early catholic Christianity. However, it is necessary to be cautious in identifying the movement with irrationalism. Like many theological systems, the Oxford Anglo-

⁵⁵ Chadwick, 1966, p.75

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Catholicism arose from rational reflection on sacred texts and theological discourse, some of which was clearly influenced by the mood of the times.

While it might be expected that Darby, being an evangelical would be far apart from the Oxford movement, his relationship with High church theology is complex. Darby claimed that in his early days as a clergyman, he had possessed the same views as the Tractarians.⁵⁷ After his riding accident in 1827, Darby moved towards more evangelical views.⁵⁸ In later years, Darby came to attack the views of the Tractarian writers. Darby's first work on Anglo-Catholicism was *Remarks on Puseyism*.⁵⁹ Darby defined *Puseyism*:

The doctrine of Puseyism, as put forward by its best (and, as it appears from the sale of his books, its most acceptable) advocate, is this- that sacraments are a continuation or prolongation of the incarnation. The assumption of manhood into God made, they say, that manhood the medium of communicating life to the souls of sinners; that that which Christ did personally when present, He now does by the sacraments; that, in the Eucharist, Christ's body is really present in all this vital power, and communicates life to the receiver; that all receive Christ Himself, not carnally but really: only that He does not profit those in whom that reception is not made effectual by faith; that whoever denies this denies mediation.⁶⁰

Darby did not engage in this paper with Tractarian ecclesiology, but instead attacked their sacramentalist soteriology and the central place that they gave to the incarnation in their theology. He also criticised in this paper, their reliance for support on the church fathers:

⁵⁷ J.N.Darby *Analysis of Dr Newman's Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (1865) in *Collected Writings* vol.18, p.156

Quoted in chapter 2.

⁵⁸ Weremchuk, 1992, p.49

⁵⁹ JN Darby, *Remarks on Puseyism* (1866) in *Collected Writings*, vol.15

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p.258

I have not cited the Fathers, nor gone into their doctrines. While I do not doubt that the truly pious among them were guarded in the faith; yet, as doctors, nothing can be more uncertain; as moralists, scarce anything more objectionable. God has preserved truth in and for His church, blessed be His name! but the Fathers are the expression, not of orthodox truth, but of a mass of mental efforts on divine subjects, of heavings to and fro on subjects which escaped their grasp; of the efforts, too, of minds, for the most part seriously corrupted by Platonic philosophy, and shrinking from the attacks of Pagans on the point of the unity of the Godhead, which they feared to compromise by the doctrine of eternal Sonship and divinity of Christ. Save Jerome and Origen, they did not understand Hebrew, and could only use the Septuagint version; valuable no doubt as to testimony, but most imperfect as representing the meaning of scripture, and sometimes any meaning at all.⁶¹

Darby also wrote another paper in 1866, *Remarks on "The Church and the World,"*⁶² in which he criticised the ritualist movement which followed in the wake of the early Oxford movement in the second half of the 19th century. The paper affirmed some of the criticisms made by Anglo-Catholics of the Protestant idea of an invisible church:

But evangelicals do not see the responsibility of the visible church, and that there ought to be, as there was, a maintenance of the corporate testimony for the glory of Christ. They do not see that Christians were bound to maintain unity and godliness. They do consequently, content themselves with individual salvation, the individuals being members of the invisible body of Christ.⁶³

He went on to challenge the Tractarian ecclesiology, arguing that the centrality of episcopacy to the constitution of the church had no basis in the teaching of the church fathers.⁶⁴ He also argued that it had no basis in Scripture either:

⁶¹ Ibid, p.291

⁶² J.N. Darby, *Remarks on "The Church and the World"*, in *Collected Writings*, vol.15

⁶³ Ibid, p.352

⁶⁴ J.N. Darby wrote:

The way high-churchmen avoid and slip over the great facts of church history is very peculiar. Jerome's statement as to the episcopacy being a human arrangement for quiet is conveniently ignored, and here in a note our essayist tells us, "We do not intend to enter into the question as to how far the individual members of these communities receive grace... For this reason we purposely avoid the question of schismatical or lay baptism."

How a successional system is directly from Christ it would be hard to tell. I understand a person saying God endows a person appointed by man, or even by the Lord, or endows him indirectly through a man. Both are found in Scripture. Christ appointed apostles; they were endowed on the day of Pentecost. And the apostles conferred the gift by laying on of hands, on (not the ministry, though the Holy Ghost might operate by them in ministry, but on) the whole company of the faithful, as at Samaria, Peter and John did. But ministry was free to all and special gift directly from the Holy Ghost, and under the authority and, I may add, gift of Christ. This I shall not shew. This directness characterized the ministry of Paul, here I admit, in its highest or apostolic character; "not of man," he says, "nor by man."

Thus, the church was constituted not by human authority, but by the working of the Holy Spirit. Darby asserted that the individual responsibility of persons before God meant that they were brought into the church as individuals on the basis of their relation to Christ. He argued that the Tractarian understanding of the church minimised its spiritual character as created by union with Christ through the Holy Spirit. He accused Tractarians of depreciating the centrality of the Word of God in salvation.⁶⁵ Darby wrote a number of dialogues in which he countered Roman Catholic arguments. Two of these were on the subject of the apostolic succession and in these he dealt with both Catholic and Anglican arguments for this doctrine.⁶⁶ Interestingly, Darby seems to have believed that E.B. Pusey was a genuine Christian;

Remarks on the Church and the World, in *Collected Writings*, vol.15, p.311

⁶⁵ J.N. Darby wrote:

What, then, shall we say of a system which depreciates preaching, calls faith an intellectual process, and puts a ceremony, be it a divinely instituted ceremony performed on an unconscious person, in the place of living faith and the power of the Spirit and the word? I shall now shew, as to the means of receiving life, the application of this grace of the gospel, that it is by the word through faith, faith as a means, *not* as a condition, but as a work wrought by God in the soul.

Remarks on "The Church and the World", in *Collected Writings*, vol.15, p.322

⁶⁶ J.N. Darby *Apostolicity and Succession part 1 and 2*, (1865) in *Collected Writings*, vol.22

in a reading on Revelation, he stated his belief that Pusey's love for Christ was genuine.⁶⁷

Neatby described Darby's stand against archbishop Magee in 1827 (see chapter 2) as taking place "at the point where extreme Evangelicalism and extreme High Churchmanship joined hands in the intensity of their common anti-Erastianism".⁶⁸

Neatby is among those who apply the term High church to Darby's post-1827 ecclesiology, even after he had abandoned sacramentalism and episcopacy. In chapter 4, the question of whether this description is an appropriate is discussed. There certainly were genuine affinities between Darby's ecclesiology and the Oxford movement. Both arose from a concern about the relation of the church to the state. Both sought a purer church which reflected the unity of the apostolic era. Both denied the dissenters claim to be able to form genuine churches. They both believed that the church was meant to be one visible body. However, the fundamental difference between the two was that Darby held that the unity of the visible church had been irrevocably lost and was only to be restored at its eschatological gathering, while the Oxford movement believed it had been preserved in the various branches of the catholic church. The Oxford movement looked to the church fathers for guidance, as is shown above, Darby rejected them as unsound. It is not difficult to see that Darby might well have been influenced by his High church background. It is also not unduly speculative to suggest that this background made him fearful of dissent and hostile to its claims. However, it must be remembered another member of the Brethren, AN

⁶⁷ J.N. Darby wrote:

Of these two, the Romanists put justice into Christ's hands and mercy into Mary's. (See Liguori's "Glories of Mary.") I believe it is this which stopped Pusey; he says he cannot get over this, and I believe it is because he loves Christ that he cannot.

The Seven Churches, in Notes and Jottings, p.368

⁶⁸ Neatby, 1901, p.26

Groves⁶⁹ (1795-1853) was also from an High church background and he was critical of the direction of Darby's ecclesiology.⁷⁰

Darby's interaction with his opponents

Tracing the influence of Darby's opponents on his ecclesiology is very difficult for three reasons. Firstly, Darby gives little indication of any influences at all. He wrote as though his theology fell to him from heaven. Secondly, his interactions with opponents are for the most part intense and painstaking rebuttals of their works.⁷¹ He attacked nearly every point made by his critics and conceded little. It is very difficult to penetrate this veneer of extreme confidence in the man's position and find how his thought shifted. The impression that Darby gives through his writings is that he gave little care at all as to his opponents' views. Thirdly, Darby's ecclesiology formed very rapidly in his career. By 1835 and the publication of his pamphlet, *Separation from Evil God's Principle of Unity*,⁷² his views on the nature of the church were largely established and later works only refine and elaborate his earlier views. Thus, the majority of the controversies in which Darby engaged occurred after his ecclesiology had taken a very definite shape.

Chapters 2 and 3 have referred to Darby's radical cosmic dualism, in which he distinguished between God's heavenly and earthly government. This emerged in his thought very early on and provides an important explanation as to the static nature of

⁶⁹ A former dentist from Plymouth who was involved with the Brethren from their earliest days in Dublin. He worked as a missionary in Baghdad and India. His sister married George Müller.

⁷⁰ Grass, 1995, p.65

⁷¹ For example, J.N. Darby, *What has been acknowledged?: A Short Answer to an article by Mons. De Gasparin* (1855), *Collected Writings*, vol.4, p.286 and *Examination of the statements made in "Thoughts on the Apocalypse"* (1837), *Collected Writings*, vol.8

⁷² J.N. Darby, *Separation from Evil God's Principle of Unity* (1834) in *Collected Writings*, vol.1

his theology after the early 1830s. As explained in chapter 2, Henzel views this dualism as originating in Darby's conversion to Evangelicalism after his riding accident in 1827. However, this dualism can be seen in Darby's letter to the archbishop of Dublin (see chapter 2 and chapter 3) which predated this experience. This would strongly suggest that the cosmic dualism was already present in his thinking. Recent research by Max Weremchuk provides another explanation for the development of Darby's ecclesiology. In an unpublished research paper, Weremchuk argues that Darby was never a convinced Anglican; he only became a priest in the Church of England because he saw no credible alternative at the time. Weremchuk wrote:

Taking some of the above remarks and comparing them with others it seems to be that that Darby, though rightly termed a "High Churchman" during this period in his life, was not a fully convinced Anglican. It was the best he could find at the time. This would also explain his remarks that "I was induced to be ordained." "I did not feel drawn to take up a regular post." He did it reluctantly because it seemed the best thing to do. That he was fully devoted to his work once he was ordained is something else altogether.⁷³

Weremchuk cites as evidence Darby's early interest in Roman Catholicism and the doubts implicit in his statement of his early views.⁷⁴ Weremchuk's research indicates a clear dissatisfaction with Anglicanism on the part of Darby in his clerical period. Thus, it may be that he developed his heavenly/ earthly dualism as a way to save the

⁷³ MS Weremchuk, JN Darby research papers- Part 1, <http://www.mybrethren.org/bios/by02jndw.htm>, p.15

⁷⁴ Darby's comment from the passage quoted in chapter 2:

I searched with earnest diligence the evidence for apostolic succession in England, and just saved their validity for myself and my conscience. The union of Church and state I held to be Babylonish, that the church ought to govern itself, and that she was in bondage but was the church.

J.N.Darby *Analysis of Dr Newman's Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (1865) in *Collected Writings* vol.18, p.156

What is significant in this quotation is that Darby expresses doubt about the validity of apostolic succession in the Church of England and given his views, then this would entail doubts about the entire legitimacy of Anglicanism.

notion of the church from the implications of it being dependent on a worldly succession. This is not the view of Weremchuk, but such a thesis would allow us to find an early emergence of Darby's dualism before his conversion to evangelicalism. However, there is a risk in suggesting this theory that one reads Darby's later views into this early period. What is certain is that Darby as an High Anglican clergyman feared worldliness in the church and was uneasy with the close connection between state and church and in his response to Magee he countered this tendency with a view of the church that emphasised its heavenly character. As detailed in chapter 2, the lack of any positive response to his letter to the archbishop pushed Darby on a road that lead firmly away from Anglicanism. This rejection of Anglicanism was intensified by his opposition to Archbishop Whateley's support for the a new education policy in Ireland (see chapter 2).

It is agreed amongst the most recent of scholars that Darby had established the core of his ecclesiology by the time he left for Switzerland in 1837. However, debate with the Swiss dissenters forced Darby to define and identify what he meant by the doctrine of the 'Ruin of the Church' (see chapter 2). Darby's return to Britain coincided with his developing conflict with Benjamin Wills Newton. As argued in chapter 2, although separation was already present as a theme in Darby's ecclesiology, the conflict with Newton brought this element to the forefront of Darby's ecclesiology.

The spread of the conflict in Plymouth to Bristol was even more significant in the development of Darby's ecclesiology. In condemning those who supported Bethesda in their stance on Newton's errors,⁷⁵ Darby had to articulate a doctrine of collective

⁷⁵ Darby called for collective action against Bethesda in *The Bethesda Circular*.

action against doctrinal error. Darby's ecclesiology had strongly emphasised the unity of the church prior to this. However, in papers written after the Bethesda controversy,⁷⁶ he outlined a new practical expression of the church's unity in the collective action of assemblies and the rejection of independent local assemblies (see chapter 4). This new approach necessitated the establishment of a central meeting among the Brethren, a policy that led to the 1881 division, in which decisions made centrally were viewed as binding on other assemblies. Thus, in differing ways, the two related controversies of Plymouth and Bristol reinforced the opposite poles of Darby's ecclesiology, separation and unity and gave them a practical application in the collective action principle.

Conclusion

Darby's ecclesiology had significant affinities with the three main ecclesiological movements of the early 19th century. Darby shared with the Pan-Evangelical movement a fervent desire for fellowship with all true Christians without regard to

Let this be maintained as I desire to maintain it, and have maintained in my intercourse with them; but I do call upon brethren by their faithfulness to Christ, and love to the souls of those dear to Him in faithfulness, to set a barrier against this evil. Woe be to them if they love the brethren Müller or Craik or their own ease more than the souls dear to Christ! And I plainly urge upon them that to receive anyone from Bethesda (unless in any exceptional case of ignorance of what is passed) is opening the door now to the infection of this abominable evil from which at so much painful cost we have been delivered.... I only lay the matter before the consciences of brethren, urging it upon them by their fidelity to Christ. And I am clear in my conscience towards them. For my own part I should neither go to Bethesda in its present state, nor while in that state go where persons from it were knowingly admitted. I do not wish to reason on it here, but lay it before brethren, and press it on their fidelity to Christ and their care of His beloved saints.

J.N. Darby, *The Bethesda Circular* (1848), *Collected Writings*, vol.15, p.167

⁷⁶ J.N. Darby, *Indifference to Christ: Or Bethesdaism, The Church which is His Body and Discipline and Unity of the Assembly*, in *Collected Writings*, vol.20, *On Ecclesiastical Independency* (1866), in *Collected Writings*, vol.14, p.301-307

secondary doctrinal differences. However, unlike them he believed that the church was meant to be manifest in visible form and that the absence of such visible unity indicated the church's ruin. Darby witnessed the rise of the Evangelical movement in Ireland, but saw it as a failure because of its support for the established church. Darby shared with Irving's restorationism a concern to see the church led by the Holy Spirit and to be freed from the constraints of human order. Unlike the Irvingites, however, he believed that it was impossible to restore the church's apostolic power. He took what he considered to be the unsoundness of their doctrine as evidence of the error of their movement. Darby shared with the Oxford movement an emphasis on the visible unity of the church. However, unlike them, he believed that this unity had been lost and could be only partially recovered. Despite common roots in the High church movement and similar concerns, his theology differed radically from that of the Tractarians. Like the three movements, Darby's ecclesiology was a response to a crisis of identity within Protestant Christianity, a crisis prompted by the difficulties of maintaining a church-state union in a society whose loyalty to the established church was increasingly faltering.

While it is difficult to trace the influence that individual opponents had on Darby's thought, it does appear that subtle developments in Darby's ecclesiology were prompted by particular controversies in which he engaged.

Conclusion

A Crisis Ecclesiology

This thesis has shown that Darby's ecclesiology was a crisis ecclesiology. He believed that the church had fallen into such a state of ruin that there were no longer any true local churches. While the church had once been a visible body, meeting in unity, this unity had been shattered by division and corruption of doctrine. Darby saw this state of ruin manifested in the Roman Catholic Church, which he regarded as full of error and superstition, in the Protestant state churches, which he held to be contrary to Christian principle and the many dissenting denominations, which Darby believed to be schismatic and pretentious in their claim to found churches. While other groups in history have taught the apostasy of the church, Darby was unique in holding that there was no possibility of restoration to a state comparable to the church's original standing in apostolic times. Man could not restore what God had allowed to fail. Darby's ecclesiology would seem therefore to be the most pessimistic form of ecclesiology conceivable.

Dispensationalism

This thesis supports the conclusion of Henzel,¹ that Darby's theology was founded upon a system of cosmic dualism, an hermeneutical approach to Scripture centred upon a distinction between God's heavenly and earthly government. However, it was noted in chapter 3 that Henzel overstated his case in claiming that later Dispensationalists failed to follow this distinction. In dealing with the subject of the

¹ Henzel, 2003

kingdom of God, two important Dispensationalist theologians, Alva McClain² and Dwight Pentecost³ make a similar distinction between different aspects of God's government, though in a somewhat more refined form. Darby's use of this dualistic hermeneutic caused considerable problems of coherence in his thought, particularly with regard to his insistence that the church is not a subject of prophecy. In Darby's view, the church occupied a 'timeless heavenly gap' in world history. Thus, none of the pronouncements of the Old Testament prophets made any reference to the church.

Darby's identification of the church as occupying a parenthetical stage between Pentecost and the establishment of the millennial reign of Christ entailed a fundamental divide between the church and the kingdom. The ministry of Jesus was concerned with the establishment of a kingdom in the future, a political kingdom based in Israel. The church was entirely revealed by Paul in his epistles. Ironically, this put Darby in agreement with historical critics who argue that Jesus' ministry had nothing to do with the church. It is arguable that Darby's belief in a fundamental separation between the church and the kingdom results in a somewhat disjointed and overly anthropological view of salvation history. This would seem to make the church largely irrelevant to the world. Darby did acknowledge that the church would rule heaven and earth in the future kingdom, but he did not develop this notion in any theological depth. In Darby's ecclesiology, the church seems to serve no actual purpose, but is largely an end in itself. This contrasts strongly with modern ecclesiologists such as Moltmann and Pannenberg who, while like Darby, distinguishing between church and kingdom, viewed the church as serving the kingdom by proclaiming its eschatological coming and realising its principles through

² McClain, 1959

³ Pentecost, 1995

its fellowship. Nevertheless, there may be some theological merit in the idea that the church exists merely out of God's pleasure and grace, independent of any functional purpose in relation to the kingdom of God. On this view, the church is the sphere in which salvation is enjoyed and humanity experiences unity and fellowship with God. Such a view of the church would be similar to the two models of the church explored, and to a greater degree than the other models favoured by Avery Dulles, that is the Church as a Sacrament and the Church as Mystical Communion. Dulles did critique both models as tending towards introversion and a weakening of the church's eschatological role.⁴ The great danger of seeing the church as simply existing for the God's gracious pleasure is that it excludes any kind of engagement with the world in which it is placed and therefore, the church's mission, a clear problem with Darby's ecclesiology.

The Problem of Methodology

As was mentioned above, Darby's ecclesiology rested upon a hermeneutical principle that the Scriptures distinguish between a distinction between God's heavenly and earthly government. Darby never outlined this principle with any clarity and may not have been entirely consistent with it.

⁴ Dulles wrote:

The second model, that of mystical communion, can arouse an unhealthy spirit of enthusiasm; in its search for religious experiences or warm familial relationships, it could lead to false expectations and impossible demands, considering the vastness of the Church, the many goals for which it must labour, and its remoteness from the eschatological goal. As a remedy, one must call for patience, faith and a concern for the greater and more universal good.

The third model, the sacramental, could lead to a sterile aestheticism and to an almost narcissistic self-contemplation. As a remedy, attention must be called to the value of structures, community and mission, brought out in other models.

This raises the problem of Darby's methodology in general. Darby's writings rest heavily upon his exegesis of passages, the bulk of his writings are expositional in character. While Darby knew the original languages well and was aware of biblical criticism, there is no clear outworking of an exegetical methodology in his writings. He made many assertions about the meaning of texts, but did not always support these assertions. There is a degree of carelessness and sometimes arbitrariness to much of his exegesis. This lack of a sound methodology adds to the difficulty of evaluating his ecclesiology.

The Visible/ Invisible distinction

Darby rejected the traditional Protestant and Augustinian distinction between the visible and invisible church. In his view the church was meant to be a visible body, manifesting a visible unity. However, this visibility had been lost in the church's ruin. Strangely enough, however, Darby seemed to reintroduce the notion of a visible/invisible distinction through the backdoor, by distinguishing between the body of Christ and the house of God as an external structure. This is a little known or understood aspect of Darby's theology and it served a number of purposes within the structure of his thought. He held that the professing churches of Christendom constituted this external body. They had originally been joined to the visible body of the church, but a separation had occurred as a result of apostasy. The first and main purpose of this distinction was to explain what the denominations of Christendom were if they were not the visible church. Secondly, it served the purpose of explaining the role of Christendom in prophecy. Darby held that the church was not a subject of prophecy. Yet he believed that the seven churches of Revelation provided an overview of Christian history. By distinguishing between the church and the external

house, Darby was able to apply such passages to Christendom without inserting the church into prophecy. He was also able to use texts such as the parable of the leaven as prophecy of Christendom's apostasy and ruin. Thirdly, the distinction between the church and the house also enabled Darby to defend the practice of infant baptism. In Darby's view baptism brought a person into the external structure of the house, the sphere of Christian profession, a position which entailed both blessings and responsibilities. Fourthly, Darby was able to use the concept of the external house to support his Calvinist belief in the final perseverance of the saints. Warnings of the consequences of apostasy, such as the wicked servant of Matthew 24:48-51, were directed towards unregenerate members of Christendom whose profession of faith entailed responsibilities and judgment. This is not the only area of his ecclesiology that seems to have been influenced by his Calvinism; it is arguable that his belief in the repeated apostasy of God's people in history was an outworking of the Reformed doctrine of human depravity.

Meeting in the name of the Lord

In the absence of any promise of restoration, Darby's solution to the crisis of the church's ruin was found in Matthew 18:20, where Jesus taught that where two or three were gathered in his name, he would be present. Darby took this as a promise that whatever the ruin of the church, those who met this way could know the privilege and blessing of the church's visible unity. Darby believed that only those in the Brethren were meeting this way. In his view, it involved meeting without formal structures, without claims to be a church (for there were no longer any churches), without a man-made creed and simply as Christians without any denominational affiliation. Such meeting necessarily entailed rejecting all that was evil, especially in

the denominational systems. Hence, the rightful meeting of Christians involved both unity and separation.

It may be asked whether there was a degree of arbitrariness in Darby's selection of Matthew 18:20 as the central text for his principle of meeting. This text was part of the synoptic gospels and according to Darby predated the founding of the church at Pentecost. Darby considered considerable amounts of the synoptic gospels to be related to the remnant of Israel rather than the church. Therefore, there is a certain incongruity in Darby's use of this text in ecclesiology.

Consistency of Darby's ecclesiology

In evaluating Darby's ecclesiology, an important question is its consistency as a system. Krapohl made the claim that Darby's ecclesiology was built upon an unstable synthesis of unity and separation and that the tension between these two elements made it incoherent. This thesis has argued that despite some unstable elements in Darby's ecclesiology, he was able to synthesize the two elements of unity and separation creatively. The failure to see this most likely arises from the failure to recognise that Darby advocated a qualified form of open communion. All Christians were welcome to communion with Darby's brethren and to participate in the life of the assembly without forsaking their denominations. Separation from the denominational system was not a qualification for reception. Other writers on Darby have failed to acknowledge that Darby implicitly differentiated between moral and ecclesiastical separation. For Darby, separation from immorality and heresy was an individual matter, however ecclesiastical separation from the ruins of Christendom

was a corporate matter. Darby's Brethren met in separation from the denominations, but individuals from the denominations were welcome to fellowship with them.

Having concluded that Darby's synthesis of unity and separation was not inconsistent or incoherent, this thesis would not deny that the ecclesial results were necessarily unattractive or without problems. Darby's requirement of separation from moral evil extended to Brethren who had acted, in his judgment contrary to conscience. Thus, the Open Brethren, whom he alleged to have compromised in dealing with heresy were excluded en masse from fellowship. Anglicans and dissenters, including their ministers were welcome to fellowship with Darby's Brethren and even to participate in the government of assemblies, but the Open Brethren were excluded entirely because of their alleged evil conduct. Furthermore, the corporate nature of this alleged evil meant that the dispute was perpetuated and even today, over a century after Darby's death. Even today, the various groups of Exclusives consider the Open Brethren to be beyond the sphere of fellowship. This can hardly be said to be an attractive feature of Darby's ecclesiology. Part of the problem with it may be the implications of a complete lack of structure. For all the problems caused by formal structures, they do provide means of resolving disputes. Thus disputes may continue indefinitely without any resolution, as was the case with the Bethesda controversy and the Open Brethren (see chapter 2 and 4).

Lack of Missiology

One weakness that this thesis has identified with Darby's ecclesiology is the lack of a missiology. Despite the heavy involvement of the Brethren in mission and the international character of his own ministry, Darby did not reflect very much on the

purpose, activity and implications of mission. This may have been a result of his dispensational separation of the church from the kingdom of God.⁵ The lack of a missiology is problematic for a number of reasons. First, Darby and other Brethren were involved in setting up assemblies in different locations. Yet this was done without reflection on what was involved theologically in doing so. Darby did not explain what was involved in this process. Second, a missiology would have clarified some of the ambiguity in his somewhat vague insistence that churches could not be founded today. Third, there is no consideration in Darby's ecclesiology of the implications of the ruin of the church for communities in which there was no history of Christian activity. Darby did not answer the question of how or why such communities would be affected by the ruin of the church. Fourthly, missiology is of great importance for ecclesiology given the increasingly global context of the church, in both its community base and its witness.

Lack of Cultural Engagement

Not only did Darby's ecclesiology lack an explicit missiology, but it also lacked any kind of engagement with culture.⁶ Darby, of course, believed that human culture was fundamentally corrupt in its politics, art and education. Thus, he naturally believed that the church should have no involvement in the politics or culture of the world. Yet abandoning culture altogether is practically impossible. For instance, with regard to the question of education, Darby might have had a low opinion of education in

⁵ Modern Dispensationalists have considered the subject of missiology; a notable example of a missiological work by a Dispensationalist being *What in the world is God doing?: The essentials of Global Mission*, by C.G. Olson (Cedar Knolls, New Jersey, Global Gospel Publishers, 1998). This work established the biblical basis of mission, considered its historical development and some of the issues involved in missiology in the modern world.

⁶ Culture is used here to refer to those practices in which society is actualised.

general,⁷ but he must have held that children should have some form of education. However, he gave little consideration as to what form that education might take, other than his criticism of the Irish Education Measure of 1832, which limited the teaching of Scripture in Irish schools.⁸ There are other unavoidable matters raised by culture. For instance, the Brethren uncritically followed 19th century patterns of family life. Darby took no interest in such social issues. Darby's complete ambivalence as to the morality of marriage to a deceased wife's sister (see chapter four) is an instructive example of his indifference to the cultural issues of his time. Whatever the merits of the theological commitment to Christian opposition to culture, it is impossible to escape the conclusion that an abandonment of all engagement with cultural discourse leads to intellectual shallowness.

Darby may be justifiably be described as apolitical, but ultimately it is impossible to be truly apolitical. To avoid involvement in the political process is to accept the status quo. It is easy for one to abstain from politics when one is part of the dominant group

⁷ J.N. Darby wrote:

We are bound to do good to every man, whoever it is; but the pretension of men is, that at bottom there is something good in a man, and so ultimately you can make anything out of him. And so they are working education for one great thing. Of course, everybody has to learn something, but the common idea of education now is an infidel idea. They give everybody votes, and then it follows that they must be educated in order to know how to use their vote. The whole thing is nonsense- a mere question of the passions of the flesh. In some states they compel education. God has committed children to parents, and the parent is bound to care for the child. No state can come in between God and the parent. If the state come in, you will have to leave the state. It is from no resistance to the power that I say so, for that would be wrong directly; but it is the word of God that gives the state its authority, and therefore I submit or go. If you were compelled to be a soldier, if it is against your conscience, you must be shot, or something else: that is all.

Notes of Readings on 2 Corinthians in Collected Writings, vol.26, p.361

Here Darby uncharacteristically expresses two political opinions, his disagreement with state education and his contempt for democracy.

⁸ A topic on which prompted several of Darby's papers, *The Value of Scripture Knowledge* (1840), *Some Observations on the Scripture Lessons of the Board of Education* (1832), *The Irish Education Measures of 1832* (1832), *A Speech Delivered at a Meeting held for the purpose of Promoting Scriptural Education* (1834), in *Collected Writings*, vol.32

in society and in sympathy with its ideology, as the aristocratic and conservatively-minded Darby certainly was.

If a Christian wishes to take the view, held by Darby that the world is the sphere of Satan's activity, in conflict with the heavenly kingdom of Christ, he or she can certainly find material in the New Testament to support such a theology. However, the difficulty for such a Christian is to then find a way to live in the world. Perhaps the world is a hostile territory under Satanic dominion, but it is the place in which the Christian lives, pays taxes, raises a family and must educate his or her children. It is impossible for the Christian to escape the obligation to engage in some way with this world and hence ecclesiology has to engage with the world in its mission. Darby's ecclesiology must be severely faulted for its failure to do this.

A Trinitarian Ecclesiology

As the doctrine of the Trinity is so central to Christianity, in evaluating an ecclesiology, it is worth considering the extent to which it reflects Trinitarian thought. Darby was certainly orthodox in his Trinitarian commitment. Likewise his ecclesiology is strongly Trinitarian. Darby accorded the members of the Trinity distinct roles in the formation and constitution of the church; the Father in election, the Son as the church's heavenly head and the Holy Spirit's role in indwelling the church and giving spiritual gifts. Darby, did not, however, view the church as a continued incarnation of Christ. He rather emphasised the place of Christ as ascended into heaven and seated with the Father and the church being positioned there through

him. This emphasis on the church's relation to the heavenly Christ is perhaps reflected in his Zwinglian view of the eucharist.

The Creedal Marks

Darby did not make use of the creedal markers in defining his ecclesiology, nevertheless it may be argued that the marks can be found in Darby's ecclesiology. Firstly, Darby made unity a central tenet of his ecclesiology. While the unity that he advocated may not be attractive in its implications, it is undeniably central to his ecclesiology. Secondly, the mark of holiness is reflected in Darby's doctrine of separation. He sought a very real and concrete holiness in the assembly through active separation from evil. Thirdly, there is a form of catholicity in the international character and the expansion of the Brethren movement that resulted from it. Darby sought a fellowship that crossed national borders and which brought all Christians into a visible unity of fellowship. Fourthly, the mark of apostolicity is perhaps a little harder to trace in Darby's ecclesiology. Darby certainly saw an enormous discontinuity between the apostolic and contemporary church. He believed that the church had lost much of its original power, including the power to appoint elders and deacons, as the apostles had; and even more fundamentally, he believed that the visible unity of the church had been lost since apostolic times. However, if apostolicity is seen in terms of the New Testament's role in providing the church with a source for its order, ministry and gospel witness, then Darby's ecclesiology may be said to be apostolic. Christians might not necessarily judge this ecclesiology that to be the most faithful expression of 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, but it surely is an expression of it.

Influence on American fundamentalism

Chapter 5 considered the influence of Darby's ecclesiology amongst American fundamentalists. Their theology was affected in a significant way by Darby's distinction between the church and Israel, by his view that the church's position in salvation history was parenthetical, and his belief in repeated dispensational failure. However, they did not embrace the doctrine of the ruin of the church or Darby's rejection of the visible/ invisible distinction. Hence, rather than joining those in the United States who identified with the Brethren movement, they remained within their later denominations and rejected the need for separation. Later, as their influence within their denominations faltered, they adopted the policy of separation. However, the denominations they formed were based, for the most part, on those that they had left. Like Darby they emphasised the unity of the body of Christ as an heavenly entity on earth, but they gave this concept a radically different practical expression from that of Darby by emphasising parachurch co-operation between Christians outside of denominational structures. American Dispensational fundamentalism demonstrated that it is possible to separate Darby's eschatology and dispensational theology from his ecclesiology. However, there are no examples of individuals or groups adopting Darby's ecclesiology without his eschatology. It is conceivable that a person who rejected Darby's eschatology could consistently adopt a number of Darby's ecclesial views, such as the impossibility of a formal eldership today, the ruin of the church and his synthesis of unity and separation. However, without his distinction between the church and Israel (and thus his dispensational eschatology) it would not be possible to

view the church as a heavenly entity to the same extent, as the church would be in continuity with Israel, an earthly body.⁹

This thesis points out that separatism was not a direct result of Darby's influence, but rather a later and possibly parallel development in American fundamentalism. Many of those who were most influenced by Darby, such as Scofield and Chafer were uncomfortable with separatist tendencies. The temptation to see Darby as a radical sectarian influence on American fundamentalism should be resisted. While Darby's theology had a powerful and distinctive impact on the American movement, it is misleading to call this a *sectarian* development.

Ecclesiastical context in 19th century Britain

Chapter 6 placed Darby's ecclesiology in the context of three other significant 19th century British ecclesial movements. It was argued that Darby's ecclesiology shared a number of common themes with them. Most importantly they were all a response to a crisis of ecclesiology in 19th century Britain prompted by the decreasing centrality of the established church in the life of the nation. However, while the influence of 19th century Britain was important in influencing Darby's ecclesiology, its appeal transcended beyond that context. The Brethren movement spread during Darby's lifetime into continental Europe, North America and Asia. The Brethren movement remains today an international movement, in that is present on every continent. Perhaps most interestingly, Darby's ecclesiology was to a large extent adopted (with some modifications) by the Chinese evangelist and Bible teacher, Watchman Nee,

⁹ There seems no reason to think that one who accepted Darby's ecclesiology would need to believe in a Pre-Tribulational rapture as Darby did; while the Pre-Tribulational rapture doctrine supports a distinction between Israel and the church, Gundry has argued that it is not essential to it (Gundry, 1973, p.12-28).

who founded the Local Churches movement in China (which later spread to America and other countries through the work of Witness Lee).¹⁰ Watchman Nee was briefly in fellowship with the Raven/ Taylor party of Exclusive Brethren until they found aspects of his teaching and relations with other Christians objectionable.¹¹

Contrast with Later Sectarian Development in Exclusivism

It is well known that the Raven/ Taylor party of Exclusive Brethren have developed in a radically sectarian direction, avoiding some elements of modern technology and much social contact with those outside their fellowship. It was argued in chapter four that Darby would not have approved of their practice of requiring separation of married couples in the event of one spouse being put out of fellowship. The Raven/ Taylor party has also departed from Darby's advocacy of a qualified open communion¹² and his openness to fellowship and intercourse with Christians outside the Brethren. While Darby supported the centralising tendency within the Exclusive Brethren and had strong sectarian leanings, it must not be forgotten that his life and work embodies trends that run counter to the sectarianism of the Raven/ Taylor Exclusives.

Resonance of Darby's ecclesiology

It was argued in the first chapter that Darby dealt with a number of ecclesiastical concerns with which modern theologians have grappled. It is arguable that Darby's ecclesiology might have some appeal to Christians today. There are factors that would make this less likely. In Britain, the Brethren movement has declined considerably.¹³

¹⁰ D. Roberts, *The Secrets of Watchman Nee*, Orlando, Florida, Bridge-Logos, 2005, p.17, 148-149

¹¹ Gardiner, 1951, p.217

¹² Shuff, 2005, p.56

¹³ See Shuff, 2005, p.256-263 and Grass, 2007, p.469-485.

In the United States, Dispensationalist theology has been in decline somewhat, even though many institutions and denominations are committed to its main tenets. Dispensationalism has been challenged by Progressive Dispensationalism, an alternative theology, which while seeking to maintain the distinction between Israel and the church, emphasises a high degree of continuity between the two and denies the parenthetical position of the church in salvation history.¹⁴ Nevertheless, despite these factors, there are reasons for thinking that Darby's ecclesiology might find resonance with Christians today. Despite the ecumenical movement, there is still much division between denominations. Darby's idea of the church being in ruins may arguably still be reflected in much of the current state of Christendom. It is quite conceivable that a variety of different Christians might find sympathy with Darby's pessimistic analysis of the state of the church. Some Charismatics may come to the conclusion that the modern experience of church life and the charismata is very different from that of apostolic times and may find in Darby's ecclesiology an explanation for the departure from apostolic norms. Some evangelicals may feel dissatisfied at the lack of success in various evangelistic initiatives and other negative factors, despite the enormous activity within modern evangelicalism. This would reflect Darby's own dissatisfaction with the enormous energy and optimism in the evangelicalism of his day. Perhaps with the current tensions over the issue of homosexuality and women bishops within the Anglican communion, some conservative Anglicans might reach Darby's conclusion that the Anglican church is a

¹⁴ See C. Blaising and D.L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1993, R.L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan, 1993, J.S. Feinberg (ed.), *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments*, Wheaton, Illinois, Crossway, 1988.

More traditional Dispensationalists have criticised Progressive Dispensationalism as a deviation from the essential tenets of the system. Charles Ryrie, perhaps the main spokesman for traditional Dispensationalism in recent years, provided a general critique of the movement in his work, *Dispensationalism* (Ryrie, 1995, p.161-181).

ruined institution. These dissatisfied evangelicals might find positive elements in Darby; the possibility of meeting simply as Christians outside of denominational structures and the reliance on spiritual gifts in ministry (without the expectation of miracles or new prophecies).

It may be argued that Darby's ecclesiology might provide an helpful corrective to a tendencies within evangelicalism to de-emphasise the visible church. Evangelicalism has sometimes been accused of failing to develop fully its doctrine of the church.¹⁵ A good deal of its activity revolves around interdenominational missions, publishing houses, magazines, research institutes, radio networks and other parachurch organisations, rather than local or denominational churches.¹⁶ While in some ways, this may be a source of strength, it may be asked whether this reflects a strong enough commitment to the centrality of the church. Michael Williams writes:

For many American Christians today, the church, as an actual body of confessing believers, is simply a matter of convenience. Whether one associates or participates, is considered to be largely a personal matter. If someone in the church offends me in some way, if the pastor hits too close from the pulpit, if my pet program or agenda is rejected, I simply pull up the stakes and move to the next church. As a society we have simply lost all recognition of the local body of believers as an essential part of the Christian religion and the Christian life.¹⁷

Williams views Dispensationalism as contributing to such a tendency. However, it was argued in chapter 5 that the Dispensational tendency to de-emphasise the church was an American development which contrasted strongly with Darby's ecclesiology. With his emphasis on all believers being part of the body of the Christ and the need to

¹⁵ A.E. McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity*, Downers Grove, Illinois, IVP, 1995, p.82

¹⁶ J. Bolt, "Evangelical Ecclesiology: No Longer an Oxymoron? A review essay," in *Calvin Theological Journal*, no. 39, 2004, p.401

¹⁷ Williams, 2003, p.79

manifest this through 'meeting in the name of the Lord' in visible unity, Darby's ecclesiology could provide a potential corrective to the tendency of Evangelicalism to view the church as a voluntary society of individuals.

Supposing that an individual Christian becomes convinced by Darby's claim that the church is ruined and that the congregation he attends has no claim to be a true church. What is he or she to do? Following Darby's ecclesiology ought to mean joining a Brethren assembly which meets 'in the name of the Lord.' Yet this individual must then wrestle with the issue of which Brethren fellowship is truly consistent in its ecclesiastical policy. Is this person to join the Open Brethren, or should he take seriously Darby's rejection of Bethesdaism? If he or she sides with Darby on the Bethesda question, he or she may have to choose between different parties within Exclusivism. This person may find that the spiritual life and activity in the nearest Brethren assembly is far weaker than his or her own congregation. Should he or she lose the benefits of his or her own congregation simply to ensure the benefit of meeting correctly? Given that the church is ruined and cannot be restored, would it necessarily be wrong for a Christian to continue meeting in a congregation whose principles are wrong if there is good preaching and loving fellowship there? These are difficult questions that an individual who was persuaded by Darby's ecclesiology today would have to face. It is always possible that there might be a new movement along Brethren lines, taking influence from Darby's ecclesiology, just as Watchman Nee's 'Local Churches' did in China. However, such a movement would have to define carefully its identity in relation to existing Brethren parties.

Final Evaluation

It is clear that Darby's ecclesiology was highly idiosyncratic. In holding to the irreparable ruin of the church, he took an entirely unique view of the state of the church and its relationship to God. It is therefore necessary to ask whether his ecclesiology has any value, or whether it can be discarded to the waste paper bin of theological ideas. It is not unnatural that we should regard such an idiosyncratic approach with a degree of suspicion.

This thesis has identified a number of faults with Darby's ecclesiology, his weak methodology, his tendency to vagueness on some points, his failure to recognise the necessity for engagement between the church and the world, his lack of a missiology, his excessive pessimism, the difficulty of seeing the indwelling Holy Spirit as a source of power for ministry in the church while at the same time seeing a lack of power in the church to appoint ministers, the problems of multiplying schisms seen in the history of the Brethren and his lack of attention to the doctrine of sacraments or ordinances. These are serious problems with Darby's ecclesiology. That is not to say that they are insurmountable. A theologian who shared the basic outline of Darby's though could no doubt refine those elements of the Darbyite ecclesiology that are problematic, as American fundamentalists have done with other aspects of Dispensationalism. However, many Christians might wonder if it would be worth the effort. Nevertheless, as has been argued above, Darby's ecclesiology does have a certain resonance that can still be seen in our era. The problems that Darby identified in his day have not gone away.

In the first chapter, several factors were identified as being important within a truly Christian ecclesiology. Some of these factors can be seen in Darby's ecclesiology, such as a general appearance of the creedal markers and a Trinitarian dimension, as is argued above. It also offered a clear conception of the essence of the church as the body of Christ. It was suggested in the first chapter that a sound ecclesiology must be able to distinguish and relate the church and the kingdom of God. Darby made a strong distinction between the church and the kingdom of God, nevertheless the church still occupied an eschatological place in his theology. Darby placed his doctrine of the church into a well conceived understanding of salvation history.

The first chapter suggested that a sound ecclesiology should have the criteria of inclusiveness. The church must be open to all peoples, not putting up barriers on the basis of class, sex or race, but uniting humanity in a common gospel of salvation in Christ. Perhaps the picture on this score is rather mixed. The Brethren are an international movement represented on every continent. On the whole, they have a good track record on the subject of race. It is possible that this may have been helped by Darby's belief that the church was a heavenly institution that transcended the cultural and political divisions in the world. This gave it a supranational character and therefore made it open to all peoples. Some theologians would be rather more critical of the Brethren on the subject of sex; most parties in the Brethren follow darby in excluding women from vocal ministry in the assembly. The biggest problem for the inclusiveness within Darby's ecclesiology is brought about by his separatism. The continuing separation between Open and Exclusive Brethren has been mentioned above.

An important aspect of inclusiveness ought to be a recognition of the diversity of belief and practice amongst Christians. An ecclesiology that is inclusive must be able to deal with this diversity and relate it to the essential unity of the Christian church and faith. This thesis would suggest that he succeeded in this more than he is given credit for, but only just. On the one hand, Darby opposed all attempts to exclude diversity on non-essential matters such as the mode of baptism and prophetic events. Darby did not define what minimal doctrinal standards were necessary for fellowship, but they did not go far beyond assent to the ancient creeds, plus repudiation of what were seen as Catholic errors and avoidance of such alleged heresies as annihilation or universalism. Furthermore, Darby believed in an open communion with all Christians (excluding Catholics and unbaptized Quakers) being welcome to the table, unless they were subject to discipline. On the other hand, as is shown above, the exclusion of discipline applied to masses of the Brethren's own members who had fallen foul of the party line. Furthermore, it is doubtful that the aggressive polemical attacks of Darby against all manner of professing Christians reflect a real commitment to an inclusive ecclesiology.

It was also suggested in the first chapter that a sound ecclesiology should offer challenge to existing church structures and institutions. After all, if the church is in a perfect state, what need is there for further ecclesiological writing? The gospel is a call to a radical faith and challenges the existing order of the world. Therefore some kind of radical challenge must be offered within a truly Christian ecclesiology. Again, the results in Darby's ecclesiology are mixed. Darby certainly challenged existing ecclesiastical structures. His advocacy of open ministry offered a freedom to all Christians (though not women) to participate fully in the life of the church. However,

Darby offered no wider challenge to the existing order of society. His own instincts were conservative and he had no interest in challenging the political system of his day. The radicalism of Darby was only in spiritual terms and not political.

For all its problems and inconsistencies, it must be said that Darby's ecclesiology is a sincere effort to establish in practice the essential Christian belief that the work of Christ had established a united body of men and women, sharing a common salvation. It stands in a long tradition within church history of powerful, zealous and sincere movements that have attempted to call the church back to an original purity and faithfulness.

Avenues for Further Research

This thesis opens up several possible areas for future research. It was argued in chapter four that the Raven/ Taylor party of Exclusives departed from Darby's ecclesiology in their more radical policy of separation. Shuff has provided a helpful treatment of some of the changes with this party of Exclusives.¹⁸ However, new research into some of the reasons for the changes within Exclusivism would be helpful, particularly considering the question of why other parties of Brethren have not developed along these lines. Chapter 5 considered the Dispensationalist segment of American fundamentalism. Within American fundamentalism there are many independent and non-denominational 'Bible churches.' Research into the ecclesiology of these bodies would be helpful. Another fruitful area for research would be the ecclesiology of Watchman Nee and the local churches that followed him. It would be

¹⁸ R. Shuff, *From Open to Closed: A Study of the Development of Exclusivism within the Brethren Movement in Britain 1828-1953*, PhD dissertation, University of Wales, 1996

helpful to understand why he opted for the theology of the Brethren, rather than some of the other theologies imported to China by missionaries.

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