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WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

BY THE LATE

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WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

THERE is reason to fear that indistinct and incorrect, if not altogether erroneous, ideas are very commonly entertained respecting the Church of Christ; whilst most persons are ready to admit that from its very nature, as well as from the express declarations of Scripture, it is a subject of deep importance. Now, where incorrect or erroneous ideas are held on a matter of this nature, it will generally be found that unsound or inaccurate views are entertained on fundamental and vitally important doctrines.

It would be scarcely possible, nor would it fall within the scope of these pages, to enumerate the various shades of opinion which exist on the question, 'What is the Church?' , It may, however, not be without profit briefly to notice those generally entertained; to point out their deficiency; and lastly, to consider the instruction conveyed to us in the Word of God on this subject.

1. By some the Church is regarded as merely a worldly human establishment, an appendage to the State, and, at the same time, a needful machinery for the preservation of religion and public morals.

2. Others, taking a more exalted view, consider the Church as a Divine institution, founded by Christ, endowed with spiritual life, and enabled by His grace to fulfil its vocation.
3. By another party the Church is considered to consist of two parts, viz. ,the visible‘ and ‘the invisible‘ - the former comprising all who are admitted to the external privileges, and make a profession of Christianity; the latter, those who have been converted to God, and are true Christians.
4. Lastly, we have the Church of Rome, claiming to be the true Church - asserting that her chief bishop is the head of the Catholic, that is universal, Church, and, consequently, that all not in communion with her are schismatics.

Doubtless, there are many shades of opinion under each of these heads; but these sufficiently represent the views maintained by the four principal and distinct parties - the Men of the world, the High Church, the Evangelical, and the Roman Catholic.

We shall endeavour, first, to point out wherein these several views of the Church are incorrect or imperfect; and, next, to show what is the true con-

dition and standing of the Church, as declared in the word of God:

5. In reference to the first mentioned, viz. that of the Church being ‘a merely worldly or human establishment - an appendage to the State ‘ - little need be said. For, however this view may be entertained by ‘men of the world,‘ it is not, and cannot be, held by those who profess to be Churchmen.

No one well instructed can for a moment doubt that the Church and the State have relative duties towards each other. It is the duty of the Church to instruct men in the principles of religion and morality, and to be herself the pattern of all lawful obedience to authority. On the other hand, it is the duty of the State to uphold and to aid the Church, by all legitimate means, to carry out her high and holy vocation. If, therefore, the connection implied by the words ‘Church and State,‘ simply means that support, honour, and furtherance which the State renders, or should render to the Church, in the discharge of her duty; and, on the other hand, the willing obedience the Church is called to give to those in authority - if this is what is meant by ‘Church and State,‘ the words are unobjectionable. But if (as there is too much reason to fear is generally the case) they imply that the Church is the creature of man’s will, depend-

ent on man's authority, and subject to his control; that her sacred offices and functions are to be regulated and distributed by the temporal power; her services and forms subjected to the sanction and authority of the civil ruler, whether exercised by one or by many; if such be the supposed relationship contained under the words 'Church and State,' such a definition of the Church and of her vocation must be entirely rejected by everyone who knows what the Church is; and such a state of things, wherever existing, can only be regarded as dishonouring to the great Head of the Church, and bringing sore injury and loss to the members of His body.

That such a state of things does unhappily exist, we have too many evidences to deny. From the days of Constantine downwards the Church has been brought, almost entirely, under the power and control of the civil ruler. To maintain that power and control, the State has been willing to afford a certain amount of honour and protection, and even a certain amount of liberty to the Church; so much so that ecclesiastical offices have become titles of worldly honour and rank; and the Church, in order to purchase that protection and support, has been content to forego her true and holy position.

But, as above stated, this state of things can never be regarded by those who have any true idea of the Church and of her calling, otherwise than evil, however it may have been overruled by God to effect His purposes of mercy and grace to the world in general.¹

II. Another, and in many respects a more correct view of the Church, is put forth, chiefly by the so-called HIGH CHURCH Party, viz. 'That the Church is an INSTITUTION OF DIVINE AUTHORITY.'

The doctrine maintained is that our Lord chose twelve men, whom He called Apostles. That to them He gave commission to teach what they had received from Him - to ordain other ministers - to organize a form of ecclesiastical government and order - to establish the general form of worship - to hand down the sacraments He had instituted; in a word, to constitute that, 'Ecclesiastical Polity', which under the name of 'The Church' has existed (though with differ-

¹ The past history and present condition of the world afford ample evidence of the evils which arise when the Church and the State fail to preserve their true relative position towards each other. In those countries where the dominion of the Pope has been thrown off, the State controls and often oppresses the Church, whilst in Papal countries, for the most part, but especially at Rome, the Church, absorbing the power and offices of the State, carries on an unrighteous and oppressive government.

ent modifications, according to time and circumstances) to the present day.

They who maintain this view of the Church, for the most part, hold the doctrine of 'baptismal regeneration', - , the real presence in the sacrament of the Lord's supper, - , apostolical succession; in a word, those doctrines which are supposed to distinguish the High Church Party.

Now, the objection to be made to this definition and view of the Church is, not that it is incorrect, but that it is *imperfect*. It is true that the Church is a Divine institution, but it is something more, and that *something more* is the very point in which this definition is defective, and so defective, as to omit altogether the *real distinctive* feature of the Church. This will be more clearly seen in our further investigation; suffice it at present to say, that this view claims for the Church of Christ no higher standing than can be claimed for the Jewish polity. That polity was in the strictest sense a Divine institution. Its services, laws, obligations, were all of Divine appointment; and, as regards the *letter*, were as definitely and authoritatively imposed as those of the Christian Church. True it is, those of the Christian Church are of a more spiritual character; but as regards Divine authority, and as a Divine institution, the Jewish and Christian

covenants stand on the same footing. Consequently this definition of the Church is imperfect, and so imperfect as to leave out her true distinctive feature altogether.²

III. Another idea of the Church is maintained (chiefly by that portion of the Church termed 'Evangelical') according to which the Church on earth is supposed to consist of two parts or divisions, viz. 'the outward or visible,' and 'the inward or invisible.' By the former are meant all who by baptism have been admitted into the Christian covenant, and make profession of Christianity. By the latter, those only who are true believers, have been converted to God, and live as Christians.

Now this view of the subject, whilst it contains a certain portion of truth, is nevertheless founded on a complete fallacy.

True it is, alas! too true, that in the mystical body of Christ, the Church, there are sound and unsound,

² It must, however, be admitted, that if the words 'Divine institution' were used in their legitimate and comprehensive sense, they might serve to convey a sufficiently accurate definition of the Church; but that which is here referred to is the meaning commonly attached to these words, implying simply that the Church was constituted by Divine, not human authority.

healthy and unhealthy members. In the vine fruitful and unfruitful branches. In the same family may be found obedient and disobedient children. But they are all members, branches, or children respectively, and continue such, until by a *judicial act* they are separated from that connection.

In point of fact, this idea of 'visible and invisible' is founded on an entire ignorance of what baptism is, and consequently of the standing of the baptized.

The Church in the aggregate is the company of the baptized; for baptism is the *act of God*, whereby man is taken out of a state of nature, and brought into a state of grace. All who are baptized are 'baptized into Christ,' and all who are 'baptized into Christ have put on Christ.' They are 'baptized into one body,' the mystical body of Christ, the Church. Consequently they are made, as members of that body, partakers of a regenerate life. They are as the Church of England admirably expresses it, 'made members of Christ, children of God, and heirs of the kingdom of heaven.' There are no *two* bodies into which persons are severally baptized, but '*one* body.' There are no *two* Churches into which persons are severally admitted (into one by baptism, into the other by conversion), but *one* Church. Baptism, as the act of incorporation, is the act of God. Conversion is the act of God likewise, restoring to health and vigour (at

likewise, restoring to health and vigour (at least, in reference to the baptized) the decayed or decaying member. Conversion is not the cause or origin of regenerate life (in the baptized), but the restoration or revival of regenerate life already received.

Moreover, this distinction between 'visible and invisible' is wholly incorrect in its application. The visible portion of the Church is that portion which is on the earth, and consequently visible. The invisible portion of the Church is that portion which is *not* on the earth, but has entered into the state of separation between soul and body - disembodied spirits. It is an utter confusion of terms to apply the words 'visible and invisible' to that portion of the Church which is on the earth, and which therefore must necessarily be visible.

We know, indeed, too well from Scripture and from experience, that 'all are not Israel that are of Israel.' We know likewise, that amidst the general, one might almost say the universal departure from the ways and will of God, He has had in all generations those who have loved and served Him according to their day and generation; and if the term 'invisible' is merely used to signify that man cannot discern who are true and who false members of Christ, the expression (however inaccurate) is harmless. But when

used, as we know it is used, to signify *two essentially* distinct and separate portions of Christ's Church on earth, to one of which all are admitted by an official or ministerial act, whilst to the other only some are admitted by the grace of God, then is it impossible to regard this distinction and this definition of the Church (though entertained by many excellent persons) otherwise than as a serious error, which sets aside the truth concerning baptism, nullifies the unity of the body, and which tends, in no small degree, either to puff up with pride, or depress with unholy fear, those who maintain it. The Scripture knows but of *one* Church, speaks to but *one* Church, exhorts, rebukes, encourages, and commends but *one* Church - the Church of Christ - the baptized. Whereas according to the above-mentioned definition of 'visible and invisible,' there are two distinct Churches, two distinct classes of individuals to whom these exhortations, warnings, etc., are addressed, and by whom they are to be severally appropriated according to the judgment which each may pass upon himself.

This definition and view of the Church must, therefore, be rejected, as inaccurate, unsound, and injurious.

IV. Lastly, we have the Church of Rome, claiming to be the only true Church - asserting that her chief

bishop is, by Divine appointment, the head of the Catholic Church, and, consequently, that all not in communion with her are guilty of schism - that guilt, however, differing in degree according to the circumstances and opportunities of each individual case.

On this view of the Church little need be said. If the doctrine respecting baptism, above stated, be true, as it assuredly is, the claim of the Church of Rome to be *the* true Church must be rejected, as nullifying that truth. It practically denies that the baptized are members of Christ's body; or else it asserts that they may be regenerate and members of His body, and yet not be members of the Church of Christ.³

³ In answer to this, Roman Catholics sometimes say, 'We admit that all baptized persons are Christians, as there is but "*one baptism*"; but if, when they come to years of discretion, and have the power of choosing for themselves, they are not in communion with that Church of which the Pope is the head, they forfeit this privilege, and are not members of the Church of Christ.'

The fallacy of this statement is obvious. It admits that persons are baptized into Christ without being made members of the Church of Rome; consequently the Church of Christ and the Church of Rome are not *identical*. It makes membership in the Church of Christ the act of the individual, not the act of God. It makes separation from the Church of Christ take place without any *judicial* act, and leaves undetermined the age, circumstances, etc., when this takes place. In a word, it is a complete denial of baptism as the

This is one of the sad evidences (alas! too many) how far the Church of Rome has departed from true catholicity. By her claim to be *the* Church, she cuts herself off from the rest of Christendom - from the Greek, Protestant, Lutheran companies of the baptized, and is schismatic. For, be it observed, it is not a question of comparative superiority in doctrine or practice between herself and other communities. That might be maintained without forfeiting catholicity. But when she sets up another standard, and declares that, not baptism, but union with the Bishop of Rome, is that which constitutes true membership in the body of Christ, she practically separates herself from the baptized, and is proved schismatic.

It is to no purpose that she claims to be the most ancient Church. It is to no purpose to allege that the Pope has been acknowledged as the head of the Church by the majority of Christendom. Were it even so, this would avail her nothing, nor exempt her from the charge of being sectarian and uncatholic, so long as she separates herself from the rest of the baptized, by refusing to acknowledge them to be members of Christ's mystical body. And, indeed, who is there that has ever contemplated the Roman Church, as seen in foreign lands, but must painfully feel that the low es-

act of God, wherebv we are incorporated into the body of Christ.

tate of her priesthood (morally and theologically considered) - the widespread infidelity and laxity of morals amongst her laity - the Mariolatry of her worship and teaching⁴ - the withholding of the Scriptures of God from her children - and, alas! her sad corruptions of the ancient faith, afford her but little support in claiming to be *the* Church of Christ, and that, in distinction to the rest of Christendom

If, then, we are taught that the Church is not a mere worldly, human establishment' - the expression, „a Divine institution“ (as ordinarily understood), is inadequate - if the division, 'visible and invisible,' is not to be admitted; and, lastly, if the claim of the Church of Rome to be *the* Church is entirely to be rejected - the question naturally arises:

WHAT IS THE CHURCH? or rather, HOW ARE WE TO REGARD THE CHURCH?

This is the question to which the following pages are addressed; and the answer to this all-important enquiry is this:

THE CHURCH IS HEAVENLY - THE CHURCH IS A NEW CREATION.

⁴ The writer of these pages could mention many things he has heard from French and Italian preachers on this point that would rather astonish English ears; so likewise in regard to the condition of the priesthood from the testimony of priests themselves.

We assert that the Church is not earthly, nor of this earth; that her origin, existence, laws, authority, powers, objects, motives, all belong to 'the heavens,' and do not belong to the earth: that her connection with the earth is not of her essence, but is an accident.

Let us briefly consider this point.

We are taught by the Word of God that it was the eternal purpose of God, purposed in Himself before all worlds, that the Son of God should take human nature into indissoluble union with the Divine nature in His own Person. That having in that Divine union of Godhead and manhood, made atonement and reconciliation for man, and being exalted out of death to the right hand of God, He should become the fountain-head, the giver forth of a spiritual existence, a new life emanating from Himself by the Holy Ghost.

Of this life, this new life, an election out of mankind is made to partake. This election, quickened with life derived from Christ, the 'quickening spirit' is the Church. It is the body of Christ, spiritually yet substantially existing. He rose out of death, and thence became a 'quickening spirit,' and being ascended to the right hand of God, He received and gave from the Father the Holy Ghost, to form, organize, and vivify

that body, which is thus united to Him in real spiritual membership. The Church is a reality, an existence, not an ideal thing. It is the body of Christ, existing after a spiritual manner, yet substantially existing. It partakes of that life of which He, quickened from death, is the fountain and source.

Hence the Church is said to be 'the fulness (*πληρωμα*) of Him that filleth all in all' (Eph. i, 22); to be raised up with Christ and to sit in 'heavenly places' (Eph. ii. 6); to have her 'life hid with Christ in God,' (Col. iii. 3). Hence it is called to have His mind (Phil. ii. 5); to do His works (John xiv. 12); to follow His example (ii Peter ii. 21); to be conformed to His image (Rom. viii. 29, 1 Cor. xv. 49, Col. iii. 10); to share his kingdom (Rev. iii. 21, v. 10); to make known to the ages to come His grace and manifold wisdom (Eph. ii. 6, 7, iii. 9, 10); to judge creation (1 Cor. vi. 2, 3, Ps. cxlix. 9, Jude 14, 15).

Such is the Church - such her calling. She is heavenly, the new creation of God. Formed out of earth, formed out of mankind, she is not of the earth. Her head is in 'the heavens'; her life is in 'heaven'; her kingdom is 'the kingdom of the heavens'; her laws are heavenly. By-and-by she will throw off the earthly element, for the very bodies of her members, though still material, will be changed into glorious bodies,

like unto Christ's glorious body. When the earthly tabernacle is dissolved, 'the tabernacle made without hands, eternal in the heavens,' abides (2 Cor. v. 1). When the Lord, her head, shall reappear, then she shall enter on her true condition. The earthly phase passes away, the heavenly abideth. Then in *entirety*, as now in *part*, she shall be seen, and only seen, as HEAVENLY.

The Church is heavenly; heavenly, as the purpose of God, before all worlds; heavenly, as the creation of God; heavenly, as having oneness of life with the incarnate Son of God; heavenly, as the dwelling-place of God; heavenly, as called to fulfil His mind, do His work, show forth His praise, share His glory.

Such is the Church - such her calling.

DO ANY ASK, 'WHAT IS THE CHURCH?' THE ANSWER IS -

The Church is the election out of mankind, who, by the Holy Ghost given at baptism, are partakers (first in their spirits, hereafter in their bodies) of the life of the incarnate Son of God risen from death.

This is a new creation - an heavenly, not an earthly constitution.

The Church was constituted on the day when, in fulfilment of His promise, the Lord Jesus Christ sent down the Holy Ghost. On that day a new creation, an heavenly constitution, a state of things utterly and entirely different in kind from anything and everything that had gone before, commenced.

Then first man was quickened with the very life of the Son of God incarnate. Then first man was raised to the unspeakable glory - the highest the creature can be raised to - to which angels cannot attain - to form the membership of that Body of which the Lord of Glory is Head. Then the Church began. On Apostles, as the constituted heads of the Church, were concentrated, so to speak, the other gifts and ministries to be developed in due time, and by the ac-

tion of which the Church was to be built up and perfected.

Ascended up on high, Jesus, the Lord of Glory, received from the Father and gave unto men, 'some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ' (Eph. iv).

Thus the Church began, that mystical unity of which Jesus is Head and Lord. The Church was heavenly, and had only to wait for the reappearing of her Lord that she might enter into and share His glory and kingdom.

In the recognition of this her heavenly standing apostles laboured to preserve the Church. They laboured to present her as a chaste virgin unto Christ. They laboured, and 'hoped against hope' even to the end. But they themselves witnessed and warned the Church against the gradual departure from her true standing, which even then commenced, and has well-nigh reached its consummation.

No one can read the apostolic epistles, more especially those of St. Paul, without perceiving how constantly and earnestly they warned the Church against

'the evil heart of unbelief,' whereby gradually but surely the Church was 'departing from the living God,' and failing to enter into 'the rest prepared for the people of God.' To the Galatian Church he says, 'Who hath bewitched you?' 'Ye did run well, who did hinder you?' 'Having begun in the spirit, are ye now made perfect in the flesh?' , 'Where is the blessedness ye spake of?' To the Corinthian Church he says, 'Ye are yet carnal'; 'This is not to eat the Lord's supper'; 'Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me'; 'Know ye not that Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?' , 'To others, , In the last days perilous times shall come'; , 'After my departure shall grievous wolves enter in, not sparing the flock'; 'All have forsaken me'; 'All they in Asia be turned away from me.'

These, and many similar passages running through the apostolic epistles, full of lamentation and warning, too plainly show that, in the very days of the apostles, the 'mystery of iniquity' had already begun, and that the Church was declining from her steadfastness, ceasing to recognize her heavenly calling, more and more becoming earthly, forgetting to look for and make preparation for her Lord, despising prophesying, quenching the Spirit, and all but rejecting apostles.

And what is the subsequent history of the Church but one continued struggle against heresy and schism, one part striving against another even to war and bloodshed? From the time of Constantine the Church succumbed to earthly rule, sought the protection and became the creature of imperial or royal power, to purchase which she renounced her claim to be heaven-born, and sold her birthright.

The Papacy itself, whilst claiming for her chief bishop to be head of the universal Church - the vicar of Christ on earth - conceded at various times, to emperors and their minions, the right of appointing the pope. The Eastern Church, separated from and disallowed by the Western, falling into all manner of superstition in doctrine and in practice, is seen the servile creature of an autocrat. In England, where pious and zealous men strove to free the Church from papal authority and papal abuse, the result has been the loss of many Catholic practices, if not of Catholic truth; the isolation of a small section from the rest of the catholic world; and in some respects the establishment of the opposite extremes of error. Instead of a pope, a king becomes the acknowledged head and 'Supreme Governor of the Church.' The civil power nominates to the episcopacy; the Houses of Parliament authorize or forbid the form of prayer; civil courts decide on the doctrine of the Church; the high-

est ecclesiastical court declares there is no altar; the most solemn service of the Church is only a 'Communion'; the Eucharist service of the ancient Church⁵ all but done away with; an unfurnished altar, an unvested⁶ priesthood bespeak her poverty.

Oh; what tongue can tell - what heart can conceive the depths of shame and poverty to which the

⁵ Let it not for a moment be supposed that anything is here said with a view to diminish the respect and veneration so justly due to the eminent men who compiled the English Prayer Book, or to disparage their work. If we consider the times in which they lived, the sovereigns under whom they for the most part laboured (little inclined to forego their assumed headship of the Church), the state of opposing parties, the spirit of the age, and the various difficulties they had to encounter, and, above all, that they undertook a work for which they had no immediate commission from God; when we consider these things, one cannot but admire the wonderful grace and goodness of God which preserved them from going further in throwing off ancient and Catholic principles and practices, and enabled them to hand down to us such a treasure as the Prayer Book has proved to be in times past. Such a feeling of reverence and veneration is perfectly compatible with the painful consciousness that the Church of England, by reason of her false position, and by her denuded Liturgy, is a striking witness to the melancholy fact that the Church has forgotten her calling.

⁶ It is well known that the surplice is the vestment belonging to the deacon; and in point of fact, neither the bishops nor priests in the Church of England wear the vestments belonging to their respective orders, and enjoined by the Rubric. The gown is merely an academical garment, and has no place and ought never to be worn in the church.

Church has fallen, in being satisfied with the earthly and forgetting her heavenly standing!

‘How is the gold become dim, the most fine gold changed! The stones of the sanctuary are poured out in the top of every street‘ (Lam. iv. 1).

‘Thy silver is become dross, thy wine mixed with water , (Is. i. 22).

But it may be well to point out some particulars in which may be more clearly seen the great loss and privation the Church has suffered from failing to recognize her , heavenly calling.‘

The Church, failing to discern, failing to abide in her heavenly standing, *necessarily* ceased to preserve the apostleship. For this reason - apostles hold their ministry *immediately* from the Lord Jesus Christ. Apostles are the first link of that chain of ministry whereby Jesus, the Lord, ministers from His fullness to His body, the Church. All other ministers (prophets, evangelists, pastors) hold to Him, and are held by Him, through apostles. Apostles alone are ‘not of man, neither by man, but by the will of God‘ (Gal.i. 1; 2Cor.1. ii; Eph.i. 1; 2 Tim. i. 1). Such has ever been the doctrine of the Church. Now the especial function

of the apostolic office is to minister the Holy Ghost unto the Church.

This ministration of the Spirit is not for imparting regenerate life; for baptism, which is the ordinance for that end, is not peculiar to apostles. But the giving of the Holy Ghost, which is the *specialty* of the apostolic ministry, is that by which such a measure of the gift of grace and power is ministered to each as may enable every member in its vocation and calling to fulfil its place in the body, for the edification and increase of the whole (Eph. iv. 10; 1 Cor. xii. 14); whether it be the gift necessary for the exercise of ministerial function, or that belonging to the particular member. Hence the faithful, *after* they believed, received, by the laying on of the hands of the apostles, the gift of the Holy Ghost (Acts viii. 17). ‘They were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, the earnest of the inheritance (Eph. i. 13,14). , The Spirit (and the gift of the Spirit) was ministered unto them, (Gal. iii. 5; Rom. i. 11). They were made, partakers of the powers of the world to come , (Heb. vi). In a word, to each was imparted (‘as the Spirit gave to each’) that gift needful to the health and well-being of the body (1 Cor. xii. *in toto*).

Without this ministry the Church could not continue in or fulfil her heavenly vocation; whilst ceasing

to recognize her true calling she did not, and *could* not, desire its continuance.

The Church could see no necessity for the continuance of that office and ministry, the *specialty* of which lay in imparting the 'powers of the world to come,' and those gifts 'in which she should not come behind,' if she would be found 'waiting for the coming of the Lord.'

When the Church ceased to recognize herself as 'seated in heavenly places in Christ,' and took up with a standard and condition to which the sacraments of life and the ministry of the word were alone essential, she was content that apostles, having fulfilled a certain work, should cease. The faith of the Church waned, and apostles died out.

Not seeing her own guilt, and loss, and degradation - not seeing that, like Ephraim of old, she had 'turned in the hand as a deceitful bow' - the Church was content to be without apostles; and not only so, but settled down on the conviction, and maintained the doctrine, that apostles were only given for a certain time, and for a certain work; which work being accomplished, it was in accordance with the will (and not merely by the permission) of God that the rule, guidance, and oversight of the Church should pass

into the hands of bishops, to whom has been given (it would be difficult to say on what authority) the name of 'successors to apostles.'

A Church without apostles is a Church that only recognizes herself as 'earthly,' or at best only as a 'Divine institution.' She is not, and cannot be, 'filled with the Spirit,' the ordinance for effecting that being wanted. She is not, and cannot be, described as 'coming behind in no gift, waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.' She is not, and cannot be, 'adorned as a bride,' expecting and looking for her lord. In a word, she has ceased to know that she is 'HEAVENLY.' The absence of apostles is the true exponent of her earthly condition, and of her willingness to be so. Apostles can only be needed or desired by a Church seeking to be found ready for the Lord - that would 'abide in Him, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming' (1 John ii. 28).

Nevertheless, the Church is *essentially* heavenly; for her head is Christ, and her 'life is hid with Christ in God.' The Church is also *essentially* apostolic; not because there have been twelve men called apostles, but because Jesus our Lord is *the* 'Apostle,' as well as 'High Priest of our profession.' Therefore, as it is ever possible for her to rise up into the knowledge and faith of her 'heavenly calling,' so it is ever possible for

her to put forth the apostleship. And there would seem to be an intimate connexion between the knowledge of her 'heavenly calling' and the discernment (κατανοησατε) of Christ, the Apostle (Heb. iii. 1).

If, therefore, God has prevailed, or is prevailing, in these last days, to bring out the office and ministry of apostle, it is the sure guarantee that He is likewise raising up in the hearts of the faithful (it may be at first of a small remnant) the apprehension of the Church as heavenly. And that office and ministry can only be developed as the faithful recognize their true calling to 'be filled with the Spirit.'

Again, the falling away of the Church from the knowledge of her true condition - from her heavenly standing - is shown out in another particular, viz.: THE LOSS OF HOPE.

The true hope of the Church - that which Christ bequeathed to the Church - that which apostles ever laboured to keep before the Church, is to 'see Him again.' The Church was led to believe and hope that the Lord would soon return. He Himself had promised to come again in a 'little while.' Apostles taught, and the Church believed, that until He came again, the body could not be perfected; the manifestation of the sons of God could not take place; the Church could

not enter into rest, nor obtain her true place. Therefore to wait for, to expect, to *long* for His appearing, was the attitude and character of a Church that knew she was risen with Christ, 'and seated in heavenly places with Him.' Having this hope, to be sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise - 'the earnest of the inheritance' - through the laying on of the hands of apostles, was a necessary consequence. But as faith failed, hope died out. Her absent Lord was no longer expected or desired. His coming again ceased to be an object of daily expectation. The servants began to say, 'My Lord delayeth His coming.' Scoffers began to say, 'Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation' (2 Peter iii. 4).

As an article of faith, indeed, as a dogma, it was still retained in the creed, 'He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.' But as a living hope - as a thing longed for and expected, it had utterly failed. And accordingly we find this subject gradually ceasing even to be entertained in the writings of the fathers and early writers, and miserable controversies occupy its place.

Nor can this be a matter of surprise, when the judgment of the world' came to be considered the great and prominent object of our Lord's return.

Judgment can never be in itself an object of hope, a thing to be desired. True it is, 'judgment' is part of the work the Lord will accomplish at His coming; but 'judgment is His strange work.' He comes to deliver, to bless, and to reign. Therefore His Church was taught to pray, 'Thy kingdom come.' But when His coming was removed to a far distant and indefinite period, under the expression 'end of the world,' and when that coming was invested with, and only with, the discouraging character of 'judgment,' what wonder that it ceased to be 'the blessed hope, and full of immortality,' or that the Church, losing sight of her 'heavenly calling,' should lose sight of her hope to be with Christ; to be like Him; to reign with Him in His kingdom?

Nor is it too much to say that this hope could never be maintained in the Church, as a living, daily expectation, when the gift of prophecy ceased to be exercised. 'The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.' The Comforter 'speaketh not of Himself,' but expresses the mind, the longings of His heart, who ever desires that where He is there His Church may be also. 'The Spirit and the Bride say, Come.' But when prophesying is no longer heard, then He can no longer speak to His people, and they soon forget His coming.

The Comforter has long kept silence; the Spirit has been quenched; prophesying has been despised, and hope has failed.⁷

Truly the Apostle had need to say, 'Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort (παρακαλεῖτε⁸) one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin' (Heb. iii. 12, 13).

Lastly, the failure of the Church to recognize her true standing, her heavenly calling, has been the fruitful cause of that want of *unity* which all acknowledge, and all godly men deplore.

'The communion of saints' has, indeed, through the goodness of God, been preserved as an article of her creed, as a dogma. But where shall we look for

⁷ It is a remarkable fact in the history of the Church, that whenever there has been a temporary revival of the gift of prophecy, the 'coming and kingdom of Christ' invariably formed the prominent subject of the prophetic word. This, no doubt, can be made use of to support opposite theories.

⁸ A comparison of the following texts, in the Greek, seems to favour the idea that the Holy Spirit ministers to the Church (as the Paraclete) mainly through the gift of prophecy - one of the gifts of the Spirit: John xiv. 16, 26; xv.26; xvi.13. 1 Cor. xii. 10; xiv. 1-3. Rom. xii. 6. 1 Tim. iv. 1. Acts xv. 32. Heb. iii. 12.

the practical demonstration that the saints are one? The unity of the Church is the unity of a body, the unity of life. 'There is one body, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling' (Eph. iv. 4). 'For by one spirit are we all baptized into one body' (1 Cor. xii. 13).

Of this oneness, this unity, the Church at the beginning had some realization, when, they continued steadfastly in the apostles 'doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers' (Acts ii. 42). But when and *as* the Church departed from her true standing, was content to take a lower position, no longer regarded herself as 'heavenly,' as a new creation, as 'risen with Christ'; then naturally and necessarily, apostles failing, division, and then strife and contention, entered. One said, I am of Paul'; another, I of Apollos'; another, I of Christ.' Men devised various means to preserve unity, or rather uniformity. Creeds were made, formularies drawn up, not so much with the object of declaring to the world the faith of the Church, but in order to keep and bind together men of like faith. And though God has in mercy overruled this to the great blessing of the Church, it did not, and could not, preserve unity; could not preserve 'the communion of saints' in its *vitality*; for this simple reason, that it was not God's way of preserving it.

Vain have been the attempts of councils and synods, by laws and prescriptions, to stem the evil. Schism has ever done its work. West and East became divided. The Papacy and Protestantism withstand each other; Churchmen and Dissenters contend; and the whole of Christendom is as 'a house divided against itself.' Nor could it be otherwise, when the ways and ordinances of God have been set aside.

Apostles were ordained by Christ heads over the universal Church, to rule in doctrine, in discipline, and in ministry, the centre of unity. Bishops were constituted, under apostles, heads to their respective churches; and being necessarily independent of each other, they can never be the head of the universal Church. Without a centre of unity, they themselves, as the fact has proved, become divided, if not antagonistic. For unity without headship is an impossibility.⁹

It was the feeling of this necessity, this want, which, in great measure, gave rise to the assumed

⁹ It is to no purpose to assert, as some do, in answer to this, that Christ in the heavens is our Head. It is a question of rule, of government, of authority, not of life. Christ acts towards, and in His Church, through ordinances, and the simple question is, what is the right ordinance for the rule and government of the universal Church? Will anyone say there should be none?

headship of the Bishop of Rome. The gradual rise of the Pope of Rome was the putting forth of a spiritual instinct - the effort of man to supply the absent ordinance of God. And where this claim has been rejected, men still have felt the need of having some head, and have been willing to give to the temporal ruler a certain amount of authority and control in spiritual matters; thus demonstrating, on the one hand, the necessity of headship, and on the other, how vain are the attempts of man to do the work of God.

Hence, then, the headship and centre of unity, as originally constituted by the Lord, having been set aside, unity was necessarily sacrificed, and the miserable estate of a divided and distracted Church not only bears witness to the depth to which she has fallen, but has ever brought dishonour and reproach to the name of Him who said, 'By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye love one another.'

Nor is the communion of saints, less violated in reference to the dead.

So truly has the Church forgotten that she is 'heavenly,' not earthly, that the dead are commonly spoken of, and thought of, as though they were no longer members of the one body - as though they

were removed from the fellowship and communion of the saints. The Church of Rome either exalts the departed faithful to that state of glory and honour which is only to be obtained at the resurrection, or else regards them as in a state of pain and suffering in Purgatory; whilst Protestants, rejecting the Roman perversion of the ancient faith, for the most part regard the dead as far removed beyond the need of intercession, and from all participation in the fellowship and communion of the Church on earth. Surely such sadly conflicting and cheerless doctrines could never have obtained place in a Church abiding in the consciousness of her heavenly condition. Death could never have been regarded as interfering with or nullifying that 'communion' which is not of earth. A Church so abiding could have found no place in her heart for the miserable doctrine of Purgatory, or the cold negation of Protestantism. Knowing that Jesus is 'Lord both of the dead and living' (Rom. xiv. 9); 'that He died for us that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him' (1 Thess. v.10); knowing that they 'who die in the Lord rest from their labours'; knowing, that the spirits of just men made perfect' are a link in the chain of her heavenly constitution (Heb. xii. 23) - knowing these things, realizing these things, she could not have forgotten her dead or have ceased to commemorate them at the altar of God; but would have ever continued to pray, as the

early Church prayed, 'May they rest in Thy peace, and awake to a joyful resurrection.'

Alike the living and the dead have suffered, because alike the living and the dead are members of that one body, 'the Church of the living God.'

In these particulars more especially (and others might be added), is seen the grievous loss the Church has sustained in declining from the ways and order of God. The ordinance for rule and the centre of unity has been in abeyance; and strife and contention have abounded. The blessed and joyful hope has been turned into a gloomy anticipation, and the fellowship and oneness of life and love between her members violently rent and all but lost. She no longer presents herself, or regards herself, as the purpose of God, as the new creation, as the spouse of Christ, as the body of the risen Son of God, as 'the kingdom of the heavens.'

Truly, „except the Lord of Hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and like unto Gomorrah.' Truly, if the Lord Himself had not promised that 'the gates of hell should not prevail,' the Church might well despair. But 'the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will, endureth for ever.

The foregoing considerations naturally suggest some practical reflections, which it may not be unprofitable to notice.

We are led to the conclusion, that as the *life* of the Church is of Divine essence, so the *constitution* and *organization* of the Church are of Divine authority.

This being the case, every part of the Church so constituted is essential, if not to its existence at least to its well-being and efficiency. Every part should be in activity. The Church, though spiritual (that is, constituted in the Holy Ghost), is a *living* reality, not an *ideal* thing. Consequently, no part can be lacking or impeded in its operation without loss and injury to the whole. There is no part superfluous; no part can say to the other 'I have no need of thee.'

When the ascended Lord gave, on the day of Pentecost, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (Eph. iv. 11), He constituted apostles (not without prophets) „the foundations“ (Himself being the chief corner-stone) of that spiritual building, the Church, which is 'the habitation of God, through the Spirit' (Eph. ii. 22). Apostles are, therefore, a *constituent* part of the Church, and that part is the *foundation*. They hold that relationship to other ministers

and to the members of the Church, which foundation-stones in a material building hold to the other parts, viz., they support, unite, and consolidate the whole.

Apostles, as already noticed, are, by original constitution, set to rule in doctrine and in discipline; and are likewise the channel through which 'the gift of the Holy Ghost' is ministered to the body. Hence they are foundation-stones of the spiritual building.

Now this function can only be discharged by *living* men. It is only as *living* men apostles can be foundation-stones. Neither as disembodied spirits, nor by the writings they have left, can they discharge this continuous ministry. For the rule of apostles, as indeed all rule, consists, not in an act or set of acts once done and ended, but in the continuous supervision, the daily care, the ever-recurring oversight which belongs to the place of authority. This is rule.

If then apostles, as the gift of Christ, are a *constituent* part of the Church, and that part the foundation - and if that implies the support, government, and binding together which Jesus, the Lord and Head, would ever minister unto the Church - we might naturally suppose that the absence of this function, the want of this ministry, must necessarily be attended with corresponding loss and grievous in-

jury. Alas! the past history and actual condition of the Church too fully prove its correctness.

Want of unity in doctrine, in discipline, and in ministry; want of holiness; the absence of spiritual gifts; the violation of the ,communion of saints, - all, as already pointed out, too forcibly testify to the absence of that ministry which is the centre of unity, as well as the ordinance for ministering the Holy Ghost.

Doubtless, in the absence of apostles, the rule and government of the Church, as far as it was possible, devolved on bishops. But bishops are not apostles. They were originally constituted and ordained to labour *with* and *under* apostles, and can never fill their place. They are not '*foundations*'; nor can any number of those set to rule over *particular* churches supply the place of that ordinance, which (as an unity) was set to rule over the *universal* Church.

That God has blessed, preserved, and mightily helped the faithful, through the instrumentality of bishops, we rejoice to know, and gratefully acknowledge; but we equally know that, without apostles, the order of God's house cannot be duly maintained, the blessings of His rule be dispensed, nor the fullness of the grace and gift of the Holy Ghost be administered. For ,He gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors,

and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ' (Eph. iv. 11,12).

Again, the consideration of the 'heavenly calling' of the Church, and its divine constitution, contrasted with the actual condition of the baptized, is well calculated to fill us with humility towards God, forbearance towards one another, and longing desire for the day of deliverance, at the coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

On these a few words.

The Church of God is holy; the Church of God is catholic; the Church of God is apostolic. The Church is holy, catholic, apostolic, because it is created in Christ Jesus. Yet the apostolate has ceased; catholicity is but a name; holiness, such as the Scriptures speak of, where is it to be found?

The vast majority of the baptized are 'living without God in the world.' 'The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life, which are not of the Father, but of the world,' are regarded, if not as unavoidable, at least as excusable. 'Covetousness,' 'inordinate affections.' 'love of pleasure more than love of God ' - in a word, the sins of the last days (2 Tim. iv), and the

apostasy which 'the Spirit speaking expressly' (by word of mouth, ρητως) gave as a sign of the last times (1 Tim. iv), seem come to the full.

The Church and the world are no longer separate. The victory over the flesh, the world, and the devil, of the baptismal covenant is little known, 'persecution because of the cross has ceased,' and that holiness, which consists (not in conventional phraseology, nor in sentimentalities, nor in voluntary abnegation of things allowed, but) in entire consecration of the whole man, body, soul, and spirit, unto God - where shall we find it?

Forgetting or denying what is written - that they who 'are baptized into Christ are baptized into His death, that the body of sin might be destroyed' (Rom. vi. 3, 6); that 'he that is born of God doth not commit sin' (1 John iii.9) - the members of Christ's body have settled down in the conviction that they cannot but sin; and the 'sin after baptism,' which the early Church considered as all but *indelible*, is looked upon as the mere expression of human frailty.

But the baptized are ONE. And the sin, the weakness, the failure of each, brings sin and weakness and failure unto all. For in this, as in other re-

spects, 'if one member suffer, all the other members suffer with it.'

What language but that of the Psalms of David can depict the dishonour, or tell out the sorrows, of David's Lord, 'wounded in the house of his friends'?

Lastly, the consideration of this subject may well give rise to questions such as these:

'Shall the counsel of the Lord endure for ever, and the purpose of His heart from generation to generation? , 'Is His hand shortened that it cannot save? , Is it incredible that He should 'arise and have mercy upon Zion'? Can He not 'raise up His great power and come among us, and with great might succour us'? , Has His promise failed for evermore'? Is it forbidden to Him to 'raise up judges as at the first, and councillors as at the beginning'? Or, shall we not rather say, 'He is not a man that He should lie, or the son of man that He should change'? 'The gifts and callings of God are without repentance.'

And what if He has risen up to save and bless His people? Have we not prayed - has not the Church for generations prayed - - 'O Lord, arise, help us and deliver us for Thy Name's sake'?

It is now some years since the report was heard that God had risen up to the help of His people; that now, at the close of the day, he was again sending forth into His vineyard the labourers He had originally appointed - apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers to do the *last work* before the night cometh on.

How has it been received? Some mocked, most rejected, a few believed. They who have believed know of a surety that they have not followed a 'cunningly-devised fable' in 'giving heed to the word of prophecy, as unto a light shining in a dark place,' or in receiving the 'commandments and ordinances of apostles.'

Calling to mind that the Church is 'built on the foundation of apostles and prophets, Jesus Himself being the chief corner-stone,' they gratefully accept the grace and goodness of God in restoring the ordinances given at the beginning.

Moreover to them who have been enabled to receive the work of the Lord, it is the sure harbinger and sign of His speedy coming and near approach. At His first coming He sent His messenger to prepare His way before Him'; and now, when about to come 'a second time without sin unto salvation,' He sends forth again His ministers and stewards of His myster-

ies, as originally constituted, to 'prepare His way before Him.' And they who know and believe this can indeed pray (it may be with an intensity and meaning little realized by others), 'O Lord Jesu Christ, who at Thy first coming didst send Thy messenger to prepare Thy way before Thee, grant that the ministers and stewards of Thy mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready Thy way, by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at Thy second coming to judge the world, we may be found an acceptable people in Thy sight, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

Amen.