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THE

PRINCIPLE OF PROTESTANTISM

782.6.1

AS RELATED TO THE

PRESENT STATE OF THE CHURCH.

BY

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TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN

WITH AN

INTRODUCTION

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CATHOLIC UNITY;

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BY REV. JOHN W. NEVIN, D. D.

Eph. iv. 4—6.—There is one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling ; one Lord, one faith, one baptism ; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

This is the image of the CHURCH, as delineated by the hand of an inspired Apostle. In the whole world, we find nothing so resplendently beautiful and glorious, under any other form. The picture is intended to enforce the great duty of charity and peace, among those who bear the Christian name. In the preceding part of the epistle, Christ is exhibited as the end of all separation and strife to them that believe, and the author of a new spiritual creation, in which all former distinctions were to be regarded as swallowed up and abolished forever. Reference is had in this representation primarily to the old division of Jew and Gentile ; but in its true spirit and sense, it is plainly as comprehensive as humanity itself, and looks therefore directly to every other distinction of the same sort, that ever has been or ever shall be known in the world. Christianity is the universal solvent, in which all opposites are required to give up their previous affinities, no matter how old and stubborn, and flow together in a new combination, pervaded with harmony only and light at every point. "In Christ Jesus, neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature." "Those who were far off, are made nigh by his blood." "He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us ; making in himself of twain one new man." In him, all spiritual antagonism among men is subverted. The human world is reconciled first with God, and then with itself, by entering with living consciousness into the ground of its own life as revealed in his person. Such is the idea of the Church, which is "the body of Christ, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all." And now at length, passing from doctrine to practice, the Apostle calls.

upon those to whom he wrote to surrender themselves fully to the claims of this exalted constitution. "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord beseech you, that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called. With all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Such a temper, and such a life, are necessarily included in the very conception of the Church, as here described. "There is one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." He does not say, *Let* there be one body and one Spirit, as simply urging Christians to seek such agreement among themselves as might justify this view of their state; but the fact is assumed as already in existence, and is made the ground accordingly of the exhortation that goes before. There is one body and Spirit, and *therefore* are ye bound to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. The unity of the Church is not something which results first from the thought and purpose of the vast membership, of which it is composed; but on the contrary, it is the ground out of which this membership itself springs, and in which perpetually it stands, and from which it must derive evermore all its harmony, and stability, and activity, and strength.

From the beginning, this great truth has dwelt deep in the consciousness of the Christian world. Through all ages, and in all lands, that consciousness has been uttering itself as with one mouth, in the article of the creed, *I believe in the Holy Catholic Church*. The Church is one and universal. Her unity is essential to her existence. Particular Christians, and particular congregations, and particular religious denominations, can be true to themselves, only as they stand in the full, free sense of this thought, and make it the object of their calling to fulfil its requisitions. The manifold is required to feel itself one. All particularism here must be false, that seeks to maintain itself as such, in proportion exactly as it is found in conflict with the general and universal, as embraced in the true idea of the body of Christ.

I propose to consider, in the further prosecution of the subject at this time, *first*, the Nature and Constitution of the Holy Catholic Church, in the view now stated; and *secondly*, the Duty of Christians as it regards the unity, by which it is declared to be thus Catholic, and holy, and true.

I. *We are to consider the Nature of CATHOLIC UNITY, as comprehended constitutionally in the idea of the Christian Church.*

Unity does not exclude the idea of difference and multiplicity. Indeed it is only by means of these, that it can ever appear under an actual, concrete form. Where the one does not carry in itself the possibility of separation and distinction, it can never be more than a sheer abstraction, an absolute nullity. The idea of oneness, however, does require, that the different and the manifold as comprehended in it, should be in principle the same, and that all should be held together by the force of this principle actively felt at every point. Such is the unity of the Christian Church. It is composed of a vast number of individual members; but these are all actuated by the power of a common life, and the whole of this life gathers itself up ultimately or fundamentally in the person of Jesus Christ. He is the principle or root of the Church; and the Church, through all ages, is one, simply because it stands, in the presence and power of this root, universally and forever.*

Every Christian, as such, is the subject of a new spiritual life, that did not belong to him in his natural state. This is in no sense from himself; for that which is born of the flesh, is flesh, and cannot be cultivated into any higher character. Only that which is born of the Spirit, is spirit. The Christian has his life from Christ. He is not only placed in a new relation to the law, by the imputation of the Savior's righteousness to him in an outward forensic way; but a new nature is imparted to him also, by an actual communication of the Savior's life over into his person. In his regeneration, he is inwardly united to Christ, by the power of the Holy Ghost, and thus brought within the sphere of that "law of the spirit of life," by which in the end the "law of sin and death" is overpowered and destroyed in all them that believe. A divine seed is implanted in him, the germ of a new existence, which is destined gradually to grow and gather strength, till the whole man shall be at last fully transformed into its image. The new nature thus introduced is the nature of Christ, and it continues to be his nature through the whole course of its development, onward to the last day. The believer has indeed a separate individual existence; but this existence has its ground in the life of Christ, just as in any other case the individual begins at first and stands always afterwards, in the force of the generic

* *Incorporari* enim, (ut ita loquar) nos Christo oportet primum, ut, inter nos uniamur. *Calvin*, on 1 Cor. X, 16..

nature to which it belongs. His sanctification does not consist in his being engaged simply to copy the excellencies of Christ, as a man might admire and copy the character of a Moses or a Paul; but it consists in this, that the very life of the Lord Jesus is found reaching over into his person, and gradually transfusing it with its own heavenly force. The old nature is not at once destroyed; but the new nature of Christ is inclosed in it, as the papilio in the folds of the chrysalis, and in due time this last must triumph over the first entirely, leaving it behind as an empty sepulchre in the final resurrection. Thus emphatically, Christ and the believer are one. Because I live, we hear him say, ye shall live also. He that is joined to the Lord is one Spirit.

This mystical union, as it is sometimes termed, is much more strict, there is reason to believe, than is commonly imagined. There is none on earth more intimate and inward. It is real and close as the union, which binds the branches to the trunk of the vine. It forms such a bond, as holds between the members and the head of the same natural body. "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man," Christ himself has said, "and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father, so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me." This is indeed figurative language; but if it have any meaning at all, it teaches that the union of the believer with Christ is not simply moral, the harmony of purpose, thought and feeling, but substantial and real, involving oneness of nature. "We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones."*

* The passage, Eph. V. 30, with its whole connection, is very wonderful. Rationalizing commentators of course endeavor to turn it into mere sound or figure; with violence however to the entire spirit of the text as well as its letter. *Calvin* is clear upon it, and strong. The language, he tells us is not hyperbolic, but simple. Nor does it refer to Christ's general participation of the human nature, but to something more emphatic in his relation to his people. As Eve was formed from the side of Adam, and was thus a part of himself, so we are made members of Christ by coalescing into one body with him through a participation of his substance. The power of this truth is exhibited to us in the Lord's Supper, which the apostle has here in his mind. "Totum autem ex eo pendet, quod uxor ex carne et ex ossibus viri formata est; eadem ergo unionis inter nos et Christum ratio, quod se quodammodo in nos transfundit. Neque enim ossa sumus ex ossibus ejus et caro ex carne, quia ipse nobiscum est homo; sed quia Spiritus sui virtute nos in corpus suum inserit, ut vitam ex eo hauriamus."

This may sound mystical ; but after all it is no more difficult to comprehend than the fact of our union to the same extent with the person of the first Adam. As descended from him by natural generation, we are not only like him in outward form and inward spirit, but we participate truly and properly in his very nature. We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. His humanity, soul and body, has passed over into our persons. And so it is in the case of the second Adam, as it regards the truly regenerate. They are inserted into his life, through faith, by the power of the Holy Ghost, and become thus incorporated with it, as fully as they were before with that corrupt life they had by their natural birth. The whole humanity of Christ, soul and body, is carried over by the process of the Christian salvation into the person of the believer ; so that in the end his glorified body, no less than his glorified soul, will appear as the natural and necessary product of the life, in which he is thus made to participate.* His resurrection is only his regeneration, fully revealed at last and complete. Our life now is hid with Christ in God ; but when he appeareth, then shall we also appear with him in glory. The Christian is spoken of at times accordingly, as already the subject of all that has been reached in the personal life of the Savior. He is not only dead with him, but risen also, and exalted along with him at the right hand of God. This representation rests throughout upon the fact, that his life is grounded in the life of Christ, and so includes potentially all that belongs to this from the beginning.

* *Carnem ergo Christi, sine ullis ambagibus, fatemur esse vivificam ; non tantum quia semel in ea nobis salus parta est, sed quia nunc dum sacra unitate cum Christo coalescimus, eadem illa caro vitam in nos spirat, vel ut brevius dicam, quia arcana Spiritus virtute in Christi corpus insiti, communem habemus cum ipso vitam.* *Calvin, Consens. de Re Sacram. Opp. Tom. IX (Amsterdam Ed. 1667) p. 657.*—Jam, quis non videt, communionem carnis et sanguinis Christi necessariam esse omnibus, qui ad coelestem vitam aspirant ? Huc spectant illae Apostoli sententiae (Ephes. 1 : 23, et 4 : 15,) Ecclesiam corpus esse Christi et ejus complementum, ipsum vero esse caput, ex quo totum corpus coagmentatum et compactum per commissuras, incrementum corporis facit ; corpora nostra membra esse Christi (1 Cor. 6 : 15.). Quae omnia non posse aliter effici intelligimus, quin totus *spiritus et corpore* nobis adhaereat. Sed arctissimam illam societatem, qua ejus corni copulamur, splendidiore adhuc elogio illustravit, quum dixit, nos esse membra corporis ejus ex ossibus ejus et ex carne ejus (Ephes. 5 : 30.). Tandem ut rem omnibus verbis majorem testatur, sermonem exclamatione finit, Magnum (inquit) istud arcanum ! Extremae ergo dementiae fuerit, nullam agnoscere cum carne et sanguine Domini fidelium communionem, quam tantam esse declarat Apostolus, ut eam admirari, quam explicare malit. *Instit. IV. 17. 9.*

The idea of this inward union on the part of the believer with the entire humanity of Christ, has in all ages entered deeply into the consciousness of the Church. Hence no doubt much of the favor which has been shown towards popish and semipopish errors, in the case of the Lord's Supper. Hence too the earnestness, with which the reformers generally maintained the doctrine of the real presence in this sacrament. They saw and felt, more clearly than many of their followers seem to see and feel now, that the life of the believer involves a communion with the body of Christ, as well as with his spirit. Calvin is particularly strong with regard to this point; and some have found it hard to find any sense whatever in his language on the subject.* But after all there is no greater darkness in it, than is presented by Paul, when he says, We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. Thus also we are taught in the Heidelberg Catechism, that to eat the crucified body and drink the shed blood of Christ, is "not only to embrace with a believing heart all the sufferings

* Dr. Dick (*Lectures on Theology*,) thought of no great weight in himself may be taken perhaps as a pretty fair representative of the prevailing modern view, when he says (*Lect. XCI*,) after giving a quotation from Calvin: "I confess I do not understand this passage. It supposes a communion of believers in the human nature of our Savior in the Eucharist, and endeavors to remove the objection arising from the distance of place, by a reference to the Almighty power of the Spirit, much in the same way as Papists and Lutherans solve the difficulty attending their respective systems. If Calvin had meant only that, in the Sacred Supper, believers have fellowship with Christ in his death, he would have asserted an important truth, attested by the experience of the people of God in every age; but why did he obscure it, and destroy its simplicity, by involving it in ambiguous language? If he had anything different in view; if he meant that there is some mysterious communication with his human nature, we must be permitted to say that the notion was as incomprehensible to himself as it is to his readers." That Calvin did entertain this last "notion," there is not the least room to doubt; and as may be seen in the foregoing note, he held it to be insane (*extremæ dementiæ*) to have any other opinion. The view accepted by Dr. Dick, from Zwingli, he went so far as to call *profane*. He is most distinct in rejecting the idea, that the union of the believer with Christ is simply *moral*. To partake of Christ's body and blood is not merely to *believe* on him, but a mystical process which is the result of faith. Nor is it simply to appropriate his *merits*. "*Ex-cipit Westphalus, merita Christi vel beneficia non esse ejus corpora. Sed quæ locutionem, quæ splendide nostram cum Christo communionem commendo maligne extenuat? Neque enim tantum dico applicare merita, sed ex ipso Christi corpore alimentum percipere animas, non secus ac terreno pane corpus vescitur.*" *Opp. Thom. IX. p. 668.* Nor is it enough with him to say, we partake of Christ's Spirit. "*Neque animas simpliciter Spiritu suo Christum in nobis habitare trado, sed, ita non*

and death of Christ, and thereby to obtain the pardon of sin and life eternal ; but also, besides that, to become more and more united to his sacred body, by the Holy Ghost, who dwells both in Christ and in us ; so that we, though Christ is in heaven and we on earth, are notwithstanding, flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone ; and that we live and are governed forever by one Spirit, as members of the same body are by one soul."

Partaking in this way of one and the same life, Christians of course are vitally related and joined together as one great spiritual whole ; and this whole is the Church. The Church is his body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all. The union by which it is held together, through all ages, is strictly *organic*. The Church is not a mere aggregation or collection of different individuals, drawn together by similarity of interests and wants ; not an abstraction simply, by which the common in the midst of such multifarious distinction, is separated and put together under a single general term. It is not merely the *all* that covers the actual ex-

ad se attollere, ut vivificum carnis suae vigorem in nos transfundat." *Ibid.* p. 669. He will hear of nothing less than a participation of Christ's substance, soul and body: "Carnem Christi nobis edendam proponi si quis sincere et luculente tradit, ego unus sum ex numero ; modum tantum definio, quod Spiritus sui virtute Christus locorum distantiam superet, ad vitam nobis e sua carne inspirandam." *Ibid.* p. 670. "In sacra sua Coena jubet me sub symbolis panis ac vini corpus ac sanguinem suum sumere, manducare ac bibere ; nihil dubito, quin et ipse vere porrigat et ego recipiam." *Inst.* IV. 17. 32. It is useless however to multiply extracts. Calvin's doctrine on this point is in no respect uncertain. Nor was he singular at all in his view. It was in fact the established view of the entire Reformed Church, in the Sixteenth Century ; for the bald theory of Zwingli outraged the religious consciousness of the age. "There is no controversy among us," says Zanchius, "whether the bread in the right use of the Supper be truly the body of Christ ; the only question is concerning the manner in which the bread is his body." All the Reformed Confessions speak in the same strain. The *Belgic Confession*, for instance, after telling us that the mode of the communication is incomprehensible, does not hesitate, insisting still upon the reality of it as it had been previously affirmed, to employ the strong expression : "Interea vero nequaquam erraverimus dicentes, id, quod comeditur, esse proprium et naturale corpus Christi, idque quod bibitur, proprium ejus sanguinem." Those who choose to do so, may pour contempt on all this as the "obsolete mysticism of the Reformers." But such would do well at the same time to consider seriously, whether in departing from the orthodoxy of the Sixteenth Century at this point, they may not have yielded their own minds possibly to the power of a rationalizing element, which if it were rigidly pushed to its consequences could hardly stop short of Socinianism itself.

tent of its membership, but the *whole* rather in which this membership is comprehended and determined from the beginning. The Church does not rest upon its members, but the members rest upon the Church. Individual Christianity is not something older than general Christianity, but the general in this case goes before the particular, and rules and conditions all its manifestations. So it is with every organic nature. The whole is older and deeper than the parts ; and these last spring forth perpetually from the active presence of the first. The parts in the end are only the revelation of what was previously included in the whole. The oak of a hundred years, and the acorn from which it has sprung, are the same life. All that we behold in the oak, lay hid in the acorn from the start. So too the human world all slept originally in the common root of the race. Adam was not simply a man, like others since born ; but he was *the* man, who comprehended in himself all that has since appeared in other men. Humanity as a whole resided in his person. He was strictly and truly the world. Through all ages, man is organically one and the same. And parallel with this precisely is the constitution of the Church. The second Adam corresponds in all respects with the first. He is not a man merely, an individual belonging to the race ; but he is *the* man, emphatically the *Son of Man*, comprising in his person the new creation, or humanity recovered and redeemed, as a whole. Whatever the Church becomes in the way of development, it can never be more in fact than it was in him from the beginning. Its life is not multiplied nor extended in quantity, by its growth. Christ is the root of the Church ; and to the end of time it can include no more in its proper life, however widely distributed, than what is included in the root itself.

The unity of the Church then is a cardinal truth, in the Christian system. It is involved in the conception of the Christian salvation itself. To renounce it, or lose sight of it, is to make shipwreck of the gospel, to the same extent. There is no room here for individualism or particularism, as such. An individual dissociated entirely from his race, would cease to be a man. And just so the conception of individual or particular Christianity, as something independent of the organic whole, which we denominate the Church, is a moral solecism that necessarily destroys itself. Christ cannot be divided. The members of the natural body are united to the head, only by belonging to the body itself. Separated from this, they cease to have any proper existence. And so it is here. We are not Christians, each one by himself and for himself, but we become such through the Church. Christ lives in his people, by the life which fills his body, the Church ;

and they are thus all necessarily one, before they can be many.*

The life of Christ in the Church, is in the first place inward and invisible. But to be real, it must also become outward. The salvation of the individual believer is not complete, till the body is transfigured and made glorious, as well as the soul; and as it has respect to the whole nature of man from the commencement, it can never go forward at all except by a union of the outward and inward at every point of its progress. Thus too the Church must be visible, as well as invisible. In no other way can the idea become real. Soul and body, inward power and outward form, are required here to go together. Outward forms without inward life can have no saving force. But neither can inward life be maintained, on the other hand, without outward forms. The body is not the man; and yet there can be no man, where there is no body. Humanity is neither a corpse on the one hand, nor a phantom on the other. The Church then must appear externally, in the world. And the case requires that this manifestation should correspond with the inward constitution of the idea itself. It belongs to the proper conception of it, that the unity of the Holy Catholic Church should appear in an outward and visible way; and it can never be regarded as complete, where such development of its inward power is still wanting. "There is one *body*," the Apostle tells us, "and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling." Such is the true normal character of the Church; and so far as it may fall short of this it labors under serious defect.

The Apostle does not mean to affirm however, that the want of such outward and visible unity necessarily and at once over-

* Nec vero satis est electorum turbam cogitatione et animoque complecti, nisi talem ecclesiae unitatem cogitemus, in quam nos esse insitos vere simus persuasi. Nisi enim sub capite nostro Christo coadunati simus reliquis omnibus membris, nulla nobis manet spes haereditatis futurae. Ideo *Catholica* dicitur, seu *universalis*; quia non duas aut tres invenire liceat quin discerpatur Christus; quod fieri non potest. Quin sic electi Dei omnes in Christo sunt connexi, ut quemadmodum ab uno capite pendens, ita in unum velut corpus coalescant, ea inter se compage cohaerentes, qua ejusdem corporis membra. *Cath. Instit.* IV. 1. 2. Speaking afterwards of the visible Church as carrying the title *Mother*, he says: non alius est in vitam ingressus, nisi nos ipsa concipiat in utero, nisi pariat, nisi nos alat suis uberibus, denique sub custodia et gubernatione sua nos teneat, donec exuti carne mortali, similes erimus angelis. — Adde quod extra ejus gremium nulla est speranda peccatorum remissio, nec ulla salus. *Ib.* §. 4.

throws the existence of the Church. It is seldom that the actual, in the sphere of Christianity, fully corresponds with the ideal. And as a general thing, this correspondence, so far as it may be secured in any case, is reached only in a gradual way. The inward requires time to impress its image fully upon the outward. Religion is a process in the individual soul, and also in the life of the Church. Objectively considered, it is complete, and harmonious, and true to itself at every point, from the beginning ; but in becoming subjective, all this may seem for a season to fail. The life of Christ in the Church includes in itself potentially from the first, all that it can ever become in the end. But it may happen that for a long time this hidden force shall be embarrassed and repressed by untoward influences, so as not to find its adequate form and action in the actual order of the Church. Thus we behold at this time the Christian world in fact, broken into various denominations, with separate confessions and creeds, among which too often polemic zeal appears far more prominent than catholic charity. Such distraction and division can never be vindicated, as suitable to the true conception of the Church. They disfigure and obscure its proper glory, and give a false, distorted image of its inward life. Still the Church is not on this account subverted, or shut up to the precincts of some single sect, arrogantly claiming to be the whole body. The life with which it is animated does indeed seek an outward revelation in all respects answerable to its own nature ; and it can never be fully satisfied, till this be happily secured ; but as a process, struggling constantly towards such end, it may be vigorously active at the same time, under forms that bear no right proportion whatever to its wants. We may not doubt therefore, but that in the midst of all the denominational distinctions, which have come to prevail particularly since the time of the Reformation, the life of the Church, with all its proper attributes, is still actively at work in every evangelical communion. The "one body," most unfortunately, is wanting for the present ; but the "one Spirit," reigns substantially notwithstanding through all communions, and binds them together as a great spiritual whole. Joined together in the common life of Christ, in the possession of one faith, one hope, and one baptism, the various divisions of the Christian world, are still organically the same Church. In this form, we hold fast to the idea of Catholic Unity, as the only ground in which any true Christianity, individual or particular can possibly stand.

II. *Having in this general way considered the nature of that oneness which belongs to the constitution of the Catholic Church, we are prepared to contemplate, in the second place, the DUTY OF CHRISTIANS with regard to it.*

This is comprehended generally in the obligation of all, earnestly and actively to seek the unity of the Church, in its most complete form. We have seen that in the actual circumstances of the Church, idea and fact do not for the most part fully correspond. It is only in the way of development and process most generally, that we find the first revealing itself in the form of the second. Thus the unity of the Church, is something which is not at once realized, as a matter of course, by the appearance of the Church in the world. The actual, in fact, stands far behind the ideal. But still this relation cannot be rested in as ultimate and right. It can hold with truth, only as an intermediate stage, through which the life of the Church is constantly struggling towards a revelation, that shall be in all respects adequate to its nature. This development is not blind of course and necessary, as in the sphere of mere nature, but moral, involving intelligence and will. The Church is required to seek and maintain her own unity; and this obligation falls back necessarily in the end upon Christians as such. They are bound to maintain "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," and cannot be true to their vocation, except as they consciously endeavour, so far as in them lies, to have this unity made in the largest sense complete; so that all Christ's people may be "one body" as well as "one spirit," even as they are called in one hope of their calling.

This might seem to be in some sense the great necessity of the Church. "Neither pray I for these alone," is the Savior's solemn language, "but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." Wonderful words; to be understood only by living communion with the heart of Jesus himself. If such was the spirit of Christ, the spirit of the Church must necessarily be the same. The whole Church then must be regarded as inwardly groaning over her own divisions, and striving to actualize the full import of this prayer; as though Christ were made to feel himself divided, and could not rest till such unnatural violence should come to an end. And so if any man be in Christ, he cannot fail, so far as this union may reach, to pray and work for the same object, the Catholic Unity of the Church, as the most important interest in the world.

1. It is the duty of all then, to consider and lay to heart the evil that is comprehended in the actual disunion and division, which now prevail in the Catholic Church. I say in the *Catholic* Church; because the one Spirit of Christ is supposed to pervade the whole body, notwithstanding this vast defect, binding it together through all parts of the world, with the force of a common life. But this cannot change the nature of the evil itself. It only renders it indeed the more glaring and painful. The Church ought to be visibly one and catholic, as she is one and catholic in her inward life; and the want of such unity, as it appears in the present state of the protestant world, with its rampant sectarianism and individualism, "is a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation," until of God's mercy the sore reproach be rolled away.

We frequently hear apologies made for the existence of sects in the Church. They are said to be necessary. The freedom and purity of the Church, we are told, can be maintained only in this way. They provoke each other to zeal and good works. Without them, the Church would stagnate and grow corrupt. They are but different divisions of the same grand army, furnished for battle variously according to their several tastes, but all moving in the same direction against the common foe, and forming together in this order a more powerful array than if no such divisions had place.

This sounds well; and no doubt many so far impose upon themselves, as to think it all correct. But it is false notwithstanding, and injurious to Christ. Our various sects, as they actually exist, are an immense evil in the Church. Whatever may be said of the possibility of their standing in friendly correspondence, and only stimulating the whole body to a more vigorous life, it is certain that they mar the unity of this body in fact, and deprive it of its proper beauty and strength. The evil may indeed in a certain sense be *necessary*; but the necessity is like that which exists for the rise of heresies, itself the presence of a deep seated evil, in which the Church has no right quietly to acquiesce. Our sects, as they actually stand at this time, are a vast reproach to the Christian cause. By no possibility could they be countenanced and approved as good, by the Lord Jesus Christ, if he should appear again in the world as the visible head of his people. This all must feel.

We do not suppose indeed that the visible unity of the Church demands a single visible head, like the pope of Rome, who is justly styled Antichrist for this very pretension. We do not suppose that it can hold only under a given organization, stretching its

arms from one end of the earth to the other, according to the dream of the High Church Episcopalians. But this much most certainly it does require, that the middle walls of partition as they now divide sect from sect should be broken down, and the whole Christian world brought not only to acknowledge and feel, but also to show itself evidently one. How far it is from this at the present time, it is not necessary to say. Now what is wanted, first of all, is a clear perception on the part of the Church, that is, on the part of Christians generally, that the want of such visible unity is wrong, and such a wrong as calls aloud continually for redress. Without this most assuredly, the captivity of Zion will never come to an end. The heart of the Church must be filled with an earnest sense of her own calamity, as thus torn and rent with such vast division, before she can be engaged successfully to follow after union and peace. It needs to be deeply pondered upon, that the spirit of sect and party as such, is contrary to Christ. The present state of the Church involves the sin of schism, to a most serious extent. Denominations are not indeed necessarily sects, and every separate ecclesiastical position is not to be denounced at once as schismatic. But to whatever extent particular denominations may stand justified before God in occupying such positions, it is certain that in some quarter a schismatic spirit must be at work to create and maintain the necessity by which this is supposed to be right. Take it altogether, there is schism in our divisions. The unity of Christ's body is not maintained. This it is that challenges our attention. This we are called upon to consider and lay to heart.

Nor should it relieve the case at all to our feelings, that we may not be able to see how it is possible to bring this state of things to an end. An evil does not cease to be such, simply because it may seem to exclude all hope of correction. Those who seek to reconcile us to the system of sects in the Church, by insisting on the impossibility of reducing them to the same communion, presume greatly either upon our ignorance or our apathy as it regards the claims of the whole subject. If we know that the Church is called by her very constitution to be visibly, as well as invisibly one, we are not likely to believe that any difficulties which stand in the way of this are absolutely insuperable in their own nature. And if we have come to feel the weight of the interest itself, as exhibited in the last prayer of the Savior, we are not likely to be soothed and quiesced over the general surrendry of it by a view which cuts off all hope of its ever being recovered. Let it be admitted, that there is no way open, by which we have any prospect of seeing these walls of partition broken

down ; still it is none the less the duty of all who love Christ, to take to heart the presence of the evil itself, and to desire earnestly that it might come to an end. What is most deplorable in the case, is that so many should be willing to acquiesce in it, as something necessary and never to be changed. And what is most needed in these circumstances, therefore, is that anxiety and concern should take the place of such indifference, and that men should be brought to acknowledge openly the reigning wrong of these divisions in the Church, and to inquire earnestly after some way of escape.

To such earnest interest the subject is well entitled ; for it includes, as already said, one of the very deepest necessities of the Church. Can any one suppose, that the order of things which now prevails in the Christian world, in the view before us, is destined to be perpetual and final ? Does it not lie in the very conception of the Church, that these divisions should pass away, and make room for the reign at last of catholic unity and love ? If sects as they now appear have been the necessary fruit of the Reformation, then must we say that the Reformation, being as we hold it to be from God ; has not yet been conducted forward to its last legitimate result, in this respect. What it has divided, it must have power again in due time to bring together and unite. Our protestant Christianity cannot continue to stand in its present form. A Church without unity can neither conquer the world ; nor sustain itself. We are bound therefore to expect, that this unity will not always be wanting. The hour is coming, though it be not now, when the prayer of Christ that his Church may be one, will appear gloriously fulfilled in its actual character and state, throughout the whole world. But before this great change shall be effected, it will be the object first of much earnest desire and expectation. Not while Christians continue to rest contentedly in the present system, as either sufficiently good in itself or at least fatally incapable of remedy, can any such new order come forward to occupy its place. The result will be reached, only after it shall have come to be generally felt that the present construction of the Church is false and wrong ; and when with such conviction, the hearts of men shall have been prepared earnestly to seek, and cordially to welcome a more excellent way.

It is not by might and by power, we know, not by outward urging and driving in the common radical style, but only by the Spirit of the Lord, that any such revolution as this can ever be accomplished. A crusade against sects, or a society to put down sects ; movements and efforts of every kind, that address themselves to the overthrow of sects, simply in a negative way, can

answer no good purpose here in the end. If the evil is ever to be effectually surmounted, it must be by the growth of Christian charity in the bosom of the Church itself. No union can be of any account at last, that is not produced by inward sympathy and agreement between the parties it brings together. But this preparation of the heart is itself something to be sought and cultivated; and we may say that the very first step towards it, consists in just that consideration and concern which is now represented to be due in the case of Christians to the whole subject. In vain may we look for any such deep inward action in the Church as is needed to make room for a closer external union, if it begin not at least in this form.

Christians then are bound to consider and lay to heart the evil state of the Church, in the view now contemplated. This might seem to be indeed the most they have it in their power immediately to do in the circumstances. It is that therefore which is mainly and primarily required. Nor may it be regarded as of only small account. An immense object would be gained, if simply the conviction of deep and radical defect here were made to fasten itself upon the general consciousness of the Church. Without this it is in vain to hope for deliverance from any other quarter. But this is not the entire duty created by the case. There is a call not merely for reflection and concern, but also for action.

2. It has already been admitted, that the interest in question is not to be secured by any attempts towards a simply outward reform. A no-sect party in the Church, bent only on pulling down and having no power to reconstruct, must ever be found itself one of the worst forms of separatism, aggravating the mischief it proposes to heal. It is not by renouncing their allegiance to particular denominations, and affecting to hold themselves independent of all; that men may expect to promote the cause of Christian unity. The union of the Church in any case, is not to be established by stratagem or force. To be valid, it must be free, the spontaneous product of Christian knowledge and Christian love. It can never hold externally, till it is made necessary by the pressure of inward want, refusing to be satisfied on any other terms. But all this does not involve the consequence, that there is nothing to be done on the part of Christians, to hasten this consummation in its time. It is by inward and spiritual action, precisely that the way of the Lord is to be prepared, for any such deliverance; and to such action all who love the prosperity of Zion are solemnly bound. Every Christian in his place is required to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." All are under obligation to cultivate the spirit of Christian charity in,

their own hearts and to exemplify the power of it in their own lives. All are bound to pray for the peace of Jerusalem ; and to "bow their knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named," that he would grant us all, even his whole Church Catholic, "according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man ; that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith ; that we, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height ; and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that we might be filled with all the fulness of God." Unto this glorious object all are required to labor, "striving according to his working, which worketh in his people mightily." It is demanded of all that they should at least endeavor, more and more, to descend into the heart of Jesus, and take the measure of this great interest, as unfolded there, in what might seem to be the main burden of his last priestly prayer. It is the duty of all to follow after the things that make for holiness and peace ; and to seek in every way the coming of God's kingdom, with new power and glory, in the hearts of his people, that they may be brought to understand and feel, continually more and more, the force of that common life, by which they are all one in Christ Jesus.

All this would be in the most important sense, to "prepare the way of the Lord, and to make straight in the desert a high way for our God ;" and the result of it would soon be, that the glory of the Lord should be revealed, and all flesh made to see it together. When it shall have come to this, that by such inward and spiritual action the Church shall be fully ripe for union, the difficulties that now stand in the way will be soon found crumbling and dissolving into thin air. "Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low ; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain." It may be utterly impossible for us to anticipate before hand, the way in which this shall take place, or the form under which it shall appear. But in the circumstances supposed, the want will provide for itself. The life that is at work will find room and scope, in some way, for its own free action. With reference to every such case, it is written : "Behold I will do a new thing ; now it shall spring forth ; shall ye not know it ? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert. The beast of the field shall honor me, the dragons and the owls ; because I give waters in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert, to give drink to my people, my chosen." That which is impossible with men, is easily accomplished by God.

3. Then it is the duty of the Church, in the third place, to observe and improve all opportunities, by which it is made possible in any measure, from time to time, to advance in a visible way the interest of catholic unity. The reformation that is needed must indeed spring spontaneously from within ; but the process can go forward notwithstanding only in the exercise of intelligence and will, and by the help of counsel, forethought, and wise calculation, at every point. We are not at liberty in the case to run before the Lord, presumptuously taking the whole work into our own hands ; but we are bound, at the same time, to follow promptly where he leads. Just so soon, and so far, as the way may be open in any direction for advancing the outward and visible oneness of the Church, without prejudice to its true inward integrity, it is our solemn duty to turn the occasion to this high account. It is not to be imagined of course that the general reconciliation of the divisions that now prevail in the Christian world, in whatever form it may at last appear, will be effected suddenly and at once. It must come, if it come at all, as a process, gradually ripening into this glorious result. Every instance then in which the open correspondence and communion of particular sections of the Church, is made to assume in a free way, a more intimate character than it had before, deserves to be hailed, as being to some extent at least an approximation towards the unity, which the whole body is destined finally to reach. No movement of this sort can be regarded as indifferent. The interest just named, is the highest that can occupy the heart of the Church. Whatever can serve in any way to bring together the moral dispersions of the house of Israel, must be counted worthy of the most earnest regard. All Christians then, in their various denominational capacities, are required, as they love the Church and seek the salvation of the world, to encourage with all their might a closer visible connection between the different parts of Christ's body, in every case in which the way is found to be open for the purpose. It is terrible to be concerned, however remotely, in dividing the Church ; but a high and glorious privilege, to take part, even to the smallest extent, in the work of restoring these divisions, where they already exist. I would not for the world be the founder of a new sect, though assured that millions would at last range themselves beneath its shadow ; but if I might be instrumental with the humblest agency in helping only to pull down a single one of all those walls of partition, that now mock the idea of catholic unity in the visible Church, I should feel that I had not lived in vain, nor labored without the most ample and enduring reward.

IN VIEW of all that has thus far been said, we may now be prepared, respected and beloved brethren in the ministry and eldership of the Reformed Church, to estimate aright the weight of the occasion, by which we are brought together this day. The very object of this Convention is to bring into closer visible union, the two denominations we have been appointed to represent. Apart altogether from the counsels and action of the Convention itself, the simple fact that these bodies have been engaged to enter into the friendly arrangement, by which it is called to meet, deserves to be regarded with special interest. In the midst of the religious divisions and dissensions that are abroad in the land, it is cheering to find in any quarter, an active movement in favor of the opposite interest. May we not trust that the measure will be owned and blessed of God, and that through his blessing it may be followed in time to come with consequences of good, far more vast than we have power now to imagine.

It is true indeed, that the Reformed Dutch and German Reformed Churches in this country, can hardly be regarded as different denominations, and certainly not as different *sects*, in any right sense of the term. They have been from the beginning substantially the same Church; different national branches only of the one great communion of the *Reformed*, as gloriously represented in the ever memorable Synod of Dort. The faith of Switzerland, the faith of the Palatinate and the faith of Holland, in the Sixteenth Century, were emphatically one faith. Transplanted to this country too, the same Churches have been closely related from the first; in a certain sense borne upon the knees, and nourished from the breast, of the same compassionate mother. For the fostering care of the Synod of Holland was never more active in favor of the scion taken from its own trunk, than it showed itself to be in planting and rearing the kindred vine brought over from Germany. Nor has the sense of this relationship been lost since. Still the two bodies have stood separate and apart as distinct religious organizations, with comparatively little knowledge of each other's circumstances, and nearly as much apparent estrangement as is seen to characterize the relations of sects generally. It is well therefore that now in the end, we should be permitted to rejoice in the prospect of a communion, from this time forward, more intimate and full. It is well that the claims of our kindred life have come to make themselves so felt on both sides, that we are brought thus openly to recognize their force, and give visible expression to the one spirit by which we are consciously bound together. The Church at large have reason to rejoice, in this union. It is something won for the cause

of catholic unity, in the broadest sense, that these two divisions of the Reformed Church, should thus embrace each other in the presence of the whole world, and proclaim themselves outwardly as well as inwardly the same ; "one body, and one Spirit, even as we are called in one hope of our calling."

Nor should it be allowed to impair the force of this declaration, that no such union has been contemplated in this case, as might involve a formal ecclesiastical amalgamation of the two Churches concerned. All are agreed that nothing of this sort, is for the present at least, to be attempted or desired. Both Churches would only be embarrassed by the measure, if it could possibly be carried into effect. But happily no such amalgamation is needed in our circumstances, to realize the fullest unity the Church is called to seek. A merely territorial separation, where different religious bodies not only hold the same faith, but are openly identified as one interest, cannot be said in any fair sense, to involve ecclesiastical disunion. The Presbyterian Church of this country for instance, resolved according to the recommendation of some into separate independent Synods, would be one Church still, if only there might be the presence of one Spirit always, sufficiently active to proclaim this unity and cause it to be felt, in a public way. And in the same manner the Reformed Dutch and German Churches may be as closely bound together as the honor of religion requires, forming in fact but one communion, while yet they continue denominationally distinct, as before. No closer connection than this in fact has yet come to hold, between the two Synods of the German Reformed Church itself, as here represented at this time. The only visible bond by which they are held together, is the present Convention.

In these circumstances it is plain enough, that no great amount of action, in the common sense, can reasonably be expected from this body. We must not allow ourselves however to estimate the importance of the arrangement by this measure. The simple fact of the Convention itself, as an open public demonstration of the mutual confidence and good will of the Churches to which we belong, carries in it a moral value, in all respects worthy of the occasion. But the correspondence thus established can hardly fail besides, to open the way directly for a more friendly state of feeling between the two Churches, by bringing them to know each other better, and to feel more extensively the force of that spiritual relationship by which they are united. If this Triennial Meeting should serve no other purpose, than to maintain and strengthen such right feeling, it would well deserve to be perpetuated on this account only. But it may be expected in the end to do more than

this. It is the want of mutual familiar knowledge of each other's circumstances, and mutual familiar confidence in each other's feelings, on the part of the two Churches, which now more than anything else is likely to circumscribe the range of the Convention's action at this time ; by creating delicacy, and caution, and restraint, when under different circumstances no call for any such feeling might be supposed to exist. In the course of time, it may be trusted, the connection which is now established, will itself serve to bring each Church more clearly before the eye, and thus more near to the heart, of the other. Points of common interest will be multiplied and room for common action extended. The relation of the two bodies may be expected to become more free, as it becomes more familiar. In this way, it is quite possible at least, that a much wider field for counsel and action may ultimately be opened for the Triennial Convention, than any have yet been led to anticipate.

It would seem to lie in the very nature of the case, that Churches so related, historically, ecclesiastically, and geographically, as the Reformed Dutch and German Reformed Churches in this country, should find occasion for common counsel and common action, in many respects. By wise co-operation, they may surely expect to make themselves felt with more effect in the land at large, than they are likely to be by standing wholly separate and apart. The interests represented in the two Churches are in all material respects the same ; and this itself would seem to require, that they should regard them as a common cause, and combine their strength in carrying them forward. In the great work particularly of Home Missions in the broad valley of the West, it should be seriously considered at least whether such conjunction of counsels and efforts be not called for at their hands. I shall not pretend however to say, in what several directions or in what several forms, occasion may be found for the two bodies thus to join in carrying forward the same general work. That is a question, which as yet none of us can be rightly prepared to answer. Only we may take it for granted that opportunities for such co-operation will not fail to exist ; while we trust to the hallowed influences that shall spring from this union itself to bring them in due time to light.

I may be permitted in conclusion to say, that the time has come, when the Churches of the Reformation generally have need to seek among themselves a closer correspondence and alliance, than has hitherto prevailed. The work of the Reformation is not yet complete. In every great movement of this kind, the direction taken by the general mind is liable in the end to become

more or less extreme ; and the consequence is then a reaction towards the abandoned error, which is often more dangerous to the cause of truth, than all the opposition it had to surmount in the beginning. To such extreme the tendencies taken by the Christian world in the religious revolution of the Sixteenth Century, have been unfortunately carried ; not of course through the force of the principles which constituted the soul of that revolution at the first, but by reason of the gradual paralysis of these principles, where they previously prevailed. The most distressing phase of this bastard protestantism, the liberty of the Reformation run mad, has been presented in the modern rationalism of Germany, and the Continent of Europe generally. A different form of it we have in the religious radicalism, with its infidel and semi-infidel affinities, into which the dissenting interest of Great Britain has been to some extent too plainly betrayed. And finally it is the same evil substantially which stares us in the face, in the unbridled licentiousness of private judgment, as it appears in the endless multiplication of sects, on our own side of the Atlantic. All this may be considered the action of a general force which has been at work for three centuries, but has only come to reveal itself fully in these startling consequences, within a comparatively recent period. And now, by a necessity which holds in the inmost constitution of our nature, a wide-spread reaction has begun to show itself, which may well cause the friends of truth to tremble. This it seems to me is the true secret of the mysterious charm which popery is found of late to be exercising again over men's minds, where its power appeared once to be effectually destroyed ; and the true secret at the same time of the remarkable success, which has attended thus far the progress of the Oxford doctrines in the Episcopal Church, both in England and in this country. In this view, the movement must be regarded as specially serious. For it is in no sense the result of accident or caprice. It springs from the deepest and most general ground, in the character of the age. It belongs to the inmost history of the Church. It is the grand rebounding movement of the Reformation itself, by which more fully than ever before is to be tried the truth and stability of the principles, from which the Reformation sprang, and by which it triumphed in the beginning.

The contest of the Sixteenth Century then is again challenging the strength of the whole Christian world. The work of the Reformation, is still to be made complete. It is not enough now simply to cry out against popery and puseyism, as a return to exploded errors. The truth as it wrought mightily in the souls of the reformers, must be understood as well as felt. There is an

opposition to the errors of Rome and Oxford, sometimes displayed in our own country, which may be said to wrong the cause it affects to defend almost as seriously as this is done by these errors themselves. In its blind zeal, and shallow knowledge, it sinks the Church to the level of a temperance society, strips the ministry of its divine commission and so of its divine authority, reduces the sacraments to mere signs, turns all that is mystical into the most trivial worldly sense, and so exalts what is individual above what is general and catholic, as in fact to throw open the door to the most rampant sectarian license, in the name of the gospel, that any may choose to demand. Opposition to Oxford and Rome in this form, can never prevail. If the cause of the Reformation is to be successfully maintained in the present crisis, I repeat it, it must be, not simply by holding fast stubbornly to the forms in which the faith of the Reformation was originally expressed, but by entering with free and profound insight into that faith itself. What is wanted is a republication of the principles of the Reformation, not in the letter merely that killeth, but in the living spirit of the men, who wielded them with such vast effect in the Sixteenth Century. Never was there a more solemn call upon the Reformed Churches, to clothe themselves fully with the power of the life that is enshrined in their ancient symbols. And surely, in these circumstances, when the very foundations of their common faith are threatened, not by a casual and transient danger, but by a force that is lodged deep in the very constitution of the age, and may be said to carry in itself the gathered strength of centuries; when questions of vital import, which were supposed to have been settled long ago are again to be encountered and resolved, on an issue that involves the very existence of these Churches themselves; when in one word the vast struggle of the Reformation is to be taken up in its original spirit and carried forward, through a crisis that may be considered final and decisive, to its proper consummation; surely, I say, in circumstances like these, the Churches in question should feel themselves engaged to narrow as much as possible the measure of their separation, and strengthen the consciousness of their unity. The interests by which they are divided are few and small, as compared with those that should bind them together. The glory of God and the honor of his truth, as well as their own common safety, require that they should stand out to the view of the world, not as many but as one, *the Church*, (not Churches,) of the Reformation, the body of Christ, "the pillar and ground of the truth," one body, and one Spirit, even as they are called in one hope of their calling. May the great Head of the Church, himself interpose, in ways that to his own wisdom shall seem best, to conduct the

hearts and counsels of his people to this result ; and in the meantime bestow richly upon us who are here present the glorious power of his grace, that we may be enabled to be faithful to this high interest especially in the exercise of the trust now committed to our hands, maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace.