

# THE HOMILETIC REVIEW.

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## REVIEW SECTION.

### I.—TRUE CHURCH UNITY: WHAT IT IS.

BY PROF. BENJAMIN B. WARFIELD, D.D., PRINCETON, N. J.

THERE seems to be everywhere rising throughout the churches a newly aroused, or, at least, renewedly quickened, ardor in seeking to realize that oneness of the Church for which our Master prayed as He was about to be offered up. Certainly the heart of every Christian should burn within him as he addresses himself to do what in him lies to fulfil his Redeemer's dying wish. It would be sad were false steps made in so sacred a cause. Yet it would not be strange, if in the natural haste of even holy zeal, somewhat confused, if not erroneous notions should mingle with our aspirations, which we need to correct by bringing them searchingly to the test of the New Testament teaching.

Nothing can be clearer, of course, than that the conception of its unity enters fundamentally into the New Testament doctrine of the Church. It is involved in the very proclamation of the kingdom of God, for there cannot be two kingdoms any more than two gods. As God is one, the King and the Mediator is one, and the Spirit one who unites to the one Christ; so those who heard the great commission and went forth in its faith to conquer the world could entertain no conception of the Church they were to found which did not include its unity. Accordingly not only is its unity implied in all the figures used by our Lord to describe the Church—the vine, the spreading mustard tree, the leaven hidden in the mass until it leavens the whole; but the same is true of the whole warp of the Apostolic teaching. The Church is the body of which Christ is the head, the building, of the foundation of which He is the corner-stone, the Bride, the Lamb's wife. The unity of the Church is even fundamental to the Gospel itself, as the unity of the race is to the doctrine of sin: "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." It was for His people that Christ laid down His life; neither was any crucified for any man save Christ Jesus, in whom alone can there be salvation.

It is equally obvious that this unity is in the New Testament, a vis-

ible unity. The kingdom of God was synonymous with doing the will of God, and the presence of the unifying Spirit was manifested in its fruit. The Christian light was not kindled to be hid under a bushel, and love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness and temperance were not such universal possessions of men that those who had them passed unnoticed in the throng. Nor were the miraculous *charismata* withheld, nor the testimony for Christ by word and work and martyr-death. Those in whose bosoms the new life stirred knew themselves to be, and were known of men to be a separated community. Between them and the society around them, in all the usages of which idolatrous rites mingled, a great and ever-widening cleft opened. About them and their fellow-Christians stronger and ever stronger bonds were forging. Travelling from city to city, Christians bore letters of commendation which admitted them everywhere to the society of their fellows. Strong churches sent now and again contributions to relieve the necessities of the weak. Sharers on the one hand in a common hope and life, and on the other in a common contempt and persecution; ministered to by a common Apostolic body, professing a common faith, partakers in common spiritual gifts, practising a common, peculiar morality, they exhibited to the world a visible unity that even deserved the name of an organized unity. They constituted an *imperium in imperio* which trembled with a common life from one end of the empire to the other, offering everywhere not merely a like, but a united resistance to heathenism and heresy, and supplying from the resources of the whole the lack of every part.

It is important to observe, however, that this unity was not organic, in the special sense of that word which would imply that it was founded on the inclusion of the whole Church under one universal government. The absence of such an organization is obvious on the face of the New Testament record, nor do its pages contain any clear promise of or prominent provision for it for the future. The churches are all organized locally, but no external bonds bind them together, except as this was here and there supplied to certain groups of churches by the common authority over them of the same Apostolical founders. No central authority ruled over the whole Church. It is perfectly obvious that Jerusalem exercised no domination over Antioch, Antioch none over the churches founded by her missionaries. Nor were the churches associated in a common dominion of the whole over all the parts. Even in the next generation the most powerful lever Rome could bring to bear on Corinth was entreaty and advice. The Apostles went forth to evangelize the world, not to rule it; they divided the work among themselves, and did not seek to control it as a "college"; they delegated their individual authority to the local officers and founded no dynasty, whether individual or collegiate.

It is equally obvious that the visible unity of the Apostolic Church was not grounded in uniformity in organization, forms of worship, or even details of faith. There was, no doubt, a good degree of similarity in all these matters in all parts of the Church. A local form of government was imposed on the churches. Everywhere men observed the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, prayed with outstretched hands, sang psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, read the Scriptures and preached the Gospel. But this general similarity fell far short of complete uniformity. Jerusalem had differentiated for itself a "bishop" out of its board of overseers, while as yet the separate pastoral office was unknown to the rest of the Church; and even after it had spread to Syria and Asia it was still lacking in Philippi. The Temple-service was part of Christian worship in Jerusalem; and even the Apostle to the Gentiles kept Jewish feasts and customs. Everywhere Christian Jews observed circumcision and the seventh day, while others were free from the Law. Christian worship was characterized everywhere by charismatic freedom, and resembled more our open prayer-meeting than our church service. Doctrinal and practical heresies were continuously springing up out of the fertile soil of Jewish and heathen superstition and habit, imported into the Church by those who, awakened to new life by the Gospel, had not yet been able to put off from them all the grave clothes of their dead past. There were probably few churches in the Apostolic age whose condition in knowledge and practice, or whose usages in church government and Christian worship would attract any modern denomination to seek to include them in its fellowship.

It is, if possible, even more clear that the unity of the Apostolic Church was not grounded in a claim to singleness of origin. The Church spread by the scattering abroad of Christians, taking their Gospel with them. Nobody cared whence a church drew its origin, so only it existed. Who founded the Church of Rome? or of Alexandria? or of Antioch herself, the mother of churches? Paul resisted the demand for commendations and found the credentials of ambassadorship in the fruits of work (2 Cor. iii:1 sq.). The church in Jerusalem with the Apostles and elders hearkened to Paul and Barnabas when they rehearsed what signs and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them, and seeing that they had been entrusted with the Gospel of the uncircumcision, gave them the right of fellowship (Acts xv:12; Gal. ii:7). The question of importance was not the *media* through which *men* obtained the call, but whether they had received it.

In a word, the unity of the Apostolic churches was grounded on the only thing they had in common—their common Christianity. Its bond was the common reception of the Holy Spirit, which exhibited

itself in one calling, one faith, one baptism. And as the existence of no other foundation for unity is traceable in the history of the Apostolic churches, so the duty of seeking no other mode of unity than would be built on this foundation is pressed on their consciences by either the Lord or his Apostles. Our Lord does not declare, as the old version has it, that "there shall be one *fold* and one shepherd" (John x: 16); but, as the Revised Version corrects it, he speaks of his sheep as occupants of many folds, but as all so hearkening to his one voice that "they shall become one *flock*, one shepherd." Nor is the unity, for which he prayed in his High Priestly prayer, one grounded on external organization, but one grounded in communion in him; its home is the mysterious unity of Father and Son in the Godhead; its mediating cause, common acceptance of the Gospel; its effect, not the convincing of the world that the Church is one, but that "Thou didst send me, and lovedst them even as thou lovedst me." Nowhere, however, is the New Testament conception of the Church brought to more complete expression than in the Epistle to the Ephesians, which may be justly called the Epistle of the Church, the body of Christ, as its companion letter, that to the Colossians, is the Epistle of Christ, the head of his Church. From its very beginning the Church is the Apostle's chief theme, what it is, and how it was framed and should comport itself. He tells us of its origin—in the selection by God before the foundation of the world, of a people in his beloved son; how it was purchased to himself in time by the death of that Son of his love on the cross; how this redemption was applied to it and sealed to each of its true members by the Holy Spirit of promise; how it manifested itself in the ages gone by in those who hoped beforehand in Christ, and in these latter days by the calling of the Gentiles—for whom the middle wall of partition has been broken down that they too may have access by the same Spirit to the one God. In the fourth chapter he begins his appeal to his readers to fulfil the duties which sharing in these high privileges has entailed upon them; and among these duties he gives the first place to unity. But it is a "Unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." The ground of this appeal he develops in a remarkable enumeration (Eph. iv: 4 *sq.*) of the things which all Christ's followers have in common, if they be his at all. The enumeration is arranged in an ascending triad: there is but one and can be but one body, one Lord, one God. If it be absurd to speak of more gods than one, and shameful to divide Christ, it is as absurd and as shameful to divide his body, which is his Church. The force of this is enhanced by the addition to each item of a further enumeration of the bond of attachment which unites us to the one body, the one Lord, the one God; and this is done in such a way as to adduce in each case both what may be called the vital and the instrumental bond—thus yielding a triad of triads.

There is but one body ; as, indeed, is necessary, since there is but one Spirit, by whose call we are united to that one body, and hence but one calling. There is but one Lord ; and but one faith which binds us to Him, and but one baptism by which we express our faith. There is but one God ; but here the Apostle sacrifices symmetry of arrangement to grandeur of thought—"but one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all," who is at once transcendent over, operative through, and immanent in all—in a word, all relations to all creations. Interfused and interpenetrated and governed by the one God, united by one baptism, symbolizing one faith to the one Lord, called in one calling, by the one Spirit, into one body : here we have the Apostle's conception of the Church's unity and its ground, a unity consistent with any diversity of gifts—with diversity in everything, in fact, except true Christianity.

If this study of the nature and relations of the conception of Christian unity as it lies in the New Testament has any validity, we cannot but be aided by it in our search for unity now. It is clear, for instance, that :

1. We are not to seek it in the inclusion of all Christians in one organization and under one government. A story is told of a man who, wishing a swarm of bees, caught every bee that visited his flowers and enclosed them together in a box, only to find the difference between an aggregation and a hive. We cannot produce unity by building a great house over a divided family. Different denominations have a similar right to exist with separate congregations, and may be justified on like grounds.

2. Nor yet are we to seek it in the assimilation of all organized bodies of Christians to one another in forms of government or worship. A people is not unified by dressing all the citizens alike. The several tribes of naked savages do not constitute a more united body than the company of civilized nations of diverse costumes but one spirit. The keynote of the Bible is liberty : and beyond the very simple forms of organization, laid down chiefly in the pastoral epistles, and the general principles of worship in spirit and in truth, the sanctified wisdom of every body of Christians is the only home of its usages.

3. Still less are we to seek it in a merely mechanical application of the rule of continuity, as if the continuance of Christ's church in the world depended on the "mere ligature of succession." The life of a people is not suspended on the mere mode of investiture with its crown. England would not forever cease to be a nation if her king were not crowned at Westminster according to the customary forms.

4. Least of all, are we to seek unity by surrendering all public or organized testimony to all truth except that minimum which—just because it is the minimum, less than which no man can believe and be a Christian—all Christians of all names can unite in confessing. Sub-

jection to the tyranny of the unbeliever is no more essential to unity than subjection to the tyranny of the believer (say the Pope); and this course can mean nothing other than—"Let him that believes least among you be your lawgiver." There is a sense, of course, in which the visible unity of the church is based on the common belief and confession of the body of truth held alike by all who are Christians; but this is not the same as saying that it must be based on the repression of all organized testimony to truth not yet held by all alike. Unity in Christ is not founded on disloyalty to the truth that is in Christ.

5. But if we are to find the unity for which our Master prayed, we are to seek it in our common relation as Christians to our one head—our common Redeemer and King—as mediated by our common possession of the one Spirit. We are to remember that neither the centre, basis nor instrument of unity is earthly, or to be discovered in any human thought, order or organization; but as Principal Gore admirably expresses it, "the instrument of unity is the Spirit; the basis of unity is Christ, the Mediator; the centre of unity is in the heavens, where the Church's exalted Head lives in eternal majesty—human yet glorified." Every Christian, through whom flows the life of the Spirit imparted by the head, is of the body which is one. In a word, the Church is one, not by virtue of any efforts of ours to make it one, but by virtue of the divine life that binds it as his body to the one head. The true figure of the Church is the circle; every particle of the circumference is held in its relation to all other particles by the common relation of each to the centre. And as we cannot create this unity, neither can we destroy it. Whoever is of God is of the Church: whoever is of Christ is of his body. Who can separate us from the love of Christ? To adopt—and we are sorry to be obliged to say also to adapt—the words of a typical high-churchman of the last generation: "The Church is one—not merely ought to be one, should strive to be one—but *is* one. The Church is one, not merely because it happens not to be more than one, but because it cannot be more than one. *Ecclesia una est et dividi non potest*, says St. Cyprian, "the Church is one and cannot be divided. It is one essentially, even as God is one."\* It is ours not to make this unity, but in heart and life to realize it.

In all this there is, of course, nothing inconsistent with the frank admission that this unity of the Spirit may be more or less clearly realized by Christians, and hence more or less fully manifested to the world. Christians may even "bite and devour one another;" members of the same family may repudiate one another though they remain nevertheless members of the same family. All that is essen-

\*GEORGE HILL of Scrivenham, *What is the Church of Christ?* Baltimore: 1844. p. 82. With a commendatory introduction by Bishop Whittingham.

tial to the foundation of unity must be found in the Church of every age—the very existence of the Church provides it:—but its complete expression is dependent not on the existence of the Church but on its perfection; and it will, therefore, not be absolute until she is presented to her Bridegroom without spot or blemish or any such thing. Meanwhile, it is ours to advance toward this ideal, as it is God's delight to be "daily smoothing the wrinkles and wiping the spots of his Church away." And the importance of distinguishing between the foundation of unity and its expression lies just in this, that we may not advance along the wrong path. If the perfect expression of unity depends on the perfection of the Church, the path toward it is not to be found in yielding our organized testimony to what is best in government or worship or what is true in faith, but in enthusiastically pressing this testimony on the attention and acception of all whom we ought not be ashamed to call our brethren. The only organization which the whole Church should adopt is the perfect one, the only worship which all should use is the perfect one, the only creed which is fitted to be the form of sound words in which all God's people express their faith is the perfect one—inclusive of all truth, exclusive of all error.

All that tends to perfect the Church or any branch of the Church in any department of Christian life or effort is, therefore, a step toward that perfect expression of unity for which we should all long. All that tends to obscure the necessity for a perfect order, form, faith under a spurious appearance of agreement, postpones the attainment. The true pathway seems, then, to lead us as our present duty to:

1. Hearty recognition of all Christians as members of the body of Christ, and of all denominations which preach the Gospel of Christ as sections of this one body.

2. Hearty and unwavering testimony to all God's truth known to us, as the truth of God to be confessed by all his people.

3. Coöperation in all good works as brethren.

4. Formal federation of denominations for prosecuting tasks common to the federated bodies, so far as such federation involves no sacrifice of principle or testimony.

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## II.—HOW ART MUSEUMS MAY INSTRUCT THE PREACHER.

BY WM. ELLIOT GRIFFIS, D. D., BOSTON, MASS.

THE museums of art and archæology in our large cities may be made a constant source of fresh thought and stimulus to preachers of the good news of God. Nor is the village pastor entirely at a disadvantage as compared with his fellow-worker in the city. One or two well-planned visits by the man who wills are worth more than permanent residence within a stone's throw of unutilized "curiosities." The power of reproducing mental images of sense-objects is one ever to be