

ARTICLE IV.

THE CHURCH.

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It is one of the imperfections of the English language, that in so many instances the same word has several and widely diverse meanings. This is a fruitful source of confusion, misunderstanding, and controversy. If the word "church" had but a single definite meaning,—if it always stood for one and the same thing,—the world would be saved a great deal of confusion of thought, and of ecclesiastical warfare. But unfortunately such is not the case. By writers and speakers generally the word is used in a variety of senses. This would not be so great an evil, if writers and speakers were only careful to discriminate, and make it evident, in every case, in which of the various senses it is used. This they sadly fail to do; passing unconsciously from one meaning of the word to another: often jumbling several meanings together in inextricable confusion. It is surprising how often we meet with this indiscriminate use of the word "church" in the writings even of eminent thinkers and authors. We are sometimes reminded of the criticism which Ian Maclaren tells us Mrs. Macfadyen passed upon a certain Highland preacher at Drumtochty. The text was, "The trumpet shall be blown, and they shall come from Assyria and Egypt." "There are fower trumpets," said the preacher. "First, a leeteral trumpet; second, a heestorical trumpet; third, a metaphorical trumpet; fourth, a speritual trumpet." "Well, will ye believe me," says the critic, "he barely mentioned the 'leeteral,' till he was off tae the 'speritual,' and then

back to the 'heestorical,' and in five minutes he had the hale fower trumpets blawing thegither." Sometimes on the same page we find such an indiscriminate mixing up of the different meanings of the word "church," that we seem to hear the simultaneous "blawing of the hale fower trumpets" of the Highland Scotchman.

DIFFERENT MEANINGS OF THE WORD "CHURCH."

The lexicographers derive the English *church*, the Scottish *kirk*, the Danish *kirke*, the Dutch *kerk*, the Swedish *kurka*, from the Greek *κυριακον* (*κύριος*), something pertaining to or belonging to a lord,—our Lord, Jesus Christ. Whatever it is, whether a society or a building, it is in some special sense the Lord's.

1. I begin with the meaning of the word that is most remote from its primitive meaning, that was the last to come into use, and is less generally used than any other, viz., a *place of public worship*. Christians build a house where they stately meet to pray, sing praises, and hear the word of God, and this house of worship is often called a "church." It is only a place where a church gathers. In England, dissenters worship in chapels, not in churches. Our Puritan fathers worshiped in "meeting-houses," and some regret that this old Puritan name has so generally given place to the word "churches." We now "go to church"; we build our "meeting-house," and call it our "church."

2. Another secondary meaning of the word "church" is, a number of Christian believers, who, under some form of outward organization, maintain their Christian life, and do their Christian work. This is the local church. It is found in all denominations,—Papal, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, or Congregational. These local churches are differently organized, but are all organized with their officers, and their rules, and prescribed methods. Some of these

local churches are complete in themselves, while others are parts of a larger organization. But they are all organizations, and when we speak of them it is in their organic capacity.

3. Another secondary meaning of the word "church" is when it denotes a larger organization, composed of many local churches; as, the Presbyterian Church, the Methodist Church, the Episcopal Church, or the Papal Church. Here the bond of union is still outward. As individuals are bound together by creeds, rules, customs, officers, into a local church; so local churches are bound together into a denominational church by creeds, customs, rules, officers. In this larger church it is the peculiarity of its organization that determines its denominational name, and makes it a church at all.

4. The word "church" is frequently used to denote the sum total of all organized churches,—local, denominational, or national churches. This is an infelicitous use of the word. If all these various organized churches were united by any outward organic bond, there would be propriety in calling them "a church," or "the church." But such is not the case; and we might as well speak of all cities as "the city," or of all nations as "the nation," as to speak of all the diverse ecclesiastical organizations or churches as "the church." Still, the word "church" is thus used with growing frequency by eminent writers and speakers. It is used thoughtlessly, and without due discrimination. It were far better, when we mean all organized churches, to say churches. If some general term is needful to apply to all the numerous and widely diversified forms of organized Christianity, pray let it be some other than the word "church." It seems an abuse of language to group together bodies so different as the Romish hierarchy, with its spectacular services, and the little body of disciples worshiping in a dugout on a Western prairie, and

apply to them a common title, "the church," since as outward organizations they have nothing in common; what they do have in common will be found beneath their differing organizations and is quite independent of them.

5. We come now to what we deem the most fundamental and important use of the word. It denotes the entire company of Christian believers, all who have been born from above, who have had awakened within them a new spiritual life, irrespective of any outward organization or polity. This is the prime meaning of the word; all other meanings are derivative and secondary. "I believe in the holy Catholic Church." This company of godly men and women and children, once small, now large, and growing larger with every passing year, bound together by that strongest of all uniting ties,—love to Christ,—constitutes the Church of the living God. It is called "holy," because all its members, without exception, are in a measure holy. It is called "Catholic," because it is as universal as Christian faith and love. It is called the "invisible" Church, because it has no visible organization, and because its real membership is known only by Him who knows perfectly the hearts of all men.

It is of this spiritual brotherhood, this holy Catholic Church, and of this only, that we can truly say, "Ubi Christus, ibi ecclesia." And of this, and of no other church, is that other saying true, "Extra ecclesiam, salus nulla."

This true Church, whose members are all united by inner spiritual affinities, not by outward bonds, antedates, underlies, outreaches, and outlives all other churches. It is "the light of the world," "the salt of the earth." It embodies those moral and spiritual forces that "make for righteousness," are destined to renovate society, and make every wilderness of this world to blossom as the rose. The roll of this Church is in "the Lamb's Book of Life." The sole condition of membership is grace in the heart. The

sole initiatory rite is the baptism of the Spirit. Its door of entrance no man opens, and no man shuts. Its discipline is in no priestly hands. Its life and growth and prosperity depend upon the abiding presence of Him whose body it is, and who lives in every individual member.

All ecclesiastical writers agree in recognizing the reality of this primal and universal Church. Nearly all the great creeds, from the so-called Apostles' Creed downward, recognize it.

Nevertheless there has been a sad failure on the part of the leaders of Christian thought to emphasize sufficiently this prime conception of the Church, and to keep in mind its peculiar characteristics. What is true of this "holy Catholic Church" is often affirmed of ecclesiastical organizations,—churches in the secondary sense of the word. Let us now proceed to inquire how the foregoing views accord with

THE SCRIPTURAL USE OF THE WORD "CHURCH."

It is first used in the New Testament by Christ (Matt. xvi. 18): "And I also say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church [*ἐκκλησία*], and the gates of hell [hades] shall not prevail against it." Christ does not here interpret or explain the word "church." We must assume, therefore, that he used it in a sense identical with, or at least kindred to, that with which the people of that day were more or less familiar. There were of course at that time no Christian churches in the *secondary* sense, answering to our local or denominational or national churches. Did Christ then use the word in the primary sense as given above? The word *ἐκκλησία* in Greek usage denoted, according to Thayer, "A gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place for the purpose of deliberating." It was not an organized civic or political body, but an assembly of certain persons having

common rights and interests, convened to consult, and act for the common good. Doubtless Peter and many of the Jews were familiar with this meaning of the word, and would understand Christ to say, "I am to have my 'called' and 'chosen' ones separate from the unbelieving world in which they live,—a company of friends,—immovable in their devotion to me—like a building on an impregnable rock which no hostile power can overthrow."

But it is the opinion of scholars that Christ ordinarily spoke Aramaic, and not Greek, in which case he said to Peter, not *ἐκκλησία*, but *הַקָּהָל*, which is the same in Hebrew, and denotes an assembly, a congregation. Etymologically it means about the same as *ἐκκλησία*, to *call* or *convoke*; and in the Septuagint it is often, I believe generally, translated by *ἐκκλησία*. The two words then are virtually synonymous, and it matters not which our Lord used. Whether he had in mind an assembly of Greeks, or an assembly of Jews, he announces to Peter his purpose to call out, or call together, an assembly which shall be known as his, "*ἡ ἐκκλησία μου*," "*הַקָּהָל שִׁמִּי*," which will be enduring and invincible. In neither word is there the least suggestion of an organization—or a formal institution. A company of Christians separated from an ungodly world, standing immovably together in their love and devotion to him—this is Christ's conception of "the church." And this first use of the word by him is the source and interpreter of all subsequent uses of it. And it is to be noted that he uses the singular, and not the plural, form of the word. He was about to establish, not his "churches," but his "church,"—one Church, whether composed of many or few, of Jews or Gentiles.

This, which we have claimed to be the primary meaning of the word, is the meaning it bears; also in the only other passage in the Gospels in which it is found (Matt. xviii.

8-17): "If he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church; but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican." This is Christ's direction to an individual believer. If his brother trespass against him, he is first to try privately to win him to a better mind; failing, he is, avoiding publicity, to call to his aid two or three others; if their united efforts fail, he is to invoke the kind offices of all the Christians with whom he is associated—the Church;—and, if these are unavailing, he is simply to leave him, as one who has forfeited his right longer to be treated as a Christian brother. There is no direction to "the church," as if it were an organic body, to excommunicate the offender. The implication is that the Church was not an organic body; and there is not a particle of evidence that at that time Christians anywhere had become a visible organization. They were simply a company of Christ's friends united only in the bonds of mutual love and sympathy. Only a few months had elapsed—perhaps only a few weeks—between Christ's use of the word "church" in these two passages, and there can be little doubt that he used the word in the same sense in them both; meaning by the "church," those whom he had called and drawn to himself—a loving, spiritual brotherhood, without the least reference to any external organization.

We next meet the word "church" in Acts ii. 47, "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." The Revised Version rejects the word "church," and in place of it puts the words "to them,"—"The Lord added to them," i.e. to the company of believers. The same expression occurs in verse 41, "And there were added to them about three thousand souls." It is supposed that "church" was early inserted as an explanatory gloss; but its insertion did not change the meaning of the text. The new converts were added to the Church, for the Church

simply means the company of believers. The gloss, if it be a gloss, only indicates that the word "church" retained the primary meaning given it by Christ.

In this primary and ecumenical sense the word is unquestionably used in many passages in the later Scriptures. I here cite but a few of them as specimens. Eph. i. 22, 23: "And gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all"; Eph. iii. 21, "Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end. Amen"; Eph. v. 25-27: "Even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water, by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish"; 1 Tim. iii. 15, "which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth"; Heb. xii. 23, "To the general assembly, and church of the first-born which are written in heaven." In these, and other passages, the word "church" exactly matches that conception of the Church which is given us by Christ himself. It is not an outward organization, nor an aggregation of outward organizations, but simply a company of believers, made a unit by their essential likeness of character, and their relations to him who is their common Lord and Saviour.

This is the view of the Church that needs to be emphasized in our day. Rather, this is the conception of the true Church which, as the one that Christ first gave us, should be always placed first, and not be allowed to be displaced or obscured by anything else called a church, in some secondary meaning of the word. Let writers, at least when they refer to this true Church, begin the word with a capital C; elsewhere let the small c suffice.

But there appears to be, in many passages of Scrip-

ture, a departure from this original and ecumenical sense of the word. Is this real, or only apparent? The small company of Christians in a private house is called a "church" (Col. iv. 15; Rom. xvi. 5; 1 Cor. xvi. 19). The company of Christian believers in a certain town or city is called a church; e.g. the church of Corinth, of Thessalonica, of Ephesus, of Rome. The plural is often used; e.g. the churches of Galatia; the churches of Macedonia; the churches of Asia. Is this usage in conflict with, or a departure from, Christ's conception of the Church universal? We think not. The word in this apparently limited and localized sense, means, the one Church, so far as it exists, or is represented in these different localities. The Church at Jerusalem was the universal spiritual Church, as present in the disciples resident at Jerusalem. Paul addresses two of his Epistles "to the church of God" (*εἰς Κορινθίους*), i.e. as it exists in the Christians of Corinth. These little companies of believers, which were rapidly multiplying throughout Judæa and Samaria and Asia Minor and Greece, were regarded as parts of the one great company of believers, which is the Church of the living God, according to Christ's conception of that Church. This Church includes all individual believers and all companies of believers wherever found, whether in village or city or private house,—whether in Palestine or Asia or Greece or Rome. The original spiritual conception of the Church is not lost; it includes all of every name and locality who are "beloved of God," "called to be saints," "called" to be Jesus Christ's.

Whether these local churches, i.e. companies of Christians in different places, were formally organized after the manner of modern churches, is an open question. We do not find any incontrovertible evidence in the Scriptures that they were. And we are very confident they are never spoken of by the sacred writers simply *as organized bodies*;

that is, there is by them no distinct recognition of such organization. They speak of them simply as Christian brethren drawn together by a common faith and mutual love. Four of Paul's Epistles—viz., to the Romans, the Philippians, the Colossians, and the Ephesians—are not addressed to them *as churches*, but as Christians, "the elect," "the called," "faithful brethren in Christ," "saints." The ecumenical conception of the Church is always present to the mind of the Apostle; and, however often he may speak of local churches, he emphasizes their spiritual character and unity, and not anything pertaining to an external organization. It is not denied that there were, at an early day, such organizations. Very probably there were. But if so, these organizations must have been very simple, and did not constitute the very essence of the churches, but such as each company of believers found convenient and helpful,—never made prominent, never imposed upon us by any one body of believers, never regarded as that which constituted a church or entitled a company of Christians to be called a church. And certainly if such local organizations existed, there is not the slightest hint or intimation that they formed one general organization, by which all the local churches were united, so as to form one Church. I cannot find in the New Testament a trace of any such ecumenical organized church. The ecumenical idea is there; but it lies not in outward organization, but in inward spiritual affinity. The Church which Christ instituted, which he loved, of which he is the head, for which he gave himself that he might sanctify and cleanse it, so as to present it unto himself a glorious Church, is a *spiritual* church; its members *spiritual* members, its bonds of union *spiritual* bonds. This is the Church which is declared to be the "body," in which he is incarnated, sending his divine life through the whole. This is "the Church" by which he is to be made known to the "principalities and powers in

heavenly places, the manifold grace of God." All this, surely, cannot be predicated of any organization that assumes the name of church, however great and noble it may be. It seems to lower and belittle this exalted scriptural conception of the true Church to identify it with any past or present ecclesiastical organization. All such organizations may include some of the members of the true Church; but none includes them *all*. But that Church which Christ is building on a "rock," and against which he assures us the gates of hell shall not prevail, is composed of believers, and believers only. Into this Church are gathered all, without exception, who are Christ's, given him of the Father; and nothing shall ever be able to pluck one of them out of his hands. The primacy, spirituality, universality, indivisibility, and permanency of this Church give it supreme importance, and forbid that it should ever be confounded with any of those organizations—churches in the secondary sense of the word—which have sprung up under it. Disband all these,—blot out of existence every local, provincial, national, and denominational church,—and this true Church of the living God would remain in all its integrity and essential glory. These secondary churches may be legitimate, useful, and even necessary to the highest efficiency of the true Church, but do not singly nor collectively constitute it, nor form a part of it. Like different church edifices, they are, or may be, occupied and used by the Church in the fulfilment of its great mission; but God forbid that they should be identified with it, or should arrogate to themselves attributes and functions which belong to it alone! They are to it less than what the moon and stars are to the sun.

If we seem to have dwelt at undue length and with needless repetition upon the foregoing views, it has been from a profound conviction of their importance and of the evil resulting from a practical disregard of them. And if the

discussion thus far has been along the lines of truth and Scripture it will throw light upon certain other closely related topics. The question is often asked,

“IS THE CHURCH OF DIVINE OR OF HUMAN ORIGIN?”

If the Church spiritual and invisible be meant, then our answer is, “Of *divine* origin.” Its very material is furnished by the renewing and sanctifying grace of God. Its life is a divine, supernatural life. Its bonds of union are the fruits of the Spirit. It was born in the mind and heart of Christ.

But if any one of the visible organized churches or the aggregate of such churches is meant, quite a different answer must be given. That any one of these was instituted directly by Christ, or by his authority, after a divine pattern, there is not the slightest proof. If such were the case, we ask, *Where?* and *When?* Surely there would be an explicit record of such an event. We find no such record. We do not know how or when the church at Jerusalem or any one of the early churches was organized. We do not know as they were organized at all in their infancy. But if they were organized then, or whenever they were, there is not a scintilla of evidence that a definite form of organization was divinely prescribed. It seems reasonable, therefore, to suppose, and it is the only reasonable supposition, that it was left to the judgment of Christians in each place to organize *when* and *as* they saw fit. But were there not divinely appointed leaders? Yes; for we read, “God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers,” etc. (1 Cor. xii. 28). Again we read, “And he [Christ] gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” These leaders with their divers gifts were early appointed to meet the needs of

the one spiritual Church, the body of Christ; but we are nowhere told that they *organized* churches. If they did so, or if they assisted in such organizations, they acted in this, as in other matters, not as infallible men with delegated divine authority, but with that human wisdom which fitted them for leadership.

The case stands then as before stated: The early local churches, if organized, could not claim for their organizations a divine origin. They were human organizations devised by human wisdom to meet human needs. This is still more manifestly true of modern churches, whether self-constituted, or constituted by council or presbytery or bishop. The time and manner of their origin are easily determined—and none of them, as to their polity or outward organization, can claim to exist *jure divino*. And yet there is a qualified sense in which local churches may be said to be of divine as well as of human origin. So far as they are the natural outgrowth of a preëxisting spiritual life, and minister to that life, and embody the fundamental principles of the gospel,—the supreme and exclusive rulership of Christ, personal responsibility to him, the brotherhood of believers, and the duty of communion in brotherly love,—they are of God; in the same sense that civil governments, “the powers that be,” are “ordained of God,”—human none the less because divine, and divine none the less because human. We ministers are sometimes tempted to claim more than this for the local church. We affirm in an unqualified way that the church is divine in its origin, is a divine institution, and we are apt to urge this fact as an imperative reason why all Christians should be connected with it. Better be frank, and say, “You are, if Christians, already members of Christ’s true invisible Church; and as such, and in confession of such membership, you should become a member of some visible church, on your connection with which in no small degree will

depend your growth in grace, your spiritual comfort, your usefulness, and the Master's full approval.

Another topic closely related to the main theme of this discussion is

CHURCH UNION OR CHURCH UNITY.

This subject for the past ten years has awakened new and wide-spread interest, volumes have been written upon it, and newspaper and magazine articles without number. There is, throughout the civilized world, a growing consciousness of the solidarity of the race and of the unity of human interests. Individualism and separatism are not the watchwords of the day, but socialism and union and brotherhood. It is not strange, therefore, that there should be, springing out of this spirit of the age, an intensified desire to draw closer the bonds of Christian fellowship. They who are brethren in Christ by a new birth and a new spiritual life, should surely be one, more than they who are brethren simply by the ties of a common humanity and common worldly interests. This movement for greater union, whether in the social or political or religious world, is bright with promise and enlists our ready sympathy. But it is important to define to ourselves just what is desired and sought by the advocates of "church union." Not every kind of church union is desirable. By some persons at least, perhaps by most, the union advocated is an organic union of the churches of all the various sects and denominations in one great compact organization, one visible, catholic church. Is such a union really desirable and feasible? Is there any Scripture warrant for it? The thrice-repeated prayer of our Lord in John xvii. is cited: "That they may be one, as we are" (ver. 11); "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" (ver. 21); "And the glory

which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one or 'perfected into one,' even as we are one"; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me" (ver. 22, 23). But the language and spirit of this prayer constrain us to refer it, not to an outward ecclesiastical oneness, but to that spiritual oneness which is the highest oneness possible among men, and which above all things Christ desired for his disciples,—a oneness of heart, of soul, resulting from union with the Father and with the Son. It degrades this sublime prayer, and robs it of half its pathos and beauty, to limit it to an external organization. But, it is said, that the expression "that the world may believe," implies some visible organic union. How so? Which testimony is most likely to convince the world of the reality and worth of the Christian religion, that of love and fellowship among members of the same church or denomination, or that of love and fellowship that overleap all ecclesiastical and denominational lines, and bind together Christians of different church relations? I cannot think that our Saviour when he offered that prayer had the remotest idea of a vast outward organization that should hold and bind together all his followers. Something far higher and grander filled his mind and heart in that farewell hour. But it is said that Christ at least prayed for a *visible, manifested* unity among his disciples, which should convince the world of their sincerity and of his divine mission. Granted. But did he indicate one particular way in which this union should be manifested, viz. by external organization? There are manifold ways in which this unity can be manifested by the interchange of Christian courtesies, by free communion and fellowship, by mutual helpfulness, and by practical coöperation as far as possible in all manner of Christian and missionary work, both at home and abroad.

This prayer of Christ for the unity of his people does

not stand alone. It should be coupled with, and interpreted by, what he had previously said (John xiii. 34-35): "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." Unity in love,—this was the burden of his instruction and of his prayer. Deep, divine, overflowing love will make Christians one, whatever diversity of personal, social, or ecclesiastical peculiarities may exist among them.

Other Scriptures are sometimes cited in favor of the union of all churches and sects in one comprehensive organized Church; especially those passages of St. Paul which liken the mutual relations of Christians to those of the different members of the human body (Rom. xii. 4, 5; 1 Cor. xii. 12-27). This classic and beautiful analogy is highly instructive, and will never cease to enforce upon all Christians the duty of mutual love and charity and kindness and coöperation. There is one body of which Christ is the head, and they are all members. But the bond that unites the members is a vital, spiritual bond, the same that unites them to Christ the head; not an outward, ecclesiastical bond. This figure applies in all its force and beauty to any company of Christians dwelling in any locality; also to the entire Christian brotherhood. It illustrates the spiritual unity of believers, but has no reference to external organization, whether local or general.

Christians are also likened to a temple of which Christ is the chief corner-stone, "In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth into a holy temple in the Lord. In whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God through [in] the Spirit" (Eph. ii. 21, 22). This figure was primarily designed to illustrate the equality of Jewish and Gentile believers. They all have "access to the Father by one Spirit," are "fellow-citizens," members of the one

“household of God,” parts of one and the same temple, “growing” together, and forming one common habitation for the Spirit of God. All these figurative expressions manifestly refer to a spiritual union and equality of Christian privilege, and not at all to any formal organization. And we hesitate not to reaffirm the conviction already expressed, that there is no explicit reference in the Scriptures to any kind of ecclesiastical organization whatever, much less to any of an ecumenical character. The unity of the one spiritual Church is taught in the Scriptures, and of no other. It is by many writers assumed, not only that the local churches in apostolic time were formally organized (which I do not positively deny), but that they were all organized upon one homogeneous pattern, and were then united in one catholic organization. But even if the first part of this threefold assumption were proved to be true, the other two parts would remain pure, unsupported assumptions. There is reason to believe that there was great diversity in the form of organization in the early churches, whenever they began to organize. The Hebrew, the Greek, and the Roman Christians would naturally adopt those forms of organization with which they were most familiar. A writer in the *Contemporary Review* for October, 1895, Rev. T. M. Lindsay, D.D., thinks that he finds evidence of five types of ecclesiastical organization existing side by side, and probably side by side in the same town or city, differing as much or more than the churches of different sects to-day differ; and that they all had apostolic sanction. Yet underlying this external diversity there was unity of spirit, unity of life, sympathy, fellowship, and coöperation. If then the Scriptures do not favor the theory of church union, by the absorption of all churches and sects into one vast, all-comprehensive organization, all arguments for or against such union must rest on the ground of expediency. Church organization,

whether one or manifold, is not an end in itself, but only a means to an end; and that end is the development of spiritual life in Christians, and the salvation of all men, i. e., the prevalence of true righteousness in all the earth. Would or would not that end be best secured by the merging of sects in one grand catholic church? Only two or three brief suggestions will here be offered, pointing, it is believed, towards the true answer to this question.

I. The evils of manifold sects are often exaggerated, and their advantages overlooked, by the advocates of organic church union. Undeniably these evils are real, and great and to be deplored, but not *as great* as is often represented. And for the most part they are incidental, and not inherent in sects *as such*. They spring largely from poor, weak, human nature, and from the lack of the Christian spirit. What is needed to correct these evils is a deeper, fuller, spiritual life in all the sects and in all the churches, more than unity of organization. A real, vital, spiritual unity is possible under great diversities of polity and ritual; while, with outward *organic* unity, evils may coexist as great, and essentially the same, as those incident to multiplicity of sects. There are, alas, too often jealousies and contentions and divisions among members of the same local church, and also among local churches of the same denomination, as unchristian and mischievous as are those due to diversity of denominations. On the other hand, we sometimes see beautiful instances of mutual love and fellowship among individual Christians and among churches of different denominations. Not sects, but sectarianism, is the source of the evils we deplore, and nothing will cure this but a larger charity, more of the indwelling spirit of the Christ; and this *will* cure it. And even as things now are, there is a great deal of common ground among the sects. They agree in more things and in vastly more important things, than those in which they differ.

Their differences are mainly superficial and about non-essentials; their agreements are fundamental and vital. The same Christianity in a large degree possesses and pervades them all. And there are, undeniably, some advantages to be placed over against the evils of division. There is certainly more freedom of thought and action, and without freedom there is not the development of the best type of religious character and life. It is better for people walking the same road to walk a little apart than to be manacled together hand and foot. There is also a fuller recognition of that prime Puritan truth, of every man's direct personal responsibility to God. And we do not see why there may not be generous and healthful competitions or emulations among the sects, which shall stimulate to greater religious activity and to the use of a greater variety of agencies, and so secure larger and better results than would be otherwise secured. Let the real, unexaggerated evils of church division be put into one scale, and the manifest advantages into the other; and it is by no means certain that the latter would not offset, if not outweigh, the former.

2. An appeal to history does not justify the belief that organic church union is most promotive of spiritual life among Christians, or the most effective agency in the evangelization of the world. The experiment has been tried sufficiently long and on a sufficiently large scale to afford a basis for a conclusive judgment. There are several international church organizations venerable with age. By their fruits ye shall know them. Does their history justify the belief that Christianity would gain in purity and power if all local and denominational churches were organically united and made one? Take the oldest and largest of these ancient organizations—the Roman Catholic. Give that church credit for the vast good it has done; honor it for its service to literature and art; and still more for its long

roll of immortal heroes and saints and martyrs. Still we do not to-day find in that venerable church the leadership in modern civilization, in science, in popular education, in the elevation of the masses, in the practical application of Christianity to the affairs of everyday life, and in missionary enterprises. Without going into particulars, or citing tables of statistics, it is safe to say that Christianity as represented by the various Protestant churches is doing a nobler work for the world, and is producing a higher type of manhood and of spiritual life, than is Christianity as represented by that vast organization whose seat is the Vatican.¹

It may perhaps be said that the one catholic church of the future will not be patterned after the Church of Rome. But, from the very nature of the case, many of the objectionable features of that church must be retained by any church claiming universal jurisdiction; especially must there be a vast centralized power, with its inevitable liabilities of abuse, and without any possibility of wisdom adequate to the just administration of such diverse, delicate, complicated, and world-wide interests. Verily history does not point to such a kind of church union as the royal remedy for the evils of division, and the best means of hastening the realization of that glorious hope with which Christianity lights up the future of our world.

3. Analogy confirms the verdict of history. Would social and family life be best promoted by merging all families into one catholic family? It may be wise to re-

¹ In comparison with the dissensions of Protestantism, the bitter discords of the Roman Church compare like a blare of trumpets to the murmur of flutes. There is an external unity of law, but dissonance of thought and purpose which the most divergent sects of Protestantism cannot equal. The unity is the unity of the letter, which killeth, not that of the Spirit, which giveth life. Submission to authority is its keynote, not the kindly coöperation of varying forces toward one great end."—C. C. Tiffany in *The Forum*, July, 1896, p. 572.

move the fences that have barricaded our dwellings, but to obliterate those boundary lines which nature and custom have drawn about our homes, making each little household a distinct and separate entity, a social unity, for the sake of forming one universal, corporate household, commensurate with the race,—how preposterous, how disastrous to human welfare!

Again, would it subserve the best civic interests of mankind to merge all the diverse existing civil governments, democracies, republics, kingdoms, empires, into one universal government, to which the people of every land should yield allegiance? From the present multiplicity of states, there have arisen manifold and terrible evils, jealousies, rivalries, and sanguinary conflicts; but the sanity of the man would be questioned who should claim that the only remedy of these international evils is the abolition of separate states, and the union of all nations and people under one central law-making and law-administering power. When there shall be family union and civic union, it will be time to think of ecclesiastical union in the sense of one all-inclusive, organic church.

4. If this church union were feasible, and were once an accomplished fact, what would guarantee its permanence? What would prevent a repetition of the same process of segregation which brought about the present condition? The same divisive causes would exist; why would not the same or greater ecclesiastical divisions result? Wherever the law of evolution operates, the tendency is not to unification, but to differentiation. Given to-day an ecclesiastically united Christendom, and the probability, almost certainty, is that a century would not elapse before sects would be as numerous or more numerous than ever. With increasing liberty and intelligence and spirituality, there is less and less likelihood of uniformity in external organization and forms of worship and of service. It would

therefore be labor wasted, if organic church union on the basis advocated by many should temporarily be secured; history would repeat itself, and the vision would quickly vanish of one compacted church organization clasping the globe, and holding under its instruction and control the ever-increasing millions of Christians of all nationalities, and of all lands, and all climes.

But there is a Christian union possible. Indeed, it *already exists*. All true believers *are one*, and do constitute one body of Christ, and this is that spiritual Church which is founded upon a rock. The unity of this Church results from the vital union of all its members with Christ. And this church unity is infinitely more desirable than any external unity. It may, and it will, be intensified by a deepening of the spiritual life of Christians. This is what we should all labor and pray for, more of the Spirit of Christ, more of the power of the Holy Ghost, in the hearts of all believers, welding them more closely together in love and hope. And we cannot but think that this, after all, is what those who are so earnest for ecclesiastical union really most desire. Is not the underlying motive of this whole movement a craving for an overflowing fulness of spiritual life among all who are Christ's, which would make them more truly a united household of faith, a loving fraternity, knit together in brotherly affection, which no outward bonds could strengthen, and which no lack of outward bonds could weaken? Let this unity of the Spirit in its fulness be realized, and we shall hear little said about any necessity for some other kind of church union. There will be coöperation, perhaps certain forms of federation. There is much of that now, and there will be more and more of it. With this increasing spiritual unity, there will doubtless be more and more interdenominational fellowship and coöperation. And it is highly probable that some form of confederation will ultimately be found expe-

dient and feasible ; not the extinction of sects, but their alliance for certain practical purposes. Of all the proposed plans of union or federation, it is morally certain that none will be adopted that does not allow "liberty of conscience" in the interpretation of the Scriptures, and in the administration of church affairs. When a larger love displaces selfishness, and reigns supreme in the hearts of Christians, diminished emphasis will be placed on externals and non-essentials ; and all divisions of the host of God's elect, under the leadership of the one great Captain of our salvation, with the same cross blazoned on all their denominational banners, will keep step to the music of the gospel's bugle call, as they move forward to the conquest of the world. With this unity of spirit and Christian coöperation, what more can be desired ?

Much is said, by the advocates of external unity, of the value to the individual of the consciousness of connection with a great historic church, with its vast array of worthies extending in unbroken line down through the ages. But every believer may glory in the more blessed consciousness of being a member of a Church—the true spiritual Church—whose history antedates all other churches, on whose roll of membership stand the names of prophets, and apostles, and martyrs, and all the great and good of earth, of every country and every age, since the beginning. "We are not come unto the 'ecclesiastical' mount that might be touched," "nor to blackness and darkness and tempest." But we are come unto the spiritual Mount Zion ; "to the general Assembly and Church of the first-born enrolled in heaven ; and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant." Well may the historic sense and every other sense be satisfied with this exalted fellowship.

The only remaining topic to be barely touched, in this article, is,

THE RELATION OF THE CHURCH TO THE KINGDOM.

The term "kingdom" is used in the Gospels more than a hundred times, usually by Christ himself, while the term "church" is used but twice. They each represent a society which our Lord instituted—a society of love and righteousness. Is it one and the same society, or two different societies? Why did Jesus so generally use this word "kingdom," and just what did he mean by it? The word did not originate with him, any more than did the word "church." He did not make language, but took words in common use; often putting into them, however, a larger and richer meaning.

It was a day, not of republics and democracies, but of kings and kingdoms. These two words stood for the highest and best things in the eyes of the people. Israel had for centuries been a "kingdom," and so had furnished a language, figuratively used, to embody that conception of a universal kingdom, with Jehovah for king, which we find in the Psalms and Prophets. If Israel had not foolishly clamored for a king, but had adhered to that more popular form of government which God instituted for them, it is doubtful whether we should ever have had in the Scriptures the phrase "the kingdom of God," as it is not found prior to Israel's defection. But Christ found it already in use in a religious sense, and he adopted it as the best current term to express a glorious idea which had been but dimly apprehended by the best of people. The long-predicted spiritual kingdom was to "come," to be established, to be realized, by and through him. But he was careful to detach from the language the false, low, and material notions which still clung to it in the minds of the Jews. It was not to be a kingdom "of this world," that is, not to be, like the kingdoms of men, political, local, outward, resting on force. It was to be a universal kingdom of love, of peace, of righteousness, of joy in the Holy Ghost; a kingdom into

which men could enter only by a new, spiritual birth. It is defined in the Lord's Prayer in the petition, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," which is but a continuation or explanation of the previous petition, "Thy kingdom come." Wherever God reigns in the hearts of men, that is, wherever men yield loving obedience to him, and do his will, there is the kingdom of God. In that "kingdom" all racial and social distinctions vanish—there is neither Jew nor Greek, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but all are "one" in Christ Jesus, in whom they believe, and by whom they have received power to become the sons of God. The citizens of this kingdom are all brethren, and constitute a renovated society, a united family, a household of faith, whose head is Christ, their Elder Brother; whose king is God, their Heavenly Father. And thus we are led to a conception of the Kingdom which corresponds exactly with our conception of the Church which Christ is building on an impregnable "rock." There is no antagonism between the Kingdom and the Church; they are one and the same. Hence there is more truth than poetry in Dr. Dwight's familiar hymn in which *Church* and *Kingdom* are synonymous.

" I love thy *Kingdom*, Lord,
The house of thine abode,
The *Church* our blest Redeemer saved
With his own precious blood."

Whatever may be true of ecclesiastical organizations, of local and denominational churches, the extension of the one true spiritual Church is the coming of the Kingdom; and therefore, instead of wasting our energies in hopeless efforts to effect an external union of all churches, let us seek to deepen in our own hearts, and in the hearts of our brethren of every name, the life of Christ, and to cultivate and exercise a larger charity towards all men. So shall we best help realize the answer to our blessed Lord's

prayers for the union of his disciples and the coming of his Kingdom.

Of late, certain writers in this country and in Germany have been disposed to exalt "the Kingdom" above "the Church." The Kingdom is ultimate; the Church is only the principal organ for its extension. It is claimed that in this conception of "the Kingdom of God," we have a comprehensive and exhaustive formula of the truth and philosophy of Christianity. The frequency of the use of this phrase by our Lord gives some color to this claim. But there is force in the remark of Professor George Harris, "I think this idea of the kingdom is just at present overworked."¹ And it may well be doubted whether this simile of the Kingdom, for it is a simile, is the best for representing to the people of all lands, and for all time, the true nature of that society which Christ instituted, and which is to become universal. It may have been the best for his day, but in more democratic times "Kingdom" may not be the best word for summing up the work of Christ. The highest revelation of God which Jesus himself gave us is not as a King, but as a Father. We are then his children, and not merely his subjects; brethren, not merely fellow-citizens. And therefore, as Professor Harris again says, "It might be urged with considerable force that the family furnishes the better analogy, inasmuch as it is coeval with society, while the rule of kings is a mode of government which did not always exist, which is not now universal, and which may entirely disappear."² And St. Paul certainly had this conception of the society of Christians as a family. "Let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Gal. vi. 10). "Now, therefore, ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens, with the saints and of the household of God" (Eph. ii. 19).

¹ *Moral Evolution*, p. 250.

² *Ibid.*

In this latter passage the two figures of kingdom and family are both used in close connection, and evidently with essentially the same meaning; thus confirming the view we have already given that "Church" and "Kingdom" as used by Christ mean one and the same thing—a society of redeemed and renovated men and women—which is destined ultimately to become coextensive with humanity, embracing in one holy, loving fellowship the people of every land. When this shall come to pass, then shall the angels' song be echoed back to heaven, as prophecy fulfilled, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace and good will to men."