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ART. II.—THE IDEA OF THE CHURCH.

THE QUESTION STATED.

BY the "Idea of the Church" is to be understood the formative idea, the essential and fundamental principle of which the Church is the embodiment, that which makes the Church to be the Church, which determines its *esse*—its essential being.

This is a fundamental question in regard to which clearness and definiteness of conception are all-important. Here vagueness and uncertainty become the prolific source of error.

It is surely the duty of every teacher of theology, and of every Christian pastor, to possess and impart clear and well-defined instruction upon such a subject. "Qui bene distinguit, bene docet." It is only by means of such clearness and accuracy in theological study that we can hope to find the unity of truth, or to mediate between conflicting opinions. So far from the tendency of such definiteness being towards a narrow and intolerant dogmatism, it is the chief means by which real comprehension and reconciliation can be achieved, and by which we can be brought into the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.

In the past the history of Christendom has been largely moulded and controlled by false ideas of the Church. The developments of the future will in a great measure be determined by the conception of the Church which becomes dominant—hence the vital importance of the topic to be discussed.

The Church is built upon Jesus Christ. It has, and can have, no existence apart from Him. Hence our ultimate appeal must be to Christ's idea of the Church. But that idea has been variously understood. Divers bodies exist which profess, more or less completely and faithfully, to embody it. Amid the differences and discordances of Christendom can we find any clue to assist us in our inquiry?

TWO ANTAGONISTIC THEORIES.

If we compare the different definitions of the Church in the creeds, confessions, and theological systems of Christendom, it will be found that all agree at least in this: that the Church is a religious fellowship—a society, company, or brotherhood of men—standing in certain defined relations to God as revealed in Christ.

But under this apparent agreement a radical difference quickly discloses itself, which separates all these definitions into two opposing classes, according as they make the ground

of this fellowship to lie in one or other of the two sides of the religious life of Christendom—the ethical and spiritual, or the ritual and ecclesiastical.

The one theory defines the Church by its outward characteristics of form and organization; the other theory defines it by the inward characteristics of faith and the fruits of a living faith in the heart and life. The former theory makes the existence of the Church depend upon what is external and visible, the succession of the ministry, and the due administration of the Sacraments. The latter theory makes the essential nature of the Church to consist in what is spiritual and ethical in the great realities of truth, love, and righteousness—in the life of God in the hearts of Christians through the presence and power of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

The former theory may be called the Roman from its chief political embodiment, or the sacerdotal from its dominant religious conception.

The latter theory we believe to be Biblical and Evangelical—that which is set forth in the Divine Word, and which embodies the spirit and life of the evangel of Jesus Christ. It may also be called the Reformed, because it was that idea of the Church which the Reformation vindicated and embodied, in opposition to the conception and doctrine of the unreformed Church.

The Broad Church view is not a distinct theory. It must either sink to a barren humanitarianism, so far as it tends to identify the Church with the world, or, escaping that tendency, it will continue to oscillate vaguely and indefinitely between the only two possible positive systems, according as its chief emphasis is laid upon the ethical and intellectual, or upon the external, institutional, and political side of Christianity.

THE “ESSE” AND THE “BENE ESSE.”

The sacerdotal theory of the Church makes its *esse*—its essential being—to lie in that which constitutes its visibility; the Evangelical in that which constitutes its invisibility. All admit and maintain that there is but one Church, out of which there is no salvation. Both also admit that to this one Church belong, at least in some sense, both visibility and invisibility. These are both attributes of the one Church, not two Churches. All the Protestant confessions maintain that the Church has visibility—that it manifests its unseen fellowship by means of visible ordinances. And, on the other hand, even Roman Catholic theologians admit that, in some sense at least, the Church possesses or contains within it what is invisible and spiritual.

But herein lies the vital and distinctive difference between the two. The Evangelical doctrine of the Church makes what is visible in the Church the consequent and result of the invisible—the outcome of the unseen life. The sacerdotal theory reverses this order, and makes what is visible—the external order and organization of the Church—the antecedent and cause of what is invisible and spiritual in the life of the Church.

The philosophical Roman divine, Möhler, gives what he calls¹ “a short, accurate, and definite expression” of “the differences between the Catholic and the Lutheran view of the Church.” “The Catholics,” he says, “teach: the visible Church is first, then comes the invisible; the former gives birth to the latter. On the other hand, the Lutherans say the reverse: from the invisible emerges the visible Church; and the former is the groundwork of the latter. In this apparently very unimportant opposition,” he emphatically adds, “a prodigious difference is avowed.”

The sacerdotal doctrine admits, indeed, that there is, or ought to be, in the Church an inner life and spiritual realities invisible to the human eye; but it looks upon these spiritual realities as merely accidental or subsidiary, and not at all essential to the existence of the Church, which, it asserts, depends upon what is external and visible in its organization and ordinances.

The evangelical doctrine, on the contrary, affirms that the being of the Church lies in what is invisible and spiritual, and that its visibility is the result and manifestation, and not the ground and basis, of the former. Herein we find the crucial difference between the two systems, as Möhler himself affirms, a difference which is fraught with the most radical and far-reaching consequences. It is, therefore, of vital moment to ascertain which of these theories represents the true idea of the Church—Christ’s idea of it.

Let us, accordingly, first briefly discuss the grounds upon which the Evangelical theory rests, and then inquire into the origin and effects of the opposite and antagonistic doctrine.

THE CHURCH IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.

From the classical use of the Greek *ἐκκλησία* we gather at least this, that it stands for the fellowship of the enfranchised, the freemen who constitute the commonwealth. There was, therefore, a natural fitness in the selection of this word by the LXX. writers to represent the Hebrew קָהָל (*kahal*), the Old

¹ “Symbolik,” § 48.

Testament designations of Israel viewed in its religious unity, the body corporate, the community in its organic completeness.

The *kahal*, or *ecclesia*, of the Old Testament had its beginning in Abraham and in the covenant into which God entered with him. He was called by God into fellowship with Himself. Great emphasis is laid upon this call throughout the Scriptures. He is described as the friend of God, called, chosen, and faithful. The covenant into which Jehovah entered with him is repeatedly referred to in the Old Testament. In the New Testament its identity with the Gospel covenant is affirmed. Christ came, as the Holy Ghost by the mouth of Zacharias declared, in fulfilment of "the holy covenant, the oath which God swore unto Abraham our father" (Luke i. 72, 73).

Now, the covenant can have but one meaning, and so it is interpreted by the prophet Jeremiah and by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews: "This is the covenant that I will make with them: I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people." As Professor Davidson tersely states it¹: "The covenant is a state of relation in which God is our God and we are His people. It is a divinely constituted fellowship of men with God. 'The everlasting covenant' is the expressive designation applied both in the law and the prophets to the fellowship of God with His people."

THE CHURCH AND THE COVENANT.

The *kahal*—the *ecclesia* of Israel—was based upon this covenant. And the covenant was antecedent to the law, which was, as St. Paul affirms (Rom. v. 20), a parenthetical dispensation. Its design was to mediate between the promise and its fulfilment. It had its position and purpose altogether with a view to the covenant. Herein its function was twofold. Its first function was to show what was the great obstacle to the realization of the covenant, the great barrier to the Divine fellowship with man. It was added because of transgressions (Gal. iii. 19), to reveal them, and so to convict man of sin and guilt. Its second function was to reveal the means by which guilt would be removed and reconciliation effected between God and man, and thus, the fellowship consummated. This it did by means of the Levitical symbolism, which centred in the priesthood and the sacrifices, and which prefigured the one sacrifice of the one priest, Jesus Christ, which alone, as the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews demonstrates, is effective to make the worshipper perfect; that is, to bring

¹ "Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews."

him into true and abiding fellowship with God. It was by the exercise of these two functions that the law made way for the realization of the covenant of grace in Christ, which was, as St. Paul affirms, the very same covenant which was "confirmed beforehand by God, and which the law, which came 430 years after, doth not disannul, so as to make the promise of none effect" (Gal. iii. 17). The law, then, did not supersede the promise as the original basis upon which the fellowship of Israel was constituted.

This original covenant was one of grace. The word used to designate it implies this. It was a *διαθήκη* (*diatheke*), not a *συνθήκη* (*suntheke*)—a gracious arrangement of God, not a bargain with man. The choice of the former word, in preference to the latter, to express the nature of the Divine covenant, is, says Bishop Westcott,¹ easily intelligible. "In a Divine covenant the parties do not stand, in the remotest degree, as equal contractors. God, in His own good pleasure, makes the arrangement which man receives." The Divine promise, says Bishop Lightfoot,² "is always a gift graciously bestowed, and not a pledge obtained by negotiation." As Oehler observes³: "Israel's adoption to be the covenant people" is "an act of the Divine love," and "in no way dependent on man's desert." On man's part the condition of the covenant is, solely and absolutely, faith, which culminates in the self-surrender of the man to God. Abraham believed God. By faith he became the friend of God and the heir of the world. He was thus the typical Israelite and the father of all who believe. He is not a Jew who is merely one outwardly. "They which be of faith, the same are sons of Abraham" (Gal. iii. 7). The promise was made for Abraham and his seed. It was essentially not a natural, but a spiritual seed. Christ, St. Paul tells us, is the true seed of Abraham. The term "seed," as Bishop Lightfoot points out,⁴ is used collectively. As Fairbairn shows,⁵ "it is applied to Christ, not as an individual, but to Christ as comprehending in Himself all who form with Him a great spiritual unity."

It is plain, then, that notwithstanding its externalism, which was due to its preparatory character, the Old Testament Church was constituted upon the ground of faith, not of works. The external and visible was subordinate to the inward and spiritual. The more the Israel after the flesh declined, the more manifestly the believing remnant was seen

¹ Westcott on the Epistle to the Hebrews.

² Lightfoot's Commentary on the Galatians.

³ Oehler's "Theology of the Old Testament."

⁴ Lightfoot on the Galatians, p. 142, *sq.*

⁵ Fairbairn's "Typology," vol. i., p. 460.

to be the true Israel. When, for example, King Ahaz, instead of trusting in Jehovah, sought the help of Assyria in an alliance which soon proved the temporal destruction of Judah, the little band of faithful men who rallied around Isaiah formed the real church within the nation. The unifying principle of this fellowship was faith in God. It formed "the holy seed" which made restoration possible, for upon it, and not upon any external institution, depended the continuity and permanence of Judah. "This," says Principal Rainy,¹ "is that which abides and persists amid all the siftings and scatterings. A tenth, a holy seed, is the substance of the people" (Isa. vi. 13).

THE HOUSE OF JEHOVAH.

But another supplementary and confirmatory line of thought is opened up to us in the word "Church," which, as the best etymological authorities affirm, is derived from the Greek *Κυριακὸν*, and signifies the house of the Lord. The house here is *οἶκος*, not *οἰκία*—the household, not the material dwelling; the family as a unity, knit together by ties of kinship, in relations of common privilege and responsibility under a representative head.

The Hebrew equivalent, *בַּיִת*, is used in two special senses, the household of Israel and the place of God's special manifestation of His presence. In the latter sense it was first used by Jacob when under the open heaven in the visions of the night he realized the Divine presence and received the assurances of Divine protection, and he said: "This is none other than the house of God." It was not the material structure, whether of the ruder Tabernacle or the more splendid Temple which constituted the house of Jehovah, but the fellowship there symbolized and realized between God and His people. Hence the expressive designation of the Tabernacle, "the tent of meeting," the tent of tryst (as Principal Douglas aptly suggested to the Old Testament revisers), because Jehovah said, "There I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee" (Exod. xxv. 22).

This is the fellowship which the Psalmist vehemently desires when his "soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord"; his heart and his flesh crieth out for the living God; and he is comforted with the assurance that he "will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever" (Ps. lxxxiv. 2; xxiii. 6).

These two conceptions—the household of Israel and the house of Jehovah—draw closer and closer together, until

¹ "Delivery and Development of Christian Doctrine," p. 339.

they become identified. The house of Israel is the house of Jehovah. The two are united in the one conception—the fellowship of God with His people. Thus, under this expressive form, bound up with the worship of Israel, there are set forth the covenant relations of God with His people, upon which is constituted the *kahal*, the *ecclesia*, the Church of the old dispensation.

It is most instructive to recognise, what a careful study of the Old Testament plainly shows, that even in its rudimental and preparatory form, when the Church was, as St. Paul declares, under bondage to the elements of the world, kept in ward under the law—a necessary discipline during the period of its spiritual childhood—even then the *esse*, the essential being, of the Old Testament Church did not lie in those external institutions, but in the great spiritual realities of faith and fellowship with Jehovah.

FAITH, THE BASAL PRINCIPLE OF THE CHURCH.

When it is so plain that the constructive principle of the Jewish Church, notwithstanding its seminal and preparatory character and the externalism of its pupilage, was living and spiritual, much more manifestly is it so in the case of the New Testament Church.

If even the law was, in its ultimate design and result, a minister of grace, beyond all contradiction the Gospel is the Epiphany of grace; and if faith were the absolute and indispensable condition of fellowship under the forms of the Old Testament *Ecclesia*, much more plainly is it the vital and constructive principle of the Church of Jesus Christ, in which we all, both Jews and Gentiles alike, are householders of the faith.

“Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (John i. 17). Christ is the Truth, the self-revelation of God. “He that hath seen Me, hath seen the Father.” But this self-revelation was accomplished by means of the grace, the self-giving of God. God is love, and love is self-sacrifice, self-giving. Hence, God could never be fully revealed except in a revelation of grace. The Incarnation is the first step in this self-revelation; and it is always viewed in the New Testament as preliminary to the cross and passion. The supreme revelation is given in, and by means of, the death of Christ, the crowning act of Christ’s self-sacrifice, when He suffered in our stead, the Just for the unjust. God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself (2 Cor. v. 19). He, the Father, “made peace by the blood of the cross,” the cross of His Son, “through Him to reconcile all things to Himself.” The death of Christ was accordingly the ratification of the covenant, as is said in Heb. ix. 16, 17:

“For where there is a covenant, the death of him who made it must needs be represented. For a covenant is sure where there hath been death, since it doth not ever have force when he that made it liveth.”¹ So our Lord declared at the Last Supper: “This cup is the new covenant in My blood.” Thus, on the Divine side, the covenant is consummated, the Church is constituted by grace, by the Divine self-giving in the Incarnation and Atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And, on man’s side, the Church is constituted, the Divine fellowship entered, by means of faith and by faith alone. This is the one unique and imperative condition and requirement. He that believeth is justified, is reconciled, is brought into fellowship with God in Christ, and, consequently, with all who believe in Christ. And so throughout the whole Christian life faith is the essential requirement. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, personal trust in Him, is the basal principle of the Christian life, the primary and essential characteristic of a Christian, without which he could not be a Christian in reality, whatever he might be in profession. Now, the basal principle of the Christian life is the basal principle of the Christian Church. The Church in its essential being is simply the fellowship of believers in Christ. The Holy Catholic Church is, as the Apostles’ Creed defines it, “the communion of the saints, the fellowship of believers.” For thus the latter clause is regarded both by Protestant and Roman theologians,² although they differ radically in their conceptions of faith and saintship.

Thus the Christian Church has no existence apart from believers. They constitute it. As Westcott says, “Christians, as such, are essentially united together in virtue of their relations to Christ.”³ That which makes a man a Christian makes him a member of the Catholic Church, viz., faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing could be more explicit than the statement of Bishop Ridley: “That Church which is Christ’s body and of which Christ is the head, standeth only of living stones and true Christians, not only outwardly in name and title, but inwardly in heart and truth.” Hooker declares:⁴ “That Church which is Christ’s mystical body consisteth of none but only true Israelites, true sons of Abraham, true servants and saints of God.” “The mere profession of Christianity,” says Bishop Jeremy Taylor,⁵ “makes no man a member of Christ; nothing but a faith working by love.” Again he

¹ Bishop Westcott’s translation in his *Commentary on the Hebrews*.

² Litton on the Church, p. 50.

³ Westcott’s “Gospel of the Resurrection,” p. 206.

⁴ Hooker, “Eccles. Pol.,” iii., i., 8.

⁵ “Dissuasive from Popery,” part ii., bk. i., s. i.

says: "The invisible part of the visible Church, that is, the true servants of Christ, only are the Church." The late Bishop McIlvaine, of Ohio, truly voices the formularies of the Church of England: "So we must say of all the baptized and the communicating that, while they all have the visibility of the Church, none of them have any part in its reality except they be joined by a living faith to Christ."

THE CHURCH AND THE KINGDOM.

Our Lord uses the word "church" but twice. The word "kingdom" ("kingdom of heaven," or "kingdom of God," or "My kingdom") He uses 112 times. Evidently the terms stand in closest connection. It is not necessary to enter into the discussion as to their equivalency. Whether they be regarded as synonymous, or the term "kingdom" be the larger, inclusive of, but exceeding in its fulness, the term "church," "it is plainly," as Oosterzee¹ observes, "a spiritual communion, to become a member of which, without a spiritual change, is impossible." The word has, indeed, as Bishop Westcott points out, a twofold application, internal and external, just as the word "church," but the essential nature of the kingdom is spiritual. Its blessings are always represented by our Lord as spiritual, not external. It is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, as St. Paul affirms. All its signs and attributes are spiritual and ethical; they relate to holy living and loving service, and not to ecclesiastical office or to acts of ceremonial.

In the Epistles the word "church" predominates, appearing 112 times, while the word "kingdom" occurs but 29 times, the reverse of the usage in the Gospels. Cremer, the distinguished New Testament lexicographer, notes that in the New Testament *ecclesia* denotes the community of the redeemed in its twofold aspect, and he makes the primary and fundamental signification of the word to be the entire congregation of all who are called by and to Christ, all who are in the fellowship of His salvation. Its application to local and visible bodies he holds to be secondary.

THE SPIRITUAL HOUSE.

The Epistle to the Ephesians is distinctively the ecclesiastical epistle. Its central thought is the Church in its relations to Jesus Christ, and these relations are set forth under two expressive analogies—the Church is the House of the Lord, the holy temple builded together for the Divine indwelling; and it is the body of Christ, which He fills with His Divine

¹ "Biblical Theology of the New Testament," p. 70.

fulness. The first of these analogies recalls at once the Old Testament designation of Israel, and evidently St. Paul had this in mind, for he is insisting upon the unity of believers, both Jews and Gentiles. These two races, so bitterly hostile, were now brought together in Christ, who "has made in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace." And, joyfully addressing the Gentile believers, he reminds them that they are "no more strangers and aliens, but fellow-citizens with the saints and members of the household of God," having been built upon the foundation of the Apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief Corner-stone, in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being builded together for an habitation [a permanent abode] of God in the Spirit." Such, then, is this great living sanctuary. It is built upon Christ. It is built in and by the Spirit. And so St. Peter (1 Pet. ii. 5) describes it as a spiritual house, built of living stones. In this passage we have St. Peter's own comment upon the words addressed to him by Christ: "Upon this rock I will build my Church." It was not Peter's person, but Peter's faith, which was the fundamental matter in Christ's mind. It is to Peter, as the man of faith, the typical New Testament believer, as Beyschlag pertinently comments, that the great promise is given. These words of Christ, says Origen, refer to Peter only as far as he had spoken in the name of all true believers. The true Church is founded on all true Christians who are in doctrine and conduct such that they will attain to salvation. St. Peter makes it plain that he regarded Christ Himself as the Living Stone upon which the Church is built, and that it is built up of men of faith—of those who, through faith in Christ, become living stones in the temple, members of the great fellowship which is the Catholic Church. Observe St. Peter's words: "Unto whom coming as unto a living stone, ye also as living stones are built up a spiritual house." So Archbishop Leighton, in his comment on this passage, says: "To be built on Christ is plainly to believe on Him." Each Christian comes to Christ personally and individually in the act of faith. It is by means of this coming that each becomes united to Christ, becomes a partaker of His life, and thus a living stone in the spiritual house, a living member of that living fellowship which is the Catholic Church. Thus Bishop Mellvaine plainly puts it: "The soul's coming to Christ is his life; his drawing life from Christ is his union with Him; and in that very union unto Christ is contained and involved his being built up in His true Church." So an old divine (Perkins) of the sixteenth century says: "This union with Christ maketh the Church to be the Church." And Hooker

says: "That which linketh Christ to us is His mere [pure, unqualified] mercy and love towards us. That which tieth us to Him is our faith in the promised salvation revealed in His Word of Truth," and therefore he declares: "Faith is the ground and glory of all the welfare of this building" (the Church).

THE BODY OF CHRIST.

The second analogy, which St. Paul employs in the Ephesians and elsewhere, brings out more fully and specifically the vital character of the fellowship which constitutes the Church, and its absolute dependence upon Christ. God "gave Him to be the head over all things to the Church, which is His body." "Unum corpus sumus in Christo." We are one body in Christ. But what is a body? Not a mere congeries of disconnected atoms without unity or completeness. Nor is it a mere machine, which, however complex or compact in its unity of many parts, is formed from without and regulated from without. A body is formed from within. It is an organic unity, built up out of many and various elements, composed of many and different members, constituted and moulded by the life of which it is the product, controlled and unified by the indwelling Spirit. Such is the Church of Christ. There is one body and one Spirit, who pervades and energizes it. It is not constituted by any external and mechanical process. It is a vital growth, constituted and built up by the Spirit of Christ. As Luthardt¹ well says: "It is not external forms and customs, but the Holy Ghost, which makes the Church really the Church. He is the soul that fills and animates her, and combines all her individual members into the unity of one body." "There is one body and one Spirit." The body is not the external polity and organization, as some say, but the fellowship of believers; and the Spirit is the Holy Ghost, who, as St. Paul declares, dwells in each Christian.

The absolute dependence of the Church upon Christ is emphasized in the concluding clause of St. Paul's definition in Eph. i. 22, 23: "The Church is the body of Christ, the fulness of Him who filleth all in all." The Church, as Meyer renders it,² is *the Christ filled*—that which is filled by Him, that in which He by His Spirit dwells and rules, producing all Christian life, and penetrating and filling all with His gifts, and with the life-forces and powers that proceed from Him. It is a living and a life-giving indwelling by His Spirit.

The Church, as the body of Christ, is constituted by the life-

¹ "Lectures on the Fundamental Truths of Christianity."

² Commentary on the Ephesians.

giving presence of Christ. As Ignatius wrote, in his letter to the Smyrnæans: "Wherever Jesus Christ is there is the Catholic Church." And this presence is conditioned on the Divine side by the Spirit, whom Christ sent, and whose office is to reveal Christ and impart the life of Christ to men. And on the human side this Divine indwelling presence is conditioned and mediated by faith—"that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith" (Eph. iii. 17). It is faith, as Principal Moule observes,¹ "which is alone the effectuating and maintaining act."

THE EXTERNAL ORGANIZATION.

Such, then, is the Apostolic conception of the Church, and we find the doctrinal teaching of the Epistles fully corroborated by the actual history of the Apostolic Church as recorded in the Book of Acts. As the Lord had refused to set up a kingdom of this world, and insisted upon the spiritual nature of His kingdom, so the Apostles did not begin with an external polity. They went forth, as their Master did, and preached the Gospel. When those who heard believed, they, by their faith itself—a faith confessed and declared in baptism—were made members of the Divine fellowship of which Christ is the living Head and Centre. In the expressive words of St. Luke, "they were added to the Lord."

In this inward and spiritual relation to Christ was involved the essential being of the Church. The invisible is first; then follows the visible, as its result and manifestation. The faith of the heart must be confessed with the mouth. From faith proceed, as its expression and fruit, all the actualities of worship and of service. Love for Christ and for the brethren must manifest itself in works of love and mercy, and in all the ministries and services by which it seeks to advance the glory of the great Head of the Church and the well-being of men.

Believers united together in worship and in work at first without any definite organization; but as the Church increased organization became necessary. As necessities arose, provision was made for them. Thus it was, as Lechler² observes, that "an external association arose out of the internal community of faith."

Three things are here noteworthy. First, the Divine work in the world is entrusted to the operation of the great social and psychological laws which govern the structure of human society. Man's social and political constitution is not

¹ Commentary on the Ephesians in the "Cambridge Bible for Schools" Series.

² "Apostolic and Post-Apostolic Times."

antagonized, but utilized and transformed, by Christianity, and made the means of its promulgation. Secondly, it was out of elements already in existence in society that the external organization of the Christian Church was constructed. In the case of the Jewish Christian Churches, the synagogue, itself the offspring of necessity under Providential guidance, was the chief mould which gave form to the nascent organization. As the Church extended amongst the Gentiles other elements were added, drawn from the civil and social life and the municipal institutions of Greece and Rome. In this way, as Bishop Westcott¹ has pointed out, "the Church organization which the vital force moulds, and by which it reveals itself," was "fashioned out of elements earthly and transitory. Thirdly, it is plain how abundantly the Book of Acts, as well as the Apostles' teaching, confirms the Reformed and Protestant doctrine of the Church. Throughout the whole course of the history, as Lechler observes, "the law holds good that creative power lives within, in spirit and personality, and that the external is produced and built up from within." The study of history and the teaching of the Scriptures alike confirm the evangelical doctrine that the visible and external in Church organization and order is the result and consequent of the invisible realities, the outcome and manifestation of the inner life. Consequently, the essential and constructive principle of the Church—its *esse*—lies not in the external form, but in the inward and spiritual life, which is the gift of God to every one who believes. As Bishop Westcott pertinently says: "The essential bond of union is not external, but spiritual; it consists not in one organization, but in a common principle of life. Its expression lies in a personal relation to Christ, and not in any outward system."²

The formative idea of the Church, then, is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. In its essential being the Church of Christ is the fellowship of believers in Christ, the household of faith.

THE SECULARIZATION OF THE CHURCH.

When the Apostolic idea of the Church stands forth so distinctly, the rise and prevalence of an antagonistic conception seems the more surprising, and it will be instructive to inquire into its origin.

The doctrine of the Church is intimately connected with the doctrine of salvation. This was remarkably brought out in the process of the Reformation, which began with the anxious inquiry of the Philippian jailer, "What must I do to be saved?" And it was, as Luthardt expressively puts it, out of

¹ "The Gospel of the Resurrection."

² *Ibid.*, p. 215.

St. Paul's answer to this great inquiry that the Church of the Reformation was born. The reformed doctrine of the Church necessarily followed from the doctrine of justification by faith only. What mattered it to the Reformers that they were thrust out of the Church as then visibly constituted? By faith they were brought into direct relations to God, and, as Dorner¹ says, "the immediateness of the relation to God in faith excluded all human lordship over faith." Thus, the sacerdotal conception of the Church was overthrown, and there first came forth distinctly into theological thought the Biblical conception of the Church and of the relations between its visibility and its invisibility, which, as Dorner says, now "became a part of the common evangelical consciousness." The very definition of the Church by which our great Wycliffe had, as Lechler observes,² placed himself in deliberate opposition to the idea of the Church which prevailed in his time, now obtained its place in all the confessions of the Protestant Churches.

Now, just as it was the recovery of the Biblical doctrine of salvation which restored the Apostolic conception of the Church, so it was through a false doctrine of salvation that that conception had been lost, and an alien and antagonistic idea of the Church took possession of Christendom.

The erroneous development began, as Neander³ says, "with a lowering of the idea of faith." This degradation of faith was prevalent in Rabbiniism. St. Paul must have been familiar with the discussions on faith in the Jewish schools. The Gentile Apostle and the Jewish Rabbi, as Bishop Lightfoot points out,⁴ might both maintain the supremacy of faith, but faith with St. Paul was a very different thing from faith with the Rabbi, with whom it was merely submission to an external rule of ordinances and reception of the orthodox dogmas of Judaism. This erroneous view of faith at once found its way into the Jewish Christian Church. It is this kind of faith which St. James stigmatizes as the faith of devils. And so it passed into the Gentile Church, where, as Neander notes, it spread more and more, and Christian faith came to be regarded as simply the belief and acceptance of Church dogma, and this, not on the ground that Scriptures so taught, but that the Church so received. Thus the old Jewish traditionalism reappeared, and the authority of the Church was substituted for the authority of the Truth.

In this way the whole doctrine of salvation was gradually

¹ "History of Protestant Theology."

² Lechler's "John Wiclif," vol. ii., p. 98.

³ Neander's "History of Dogma," vol. i., p. 217.

⁴ Lightfoot's Commentary on the Galatians, p. 162.

externalized, and the Church itself came to be regarded as primarily a visible institution. The climax was attained in the organization and theology of the Papacy. Thus Cardinal Bellarmine¹ declares the Church to be "a society of men as visible and palpable as the Roman people, the kingdom of France, or the republic of Venice." And that there may be no mistake about his meaning, he says: "We deny that to constitute a man a member of the true Church any internal virtue is requisite, but only an external profession of the faith and that participation of the sacraments which is perceptible by the senses"; while the Protestants, he adds, to constitute anyone a member of the Church, require internal virtues. This, he says, is the distinction between the Roman and Protestant views of the Church. In keeping with this statement is Bellarmine's enumeration of those who belong to the Church. He excludes heathen, excommunicated and schismatics, but all others, even impious and reprobate men, are expressly included: "Includuntur autem omnes alii etiamsi reprobi, scelerati, et impii sint."

Of course Bellarmine does not deny that the ultimate aim and purpose of the Church is to lead men to holiness, but he does deny that spiritual gifts and qualities belong to the essence of the Church. Faith in Christ becomes an accident, and is not of the essence of membership in the Catholic Church. But not only is the idea of the Church externalized, a low and unspiritual meaning is given to faith and holiness. Faith becomes a *fides implicita*, a mere assent and submission of the will to formulæ which neither the understanding grasps nor the heart embraces. Holiness itself is materialized; it is degraded into an official and ceremonial sanctity, which may exist apart from personal goodness. Such was the strange and pitiful transformation by which the living Church was petrified into a mere institution, a kingdom of this world.

THE POLITICAL AND SACERDOTAL INFLUENCES.

Two influences hastened this development. The one was political. The imperial idea and organism passed from decadent Rome into the Catholic Church, and changed it into a new empire.

The other influence was religious. A new conception of the ministerial office prevailed. The clergy became a sacerdotal order, priestly mediators dispensing the blessings of salvation. The origin of the sacerdotal idea is variously explained. Some, like Neander, trace it to Judaism. Others, as Ritschl and Lightfoot, believe it to be chiefly due to

¹ "De Eccles. Mil." c. 2.

Gentile prepossession and the familiarity of the newly-converted heathen with the priests and sacrifices of their former religions.

But from whatever source the conception came, it grew rapidly in a soil made ready to receive it by the externalizing processes to which the faith of the Christian Church had been subjected. As early as the middle of the third century, Cyprian of Carthage put forward, without relief or disguise, the most absolute sacerdotal assumptions, and "so uncompromising," says Bishop Lightfoot,¹ "was the tone in which he asserted them, that nothing was left to his successors but to enforce his principles and reiterate his language."

THE QUESTIONS OF POLITY AND SACERDOTALISM DISTINCT.

The developments of the Papacy have added nothing to the sacerdotal claims and assumptions of Cyprian. The principle is the same, only it has received in the Papacy a political embodiment. The latter is objectionable only as it makes the former more formidable. The Papacy might be overthrown and sacerdotalism still remain to form new combinations and alliances. Apart from the sacerdotal principle embodied in it, the Papacy would only be a form of polity, probably a most objectionable one, but deprived of its most hurtful and formidable constituent. No doubt the sacerdotal development in the Latin Church was intimately connected with the political environment. But the two elements are altogether distinct. Instead of being Papal, we can conceive that the Latin Church might have remained Episcopal, or it might possibly have become Presbyterian.²

The question of sacerdotalism is distinct from the question of polity. The question of the form of the ministry is entirely distinct from the question as to the nature of the ministry. The one question touches merely the external form of the visible organization; the other enters into and affects the very nature of Christianity itself. So long as we place the essential being of the Church in what is inward and spiritual, questions of polity are kept in their true position, subordinate to the great realities of faith and righteousness. There have been those who have held to the *Jus Divinum* of Presbytery, or Episcopacy, or Congregationalism, and yet did not un-

¹ Commentary on the Philippians, p. 259.

² The Cyprianic theory of the episcopate necessarily leads up to the Papacy. Of itself it is essentially schismatical. The connection between the teachings and claims of Cyprian, and the subsequent developments which culminated in the Papacy, was due to the fully developed sacerdotalism of the Bishop of Carthage.

church those who accepted other forms of polity than their own.

But whenever the *esse*, the essential being, of the Church is placed in the external polity, and that polity changed into a system of priestly mediation, we pass at once from the *non-necessaria*, in which there is liberty, into the most vital and essential questions, in regard to which there can be no compromise; we stand then face to face with two opposed and irreconcilable conceptions of the Church. And these two doctrines of the Church logically involve two theologies. Every doctrine is more or less affected—the way of reconciliation and the rule of faith at once and directly, others, perhaps, more remotely. Dorner¹ maintains that in the Roman doctrine of salvation there lies ultimately an immoral idea of God, that in it a physical conception of the Divine nature is substituted for the ethical. How far-reaching, then, are the issues involved in the question before us! And these are not merely theoretical. They are most practical, and have directly to do with Christian life and conduct, and with the great practical questions of the day as to Church work at home, missions abroad, and Christian unity and co-operation.

THE TRUE GROUND OF THE CHURCH'S STABILITY AND CATHOLICITY.

It has been alleged against the Protestant and Reformed doctrine of the Church that it reduces the Church to a phantom, a mere idea without substantive existence, a Platonic republic, as the cavillers against the Augsburg Confession called it.

Those who make such statements overlook two things. First, to put the external organization in its true place, subordinate to the inward and spiritual, is not to disparage or discard it. On the contrary, we maintain that there must be organization, that the unseen fellowship must manifest itself in visible ordinances and ministries. We believe that right organization is of the greatest value, and necessary for the due discharge of the functions of the Church in its service and witness in the world. But while we assert that government is necessary, we do not, as Archbishop Whitgift says,² thereby affirm that it is of the essence of the Church, or that it could not be the Church of Christ without some one form of government. Still less do we make any form of government a channel of grace and a mediatorial agency through which

¹ Dorner's "History of Protestant Theology," vol. i., p. 47.

² Whitgift's "Works," vol. i., p. 184, *et seq.* (Parker Society Edition).

alone Christ exercises His ministry and bestows His grace upon men.

Then, secondly, these objectors overlook the real seat and source of the permanence and indefectibility of Christ's Church. It is a common mistake to regard an external institution as a better guarantee of endurance than a living principle. But the real ground of the permanence of any institution is the principle embodied in it. The securities for the continuity and perpetuity of the Christian Church do not lie in antiquarian researches or doubtful precedents or the *jus Divinum* of an external order; but in the truth and love revealed in the Gospel and apprehended by humble and believing hearts. Even the Roman theologian Möhler makes the remarkable admission that "Christ maintains the Church in vigour by means of those who live in faith." "These unquestionably," he says, "are the true supporters of the visible Church."

The continuity of the Church is primarily a continuity of life; the external forms in which that life is embodied may change. As Bishop Westcott says,¹ "It is impossible to regard the Church as a body without recognising the necessity of a constant change in the organization."

If the essential being of the Church lies in some one external form, there is no room left for development or reconstruction. Everything is fixed, positive, and unalterable. The sacerdotal theory of the Church can never be the basis of a reunited Christendom. Were it possible, nothing more grievous, more disastrous to the kingdom of Christ, could ever take place. It would be the re-establishment of a reign of priestly despotism and spiritual death. But it would surely be the precursor of judgment. "God," says Bishop Westcott, "has signally overthrown every attempt to establish Church unity upon a false basis."

But if the Church is a living body, an organic unity, what is organic has endless power of adaptation, only this organic process will be in harmony with the great laws and principles of the Gospel. Litton well says:² "Just in proportion as Protestantism, as compared with Romanism, takes the inward view of the Church, does it place the legitimate expansion of the various elements of visible Church life upon a surer and more permanent basis."

The essential idea of the Church reaches back into the very *origines* of man's being. Man was made for fellowship, and the foundations of his social relations were laid in his relations to God, whose offspring he is. The Church is designed, in

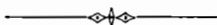
¹ Westcott's "Gospel of the Resurrection."

² Litton on the Church.

God's gracious purpose of love, to become the realization of this fellowship through the processes of redemption. It is the society God Himself is creating, the community and fellowship of men who are redeemed by His Son and regenerated by His Spirit, who are possessed of His truth and obedient to His will—the fellowship of the Sons of God. This is the city which hath the foundations, eternal foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God. Of this city, this great spiritual fellowship, Jesus Christ Himself is the chief Cornerstone. He is, as has been well said, "its creative and normative personality," "in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord."

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ART. III.—CHURCH TEACHING AND THE CHURCH OF ROME.

SOME of our prelates, and the whole of the modern school, are constantly urging the importance of "Church Teaching." "Ah," they say, with an audible sigh, "poor Steelborough, poor Eastport, poor Westport, poor Mr. So-and-So—sadly deficient in Church Teaching!" These lamentations have their effect and serve their purpose. Those who utter them stand as the true Church teachers, and their very utterance brings the persons to whom they relate into some measure of contempt. "Church Teaching" is a very vague expression, and generally means the particular views of those who employ it. To be understood properly it requires definition. If it exclusively relates to the teaching of the Church of England, we can test it by a reference to our formularies, interpreted, as our Church requires, by the aid of the Holy Scriptures. But if the Church be some other church, or an aggregate of churches of which the Church of England is one, then plain Churchmen must be on their guard, lest, under the sacred name of Church, rejected teaching should be introduced and propounded. That such teaching is given really requires no proof. The air of our National Church is full of it. Whatever may have been the case in the past, it is now no secret, but a settled and avowed purpose, to Catholicize (not in the simple sense in which the Church of England is Catholic) the Church of these realms. If anyone has any doubt upon this point let him read "The Catholic Religion," issued from Clewer, and carefully consider the conscientious action of those who desire corporate union with the Church of Rome.