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## OF THE CHURCH

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It would be a thankless task, and one little congenial to the heart that loves the sheep of Christ, to dwell on all the corruptions of the Establishment, which the spiritual in its communion are forced to groan under; or on all the evils which mark the various forms of Dissent, and from which many amongst them, that have a heart for Christ, would be gladly freed. It will, therefore, be my object, mainly, to point out the practical setting aside, by the one and the other, as systems, of those basis principles which are essential to any adequate witness for the unity of the Church of God, and for the true and divine grounds of the fellowship of all believers.

Not only, then, is there no practical exhibition of the unity of the Church as the body of Christ, or of the foundation and bond of Christian communion, but there exists, as a fact, and has long existed, the prescriptive establishment of grounds of communion and bonds of fellowship so entirely opposite, that it is difficult in the extreme to rouse the great body of professing Christians to the thought that the Church ever was, or ever could be, any other than the mass of jarring elements, and worldly principles, and rival and discordant sects, which it now presents.

If personal piety be cultivated, and such fellowship be enjoyed as the sect may afford—and especially if, through the ministry of the word, souls be converted to God—in the apprehension of the majority of Christians there remains little more to be desired, and little to be mourned over, in reference to the general condition of the Church of God. It is hardly suspected by them that the great body of truth presented in the apostolic epistles has as much to do with unfolding the blessings in which the Church as a body is set, and in directing the communion and *associated* walk of believers, as it has with the establishment of the grounds of individual justification and the direction of the separate walk of the children of God.

But, as an exhibition of the Church as the body of Christ, having one life with Christ and one destination with Him in glory, what is the Church of England? and what is Dissent?

How, it may be asked, does the one or the other present the unity of the body or the grounds of christian fellowship, so that there should be any place for the exhortation, “endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace?” I do not here invidiously inquire what are the manifest corruptions of the Establishment, or what are the practical evils of Dissent. I take the principles of a national establishment and the abstract theory of dissent; and I find that the one, in its very constitution, *because* it is national, and therefore gathers the world within its pale, subverts the very basis of the Church as composed of the members of Christ’s body, and renders impossible any witness for the glory of Christ against an idolatrous world. The other also, in its endless divisions and conventional rules of communion, even though it require a spiritual confession in its members, is founded, nevertheless, on the non-existence of the unity of the Church, such as the epistles of the New Testament present.

It is matter of history that in the settlement of the parochial system of the Church of England there was a transfer of all the inhabitants of a parish from a popish to a protestant form; and that altogether apart from the question of whether there was a single Christian in the parish or not. So that, from the outset, the Church of England failed to accord with its own definition of a church, as “a company of faithful men,” &c., and failed in the scriptural requirements of a church.

I may add here, in the words of another: “At the time of the Reformation two great elements entered into the composition of the Church of England, as