

The Romanist says: "Oh, it is all well enough to believe in Christ; but then you must believe in the Virgin and the Saints, and in the unbloody sacrifice of the Mass." Just so the Jewish Christian said to the Gentile believer: "You are right in believing that Jesus is the Christ; you must also be circumcised, and keep the law of Moses."

Now, what did the Apostles do? Did they recognize these two divisions, and formulate a constitution for each? No, they did nothing of the sort! They did not recognize them as being two—but *one*; in as far as they held to Christ as the head, they pronounced them right—in as far as they divided themselves from one another, they pronounced them wrong!

3. What connection had these two great divisions or sections, one with another? and what connection had the various local churches in either, or both, with the other local churches in either, or both? We answer: It was a connection of identity in main belief, brotherhood of feeling and sympathy, care for each other's welfare, respect for each other's independence. What about doctrine?

Difficulties on this point were referred to the Apostles. The Corinthians wrote to Paul, respecting difficulties that had occurred to them as to doctrine and church-administration (1 Cor. vii. 1, and more remotely, viii. 1; xii. 1; and xvi. 1), and all the churches had the privilege of being instructed by the inspired Apostles of the Lord Jesus. They had the Old Testament—more or less of the words of our Saviour, in some of the Gospels—and, as I have said, the living Apostles, and they needed no more.

After a time—when the men were all dead who had the miraculous gifts of the Spirit—they got into the way of holding councils for consultation respecting doctrines and practice. At first these councils were merely advisory, and claimed no power over the churches. They began at the time we have stated. Mosheim says: "There are no vestiges of ecclesiastical councils till the middle of the second century." Gibbon says substantially the same—that "the useful institution of provincial synods took its rise in Greece, in the second century."

Then, what were the bonds all this time of unity of faith and oneness of being among the large and increasing number of local churches holding Christ? This: First, the living Apostles to instruct them.

Next, after the Apostles' deaths (and they left no inspired successors), the *inspired writings* of the Apostles. These are to us in lieu of, and in succession to, the living Apostles.

What about mutual consultation and sympathy? Well, see how they did for the poor saints at Jerusalem, how the whole Gentile world, as far as that world was Christian, gathered money, and sent sympathy to them. How Antioch laid its ordaining hands on its two best and most cherished preachers, Barnabas and Saul, and sent them off as missionaries; how the Christians of Ephesus sent letters with Apollos, to introduce him to the church at Corinth; how travelling or missionary Christians everywhere found welcome and sympathy from other Christians.

The first occasion for sects—not as respected doctrines differing from the majority, but as bodies of Christians separate from the majority, and disowned by them—was when Christianity was "established" by Constantine. From that time forward, the Catholic Church, so called, became intolerant; and those divisions began which have since so rent the mantle of Christ. For it naturally followed that if no divergence of opinion was allowed on any points of doctrine and practice, then those holding such divergent views must be "dissenters."

Unfortunately, the example of the State superintending and guiding the religious life of the people was copied and followed in the time of the Reformation; and the occasion and the necessity for "dissent," or for diverse religious bodies, continued to exist as before.

What is then to be done? We must do as they did in the Apostles' times, and in the generation immediately following the lives of the Apostles. They were *one* in faith on the Son of God. They were *one* in receiving and walking according to the Holy Scriptures, including the New Testament as far as it was known to them; for probably not *all* the New Testament was known to *all* Christians of that day. But they were *not* "one" in a great many details of church life or belief. They found necessity for bearing and forbearing; and if they sometimes failed, it is only what we have done in larger measure. They learned to rejoice when souls were converted, even if they did not adhere to the particular set of opinions on non-essential matters, which they themselves held.