

gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." The visible have time and again perished. Where are the churches of Asia to whom St. John wrote? Where are the churches of Macedonia among which St. Paul labored? Where are the numerous and flourishing churches of North Africa, which nurtured an Origen, a Tertullian and an Augustine? All have passed away; but the living Church of the living God abides.

That the Church has both visibility and invisibility may be accepted as an undisputed axiom. In this all are to a certain extent agreed. All the Protestant Confessions maintain that the Church has visibility, that it manifests its unseen fellowship by means of visible ordinances. And even Roman Catholic theologians, on the other hand, admit that in one sense at least the Church is invisible, making a distinction between dead and living members. If both, then, assert, at least, to some extent, both the visibility and invisibility of the Church, wherein lies the difference between them? For a difference most vital and distinctive does exist.

#### THE REAL POINT OF DIFFERENCE

lies in this: The sacerdotal doctrine admits, indeed, that there is, or ought to be, in the Church an inner life and spiritual realities invisible to 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, the succession of the episcopate and the sacraments. The evangelical doctrine, on the contrary, while it maintains that to be visible is an inseparable and necessary property of the Church, makes its essential nature to consist in what is spiritual and unseen, those great realities which are the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of Christians. The one theory defines the Church by its outward characteristics of form, organization, orders, and sacraments; the other theory defines the Church by its inward characteristics, the fruits of the Spirit, likeness to Christ, faith and love.

That I am correctly representing the sacerdotal doctrine will be seen from this statement of Moehler, one of the most eminent theologians of the Roman Church. He declares, "that the difference between the Romanist and Protestant view of the Church may be briefly stated as follows: the Romanist teaches that the visible Church is first in the order of time, afterwards the invisible; the relation of the former to the latter being that of cause and effect. The Lutherans, on the contrary, affirm that the visible Church owes its existence to the invisible, the latter being the true basis of the former."

Cardinal Bellarmine says:—"This is the distinction between our view and that of the Protestants, that they, to constitute any one a member of the Church, require internal virtues, and consequently make the true Church invisible; we, on the contrary, believe indeed that all internal graces, faith, hope, charity, will be found in the Church, but we deny that to constitute a man a member of the true Church, any internal virtue is requisite, but only an external profession of faith, and that participation of the sacraments which is perceptible to the senses."

The Laudean or Tractarian doctrine is essentially identical with that of Rome. It defines the essential being of the Church to lie in a certain external form and ecclesiastical order, in a succession of bishops traceable to the apostles, and in the due reception of sacraments administered by "priests" especially ordained. In a word, as Hadden puts it, "without bishops no priests, without priests no sacraments, without sacraments no certain union with Christ, without union with Christ no salvation."

Observe, the question here is not what is the most valid or ancient or scriptural or efficient form of church policy and government. It reaches far deeper and involves far more vital issues. The contention involved in

#### THE SACERDOTAL THEORY OF THE CHURCH

is, that Christ constituted the apostles His successors, and the bishops, in turn, the successors of the apostles, to whom were committed not only all authority and rule, but all gifts and graces needful for man's salvation. The Divine Covenant and promises are limited to this succession. Where it is there flow the mystic streams of supernatural blessing; there is located the full and rich provision which Jesus Christ has made for the sin-stricken and perishing; there alone is the assurance of the Divine pardon for the penitent and the Divine Presence for the seeking soul. Those outside of this channel and succession are consigned to uncovenanted mercies, which may possibly be vouchsafed, but of which there is no promise and no security. I cannot pause to point out all the consequences which result from a theory which disguises the most narrow, intolerant and exclusive claims under the pretext of a

spurious Catholicity. My purpose now is simply to note that this theory makes the essence of the church to consist in its visibility, and gives precedence to what is merely external and formal over what is spiritual and moral.

#### THE EVANGELICAL DOCTRINE,

On the contrary, claims 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. The visible church is simply the invisible taking form. The invisible is the ideal; it is the church as it exists in the knowledge and plan of God, as it will be revealed in the consummation of redemption. The visible is that ideal as now actually realized on earth, as embodied in the confessions of our faith, in works of love and mercy, in worship and adoration, in ordinances and ministries. The invisible is related to the visible, as cause to effect; as the living spirit is to the body which it moulds and inhabits; as faith and love and desire are to the words in which they are expressed, and to the acts to which they prompt.

But, it may be asked, ought not the visible to be the counter-part of the invisible? Ought not the realization of the ideal to be like the ideal itself? Truly it ought. As the invisible is one, one life, one faith, one love, so ought the visible to make that unity manifest. As the ideal is holy and spotless and bears the image of its Head, Christ, so ought its embodiment to reveal in the world the beauty of holiness and the glory of unselfish love. It ought—that is the divine purpose; it will—that is our goal. God speed the day.

But what hinders now? Many things. First, the Church is made up of imperfect Christians; their knowledge is partial and their love feeble. Each individual Christian is only a very partial and defective embodiment of the ideal. The image of Christ as reflected in his life and character is shadowy, distorted, imperfect. Could any number of such broken and fragmentary reflections form one true and complete likeness? Now, it is just through the lives and characters, the fellowship and worship of Christians that the invisible takes form, receives embodiment. And how can such a form under such circumstances be otherwise than imperfect and fall far short of that to which it gives expression? Then, not only have we imperfect Christians, we have also spurious Christians. No sooner was the Church revealed in the world than the world began to enter the Church. Among the apostles was a Judas; among the brotherhood of Jerusalem were Ananias and Sapphira. So everywhere are Christians by profession, not in reality; Christians who have the name but not the spirit of Christ. Now must not the influx of all this worldliness, selfishness, and unbelief into the visible church mar its fair lineaments? The visible, then, in taking form sustains serious loss and damage from both these causes, and from the very nature of things the visible must be but a very imperfect, partial, and inadequate representation and embodiment of the glorious ideal.

Closely related to the point I have just discussed is one of great importance, but which I can only briefly refer to—

#### THE ORIGIN OF CHURCH ORGANIZATION,

The modes of government, methods of administration, and the various officers and organs through which the activities of the Church are carried on, and in which its visibility very largely lies. The sacerdotal theory affirms, as we have seen, that Christ by a positive law imposed one unchangeable form of organization forever upon the Church. But this is not borne out by the study of the New Testament, nor by the testimony of Scripture. In the New Testament we do not find a single positive law or rule on the subject, but only very scanty hints, from which the most contradictory inferences have been drawn. Our Lord did not begin with the external polity, but with the life; and from that life resulted the organization of the visible churches. To life, of every variety, spiritual, intellectual as well as physical, belongs the extraordinary power we call assimilation, the power of building up organized structure out of unorganized materials. By it life takes to itself the crude elements around it, and fashions them into the form and glory of the manifold structures in which it reveals itself. The elements of which the external organization of the Christian church is composed were already in existence in human society, and it was of these pre-existing elements that the various forms and varieties of church organization have been moulded. For Christianity assimilates all the elements of the world into which Christ breathed it. It has, as Canon Venables beautifully says, the power of taking to itself all that is noblest and best in the old forms of literature and art, of science and politics, and by breathing into them a new

and higher life renders them capable of far more glorious development than their first creators dreamt of. There is thus in all church organization, as Canon Westcott remarks, two elements, "an element of permanence and an element of change. There is the essential life by which the whole body is quickened, absolutely one and immutable, and the organization which the vital force moulds, and by which it reveals itself, which is mutable and fashioned out of elements earthly and transitory."

#### WHAT LESSONS

can we deduce from this great truth? Briefly they are these: First the body is more than raiment; the living church of believers is infinitely more than any garment however beautiful in which any branch of the church visible arrays itself. Love, wisdom, truth, righteousness, are infinitely greater than the ways and modes in which they may be exercised. Secondly, variety as much as unity is the law of the Christian life. Life-forms are diversified; some more useful, others more complex. The higher the life the more complex and multiform will be the structure in which it is embodied. Thirdly, there will be growth in a living body, and growth means change, the replacing of old worn-out structures by more adequate and complete ones. Hear again Canon Westcott: "It is indeed impossible to regard the Church as a body, without recognizing the necessity of a constant change in its organization. Growth itself is change, and in proportion as the life of the body is complex, we may expect the forms in which it is clothed to be varied." Fourthly, the ultimate test of the value of different church organizations and forms of government will be their capacity to embody fully and adequately the rich, full life which flows from Christ, the Head; and to carry out effectively the ends for which all church organization exists, the bringing of the world into contact with Christ, and the discharge of all the functions of the Christian life in its beneficence and self-sacrifice. It is altogether legitimate that we should regard our own church organization as the most completely and highly organized, the richest in all the elements of efficiency, and capable of most fully manifesting the energies and activities of Christian life, although by no means free from imperfections, and liable to most serious abuses in the hands of weak and worldly men. But while our convictions and the facts of history "justify our jealous adhesion" to our own church polity, they do not, as Bishop Lightfoot says, "allow us to unchurch other Christian communities differently organized." On the contrary, as Canon Westcott states, "we cannot be surprised if we see around us many Christian societies, distinct and subserving in virtue of their distinctness to distinct types of thought and feeling. Differences which once were found in the same external body, are now seen embodied in separate societies. We lose something by the change, but the gain must not be neglected. We are led to

#### THE SPIRITUAL BASIS OF UNITY

instead of reposing in the fact of formal unity. And more than this, the full development of each part is best secured by independent action. Division appears to be the preliminary of that noblest catholicity, which will issue from the separate fulfillment by each part in due measure of its proper function towards the whole.

Our strength will be indefinitely increased if we believe that God works not only through us or in our way, and according to our notions, but uses us according to the measure of our capacities, and others with us, in the accomplishment of the designs of His love."

What any church organization claims for itself will ultimately prove to be of very secondary importance; what it performs will be the ground of its acceptance or rejection. That will be the best, which clings closest to the revelation of redemption, which honors most the living head, which stoops in lowliest unselfishness to labour and to suffer for men. Humility is a cardinal virtue in a church, as well as in an individual, while pride only presages failure and dishonor.

#### CHRISTIAN UNITY.

If the essential being of the church is constituted by the relationship of believers to Christ their Head, the nature of the unity of the church is at once apparent: True unity, unlike uniformity, consists in essentials, not in mere externals. It is the work and fruit of the Divine Spirit. It is a growth, a process of life. It therefore proceeds from within outwards, and not from without inwards. It consists in community of life, in mutual love and trust, in the co-operation of unselfish service, and in the likeness of character and disposition. As Canon Westcott forcibly puts it:—"The essential bond of union is not external, but spiritual; it consists, not in one organization, but in a common