

The Church Guardian

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CALENDAR FOR JULY.

- JULY 7th—3rd Sunday after Trinity.
" 14th—4th Sunday after Trinity.
" 21st—5th Sunday after Trinity. (*Notice of St. James.*)
" 25th—ST. JAMES. A & M. (*Athanasian Creed*)
" 28th—6th Sunday after Trinity.

THE MAINTENANCE OF CHURCH PRINCIPLES.

NOT ONLY CONSISTENT WITH, BUT DEMANDED BY CHRISTIAN CHARITY.

By the Right Rev R. H. Wilmer, D. D.,
Bishop of Alabama.

[Continued.]

Starting from the admission, which must be made on all sides—that God has revealed and established nothing significant or unimportant—charity will hold ardently, and contend earnestly, for, "all that He hath so revealed." Note the expression—"Charity will do this." And why? Because it is love—love to God supreme and love to one another as to one's self.

For in whatever God has revealed or established there is something of importance, either as the revelation of some divine attribute or will, and therefore necessary to the full exhibition of the divine mind; or, as setting forth some duty or doctrine, the recognition and reception of which is necessary to the full and symmetrical system of truth, and duty, and consequently necessary to the *well-being*, if not to the *being*, of the Christian man.

So far then is it from being true, that it is uncharitable to your fellow man to think him in error wherein he differs from you, or to attempt to put him right when you think him to be wrong, the very contrary is true—charity requires him to do that for doing which he will be regarded, and perhaps stigmatized in modern conventional speech, as an "uncharitable man."

It is passing strange that, whilst in all other

matters, you are called upon to help your neighbours, and your love will be called in question if you do *not* help him, yet the modern charity requires that you let him *alone* in his *gropings for religious truth*, will brand you as a "proselyter" for attempting to bring him to your way of thinking which, your way of thinking must be to you the way of truth, and that in which your charity must rejoice.

Now by way of example—suppose you were to see a friend about to embark for a long voyage upon a vessel that had not been well tried at sea—that was not built according to the most approved model—that had no adequate provisions for skilled officers to sail her—would it be considered a very friendly, not to say charitable, course for you to keep silence and let him run the risk? Your charity would rejoice in the truth that you knew and he knew not, and you would from love to him impart your counsel.

Why in everything except that which pertains to The Church and matters of religion, are we uncharitable if we do not help our neighbour with whatever of knowledge and counsel that we can command? If we think our eyes stronger or the light that guides us brighter we will help one we love to pick out his way; why must we let him alone, when he is bewildered and groping for religious truth?

Here is one, who believes that the religious Communion to which he belongs is a *divine organization*—divine in its *origin* and divine in its *universal obligation*. He believes this sincerely. He is fully persuaded in his own mind that this divine system is necessary to the preservation and perpetuity of the truth. If he be a man of much charity he will hold his conviction ardently, and contend earnestly for it. His love to God, the giver, and to man, the receiver of this truth, will alike inspire it. As a matter of necessity, he must regard his fellow-man, who holds an opposing belief, as in error, and in error exactly in proportion to the extent that he differs from himself; and in so far as he can properly do so, try to put him right. Is he uncharitable in thus thinking and acting? How? He may be mistaken in his conclusions, for he is a fallible man. And any one who thinks he is mistaken ought to have charity enough to try and put him right, and not allow him to abide in his error. And these men, thus differing, may live, and, if charitable men, must live in love, and peace together, not *thinking each other right*, for that is to stultify themselves; not making light of the truth held and denied, respectively, for that is to make light of the truth, and charity rejoiceth in the truth, there being nothing so precious as truth, not even peace, for the wisdom which cometh from above is *first pure, then peaceable*.

Truth at all hazards—peace is possible. The world and uninstructed Christians put *peace first*, but alas! theirs is not "the wisdom which cometh from above."

Charity, then, is not a matter of opinion, it is a matter of the heart—it is love, and the more one loves his neighbour the more will he rejoice to bring him to a knowledge of all truth, so that he may lack no manner of thing that is good.

To charge your neighbour with insincerity, or dishonesty or hypocrisy, when there is room to believe in, or hope for better things, Oh! this is uncharitable indeed, and a violation of one of the "two laws" upon which "hang all the law and the prophets." "And with what measure we mete, it shall be measured to us again."

The truth is, that charity concerns more the judgment we form of the *motives* of others, than the estimate we make of the correctness of their opinions. But the current popular thought is, that charity consists in thinking every one to be right, or at least not seriously wrong, in his opinions. And he who stands up

uncompromisingly, however amiably, for his convictions of truth and duty, and will not fall into popular ways, for fear that he may perchance compromise the truth, is branded as an uncharitable man—notwithstanding the fact that his charity it is, which forbids him to compromise the truth.

The whole case stands thus: If any one is wanting in love to God and to his fellow-men, he is uncharitable, unloving. If he imputes to his fellow-man a bad motive, when it is possible to ascribe a good or better one, he is uncharitable, for "charity thinketh no evil." If he delights to bring out to view the defects and infirmities of his neighbour, he is uncharitable, for charity is "kind" and "hopeth all things." If he holds his opinions in a proud and haughty spirit, he is uncharitable, for "charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, and doth not behave itself unseemly."

But if one is fully persuaded, after all the study and instruction within his reach, of certain truths; if he takes exceeding delight in them—for the mind should rejoice in truth as the eye rejoices in light—if by all proper means he seeks to win others to his own joy in truth—and what a wretched absence of charity there must be when one is indifferent to the welfare and joy of his neighbour—he is by the test of reason and scripture, and in the sight of God, a *charitable man*—for "charity rejoiceth in the truth."

Bishop Mant, in his comment upon this passage, thus excellently sums up its meaning: "Charity, saith the apostle, rejoiceth in the truth. It rejoiceth not in lending countenance and encouragement to delusion; not in giving weight and circulation to error; not in promoting 'the worshipping of imaginations,' and establishing, as it were, in the temple of God the conceits of human pride; not in extending indiscriminate protection and succor to discordant and conflicting systems of faith; but it rejoiceth in a cordial, unshaken, unmixed attachment to the revealed will and word of God; in an entire devotion to 'the truth as it is in Jesus;' in a conscientious and exclusive zeal for those doctrines which the Holy Spirit 'once delivered unto the saints;' and for that system of order, decency and peace, of which He was the author in the Apostolic Church. Sensible, indeed, of the weakness and imperfections incident to human nature, she 'doth not' on the one hand, 'behave herself unseemly' toward those who differ from her; she thinketh no evil of her opponents: but with compassion and benignity she 'beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.' But persuaded on the one hand, that 'the truth' is simple, and one, like its great author 'the Father of Lights, in whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning,' in the truth she rejoiceth; not only making it the object of her own affections, but studious to excite love and admiration of it in others."

Here, dear brethren, with this good Bishop, setting forth the meaning of the Apostle in its large comprehensiveness and sweet benignity, we may take our stand. Here we can stand the test of reason, here abide the judgment of God, and here fear not the judgment of men.

We cannot ask the men of this world to interpret for us the law of Christian charity. They cannot be our judges in this matter. To them the varying and conflicting opinions of Christian people—even when they concern such questions as the nature and origin of ministerial authority—yes even the nature and office of Christ Himself—are of less consequence than the petty and transient political issues of the hour. We should have no aspirations for the reputation of that charity which means indifference, nor should we dread the imputation of bigotry, when it means a deep devotion to, and joy in, the truth. King Solomon, the wise, discovered the true mother of the child by proposing to divide and mutilate it. The false mother was willing to compromise in any way,