

forms of sin with which we become acquainted. Our sins may not have assumed a very extreme form or degree, but, if sin reigns, it has separated man from God and also from his fellow-men.

The Gospel of the day refers to the forgiveness of sins, and furnishes the whole doctrine of absolution from transgression as it is bestowed in this world—"The Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins." The Epistle details the several particulars of the Christian life consequent upon a renunciation of sin—the putting off the old man, and putting on the new man, which after God is renewed in righteousness and true holiness.

### CHURCH THOUGHTS BY A LAYMAN.

No. 26.

#### ON PUTTING THE CHURCH BEFORE CHRIST.

OF those who believe in the divine origin of the organic life of the one Catholic Church, it is often said that they "put the Church before Christ." That this is no slight charge may be judged by this fact that one of the most pious clergymen in the Toronto Diocese was recently said, by a certain high dignitary therein, to be guilty of this sin and therefore, in his opinion, cut off from salvation.

For one clergyman to be doing as a solemn duty what a brother cleric declares will lead to eternal ruin, suggests to the lay mind a puzzling dilemma, but only for a moment, for the difficulty is superficial.

This, in fact, is a typical case, illustrating the confusion of thought which underlies so many differences of opinion, which creates and does so much to perpetuate divisions and strife. It affords an excellent text for a brief homily on the duty and wisdom of obtaining a clear, full, just idea of the convictions of those we judge before giving our verdict. The word "Church," to the two clerics alluded to, conveys ideas so irreconcilable as to be almost antagonistic. If the one charged with putting the Church before Christ, held the Church to be what his accuser thinks it to be, then the charge would be justified and the danger of such an offence would be grave. But he does no such thing, for in whatever position he—in a metaphorical sense—puts the Church, he places it so far as his will and consciousness extend, only where Christ Himself placed the Church, and therefore in its only position, for the relations of Christ to His body are eternally immutable.

To us who are honored by the name of "High Churchmen," the position of the Church is no more a matter of controversy than the position of Christ, it is not for man to define or settle or agitate about what those positions are, they are both declared to be what we hold them to be by Christ's own, or by His Apostle's inspired words. To talk of placing the Church before Christ or behind Him, or at the same side or in any other relative position, is to use terms of the meaning of which we can form no conception; to our vision they seem only to be blasphemy in a nebulous condition. Water which is dry, a blue tint which is scarlet, or a figure without bounds, are not less difficult for us to form a mental image of than a church with a varying relation to Christ. A great ecclesiastical split took place a few years ago on the question of the Kingship of Christ, but he who does not recognize Christ as Head of the Church, is split off from His sacred body, and no surer sign of that fatal disconnection can there be than the thought being entertained of the body and the head having a variable relation or a separate life.

The charge of putting the Church before Christ shows that there are those who venture to condemn the theological convictions of others who are constitutionally incapable of that order of mental action which theology demands, for they are incapable of grasping even so simple an idea as that of the indivisibility, unity, and identity of the head and body as one organism. Such paralysis or imperfect development of brain faculty is so sad a calamity that we extend our pity for those who are so afflicted, whose trouble is manifested by them supposing it possible to put the Church, the body of Christ, before Christ, the head of the Church. Let us be thankful for a clear brain, and charitably deal with those whose wits are so muddled as to talk about the inconceivable. But, so far, we have assumed that the idea conveyed by the word "Church" to us who rest our convictions and base our definitions upon the words of Christ and His Apostles is the same idea which this word conveys to the minds of those who are in the habit of using the accusatory phrase, "putting the Church before Christ." This is not so, hence the dilemma we have named, for it is not only quite possible to put what our critics mean by "church" before Christ, but anywhere else they choose, for it is a creation of their own vain imagination and they place the phantasy just wherever they prefer. What such persons fantastically call the church is, they say, quite "invisible," without any relation to place, or space, or time, manifestly, therefore, is in what the metaphysicians call the "unconditioned" state and what non-philosophic people just as exactly, with just as much scientific accuracy, call a mere notion or day-dream. To put this before Christ would be lunacy rather than sin. That this notional church is the private property of our critics is clear from the very authority they claim over it and the conditions which they desire to impose upon it, which are wholly opposed to the headship of Christ and impossible to reconcile with the actual conditions of that Church's life which He founded, and which was then, and is now, not only visible but having very definite relations to place, space and time, not unconditioned, not a notion, but as truly an organic unity as the British Empire. We would rather avoid words of rebuke, but plain speech is often a duty in self defence, and self-disgrace often involves a retaliatory charge when the wolf up stream charges the lamb down below with troubling the water, the lamb's defence involves the accuser in guilt. Those who charge us putting the Church before Christ do so to atone for their contemptuous treatment of Christ's body, nurturing the delusion that by thus accusing us they will be thought the exclusive adorers of our Lord, or His adorers in some exalted sense unknown to those who rejoice in recognizing themselves as members of His body, in proving the vitality of their union by obedience, and evidencing their membership with His body by sharing the Church's life in all its acts of love and worship. To us the idea of a church apart from, not organically one with, Christ is an impossible conception. This is our insuperable difficulty when asked to recognize this church and that church,—"Christ is not divided." He is not head of a congeries of churches, the recognition of Christ to all involves the recognition of Him as Head of *One* Church; if His church is no longer a unit, scriptural language becomes absurdly irrelevant, meaning nothing less than a solemn mockery. We then challenge our accusers to define their meaning, the charge we discuss as though we were accused of being the hypothenuse of a circle or some other verbal folly. No service can be done the Church which is not service to Christ; no

service can be done to Christ which is not also a service to His Church. To seek to do Christ honor by degrading the Church is rank lunacy; to seek to honor Christ without honoring His Church is to deny His own word declaring the Church to be His body, therefore it is seeking to honor Him by dishonor. He who talks of "elevating the sacraments above Christ" deserves no more serious answer than the classic rebuke of Bishop Strachan: "Sit down, man, ye're talking nonsense!" for a sacrament without Christ as its life is inconceivable, it is a verbal contradiction. He who would honor a sacrament more than Christ could not, for the very intention to do so, or even the ignorance that could inspire the act, would destroy the sacrament, it would be sacrilege.

We beg, therefore, our critics to furnish us with a "bill of particulars" so that we may be enabled to discover what this terrible indictment really means. We cannot repent of a meaningless generality, or turn away from an inconceivable, impossible sin, and we refuse to be disturbed about our eternal state because we do something which is incapable of being formulated into intelligible language. We are, indeed, very vividly impressed with the conviction that He who will say, "Inasmuch as ye did it unto the least of my brethren ye did it unto Me," will not condemn us for honoring the brethren, His brethren and ours, the Church, but will accept, honor, and reward all service done to glorify His body.

We would beg any friends who make use of such a phrase as "putting the Church before Christ," or "elevating the sacraments above Christ," to cultivate a little better style of language. Those phrases are only saved from being offensive by being silly, and their canting tone betrays a very vulgar origin. Another word to the users of such pious accusatory slang:—There is a such a danger as a man going "to his own place," and the place for slanderers is the realm where the chief "accuser of the brethren" reigns.

ERRATA.—In our report of the proceedings of the Provincial Synod in last week's issue, page 540, 1st column, 28th line from the bottom, for "ordination" read "education." On the 3rd column of the same page, 24th line from the top, a period should be put after "purpose"; and from "Owing" to "withdrawn" should be read as one sentence.

#### DEPOSITORY FOR THE PUBLICATIONS OF THE SOCIETY FOR THE PROMOTION OF CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE.

FROM the discussions which took place in the Provincial Synod and from some communications we have since received upon the subject, it appears that the fact is not generally known that there is already A LARGE DEPOSITORY for the publications of the Christian Knowledge Society, and has been for some years in this country. Messrs. Rowsell & Hutchison, Toronto, have this Depository, and, what is just as important is, that books from the S.P.C.K. can be obtained from them at just as low a price as in England. They also keep on hand the publications of the Church of England Sunday School Institute, and are continually adding to their stock.

#### THE BISHOP OF NOVA SCOTIA'S SERMON

SOME portions of the sermon of the Bishop of Nova Scotia, preached before the Provincial Synod at its recent meeting in Montreal, have been cavilled at and misquoted by certain of our contemporaries, apparently for party purposes.