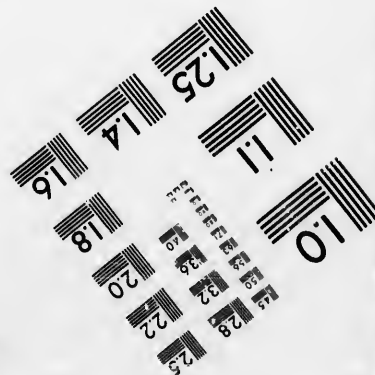
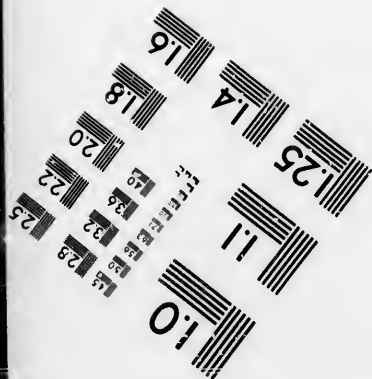
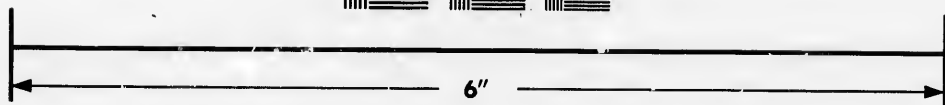
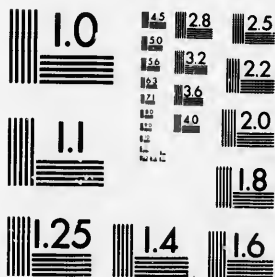


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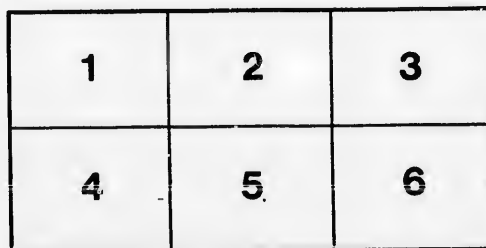
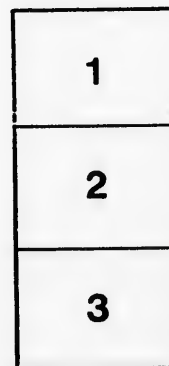
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THE  
CONDITIONS OF CHRIST'S PRESENCE WITH  
CHURCH SYNODS.

A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE CATHEDRAL OF QUEBEC,  
BEFORE THE MEETING OF THE CLERGY AND LAITY OF THE  
DIOCESE, ON ST. JOHN BAPTIST'S DAY,  
June 24, 1858.

BY

J. H. THOMPSON, M. A.

HARROLD PROFESSOR OF DIVINITY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF  
BISHOP'S COLLEGE, LENNOXVILLE.

Published by Request.

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ST. MATTHEW, C. XVIII., V. 20.

“Where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them.”

OF all the words that Jesus spake, there are few that are more frequently appealed to by Christians, and more deeply engraven on their minds, than those which form the text. They are to us the guarantee of an especial presence, of an especial blessing, whenever we assemble in the Name of Christ, to offer unto our Heavenly Father the honour and worship that is His due. They are the sure and certain promise, which the Church pleads in her daily prayer, to obtain for us the fulfilment of those desires and petitions which we have offered with one common voice before the throne of Grace. They tell us that the gifts of God are given, not according to the number of the worshippers, but according to their unity and sincerity,—that it is not the multitude of the careless and the formal that throng the aisles which gives efficacy to the Church’s prayer,—but it is the cry of the few humble and contrite ones, unheard and unheeded by man, that pierces the clouds. We take courage as we read anew these glorious words of promise and of hope. We feel that there is One near us, Whose truth is pledged to our succour and support. The coldness of others—the slow advance of Christ’s cause—the overflowings of ungodliness no longer make us fainthearted and afraid. We have but to “lift up holy hands, without wrath or doubting,” and Christ will be an ever-present Mediator and High-Priest, to obtain for us what we pray for. We may not, we cannot doubt that there are other voices raised in unison with ours in the assemblies of God’s people; and

though we may not know here on earth who there are, or how many, whose fervent petitions gain acceptance even for our own, yet such, we may be assured, there are ; and with them, in sacred and mysterious sympathy, our hearts and desires flow heavenwards ; and the Father of Lights, the Author of every good and perfect gift, vouchsafes a favorable answer to the common prayer. " For again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree upon earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father, which is in Heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them."

But it may be asked—What has this to do with the object for which we have been summoned this day? What has Christ's promise to united prayer to do with the Synodical action of the Church?

I reply, that it was with especial reference to Church acts that these words were first used ; and that, although they are our undoubted warrant for God's blessing on common worship, yet they are evidently intended to set forth the principles on which the corporate acts of the Church are to be carried on, and to promise the presence and guidance of the great Head of the Church to all that is legitimately done in His Name.

The earlier part of the eighteenth chapter of St. Matthew contains a solemn warning to the disciples to be humble and harmless ; enforced by the touching appeal to the guilelessness and humility of a little child. In the seventh and following verses, our Lord proceeds to point out the danger of a contrary spirit, of giving offence to others, or of taking advantage of their innocence and confidence to do them injury. The next lesson which He gives is to the sufferers themselves—how they were to deal with those brethren who had injured them. They were not to take the law into their own hands ; nor were they altogether to pass by the injury without notice.



After all private efforts had proved in vain, they were to take two or three with them, as witnesses of the truth of the accusation, or to shame him who had offended into confession and atonement, or in view of further proceedings. And if the offender still proved obdurate, he was to be referred to the judgment of the Church—the neglect of which was to be punished by excommunication. Nor was such sentence, duly considered and pronounced, to be lightly regarded—it would be ratified in heaven. It was not merely an outward sentence, which depended upon the opinion of men for its force, but whatever was thus bound on earth should be bound in heaven, and whatever was loosed on earth should be loosed in heaven. The learned Hammond thus paraphrases this passage:—“These censures of yours, inflicted by this commission from Me, shall be backed by Me, and so whomsoever ye shall, upon sincere repentance, receive into the peace of the Church again, he shall be by Me pardoned also.” Immediately our Lord subjoins the text with its preceding verse. Again, I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree upon earth.” The connection with the preceding words seems to involve reasoning from the less to the greater. If God will grant whatsoever may be asked by even two or three assembled in His Name, how much more will He ratify and confirm the acts of the whole Church? Or otherwise, not only what ye bind upon earth shall be bound in heaven, but what is yet greater, whatever any two of you shall ask of common consent, they shall obtain. And the true reason why such mighty results would follow, would be that He, the sole and only Priest and King, would be in the midst of them, speaking for them to the Father, or confirming the acts of His Ministers.

The expression “I am in the midst of them,” is one of deep and glorious meaning. It is more than simply to dwell in our hearts by faith. In that manner Christ is present with all the just, whether assembled or not.

No! These words declare that Christ is present in some more especial sense. They imply not only His assistance but also His authority. I sit in the midst of them as Supreme Judge, to accept and to ratify, forgive or condemn; as it is written in the Psalms, "God standeth in the congregation of the mighty—He is a Judge among gods."

Thus understood, the text appears admirably adapted to set forth

I. The importance of the work in which we are engaged.

II. The promise of Divine presence and assistance.

III. The special conditions required for conducting that work with success, which are (1) Devotion and (2) Unity.

I. We may not measure, my brethren, the importance of our work by what meets the eye, by the extent of the interest felt in it, or by the immediate value of its results. To the world at large, the meeting of a few Clergy and Lay Delegates with their Bishop at their head, from a scattered and struggling Diocese, to consult upon the concerns of their small and isolated body may hardly be worth a thought. On the other hand, the well-instructed Churchman sees in this constitutive assembly much to excite his attention, and to inspire him with hope. He sees in that ancient and reformed Church to which it is his blessing to belong, a fresh token of life—the earnest of great things yet in store for our Zion. He sees in the Synod of this day the revival of that Corporate action which was the strength of the Church ere yet the See of Rome had swallowed up the liberties of Western Christendom, and before the jealousy of States interfered with the religious freedom of the people. He sees about to be carried into effect that system of self-government which the Fathers of the English Reformation desired but were unable to carry out,—a system modified to suit the times, after the plan which has worked so well in our Sister

Church in the United States. And, although he knows that no outward system of laws and regulations will endue the Church with unity and love, and with the zeal of saving the immortal souls of men, yet he believes that such assemblies are of eminent importance in promoting peace, in breaking down differences, in removing prejudices, in conveying right ideas of the constitution, doctrine and discipline of the Church; as well as requisite for adapting the rules of the Church to new circumstances, for the exercise of discipline, for the uniform and orderly government of the whole Diocese.

And, moreover, when the Churchman considers the weight which the deliberations and decisions of this Body will possess over the minds and consciences of our people, he is still more convinced of the importance and solemnity of this occasion. The acts of any body politic bind all the members of that body. To escape submission it is needful to withdraw. To infringe them while under their jurisdiction incurs the specified penalty or punishment. Were then the Church a mere voluntary association, its corporate acts would be matters of the deepest concern. But as it is, we are bound to obey, not for wrath, from the fear of punishment, but for conscience' sake. All law is indeed of God. But to the acts and decrees of the Church He has given a higher sanction than even to the laws of man, inasmuch as that sanction is a spiritual one. In the power to bind and to loose, to which we have reference in the 18th verse, we recognize not only the exercise of discipline, but also the enactment and abrogation of such matters as being in themselves indifferent, and not enjoined or forbidden by God's law, are yet made binding or repealed by virtue of the power which by Christ's Commission is inherent in the Church. Of this authority the 20th Article of our Church thus speaks: "The Church hath power to decree Rites or Ceremonies, and authority in Controversies of Faith."

This, however, is a power which must be sparingly, cautiously, tentatively used. Although there will be among us the utmost freedom of representation and debate, yet even in the case of a body thus constituted, the less the nice points of doctrine and of ritual are interfered with the safer it will prove. The management of Church affairs, the statistics and growth of the Church, the enactment of a code of Canons, the preparation of an authorized Hymnal, the establishment of suitable Courts for the trial of offences, the arrangement of parishes, the formation of a Provincial Synod, will probably furnish us with employment for a long time to come. And let it not be thought that these are of such trifling importance as to render inapplicable to them the high promises of Christ. We have need of wisdom, of Divine guidance as much in the external as in the internal domain of the Church, and that branch of her which is divided and disorganized, which has no common rule of action and no common principles, cannot do the work of God in the world. We must gather into the construction of the Tabernacle all the various gifts which the Holy Spirit metes out severally as He will; and the result, though seemingly the work of human hands, will be instinct with the presence, and radiant with the glory of an Indwelling God.

Of one thing we may be assured, that whatever be the powers of this Synod, or of any Provincial or General Synod that may be established, the Prayer Book will not be altered. That sacred heritage is too dear to us; it has been won at too much cost, and gives expression too well to our spiritual desires and aspirations to be lightly changed. Let our lay friends dismiss, if they have ever entertained, the apprehension that such change is so much as desired. Indeed, without their concurrence nothing could be done; and we trust that in the well-instructed and intelligent lay-members of Synod, the Church of this

Diocese will find, as she has found elsewhere, the most resolute defenders of her doctrine and her discipline.

2. Whatever, then, may be the duties which it may fall upon the Synod to discharge, we may feel ourselves entitled to look for Divine guidance and blessing, provided the conditions be fulfilled. It is for us to receive the promise of Christ's Presence, to rely upon it, and strengthen ourselves by it in the face of any difficulties which may occur to try our faith. There have been many times in the history of the Church when it was difficult to believe that Christ could be present in the universal uproar and strife of tongues. Yet by and bye, the horizon grew clear, and the still small voices of Faith and Truth made themselves heard anew. It is a great sin to doubt Christ's Presence with His Church. No one can work manfully if fainthearted; and that the future of our Church may be equal to its charter and its opportunities, we need men who will go forth believing not only that Christ is present with His Holy Church Universal, but that He is present with that Body to which they belong in the acts in which they are engaged. We want not only faithful Missionaries, but faithful Wardens, and faithful Laity, who will strengthen the hands of their Clergy at home, and who will come to the annual Synods as a labour of love, to contribute their own share of piety and wisdom, and to gain fresh confidence and encouragement from contact with the zeal of others. For as "iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend."

III. (1) What, lastly, are the conditions required for successfully exerting those powers which are vested in the Governing Body of the Church? They are none other than those which are not obscurely set forth in the passage of which the text forms the conclusion. Long-suffering, a readiness to bear with the prejudices, and to learn from the experience of others, are lessons much

needed at all times, not the least when we remember the bitterness and suspicion which has in former times often impeded the deliberations of ecclesiastical bodies. Nor can we deem it an accident that Christ subjoined those words respecting Prayer to what he had said respecting the Church. Rather it was an instruction to those who shall engage to all time in such acts as those which will shortly come before us, to use earnest prayer to God that He would grant to them a just and right judgment in all things. Hence we commence the proceedings of our Synod with prayer and the Holy Communion, that not only we may thereby obtain Divine assistance, but also that we may proceed to our duties with a heightened piety, a deeper sense of the Divine Presence, and hearts full of charity and love both towards God and towards our Brethren.

(2) Another condition implied in our Lord's words is Unity. By this He would not seem to exclude difference of opinion, and the eliciting of truth by fair and temperate discussion and debate. It is impossible to expect absolute agreement between mankind. Probably no question whatever is viewed in exactly the same light by any two individuals, and the best and wisest course generally lies between the extremes. What He here seems to indicate is the spirit in which such differences should be considered and adjusted. When a decision has once been arrived at, then the principle of Unity and Peace asserts its prerogative. Whatever conflict of opinion may have preceded, harmony and agreement are to accompany the action of the Church, or the promise of Divine Presence is suspended. What can more strongly declare the importance of Unity? We have been so much accustomed to act independently, and to consider the Church as made up of fragments, that we have far too little apprehension of the value and the efficacy of Unity. Yet how strongly do the Scriptures condemn that

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tendency to division, which was already working at Rome and at Corinth in the Apostles' days. These divisions had not gone so far as to break up the ecclesiastical organization into contending sects, but even as displayed within the pale of the Church, they met with the strongest rebuke. The disposition to stand aloof from one another, to exalt trifling differences into vital points of disagreement, to enrol themselves under the banner of party leaders, had their prototypes of old. But against this sad tendency, are directed the severest rebukes of the Apostle—the most earnest prayers of Christ. “Every one of you saith, ‘I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ.’ Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized into the Name of Paul?” Again, let me recall to you those words uttered by our Lord, in that most solemn and touching prayer which was offered up on the eve of His Passion, “That we might all be one, as He and the Father are One.” Again; “There is One Lord, one Faith, one Baptism,—one God and Father of all, Who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” Where can we find stronger inducements, more potent exhortations to Unity than are here set before you?

And surely to us, members of one Common Church, linked together in a holy bond of brotherhood by the faith and sacraments of Christ,—to us who accept as Apostolic the Episcopal form of Government, or at least believe it to be the best of all, who recite the ancient Creeds, and are joined in spirit to the holy and the good of many generations by the use of that form of sound words, the Book of Common Prayer,—to us, I say, there can be little cause of disagreement. That views widely different are held and were intended to be held in the Church of England, is undeniable. The enforcement of nice, speculative points of doctrine was no object of our Reformers. Agreement in the general principles of our Ecclesiastical

polity, in the broad outlines of Catholic truth set forth in our formularies was deemed sufficient for Communion. Certain distinctive principles every body must have. A line must be drawn somewhere, beyond which divergence of opinion cannot be reconciled with the welfare of the Church. Largeness of bounds is however no reason for overleaping them, and it is essential that those who take part in the Synodical work should acquaint themselves with the history, general principles and genius of the body to which they belong, in order that they may intelligently take part in the proceedings, and wisely and prudently promote the interests of the Church.

Our work at present is not to found a new Church, but to adapt to the requirements of a Colony the rules and the spirit of our Mother Church of England and Ireland. The sphere of our action is therefore greatly limited,—and there is a call not so much for invention and experiment, as for the less brilliant but safer qualities of caution, research and common sense.

Yet let us not forget that, limited as for years to come, that sphere may be, great results will yet depend upon the mode and spirit of our first steps. Our powers are great for good or for evil, and though it may be long before the results are apparent, yet follow they will most assuredly, as certainly as the report follows the flash.

Finally, brethren, let us commend ourselves to God and the power of His Grace. May He Who is the Author of Peace and Lover of Unity preside over our deliberations. May He Who was sent to guide the Church into all truth, be an ever present stay and support. May He inspire us with uniting principles and charitable hearts, and may He overrule our humble efforts to the glory of His great Name, and the everlasting welfare of His people.



