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ARTICLE II.

THE CHURCH ESSENTIALLY SPIRITUAL.

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RESPECTING the outward affairs of the church of God, there has been no lack of history and discussion. But respecting its inward life, and particularly the relation which that life bears to the forms of its outward manifestation, it must be confessed that the attention and the treatment which these fundamental topics justly demand, have not always been given to them. It has been too much forgotten, or beforehand disbelieved, that the church of Christ in this world is not a kingdom of this world; but is the kingdom of God and of heaven, making itself visible in the work of human redemption.

Just ideas on any subject can be had only from a just point of view. The position assumed as the true point of view on the subject of this Article is, that the religion and church of Christ are essentially spiritual. From this point of view, it is believed, just ideas may be obtained respecting the true character of the church of God, its outward organization, forms, and usages. Some such views it is proposed to set forth in the following propositions:

First. The existence of the church of God in this world is a necessary result of the work of saving grace among men.

Here, let it be remembered, that all mankind are by nature dead in trespasses and sins, estranged from God by wicked hearts and wicked works, and evermore, with the evil heart of unbelief in them, departing from the living God. But, by the manifestation of Divine truth to men's consciences, some are awakened to a sense of guilt, and by the life-giving spirit of God are made alive in Christ Jesus. Henceforth they walk in the Spirit and in newness of life. New hopes and fears, new joys and sorrows, and the manifold experience of the Christian life, so utterly alien from the life of the world, now animate their hearts and lives. Old things are passed away, behold all things are become new.

Now, even were there no other and higher principle at work

in them than the mere social instinct of human nature, it is manifest that, in such a case as this, the mere synthetic power of human sympathy would gather together and combine all such in a sacred community, or communities, as circumstances might permit.

And in point of fact it is so. These social sympathies of our nature, redeemed from sin and sanctified by Divine grace, have both a predisposing and an actual influence in bringing converts together and into the church. And rightly so. To do otherwise on their part, would be to do violence to human nature in them, to resist the Spirit in his work sanctifying their social affections, and to deprive their souls of one of the means of growth in grace.

But, in connection with this, let us advert to the nature of true religion, and the way in which it must necessarily manifest itself. True religion is at once spiritual life, love, and holy activity. As life, it is Divine, and must be love, as God is love. As love, it is essentially social, and must have and will seek some congenial objects of affectionate regard on whom to bestow its holy warmth. These will be God and man. From the full heart in which this love is shed abroad by the Holy Ghost, will issue the ardent words of the rapt Psalmist: "Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none in all the earth I desire besides thee." Next after God, those who bear the image of Christ will be the objects of affectionate regard and brotherly kindness. Thus, wherever those meet, or happen to reside near each other, who are born of the Spirit, the law of love written in their hearts, the love of God shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is its own law, will bring them together for the worship of their God, and will prompt them to the exercise of brotherly kindness and the various other duties belonging to the church relation. And so doing they simply obey the voice of duty and do the will of God.

And what, indeed, is the necessary result of the very fact that they are born of God into spiritual and Divine life—a birth, though supernatural, as true and real as our natural birth—what but to make of all such a true and real brotherhood, the children of one Father and of one family? They are "no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God." This is, indeed, true of the church universal. It is true, also, of each particular local church, which

is but a part of the great whole; localized by the circumstances of their residence on earth, and subordinately organized by themselves only for their greater convenience of worshipping together and attaining the other ends of church fellowship.

Thus are churches constituted by the work of saving grace in the hearts of men.

It is true, something may yet be wanting to their completeness as a perfect organic whole, something yet needed for their highest efficiency and usefulness to each other and the world. But what more that is essential to the being of a church of God is wanting? Are a written creed and formal covenant deemed indispensable? These, indeed, are desirable and useful as an exposition of their Christian faith and life, so that others may recognize them as a church of Christ. And, on prudential grounds, no body of men ought to be recognized as a Christian church without a satisfactory exposition of the faith and life in which they are united. But this exposition presupposes that which has truly and really and already constituted them a church, namely, faith in the Gospel and the covenant of God written in their hearts; or, is the action of some ecclesiastical council, presbytery or prelate deemed indispensable to the very being of a church? That, too, on prudential grounds, is desirable and useful, for the sake of good order and the purity of fellowship among particular churches. But that such actions can create, or properly constitute a church, cannot be admitted; cannot be true, if the proposition just discussed be true. Men may examine, declare, and commend churches, but God only can really and truly constitute a Christian church. Without Christians, there could be no Christian church in the world; and without the work of redeeming grace, there could be no Christian on earth.

Second. Regenerate persons are the only true members of the Christian church.

To suppose the contrary of this proposition seems sufficiently absurd to establish it. For if in any case an unregenerate person can be made truly and really a member of a Christian church, it might be so in all cases, and so there might be a Christian church without a single Christian in it.

But, as appears from the preceding proposition, the church is brought into existence, and men are brought into it, by the Spirit of God redeeming and sanctifying the social affections of those

who believe. Thus the regenerate are brought into the church, and the unregenerate are left out of it.

Besides, their respective and contrary characters show the same thing. "What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness, what communion hath light with darkness, or τίς μερίς πιστῶ μετὰ ἀπίστων; what part hath the believer with the unbeliever? Wherefore come out out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord." 1 Cor. 6: 14—18.

None other than regenerate persons are qualified for the spiritual duties and employments of the church relationship. None other can be the light of the world, the salt of the earth. None other can be objects of that complacent love which God bestows upon Zion. And none other can warrant the epithets bestowed by inspired men upon the churches of Christ, at Rome, Corinth, and other places — visible, local churches these were — such as "Brethren holy and beloved; partakers of the heavenly calling; elect of God; sanctified in Christ Jesus," etc. See the introductory salutations of the Epistles to the Romans, Corinthians, etc.

But here an imposing array of objections is encountered. It is objected that most or all that has been said hitherto applies only to the church invisible, but not to the visible church on earth; that, as every Christian on earth has in him a mixture of grace and remaining corruption, so the visible church in this world may have in it, and in all probability ever has had, a mixture of regenerate and unregenerate persons; that it is beyond the power of man to discriminate accurately between the two classes; that the Jewish church, ordained and regulated by God, was composed of all in the nation of both classes; and, finally, that, by admitting both classes into the church, you encircle the unregenerate with all the means of grace, and bring them into closer contact with the saving ordinances and influences of the Gospel.

In replying briefly to these objections, it is denied, first, that the distinction of the church into visible and invisible is a real division of the church into two churches, or into two departments of the one church of God. The distinction is only circumstantial and verbal, though, when rightly understood, like the current distinction between professing Christians and true Christians, it is proper and useful in human discourse. But, as it is not the visible profession that makes the true Christian, so it is not the

visible profession or form of any church that constitutes it a true church of Christ. Strictly speaking, the visible church means simply the one true church of Christ, or any local portion of it, as visible to human view, by the outward manifestation of its inner spiritual life in its forms of worship and faith, and in the pious lives of its members. But as there may be true Christians in the most degenerate times, and communities called Christian, whose light may be lost to human view amid the surrounding darkness, and especially lost to the pen of history, these are said to belong to the church invisible. Such was the use of the term, it is said, as invented by Luther.

It is, indeed, true that there is in every Christian on earth a mixture of good and ill; of prevailing grace and remaining corruption. And hence, *the character* of the church on earth will be a mixed one, like that of its members. But it does not follow that the constituency of the church may be a mixed one. Still there is a wide and radical distinction between the veriest babe in Christ Jesus who is born of God, and the unregenerate man who has not the spirit of Christ and is none of his. And it should be noticed, also, that the true Christian is not such, nor recognized as such and rightfully a member of the church, on account of his remaining corruptions; but on account of the work of grace in his heart and the fruits of it manifest in his life. But the unregenerate furnish no evidences of such a work (which are not deceptive), and hence they cannot rightfully be received or recognized as true members of the church of God, or any portion of it. If they should be so recognized by men, still they are not truly and really members of the church of God, any more than the remaining corruptions of the true Christian are elements of his Christian character.

And what though it is beyond the power of man to inspect the heart as God does, and so to discriminate with unflinching accuracy between the regenerate and the unregenerate soul? Still the distinction may be held up, as the discriminating principle of church membership, and an approximation be made to it in practice, sufficiently accurate for the purposes of church fellowship on earth. "Every tree may be known by its fruits," and those who are born of God may be known by "the fruits of the Spirit."

Here, the parable of the tares among the wheat (Matt. 13: 24—30) may perhaps be thought of as sustaining these objections.

But not justly so. For it was an enemy that sowed the tares while men slept. And the direction given to the over zealous servants to let the tares alone until the time of harvest, lest they should pull up the wheat also, through their inability to discriminate accurately by the appearance of the blade, can fairly be understood only as a caution to the church not to attempt rashly what man cannot accomplish, the perfect separation of the unregenerate from the regenerate, already in the church.

Nor can the parable of the net cast into the sea and gathering fishes of all sorts, good and bad (Matt. 13: 47—50), be fairly interpreted as teaching anything more than this: that however the ungodly may be gathered into the congregation by the preaching of the Gospel, or even be intermingled with the righteous in the formal fellowship of the church, still they have no right to be there, and at the last day they will be finally cast out. This was evidently the main point of instruction, both in this parable and in that of the tares. And the spirit of both plainly teaches the church to reject the bad, though with due caution, and to admit no one except upon sufficient evidence; yea, to cast out the bad by the ultimate act of excision from the formal fellowship of the church, as enjoined elsewhere by our Lord, and as required also by the spiritual character of the church. And, indeed, this same power and duty of the church (excommunication) implies, and is based upon, the doctrine of the proposition, that regenerate persons only are truly and rightfully members of the Christian church. When unregenerate and merely nominal members are detected by their immoralities, heresies or delinquencies in Christian duty, then they are to be cut off as dead branches and being no part of the true living vine. See 1 John 2: 19.

As to the Jewish church, it was peculiar and temporary. It was not so much a church, as a theocratic kingdom of this world, having the church of God embosomed in it for a time, and for the special purpose of protection against the whole world besides, which was then given to idolatry. But even while the true spiritual Israel were not distinguished from the nation by any outward organization, or ordinances exclusively for the pious, the church nevertheless existed in the nation and was separate from it. This Christ intimates (John 8: 39). This Paul explicitly teaches: "For they are not all Israel who are of Israel" (Rom. 9: 6). See also Rom. 2: 29. 11: 17. Gal. 3: 29, etc.

But even were it otherwise, we are not at liberty to take the Jewish economy as an illustration or pattern for the Christian. On the contrary, it is held up in the New Testament as an abolished ritual that had accomplished its temporary ends, as a system of "carnal ordinances" which had vanished away, as a dispensation of "the letter" now superseded by the more glorious dispensation of the Spirit, as "in bondage" to imperative, punctilious ordinances from which we are delivered by the free spirit of the Gospel.

And, finally, respecting the practice of admitting unregenerate persons into the formal fellowship of the church, that thereby you may encircle them with all the means of grace, and bring them into closer contact with the saving ordinances and influences of the Gospel, what is the lesson taught by the whole history of the Christian religion and church? Is it not, that men thereby have been lulled into a more fatal security in their sins? Deluded by the share awarded to them in the forms of godliness without the power thereof, they have taken up a religion of empty forms for the true religion of the heart; they have relied on the mediatorship of an earthly priesthood, and have built high hopes of heaven on their nominal membership in a church out of which, they have been taught to believe there is no salvation. But, on the other hand, it may be confidently asserted that wherever some good evidence of a change of heart has been faithfully held to as the terms of admission into the church, there the spiritual purity of the church has been the most manifest, and the power of godliness seen and felt in the highest degree for the good of man and the glory of God.

Third. The ministry of the Christian church is simply an organic part of the body specially qualified by the gifts of the Spirit, superadded to those of nature and culture, and thereby called of God to devote themselves entirely to the work of the ministry.

Every member of the church has, indeed, obtained the gift of grace. But there are degrees and diversities of gifts, corresponding to the diversities of temperament, talent, culture, etc. of the individual, which thereby are sanctified and enhanced in power for usefulness in the service of Christ. But in every case, the possession of any gift of God brings with it a call from God to employ it diligently and profitably in his service. "The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal" (1 Cor. 12: 7).

But some are specially and more eminently endowed with the gifts of the Spirit, superadded to those of nature and culture. Thereby they are fitted for more abundant labors and more eminent usefulness in the vineyard, and thus they are called of God to the work of the Christian ministry, just as every Christian is called of God to devote himself and his all to Christ. That such was the Apostle Paul's theory of gifts and the constitution of ecclesiastical offices, may be seen by consulting the passages beginning at Rom. 12: 4. 1 Cor. 12: 27. Eph. 4: 17, etc.

The true ministry of the Christian church, then, like its true membership, is a production of the Spirit of God. Thus hath God set them in his church, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, the extraordinary ministry for the establishment and extension of the Christian religion and church, and the ordinary ministry for its common wants and permanent work in the world.

And it is a ministry, not a priesthood; an organic part of the body, not an order of nobility, not an hierarchy set over it. The Christian minister's duties, and of course his rights also, differ not essentially from those of every other member of the church to whom he ministers; each, however, in his own sphere of labor in which the gifts of grace and providence have placed him. As their public teacher, he is to feed the flock of God with knowledge; as their pastor, he is to watch for their souls. And they all should do the like for one another, according to their several abilities and opportunities. That the minister may give himself continually to prayer and the ministry of the word, the deaconship is appointed, in order to take off from his mind and hand the care and management of the alms and other temporal affairs of the church (Acts 6: 2—4). And, that he may give himself wholly to his spiritual work, the church is to provide wholly for his temporal maintenance. "For even so hath the Lord ordained that they who preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel" (1 Cor. 9: 14).

Thus the minister and his people are organically related to each other in their several spheres of Christian duty and activity. His work is really no more sacred than theirs, his responsibilities no more weighty on him than theirs on them. He, indeed, is set over them in the Lord, and yet he is one of themselves, a brother in the brotherhood; yet a brother to whom they may and should look up, as their public teacher and leader given to them

by God, to whom they are required to be obedient and subject in his appropriate work, even as they are all required to be subject to one another, and whom they should esteem highly in love for his work's sake, even as they all ought to love one another with pure hearts fervently.

Whoever is thus qualified by the Spirit and called of God and faithful in the work, is evidently a true minister of Christ. He carries his Divine credentials with him wherever he goes; he exhibits them before all men in his pious life and labors. His authority to preach and administer ordinances, he receives direct from the hand of God, and not from man or through any succession of men, as the Apostle Paul received his apostleship (Gal. 1: 1).

What then, many may be disposed here to exclaim, do you allow no validity to the act of ordination; no necessity for the laying on of the hands of the presbytery; no authority and power vested in the ecclesiastical council, presbytery or prelate to confer on candidates the right to preach the Gospel and administer sacraments? None whatever, in any sense that implies the intervention of man as indispensable between God and one divinely called to the ministry, in order to make him a true minister of Christ. And much more, it is strenuously denied that any act of any man or men, can make a true minister of one whom God has not qualified and called to the work.

Nevertheless, for the sake of guarding the acknowledged ministry of the churches against the intrusion of unsuitable persons whom God hath not called thereunto, and that the churches and the world may have the means of knowing, from due examination made by competent persons, whom they may receive and trust in as ministers of Christ, able, true, and faithful, it is expedient, and it is enjoined by the dictates of Christian wisdom and prudence, as exemplified by apostolic example and the whole history of the church, that formal ordination to the Christian ministry should be one of the permanent regulations of the church on earth, that the preliminary examinations upon the candidate should be faithfully held, and that the act itself should be performed with becoming solemnity.

But, that the ordination service, the imposition of hands, or any other part thereof, constitutes any one a true minister of Christ in his church, is utterly inconsistent with the teaching of the Bible and the spiritual character of the church and its

ministry. The minister is made, as the Christian is made, by the grace of God.

Fourth. The unity of the Christian church is spiritual, and, within the limits of vital godliness, it is consistent with some diversity of church polity and forms of worship.

Whatever is the constituent principle of any system, is necessarily the principle of its unity. Thus in the solar system, it is not the observed uniformity of planetary shapes and motions, but the one fundamental idea, the law or principle of gravity which is the unifying principle, and which produces the observed uniformity. So in any living organic being, it is not the observed symmetry of its organism, but the one central law or principle of life, in each after its kind, which produces the observed symmetry and makes of all its organic parts one organic whole, the plant or animal.

So the true unity of the church of God consists, not in any outward uniformity or symmetry that is, has been, or can be given to the forms in which the inner life of the church may manifest itself, but in that life itself which is ever one and the same. This life is the constituent principle of the true church, the distinguishing characteristic of its true members and true ministry, and therefore must be the principle of its unity. The argument is short but conclusive, and seems well-nigh self-evident.

And such, too, is the New Testament view and argument for the unity of the church, and the moral and religious duties that grow out of it. Let it suffice to quote the Apostle Paul. He says to the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 12: 27): "Now ye are the body of Christ and members in particular," etc. As much as to say: Even as it is the one vital principle in the head and members of the human body, working in each for its life and growth, and coöperating in all the members for the life and growth and well-being of the whole body, so, by a perfect analogy, is it with Christ and believers in him. Their vital union with Christ, in regard to spiritual life, makes them members of his body, which is his church. The unity of the whole, then, must consist in the inner, spiritual life of the church.

The Apostle's view, also, of that which introduces any one into the church, may be seen at 1 Cor. 12: 13: "For, by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have all been made

to drink into one Spirit." The baptism of the Spirit of God, then, is the efficient, real initiation into the church of Christ, and not the baptism with water which is only its symbol. Hence he says respecting the unity of the church (Eph. 4: 5): "One Lord, one faith, one baptism;" that is, one Lord in whom we all believe, one faith which unites all our souls to him, one baptism, even the washing of regeneration, by which we are all baptized into the one body of Christ which is his church. In that spiritual baptism, then, we must find the true unity of the church.

Such a principle, being spiritual, will, indeed, be invisible by itself. But, by its very nature, as life, love, and holy activity, it will manifest itself outwardly by its appropriate works, and it will even produce an appropriate uniformity of fruits. But these will be of a kind congenial with its own holy and heavenly nature, namely, works of righteousness, acts of piety, deeds of benevolence. But let it be noticed that it is not in the formal worth but in the righteousness of them, not in the formal acts of piety but in the piety of them, not in the deeds of beneficence but in the benevolence of them, that we are to look for the appropriate actings and fruits of spiritual life in the soul and in the church. To suppose that uniformity in such outward things as church polity and forms of worship, ought to be produced by the one unifying principle of spiritual life, even as the vital principle in the plant or animal produces so wonderful a symmetry in their organism, is a palpable fallacy, and the fallacy arises from confounding things that differ in their nature, laws, and subjects. Indeed, things natural and things spiritual are just the poles apart.

If now, the unity of the church, the whole church on earth or any particular local church, be spiritual and not formal, then manifestly it is consistent with some diversity of outward forms, provided the true light and life of Christ in his church shines forth and acts in and by those forms. Whether all outward forms are alike congenial to the welfare of the church, is not now the point before us. But, even as the physical life of man is such that he can live in all regions and climes of the globe, and under all conditions and forms of society, although all are not alike congenial to his physical welfare, so the life and vital energies of the body of Christ, which is his church, is such, and so independent of outward forms and circumstances, that it can subsist, and act, and bring forth good fruit under many varieties

of external forms and circumstances. If, under any form of ecclesiastical polity, Christ be recognized as the King and Law-giver in Zion, and it be not an usurpation trampling on the liberties of the church and crushing out its very life under the heel of despotism; if the formal creed embodies substantially the saving doctrines of the Gospel, and sets not up another Saviour and another Gospel in which men cannot trust and be saved; if, under whatever formalities of worship, we discover "the true worshippers" worshipping the Father in spirit and in truth, and walking with God from day to day, do we not see the true unity of the church amid all the diversity? And if so, why may we not hold fellowship with such a church, in some way and to such an extent as Christian charity and wisdom may dictate?

Church unity has on its moral and practical side, church fellowship. As the spiritual bond in each local church unites all its members in one brotherhood of love, and mutual aid, and general coöperation in the service of Christ, the duties of which they are solemnly bound to fulfil; so the same bond, the same unifying principle, unites all the particular churches of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in one church universal, and imposes on them all the moral and inalienable duties of a similar fellowship of churches. This fellowship neither requires nor implies any such thing as an approval of any error or wrong in any church or in any Christian, but only that it is a Christian church, or he a Christian. Why, then, should these formal diversities ever separate very brethren in Christ, or perpetuate among "the true worshippers" the non-intercourse of the Jews and Samaritans of old, or ever set the tribes of Israel one against another? Why should they ever be permitted to obstruct the free course of the Gospel; why retard the growth, the expansion, and the more abundant fruitfulness of that goodly olive-tree, which is yet to overshadow the whole earth and to bless the nations with its healing leaves and its heavenly fruit?

Fifth. That form of church polity or worship is the best, in any given case and circumstances, which permits the spiritual life of the church, under God, to increase and to do good with the greatest freedom, purity, and power.

Here, as no ritual code has been left on record for the Christian church, like the Mosaic for the Jewish church, the question arises: Whether the forms and usages of the primitive churches are not the best in all cases and under all circumstances, and

whether, indeed, they are not of imperative obligation to be observed by the church of Christ to the end of time.

A full discussion of this question would lead to a digression too protracted for this Article. Let it suffice to say, that, if they had been so intended and were deemed indispensable for the well-being, not to say the very being of the church, they would doubtless have been set forth on the sacred record definitely as the ritual code of the Christian church. The silence of the record, under all the circumstances, seems to amount to positive proof of the contrary.

And when we consider that the Christian dispensation was intended for all nations to the end of time, for mankind in all degrees of civilization, in all grades of mental and moral culture, in every variety of social condition, under all forms and kinds of civil government, with these circumstances ever changing, we see that Christianity is fitted for its great mission in the world by this very freedom from prescribed, punctilious, rigid, and permanent forms. Judaism could never have become the religion of the whole earth.

To account, therefore, for the forms and usages of the primitive churches, it is deemed altogether more in accordance with the teaching of Christ and his apostles respecting forms and "bodily exercise" in religion (John 4: 24. 1 Tim. 4: 8), more in harmony with the free spirit of Christianity, and more consistent with the historical record interpreted, as it should be, by that teaching and that spirit, to say that the primitive churches under the guidance of the apostles, simply and spontaneously adopted the religious forms and usages to which they had been accustomed; taking so much as was consistent with the spirit and facts of the Gospel, and leaving or rejecting whatever was unsuitable for the new dispensation and peculiar to the old. Hence we find that the forms and usages of the synagogue were taken, and not those of the temple. Hence, also, Christ took the Lord's supper from the Jewish passover, and the rite of Christian baptism from the diverse baptisms of the old covenant, prescribing neither of them punctiliously, after the manner of Moses, but giving to both a simplicity and a significance truly Christian.

Yet the forms and usages of the primitive age are by no means to be underrated, they are still of great authority, as instructive examples on this whole subject; although there was enough left among them of the old leaven of Judaism and heathenism

to blur their example and to spoil it for a perfect model. Their example showing so clearly the subordination of the formal to the spiritual, together with the general teaching of the New Testament respecting things formal and things spiritual, and, above all, the permanent presence of the Spirit of all truth in his living temple, seem sufficient to guide us in the outward ordering of Zion in these latter days.

But, though forms and shadows are not the substance of true religion, these will have a reactionary influence, through human nature, for good or for ill, on the spiritual life and welfare of the church. Just as the forms of civil government grow out of the fundamental idea and inherent spirit of each; despotism naturally assuming its own congenial forms, constitutional monarchy its own, republicanism its own; and as these forms respectively serve to strengthen and perpetuate these different kinds of government, so is it with Christianity. If the existing outward forms and modes of its action are congenial to its holy and heavenly nature, they will have, under God who alone can impart, and give increase to the inner life of the church, an influence subservient to the enlargement and beneficent action of the vital energies of the church. But if they are not, but wholly or partially are embodiments of some worldly idea of aggrandizement and power; if they are adapted to seize upon and captivate the sensuous and the imaginative in man rather than to arouse his conscience and penetrate his moral affections; if they tend practically to eclipse Christ behind the cross, presenting the latter to be kissed with the lips instead of the former to be believed on for righteousness; if they substitute holy water for the washing of regeneration by the Spirit of God as the way of salvation from sin, then their forms and formalities, and all such like, will prove detrimental to the inner life of the church, or even destroy it altogether, and imperil the salvation of souls. It is true, if pure, spiritual Christianity could have its own way, in the matter of forms and usages, without hindrance or perversion from man, unquestionably it would assume for itself those forms most congenial to its own nature and best adapted to the circumstances of man. But it encounters more or less of the world even in the church; besides, the feebleness of man and the imperfections of the Christian must ever cleave to the administration of the church on earth. Hence, it is not to be supposed that all the forms in which Christianity has appeared in the world, are per-

fectly congenial to its holy and heavenly nature; perhaps no one is, or ever can be, though some doubtless are more so than others. The Bride, the Lamb's wife, will not appear all glorious within and without, till finally redeemed from earth she is presented by the Bridegroom before the Father's throne.

Meantime, it remains that her dress on earth should be as near as may be after the fashion of the heavenly. This, however, calls for no iconoclastic zeal demolishing existing forms, but rather for the cherishing of spiritual life in all the churches, and giving it free scope, world-wide, in the fellowship of the churches among themselves and in all enterprises of Christian benevolence. The inner life of the church, being fed from above, growing with the increase of God, acting freely, energetically, beneficently on earth, will naturally, though perhaps very gradually, appropriate from existing forms and modes, those which, under the circumstances, will be the best for it. And such as are not suitable or the best, it will tend to transform, or throw off in the best way, without violence to its own benign spirit and with no counterbalancing evil left behind.

Any further and direct argument for the proposition before us, seems hardly called for. That the best forms of church life and action are those which permit its inner life to increase and to do good with the greatest freedom, purity, and power, is what no one will gainsay who believes in such life at all. It is the great design of the church's existence to cherish that life and to perfect it in her members, and her great mission in the world is to open up channels whereby the stream that makes glad the city of our God, may flow forth to bless the nations. Those forms and ways and means, therefore, must be the best, which best subserve this great end and mission. To describe or to discuss them in the concrete, and from the outside, was not the purpose of this Article. They are to be seen now wherever the life, love, and holy activity of Christ's church are the most manifest. They will be seen, whatever they may be, when the church will arise and shine, her light having come and the glory of the Lord having risen upon her.