

## XXXVI.

**The Church of Christ.**

"It is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth."—*1 John v. 6.*

We now proceed to discuss the work of the Holy Spirit wrought in the Church of Christ.

Altho the Son of God has had a Church in the earth from the beginning, yet the Scripture distinguishes between its manifestation *before* and *after* Christ. As the acorn, planted in the ground, exists, altho it passes through the two periods of germinating and rooting, and of growing upward and forming trunk and branches, even so the Church. At first hidden in the soil of Israel, wrapped in the swaddling-clothes of its national existence, it was only on the day of Pentecost that it was manifested in the world.

Not that the Church was founded only on Pentecost; this would be a denial of the Old Covenant revelation, a falsification of the idea of Church, and an annihilation of God's election. We only say that on that day it became the *Church for the world.*

And in it the Holy Spirit has wrought a very comprehensive work.

Not its formation, however, for that is the work of the Triune God in the divine decree; or, speaking more definitely, of Jesus the King when He bought His people with His own blood.

Indeed, the Spirit of God regenerates the elect, whom He does not find in the world, but already in the Church. Every representation as tho the Holy Spirit gathers the elect out of a lost world, and so brings them into the Church, opposes the Scripture's representation of the Church as an organism. Christ's Church is a body, and as the members grow out of the body and are not added to it from without, so must the seed of the Church be looked for in the Church and not in the world. The Holy Spirit works that only which is already sanctified in Christ. Hence our form of Baptism reads: "Do you acknowledge that altho our children are conceived and born in sin, and therefore are subject to all miseries, yea to condemnation itself; yet that they are sanctified in Christ?"

However, since regeneration belongs to His work in the *individual*, and we are considering now His work in the Church *as a whole*, as a community, we direct our attention, in the first place, to His work of imparting spiritual gifts, particularly those called "*charismata.*" Some New Testament passages speak of gifts like those offered to God (*Matt. v. 23*): "If thou bring thy gift to the altar"; or gifts communicated to others (*2 Cor. viii. 9* and *Phil. iv. 17*) and the gift of salvation; but those we do not consider.

A gift offered to God is called in the Greek "*doron*"; imparted, to others, it is commonly called "*charis*"; while the gift of grace is usually called "*dorea.*" Hence these gifts are distinct from those that now occupy our attention. And this distinction appears strongest when we compare the gift of the *Holy Spirit* with *spiritual gifts.* The Holy Spirit Himself is a gift of

grace. But when He imparts *spiritual gifts* He adorns us with holy ornaments. The first refers to our *salvation*; the last to our *talents*.

Referring to our salvation, the Scripture calls it a free and gracious gift, generally "*dorea*" in the Greek, which, being derived from a root meaning *to give*, denotes that we were not entitled to it, having neither merited nor bought it, but that it is a *given good*. St. Paul exclaims: "Thanks unto God for His unspeakable gift," *i.e.*, of salvation (2 Cor. ix. 15). And again: "Much more the grace of God and the gift of grace, which is by one man Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many." "Much more they which receive abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ." (Rom. v. 15, 17). And lastly: "But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ." (Ephes. iv. 7).<sup>9</sup>

The same expression is used invariably for the imparting of the Holy Spirit: "Ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts ii. 38). And: "Because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts x. 45). Hence it should be carefully noticed that this has nothing to do with the subject under consideration. When St. Paul speaks of faith as the gift of God, he refers to our *salvation* and God's saving work in the soul. But the gifts of which we now speak are wholly different. They are not unto salvation, but to the glory of God. They are lent to us as ornaments, that we should show their beauty as talents to gain other talents therewith. They are *additional* operations of grace; which can not take the place of the proper work of the grace of salvation, nor confirm it, having an entirely different purpose. The work of grace is for our *own* salvation, joy, and upbuilding; the charismata are given us for *others*. The first implies that we have received the Holy Spirit; the latter that He imparts gifts unto us.

Properly speaking, the charismata are given to the *churches*, not to individual persons. When a ruler selects and trains men for officers in the army, it is evident that he does this not for their personal enjoyment, honor, and aggrandizement, but for the efficiency and honor of the army. He can search for men with talents for the military service, and train and instruct them; but he can not create such talents. If this were possible, every king would endow his generals with the genius of a Von Moltke, and every admiral would be a De Ruyter.

But Jesus is not thus limited. He is independent; unto Him all power is given in heaven and on earth. He can create talents, and freely impart them to whomsoever He will. Hence, knowing what the Church requires for its protection and upbuilding, He can fully supply all its need. His purpose is not merely to please or enrich individuals, much less to give to

9 It should be noticed that in Rom. v. 15, 16; vi. 23; xi. 29, the word "*charisma*" is found in the Greek text, referring to salvation. The reason is that these passages refer not to the graciousness of the gift, but to its scintillating brightness, in contrast with corruption and death. "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life."



some what He withholds from others; but with the persons thus endowed to adorn and favor *the whole Church*. We do not put a lamp upon the table to show it a special favor or because it is more excellent than chair or stove; but simply because thus it serves its purpose, and the whole room is lighted. To consider the charismata as intended merely to adorn and benefit the person endowed would be just as absurd as to say: "I light the fire to warm not the *room*, but the *stove*"; and to be jealous of the charismata given to others in the Church would be just as foolish as for the table to be jealous of the stove because it gets all the fire.

The charismata must therefore be considered in an economical sense. The Church is a large household with many wants; an institution to be made efficient by the means of many things. They are to the Church what light and fuel are to the household; not existing for themselves, but for the family, and to be laid aside when the days are long and warm. This applies directly to the charismata, many of which, given to the apostolic Church, are not of service to the Church of the present day.

These charismata have undoubtedly more or less an official character. God has instituted offices in the Church; not in a mechanical way, or depending upon robe or gown; such unspiritual conception is foreign to the Scripture. But as there is division of labor in the army or in the human body, so there is in the Church.

Take, *e.g.*, the body. It must be protected against injury; blood must be carried to muscles and nerves; venous blood must be converted into arterial; the lungs must inhale fresh air, etc. All these activities are laid upon the various members of the body. Eye and ear keep watch; the heart propels the blood; the lungs supply the oxygen, etc. And this can not be changed arbitrarily. The lungs can not watch; the eye can not supply oxygen; the skin can not propel the blood. Hence this division of labor is neither arbitrary, by mutual consent, nor, a matter of pleasure; but it is divinely ordained, and this ordinance must not be ignored. Hence the eye has the office and gift of watching over the body; the heart of circulating the blood; the lungs of supplying fresh air; etc.

And this applies to the Church in every respect. That great body requires the doing of many and various things for the common weal. There is need of guidance, of prophesying, of heroism; mercy must be exercised, the sick must be healed, etc. And this great mutual task the Lord has divided among many members. He has given to His body, the Church, eyes, ears, hands, and feet; and each of these organic members a peculiar task, calling, and office.

Hence to be called to an office simply means to be charged by Jesus, the King, with a definite task. You have done some work. Very well, but how? From impulse, or in obedience to the charge of your Sender? This makes all the difference. The King may send us in the ordinary or in an extraordinary way. Zacharias was a priest of the course of Abijah; but his son John was the herald of Christ by extraordinary revelation. The Levite served by right of succession; the prophet because he was chosen of God. But this makes no difference; called

in the one way or the other, the office remains the same, so long as we have the assurance that King Jesus has called and ordained us.

For this reason our fathers devoutly spoke of an *office of all believers*. In Christ's Church there are not merely a few officials and a mass of idle, unworthy subjects, but every believer has a calling, a task, a vital charge. And inasmuch as we are convinced that we perform the task because the King has laid it upon us not for ourselves, nor even from the motive of philanthropy, but to *serve the Church*, to this extent has our work an *official* character, altho the world denies us the honor. \_\_\_\_\_

## XXXVII.

**Spiritual Gifts.**

"But desire earnestly the greater gifts. And a still more excellent way show I unto you."  
—1 Cor. xii. 31 (R.V.).

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The charismata or spiritual gifts are the divinely ordained means and powers whereby the King enables His Church to perform its task on the earth.

The Church has a calling in the world. It is being violently attacked not only by the powers of this world, but much more by the invisible powers of Satan. No rest is allowed. Denying that Christ has conquered, Satan believes that the time left him may yet bring him victories. Hence his restless rage and fury, his incessant attacks upon the ordinances of the Church, his constant endeavor to divide and corrupt it, and his ever-repeated denial of the authority and kingship of Jesus in His Church. Altho he will never succeed entirely, he does succeed to some extent. The history of the Church in every country shows it; it proves that a satisfactory condition of the Church is highly exceptional and of short duration, and that for eight out of ten centuries its state is sad and deplorable, cause for shame and grief on the part of God's people.

And yet in all this warfare it has a calling to fulfill, an appointed task to accomplish. It may sometimes consist in being sifted like wheat, as in Job's case, to show that by virtue of Christ's prayer faith cannot be destroyed in its bosom. But whatever the form of the task, the Church always needs spiritual power to perform it; a power not in itself, but which the King must supply.

Every means afforded by the King for the doing of His work is a charisma, a gift of grace. Hence the internal connection between *work*, *office*, and *gift*.

Wherefore St. Paul says: "To each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit to profit withal," (1 Cor. xii. 7) *i.e.*, for the general good (δῆμιὸν ὅλον ἀποτόπον) (1 Cor. xii. 7). And, again, still more clearly: "Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel, to the *edifying of the Church*" (1 Cor. xiv. 12). Hence the petition, "Thy Kingdom come," which the Heidelberg Catechism interprets: "Rule us so by Thy Word and Spirit that we may submit ourselves more and more to Thee; preserve and increase Thy Church; destroy the works of the devil, and all violence which would exalt itself against Thee, and also all wicked counsels devised against Thy Holy Word, till the full perfection of the Kingdom takes place, wherein Thou shall be all in all."

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It is wrong, therefore, to consider the life of individual believers too much by itself, separating it from the life of the Church. They exist not but in connection with the body, and thus they become partakers of the spiritual gifts. In this sense the Heidelberg Catechism confesses the communion of saints: "First, that all and every one who believes, being members of Christ, are in common partakers of Him and of all His riches and gifts; secondly, that