

XXX.

Organically One.

“From whom the whole body, fitly joined together and compacted, maketh increase unto the edifying of itself in love.” — *Ephes. iv. 16.*



The *newness* of holy Love lies *in the Church*. As we look at the withered state of the Church in almost every period, we almost hesitate to make this statement; yet in principle we maintain it to its fullest extent and power.

The Church of Christ on earth is like an “incline.” The “incli” were honorable men and women who in the Middle Ages immured themselves in little cells of stone, built under the street, just high enough to allow a man to stand erect. After the incline had descended into his cell, it was closed over him with a grating, and thus he spent his lonely, comfortless life in voluntary isolation. Passers-by could see but little of him. Through the grating the faint outline of a dark form was dimly visible; but it did not seem to possess the least attraction; did not once suggest what manly and noble stature might be concealed in that cell; much less what extraordinary power might be embodied in that incline, and what hours and days were spent in inward conflict. And such is the image of the Church of Christ on earth. It is enclosed and can not reveal itself. Of its real form only a faint outline appears, almost always unfavorable and unprepossessing. Unless its spiritual wealth and nobility are discovered in some other way, no one will surmise that this is the Church which shall one day decide the destiny of heaven and earth.

Still this is the fact. The Father loves the Son. The body of the Son is the Church. Hence no one can be saved but he who is incorporated into His body the Church.

Surely it requires a great stretch of the imagination to believe that this muddy shell of the visible Church contains such a precious pearl; but the initiated believe it. They know that in this respect the Church resembles its glorious Head, in the days of His flesh; of whom it was said: “When we shall see Him there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected of men; we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised and we esteemed Him not.” (*Isa. liii. 3*) And when Herod’s soldiers mocked and shamefully entreated Him, when stripped and dying He moaned upon the cross, “I thirst,” no one but those who looked beneath the surface could surmise that this man was the Lord of Glory. And yet so He proved to be. “He received beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.” (*Isa. lxi. 3*) And so it may be said of the Church while an earth. When we see her, there is no beauty that we should desire her; she is despised and rejected. Every one is, as it were, hiding his face from her. Still, she is the Lamb’s Bride-elect; and the holy Church, which without spot or wrinkle shall one day be presented to the heavenly Bridegroom, is concealed within her. And therefore holy Love must celebrate its triumph in the Church.



The *newness* of the commandment, “Love one another,” consists in the fact that, being freed from the bonds of the Jewish national character, love can effectually operate in the Church. And tho it be objected a thousand times that love is nowhere a greater stranger than in the Church, and that rather strife and division, backbiting and devouring one another, always have seemed to be the order of the day, yet this lamentable fact does not alter the foregoing positive statement.

It should be remembered, in the *first* place, that strife and division assume the fiercest aspect among those that are most closely related; between brothers and sisters they are more serious than between strangers. Cain and Abel were too intimately connected. This is why differences between husband and wife leave such deep and painful impressions. Their mutual love can not treat the matter lightly. It is the very intimacy of the relation that gives the difference such a serious character.

Secondly, we should not forget that even in the Church strife and division make the loudest noise, while love unseen quietly pursues its way. Among the initiated in the Church there ever has been a communion of soul which has nowhere its equal—an attachment and opening of hearts impossible but in the Christian life; a brotherly love so sweet as to surpass every other love.

And *finally*, for the present time these discords must continue, that in the last day the beauty and symmetry of the structure may appear to highest advantage. During the construction of a palace one looks in vain for symmetry; the eye meets but disproportions and jarring contrasts. It can not be otherwise. Confusion there must be until the work is completed. Then the pure and perfect symmetry of the whole will be seen and admired. To call for it during the time of the building would make the final beauty impossible. It would be no profit, but loss. It would spoil the work. Perfect agreement of the parts, finished and unfinished, is out of the question so long as the whole work is not completed. Until then perfect harmony is a matter of faith, not of sight. This is why the saint can say, not, I see, but, “I believe in, the Holy, Catholic, Christian Church.”

This is caused by another separating element in the Church antagonizing love, viz., *the truth*. This is evident from the apostolic word warning us against sentimental love, saying: “That we be no more children, but, *doing the truth* (Dutch Translation) in love, we grow up in all things unto Him who is the Head, even Christ” ([Ephes. iv. 15](#)).

What are we to understand by truth opposing love? Are not both from the same source? Love is union; it joins and binds together severed parts that belong together. And this may be done in two ways. The easiest way to match two non-fitting cogwheels is to *remove* the teeth; then their faces will cover each other. A much more difficult way *is to file each tooth to the required size*. Let us apply this to love. To make the wheels fit each other by removing the teeth is undoubtedly a work of love; for now the wheels are perfectly matched,



they seem to be of one piece. But the truth is lost; the wheels are no longer cogwheels. The teeth which made them so are missing. It is true, to fit them by filing each tooth to the right size requires inexhaustible patience, but it retains the truth; the wheels remain cogwheels; even the love, which is the matching of the wheels, comes slowly, *i.e.*, not until the last tooth is filed to its proper size.

The love which ought to reign among God's people is not the excitement of a dreamy, mystic feeling, destroying individuality; but such uniting and knitting together of the elect that each can attain the full measure of his individual growth ordained for him in the divine counsel; so that in this completion the glory of their membership in the same body may appear and be tasted in the blessed consciousness of the most tender and intimate union.

This is contained in [Ephes. iv. 16](#): "From which the whole body fitly framed together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." In the first place, the apostle does full justice to the divine ordinance and honors the divine disposition in the "joining together" and "Compacting" and "joints of supply"; and then, by this clearly defined path, he returns with the words, "To the edifying of itself in love," to the deep mystery of this holy intimacy.

It is easy to cultivate love without regarding the truth. It requires neither conflict nor exertion. We simply file down every rough place and rub away every wrinkle; and at last nothing remains to oppose love. But in that way the Lord's disposition is simply set aside, His ordinance made of no effect, and His truth stumbles in the street. But if you acknowledge the truth and the divine counsel and disposition; if you do not cavil at the divine ordinance and arrangement; if you do not plane, file, and level, but seek the union of spirits in such a way that together they form a whole, so that the teeth of the wheels always clasp each other—then the cultivation of love meets many more obstacles and requires infinitely more care and labor. But finally it will be crowned with the glorious success of obtaining love without *sacrificing divine truth*.

Or to express it more comprehensively: God Himself is the greatest obstacle in the way of that quickly grown and immature love. If God did not exist, two seriously minded men could be made to agree much more easily. Then they would be at liberty to dispose and arrange matters to suit themselves, according to their *own choice*. But God exists; hence the disposition of things must be according to His *choice*. In the covenant of love between two persons He is always the Third, and claims that He and His name be not sacrificed to their mutual love. Hence all the conflict, difficulty; and vexation of spirit. Among God's people love in whatever form is ever subject to the first and greatest commandment: God first and



last. This is why it is not lawful to cherish and cultivate an affection which excludes His love. In their mutual affection they may not ignore God; act as tho God did not exist; be indifferent to His name and truth as tho they were of little account and their mutual love the principal thing.

Nay, the wisdom which is from above is first *pure*, then peaceable. Mutual love among the saints can not flourish unless the saint acknowledge God, confess His name, exalt His truth as their shield and buckler; praise His virtues and reverence His counsel, especially regarding their own person and destiny. Christian love, new and unfailling, born here to live forever; can scintillate only where the name of the Lord shines forth in His truth, where that truth, bearing and animating souls, is experienced and confessed. And this exists, not in sentimentalism, wheedling tones, or sinful indulgence, but in being united and knit together by the Holy Spirit according to the divine foreordination.

At this point the work of the Holy Spirit returns to the eternal counsel of the Lord Jehovah. From that counsel it flows; in that counsel every life has its starting-point, and to that counsel every completed development must return, impelled from its own internal pressure. Every development, tho adorning itself with fairest names, which opposes that counsel, proceeds in a wrong direction, and must change its course or run into eternal death. That which is to receive consistency, endurance, and eternal, inexhaustible fulness must spring from that counsel, and in the end, with reference to itself, correctly reflect its fulness.

And since in that counsel the parts do not lie loose, side by side, but are destined to form one rich, spiritual whole, it is the Holy Spirit who, by fitly joining together these parts—*i.e.*, the elect children of God—unites and knits them together according to that counsel. Only when this is accomplished, love's perfect beauty shall appear. Then the Church of Christ shall shine as the bearer of that love in the presence of the Lord. And then only the Holy Spirit, even the Spirit of *Truth*, shall have finished His greatest work—that of the *cultivation of Love*.



XXXI.

The Hardening Operation of Love.

“Being grieved for the hardness of their heart.” — *Mark iii. 5.*

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Love may also be reversed. Failing to cherish, to uplift, and to enrich, it *consumes* and *destroys*. This is a mystery which man can not fathom. It belongs to the unsearchable depths of the divine Being, of which we do not wish to know more than has been revealed. But this does not alter the fact.

No creature can exclude itself from the divine control. No man can say that he has nothing to do with God; that he or any other creature exists independent of God; for God upholds, bears, and carries him from moment to moment, giving him life and power and all his faculties. Even Satan is not self-existing. If it pleased God to discontinue his existence, he would cease from being. Satan and all his demons and all flesh live and move and have their being in God. This apostolic word does not signify an intimate, acquaintance with the secret of the Lord, but is merely the clear and sober statement of every creature's essential relation to the Creator. Whether sinner or saint, angel in heaven or demon in hell, even plant or animal, each lives, moves, and exists in God.

Hence to withdraw oneself from God is utterly impossible. *Psalm cxxxix.* is not merely a sketch of the divine omnipresence, but much more; in holy sense, a testimony and confession from the very root of man's being, of the creature's absolute inability to withdraw himself from God's active control. The misery of the lost in hell consists in the fact that in their unholy and wicked hearts they are subject to the active, divine control. The cry which once escaped from moaning lips, “*Let me alone* before I go hence” (*Job xx. 21*), is the presentment of the unavoidable control of God, which overwhelms the ungodly as a calamitous flood. If God would let them alone, there would be no hell and no misery. The unquenchable fire would be quenched, and the worm would die. But He does *not* let them alone. He continues His hold upon them. And this causes the eternal pain, and overwhelms them with destruction and condemnation forever.

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It is represented sometimes as tho God's *material* dealings were to be continued with every man, whether good or evil, while His *spiritual* dealings are confined to the elect. But this is a mistake. It is true His sun rises upon the good and the evil, and His rain comes down upon the just and the unjust; but the same is true spiritually: There is this difference, however, that while the just and the unjust are both profited by the rain and sunshine, the radiation of the Sun of Righteousness and the rain of grace result in blessing for the elect and in destruction for the lost.

This is clearly illustrated by the effects of the rays of the sun in nature. In March they melt the snow and warm and fertilize the soil, while in August they harden the field and scorch its fruit. This is caused by the field's too close proximity to the sun in summer, while