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4139. f. 26.

A SERIOUS ADDRESS TO CHRISTIANS ON THE  
CONSECRATION OF AN EDIFICE CALLED A  
CHURCH.



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Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make  
you free."—John viii, 32.

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It would be very easy, christian friends, to turn into ridicule the ceremony of the consecration of a church; and to show by many arguments that it is a very frivolous superstition, which cannot produce any beneficial effect, though it may excite the merriment of spectators; in one word, that it is a *solemn absurdity*; but I have no desire to make you smile at this popish rite: I address serious christians only: and for such I take advantage of the occasion offered, to press a few remarks which I hope may not be wholly thrown away.

We are told that a great prelate is to "consecrate a new church" on a certain day, and that several of the clergy are to attend at the ceremony. What, then, we ask, is a *church*, as understood by a christian? for this is of course a point that must first be examined in order that we may comprehend the subject.

When we talk of "consecrating a church," we mean, of course, that a certain building, of brick or stone, is to be opened with clerical pomp, and that the archbishop or bishop is, with prayers and benedictions, and various rites, to endeavour to make the building more holy than the usual habitations of man. This is the *popish* meaning we attach to the idea of "consecrating a church;" but in the New Testament there is not one single passage any where to be found in which the "church" appears as meaning "a building of brick or stone." We find indeed the word "church" or "churches" occurring in the New Testament more than a hundred times, but not once has it the meaning of "a building made by man."

The general meaning of "church" in the New Testament is, a religious assembly selected and called out of the world, by the doctrine of the gospel, to worship the true God in Christ according to His word. In this sense it



occurs very often—"Paul . . . to the church of God which is at Corinth" (1 Cor. i, 2). "To the churches which are in Asia" (Rev. i, 11). "At that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem" (Acts viii, 1), &c. &c.

Sometimes it means all the elect saints of God, of what nation soever, from the beginning to the end of the world, who make one body, whereof Jesus Christ is head: "He is the head of the body, the church" (Col. i, 18). "Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church" (Eph. v, 25—27). "I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee" (Heb. ii, 12).

It also means the faithful in Christ Jesus belonging to some one family—"Salute . . . . Nymphas, and the church which is in his house" (Col. iv, 15). "Greet Priscilla and Aquila . . . . likewise the church that is in their house" (Rom. xvi, 3, 5).

Again, it is to be understood sometimes as indicating the faithful generally, then living on earth: "The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts ii, 47). "I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it" (Gal. i, 13).

One passage there is in the Acts of the Apostles where "churches" *seem* to mean buildings, but it is entirely owing to the management of our English translators: "Ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess" (Acts xix, 37). In the original the word translated "robbers of churches" means "robbers of temples"—i. e. the temples of the heathen gods and goddesses. The translators, it may be surmised, had their reasons for introducing the word "churches" in this sense, when the text would not allow them; it scarcely admits of doubt that in some other passages relating to "bishops," "deacons," "ministers," they have, not unintentionally, disguised the true meaning of the Greek.

Thus it is established, that no where in the New Testament is the word "church" to be found in the sense of a building; and this is a very serious consideration, because if this be so we may be quite sure that in the days of the Apostles they never consecrated "churches." But it will be asked, Where then did the disciples of Jesus meet? they met in large upper rooms (Mark xiv, 15); and in upper chambers (Acts i, 13), they collected to break bread together, that is, to "celebrate the Lord's supper," as it is

called, on the first day of the week (Acts xx, 7). But they had no churches, nor indeed had they any clergymen or "bishops" as we have in these days. "Bishops" or overseers they had, but not in any respect resembling our Diocesan bishops; *clergymen* they knew nothing of. The word *clergyman* cannot be found in the New Testament.

Now in the English language the word "church" has several meanings, and much confusion is thereby created in the minds of many persons, who do not take the trouble to examine these questions, but attach ideas to words without inquiring into the origin of those ideas, or suspecting the very serious mistakes into which they are led by a faulty mode of speaking. The most ordinary use of the word "church" amongst us gives to it the meaning of a building: "the parish church," "consecrating a church," "building a church," "repairing a church," "a church rate," "church-wardens," "church steeple," &c.; all these expressions relate to a building.

It is also common to understand by "the church" the clerical body, the clergymen, the bishops, the ecclesiastical rulers; as we talk of "the wealth of the church," "the power of the church," "the doctrine of the church," "the intolerance of the church," &c. &c.

This is by far the most mischievous abuse of the word, for as there is no mention of clergymen at all in the New Testament, and as "the church" always in some sense or other means in Scripture either the whole body of the saints, or a portion of that body, it is a perversion of Scripture doctrine, most dangerous in its consequences, to take a name set apart exclusively in the Scriptures for the Saints of God, and apply it to a body of men who are not allowed any existence by the Scriptures. The enormities of the church of Rome will generally be found to have struck their roots firmly and deeply in the *clerical* meaning of the word "church."

We also occasionally, though seldom in comparison, speak of "the church" in the Scripture sense, as in one of the thirty-nine articles—"the visible church of Christ, is a congregation of faithful men," &c.

Not only, however, does the word "church" never appear in the New Testament in the sense of a building, but in that sense it is never once to be found in the whole Bible. Before our Lord came upon earth the great national edifice of the Jews was **THE TEMPLE**, a most superb and costly building, to which all the tribes of the Jewish Nation brought their offerings in the great religious festivals of the Mosaic law. There was but one temple amongst

the children of Israel, for though they had several large cities, the law of Moses did not allow any temple for the worship of God, except on that holy hill which the Almighty had Himself selected. Jerusalem was considered the throne of the great King; there was one Lord, and His name and worship one (Deut. xii, 13, 14; Ps. lxxxvii, 2).

When our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, had fulfilled the law, and by His death and resurrection and ascension into heaven had made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness, all the outward forms, orders, rites, figures, and shadows of the law of Moses were abolished. "It is finished" was a sentence that rent the veil of the holy place asunder, and abolished the temple worship, and all things pertaining to it. The priests of the Mosaic institutions were then virtually disbanded, and all things hitherto acted in types in the law, became substantial and eternal realities *for the church*, in the person and offices of the divine Mediator at the right hand of God.

Christ became then the only Priest (in the strict sense of the word); He is the great High Priest of the church, *and all believers*, in a secondary and spiritual sense, become priests in Him (1 Pet ii, 5 and 9). The altar now disappears; the divine nature of Christ, in union with our human nature, is that substantial thing on which the sins of the church are laid; this is it which bore the wrath of God, and was not consumed when the curse due to our sins was laid on the sinless person of Jesus; it bore all that which we could not bear, and therefore on the suffering Son of God believers lay their sins for atonement; even as under the law they placed burnt offerings on the great brazen altar, and received an atonement in the life-blood of the slaughtered victim. The temple itself is now not to be sought for in buildings made by hands, but in the mystical body of Christ—for it is a resurrection-temple, as He Himself declared: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up . . . he spake of the temple of his body" (John ii, 19, 21); and this, christian friends, is that Holy Church which is consecrated by the glorious inhabitation of the Holy Ghost; for in the most blessed mystery of our faith the risen Saviour is one body with all the Saints; the Saints and Christ united are that body, and when in union, they become the Holy Temple of the Christian Religion.

We are not, in inquiring about the true church, to separate Christ from the saints; Christ alone is not the temple, nor are the Saints alone the temple, but the Saints united to Christ, through a justifying faith imparted by the Holy

Spirit, are the mystical body and the temple. "As the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ" (1 Cor. xii, 12). The "church is *his body*, the fullness of him that filleth all in all" (Eph. i, 22, 23). "We being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another" (Rom. xii, 5). "Jesus Christ . . . . in whom all the building fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: *in whom* ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph. ii, 21, 22). "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (1 Cor. iii, 16).

The justified christian will fully understand these precious truths, which to a carnal mind may sound unintelligible; for though it may appear strange in ordinary language, to talk of union with, and incorporation in, the risen Son of God, yet this is the high position of the saints, to be reputed dead in the death of Christ, and raised up in His resurrection (see Rom. vi, 4, 5; Col. ii, 12); and on no lower ground do christians enter into communion with God—they "sit in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. ii, 6); and thus, as united to the upraised Son of God, they become the temple which He raised up again in three days.

Such, then, is the Church of God, the only "church" acknowledged in Scripture! Is it not, then, a pitiable descent from the bright and glorious elevation of the gospel heavens, thus to come back again to dead bricks, and stones, and dead mortar, and dead wood and plaster, and to call these things "a Church of God," and to reckon that a poor human priest can make these things holy by any rites he can perform; and that when he shall have duly gone through his ceremonies that the dead building will become a holy place, to be approached with reverence, as if it were a mimic temple of Jerusalem, which we know has been ruined by the "IT IS FINISHED" of the dying Son of God? Oh, christian friends! it is sad to see any who call themselves the Lord's people, countenancing these abolished Judaisms, and thus virtually thrusting aside the gospel. "The church" of which the apostle Peter spoke, was not made of dead stones and timber, for, says he, "ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. ii, 5). There was *life* in the stones of the church with which he was acquainted—"the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" had made

them "free from the law of sin and death;" and in the power of this life, they became living stones of the great resurrection-church of the living and true God.

If, then, we find that there was no dead church known in the New Testament, and if we see that there were living churches in the houses of Nymphas, and Aquila and Priscilla, and of others, then are we as fully warranted in saying, that if in the neighbourhood of this dead "church" which they are going to "consecrate," there should perchance be a house of some poor man (it may be), in which house the family knows God in Christ, and worships God in spirit and in truth, then in that house there will be a living Church of the true God, whilst this expensive and comely building, which they call "a church" is no church at all; it is an edifice for ceremonies—or any thing else you may choose to call it—but church or temple it is not—at least not to christians; and it is only to christians that I address these remarks.

In this new "church" there is an altar, and an altar of course there must be where there are priests; but the very existence of priest and altar must be taken as an apparent disbelief of the gospel. Ask yourselves, For what purpose can you want priests and altars, if you believe in the finished work of Jesus Christ? Priests are persons appointed to make reconciliation for sin, or effect atonement, to procure pardon; altars are for sacrifices, and for the reconciliation-work of priests. Do you, as christians, believe that your sins are wholly and absolutely forgiven for Jesus Christ's sake? If they are not, you are not a christian; the forgiveness of sins, and peace with God, through justification by faith, are the entrance into the Church of God; if you are not justified by faith, if you are not righteous in the righteousness of Christ, who was delivered for our sins and raised up again for our justification,—if you do not rejoice in His atonement, and have not received of His Spirit, you are not a christian (Rom. viii, 9). But if you are a christian, and being justified and righteous by faith, have peace with God, what further benefit can you expect from a dead altar and a human priest, who, if he be a christian, stands precisely in the same grace as yourself? What can that useless official do for you? Is he, as a christian, to pray for you? Very well; but then you are a christian, and you can pray for him. He is not at all nearer to God than yourself; if you know anything of your privileges as a child of God, you are yourself a spiritual priest, and you have (or ought to have) "boldness to enter into the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new

and living way which He has consecrated" for you; and you ought "to draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith" (Heb. x, 19). How much nearer than "near" can the priest draw nigh to God—that human priest, I mean, who is to officiate at a dead altar of stone or wood? If your place is in "*the holiest of all*," by the blood of Jesus, you are where Aaron could appear only once in a twelvemonth. You are there because you are a member of the mystical body of Christ; why then be so blinded with Jewish and Popish darkness as to worship now through the medium of "priests" and "altars"?

You will find, that the tenth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews is written for this express object, of shewing that Christ's atonement was complete—that He having done a perfect work *once*, never repeats it again—that if it were imperfect there would be priests on earth to carry on reconciliation—that the priests under the law, as they never could make the worshippers "perfect," were continually making new sacrifices; but Jesus Christ, having done a perfect work "has by one offering perfected for ever them that are sanctified;" and that in this perfection God does not *remember any more* (verse 17) the sins of those whom He pardons. The moment, then, I admit the office of a priest upon earth, as distinguished from other christians, it is obvious that I virtually disbelieve the gospel; when I go to human priests and altars, I do not trust in Christ's finished work—in other words, I do not believe the grace of God in Christ Jesus our Lord; and this is most certainly the position of those who worship according to the forms of the prayer-book in "churches."

This is quite plain; for—1. The prayer-book introduces official human "priests," and therefore has not confidence in the one sacrifice of the Son of God; priests it has, because it divides "the clergy" into three orders—bishop, priest, and deacon; and gives "the priest" the power of pardoning sin. When "a clergyman" takes priests' orders, the bishop, laying his hands on the head of the clergyman, says to him, "Receive the Holy Ghost *for the office and work of a priest*, in the church of God, now committed unto thee by the imposition of our hands. Whose sins thou dost forgive they are forgiven; and whose sins thou dost retain they are retained." Here then they have priests in the church of England, as they have in the Popish communion, though it is most clear that an official human priest is utterly unknown in the Church of God, as we find it in the New Testament. But more than this, "the priest" not only receives his sacerdotal "office and work," but he

also forgives sin; for in the form for "the visitation of the sick," in the prayer-book, the priest is directed to say these words, "I absolve thee from all thy sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." So that the priest has not his "work and office" for nothing; he is to do that which God in Christ alone can do; he is, by the prayer-book, supposed to have such power that he can remit iniquity, transgression and sin.

2. The finished work of Christ is not credited by those who worship according to the prayer-book; for not only have they official priests upon earth, which they would not have if they believed in "the one offering which hath for ever perfected them that are sanctified," but their forms of religious worship never admit justification by faith, nor allow "the comers thereunto to be perfect" (Heb. x, 1). All the offices of the prayer-book, though composed with much pathos and beauty of language, utter the sentiments of persons who are ignorant of the peace procured through the blood of Christ. "Remember not, Lord, our offences, nor the offences of our forefathers; *neither take thou vengeance of our sins*; spare us, good Lord, spare thy people, whom thou hast redeemed with thy precious blood, *and be not angry with us for ever.*" To put such words as these in the mouths of the redeemed people is shocking mockery; for if they are redeemed, their sins are forgiven, and God is not angry with them, and vengeance is passed away, and peace, pardon, reconciliation, and love, now reign in the heart of the justified children; so that to make them cry out thus for mercy is in fact to make them disbelieve the gospel. And this is apparently the object of the prayer-book, *to prevent believers from seeing their privileges, to keep them in the rank of unpardoned penitents, and to set a barrier between them and the glory of the new covenant!* If we inquire into the reason of this unhappy scheme, I believe it to be this, that as the compilers of the prayer-book had to make a form of worship for the *nation*, and as the religion they had to chalk out was not for the saints, but for whole parishes, they felt themselves obliged to adapt the language of the prayer-book for such persons as they foresaw the majority of the worshippers would be—for the ungodly and profane, for evil livers, for the careless, the indifferent, the licentious, and the unconverted,—and that they hoped, as they could not speak for the saints, at least to do good to sinners. Hence it is that in the office of "the communion" (not, alas! the communion of saints), they make the communicants utter the sentiments of miserable penitents, and not of justified children of God—"We do

earnestly repent, and are heartily sorry for our misdoings; the remembrance of them is grievous upon us; the burthen of them is intolerable. Have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us!" And this is, indeed, the prevailing sentiment of the prayer-book throughout: that the worshippers are "tied and bound by the chain of their sins"—that "there is no health in them"—and that the chief object of their hopes is to obtain "true repentance," which is, in fact, to confess that they are not christians.

But now mark how the "communion service" of the Establishment is something else than the communion of saints. The bread and wine represent in the Lord's Supper the body and the blood of the divine Redeemer, and our Lord Himself said, when instituting the Eucharistic supper, "This cup is the New Testament [covenant] in my blood, which is shed for you" (Luke xxii, 20). What, then, is the meaning of the New Testament, or covenant? We see it explained in Heb. viii,—“I will make a new covenant . . . . and this is the covenant I will make . . . . I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more;” and again (chap. x), “Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is there is no more offering for sin.” The new covenant, therefore, is a full remission of sins through the grace of God in Christ Jesus our Lord; christians are in this covenant, and in none other; if they meet together to observe the Lord's Supper, it is to acknowledge the salvation and remission of sins they have already received, and on that foundation to seek for further grace. To come, then, to the Lord's Supper, crying out as a miserable, unpardoned, unjustified, sinner, is not to come in the faith of the new covenant, but in the darkness of the old, “which made nothing perfect” (Heb. vii, 10); from which we conclude that the worshippers of the Establishment are, according to the prayer-book, either Jews or Heathens; for as they do not acknowledge the new covenant how can they be christians?

But these remarks are meant to bear on this point, that if they have priests and altars, and if they do not meet to worship God as saints, of course they cannot understand the meaning of the true “church,” neither can they believe in the mystical temple, which, though destroyed, was raised up again in three days. Hence it is nothing wonderful that they should return to Judaisms, and endeavour to make dead “churches” holy places, and to “consecrate” dead stones and dead graveyards; for if their communion consists mainly of the unconverted world, which of course



knows nothing of justification of life (Rom. v, 18), it is quite natural that they should substitute *something* for the spiritual life of the Church of God. Hence, instead of the living stones of the temple, they have squared stones out of a quarry; instead of the beauty of the imputed righteousness of the Son of God, they give us gothic architecture and chiselled altars; instead of the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, the consecration of a bishop; instead of joy and peace in believing, the poetical but deplorable confessions of the prayer-book. This is their "church;" and this is the thing which they "consecrate."

I anticipate, however, christian friends, that some of you may object that you are accustomed to consider "the altar" a table, and that you do not even think of priests or sacrifices when you go to the table. That may be; but still, in the full sense of the word, you have priests, as the prayer-book asserts; and the bishops themselves declare, that they make offerings on the altar. The present Bishop of Exeter, in a charge, delivered in the year 1836, thus explained this subject:—"The church is a visible body in the appointed means of sustaining the new life, especially in that most sacred and sublime mystery of our religion, the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, the *commemorative sacrifice of the body and blood of Christ*, by which the action and suffering of our great High Priest are represented and *offered to God on earth*, as they are continually by the same High Priest in heaven." Bishops Sharp, Wilson, Horsley, Jolly, Archbishop Lawrence, and divers others, speak the same language; and, indeed, as the prayer-book does not acknowledge justification by faith for the worshippers, of course the clergy must have the "office and work of a priest" to perform, in making offerings, and procuring reconciliation, or the hopes of it, as well as they can. The prayer-book "makes nothing perfect," though "the bringing in of a better hope does, by the which we draw nigh unto God" (Heb. vii, 19)

Surely, then, christian friends, if you wish to manifest that you are indeed christians, it must be your duty practically to acknowledge these truths, and not to trifle with the gospel by countenancing dead "churches," dead holy places, dead altars, human priests, imperfect, and therefore continually-repeated atonements, false doctrine, and the communion of saints with the world that lieth in wickedness. Holy places, and all these beggarly elements may do well enough for a system of parishes, because the unconverted and carnal man always has an appetite for superstition, and a natural aversion to spiritual worship; but you

can have no excuse in taking any share in these "traditions of men, which are after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ;" because "ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power" (Col. ii, 8, 10); and if the Son hath made you free, you ought to be free indeed (John viii, 36); for the knowledge of the truth is meant to emancipate you from these sad delusions of Popery, that you may, with an enlightened understanding and purified affections, "worship God in spirit and in truth."

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## PRINCIPLES.

1. A Church, in Scripture language, never means a consecrated building.

2. The saints of the apostolical day had no "churches," "altars," or "priests;" they had no consecrated buildings of any sort.

3. The christian, according to the revelation of truth in the New Testament, is born again of the Holy Ghost, is under the new covenant, is justified before God, accepted in Christ Jesus, and fully absolved from both the guilt and defilement of his sins.

4. A christian, according to the New Testament, whether man or woman, is a priest, and has close access to God, even into the holiest of all, by the blood of Jesus.

5. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ our Lord is complete, it was *once* offered for the sins of many. It is a presumptuous falsehood for a priest upon earth, to pretend that he can repeat, either really or figuratively, that sacrifice.

6. The saints are kept in a pardoned state through the intercession of the great High Priest in Heaven. Jesus Christ, the righteous, ever appears as a High Priest in the presence of God for the household of faith.

7. The church of God is the whole body of faithful believers; this is the temple in which the Holy Ghost dwells, imparting life and sanctification to the mystical body of Christ.

8. A dead "church," of stones, bricks, or timber, cannot be consecrated or made holy.

9. A dead "church," after it has been consecrated, is no more holy than a stable, cow-house, or brewery.

10. An altar in a church is not a holy thing; it is no more deserving of the respect or reverence of christians than a shop's counter or a kitchen-dresser.

11. The word "clergyman" cannot be found in the New Testament.

12. The body of christians was not in the apostles' day divided into clergy and laity.

13. There were several bishops in the church at Philippi, that is, several bishops in one town (see Phil. i, 1); therefore the "bishops" of the New Testament did not at all resemble diocesan bishops.

14. A bishop, in the New Testament, is an "overseer" or "elder;" there was more than one bishop, overseer, or elder, in the apostolical churches.

15. A bishop or priest cannot absolve from sin.

16. The christians of the apostles' day used to "break bread" every Lord's day. "The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper," as it is called by priests, and as it is administered by priests at altars, to people kneeling, is not according to the New Testament.

17. The word "Sacrament" cannot be found in the Bible.

18. The title "reverend" given to priests is a scandal. The name of God alone is "reverend" (Ps. cxi, 9).

19. The New Testament never mentions rector, vicar, curate, parson, incumbent, archbishop, archdeacon, dean, subdean, rural dean, prebendary, canon residentiary, or doctor of divinity. All these titles and offices are inventions of man, and are not deserving the respect of christians. Some of these titles and offices are derived originally from the superstitions of the Persians, Brahmans, Druids, and Mahometans.

20. "It is the undoubted duty of a christian, as a disciple and follower of Jesus, who was despised and rejected of men, to separate from any known evil or untruth in the worship of God, as revealed to the saints in the gospel."

21. The christian who, by grace, has been made a portion of the living temple, is by the very grace called on and commanded to separate from known evil. "What agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore, come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you" (2 Cor. vi, 16, 17).

## 8 NO 61





















