

The Implications of Public Confession

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THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF HOLY BAPTISM AND THE HOLY SUPPER

"Live; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast
in thy blood, Live" (Ezek. 16:6).

BAPTISM is not complete without its complement, the holy supper. When an infant is born into the world, the nurse who is in attendance washes it, because it is born unclean. It needs bathing, but that is not all it needs. It also needs food. Hence, it is most likely that the same maid who washed it will also bear the infant to its mother's breast. And an atmosphere of peace and contentment pervades the nursery room only after the child is feeding at its mother's bosom. In fact, we would not hesitate to censure the attitude of a nurse who supposed she had absolved herself of responsibility by bathing the child, and cared not at all whether or not it was given an opportunity to be nursed. Such conduct on her part, we feel, would be sufficient reason to dismiss her.

This figure illustrates the significant relationship which obtains between the sacrament of baptism and that of the holy supper. We may not suppose that baptism alone is sufficient, may not desire the sacrament of purification and neglect that of nourishment. To desire bap-

tism and to ignore the holy supper is to rob each of its significance.

It becomes us to remember that we were once like the child the Holy Spirit depicts to us in Ezekiel 16, like the child of which we read in verses 4 to 6: "As for thy nativity, in the day thou wast born thy navel was not cut, neither wast thou washed in water to supple thee; thou wast not salted at all, nor swaddled at all. None eye pitied thee, to do any of these unto thee, to have compassion upon thee; but thou wast cast out in the open field, to the loathing of thy person, in the day that thou wast born. And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live."

This passage tells us that we were conceived in sin and born in iniquity, that because we were born of unclean parents, we also were unclean. It tells us that before our baptism we needed spiritual cleansing within, that we needed to be purged by the blood of Christ. Baptism, indeed, was the external symbol of that purification of the soul by the holy Lamb of God. It is that the holy apostle confirmed by the words: "Once ye were unclean, but now ye are sanctified, now ye are justified, now ye are washed."

Our Church also confesses that such is the significance of baptism. In the 35th Article of her Confession we read: "Those who are regenerated have in them a twofold life, the one corporal and temporal, which they have from the first birth, and is common to all men: the other spiritual and heavenly, which is given them in

their second birth; and this life is not common, but is peculiar to God's elect." And Article 34 states: "Therefore he has commanded all those who are his to be baptized with pure water 'in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost'; thereby signifying to us that as water washeth away the filth of the body when poured upon it, so doth the blood of Christ by the power of the Holy Ghost internally sprinkle the soul, cleanse it from sins, and regenerate us from children of wrath unto children of God."

But baptism is not a be-all and end-all. It is true that a newly-born babe must first of all be bathed. But it must also be given food. So, too, the sacrament of purification needs the sacrament of nourishment as its fulfillment. Note that the Confession of our Church continues as follows: "We believe and confess that our Saviour Jesus Christ did ordain and institute the sacrament of the holy supper to nourish and support those whom he hath already regenerated, and incorporated into his family, which is his Church." And, further: "God hath given us for the support of the bodily and earthly life, earthly and common bread, which is subservient thereto. But for the support of the spiritual and heavenly life which believers have, he hath sent a living bread, which descended from heaven, namely, Jesus Christ, and which we partake of in the sacrament of the holy supper."

Baptism, therefore, is merely a preliminary sacrament. It represents only the opening of the door by which we pass to the holy supper and to the mystical communion with our Lord. This truth subtracts nothing

from the importance and the indispensability of baptism. Whoever is not baptized is an outsider. **By desiring to be baptized he asks for admittance; by means of the sacrament of baptism he knocks at the door.** By it he enters, that is, he becomes segregated from those who stand without, in order to enjoy the fellowship of those who are within. **And that fellowship and communion become complete when, together with the assembled guests, he partakes of the holy supper.**

But he who has been baptized, who has knocked at and been admitted to the banquet hall, and who thereupon restrains himself from sitting at the table with the others, resembles a stranger who upon his own instigation is invited to enjoy association with a festive company, and who forthwith insults his host by standing, distant and aloof, at the door. The intruder, of course, who, without an invitation and without appropriate dress, forces his way into the company, must be thrown out. He is an intruder. But the baptized person is not that. By desiring baptism he appropriately asks for admittance. By his baptism the door is opened, his formal clothes are extended to him, and by it he is invited to share the activities as an approved guest. Naturally he severely injures social propriety if he remains distant and aloof after these favors have been bestowed upon him. His conduct differs from that of the intruder, but it is not less culpable. Even so, it is a terrible sin to ignore the holy supper after one has been baptized.

He who undertakes to wade through the holy streams of baptism may have no other purpose in mind in doing so than to enjoy a festive fellowship with the Lord of

the House upon the other shore. He knows that that Lord awaits His guests.

He who is born merely of water and of spirit is given but a distant glimpse of the kingdom. He may never be satisfied with that, but must be up and away, nor rest until he is seated at the marriage feast of the Lamb.

Any Jew who becomes converted to his Messiah immediately appreciates the fact that an intimate relationship exists between these two sacraments. Observe him, if you will. He is converted today, is he? Then before the week has lapsed you will see him seated at the table of the Lord. **Everything combines to assure him that baptism and the holy supper are complementary to each other.**

Adult converts also illustrate that theirs is the same conviction in this matter as is that of the converted Jew. Their baptism was neglected when they were children. Now that they have repented and turned to God at a mature age, they choose to postpone the time of their baptism to a moment which will make it convenient for them to partake of the holy supper immediately afterwards.

The same custom prevailed in the earliest Christian churches. Those who were converted from Judaism and paganism were baptized one day, and were present at the holy supper the next. At that time no one ever thought of baptism apart from the holy supper. By asking for baptism these Christians simply were asking: **"Permit me to partake of the holy supper."**

We do not cross the Red Sea in order to fix camp permanently upon the farther shore; we must be on our

way through the wilderness; our destination is the Holy Land. Having crossed the Jordan, we do not stop at its banks but press on to Jerusalem. Just so, we may not be content with having forded the waters of baptism, but we must pursue our way until we see extended to us the rare wines that are pressed from the grapes of Eshcol.

It is the custom of infant baptism which has tended to fix lines of demarcation between these two sacraments. But such lines of distinction are inappropriate there. Naturally, an infant is not qualified to partake of the Lord's supper. A child is morally too irresponsible to appropriate the blessings of his baptism to himself by a public confession. It is because of that circumstance that the perfectly appropriate and necessary custom of infant baptism has unfortunately fostered the thought that baptism is a sacrament independent from that of the holy supper.

An infant is impressionable and is therefore fit to receive baptism. But it is not yet qualified to receive the sacrament of nourishment. We must remember that the sacrament of the holy supper requires that only he may partake of it who has made his confession and his deeds a matter of personally appreciated responsibility. Hence, it is inevitable that some years must elapse between these two sacraments in the life of every individual; as many years, in fact, as are required to make his confession and his approach to the Lord's table a morally responsible action. The intervening time may not be longer than that and it may not be shorter. The number of years required for each individual to be qualified for his personal confession was determined by God at

the time of that person's creation. The intervening years therefore represent a fixed interim. Those who abide by it walk in the ways of God, and those who do not, depart from them. ~~Those who curtail or add to that interim are guilty of sin.~~

The number of those intervening years is not the same for all. Some are qualified for public confession at sixteen, others at twenty-three years of age, but all reach a morally responsible age sometime during this interval of seven years. Hence, it is the duty of each to respect these boundaries.

Irrespective, however, of whether the holy supper be divided from baptism by sixteen years or by twenty-three, the close relationship between the two remains the same. Throughout those years baptism sounds the plea: Seek the Lord's holy supper.

A CHILD'S CONFESSION OF HIS LORD

"Make confession unto the Lord God of your fathers" (Ezra 10:11).

PUBLIC confession of your faith must take place between your baptism and your approach to the holy supper. That confession is a unique and important event because it represents the time when you rise in the assembly of believers and publicly assert that you desire to be one of them. It is also true that in that sense public confession is entirely necessary and perfectly appropriate. It is an event in your life, and is an important one. But that event should by no means suggest that it is your first confession, or that it is to be your last.

Have you ever heard the expressions: "I shall make my confession next year" or "I made my confession three years ago"? Such statements ought not to be made. They betray an improper attitude, for they suggest that public confession is a milestone which, once it has been passed, can conveniently be forgotten. They are expressions which seem to imply that the young man or woman who has not yet committed himself to the event of public confession cannot yet be held responsible for

the moral implications involved in that event. And they suggest also that he who has "made his confession" is thereby absolved of all responsibility in the matter.

That attitude is quite wrong. **Confession is a life-long matter. Responsibility for it begins early and never ceases.** One's confession should be actively expressed each time one observes that Satan's voice and strength and machinations are being employed against the Saviour.

Indeed, confession begins early. It comes to expression in the schoolboy who hears his Jesus insulted by one of his associates. He objects to that insult. He simply refuses to be told such things. His fellows tease him, of course, and mock him, but, even though he is buffeted and beaten, he perseveres in his confession. Such occasions are presented to children—in school, on the streets, at their games—and they should rise to them. Baptized children must be Jesus' children, and must be indignant when any disparage the Saviour they love. Confession begins as early as that; and those early confessions sometimes cost more of sacrifice and of tears than does the public confession in the church.

Unfortunately, there are also indifferent children. There are children who are incapable of a righteous indignation. And there is also that other, most unbearable type, those, namely, who always want to be teaching others, and that frequently by means of "big" words they themselves do not comprehend. Such practices represent no true confession, naturally, but only arrogance and pride. If these young Pharisees could, they would parade through the streets wearing their

minister's wing collar and white necktie. We are not rising to the defense of these.

But the truth remains that a young child should be filled with childlike zeal for Jesus; he should bow before Jesus' Name; he should foster reverence and respect in his heart for his Saviour. Knowing that he belongs to Jesus, he may not be passive and indifferent when he hears his fellows reproach his Master. A good child allows no one to say anything disparaging about his own father or mother. And every child can and must know that Jesus said: "He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me." Vaunted pedantry becomes no child, but love and ardor and zeal for Immanuel do. He must rise to defend the honor of his Jesus, and he must do it with an unwavering voice, with a flush of indignation on his cheeks, and with a sparkle in his eye. That is the true and natural way in which a baptized child confesses his Lord.

Fathers and mothers must augment that kind of confession in their children. None can be as loyal as a child, none as heroic, none as susceptible to indignation. Unfortunately, all parents do not observe that, and do not assist their children in a constant confessing. Father, well, he once "made his confession." And mother "attends communion," of course, and for the rest, she seems to take Jesus for granted.

If that be your attitude, parents, how will your child ever learn to confess? You know he must be encouraged to persist in making his confession constant. You know how hard it is for him to do that. Nothing "hurts" a child quite as much as to be laughed at by his fellows.

There is quick justice in the world of children. They make their verdicts, pass sentences, and enforce them. Sometimes they enforce them by teasing, sometimes by vexing, and sometimes by coming directly "to blows."

Your child needs encouragement. Stop to appreciate his situation. He leaves home to make contact with the world, and does so with the sure conviction that Jesus is supreme always and everywhere. Then he learns it is just because of that conviction that he is to be called into court by his fellows. That awareness shocks him, fills him with fear and temerity. If in that crisis you fail to sustain him by your love and your prayers, it is most likely that when he next hears his Jesus insulted, he will be less courageous in rallying to the defense. Later he will say nothing, and finally he will join with his comrades in laughing at some other boy.

Hence parents and teachers have a weighty responsibility in this matter. It would, in fact, be quite appropriate if catechism classes and sermons were made more emphatically encouraging to young confessors. Do not forget that courage is a singular quality. Once it has gone, it seldom returns. Yet it is a noble quality of the soul, and without it there can be no true confession.

Here is a young man who has become twenty years of age. He has never risen to defend his Lord, has never by his actions testified for Him, has never sacrificed for Jesus. Now, having almost attained the legal age of maturity, he is accepted by his pastor, and he says "Yes" before the congregation. He has "made his confession." But who would dare to call that a confession which obviously was a mere formal observance of a

custom! No heroic courage entered into it—unless it were the courage to defy the embarrassment of rising before so large a group of people. And of genuine ardor, of heartfelt zeal there was nothing at all.

Indeed, no one ever truly confessed whose experience as a child and as a youth was not characterized by frequent confessions of his Lord. He must have been previously mocked, despised, blasphemed, beaten, perhaps. He must have persevered courageously in spite of these, being motivated solely by his love for and his loyalty to Jesus. His public confession then represents a public expression of what he has long fostered in his heart. This is the true confession of every young man and of every young woman. For, a young woman, too, although manifesting it less drastically than a young man, should be full of courage, of loyalty, and of love, and should never allow herself to deny her Jesus.

It is to be regretted that many parents do not fully appreciate the fact that their children should be constantly confessing their Saviour. Such parents have their children baptized and accepted by the Church. They send them to school, to catechism classes, and to Church. But they fail to appreciate that their children should be educated to become heroes and heroines of Jesus, and that their confession, unless they become that, will be merely formal and illusory. These parents fail to respond to Ezra's dictum to Israel: "Now therefore make confession unto the Lord God of your fathers, and do his pleasure; and separate yourselves from the people of the land."

Parents who fail to respond to that plea do not ap-

preciate the fact that the service of the Lord involves a holy warfare, and that new recruits must constantly be trained and qualified for that conflict. Yet that is the situation. After Paradise God put enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman. That combat continues from one generation to another. One generation passes away and another rises in its place, but the holy war for the Son of God against his enemy must be fought from epoch to epoch.

For that reason, parents, the fact that you yourselves, as loyal servants, are fighting in that conflict does not suffice. You must also prepare your children for combat, must fit them out in suitable armor, must drill them, and, above all, you must inspire in them an unwavering loyalty to the Lord's banner and an unquenchable ardor for His holy Name.

You say your child does not oppose the kingdom. But that is not enough. True confessing demands a positive attitude. He accompanies you in battle, does he? But he must take the initiative. The fact that he imitates your words and actions does not prove his personal valor. Remember that even a child, though he be but one in a world of others, must be the voice of one crying in the wilderness.

How foolish it is, then, to say to yourself: "I think my child will make his confession when he reaches maturity." Confession is a daily matter. It should come to expression as frequently as your child meets other children and other people. He confesses or he fails to do so as often as he is among "the people of

the land." We know that these people shrug their shoulders when Jesus' Name is mentioned.

The Name of the Lord must be praised from generation to generation. The Lord's praises must be voiced by the seed of the Church, must be sung by the children who have been baptized in His Name. Hence you may not permit your child to grow accustomed to indifference or to passiveness, ~~but must teach him to sing his Saviour's praise and to rise to his Lord's defense at every occasion.~~ He must be always confessing if ever his public confession is to be genuine and true. That only makes confession a sincere and heartfelt matter.

III

PRAYER AS A TRAINING SCHOOL FOR CONFESSION

"I prayed . . . and made my confession" (Dan. 9:4).

THE seed of faith which it frequently pleases God to sow within the heart of a child does not grow and flourish of its own accord. Imagine, for a moment, that a child within whose heart this seed had been planted had been kidnapped soon after its birth by a tribe of savages, that it had been taken far from its father and mother, and far from the blessed influences of Christ's Church. Do you suppose that child's faith would have developed? By no means, though he were now a man of thirty years of age. If the seed of faith in any child is to sprout, grow up, and burst into bloom, that child must be kept in contact with the church that baptized it, must be kept familiar with God's holy Word, must, in short, be *prepared for making its confession.*

That emphasis does not mean to imply that external means alone can ever succeed in causing faith to develop and to flourish. External means cannot cause that. All external cultivation will avail nothing unless God the Holy Ghost causes that seed of faith to germinate and

unless He supports that tender growth by His Divine power. If the Divine influence were wanting, that seed of faith would be as unproductive as that which falls upon stony places, and all external attempts to cultivate it as effective as plowing a bed of rocks.

A farmer sweats at his labor and expends great care and tireless energy at tilling his fields. But unless his efforts be accompanied by the life-imparting rays of the sun, he will reap no harvest. It is equally true that the internal operations of the Holy Spirit must accompany the external means of preparation for confession if ever a child's confession of his Lord is to be genuine. That is not saying that God's omnipotence is limited or that it is dependent upon external means to bring faith to its full fruition. A child who dies as an infant can be saved even though it has never comprehended the Word of God. God has other means of saving such as he, other means of educating such infants from a state of unconscious innocence to that of a full appreciation of their Saviour. The arm of the Lord is never shortened. But for those of us who grow into consciously responsible maturity, it has pleased God to fix this law: **The internal work of the Spirit and the external means of grace serve as complements to each other.**

It is obvious, therefore, that preparation is necessary for making public confession.

Of what should that preparation consist? Of home and catechetical training merely? Does an accumulation of knowledge, a committing to memory, a familiarity with various facts and particulars suffice to prepare the child for a true confession? Indeed not. To "make

confession" is a much weightier matter than to "recite a lesson," and to actively join God's Church involves much more than to be able to repeat the tenets she embraces and the canons she professes. True, study is necessary, indispensable, in fact, and committing to memory is invaluable. Much time and attention must be devoted to giving the child a vivid impression of Christ and of His Word. But these means do not, to use a figure, exhaust the curriculum in the school for the preparation for confession. If they did, one could with as much hope for success attempt to prepare pagan and Jewish children for making their confession of faith. To suppose that such means sufficed would be assuming that confession is an intellectual matter merely, and that the heart does not enter into it at all. Such an assumption, surely, is quite unwarranted.

It is for that reason that the preceding meditation emphasized the fact that a child must be constantly confessing Jesus among his companions at school if ever his "public confession" is to be a true one. To confess is to "show one's colors" for one's King, to be loyal to Jesus, to allow oneself to become incorporated into Christ's battalion, and in that way to be active for His majesty and Kingdom.

That child will never become an audacious soldier who, as a child, does not exhibit courage and daring among his fellows. But it is even more true that no decisive confession was ever made by an adult whose eyes, when he was a child, had not sometimes lowered with indignation at every reproach heaped upon his Saviour.

However, one other thing is needful for one's prepa-

ration for confession. It is a requisite which generally is not sufficiently emphasized. The Bible names two kinds of confession: a confession of one's Saviour, and a confession of one's sins. These two kinds should co-exist in the heart of a Christian, be he an adult or a child.

Your confession of your Saviour and Lord before the congregation must include a confession of your personal wretchedness. A confession which desires Jesus but which is not characterized by a profound conviction of personal sin and guilt is false. Paul would call that a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. Indeed, it would be a weak and flimsy confession. That is self-evident. Why a Redeemer if there be no need for redemption? How yearn for a Saviour except there be a consciousness of the bonds of death? And again, why should you seek the Physician if you do not sense that your soul is sick? Yes, there should be a consciousness, a poignant, painful consciousness of personal sin and guilt. That does not mean that you must have the full and profound consciousness of your depravity in the moment you say "yes" before the congregation. Those who profess the necessity of that, drift toward emotionalism and depart from the meaning of the Word of God. But it is unequivocally true that he who confesses his Saviour must confess his wretchedness also. He must, to a degree and in a way appropriate to his age and experience, fully sense that he is lost, and that therefore he, together with all God's children, is taking refuge under the Saviour's wings.

If one is to make one's confession in that way, one

must be prepared for it from youth up. Then the child must be educated according to Daniel's rule: "I prayed, and made my confession unto the Lord."

A child must learn to pray. You must teach him to do so. Does that mean that you must convert him into a little preacher by having him display his cleverness at making prayers? No, for that would be destroying the tenderest qualities in the child's soul. Children should, in fact, be kept from all attempts at ostentation. A child must learn to pray in a childlike fashion: modestly, shyly, almost. There is a custom in some homes to have four or five children "rattle off" their "Lord, bless this food, Amen" successively, after the father has completed the family prayer. That custom ought to be discouraged. It thwarts fervent, heartfelt prayer in the soul of a child. Perhaps children cannot enter into the petitions of the father. Perhaps they need their own intercessor. If that be true, let one of the older children be that intercessor. Teach him to pray slowly, reverently, so that his praying may be true prayer.

And as for the rest, let their morning prayers at arising and their evening prayers at going to bed be their quiet training school for confession. In that school you must be the teacher. Hence, you must give them a model, but in giving it you must pray. Then they must pray it with you. In that way they will reach the stage at which they can pray alone. Their prayer may be a formulated one sometimes, provided it be discreetly chosen and infrequently used. Formulated prayers are to be used only when the spirit is too dull to shape its own petitions. Personally engendered

prayers should be the goal, the ideal. Each child should pray in his unique, individual way; he should pray not in the language of adults, but in that of children. He should express his thanks for what has made him glad, his petitions for what troubles him. And he should give his praises just as he might give them if his Jesus were present to receive his embraces.

Above all, teach your child to pray on special occasions. The bidding "In all thy ways acknowledge him" is a fountain of riches for prayer. Mornings, at noon-day, evenings — yes, indeed. But these occasions do not suffice for prayer to attain its own true value. True prayer attains its richest quality when every obstacle that life presents causes the soul to send a cry of help to God, when every joy that throbs at the heart engenders a note of praise and sends it up on High. Your child must know intimately that prayer is that. Nothing is too trivial for God's attention. A difficult lesson at school perplexes a child as much as a difficult campaign annoys a general. And the Lord God wishes to be acknowledged in all things. Hence, teach your child to pray not because you ask it, not because he knows you will observe and be pleased, but because he knows he needs the peace it gives his heart.

In that way a child should also pray for the forgiveness of sins. It is very easy to change a child into a little Pharisee. He can repeat the words "I am wretched, Lord, and deserve to die," very sanctimoniously. Yet, after he has cheated, or lied, or wounded his mother's feelings, he has not the least personal conviction of guilt. Nevertheless, your purpose in teaching

him prayer should be to augment a conviction of guilt in him. He should sense that, in a childlike way, of course, but in a heartfelt manner, and should ask God to forgive him. You know how your child reacts when he has injured you. He regrets it later, comes to you ingratiatingly, sincerely, whispers into your ear that he is sorry and that you must not be angry any more. His confession to God should be as real, as sincere as that. He should confess his guilt in specific terms, should name his naughtiness as he himself appreciates his sin in them. If he does so, he prays sincerely, and in a heartfelt manner. Then he is learning what justice is, and is learning what it means to live honestly and uprightly before his God.

A mother has an especially responsible and holy calling in this matter. She cannot fulfill the responsibility which is hers unless she herself knows and has experienced the reality of prayer in the sense in which it has been defined. She must share with her children a sure and a quiet trust in God. Mothers, older sisters, housemaids — these have a holy calling and a precious privilege in teaching children to pray. Christian education is a sacred matter and a beautiful privilege. And it costs the soul many an exacting effort.

IV

THE CONFESSION OF YOUR CHURCH

"Let us hold fast our profession" (Heb. 4:14).

SOME and again you hear the remark made that the confession of your Church is a comparatively unimportant matter, and that your personal confession ought in no way to be affected by it.

Those who voice such remarks usually talk in this fashion: You belong to Jesus, do you, and the life of God dwells in your heart? Why, then, be concerned about the confession of a Church? Every Church of Christ worthy of the name must open its doors to you, and every Church which refuses to do that, thereby forfeits its right to exist! Why all the learning and theology? As if the Kingdom of God depended upon the formulated questions and answers of a Catechism! Confession is the work of the Spirit, and it is nothing else! As though sheer memorization could ever take the place of a heartfelt experience! No, indeed! If you have experienced the work of the Spirit, each and every Church must admit you to her celebration of the holy supper; and if you have not experienced the influence of the Spirit, even though you are the best of catech-

etical students, each and every Church must refuse your request for admission!

Sentiments such as those were being expressed by the Montanists soon after the apostles of the Lord had died. Certain delicate, emotionally pious people have spoken in that vein in every epoch. During the time of the Reformation the Anabaptists were saying such things. Today, too, there are spiritually one-sided individuals who would make the awakening by the Spirit the sole condition for permitting access to the holy supper. Has the "big thing" happened in the life of the person asking for admission? If so, let him come; if not, let him stand outside among the unconverted many! The study of a Catechism is quite irrelevant! All study can safely be ignored! In fact, even that much touted "making confession" represents a mockery of holy things!

But it is remarkable that the holy apostles have judged of the matter also, and that their judgment is the exact opposite of the judgment of these ultra-spiritualists. What? The common confession of the Church does not affect one's personal confession? It most certainly does. Read what Paul wrote to the Church at Corinth: "I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing" (I Cor. 1:10). This "speaking of the same thing" definitely refers to a common confession, for Paul added: "And that there be no divisions among you; but that ye (as a church) be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." Note that Paul urged that they be joined together not in the same feeling, or in the same emotional experience, but in the same

mind and judgment. It is the identical plea he addressed to the Church at Philippi, when he wrote: "Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing" (Phil. 3:6). the holy Apostle John gives expression to the same thought and as definitely relates it to a confession. Paul had written in Romans 10:10: "With the mouth confession is made unto salvation." John affirmed with equal decisiveness: "Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is the spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is in the world."

You see, therefore, that the holy apostles, who wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and to whose word and meaning all people should be subservient, affirm the exact opposite of that of those ultra-spiritualistic people who assert that the common confession of a Church is a comparatively unimportant matter. Whereas the latter maintain that the mind's confession affects that of the heart hardly at all, the holy apostles affirm in the Name of the Lord that "with the mouth confession is made unto salvation," that you must be of one mind with the believers, and that you must speak the same thing with them. And they boldly add that he who, in his confession, departs from the true conception of the Son of God, is of the antichrist.

Let this testimony of the apostles encourage you when you find that you must *study* as a part of your preparation for confession. Let it encourage you in

insisting that your children be taught. It is, of course, obligatory that you teach them. **You promised to do so when you proffered them for baptism.** Upon that occasion you answered affirmatively to the important question: "Do you promise and intend to see these children, when come to the years of discretion, instructed and brought up in the aforesaid doctrine, or help or cause them to be instructed therein?" Nor was that "aforesaid doctrine" a vague and nebulous one, for the immediately preceding one asked: "Do you acknowledge the doctrine which is contained in the Old and New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith, and which is taught here in this Christian Church, to be the true and perfect doctrine of salvation?" **Hence, your baptism, too, bound you to a doctrine, a specific doctrine, and a doctrine which is well-defined and nicely circumscribed.**

That baptismal promise is made by one generation to another. The father promises that he will instruct his child. The child when he has become a father vows it anew. The promise is ever the same: to instruct or to cause or help children to be instructed in the "aforesaid doctrine." **In that way the Church continues in a common confession.** Ecclesiastical life and activity are based upon that baptismal vow. Yet it is encouraging to note that the propagation of the same doctrine is enjoined upon you by the holy apostles also. Their dictates are conclusive and are binding. All must be of the same mind, must speak the same thing. **That means that the same doctrine should be confessed by all.**

For that reason study is necessary. A Church which

does not teach her youth can never hope to retain a pure confession, but relinquishes it, cuts off all contact with the past, divorces herself from the fathers, and forms a new group.

Yes, study is obligatory. If you desire to confess, you must learn. You must not learn the interpretation of this or that preacher or instructor, for the opinions of these vary widely, and have always done so. Instead, you must learn what the Church has throughout the centuries confessed as the truth revealed by God in His holy Scriptures. **That confession must be taught in all the Churches, to all who are reared within the Church, to all who wish to become responsible members of it, whether they be young or old, experienced or inexperienced.**

The present generation must *reaffirm* the confession which the previous generation received from its fathers. Nothing could be more erroneously conceived than to suppose that each new generation should make a new, that is, a different confession. The children must reaffirm the confession of their fathers. True education is just that: a *reinterpretation* and a *reaffirmation*. Such true education, accordingly, should obtain in the Church of Jesus. It should be the holy objective of that Church to make the spontaneous voice of the heart identical with the reaffirmation of the lips.

In Psalm 78, Asaph laid down the golden rule in this matter: "Give ear, O my people, to my law: I will utter dark sayings of old: which we have heard of old: which we have heard and known, because our fathers have told us." Asaph tells us concerning these truths

that we may not "hide them from our children, from the generation to come." The Lord God has committed the treasure of His truth to the keeping of His Church, in order that it may maintain itself from Paradise through the generations to the consummation of the world. Asaph sang: "For he hath established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children; that the generations to come might know them, even the children which should be born, who should arise and declare them to their children: that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments."

Hence there is no room for doubt about the obligation of study and of instruction. You are duty-bound to do so. The truth of God which He revealed must be transmitted from one generation to another. **The confession of the Church may not become embedded in the dust of the ages but must be constantly reaffirmed.** Memorization alone is futile, it is true, but without it the links of the chain that bind the Church of God into a unity break and fall apart.

It strikes us, at first thought, that it would be a most gratifying situation if the Church of God upon earth had a confession now which was the same as that which she had always confessed, and a confession which was most exact and elucidating in every detail. Yet, there is an element of unsoundness in the very appeal of this situation. In fact, there is an element of sin in it; for, the history of the Church proves that exactly the opposite has been God's will. How plausible, too, that changes

sometimes must occur. Otherwise the confession of one generation would simply be a blind imitation of that of the preceding generation.

We know, therefore, that there are some virtually deformed, or contaminated, Churches, and some reformed or purged, Churches, representing contaminated and purged confessions, respectively. It has been your privilege to have been born in one of those reformed Churches which has a reformed confession. That privilege should tend to strengthen the yearning within you, never to relinquish your hold upon that purged confession, but to "keep that which thou hast."

V

KNOWING GOD'S WORKS

"The praises of the Lord" (Psalm 78:4).

MEN have studied for making confession as long as Christ's Church has existed. That is perfectly natural. You would not need to study if you had been present personally when God revealed Himself through the prophets, through Christ, and through the apostles. But God's works and God's revelations were not completed within the scope of one man's lifetime. They occurred long before you lived, and they needed several epochs to be fulfilled. Because of that, and because of that only, it is necessary that you study for making confession.

If you are to know anything about the history of your own country, you must study for it. You know what is happening around you in your own time without having anyone tell you of it. But you have not this same first-hand information concerning what happened in the days of William Penn, of the Redcoats, of George Washington, or of Abraham Lincoln.* Of that you were not an eye-witness. Accordingly, the history of those days has been written into books so that you may read of it.

* Names taken from American history have been substituted for those borrowed from Dutch history by the Author.—Translator

Because God accomplished His mighty deeds in by-gone ages, and because He made His significant revelations long before you were born, it pleased Him to have the record of them preserved for you in written history. He provided that all of His "praises," as the 78th Psalm calls His mighty deeds, would be available for you to read. But if these praises are not to remain foreign and unknown to you, you must put forth a conscious effort to acquaint yourself with them.

It is for purposes of such study that God endowed you with a memory, that marvelous faculty which enables you to carry a photograph of the past with you in your mind. Because of memory, by-gone epochs can become palpably real and genuinely meaningful to you. By means of it you can relive the experiences of an earlier generation.

That does not mean to say that you may use your memory only for familiarizing yourself with the "praises of the Lord." You may use it to bless your daily, public life, also. **Yet, you may never forget that your memory is employed for its highest function only when you use it as a means to make the deeds and the revelation of God part and parcel of your own consciousness.** You do well to remember that you must love the Lord your God with all your faculties. Memory is not the least of these.

Your attitude is not to be commended if, in study, you concentrate all your powers upon the several sciences and arts, and never once undertake to enrich the rising generation by a knowledge of God's deeds and by the science of His revelation.

The value of study as a preparation for confession may, therefore, not be underestimated. Yes, even the task of "committing matter to memory" is an invaluable one. The strenuous efforts which must be put forth in such study, form a part of the "sweat of the brow" by which alone we are to eat bread. You may think that you are manifesting love for your children by sparing them exertions required for such study, but such misdirected pity makes you guilty of a brutal want of sympathy for them. Your children must study, be the exertion demanded from you and from them ever so exacting. The faculty of memory meets fewer obstacles in exercising itself in children than it does in adults. **The age of childhood, accordingly, is the appropriate time for memorization.**

One caution is in order, however, in urging that children be compelled to memorize the historical truths narrated in the Scriptures. It is this: Never suppose that a well-supplied memory equals piety, or that an encyclopedic mind alone can ever foster religion. When a man has gathered stones into a heap, he has not yet built a house. An aggregation of kernels is not yet a loaf and will stay no man's hunger. So, too, the facts accumulated by the memory will become so much ballast to the brain if they are there left amused. Yet, it is also true that no house can be built, nor loaf baked, before the constituent elements have been gathered together. **So, again, there can be no religion without a knowledge of "God's praises."** It remains equally true, of course, that just as an aggregation of constituent elements can never equal a house or a loaf of bread,

so also an accumulation of facts cannot amount to true religion unless they have been seized upon and shaped into a living, organic whole.

It is necessary, of course, that memory be put to work at accumulating facts which can be of real use. That fact makes a second caution necessary. There are those who fatigue children by compelling them to commit, long, meaningless lists of names to memory. Perhaps your children can recite in order the names of all the patriarchs who lived before the flood and of all the kings of Israel. Pray, what of that? It does not prove that they appreciate the "praises of the Lord, and his strength, and the wonderful works he hath done."

Such appreciation should, nevertheless, be the sole purpose of religious study. The progressive movement of the grace of God is clearly discernible in history. It has pleased God to strikingly accomplish a mighty work in successive epochs of history, a work which affects all mankind, and which, accordingly, affects you also. By that work, which culminated gloriously in the sending of His Son, God displayed His compassionate grace toward sinful men. **It is that work, that mighty deed which must be struck deep into your consciousness and into the consciousness of your children.** Familiarize yourself with the evolution of that work. Let its organic unfolding be a vivid picture in your mind. Ponder it often; be able to translate yourself from the present to the past at the bidding of your will; learn to enjoy living with previous generations. That should be the goal of your study, the content of your trust, the stay of your hope in life.

How untoward the results of those Sunday schools and catechism classes are, therefore, which try to convert pupils into memorization machines. Upon graduation such pupils can recite quantities of facts. But when they are asked: "What has God done for you, and what has He revealed to you?" they stand embarrassed for want of an answer.

~~A child must be able to appreciate what it has learned, must be allowed to enter into the spirit of it. His knowledge should mean things for him, should serve him well in the conflicts his soul is soon enough to experience.~~

If he is armed with such real knowledge, you need not be anxious about your child. It may be, is likely, even, that he will hear the Lord's "praises" mocked, slandered, or denied. But upon such occasions he will come to his Saviour's defense, armed not with a series of patriarch's names or with a list of parables, but with the bold and eloquent testimony that God has wrought a mighty accomplishment throughout the centuries. If he is to make that bold and lofty confession, of course, your child must have stood in breath-taking awe and wonderment before the grandeur of that work of God.

REPENTANCE AND TURNING TO GOD

"Repentance . . . not to be repented of" (II Cor. 7:10).

YES, you must study for confession. ~~But you must~~
~~also repent and turn to God.~~ How, indeed, could an unconverted person make a sincere confession of his Lord?

It is unfortunate that Methodism has worked havoc in our Reformed Churches in this respect also. For it was the influence of Methodism, was it not, which, in an evil hour, led some of our churches to suppose that "regeneration" and "conversion" are identical? The implications of that false distinction are these: ~~that the~~ act of God, by which regeneration and conversion suddenly and simultaneously occur, is experienced by ~~but~~ a numbered few, and is usually experienced by these few at a very advanced age.

Naturally, the more thoughtful of those who accepted this notion of the matter felt themselves placed before a choice between two alternatives. Either they could insist upon conversion as a condition for confession, and, accordingly refuse to accept into the Church those who could not testify that this sudden act of God had

accrued to them; or they could accept others also by insisting less rigorously upon "repentance" as an unconditional prerequisite for confession.

Each of these alternatives, ~~you see,~~ presented serious difficulties. Suppose they chose the first and granted admission to those only who, in the Methodist fashion, could speak of a sudden, striking, right-about-face conversion. That would mean that very few individuals could be accepted, and that all instruction in the Christian religion was really superfluous. Suppose, then, that they chose the other alternative, and, as a general rule, accepted all those who had reached the age of eighteen or twenty. Conversion, then, would no longer be a prerequisite for confession. "Making confession," then, would become a kind of examination in what had been learned, would have no real spiritual significance, and would have no import for the future life.

In favor of saving the status of education in religious things, they chose the second alternative, with the result that the "making of confession" was emasculated of its very essence.

This precarious condition can be avoided and remedied only by a reaffirmation of Reformed principles. ~~Persons~~ **of truly Reformed persuasion, surely, acknowledge and confess** that neither parental admonishment nor the ~~preaching of the Word, nor the instruction of catechism or Sunday school classes, can avail anything against~~ **an unregenerated person, who, because he is unregenerated, lives in a state of elemental enmity against his God.** Reformed people acknowledge and confess that if such means of grace are to be effective, an act of

God must take place within the soul beforehand. In other words, they maintain that "conversion" and "repentance" are not identical, that regeneration, an act of God accomplished in the soul, must take place before that soul can repent and turn to God.

Conversion can be expected only from a person who has been regenerated, and can be expected from him only as a fulfillment of regeneration. That is the Reformed view of the matter.

Almost half of the children who are baptized die before they have reached the years of discretion. Perhaps no one would care to maintain that all who die in infancy are lost. In view of that, and because entrance into the Kingdom of God without regeneration is inconceivable, the Reformed Churches confess that this act of God, as a general rule, accrues to the elect person while he is an infant. They do not mean to suggest that because regeneration occurs at an early age, however, the seed then planted immediately bursts into blossom. Sometimes that seed lies dormant until the person has reached an advanced age. Nevertheless, the glorious assumption that that secret regeneration does take place is the sole and conclusive ground upon which the Reformed Churches base their demand that every baptized person must repent and turn to God if he would sit at the Lord's holy table. If they accepted that the baptized are not reborn, they could not insist upon this prerequisite; for, only regeneration enables a sinner to repent and turn to God.

If baptism, therefore, is to be a "baptism of repentance," the Church must cling to the conception of re-

generation. That conception gives you a founded hope in God when it pleases Him to take your children from you in their infancy. It gives you a sharp goad with which to relentlessly urge your children to study God's Word. It prevents you from ascribing such early manifestations of piety as you sometimes observe in your children to their natural guilelessness, but compels you to think of these as the effects of their regeneration. It makes the desire in you to eventually lead your children to the holy supper a holy desire. Above all, the conception of regeneration gives you the freedom and the right always to insist that your children shall repent and turn to God.

In the age of spiritual prosperity our fathers clung to this conception. Because of it, God's Zion flourished, and thousands upon thousands of souls enjoyed a more beautiful assurance of faith. Hence, no one, in those days, spoke of "being received" by the Church; no one thought that a kind of examination in what had been learned had to be successfully passed. They came as soon as possible to confess the Christian religion, and to take their places with other believers at the Lord's table.

But things have changed for the worst since then. Churches insist upon study, study, and more study. Then they demand that an examination be passed in the matter studied. After that, confirmation takes place. Sometimes it seems that then one can attend the holy supper or one can ignore it. Irrespective, however, of whether one attends it or not, of "conversion" as a prerequisite for confession many seldom think.

Perhaps they do ponder about it sometimes, but in a way which conceives of "conversion" as a kind of final appeal which must be stressed during the six weeks immediately preceding the time those who desire to confess hope to "make their confession." Those six weeks are marked by special drill. Catechism classes meet somewhat longer; a certain party or entertainment must be foregone; the minister speaks somewhat more earnestly; those who plan to confess study harder than usual; and, finally, "conversion" is held up as the objective of it all.

We know what frequently happens then. The minister dared not insist too rigorously upon conversion. To use a figure, the whole plant was not rooted in the confession of the fact of regeneration. Words of appealing admonishment had to suffice. But, as the parable of the sower has it, much of the seed of that admonishment is snatched up by birds. In other cases that seed grows up luxuriously and rank, and withers away, that is, it causes an emotional upheaval, which soon subsides. In the case of others the imparted plea is smothered all too soon by the many attractions life offers. The result is that we seldom hear a man testify that his conversion occurred at the time he "was received" or at the time of his "public confession." It happens — yes, but rarely.

The evils inherent in such assumptions and in such practices can be avoided only by decisively and periodically holding up "conversion" before a child as his obligation. A child must study, must repent and turn to God, and must confess. Anyone will agree that a

child must begin study before he reaches an age of maturity, that study ought not to be postponed until about three weeks before he hopes to make his confession. They will also admit that much confessing should antedate the event of "public confession" before the congregation. Naturally. They see a person who lives in his daily conduct as though he were ashamed of his Jesus. They see that this person makes his confession, and thereafter continues in the same disgraceful conduct he practiced before. Seeing that, they realize that a constant confession is necessary, that confession should begin at childhood. But, just as surely as study and confession should begin early, so surely should conversion come to expression early.

You may not let your children grow up without ever causing them to think of the obligation of conversion. You may not let them suppose that conversion is something which gradually happens to older people. If you do, you share the guilt when your children confess publicly without ever previously having thought of the responsibility for conversion.

Every Christian child must be educated to the conviction that he must repent and turn to God. He should be appropriately educated to that in a manner outlined in the 88th Question of the Catechism. Conversion, it should be remembered, means turning about in one's way, so that one no longer pursues a way that leads away from God, but one that leads to God and to His Christ. In demanding conversion from a child one demands that he have a sense of direction in his life, a habit of struggling against the sins of childhood, and

a simple childlike knowledge of the fact that he can enjoy a precious peace and happiness in his God.

Any question as to how far one has proceeded upon that new way is beside the point. True conversion is a life-long process. Consequently, there is only one relevant question: In which direction are you traveling: to Christ, or away from Him? ~~Remember that he who has not repented and turned to Christ cannot and may not make his confession.~~

VII

SPEAK!

"Before men" (Luke 12:8).

DURING the weeks which precede your "making confession," and on the day it is to occur, Satan often whispers this thought into the heart of the believer: "Why make a public confession; is religion not a matter of the heart, an affair between my heart and the eternal love for whom it aches and to whom it extends itself in prayer?" That is a typical Satanic suggestion, a suggestion which is especially tempting because it contains some truth. Religion is, indeed, a matter of the heart. The man for whom it is not that, is still foreign to the first rudiments of true religion. An illustration will help you indicate that: You can hang a gorgeous picture of the rising sun in your room, but that does not make your room comfortably warm. Just so, spring has not necessarily dawned in your heart, just because you happen to have a beautiful conception of the Christ and of His things.

Inner intensity, ardor of conviction, in other words, the sparkle of faith in your heart—these are the things that matter. It is a lack of these qualities which causes

so much sham-religion. Who knows how much more strongly and beautifully the power of Christ upon earth would come to expression if the "burning fire shut up in my bones" of which Jeremiah speaks would only burn more ardently in those who confess Him?

Religion is a matter of the heart. The man who in his religion attends often to what people say and think and seldom to what God demands may be one of religious throngs, but he possesses no spiritual strength. Because darkness envelops his soul, he can give others no light; because there are only cinders and ashes in the hearth of his feelings, he can give no warmth to others. One loathes such pseudo-piety and reverences only the religion of the man who can testify with a sparkle of conviction in his eye: "I believed, and therefore have I spoken."

During the period immediately preceding your "being received" into the church you see many and more running to make their confession. They are people in whose heart the world rules, and in whose feelings egotism reigns. It is no wonder that you are then painfully affected by this conspicuous lack of heartfelt fervor; no wonder that the whole process seems to have a machine-like precision about it which betrays a lack of sincerity. In fact, it is no wonder, although you were on your way with those many to make the confession, that, in a pious moment, you stopped, thinking: "Not so, surely. Religion must be a heartfelt matter. I will confess before God, but not before men."

In a sense it is true that the better qualities of your heart came to expression in that moment. Yet it was

Satan who suggested the words: "But not before men." You know that Satan is always controverting Jesus' words, and Jesus, so far from discouraging a continual confession among men, has specifically laid that task upon your shoulders as a binding duty. You remember His words: "Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God."

The issue, therefore, is clearly delineated: either you confess the Christ or you deny Him. Jesus recognized no third possibility. He never spoke of a neutral sphere in which you could remain noncommittal in your attitude toward Him. It is a matter of pro or con, of a savour of life or a savour of death. You confess or you deny, and you confess or deny before men.

Do not your alms before men. Otherwise you will have no reward. Let your soul flow out in prayer toward God, but do so only after you have closed the door of your inner room. And when you pray, pray the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Kingdom comes not in external form, but is within you. True, all these emphases, very true. But they do not release you from the responsibility of confessing your Jesus before men. Remember that by not confessing Him, you are denying Him before men.

Confess Him, of course, with propriety; not crudely, and not on uncouth occasions. A shyness in the presence of holy things is always desirable. You may not cast pearls before swine. The prudent will know the occasion. Never, then, keep silence; or accustom yourself to reticence. You must speak out for the Christ. He

who does not do so, or who is loathe to do so because of embarrassment, becomes guilty of denying his Saviour.

It is a sin to be reticent over against the Christ; it is cowardice; it betrays a want of ardor, of love, of zeal for one's Lord. One can conclude that from daily experience. If someone happens to count a prominent person among his relatives, he always takes delight in telling his associates that the man is his relative and friend. But if, on the other hand, the relative happens to be one whose reputation is tainted or who has been singularly unfortunate, one prefers to act as though the man were no relative at all. That represents a sinful tendency, but sinful man is so inclined, nevertheless. How we like to champion a man when the championing gets us honor; and how we like to conceal all relationships which do not flatter us! Jesus appeals to this characteristic of human nature when He asks that you confess Him. He seems to be saying to you: "It gets me no praise among the angels of God; yet, I am not ashamed to be called your brother. Hence, I ask that you be unashamed of me also, although I know the world will despise you for defending my cause."

Your decision upon whether or not you shall rise in a person's defense may not hinge upon whether or not it will get honor for you. It should depend upon whether or not you love and have faith in Him. For that reason it is not enough that you confess Jesus in your own room, or before your pastor, or when you are in the company of pious folk. On the contrary, the test by which the quality of your faith and hope can be deter-

mined is whether or not you have the desire and the courage to confess your Saviour *before men*.

Note that the expression "before men" means before all men. Hence, you must do more than to confess Him as do they who defend the Christ in the company of their inferiors, but who fear to do so in the presence of people more eminent than they. But Jesus did not recognize the courage that waxes heroic before inferiors, and dwindles into cowardice before those who are superior to us. He asked that we confess Him before all men, before kings, and governors, and priests, also the priests of science. He Himself gave us the example. He made the good confession not only among the fisher-folk of Capernaum and the farmers of Galilee, but quite as boldly and heroically before the learned and the great of Israel, before Herod, and before the procurator appointed by Caesar of Rome. The Jesus of Nazareth is the same as the Jesus of Jerusalem.

He demands, therefore, that you esteem Him highly, that you love Him so much and cling to Him so inseparably that you deny Him before none, but courageously, faithfully, and boldly confess Him before men of every rank and position. That kind of confession will cause you many inconveniences. Many will avoid you because of it. It may cause divisions between you and your acquaintances, between you and your friends and relatives. But Jesus sacrificed all these things and more. He suffered blasphemy, scourging, the awful anguish of Gethsemane, and finally, the cruel death upon the Cross. Peacefully, almost, but with determined courage, He persisted. In fact, He told you that He came to intro-

duce divisions upon earth, to put schism between a man and his friends, between a man and his relatives. Concerning that schism He Himself testified that it would sometimes result in separation between even a parent and a child.

One can safely say, therefore, that it is an unfavorable symptom if someone has reached a considerable age without ever having broken an association because of his confession of Jesus. Beware, if all men speak well of you. Their speaking thus suggests that little of your confession reached them, that you preferred, therefore, to deny your Saviour.

Do not deceive yourself. Your religion must be a matter of ardent, heartfelt conviction. It may not represent a mere display before men, but must profoundly affect your soul's relationship to God. If your religion is ostentation and display merely, you worship illusion and there is no life within you.

However, you may not go to the other extreme. Never say you propose to let your religion be your own, that it is not the business of other people. A believer cannot maintain silence; he must express himself. As often as that expression of his conviction meets with opposition, he is confessing his Lord.

VIII

HE ALONE RECEIVES US

"I will receive you" (II Cor. 6:17).

WHAT is the relation between your "confession" and the so-called "being received" into the church? About the time you contemplate making your confession you are frequently asked, perhaps: "When shall you be received?" We hear it said on a day that next week occasion will be given for "receiving" members into the church. Sometimes, even, the attitude prevails that the important thing has happened when the "receiving" has taken place, that, except for the formal incidental of "confession," all is done and passed. It was the "receiving" that caused you all the anxiety; for that you studied especially hard during the last few weeks. When that has been successfully "survived," the worst is passed. Some have become so absorbed in this attitude that they neglected to participate in the "public confession," and neglected also to partake of the holy supper.

That attitude represents a lie in the Church, and a lie which issues always and only in fatality. There should be no "receiving." Formerly it did not exist. He who desired to confess his Lord and Saviour arose in the presence of the congregation and made his confession

in clear audible tones. In those days the confession of Jesus involved sure sacrifice, self-denial, and suffering. Consequently, he who was courageous enough to face so much opposition could certainly be trusted. The congregation would welcome such a person with grateful joy.

Time came, however, when the scourge of persecution was lifted and when it was esteemed an honor to be counted a Christian. Many then came forward who could in no sense be trusted. To protect herself, the Church had to set up standards, had to examine those who would confess, and had to demand that instruction be given. In that way the custom gradually originated of granting permission to individuals to make their confession.

These steps had to be taken in order to safeguard the Church against spiritual decay, and in order to spare certain individuals the sin of making a merely verbal, insincere confession. That preliminary examination in faith has now evolved into the practice of "receiving." Upon this occasion the consistory delegates the Minister of the Word and an Elder to examine the persons who desire to make their confession.* If these find that the persons in question possess enough knowledge of the Word of God to know what they are doing, and if they manifest evidences of the fact that they have turned away from the world and unto their Saviour, they grant them the permission to make their "public confession" in the presence of the congregation. As such the practice of "receiving" is legitimate and necessary. But it

* The fact that the procedure now differs from that which obtained when this description was written, does not affect the argument.

—Translator

must be insisted that "confession" itself remain the important event. The "receiving," which should never have been so designated, is and should be merely a preliminary examination. It is the "public confession" and not the "receiving" which qualifies one to approach the Lord's supper.

The notion suggested by the word "receiving" is unsound; it confuses the issues and results in spiritual havoc. It obscures the significance of baptism. If it were a Jew or a Turk or a pagan who desired to make a confession, the matter would be quite different. We could appropriately speak of receiving him into the church. But a baptized child of the congregation, a child sanctified in Christ even before its baptism, cannot be *received* into the Church. As though he were a foundling! But he is not. A baptized child is a member of the family. He has been reared in the household of faith. "But," you reply, "the visible Church has not yet extended to him the rights and privileges of membership." That is true, but it is also true that these rights are not extended to him at the time of "receiving" by the Minister and Elder. They are his only after his public confession of faith.

If a term is necessary, therefore, we could name the "receiving" the "admission to making public confession." This preliminary examination may never represent anything more than the vestibule through which one passes to public confession. Not the "being received" but the "public confession" represents the holy and decisive moment for the great decision of your life. It is at the "public confession" that you vow 'to be forever faith-

ful to your Jesus. Never break that vow!

But there are those who would not have it so. These wanted the event of "receiving" to represent a touching and exciting ceremony. Hence this event was converted into what the Lutherans had long made of it. The Pastor and the Elder "took" the confession. Later the Church "confirmed" it.

This fallacious conception of the matter must be uprooted. Doubtless an examination must precede the public confession. It must, however, retain the characteristics of an examination. Its sole purpose must be to determine, to the extent that is humanly possible, whether or not the person who desires to confess knows and means what he wishes to do. That examination should inquire into one's conduct, into the attitude of one's heart, and into the extent of one's knowledge of the full counsel of God for the salvation of sinners. To recite the books of the Bible, to know the names of all the patriarchs, to name all the kings of Israel in order—these attainments merit praise but have no place in this preliminary examination. This examination should determine only whether one has a knowledge of the plan of God for the salvation of sinners, and whether one is earnest, is sincere in his intention, i.e., whether one means what one is about to do for time and for eternity.

How different that is from what frequently occurred when some forty individuals came to make their confession at one time. One of them, for example, would be asked: "How many children did Isaac have?" He would answer, "Two," and with that be received into the Church. That is a mockery of holy things, a mockery of

the spiritual life of the soul. In this the spirituality of the Roman Catholics puts us to shame, for these find time to consult often with each person individually in the confessional. It may be, of course, that a Minister or an instructor knows his pupils personally and that a single answer from them at the examination suggests more to him than a single answer would indicate to another. But that examination should prove to the attendant Elder also that every individual who desires to confess appreciates God's plan. (That plan of God would be better appreciated if the catechetical booklets were abandoned, and if the Catechism itself were employed to serve as an outline of study for a number of successive years.)

Must the "receiving," as it is called, the "examination in faith," as it should be called, then, be a purely academic affair? Is the announcement "You are admitted to public confession" all that may appropriately be said? Is there no room for touching, emotionally exciting words, no room for solemnity? The answer can be given comparatively easily. Tears may never be the objective; the Kingdom of God does not consist of an emotional upheaval, but of the workings of the heart. The attempt may not be made to add significance to the event of "receiving" by robbing it from that of "public confession." But it is appropriate and it is necessary that earnest words be spoken after the "examination" concerning the confession which is to follow. These words should inspire personal introspection, and should plead for loyalty and for integrity. And if the Minister wishes to touch upon his personal relation to those present, now

these are no longer to be his catechumens, why should he not do so at this time? Not to do so, would, in fact, represent a cold and unnatural attitude. The important thing to be guarded against is confusing the "receiving" with the "public confession." The former may never deny the essence and validity of baptism.

Is there, then, no "being received"? Yes, there is an acceptance of God. He confirms it with the words: "Wherefore come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." This "being received" does most certainly have significance for public confession. Your appearance before the assembly of believers is a public acknowledgment of the fact that you have heard the commands of your God, that you wish to separate yourself from the world, from association with evil things, and from sin, and that you believe the promise that the Lord, as your Father who is in heaven, has *received* you as one of His own. This "being received" is spiritual, is holy, is true, and it is the only one that may be thought of in connection with your confession. *Only because He has received you* may you confess His Name.

The conception, on the other hand, that you can be received by a Minister and an Elder obscures the fact that there is an acceptance with the Almighty God. Hence, it cannot be too strongly insisted upon that that false "receiving" be forever banned from the Church. You and your church must always affirm that there is acceptance for you and your children only with the Lord God.

IX

OUR BOND WITH THE BELIEVERS

"The bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3).

THE Church has always demanded that certain stipulations be endorsed by those who make public confession of faith. She should still seriously make it a point that these stipulations be explained to those who ask for admittance to the holy supper.

Stipulations are promises. **Promises are exchanged between those who ask for admittance and those who have previously been admitted to the holy supper.** A covenant, a contract is mutually endorsed. It is always unethical to make a person promise a thing of whose implication he is unaware. The promise in question here establishes a bond between the Church and her members-in-full. Obviously, that bond may not be secretly or surreptitiously imposed upon a person. The church must present it for endorsement in clear and defined terms. The person endorsing it has a right to know what he is signing.

The public confession is and should remain the important matter. Yet these stipulations, this contractual relationship may not be ignored. It must be remem-

bered that the affirmative answer given at the time of confession is the same as that which binds the confessor to these stipulations of the Church. For that reason the catechetical instruction which antedates the public confession should elucidate all the implications of these stipulations. The Church which does not do so fosters the lie within her own organization. By that omission she introduces something mechanical into holy relationships, and has herself to blame if the stipulations she insists upon are later ignored by those who unwittingly agreed to keep them.

In an attempt to absolve the Church of responsibility in this matter it has frequently been said that those who make their confession are too young and too shortsighted to understand the nature of these stipulations. That excuse is unsound. Your making confession signifies that **you have become of age in ecclesiastical affairs, that you have the right to be given a voice in the matters of Church life.** By making your confession you become a consciously independent, contributing member of your Church. Because of that you deserve to know what the nature of the bond is which binds you to the Church whose full communion you are about to share.

You should not speak of a confirmation of new members, for there is not such "confirmation" and there are no "new members." When you reach your majority in political life you are given a voice in political affairs. That is a new experience for you, but you are not for that reason spoken of as a "new" citizen. Just so, confession does not make you a "new member" of the Church. It ~~gants~~ grants you a voice in her affairs. Your bap-

tism took place many years before your confession and you know that your baptism was administered to you upon the assumption that you were a "member of Christ." Upon that occasion your parents acknowledged that "although our children are conceived and born in sin, and therefore are subject to all miseries, yea, to the condemnation itself; yet, that they are sanctified in Christ and therefore as *members* of His Church ought be baptized."

Your parents had you baptized in the specific church which they thought the best and purest revelation of the body of the Lord. By baptizing you that church incorporated you into herself as a member. Hence, you have belonged to that church since the moment of your baptism. At that time you were accepted into communion with her as an unmatured member.

Your daily experience presents many illustrations of your pre-confession relationship to your church. A bird, destined to display gorgeously colored feathers on its wings, has only down to exhibit when it bursts from its shell. The beautiful wings are not attached later as separate or independent parts of the body. Nothing new is added. The gorgeous feathers were present in the bird at its birth. They had not grown out at first. So it is among plants, among animals, among men in natural life. And so it is with the body of the Church: there is latent in it that which emerges in full bloom at the time of confession.

A baptized child, then, is a member of the Church, latent, undeveloped, immature, it is true, but a member. He remains undeveloped until he makes his public con-

fession. Then he is no longer a minor. Then he attains his majority. Henceforth he acts by personal initiative. He departs from parental guardianship and expresses himself as desiring to become a contributing member to the Church. It is at this time that he consciously and responsibly assumes the privileges and obligations of the bond that unites him with the Church and with her other members.

In thinking about that unifying bond you must distinguish between what the holy apostle called the "unity of the Spirit" and that which he designated as "the bond of peace," for these are not identical.

The "unity of the Spirit" represents something beyond human power to touch or affect, namely, the working of the one Holy Spirit in the several members of the one Body. If the Holy Spirit does not work within those members, they do not belong to the Body, even though they may have been inveigled into the external, ecclesiastical organization. The holy apostle tells us that there is one body and one spirit. The Triune God created and formed that Body, and God the Holy Spirit dwells and works in it. The Holy Spirit causes that Body to be alive and living.

If the Holy Spirit does not work in you, you are not a member of the Body, for no one can say he is Jesus the Lord's, except by the Holy Spirit. But, let us suppose that by God's incomprehensible mercies the Spirit of the Lord does dwell in you, that He entered you, be it as a child or as a man, and that He regenerates you. If that is so, then from the very nature of the situation there is a unity not of the spirits but of the

Spirit between you and all the other members of the Body of Christ. That does not mean to say that you agree with them always and in all things, but that **the same Spirit is in you and in them.**

Now it can be true that you and they share the presence of the same Spirit, and that you and they, nevertheless, frequently disagree about things. Although this is possible, it may not be so. Hence, a "bond of peace" should be laid between you and them as the fruit of the "unity of the Spirit."

This "bond of peace" serves as the basis upon which the aforementioned stipulations rest. It is a common reciprocal unity exercised in a communion of saints and in establishing upon earth a peace like unto a heavenly peace. The fact that there is the "unity of the Spirit" in all does not mean that it has developed in all or that it has fully developed in any. If that were true, he who had received the Spirit would suddenly and immediately be emancipated from the influences of sin, and would similarly be emancipated also from any traces of spiritual blindness. A church composed of such members would not need the "bond of peace." Earth would be heaven then, and all things would be perfect.

However, that is not the situation. When God the Lord permits the Holy Spirit to enter a person, that Spirit works very gradually, and His influence is not perfected until after the person's death. Upon earth, therefore, obstacles, hindrances, and retarding influences remain. These proceed from Satan and the world, from our own flesh and from our own sin. Consequently we are often spiritually shortsighted. Much evil intervenes

to threaten a disturbance of the peace between us and our fellow-believers. Because of that, we, the several members of one Body, would fall apart as do the staves of a barrel, if it were not for some unifying bond. That bond is the external Church, and the "bond of peace" is a consciously builded covenant of unity which you must help to establish.

You see, therefore, that by your public confession you are most certainly assuming the obligations of a covenant relationship within a specific church. The church in which you desire to be active took you into her care at the time of your baptism. Now she is willing to admit you to the holy supper, to let you take your place at the Lord's table with the other members, provided that you are willing to confess that their confession is yours. She cannot be satisfied by your assuring her that God gave you the Holy Spirit. There is much blindness in you still, in spite of that. It is a blindness, too, which could lead you to ill-conduct and to heresy. In order to offset the possibility of your igniting the church community with these destructive fires of ill-conduct or heresy, she demands that you must confess what she confesses.

That is the first of the stipulations you must be willing to endorse; it is the first promise you must make. But you must also make a second promise, and this second promise more specifically pertains to the "bond of peace." You have received the Holy Spirit. You can therefore say that you belong to Christ the Lord, and you make that your public confession. But many kinds of sin and evil can still be trying to come to

expression in you. These can manifest themselves in the form of envy or of bitterness toward your fellow-believers, and that is a condition which may not obtain among brothers and sisters of one church. Again, this sin and this evil, can come to expression in the form of disgraceful conduct, of disreputable overt actions, such as would bring shame and reproach upon the church. Naturally, the church may have no patience with any of these manifestations. Hence, the "bond of peace" is necessary. You must promise by covenant to regard the other members of your church as your brothers and sisters, and must promise to help them as such, irrespective of whether they be rich or poor, amiable or unamiable. And you must also promise to submit to church discipline willingly, in the event that you should ever break that covenant of unity.

That is the way in which this bond, this covenant, is made. It is a covenant which brings you no earthly profits, and which secures for you no sensual pleasures. It is a bond of peace which demands that we serve the Lord our God together, that we walk together, and that we bear each other's burdens. For we are fellow-pilgrims to a better fatherland.

X

THE BUD THAT BLOOMED

"Justified freely" (Rom. 2:24).

FINALLY the moment came in which you could make your confession. The moment came in which you could confess before God and His holy angels, before men, and before Satan that you had turned to Jesus and that you now acknowledge that He is the Son of the living God. In a sense, you could have made that confession even if there had been no church. You can testify of the hope that is in you and you can plead for the holy cause of your Lord and King at any time and place in which those with whom you associate are willing to listen. In fact, readier courage and more fervent zeal are needed in order to testify boldly and heroically for Jesus in the shop, in the office, in the journal, at school, or among your associates, than is needed to confess your Mediator in the midst of God's people at church.

Your public confession in church differs from that in your daily experience. It cannot be especially said of your confession in the church that it represents an act of heroic courage. In fact, everyone in church expects to see you rise with the other catechumens who desire

the holy supper. All expect to hear you answer affirmatively to the questions that are directed to you. Your action before the congregation is not really a confession in the usual sense of the word. **It represents a joining of yourself with those who already confess.** For that, is it not, is what the congregation of the Lord really represents? **It is a group of confessors together with the children these hope to educate to a confession with them, and to a confession after them.** The congregation is a host, a host of champions for Jesus; but a host whose ranks are always being depleted by death or delinquency, and to which, accordingly, new recruits must constantly be added. The congregation is like a plant. Some of the flowers of a plant are in full blossom; others are still enfolded in buds. When the blossoms wither and fall away, the buds burst into bloom in their stead. The buds belonged to the plant all the while, but they were not yet blooming. **The baptized child is analagous to such a bud; it already belonged to the congregation, for it had been baptized. The bud bloomed. The baptized child made his confession.**

Indeed, the public confession before the congregation is less an act of heroic courage, than a joining oneself with those whose duty it is to confess Jesus. It is that and a promise on your part to confess him always, and always with equal loyalty and trust.

Whoever enlists for services in the army of a king must swear an oath of loyalty. The oath binds him, makes loyalty obligatory. True, it requires courage to take that oath, for, although it is made in peace, it must be kept in battle and sometimes at the sacrifice of life.

Yet the moment the oath is taken provides no opportunity for one to display one's courage. It means that on some other day, the morrow, perhaps, one must rush to the king's defense when one hears the bugle call or sees the banner wave. Then one must rally to the defense with the others, and, in perfect obedience to one's oath, must be willing to sacrifice life and limb for the king.

Your public confession is *analagous* to that. It represents the occasion on which you swear allegiance to your King, the day on which you enlist for service under His banner, the moment in which you arm yourself with His holy armor. When you make your confession, in other words, you swear to be always loyal to Him who called you.

In one sense, therefore, it is a public confession, for by it you assure your fellow-believers that yours is the same faith as is theirs. But more particularly, even, it represents a promise to confess throughout your life. It is in no sense a promise that has once and for all been completed. Unfortunately, it has been that for too many. With a sigh of relief, these exclaimed after their public confession: "There! Now I have done with it." But theirs was a false confession. The true confessor, on the contrary, exclaims: "There! Now I may begin." He means that now he may begin to defend Jesus, may begin to put his fullest and best efforts, and those unstintedly, into the Master's service.

A confession such as that offsets the pride which is very imminent at such a time. Whoever supposes he has already attained exalts himself, but he who knows he has taken only the first step feels rather tremulous.

It is the tremulous attitude of the soul which best becomes a young confessor. That does not mean that, half-dazed by dread at the immensity of his obligation, he ought to feel inclined to retreat from it. There is no need for remorseful tears at confession, and, although it would be an untoward symptom not to be intensely stirred by the experience, yet there ought not to be an emotional display. We read of Jesus that He was often touched by experiences, but only once do we read of Him that He wept. By a *tremulous attitude of the soul*, then, a flagrant emotional display is not meant. *By it is meant the quiet, holy tremulousness, that is engendered by one's having a low opinion of himself and a high opinion of the mercy of God.* It is engendered by the still, small voice that whispers to the soul: "I am not worthy to be called thy child. Who am I, Lord, that Thou art willing so to anoint my soul with Thy Holy Spirit? Yea, Lord, I am less than all these spiritual benefits which Thou in Thy mercy dost manifest to me."

How different that desirable attitude from the haughtiness which says: "Others oppose the Christ, but I do not. I shall rally to Jesus' defense, and so restore honor to His cause." As though Jesus needed any man for that, Jesus to whom is given all power in heaven and on earth!

Believe it wholly, confess it continually, let it be your comfort on your death-bed; that in yourself you are leprous and wanting altogether, but that in Christ you are justified before God, and freed from all sin. In Christ you are so free, that if you were to die in this moment, you would be found in eternity to have an

immaculate purity like that of the angels. Satan could find no cause for charging uncleanness against you. You are justified and are justified *freely*.

Bring that confession to the congregation of believers, and begin to fight one identical warfare with them. They too have nothing of which to boast in themselves. Yes, they are being satisfied with a heavenly nourishment, but it is a milk and wine which is given them without money and without price. They too are justified and they too are justified freely. Now that you come to make your confession, they praise God. **They praise God because another bud has blossomed, because another baptized child has indeed found Jesus to be a Saviour, and has therefore desired to remember Jesus' death.** None can boast of anything. All are freely justified. God is all the praise and honor.

XI

THE ART OF GIVING

"Of a willing heart" (Exod. 35:5).

DAILY experience teaches us that privileges always involve obligations. It is therefore readily understood that he who attains the full communion of his church and the privilege of partaking of the holy supper, is also called upon to share the financial burden of the church. The term "financial burden" must, however, be immediately suppressed and be translated into the Christian terms: a free-will offering. Your promise to contribute for this purpose is one of the important implications of your confession, and, although few think of it upon that occasion, it does represent one of the stipulations demanded of you.

Long ago the Lord God said: "Take ye from among you an offering unto the Lord; whosoever is of a willing heart, let him bring an offering of the Lord: gold, and silver, and copper." From this it may be concluded that he who does not bring an offering has not a willing heart. One who is unwilling to serve the Lord with his goods may not come to make his public confession. By your confession you promise to love God "with all your

heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength." You certainly are not doing that when you refuse to lay an offering of your goods upon His altar.

One person is inseparably attached to his money; another transcends the miserliness of that. These two attitudes definitely manifest spiritual conditions. You can observe that this is true from the case of the rich young ruler. We might say that he also wished to make his confession. Jesus asked about his relationship to the law and he replied that he thought he fulfilled the requirements. Then Jesus asked whether he was willing to sell his goods for the sake of the poor. And that demand, you remember, broke his resolve. He went away. He kept his money, but he lost his God.

It is obvious, therefore, that one's readiness to offer freely is most surely a part of one's confession. The church which neglects to examine those who come to her to make confession in this matter also, does not do her full duty.

"Whosoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it." That is what God said. The statement, accordingly, is a touchstone by which the quality of your spirituality can be tested. The implications of that statement are that you cannot by one gift absolve yourself of responsibility for giving. An especial offering upon the day of confession does not suffice. You should then declare yourself and ever after show yourself to be willing to serve your God by means of your goods.

Yes, you must both serve and honor Him by means of these. "To serve," in this connection, means that you must help to maintain what is necessary for the service

of the Lord. "To honor" means that besides this you must periodically give especial offerings. A child faithfully serves his father when his father needs his services. But when his father's birthday comes, the child honors him by some token of regard, of esteem, and of love. It is in that way that you must both serve and honor your Lord with your gifts.

One practical difficulty perhaps militates against the fulfillment of this requirement in the case of those who are just beginning to attend the holy supper. Young men and women frequently have no independent income at this time. Those among the lower classes who "work out" have funds of their own, and those among the higher classes who are granted legacies or allotments have them also, but the others who are many, still live with their parents and have no independent income. Now it is remarkable that in the past the lower and higher classes gradually learned the art of giving, and that stinted giving is most characteristic of the many in the middle class of society. This phenomenon can be ascribed to the fact that those who earned independently were in a position to begin giving as soon as they had made their confession, and that the sons and daughters who live for a time with their parents after their confession missed this desirable discipline. For that reason it is important to emphasize that giving depends upon a principle rather than upon the quantity of one's earthly goods.

It frequently happens that sons and daughters do manage to honor their parents by an occasional gift, but that the urge, the desire, and the zeal to contribute to

the Lord seldom stirs them. At collections taken in church they contribute what father or mother has put into their hands. In that way they themselves give nothing. Hence, it is to be advised that children, small tots excepted, be urged to give from their own funds. There is more of true giving in one penny from their own bank, than in ten simply conveyed from their pocket to the collection plate. He who makes his confession must give. He himself must give, even though he must earn what he gives.

"Whosoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it." He must bring it because it is needful, and because it blesses him. Yes, his offerings are needful. The Church of God is expensive; it costs a great deal. Jesus said to the rich young ruler: "Sell *all* thy goods." In the first place, the service of the Word and of the Sacraments may not be allowed to suffer because of financial embarrassment. The ministers of these must be provided with the needful things. Of them the holy apostle says: "Who goeth a warfare at any time at his own charges?" Later he says, "Who planteth a vineyard and eateth not of the fruit thereof?" And again: "Who feedeth a flock and eateth not of the milk of the flock?" And there are other needs within the church. The service of education and of mercy should flourish. Your Catechism advises that in order to keep the Sabbath day truly, you must see that the ministry of the Gospel and the schools be maintained. That is the service of education. And the service of mercy, according to the Catechism, is "to contribute to the relief of the poor, as becomes a Christian." Besides, the Church of God is not an anthill

which gathers up for itself only. Hence, the Gospel of the Kingdom must be brought through the Church to those outside of it who do not yet believe. Similarly, the mercies of God must be borne through the church to all the miserable without. Remember that there are two kinds of missions: That of the Word and that of mercy. The more bountifully and flourishingly each of these can be carried on the more gloriously is the Name of the Lord praised. Indeed, a church is costly. Ideally the Church should be much, much richer than she now is.

It is needful, therefore, to bring an offering and to bring that offering willingly. **That must be done not only because the church needs it, but also because it blesses him that gives.** God might have created a Church which needed no money. The life of the Church in the wilderness proves that. Hence, the fact that He has now called into being a Church which needs money, and which needs much money, has a spiritual significance. Our giving is a part of our sanctification. "The love of money is the root of all evil." Anything, therefore, which restrains us from a love of money is a redeeming and sanctifying influence. Our giving must prove that we are Christians and must each year add to the genuineness of our Christianity. That fact does not suggest, of course, that we can earn our salvation by our gifts. Our gifts affect our salvation not at all. If we sold all our goods and gave the money to the poor, and had not love, we would be nothing. Our offerings bless us only when we give them willingly. If we give in order to get praise for ourselves, if we give stingingly, if we give in order to get an honorable place in heaven, our offer-

ings avail us nothing. We must give because of love, only because of love, for God and for our neighbor.

Such giving, however, does most certainly bless us. Our money seems to say to us: "Love me, and forget God and the poor." God calls: "Give me your heart, and give it not to Mammon." Hence, he who is of a willing heart *must* bring his gifts; and he *will* bring them. His giving so far from making him poorer, makes him much richer.

Bring gold, silver and brass. These are three metals, and they are listed in the order of a descending scale of value. Accordingly, the statement means that each must give in proportion to the amount of wealth it has pleased God to give him. A man says: "I have saved so large a surplus, that I think I shall retire from business." But has that man frankly asked himself: "Have I, perhaps, saved that which rightly belonged to God and to His service? Is my surplus really so large that I can live from it and that I can also help the church to flourish?" For, except he have asked and satisfactorily answered those questions, it is sinful for him to desire retirement. God's demands in this matter of giving are as exacting as that.

The truth is that by nature we are inclined to say: "I and my family must live, must have food, clothing, and shelter; if any thing remains after that, let it be given to the church." However, he who thinks that way about it may not make his confession, for it is obvious that to him the service of God is still a secondary matter. The exact opposite would, in fact, be far more appropriate: "I and my family need God and His service more

than all things else; we shall provide for that first, and afterwards for food, shelter, and clothing." That would be applying Jesus' rule: "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness."

A tenth of our income should be the least we give. That is little, but it proves that God and His service figure in our lives. After all, giving is a matter of how important we think our bodies and souls, respectively. He who thinks most highly of his body will have little to sacrifice for his soul, for his God. Only he who can confess that his soul is much more important than his body will sacrifice more for it than he does for his body. He only has a willing heart; he only brings his offering.

If you rank among the well-to-do in society, bring gold, not silver or copper. If you rank among the financially poor in society, bring copper. And if your position is between these two, bring silver; bring a nickel or a dime, if you have little; give a dollar, if you have been given much.

Place the Kingdom first in your life, and give as you have been given. If you follow that rule, all your offerings will be pleasing and acceptable to God. Yes, then the widow's mite is most acceptable to Him.

XII

ADULT MEMBERS OF CHRIST'S CHURCH

"Now *hath* God set the members each of them in the body" (I Cor. 12:18).

MANY organizations make a distinction between "active members" and members who merely give their financial support. The active members participate in the activities of the organization; the others are mere hangers-on. The active members are actual members because they exert themselves to attain the objectives of the organization. Those who quit themselves of responsibility by "paying" may be called members, but they are not actually that.

A twofold relationship such as that is possible in a society because a society is not a body, is not an organism. But a relationship such as that is not possible within the Church of Christ, because the Church is as it is depicted to us in the Scriptures: it is a Body. It is a body not made by human hands, but created by the Lord our God. We ourselves are the members of that Body. It is that truth which the apostles are constantly trying to weave into our consciousness, and it is especially that truth which the Apostle Paul exposes to us in I Corinth-

ians 12. Your relationship to the Church can be a true one only if you think of that Church as a Body, and of yourself as a living member of it, and as one who will always remain a living member of it.

A conception such as that enables you to appreciate that the several members can be different, that one member of the Church can possess an individuality differing from that of another, and that each member has a function to perform which is peculiar to himself. Your body has many members, has eyes and ears, feet and hands, and each of these serves the body differently. Jesus' apostle tells us that it is thus also among the members of the Church. So far from resembling each other as do two drops of water, he tells us, the several members differ among each other and vary greatly. Such is the Body of Christ, not because we have spoiled it by our wilfulness, but because God has ordained that it should be so. The apostle says: "But God *hath* set the members everyone of them in the Body, as it *hath* pleased him."

These facts are being said, of course, of what our fathers called the "invisible" Church, of the mystical Body of Christ, and not of the external, visible Church. Who, indeed, would say of his relationship to the visible Church: "I am and eternally shall remain a member of it." The Church upon earth has many members whom God has never set in the Body. There are thousands, millions, who have never performed any function for the mystical body as members of the visible Church. Yet, you may not think of the visible Church as an organism which is quite disassociated from the invisible

Church, may not think of it as though the former stood beside the latter, as though you could do as you pleased with the visible Church, and do so with impunity. An illustration will elucidate what is meant. You are raising peas in your garden. You know very well that you want the peas, not the pod. Yet you do not tell your gardener: "You must tend the peas, but may ignore the pod." True, when the peas are ripe, and picking time has come, you shell the peas and throw the pod away. Similarly, you remove a scaffolding when once the building has been completed within it. Just so, the Lord God will sometime come to throw away the visible Church. But the present is not yet the season of harvest. The scaffolding is necessary still, and the pod must needs be. And pod and scaffolding must be protected: the visible Church must be preserved. Hence, you may not be indifferent about the visible Church, wrongly supposing that the invisible, spiritual Church can mature without her. Remember that the invisible Church is contained within the visible, and that the invisible Church flourishes only when the visible grows.

Never yield, therefore, to that spiritual greed by which so many, because they supposed their own soul secure, became indifferent to the welfare of the invisible Church. Whoever thinks that way supposes himself to be wiser than God, who gave us the visible Church. Essentially, the attitude of a man such as that represents sheer arrogance and pride. These are sins which inevitably are punished be they ever so skillfully subtilized. A sheltered spirituality is false. Every child of God is, by his confession, obliged to join the true Church of

God. The trueness of the Church can be determined from the purity of her confession, by her purged administration of the Word and of the Sacraments, and by her maintenance of Christian discipline. Never say, therefore: "I am a living member of the invisible Church, and, besides, I have joined the visible Church." By such a confession you put asunder what God has joined together. You separate the soul from her external body. By it you suppose that two kinds of life obtain: the one a spiritual life, which is lived for God; the other a life which accrues to you from your membership in an external organization, a life really external to holy things. It is from heresies such as these that the wicked custom of "receiving" members into the Church arises, a custom the sole objective of which is to support an external scaffolding of the Church, and which cares not at all about spiritual, Godly essences.

If you are to prosper spiritually, you must at the time of your public confession begin to take an active part in the life of the visible Church. The Body of Christ has room for only active members. Hence, he who is passive and indolent in the affairs of the Church is courting a lie and raises reasons to suspect that he is not a member of the Body, even though his name is enrolled on the records. The fact that you are young does not excuse you from active participation, for by your public confession you asserted that you had outgrown "childish things" and that you had attained an age of discretion. Nor may you plead that you are so insignificant that your contribution can be of no avail. The Apostle Paul has clearly pointed out that the least

significant members of the body do have a function to perform. Hence, there is no comfort in pleading one's insignificance as an excuse for indolence. The apostle pleads for co-operation between all members in order "that there be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another" (I Cor. 12:25). You were born within the Church, you were baptized within it, and you lived in it many years. But you perhaps never stopped to reckon what active participation in the life of the Church really meant. At the time of your confession you must become responsible in this matter. After your confession it is most obligatory that you ask what such participation demands of you in the Name of the Lord.

Real participation in the life of the Church asks many and various things of you.

First of all, it demands that you avert shame and reproach from the Church by yourself maintaining a goodly conduct. Next, you must insist that you and your family make constant use of the Church, and you strive to obtain spiritual nourishment, spiritual exercise, and spiritual enrichment. You must insist upon that because you know that the body is healthiest when the constituent members are vigorous and strong.

But these are not the only demands. You must also support and sustain others, must be patient and long-suffering toward them, must strengthen them spiritually. That does not mean that you must assume the duties of the pastor. That would be arrogance, and you must be motivated solely by your love for the Body of Christ, a love which seeks not itself. For whom, then, should you

provide? That question is easily answered. You may not imitate Cain by saying: "Am I my brother's keeper? Let him see to his own affairs; they are none of mine." Cain blasphemed with those words, but a child of God does not. The child of God knows who his neighbors are. True, you may also go into the highways and byways and seek out and help the unfortunate. It is blessed to do so, provided that you have first, with spiritual love and courage, fulfilled your duty within your own community. There are those, we know, who detect much evil in their own group, but who, though they see it, are silent. Often such as these try to assuage their conscience by going out to admonish some unfortunate strangers in a distant hovel or saloon. Sheer folly that: it is folly and a desire for ostentation. It is shirking one's duty under the guise of performing it. No blessing accrues to such practices. You must always begin by helping those whom God has placed in your way, in your house, in your circle of intimate friends. When you have done your duty there, you may go outside.

But the life of the Church offers still other opportunities for service. The Church also has a social life. She observes the communion of the saints, and maintains services for that purpose. She provides for those who suffer. She seeks out the delinquent. She maintains missions to those still outside of holy baptism. These duties involve much work. Some of this work is of a high type; some of it is of a lower class. There is work for those who are office-bearers, for those who function in offices which Christ has ordained. But there are also other duties, such as remind us of those performed by