

## THREE VIEWS OF THE CHURCH.

"There are two conceptions of the Church, which for convenience I shall designate as the Protestant and Catholic conceptions. The Protestant idea of the Church is that it is a voluntary association of believers in Christ; that those who think alike upon religious subjects join together in a society and choose their pastor, who derives his commission and his authority from them. Consequently they are at liberty to prescribe what he shall and shall not teach, or to unmake their church and make another, precisely as the members of a club, or of a political party have a right to withdraw and form a new organization. The Protestant theory of the Church is that of an aggregation of individuals, 'who can rearrange themselves at will, and thus create new churches at every re-arrangement.' (*Ewer.*) The Catholic theory, on the other hand, is that it is an organization which God Almighty has founded once for all, to last to the end of time, and into which he invites men: it is His family, His household, His kingdom, His city. Its officers are commissioned by Him and hold their authority as teachers only from Him. In a word; the Catholic Church is not a democracy but an empire, not a republic but a kingdom. As such it comes to man with divine authority: its officers are under oath to the Eternal King, and they are to minister to man in His name and for Him."

### – *The Living Church.*

Brother Wright who sends us the above clipping remarks, – "Two views well stated. Please give us the third and true one, Brother Russell."

In presenting the true view of the Church, we labor under the disadvantage that for fifteen hundred years people have been taught one or the other of the above views and combinations of both, while

the *true* idea has been generally lost sight of since the second century. The true view, as we conceive it, is as follows: –

God's church when completed and *organized* will be all that is given above as the Catholic or Episcopal view. But it is not yet completed, and hence not yet *organized*. When organized it will be clothed with power, and will be, "not a democracy but an empire, not a republic but a kingdom. As such it [*will*] come to *man* [the world – during the Millennium] with *divine authority* [and with power to back up that authority]. Its officers are [then, to be] under oath to the Eternal King, and they are to minister to man in His name and for Him." All this, it is to be noted, fits exactly to the coming *reign* of the church, when it shall "bless all the families of the earth;" but it will not fit at all to the present state or condition. There is no *organization* to-day clothed with such divine authority to imperiously command mankind. There is no *organization* doing this to-day; though we are well aware many of them in theory claim that they *ought* to be permitted to do so; and many more would like to do so.

This was the fatal mistake into which the church began to fall in the second century; and the effort to realize this false conception culminated in the boastful imperious counterfeiting of the *coming* kingdom in Papacy, which for centuries sought to dominate the world, by claimed "divine authority." This idea has more or less pervaded and poisoned the ideas of all the "Protestant clergy" as well, who, copying Papacy's false ideas of the Church, claim also that the Church of Christ *is now organized*, though they make less boastful claims to "divine authority" to teach and rule mankind in general, than Papacy does.

God's church is not yet *organized*; on the contrary the Gospel age has been the time for *calling out and testing* the volunteers willing to sacrifice and suffer with their Lord now, and thus prove themselves worthy (Rev. 3:4,5,21; 2 Tim. 2:11,12; Rom. 8:17) to be organized as joint-heirs in his kingdom at the close of the Gospel age, when he shall

"set up" or organize his kingdom in power and great glory, to bless and rule the world with "divine authority."

In the meantime, these *unorganized* but merely called out ones, who are seeking to make their calling and election sure, that they may obtain a share in the kingdom (2 Pet. 1:10; 2 Cor. 5:9), are "*a voluntary association of believers*" drawn together for mutual assistance in seeking to know and do the Master's will, that they may be accounted worthy the honors and glories promised, and not to rule men by divine authority; for they have no such authority now. In this "*voluntary* association" of the consecrated there is no imperial authority of one over another; and no lording it over God's heritage should be permitted; for the one and only Lord has left the instruction, "Be not ye called Rabbi; for one is your Master, even Christ, and *all ye are brethren.*" – Matt. 23:8.

Instead of the kingly and lordly rule prevailing in the customs of the world, the Master gave all another and an opposite rule, saying, "Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you; but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister [literally, servant]; and whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all [or greatest servant]: For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto [served] but to minister [serve], and to give his life a ransom for many." – Mark 10:42-45.

The Lord was chiefest servant; and among the apostles those who served the church at greatest cost to themselves – Paul, Peter, John and James – are esteemed, by those who have the spirit of the truth, in proportion to their *service* and not in proportion to their titles, gowns, vestments, praise of men, etc., of which they had none.

The Church, or company of believers, probationers for coming glory, in its "voluntary association" was indeed to *recognize* "teachers," "helps," "apostles," etc., but not

to *make* them. If they recognized a man "mighty in the Scriptures," "apt to teach," able to make clear the divine plan, and specially qualified to build them up in the most holy faith, they gladly *acknowledged* God's favor in raising up among them such a *servant of all* to assist them in the understanding of his word. But they should be careful always, even while rejoicing in and thanking God for such a servant, to require a "thus saith the Lord" for every point of doctrine, and to search the Scriptures daily to see whether these things be so – whether the deductions and arguments of the teacher agree with the whole testimony of God's revealed plan.

Thus, the Lord is the teacher of his followers, sending them now and again, in their own number, certain ones to call attention to truths being overlooked, or to injurious errors being entertained. The "meek" among the probationers will hear the Master's voice by whomsoever he speaks; and these will be guided into the truth, and prepared in due time for organization as his kingdom. "The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way." – Psa. 25:9.

Thus seen, both the Catholic and the Protestant views of the Church are erroneous. The Catholic view gets the future organization applied to the present time, and the Protestant view, though ridding itself of some of that error, carries along enough of it to injure itself; for instead of admitting all consecrated believers into a "*voluntary* association," in which God would raise up his own teachers, Protestantism attempts also to *organize* and bind with creeds and confessions into various sects, each of which anxious to perpetuate itself and its ideas, selects and *makes its own teachers* in its own seminaries.

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