

Charles Krauth

Christian Liberty



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Christian Liberty

By Rev. Charles P. Krauth, D. D.

The Substance Of Two Sermons
Delivered In St. Mark's Lutheran Church,
Philadelphia, Sunday, March 25th, 1860

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Contents

[Also Available from LutheranLibrary.org](#)

[About The Lutheran Library](#)

[Titlepage](#)

[Contents](#)

[Prefatory Note](#)

[Christian Liberty Maintained](#)

[The Essence, Manifestation, and Means](#)

[The Fundamental Proposition](#)

[Individuals and Congregations](#)

[The Principles Applied](#)

[New Testament Usage](#)

[Clerical Apparel](#)

[Decline and Revival of the American Lutheran Church](#)

[The General Synod Did Not Originate The Diversity](#)

[This Usage is Right](#)

[Christian Liberty Defended](#)

[Objection 1: There Is No Express Command](#)

[Objection 2: The Usages Are Offensive To Some](#)

[Copyright Notice](#)

[How Can You Find Peace With God?](#)

[Benediction](#)

[More Than 100 Good Christian Books For You To Download And Enjoy](#)

Prefatory Note

THE NECESSITY for the Defense of Christian Liberty, which lies before the reader, arose so unexpectedly, was surrounded by so many distracting circumstances, and yet seemed so imperatively to require promptness, that it was impossible to secure the time needed for a thorough presentation of topics as extensive in their bearings, and as important in the principles they involve, as to those to which we solicit attention in these Discourses. As, however, in the opinion of the many friends of truth and of the Church, who have urgently solicited the publication of these Sermons, they are, in spite of their crudity, adapted for usefulness, the author has waived his own judgment. He cannot, however, surrender them without the petition that the hastiness and feebleness of the Apology may not create or leave unmoved a prejudice against the good cause it is designed to serve.

Christian Liberty Maintained

“Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is Liberty.” – 2 Cor. 3:17.

THE REDEEMER of the world was sent with the Spirit of the Lord God upon him “to proclaim liberty to the captive, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.” He came to give freedom, through his truth, to the soul in the bondage of error; freedom through his precious blood from the power of sin; freedom through his kingly might from every sorrow, and in his eternal realm a full entrance on the glorious liberty of the children of God." We have a free Gospel, the free gift of God, to make us free; free by what Christ taught, free by what he was, free by what, in his infinite grace, he imparts to us: “if the Son make you free, ye shall be free indeed.”

Christ has redeemed us from the bondage of the whole law. The moral law is no longer the ground of justification, though it remains as a restraint upon the remnants of our indwelling corruption, as the guide of our life, the rule of a voluntary obedience, the directory of that holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord. The ceremonial law, Christ has utterly and absolutely abrogated in all its parts, as the sun at noontide abrogates the shadows it cast in its rising and ascending. No lamb is henceforth to bleed, for the Lamb of God has forever taken away all sin by the one sufficient sacrifice. No high priest is to come into the earthly shrine, for the great High Priest has passed within the veil of God’s eternal temple, and ever liveth to intercede for us. The law of the whole Old Testament service, with the passing away of the necessities from which it arose, has vanished. A dispensation in which the minutest points of ritual were determined by absolute prescription, has been succeeded by one in which nothing merely ceremonial is fixed by positive divine law. The New Testament has no Book of Leviticus; no, not a solitary Levitical verse. Levi was lost in Christ, as the acorn is merged forever in the oak.

And yet order is just as necessary under the New Testament as it was in the Old. God is not a God of confusion, but of order. Nothing can be

prosperous, nothing can long exist without order; and, therefore, order under the New Testament is just as little left to accident as it was under the Old. It is committed to another principle, not indeed as precise in its operation, not as mechanically regular in its work as that of law, but all-sufficient for its ends if properly applied, a principle in beautiful harmony with the benignity, spirituality, and power of universal adaptation which belong to our holy religion. That principle is the principle of liberty, freedom to the Church to exercise her own judgment and to determine for herself all points of mere order. This is an inalienable endowment of the Church, and, in its light, as in so many others, the affirmation of our text is true, Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."

The Essence, Manifestation, and Means

To understand more clearly the nature and limitations of Christian liberty, let us look at the objects with which it has to do. There are three aspects in which religion presents itself to us. It may be considered in its essence, the thing that makes it; in its manifestation, the thing that shows it; and in its means, the things which impart it to us and sustain it in us. Now the liberty of the Church has nothing to do with the essence of religion. Religion in its essence is an internal thing, it is faith, love, the heart of holiness, wrought by the Spirit of God. No power can dispense with the necessity of these things. If an angel from heaven, strangely mistaking or perverting the mind of God, should proclaim another Gospel, in which these things were left to the liberty of the Church, he would be accursed, and the Church which would receive such a Gospel would be destroyed.

Nor does the liberty of the Church concern the essential manifestations of religion. She is not free to confess or not confess her Lord; to sing his praise or be mute; to pray to him or withhold her prayers at will; to do or not to do all outward things which her Lord has commanded her. She has not only no freedom as regards the possession of the light; she has none as regards its manifestation. She *must* let it shine.

And as regards the means of religion, in what is essential to them she has no liberty. The means, indeed, are not religion itself, nor are the manifestations, but as the manifestations are the necessary branchings of religion, so are the means the necessary nurture of its root. The Bible is not

religion, for men may have a Bible and have no religion. The Gospel is not religion, for men may hear it and have no religion. The sacraments are not religion, for men may receive them and be far from God. Yet they are the essential means; and religion itself, without them, would perish from the world, oven as men would perish without nutriment; though bread is not the body and food is not the life.

Nor is the liberty absolute in all things that pertain to the order of the means, for there are some things in the order of the means apart from which the means themselves cannot be administered. One of these is time and the other is place. Time and place are the necessary conditions of all that is earthly. Whatever is done, is done at some time and in some place. To say that the Church is bound to use the public means of grace, but has liberty to dispense with either time or place for them, is a self-contradictory proposition. While, therefore, the Apostolic Church used its freedom in changing from the seventh day to the first, exercised the freedom of changing from one day to another, it had no liberty to change from a specific day to no day at all, but was bound by the minimum divinely fixed from the creation of man, and reaffirmed in the decalogue, — the minimum period of one day in seven. So, also, as it is of God that we are commanded not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, the Church is, of necessity, bound to have places of worship.

But in all that belongs to the order of means which is not connected with the essence of the means or bound up with them in the nature of things, the Church of Christ has absolute liberty. She is not free to put aside the appointment of one day in seven as the day of the Lord, but she may have other days of fast or of spiritual festival, as she freely determines; may have services on Wednesday night also, or every night, if she thinks best; may consecrate days of the year to the memorial of great facts in the life of her Lord; may keep Christmas, Good Friday, Easter and Ascension Day; may observe days of thanksgiving and days of humiliation. She must have hours of worship, but she is free to take what hours she pleases. She must have prayer, but whether it shall be spoken in the pulpit or at the altar, whether it shall be extemporaneous altogether or from a form altogether, or as in the simple services of our Church shall combine both, whether the minister shall utter it alone or accompanied by the people, is left to her freedom; for the essence of prayer is the soul's earnest desire, whether it be uttered in the words of David or of Paul, or of the Liturgy, or in our own words. She must

have singing; but what hymns or psalms she shall sing, how many, in what order, whether they shall be in rhyme or not, chanted or not, whether with the accompaniment of an instrument or without it, all these things are left to her freedom, for with or without any one of them she can sing with the spirit and with the understanding.

A place is necessary, but whether it shall be as in the early ages, some secret room barred against the bloody hand of persecution, or shall be the lone cave, or the vaults of the dead; whether it shall be some little church in the quiet woods, or some gorgeous pile of architecture amid the ocean roar of the great city; its size, its form, its arrangements, all these are matters of freedom. She must have baptism, and in it use no element but water, no name but that of the Holy Three, the undivided One. But what shall be the source of the water, spring, fountain, rill, running brook, river or sea, is a matter of freedom. To a very scrupulous inquirer who wrote to Luther to ask whether it were lawful to warm the water with which a weakly child was to be baptized, his sententious reply was, "Water is water," and as water is water," so washing is washing, whether the purifying element is sprinkled or poured, or the subject placed in it, and therefore the mode of baptism is free. The Church must keep the Supper of her Lord, she must give the bread which is the communion of her Lord's body," but whether that bread shall be leavened or unleavened, thick or thin, round or square, cut or divided in the hand, broken at the table or before it comes to it, placed in the hand of the communicant or put immediately into his lips, all these are free. She must give the cup of blessing, which is the "communion of the blood of Christ," but whether that cup shall be silver, gold or glass, whether the wine within it shall be red or white, all these are free. The communicants must show forth their Lord's death, but whether they shall sit, or stand or kneel; whether they shall commune in the morning, at noon or in the night, is left free.

The Fundamental Proposition

This, then, is our fundamental proposition: **WHATEVER DOES NOT PERTAIN TO THE ESSENCE OF RELIGION, TO ITS NECESSARY MANIFESTATIONS AND ITS NECESSARY MEANS, IS SUBJECT TO THE LIBERTY OF THE CHURCH.**

It is to maintain, apply and defend this proposition I stand here, not to defend the wearing of a gown in itself considered. I wish to bring into this pulpit the themes of the Gospel ministry, not the themes of the tailor or of the dressmaker. I stand here to defend a great principle on which the freedom of the whole Church rests, alike the freedom of the part which with our Church accepts certain usages, and of that which rejects them. We claim no more than we accord. The defense of our freedom is equally a defense of the freedom of those who use theirs in exactly the opposite way. We stand here, not to contend that what we freely retain makes us better than those that reject it, but that it makes us no worse; not that eating commendeth us to the Lord over another, but that not eating does not commend another over us. We contend for the only principle on which he that eateth will not despise him that eateth not, and he that eateth not, cannot judge him that eateth. The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, nor the absence of meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, and he that in these things serveth Christ, whatever may be his preference in other things which have no connection with these, whether he has them or has them not, is acceptable to God and approved of all thoughtful men.

My object then is to defend the right of our Church to have or not have, these things as she sees best — her right to have what she has — her right to keep what she wills to keep — judging no other Churches in their liberty, and allowing none to judge her in hers, committing them to their Master, and in the full persuasion of her own mind, standing reverently but fearlessly in the freedom He has given her, before hers. And such a defense connects itself with the great central theme of the Gospel; it is one of the multitudinous forms in which Jesus Christ and him crucified may be preached. For it is a precious gift purchased with his blood which I defend — the gift of evangelical freedom — the inalienable right of the Church to remain free where her Lord has made her free. God helping me, I shall strive to show that in the principles on which she has established her usages, and in the usages she has established on those principles, our Evangelical Lutheran Church has had and still has, that token of the presence of her Lord of which our text speaks:

“Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”

Individuals and Congregations

Now it is very evident that as a congregation is a body of individuals whose views and preferences conflict on many points, and as the Church embraces many congregations, which, if they consulted only their own wishes, would seriously differ, there must be some principles by which Christian liberty regulates itself, so that the freedom of the individual does not take from the congregation what belongs to its freedom as a whole, nor the freedom of the congregation take from the Church what belongs to its freedom as a whole.

Let us illustrate the point from our civil liberty. We are the tree citizens of free States, which are bound together as a free country. The individual has liberty, the State has liberty, and our whole land has liberty; but, this liberty is regulated by one general principle — and that is that the whole is greater than a part. The individual liberty is limited by the liberty of the State; that of the State by the liberty of the nation. The theory of equal rights prevents one person from settling questions which equally interest others, or one State from deciding, even for herself, matters which will involve the interests of the other States. It might be very clearly the interest of some individuals in this city, to have particular things arranged with reference to their wishes, as for example, the local taxes; but as the interests of others are also involved, these matters are settled, not by individual freedom, but by the freedom of the city as a whole, represented in the City Councils, chosen by the whole city. It might be to the interest of Philadelphia to control certain things for herself, but as they involve the interests of other cities and parts of the State, they are regulated, not by her freedom, but by that of the State, represented by the Legislature, chosen by the whole State. It might be to the interest of Pennsylvania, to have certain things in a certain way, as for instance, a particular rate of duties; but these matters affect the interests of all the States, and therefore, they are settled, not by the exercise of our State freedom, but by the freedom of all the States, represented by men chosen by the whole land. The liberty of one is limited by the equal liberty of others; two do not yield to one, but one yields to two. The part is limited by the whole; the less ratio by the larger ratio; the narrow interests by the wider; the local yields to the general; the particular to the universal; the minority to the majority. Nor is this inconsistent with true freedom. One pound is as heavy as another; but if the one is associated

with nine pounds, and the other is alone, the one sinks in the balance with the nine, and the other strikes the beam by itself. The principle is as simple as this, that though one is one, two are twice one.

And this simple principle regulates Christian freedom. The freedom of the individual is limited by that of the congregation; the freedom of the congregation by that of the Church. The individual uses his freedom to determine what involves himself only; the congregational freedom settles congregational questions, and the freedom of the Church determines what interests her as a whole; the individual gives way to the congregation on congregational questions, as the congregation does to the Church on Church questions. The individual is not to exercise a liberty inconsistent with that of the congregation with which he freely remains associated, nor is the congregation to exercise a freedom inconsistent with that of the denomination with which it remains freely attached.

The Principles Applied

Now apply these principles. The liberty of the Christian individual in regard to matters of order which involves himself only is unlimited, he may conduct his private and family devotions as he will; make them as long; or as short as he pleases. He may pray as often as he pleases, and in whatever attitude he pleases; he may use a book of prayers or dispense with it; sing what hymns to what tunes he pleases; sing with an instrument or without it, as he deems best; and no congregation, no Synod, no authority on earth, has the right to prescribe to him. but he dare not go out of this sphere to make his liberty a law to others — to prescribe that they in their homes shall do things in his way. He is not to assume what belongs to the congregation as a whole, or to the council which has been chosen by the Church, and whose decisions therefore, are those of the congregation. If an hour is fixed for public worship, he must not make it the hour of his secret devotions and remain away from the Church. He must not say because he prefers kneeling at home, that the congregation shall not stand in the sanctuary, or refuse to stand with them; he must not say because he prefers singing at home without an instrument, that the congregation shall not sing with an organ; that because he prefers dispensing with all forms at home, the congregation shall not unite in using the Liturgy of the Church.

On the same general principle the liberty of the congregation is defined. Whatever relates exclusively to its interests and rights as a congregation, belongs to its freedom. Within the congregation, the council, for the purposes constitutionally determined, is the congregation representatively, as a Legislature, in its constitutional functions, is representatively the people of a State, and as Congress, with the same limitation, is the people of the United States. Whatever is done by the council, in accordance with the constitution of the congregation, is done by the congregation itself. In the constitution of most churches there is an arrangement by which, if the council violate the constitution or misrepresent the people, the people can be called together to express their views to the council; and even when there is no such provision, there is always the power of redress connected with a new election, the congregation can refuse to elect again those that have not served them well. The pastor has the freedom of any other Christian in matters which relate to him as a private individual; and as a pastor, he has the control of all matters connected with the ordinances, which are not determined either by the congregation or council, in its sphere, or by the Church in her larger sphere. When he is ordained, he declares his faith in the doctrines of the Church and his determination to be loyal to her principles. If a conflict arises between the demands of the Church as a whole and the demands of a congregation, he is bound to respect the demands of the Church; but he has no rights which conflict with the proper rights of the congregation, as laid down in its constitution, or of the individuals in it, as on the other hand, they have none which conflict with his.

Finally, on this point, the freedom of the Church or denomination as a whole, is one which regulates all matters which pertain to her common interest as a whole. When a body chosen by the whole Church and therefore, representing it, makes decisions on points of order which affect the whole, the congregations are bound by them. No congregation has the right to isolate itself by usages inconsistent with the good of the other congregations, and such a course is not only an abuse of its own liberty, but also, as we shall show before we close, a violation of theirs.

The bodies which the Church clothes with authority may determine points of order by resolutions, but, in most cases in an Ancient Church like ours there are usages so deeply rooted, so well established, that even although they were unwritten, they would come with all the well defined

characteristics of law; such, for instance, as the usage of pastoral confirmation.

It will not require much reflection to satisfy any dispassionate thinker that the liberty of determining points of order which affect the whole Church belongs, not to the congregation, but to the Church as a whole. This I argue, First, *From the nature of the case*. It is granted that uniformity is desirable, even if it be not indispensable.

Now there can be no uniformity unless the same authority gives the rule to all. If every congregation settles these matters for itself, there will be as many varieties as there are congregations. The apparent largeness of liberty, which is the only possible recommendation of such a course, is not real. (In the contrary, in this way the one congregation violates the liberty of others, and prepares the way for the violation of its own.

Look at it on a small scale, in a single city. We will suppose that each of our congregations here, settles the matter for itself, and that as the result each one differs from all the others. Now, if there were no change whatever in the membership; no new members coming in; no old ones moving; no transition from church to church; if we never visited each other's places of worship; never gave invitations to those who attend them to assemble with us, or received their invitation to assemble with them; this incongruity might not be so painfully felt. But how is it actually? Would we not by such license go to work utterly to destroy the feeling on the part of the Lutherans of Philadelphia that they really belong to the same Church. A member of St. Mark's moves too far from his old church to attend it, but he finds in the Lutheran church nearest him wholly diverse usages and he is chilled. The habits which have been formed here must all be set aside, and for a long time he feels as if he were not at home.

A member of another Lutheran congregation comes into our vicinity, but he sees at once that the state of things is different from that to which he has been accustomed; the tastes and habits which were cultivated in one Lutheran church, must all be renounced before he can be comfortable in another. Is it hard to believe that our people often feel, not as if they belonged to the Lutheran Church, but merely to a particular Lutheran congregation, and if they remove too far from the congregation to worship with it, leave our Church and unite with another? Do we prize so little the distinctive excellencies of our Church, that we are willing to see it going into a state of dissolution for the benefit of other denominations?

And the remarks we have just made in regard to a single locality are strengthened when we think of our whole land. Must a Lutheran clergyman learn a new set of usages every time he makes a change; and shall we never have clustering around the service of our Church the potent charm connected with the growth of our habits in it, the feeling that go whither we will, we shall find it the same; shall we never have a unity manifesting itself in uniformity, and see our people every where trained in the same way, so that in all their wanderings, as soon as they are within the threshold of the Church of their heart they shall feel that they are at home?

New Testament Usage

I argue secondly, from *New Testament usage*. We see in the Acts of the Apostles and in the Epistles, the evidence that the congregations had a general uniformity of service, the same parts of worship in the same order, and that where a variation occurred in a particular congregation, the removal of it was urged on the ground that it was a departure from general usage. Take for example, a point of order in itself seemingly insignificant. In the eleventh of First Corinthians there is evidence that a usage different from that of other churches had arisen at Corinth. It seemed indeed a very little matter whether the public teaching and praying should be done with the head of the officiating person covered or uncovered, and as the members of the Church in Corinth had been accustomed, whether they had previously been Jews or Pagans, to see persons officiating with their heads covered, they continued this usage in their congregation. In itself it was a thing indifferent, but St. Paul calls on them to surrender their own custom, and conform to the practice of the church at large, and adds, "but if any man seem to be contentions," violently opposes the giving up of your congregational custom, insists on your regulating these matters for yourselves, let this settle the question, that "we have no such custom nor the Churches of God," from which in that excellent old Puritan commentary, *Annotations*, by Matthew Poole, the inference is drawn, that "good Christians ought in things of this nature to have an eye and regard to the customs of their own Church." Here is a recognition of the importance of uniformity, a regulation of a matter of dress in those who ministered, and a

denial of the right of a congregation to set up its liberty against the freedom of the Church.

The Apostle in the same chapter decides questions of order in regard to the Lord's Supper, and closes with saying, "The rest will I set in order when I come," implying that a power outside of the single congregation was the proper one to settle questions of order which equally affected all congregations.

In the fourteenth chapter of the same Epistle, St. Paul goes on to settle other points of order for the congregation at Corinth. He attributes their deviation from good order, not to the super abounding presence of the Spirit of the Highest, but to want of that Spirit, and again appeals to the usage of the Church at large: "For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, *as in all Churches of the saints.*" The history of the later Church confirms the fact that the very instinct of Christianity leads to a recognition of the great truth that unity works uniformity.

From the time of the Apostles, to the Reformation the idea of a congregation setting up in its isolation, usages of its own in regard to points of general interest, never entered, so far as we have been able to discover, the minds of Christian men. When the Reformation blessed the Church with a restoration of the pure truth, the principle of uniformity asserted itself again with all its ancient vigor. No Church of the Reformation left these general questions of order to the congregation. All the Churches of the Continent, the Reformed Churches of Switzerland, of Germany, of Holland, of France determined by a general, not by a congregational, authority the usage that equally interested all. The Church of England did the same. The Churches whose dissent carried them furthest from her, acknowledged this principle in common with her. When they rejected her order of services they established a general order of their own. Even the extremest sects, engendered in the great period of the Nonconformist Controversies, whatever may be their theories of congregational power, have practically embodied the same principle.

Preeminently as the Evangelical Lutheran Church was in her true life, a Church of the Spirit, clear and sharp as was the line she drew between religion itself and the means of religion, and in the means between their essential parts and their mere order; distinct as was her enunciation of the doctrine of the spiritual priesthood of all believers; stern, even unto death, as was her maintenance of Christian freedom, never did she in theory or in

practice countenance the idea that the separate congregations of a country are the proper authorities to determine the usages of the Church. Even in her different nationalities, with diversities from each other in some particulars, there is a fundamental agreement; and in the same land her congregations have the same usage in all matters of order of a general kind.

When our forefathers planted the Lutheran Church in this country they carried out this principle. When in this land, which was then almost a wilderness, they gathered together congregations they did not consult them, nor did the congregations dream of being consulted, whether they would retain the usages of our Church. Those usages were established on the one side, and received on the other, as a matter of course. And though their acts are not always perfectly consistent with it, this principle is recognized to this hour in all of our Lutheran congregations. It has been recognized and is now recognized in St. Mark's. Why do we have confirmation in all our churches and in this church? Why the solemn confession of sins on the part of our people, and the declaration of the divine promise of forgiveness on the part of our ministers, as preparatory to the communion service? Our congregations never voted on these things, yet they have them, because they were fixed, in the general usage of the Church. Why do we have a liturgical service? Our congregation never decided we should have that. The general usage of the Church has decided it. Why do we have the particular book we use in that service? Neither because it has been compiled by order of our congregation, nor because it has been adopted by it, but because it was set forth and recommended for use in our churches by the General Synod. Our congregation never voted, and do not claim in their constitution the right to vote in establishing what we now have; and all the antecedents show that as a congregation we claim no right to settle questions which equally belong to all other congregations in our Church. These questions, which effect the whole Church, must be settled by the whole Church.

Clerical Apparel

How has our Church, as a whole, settled this question of clerical apparel? Her written law in most lands, and the unwritten law of her usage elsewhere, have determined most definitely that in her judgment it becomes ministers of the Gospel to wear a distinctive robe in the performance of

their official work. In every instance in the three centuries and a half of her existence, in which she has expressed any opinion on this point, this is the opinion she has expressed. Many are the millions she has trained for heaven, in Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Isles of the Sea; and never has she seen evidence that the Gospel ceases to be the power of God to salvation, because the preacher of it, by a simple, unchanging apparel, marks his character as a religious teacher. Our Church embraces many nationalities, and many tongues. All the other Protestant Churches together do not proclaim the Gospel in as many tongues as she employs — and in all, her ministers mark their work by their dress.

Decline and Revival of the American Lutheran Church

The patriarchs of our Church in this country — spiritual, self-sacrificing men as they were — continued this usage of our Church. When they were taken away; when the low state of religion which followed the war of our Independence, infected our Church in common with others; when the taint of rationalism reached her from Europe, and she grew careless of her doctrines, then a decline in her love of her venerable usages took place, and from indifference, and accident, from the excessive size of her pastoral districts, and from the usages of the sects around her, much was suffered to fall away to which she ought to have clung. In the period antecedent to the formation of our General Synod, there was a deadness in our Church — an indifference not only to the doctrines which distinguish her from other Churches, but to those great vital doctrines which are dear to true Christians of every name. It was in this sad period of decline from her first love, that the neglect of her usages, which occasioned the diversity in this country, took root. The tendency to a false Congregationalism, which has so injured our Church, arose at this period, and originated in the fear of all general authority which might have the ability to control the laxity in doctrine, and in Christian life, which so widely prevailed.

When God raised up the new generation, who labored in reviving the life of the Church, this diversity already prevailed. The first labors of the men of God, who felt the sore need of the Church, were directed to the revival of the great central truths of Evangelical Christianity. Venerable men whose

names will be forever revered in our Church, in this time of darkness prayed on and toiled on — and they were spared to see the day dawn. Some of the younger men who labored in that time of reviving are still living. It was not the General Synod, not the Synods which clung to it most firmly, not the men who did most to give it efficiency, who introduced the diversity. When most of these men arose it already existed — one fruit of that time of decline. They attended first to what was most pressing; and in those days in which they fought against the spirit of sloth in the Church with the one hand, and worked on the wall of Zion with the other, they perhaps hardly had time to think of the importance of restoring the outward grace of the Church with the restoration of her internal life. It is a lesson rich in suggestion, *that just that period in the history of our Church in this country in which the formalism of heart was most absolute, and the Church most lifeless, was the one in which her venerable forms were abandoned.*

It is a sad thing to see the form robbed of the power; but there is one stage of misery below this. It is reached when the Church becomes so careless, so indolent, that she does not even keep up the form. And this was the condition of a large part of our Church. The power had vanished, and the form went with it. We take this position and defy contradiction, *that the abandonment of her ancient usages, by our Church in this country originated in her deadness and not in her spirituality*. The body without the spirit is dead, but it retains for a while the form; and while the form is there, hope may sometimes lie cherished that life will yet revisit it; but when even the form is gone, and the body fallen to ashes, unless God shall speak, hope is extinct forever. The loss of form in our Church was one which followed the loss of her life — the wasting away which followed death. It was not the triumph of spirituality over formality, but the final triumph over the form, on the part of that deadness which long before had triumphed over the power.

The General Synod Did Not Originate The Diversity

Our General Synod, then, did not originate this diversity; and wherever she has touched it at all, it has been in the effort to relieve it. One grand object of our General Synod was, indeed, to put a check upon the excessive

freedom of congregations and synods — a freedom which threatened utterly to destroy the unity of the Church. Though the excessive jealousy of general authority, which arose from the laxity of the Church, compelled the General Synod in its Constitution, to disavow the power *prescribing* among us uniform ceremonies of religion for every part of the Church; yet under the limitations of its constitution, it has constantly labored by its *advice* to do what it is not allowed to do by *prescription*. It has set forth a Hymn-Book, a Catechism, and at different times, two English Liturgies; has recommended the observance of the leading days of the Christian year, and as far as it could, has endeavored to establish uniformity in our Churches, and to correct the evils of an excessive freedom on the part of congregations, and of the local synods. It has never expressed itself against conformity with the general usages of our Church in regard to the clerical robe; and if it gave advice in accordance with the general spirit it has previously manifested, that advice would be, that, to the utmost extent to which they conscientiously can, our clergymen should aim at uniformity in this as in all other points.

While diversity, therefore, has existed in our Church in the United States, under circumstances which have made its toleration proper, it noAmr has been authorized. That it arose in an unhappy state of affairs; that its origin was unjustifiable, not eAmn those who defend it, can deny. Its birth was spurious. Ho lapse of time can legitimate it. It was unauthorized when it began — it never has been authorized; and it stands utterly powerless as a plea against the whole action of the conscious and earnest life of the Church. But if it is contended that a departure from usage could be made without any authority, much more can a return to it be made without authority. Nor could anything well ho more absurd than to elevate an accident in a very little branch of our Church into an antecedent, and to say that we are bound by the deviation from usage on the part of a few, a deviation made within the past generation. For they were either bound or not bound by the centuries of unbroken uniformity which preceded them. If they were bound, then they did wrong, and their course has no authority with us. If they were not bound, then infinitely less are we not bound to follow them; for, if the uniform usage of the whole through all time does not bind a little part, how can the conflicting usage of a little part for a short time, bind the whole or bind us.

Conflicting usage, we say, for, in the very midst of this lapse the usages were not everywhere abandoned. They were maintained in this city — and this is one reason why Philadelphia is at this hour a citadel of our Church in this land. All our prominent German Churches have retained the usage; the First English Lutheran Church retained it. The diversity began with St. Matthew's, not from opposition to the usage, but from circumstances purely accidental; and even in that Church, one of the pastors, with his right unchallenged, wore the gown; so that up to this period St. Mark's is the only Evangelical Lutheran Church of this city in which the gown has never been worn. The usage of our Church, then, is decisive — a usage absolutely universal in all other times, and in all other lands than our own; and this, with her original usage in our own land, and her preponderating usage in this city, ought to settle to us the question what is the mind of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and establish it as her judgment, that her ministry should bear in their dress the token of their official work.

This Usage is Right

Finally, We maintain that this usage which our Church has thus determined and to which we conform, is *right*. This, we ought not, indeed to be asked to prove. The members of a Church acknowledge, in being such, that her doctrines and distinctive usages are right. To those not of her, she may be bound to give reasons, but her own children ought to be her defenders, not the exactors of a defense from her. Nevertheless, we will try to vindicate our Church to her own children. It is a divine thought, whose traces we meet everywhere, that all things shall clothe themselves in forms that indicate their nature. A thought prompted by the tenderness of God puts on its apparel in the violet, and His majesty reveals itself in what the Bible calls, "Cedars of God." Through all the kingdoms of nature, animate and inanimate, through earth, sea, and sky, the thought of God which lies *in* things reveals itself in their outward garb. The whole universe of matter is the clothing of divine thought. In it God shows what he is, by selecting the appropriate appareling of his attributes: For the invisible things of him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made." All matter is designed to serve mind, or to display its attributes. The ultimate reason of all things visible is found in spirit.

Essence and revelation, being and clothing are the two ideas of the entire creation. The clothing of our race since the fall is not the mere result of physical necessity, it springs from a divine purpose. God meant that thought, and pure taste, and a sense of propriety, should be called forth in it, and by it, and that it should exercise a refining and elevating influence on man; and his book declares, (Gen. 3:21,) that the first clothing of our race came from him. There is hardly any part of our race so utterly sunk in barbarism as to have lost the general sense that there is a propriety and a congruity to be consulted in dress. All feel that qualities of the soul may be revealed in it, that it may display modesty and other virtues, or impurity and other vices and may prove the wearer to be refined or coarse. All feel that one style of dress is appropriate to childhood, another to youth, another to old age. What we would admire when worn by the girl, would disgust us if worn by a woman advanced in years. The dress of our joyous life is laid off in times of mourning, and we array ourselves in the garb of sorrow.

Almost parallel with this general feeling, and, indeed, as a necessary result of it, it has been the sense of all our race, that sacred offices should be marked in the dress. It is the common feature of all religions, but in none was an ampler arrangement, a minuter detail in matters of dress entered into, than in that system which was given of God to the Jews. As regards the clothing of the ministers of Christ in the primitive Church, one of the most learned among the latest authors who have specially investigated this subject, says: In conformity with the command of God, Aaron and his son assumed priestly clothing. This clothing was always retained in the Synagogues, and from the Christians of Jewish origin passed over into the Church, though, in the nature of the case, it experienced various changes in this transition. In the ordinary intercourse of life, in the first centuries, ministers did not distinguish themselves from the people by their clothing, *but beyond doubt they did so in the performance of official acts.*¹ In every part of the Church, in the period between the Apostolic time and the Reformation, this principle was honored, just as explicitly indeed in the parts of the Church which struggled even unto death against the corruption, as in those parts which were involved in it. Huss and Wiclif, and all the Reformers before the Reformation,” amid the ardor of the assault on the superstitions of Rome, never denied in theory, nor departed in their practice from this usage. When the glorious Reformation occurred, all the Churches which arose, acknowledged the principle. Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin, the

Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the various Reformed Churches in Germany, Switzerland, Holland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, England, Scotland, and Ireland, whatever might be their differences on other points, or whatever their diversity in the application of the principle, acknowledged and maintained the principle itself, and practiced on it. Those who most fully rejected the idea that a minister is a priest in any other sense than that in which all believers are priests unto God, and who therefore rejected whatever in the existing apparel was designed to claim a sacrificial priesthood for him, substituted for the gaudy and superstitious garments of the Romish priesthood, the plain, decent, and becoming dress which marked the minister's character as the preacher of the Gospel, and the steward of the mysteries of God. The use of an official dress is distinctive of every Church of the Reformation on its own soil. The surrender of the usage is characteristic either of the deformatory sects, most of them long since extinct, whose excesses periled the very existence of the Reformation, or it marks the Churches which have arisen in the internal divisions of Protestantism. It is generally supposed that the opposition to everything in the dress which marks the clerical character is a proper and original element of Puritanism; but such is not the case. While the Puritans objected to the retention of the gaudy and superstitious apparel of the priesthood of the Romish Church, they never objected to the simple gown and bands, but wore them. Not only do we see the great English Non-Conformist divines, men like Baxter and Howe, represented in this apparel, but the portraits of the Puritan divines of New England, as late even as those of President Edwards, and of others of his time, represent them with the bands at least, or some dress distinctively clerical. In the earlier history of a newly settled country, the struggle to meet the coarser and commoner wants of human nature, to find shelter, food, and clothing, to cut down the forest, and subdue the land, throws comparatively out of sight the more subtle yet not less real wants of men. The means of religion, and even its essence, are in danger of being turned under by the plowshare of materialism; and much more are the graces of order, the refinements of historical feeling, the nice sense of propriety, in danger of being entirely crushed out. The violent and radical opposition which is sometimes manifested to the usage we defend, will disappear from our land as she emerges from the bustle of a purely earthly life, and rises into a sphere of calmer thought, and of a larger consciousness in regard to all the wants of man's religious nature. Puritans

will feel that what their fathers conceded and practiced in the time of the fiercest warfare may safely be conceded by their children in time of peace. Presbyterians will feel that what Calvin and his great co-workers recommended; what was preached and practiced by the Reformed Churches of the Continent; what has been practiced and is practiced to this hour by the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, by both the National and the Free Church, cannot be perilous. Methodists will feel that what was worn by Wesley, Whitefield, Fletcher, and the great workers in the Second Reformation of the Church in England, and is worn now by Methodist preachers in Great Britain, cannot have a paralyzing power on the preacher.

What is this apparel in which such offense is found? Not a gorgeous robe of scarlet, but a vestment of black; it is not one which bears the tracery of superstitious emblems, but is entirely plain; not Romish, even in the sense of being used as an official dress in the services of that Church. It is Protestant, and exclusively Protestant. No Romish priest wears or dares to wear it. Where its use is established it marks the Protestant minister, and separates him from the priesthood of Rome. It is an apparel appropriate to the office, the person, the place with which it is associated. It helps to keep distinct the character of the minister as a teacher of God's truth; to remind him that he stands before men, not to instruct them in politics or in business, not to display his eloquence or learning, but in God's name to proclaim the Gospel of peace. Around it gather the associations of the young — associations which are strengthened by years. It does not shift with the changes of fashion, does not tempt the minister to conform to the fluctuations of the mode. It helps to merge the man in the servant of God and ambassador of Christ. As far as its influence goes, it helps to correct an evil tendency of our time — the tendency to prize the minister more than the ministry — the voice more than the word. It helps to throw the man into the background, and bring the office and the work into relief.

In no Church are the reasons for its use as cogent as in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States. She is a portion of the most conservative of Protestant Churches; she has centuries of venerable usage; she has the whole life, genius, and history of Evangelical Lutheranism to warn her against the craving for change, and to encourage her to "ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and to walk therein." She is the only one of the Protestant Churches which has generated no sects. With her children scattered in more nationalities than all the others embrace, she has

a common confession all the world over. In this country she is in the heart of sectarianism — encompassed by denominations, large and small, of every shade. From almost every part of Europe her children have been gathered here, bringing with them the diversities of their national usages. But to the heart of Dane, Swede, Norwegian, Prussian, Saxon, Hungarian, Serbian, her name is a password. Come whence the Lutheran may, if he be met by a Church on these shores, which shows him that she is Lutheran, his confidence is won. Whatever that may be which in any degree helps to mark our Church, and to prevent her from sinking into the indistinguishable shape of the sectarianism around her,

“If shape it may be called, that shape has none,”

it assumes the highest importance. The uniform does not make the soldier, but how important it is in distinguishing friend from foe in the battle. The garb of the officers imparts to them no qualities, but how it facilitates the order, the unity, and the prompt direction of the energies of the host. The official raiment of the minister is a visible and easily recognized token of unity and mark of uniformity. Shall we go oft in a blaze of ardor for the unity of the whole Church, and neglect the simplest, the easiest, the most obvious means of promoting the unity of the part in which we are? Shall we place in our household the elements of quarrel and feud between our own children, and in the midst of the battle leave home and compass, land and sea to have others keep the peace? Shall we have the spirit of the most latitudinarian concession for every sort of infirmity out of our Church, and exhibit the most rigid severity in our treatment of all that differ from us within it? No! our first duty is to sacrifice our mere preferences for peace in the Church; to get this monstrous beam of disunion and diversity, of conflicting councils, and conflicting usages, out of the eye of our own Church, before we volunteer our offices for the removal either of motes or beams from the eyes of others. All the denominations of this country are aroused to the importance of securing these emigrant elements, which of right are ours; but every habit, principle, and preference of the emigrant thousands are arrayed against their labors. The result, thus far, of all these efforts, when compared with the force of men employed, and the amount of money expended, has been an almost utter failure. The name of the Evangelical Lutheran Church at once conciliates their prejudice and arouses

their principles. But if the first sight which the emigrant gets of our Church in this land shows him that we repudiate her heretofore uniform usage, that we fall in with that which to his mind is utterly alien to her, he considers us false brethren; and all our explanations (and very sorry explanations they are) he hears with suspicion. He will be less averse to those who are avowedly not of his Church, than to those who in his eyes bear, indeed, her name, but trample on her usages. Many of these emigrants need all that we can do for them spiritually. They have had a theoretic training in the doctrines of our Church, but many of them have not experienced their saving power. How important is it that we should have their confidence, that they may be won to Christ, and be incorporated in a healthy and vigorous union with our Church in the New World.

But there is another element of the most important character to which we should have regard. It is to the foreigners in our Church, and their children, who are rapidly becoming Anglicized. The inevitable substitution of the language of our land for the German and other foreign tongues, first inclines and finally compels them to seek a home in English churches. But if our English congregations show no sympathy with the life and usages of the Lutheran Church, they will not come to us. They will be carried off in directions in which there is more seeming conformity with what they have been trained in, than they find in our congregations; and a class of persons, not second in value to any in this nation, are thus lost to us. The diversity of usage, moreover, tends to foment party spirit. Those that have a usage are tempted to make a virtue of the having, and those that have not, imagine that their want is a distinctive excellence. Not only does this diversity tend to cherish the most suicidal mistake which our Church could fall into, the mistake of sundering her German and English interests, of laying the foundation for schism, but even between churches using the same language, especially our English churches, it tends to prevent perfect cordiality in feeling and hearty cooperation in action. It tends to divide our house against itself if there be churches deviating from the general usage, they are tempted to receive with open arms, those who come from churches in which the usage prevails. It plays into the hands of those who would rather rule in some little fragment of a torn Church than work on the broad and equal ground of fraternity in an undivided Church; it encourages those who would widen the breaches, would have Old and New School Lutherans, and would aggravate our differences until they ceased to be the mere necessary

variations of a free and healthy life, and became the sources of party feuds and sectarian divisions. We should aim at having such uniformity throughout our whole land, that wherever our people enter a Lutheran Church they will feel that they are at home. The members of other denominations, even of the most unchurchly, feel so in their houses of worship, whether they go East, West, North or South. They have not radically different habits of worship and form, go whither they may. But what is the lamentable condition of things in our Church, which in her proper genius, has more that tends to unity than any other? I ask not what are the diversities which mark her when State is compared with State, Synod with Synod, or city with city? But what is the state of things in the single locality in which we are? Congregations using the same language, belonging to the same Synod, established in the same city and sometimes with but a few squares between them, have had usages so different, that the members of one experienced discomfort and perplexity in worshiping with the members of the other; so different, that when our members moved out of the bounds of the one into those of the other, they felt more at home in Presbyterian, Methodist or Episcopal Churches than in their own, and have often thus been tempted to unite with other denominations, and sometimes have actually been drawn into union with them. The result has invariably been, that, to a large extent, the sense of unity has been lost; the part has been more regarded than the whole; the link of our people has been that of the congregation, rather than that of the Church; they have been members of St. John's, or of St. Matthew's, or of St. Mark's, rather than members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. They have gathered around pastors, rather than around principles, and when their pastor was removed, the center of their union was in a large degree gone; and some in losing him losing all the centripetal force they ever knew, and obeying now an unchecked centrifugal power, have shot so madly and so remotely from their spheres, that no man thereafter was ever able to find them. And thus, pursuing this disastrous policy and raising an outcry at every effort to change it, we still wonder that our Church is so little known, that the mother of the Protestant World is so little regarded in this Western hemisphere; that the greatest of Evangelical Churches carries comparatively so little weight. But if we would have others to honor our mother, we must honor her ourselves. We have surrendered our unity to accidents. The distractions which arose when our church was paralyzed with rationalism and with the deepest formalistic

indolence, we have allowed to continue in this era of her renewed life; we have been willing that she should follow where she ought to lead; to imitate where she ought to be the model. We are not respected because we do not show the proper self-respect. The churches around us take it for granted that when we do not make the effort to find out the principles and usages of our Church, it is because there is very little to find; or that if we do not conform to them when we know them, it is because they are of little worth. Surely what was a precept worthy of an Apostle's utterance to a single person, "Let no man despise thee." may be addressed with unspeakably more weight to a great Church. But if our Church gives up her uniformity as a plaything of human whim, it will be addressed in vain to her. Men will despise her and she will deserve to be despised.

Brethren, I have almost done. The past week has been to me one of deep solemnity. Many of its hours, from morning till midnight, have been spent among the sick, the dying, the dead and the bereaved. From the services of the funeral I have hurried this hour to the duties of the house of God. The shadow of eternity has been upon my pathway. Others have been passing away before me, and I have felt how frail I am. I have felt a longing and a yearning I cannot express, to sunder every thought and affection from earth, and fix them on heaven, fix them on Him, "whose I am, and whom I serve." And as conflict has gathered on toil, my heart could hardly repress the cry, "Hide me, my God, in the secret of thy Tabernacle, keep me in thy pavilion from the strife of tongues." These are no festal apparelings I wear. They have associations which deepen the shadow of sadness under which my soul lies. Once before, the work of my ministry was done in vestments like these; not in this fair land of ours, but in the heart of tropic seas, at the altar of another church, in yielding to the thrilling appeal of strangers, who had no plea to make but that their city was a city of the dead. As with the setting sun of each evening, I passed through the long streets of that city thus appareled, following the dead, the moan of the sea which mingled with the sobs of human grief was in my ear, telling me of that waste of waters which might roll between my own ashes and the land of my birth. Yet between the pauses of the moaning sea and of the sobbing hearts, I heard a voice, not unknown, whispering as it had often whispered before, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee." That same voice I hear now, and my soul is calm. Nor would my soul be shaken if I knew that this plea, a plea for freedom, for charity, for

unity in the church which is so dear to me, would be the last I should be permitted to utter. The last breath would not be misspent in proclaiming: Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is Liberty." God lift us up to the true spirit of this liberty, and keep it untouched in our Church forever.

1. II. F. Jacobson in Herzog's Rel. Encyclop., 7:733.



Christian Liberty Defended

“Judge nothing before the time.” – 1 Cor. 4:5.

IT IS not so much the feebleness of human reason, as the power of human passions, which creates diversity of opinion among men. We confound the results of habits, tastes and prepossessions, with the results of judgment, and put them in the place of our conscience. We pretend to search the hearts and read the motives of those who maintain what we deny, and transfer our dislike of their persons to their principles. We are partisans, we do not like to desert those with whom we are accustomed to act. The pride of opinion is mighty in us. We forget that nothing is to be done through strife or vain glory, but in lowliness of mind each is to esteem other better than themselves. The pride of consistency influences us; we have said a certain thing and we will abide by it. There is but one who has touched our world who was perfectly free from prejudice and rash judgment. How perfect was his serenity; how calm his spirit in the midst of the mistakes of friends and the malice of enemies. When he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously. Oh, that with his forbearance we might approach every subject that may divide us! Come, thou loving and forgiving Saviour, and breathe into us thy spirit; correct our rashness and impatience; give us grace to wait till that which is dark is made clear, and thus to fulfill thy command, given by thine Apostle, to judge nothing before the time."

Approaching the great theme of Christian liberty in its relation to the usages of our Church, we have tried to look at the arguments for the view we this morning maintained. But our work is not yet finished. We feel that it is due to those who have urged the difficulties on the other side, to weigh their objections. Most of them have, indeed, been anticipated in the argument of this morning, and we shall, therefore, touch them very briefly.

Objection 1: There Is No Express Command

The first objection urged is, that there is no express command of the Lord for these usages. "Where," it is asked, is there a 'thus saith the Lord' for them?" To this the answer is very simple. There is no express command for them, nor is there any against them. The objector says, "You must not conform to the usage," and then, in my turn, I ask, Where is there a 'thus saith the Lord' for his demand?" He is bound, on his principle, to show one; for his principle is, that there must be an explicit command for every Church usage: if we need a command to justify us in conducting the services in a gown, we equally need one for conducting it in a coat. Where is the explicit command for voluntary associations in the Church, for Bible, Tract, Missionary and Temperance Societies; for Wednesday night meetings? There is not a Church on earth which confines its usages strictly to that which is prescribed by a direct command of God; and none deviate further than some who, for sectarian purposes, are constantly using the plea of which we have been speaking.

The true principle is, that in things undefined by the Word of God, the Church has liberty; but the objector is self-convicted, condemned by the very thing he alloweth. And yet the positive prescription of apparel for sacred offices under the old dispensation, shows that such apparel is not wrong; and the directions in the New Testament in regard to propriety in dress on the part of all Christians, justify our attention to the proprieties of official costume on the part of ministers.

But is not this usage opposed to the *spirituality* of the new dispensation, does it not tend to formalism and ceremony, to pomp and pride; and is it not, therefore, contrary to the spirit of God's word? We reply it is not opposed to spirituality, for as that which enters into the man does not defile him, that which is laid upon him cannot affect his heart. Clothing may reveal character, but it cannot make it. If Herod had changed robes with the Saviour, the king would have been as cruel, the Master as meek as ever. If there is pride within a gown, the man puts it into the gown, not the gown into him. The form is indeed little without the power, but the spirit of religion, while it is in the world, must have a form, as the soul while alive must have a body; and the condemnation of the Church is not for having the form, but for having the form only. The form may be sundered for a while

from the power, and God may use it to bring back the power; the water-pots of stone may be empty, yet in his own time the Son of God may fill them with the marvelous tokens of his grace. The bottle is of little value without the wine, but if the bottle be burst, the wine is spilled. No churches are more spiritual, more simple, more earnest than some which have this usage; none more dead than some which reject it: earth has never seen humbler and more devoted men than some who have conformed to it; and none more rancorous and narrow than some who have bitterly opposed it. The presence of it is no token of pride, any more than the absence of it is of humility. Some churches that are formal may have it; and they have the Bible, and hymns and prayers, too; but the connection of coexistence is very different from the connection of cause and effect. Good churches and good men, it is urged, have done very well without it; and good men and good churches, we reply, have done very well with it.

But is it not in keeping with the spirit of the New Testament to consult the most perfect *simplicity* in worship, and in all other things? We reply, that without simplicity in its true sense, there can be nothing really attractive. Whatever God makes or does is marked by it. Simplicity is opposed to superfluity. How many or how few elements are necessary to a certain result, depend on the character of the result itself, and simplicity therefore is always relative. Public worship must have more parts and elements than private worship, because it proposes to supply the wants of a much larger circle of worshippers. It should meet every want of the devotional nature of man, and should address itself, within due limits, to his imagination as well as to his colder reason. Simplicity in worship no more requires nakedness and barrenness, than simplicity in dress requires that we should confine ourselves to the original apron of fig leaves. The particular apparel now in question is simple, few in its parts, and unobtrusive in its color, and its unchanging simplicity is therefore one good ground for using it. We have tried to show that it is not useless; and have employed the unanswerable argument of facts, to prove that it does not destroy the spiritual simplicity of ministers or of Churches. The sort of simplicity which is sometimes extolled for controversial purposes, is very hard to find. It is not to be found in this beautiful world of ours, with its rainbows spanning its awful cataracts; with its flowers, and its fruitage; and with all its wonderful appareling. It is not to be found in the Old Dispensation, with its magnificent ritual. It is not to be found in the words of our Saviour, who

wrought into his teaching, the most solemn and beautiful images from the outer world; and who spake not cold abstractions, but called the lilies and the birds to be our teachers. It is not to be found in the life of Him, who commended the woman who broke the alabaster box of ointment whose perfume lingers for all generations. It is not to be found in the Apostolic Church, which taught that every creature of God is good, and that every faculty and every innocent taste of man is to be drawn into the sphere of religion and sanctified by it. It is not to be found in the Christian Church at large, which through ages made all the arts tributary to religion. It is not to be found in the Lutheran Church, which has always resisted the Vandal spirit, which would strip the sanctuary and its services of all their power of ministering, under the hallowing direction of religion, to the affections and the imagination of men. It is not found in the denominations which, whatever may be their practices in regard to what they call simplicity in the externals of worship, have nothing whatever of that sort of simplicity in their houses of worship, but lay upon them every ornament which money can procure; and in some pile of imitative architecture, which carries the mind back to the centuries of Gothic elaboration, have a service whose tone is that of yesterday's newspaper, not that of the simple olden time whose prayers were heart to heart. It is not found in St. Mark's Church; neither in its painted walls, its windows of stained glass, its elaborate altar railing, its massive pulpit, its fine organ; nor in the dress, nor in the homes, nor in the habits of its people. There is no family in our Church which, on the ground of this sort of simplicity, would not find more difficulty in defending some of its usages, than our Church has in defending any of hers.

Objection 2: The Usages Are Offensive To Some

The second objection is, that as the usages in question are offensive to some of the brethren, a conformity with them is in conflict with the law of love; "If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend." (1 Cor. 8:13.) The mere putting of the question on this basis, acknowledges that it lies in the sphere of the Church's liberty, admits, therefore, that it does not properly belong in itself to the sphere of conscience, and on the ground of love appeals to her not to

do what it concedes she nevertheless has the right to do. To maintain this objection would, therefore, require the abandonment of nearly all the others. Most of them deny her right — this fully recognizes it. If it stands, they fall. On the other hand, we freely concede that if it can be shown that this divine law of love, as here defined, is violated in the usage of the Church, the usage ought to fall, by the unforced, free consent of the Church yielding her own, in the Spirit of Jesus, for love's sake. This is the key of the antagonistic position; and if it can be successfully maintained, whatever may be the advantages we may have seemed to gain elsewhere, we will retire from the field.

The circumstances under which St. Paul wrote this memorable verse are very clearly brought out in the chapter it closes, and ought to be familiar to you all. It may, nevertheless, be well to recall them, that we may judge whether it has any fitness for sustaining the position in behalf of which it is quoted. Some of the Christians at Corinth, who prided themselves on their superior knowledge, and their complete freedom from former prejudices, did not hesitate to eat the flesh of animals which had been offered in sacrifice to idols, for they knew that "an idol is nothing in the world." They urged that the burning of one part of an animal on the altar of such a visionary being as an idol, was no reason why the other parts might not be used as food, and some went so far as to partake of this food at the banquets in the temples of the false gods. But there were Christians at Corinth, who though they had renounced idolatry, could not entirely shake off the impressions of their heathen education, and still thought that these idols were real gods, though false ones. Now to eat of the sacrifice was regarded both by Jews and Gentiles as a communion — an act of fellowship with the being to whom that sacrifice had been offered. The Christians, who thought themselves strong, laughed at the idea of communion with beings that had no existence, and ate of the sacrifice with a contemptuous rejection of the idol. But their weaker brethren could not help looking upon the eating as a sort of communion with the idol; nevertheless, seeing the course of Christians, in whom they confided, and to whom they looked up, they with conscience of the idol," with a sort of trembling faith in the reality of the idol-god, partook of the sacrifice, and sinned against their conviction. The example of the strong emboldened the weak to do what from their point of view was morally wrong. Now the Apostle divides the question. He declares, in a later part of the Epistle, that the participation at the idol-

temple was utterly indefensible, and directly inconsistent with the Christian profession; but of the eating elsewhere of what had been offered in sacrifice he pronounces it in itself a thing entirely proper, (1 Cor. 10:25—28,) provided it was not done under circumstances which led those that were weak into sin; for, says the Apostle, “When ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend,” that is, lures him into sin, “I will eat no flesh while the world standeth.” Now if there be a parallel between the usage of our Church and the eating of which the Apostle speaks, his argument would imply that the usage is not in itself wrong; that on the ground of *right* it is a matter of liberty — before God, we are neither the better nor the worse for it. If the Church, on this supposition, is asked to give up her usage, she may, if she sees fit; but only on the ground of her own concession in love, not on the ground of the right of any one on earth to exact it. To use this plea, we repeat it, the reasoner must concede, what we contended for in our first Discourse, that this is a matter which lies not in the sphere of conscience, but in that of liberty.

But though, for argument sake, we have supposed for a moment the cases to be parallel, there really is no parallel whatever. In whatever point of view you attempt to institute a parallel between the eating of idol sacrifices, and the return to the usages of our pure, Biblical, and Protestant Church, the analogy utterly fails. It fails utterly as to the *subjects* between which the attempt is made to find a parallel. There is no analogy between flesh offered to idols, and these usages. The unity and uniformity, the order and propriety of the Church of Jesus Christ, are not idols, but things which God approves. “An idol is nothing in the world,” but these are solid realities, and next to the essence and means of religion, of which they are in a high degree conservative, are the most desirable things in the Church. A sober, unchanging, and becoming apparel, which marks the ministerial functions, is not of the nature of an offering, it has nothing sacrificial about it — it has not even the taint of association with superstition. The question how far things, in themselves indifferent, but which have been abused by a system of idolatry and superstition, may rightly and prudently be used in pure Churches, is entirely distinct from the question before us. The struggle in England between the High Church party on the one side, and Evangelical Episcopalians and the Non-Conformists on the other, with reference to the so-called “vestments,” or habits, was in regard to the white and scarlet, and

the many colored and many fashioned robes which had been associated with the abominations of the Romish Mass, and not on the general propriety of a clerical dress, which was admitted by all; nor especially of the propriety of the black gown, *for which, over against the vestments, the Puritans and the Puritanizing party frequently contended.*¹ For the particular apparel which in this case is associated with Christian liberty, is not monkish, nor Romish, even in the mere accidents of historical association. As an ecclesiastical dress, it is later in its origin than the time of the Reformation, has been used in the majority of Protestant Churches, was introduced by Protestants, and has been confined to Protestants. No Romish priest has ever officiated in it; and if he should do so, would do it at the peril of degradation from his office. The black gown, in the service of the sanctuary, is the result and the remembrancer of our having thrown off the yoke of Rome. It is no idol, nor offering to an idol, but recalls the overthrow of superstition, and the reestablishment of the office of the Christian teacher in its ancient purity.

But we argue further that there is an utter failure of analogy in the result deprecated in the two cases supposed to be parallel. The result at Corinth was that the strong drew the weak into a practice condemned by their conscience, into sin and the peril of apostasy, but in the present case, those, who, to enjoy the benefit of their own illustration, must consider themselves the weak, are in a state of vigorous protest against the offensive meat. The restoration of the usage has quickened them to an ardor of opposition such as they never felt before. But even if they acquiesce, and permit their Church to exercise her liberty, they will not be “offended” in the Apostolic sense, in which sense it does not mean to have offense given us, but to be snared into sin; for, surely, the Gospel is the power of God to salvation, whatever may be the apparel of the preacher; what he says cannot be made sin by what he wears. Our brethren, therefore, whom very reluctantly, for argument’s sake, we allow for a moment, on their own insisting to be the weak, are not “offended” if even they are drawn into a conformity with those whom they too flatteringly concede, by quoting the verse under discussion, to be the strong.

Too flatteringly, we say, to us, as well as too disparagingly to themselves; for we argue further, that there is an utter failure of analogy in the *persons* involved in the two cases, between which it is sought to institute a comparison. There is not upon the one side a party with a claim

of superior knowledge to puff them up, but simply Christian men and women, and a Church council freely chosen by a Christian congregation, who have felt a desire to remove injurious diversities from the Church, that it may with more heartiness and unanimity do the Master's work. Nor is there on the other side a party of the weak. The few who are opposed to the usage have minds of sufficient vigor, and have had a sufficiently large Christian training to understand the principle of liberty involved: and, when their minds are fully directed to the necessity of a general uniformity, and to the means necessary to secure it, we believe that they will cease to confound taste with conscience, and early habits with conviction. It is in any case only to involuntary weakness, and to it no longer than until it has had full opportunity of correcting itself we are to yield. The principle of the New Testament was laid down not to make the weak, in effect, the controllers of the strong, but to prevent the strong from forgetting the demands of love to the weak. It was meant that the strong should use it as a plea with each other, not that any one simply by claiming to be weak should restrain the liberty of others. And the double claim which is asserted by those who usually make this plea; the claim that they are right, and that they are also entitled to the immunities of the weak, necessarily overthrows one of its parts by the other. If they are right and strong, then they should, on their own showing, defer to the others. If they are the weak, then of necessity, on their own showing, they are wrong, and should abandon their error. We are entirely willing they should select their own position in the illustration; they may be "the strong," if they will, or the "weak," if they will, but we humbly submit, that they cannot be both. And to conclude on this particular point, were the features on which we here dwell, otherwise, nevertheless there is an immense difference between the case of an individual freely giving up a solitary article of food, because it had a certain dangerous association, and the case of a great Church abandoning on compulsion, important usages, and periling great principles.

But suppose the principle involved in the text of St. Paul does apply; admit that there is an analogy, we contend, finally, on this general topic that it makes not *for* those who urge it, but *against* them, and that it really furnishes an argument of the strongest kind, for the whole position we have been defending. For there are two sides to charity here. There is a preference for these usages, as decided, as intelligent, and as conscientious, as any opposition to them can be. Weakness would here counterbalance

weakness, and compels us to settle the question on other grounds. But there is an important difference between the weakness that is for these usages, and that which is against them, and that is, that our Church is responsible for the former — her children learned it of her. It is not the plea of love alone, but of justice which they can make. On the one side stands individual preference alone; on the other an individual preference no less marked, and sustained as the other is not, by the genius and usages of our Church, through all the centuries of her existence.

If it be suggested that St. Mark's presents an exceptional case, because it is so largely made up of Christians whose religious training occurred in other denominations, and, who, therefore, ought not to be expected to conform to the usages of the Lutheran Church, we reply, that this fact, so far from weakening the force of our argument, imparts to it great additional strength. For, just to the extent to which the preferences are manifold and conflicting, does it become difficult to meet the wishes of all. But if you have respect to one set of wishes, you are bound to have equal respect to all; and as this is impossible, nothing remains for the church but calmly to carry out her own proper usages. All her children are then put upon the same common ground. She no longer is guided by preferences, but by principle, and no one has the right to be offended. The privileges of adopted members are precisely those of members born and reared in the Church. If the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, as we confess and preach it, commends itself to them as in very deed, that faith once delivered to the saints; if our sacraments appear to them to be rightly administered, and they come to us, we receive them with the open arms of a love, which like that of our Lord, knows no distinctions. There is no privilege, little or great, that we do not freely share with them. Where, indeed, are the terms on which the members of other communions are received, so large and liberal as they are in our Church? If you have been baptized, we do not, with the hierarchical Churchman, bring you again to the font to impart to you some grace, of which we are the sole keepers. If you were immersed, we acknowledge your baptism, though its mode differs from ours. If you have been confirmed we do not reconfirm you. If you bring evidence of your right to approach the table of the Lord in another Church, we admit you at once to ours. We do not lay before you a large system of divinity, and tell you, you cannot hold office in our Church, unless you subscribe to it in every part. Where is there more true fraternity than among us, more real liberty to

serve our God in freedom of conscience? We have in the Evangelical Lutheran Church the very least amount of restraint consistent with good order and peace.

Our congregation indeed embraces many elements. This church was one of the earliest to occupy this part of the city; and the faithful labors of the first pastor drew into it many who were reared in other spiritual homes, but who have proved themselves devoted members of our household of faith. Yet whatever they have done for St. Mark's, they will confess that the ordinances and privileges of the Gospel they have here enjoyed have more than repaid them. No church member can lay up a balance of obligation against his Church. He never can do as much for the Church as it does for him. No man has a right to thrust upon a Church his claim upon its gratitude, as a reason for its departure from its principles, or as a ground on which it may be urged not to return to its usages. We belong to the Church, it does not belong to us. If St. Mark's were to have no usages but those common to all the denominations represented in her, she would have no usages whatever; no liturgical service, no instrumental music, no singing, no audible prayers, no ministry, no confirmation, no baptism, no Lord's Supper. And though usage and doctrine are very different things, yet the doctrine and principle of Christian liberty underly the question of usage; and if the preferences of individuals are to take the place of established principles as a guide, why may we not be asked to give up all our doctrines which do not accord with the early educational prepossessions of our members? Never did our Church make a compact, explicit or implicit, to surrender either doctrine or usage to the prepossessions of those "who come to her. Nor did they ever imagine that there was such a compact. The Episcopalian has come to us without expecting our ministers to seek ordination at the hands of a diocesan bishop; the Presbyterian knows that we will preach an unlimited atonement; the Methodist is aware that we will proclaim a sanctification, which is not instantaneous, but progressive, and which will never be perfected on this side of heaven. Those who come to us may never have joined in a form of service, but they found it here; they may never have witnessed a confirmation, but they have seen it here; they may never have passed through the solemnities of a special preparation for the communion, but they have engaged in them here; they may have sat or stood at the Supper of the Lord, but they have knelt here; and some of these are usages, not like the use of a gown common to almost the whole

Protestant world, but are confined to our Church, and to a few other churches which have shaped themselves by her example. As a body our people have acquiesced in the usages of our Church, and acquiesce now. Singularly enough in its connection with this point, the propriety of the conformity which I am now defending, was first urged upon me when I came here, by a member who was reared in one of the most rigid of the Calvinistic Churches. Those of our number whose habits were formed among the Scotch Presbyterians, the Dutch Reformed, the Episcopalians, the Moravians, the German, Danish and Swedish Lutherans, or among those of our English Lutherans, into whose churches the variation has not entered, all of whom have this usage, have not more warmly approved of it than many whose early tastes and habits might have been thought almost necessarily to array them against it.

But by some who oppose our Church's return to her usage, a final issue is made on the ground that whatever may be the force of the reasons which have led to it, the whole matter ought to have been laid before the congregation. To this we reply, first, that we have shown, especially in the discussion of this morning, that this is a Church question and not a congregational one, and therefore, to be settled by the Church and not by the congregation. Secondly, if the Church had not settled it, it would be a question for the minister, and not for the congregation. He is appointed to conduct the public service, and in all points left open by the Church, he has the right to do as he deems best. Thirdly, the pastor made himself acquainted privately, to a large extent, with the views of the members, and was satisfied that they very generally, either strongly desired, or at least did not strongly oppose the return to Church usage. He did not introduce the question into St. Mark's, but found it there, and learned that it had been a topic of interest for years, and saw reason for desiring to have it settled definitely, in some way. Fourthly, providential circumstances led him to a necessity for deciding the question at once. He laid it before the Council; and while he claimed the right to have decided it without consultation, committed it entirely to them, declaring that he had no personal wish in the matter, and that their advice would be to him a final decision. The Council, freely chosen by the congregation, for the very purpose, among others, of giving counsel to the pastor, and of helping him to see the wants and wishes of the people, by a vote, within one of absolute unanimity, requested him to conform to the usage. This request was, on all principles of sound

government, the request of the congregation, officially represented in its officers. Whatever the Council does in accordance with the Constitution which the congregation has adopted for the government of them and itself, is as binding on the people, as if it were done by their direct vote. The congregation has been consulted through their constitutional organ, and it is at the request of the congregation, I conform to the usages of our Church; nor has any man a right to assume that they have not been truly represented, until they themselves say so. Fifthly, the congregation did not establish the order I found here; and therefore, are not the proper persons to set it aside. It was established by individual authority, without even the advice of the Council. If I had followed the antecedents in St. Mark's, I would not, as I most gladly did, submit the question even to the fraternal judgment of the Council. Never, in the whole history of St. Mark's, has a congregational meeting been called to determine what their minister should wear or not wear. There is nothing in your Church Constitution; nothing in the precedents of your congregational history; there is not a solitary principle nor fact to justify the idea that the people in their collective capacity, are the proper advisers in cases of this sort. No congregation in this city, or in this land, as far as we are able to learn, claims such power. If any man leaves us, because his pastor, at the almost unanimous request of the Council, freely elected by the people, conforms to the general and to the prevalent local usage of his Church, without consulting a congregational meeting, he will be compelled for consistency's sake, to refuse to join any church, unless it settles such questions in that way. But he will find no such church. He will flutter homeless over the waters until, if his calmer judgment prevails, he is prepared to return to the ark.

But is it not better, it may be asked, that all the distinguishing denominational marks should be given up? Should there be anything outward to mark diverse parts of the Protestant world?

To this we reply, let the Churches come to a real living unity, and these questions of uniformity will settle themselves. On the ground on which our Church rests these usages, they cannot divide the Churches, for she regards them as a matter of liberty, in which they are as free as herself. But if they do divide the Churches, let those who oppose them give up their groundless opposition. An immense majority of the Protestant world has them; let the few yield to the many. Our Church had these general principles of usage long before any part of the Protestant world, which is opposed to them, had

a being. We did not introduce the diversity. Let those who did introduce it, take the responsibility of its removal. If we would be felt in the work of drawing others together, we must be true to ourselves. The liberality of mere carelessness, goes for nothing. If a Church cannot keep itself from dropping in pieces, it will hardly contribute much to holding together the body of Christianity at large.

It is said this diversity results from our freedom, and reveals it. I hope I have succeeded in showing that both these assumptions are groundless. It originated in our deadness, our carelessness, our disposition to imitate, and our desire to conciliate the sectarianism around us. It reveals not our freedom, but the want of deep and prayerful reflection on the needs of the Church. More than this, if you will calmly review the argument of the first discourse, we believe you will feel that this diversity is not consistent with freedom; that on the contrary, it implies the right, which is alike tyrannical and anarchical, the right of the part to exercise in its independency, functions which affect the just claims of the whole; and that beginning with an invasion of the rights of others, we justify them in a course which is often destined to come into very unpleasant conflict with ours. Oh! my brethren, wise freedom does not work this kind of diversity. If we are left free to differ, are we not much more left free to agree? We have illustrated the one side sufficiently, let us begin to illustrate the other. We have used so long, and with such sad results, the liberty of diversity, let us now, for the sake of Him, who prayed that his people might all be one, let us use the blessed liberty of uniformity. Let that uniformity be the manifestation of our unity, that the world may see that we are one. Uniformity is indeed not indispensable, but, oh! how desirable. It will knit us together; will help us to know each other; will aid us in presenting an unbroken front to the foes of our Lord, and in moving as with a common impulse, to the blessed work of bringing back a revolted world to God, and of building up, from the millions of our children, a living temple of our Lord. If we would have this uniformity, we must not only dream over it, and pray for it, but we must sacrifice our private prejudices and preferences, and yield a cheerful conformity to the general usage of the Church; we must take an intelligent view of the principles on which that usage rests, and calmly, but firmly, maintain it against ridicule, sophistry, and personal opposition.

And now a closing word. It may be that some whom, for the respect and love I bear them, I have wished most to hear this defense of Christian

freedom, have not been willing to hear it, and are not in this audience. Surely Christian men ought to be willing to give to a pastor the poor privilege the law of the land accords to the vilest criminal; to the very felon on whom the brand of infamy is burning; to the convict murderer himself; the privilege of being heard before he is condemned. To judge before we hear is surely to judge before the time. But whatever may be the amount of their prejudice against the usage of our Church; though it lead them to transfer to my person the aversion they feel to my opinions; though they may say and do what wounds my heart deeply; they shall see, if they will permit me to show it to them, that the heart of a true Christian love lies too deep, and throbs too warmly, to be chilled by that which touches but the outer man. If their love for one whose only desire is to bless them, he not intense enough to reach him through a fold of silk, may he have grace to prove that his love for them is not obstructed in its beaming forth by so thin a veil. When the years have fled; when the solemn hour draws nigh, in which the passions of earth grow cold; the hour in which dying men review their lives in the light of that awful world on which they are about to enter; it may seem to those who have thought and spoken most harshly, that they forgot the law of love to their pastor, and they may feel that they could die more peacefully if he could tell them of his forgiveness. But he may be far from them; or, after this fitful fever of life, may be sleeping in the grave; and, therefore, could he reach their ear, he would speak now what he may not be able to speak then, and would give them the assurance, that he has forgiven, and from his inmost heart does forgive all.

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1. The evidence of this fact is abundant. Neal, the great historian of the Puritans, says, in arguing against the surplice (the robe of white linen,) “Could not the parish provide *a gown, or some other decent apparel,* for the priest to minister in sacred things, as well as a square cap, a surplice, a cope, or a tippet.” (I. 47.) Hooper, who was a patron of the Non-Conformists, and the leader of the opposition to Popish vestments. (Neal, I.52,) “was as much for the clergy’s wearing a decent and distinct habit from the laity as Ridley,” and even with his objection to the vestments, “consented to be robed in his habits at his consecration.” Any one who will read the controversies of that period

will see that they turned not upon the general question we are discussing, on which there was hardly a difference of opinion, but on the propriety of using the distinctive garments of the Romish clergy. The black gown, as the exclusive clerical dress, was almost the symbol of the extremest Anti-Romanizing tendency in the Church of England; and within the Episcopal Church in the United States, the tendencies to vestimental warfare between Low and High, Evangelical and Hierarchical, might be summed up as that of black versus white, of gown versus surplice. The Low Church party is relatively the black gown party. In the two extremes the one is disposed to wear the surplice as much as possible, and the other to wear it as little as possible.↵

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Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen. (Jude 1:24-25)

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