

CHAPTER XVI

ARTICLE XV.—*Of the Church.*—We acknowledge one holy Catholic Church, the innumerable company of saints of every age and nation, who being united by the Holy Spirit to Christ their Head are one body in Him and have communion with their Lord and with one another. Further, we receive it as the will of Christ that His Church on earth should exist as a visible and sacred brotherhood, consisting of those who profess faith in Jesus Christ and obedience to Him, together with their children, and other baptized children, and organized for the confession of His name, for the public worship of God, for the administration of the sacraments, for the upbuilding of the saints, and for the universal propagation of the Gospel; and we acknowledge as a part, more or less pure, of this universal brotherhood, every particular Church throughout the world which professes this faith in Jesus Christ and obedience to Him as divine Lord and Saviour.

The circumstances that attended the Reformation in the sixteenth century made it necessary that those, who rejected the Papacy, should make clear to themselves what they meant by the Church of Christ. Hence the creeds of the Reformation Churches are careful to deal with this great and vital subject. The Scottish Confession of 1560 has a very noble article on the church; and to Scottish Christians in the centuries following, the church with its ordinances has held a central place in thought and action. (Reference here may be made to Dr. Lindsay's "History of the Reformation," Book II, Chapter VIII, par. 6.) Our own situation in Canada is parallel, in some respects, to that of the Reformers in the sixteenth century. We are face

to face with the church of Rome, of whose inner life, as seen in her great saints, as well as in multitudes of her members, we speak with sympathy and admiration; whose polity, however, we regard as unscriptural, and as exerting political influences of a sinister kind; while some of her tenets, and much of her cultus, we reject as inconsistent with the Gospel of God's grace in Christ. At the same time, we lament what has been called the "fissiparous" nature of Protestantism, and watch with dismay the multitude of sects, each with its own shibboleths, renouncing fellowship with other so-called "denominations," and filling the land with strife and debate, while the work of evangelism suffers loss, and the church of Rome looks on with a smile of conscious superiority. In this article, the inspiring element is the sense of the gravity, and even peril, of the situation, and the desire to occupy solid Reformation ground. (1) The opening sentence echoes the Reformation doctrine. Dr. Lindsay's careful statement may be helpful here. "The Church of Christ is a body of which the spirit of Jesus is the soul. It is a company of Christlike men and women, whom the Holy Spirit has called, enlightened, and sanctified through the preaching of the Word; who are encouraged to look forward to a glorious future prepared for the people of God; and who, meanwhile, manifest their faith in all manner of loving services done to their fellow-believers." The Church in this aspect is at once invisible and universal. It matters not what name Christians are known by, or what

"denomination" they belong to, they have fellowship with Christ. They constitute His Temple, His Body, His Bride. They are one in Him, with a unity which underlies all differences of creed, cultus, and polity. (2) The Church, however, is meant to be made visible. By what means shall it be made so? How shall any group of professed believers be known, in their corporate capacity, as part of the Body of Christ? The answer of the church of Rome is quite simple. That is the true church which holds by the Pope as its earthly Head. The only trouble about this answer is that it is quite unscriptural, and quite unhistorical. In reply to Rome, and in statement of their own position, the Reformers maintained that the Church is visible, and "can be seen wherever the Word of God is faithfully proclaimed, and wherever faith is manifested in testimony and bringing forth the fruits of the Spirit." The article in its second sentence states this doctrine of the visible Church, developing it in three directions, (a) The membership of the Church. These are adult believers, who make profession of faith and loyalty to Him. Children also are members of the Church, who are born into Christian homes, or are under Christian guardianship, and are brought to receive the outward sign of membership in the sacrament of baptism. (b) The Functions of the Church. These are here defined: 1. The Confession of Christ's Name, as Saviour and Lord; a confession which will include Creed, preaching, and personal witness. 2. Public

Worship. We can never get away from the idea of the Church as a fellowship. Its actions are those of the whole body of believers acting together. The worship of God, accordingly, is not adequately rendered by individuals, acting separately. It is properly rendered by the members acting as one body, and only adequately rendered, when all the members are together with one accord in one place, according as the local conditions make this possible. 3. The administration of the Sacraments. Public Worship reaches the height of its spiritual value, as glorifying to God, and as beneficial to the Church, in its sacramental actions. Where these are omitted, there may be a humanly instituted and organized society, but there is not a church. The "Society of Friends," for instance, is a very noble society; but, under historic conditions, which make the action of the founders intelligible, it has rejected Sacramental worship, and is confessedly not a church. Within the Christian fellowship, it is certain that the administration of the Sacraments, with due instruction as to their meaning and value, and due attention to the reverence, and beauty of their celebration, is indispensable to the cultivation of the inner life of the members, and to the vitality of the whole body. 4. The Upbuilding of the Saints. This includes all means that may fitly be employed for the nurture of souls, the development of Christian character, and equipment for service. But along with these, and deeper than these, is the influence of one member upon another. It may be

doubted whether the modern church has not erred more in this connection than in any other. Congregations tend to be mobs rather than organisms. But in truth, the name "Church" ought not to be borne by any group that is little more than a social club. The church is bound to fail, whose definite aim is not the deepening and development of the Christian life, the education of its members in the knowledge of God, and their preparation for witness and work and warfare. 5. The propagation of the Gospel. Christianity regards all sincere religion with respect and sympathy. In bringing the Gospel to adherents of other faiths, it has no thought of superiority, as though Christians belonged to a higher grade. But it does believe that Christ is the revelation of the Father, that He is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, and that in the likeness of Christ all men everywhere will attain the fulness of spiritual maturity. We believe in a Universal Christ, and we would stultify ourselves, and deeply wound the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus, if we did not make Him known, in every field, where we can reach our fellow men, of our own race, or of other races. Such work is the plain duty of all to whom Christ is precious. The fulfilment of it, under the guidance of the indwelling Spirit, is the chief method of filling the earth with the knowledge of God in His redeeming love, and is at the same time indispensable to the increase of the home church in manifold reflex benefits. A non-missionary church will die, spite of wealth or orthodoxy. A

missionary church will live, spite of grave defects in doctrine; which helps to explain the vitality of the church of Rome, and the moribund conditions of sects, which claim high intellectual distinction, but have neglected the missionary obligation. (c) Particular Churches. The Reformers were strong in their assertion of their catholicity, holding, as they did, the catholic Faith, which they were careful to embody in their creeds. But they rejected entirely the Roman idea that throughout the whole world the church must have but one form and shape. The church universal was represented, according to their view, by "particular churches," which existed in different nations. Such churches might differ widely in matters of administration; but so long as they retained the essential things, the preaching of the word, the due administration of the sacraments and the practice of church discipline, they were integral parts of the one, visible, Catholic, church of Christ.

Our article, in its closing sentence, adheres to this position of the Reformers. The United Church of Canada seeks the union of a true spiritual fellowship with every church, which holds to Christ as the only Saviour and Lord, the only King and Head of His Church. The Reformation ideal was, no doubt, a group of national churches, with full intercommunion. "The French, the Scottish and the Dutch churches had all their own creeds, and all believed each other to be parts of the same One Catholic Church of Christ." That ideal was broken

in the controversies of the seventeenth century. Whether this ideal can be realized under modern conditions is the ecclesiastical problem of the present day. It never can, as long as "denominations" are ranged against one another in stupid, fratricidal competition.