

**NOTES ON SHEPHERDS
AND SHEEP: A LETTER
TO JOHN RUSKIN**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649227006

Notes on Shepherds and Sheep: A Letter to John Ruskin by William Dyce

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WILLIAM DYCE

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A

NOTES
ON
SHEPHERDS AND SHEEP.

A LETTER

TO

JOHN RUSKIN, ESQ., M.A.

BY

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"SI INTELLEXISTI SPIRITUALITER, VERBA CHRISTI SPIRITUS ET VITA TIBI SUNT; SI
INTELLEXISTI CARNALITER, ETIAM SPIRITUS ET VITA SUNT, SED TIBI NON SUNT."—
S. AUGUST. TRACT XXVII.

LONDON:
LONGMAN, BROWN, GREEN, AND LONGMANS,
MDCCLII.

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Bemis fund

LONDON:
PRINTED BY JOSEPH MASTERS,
ALDRINGATE STREET.

A LETTER.

MY DEAR MR. RUSKIN,

I HAPPENED to be in the country when the newspaper advertisement of your "Notes on the Construction of Sheepfolds," first caught my eye; and as for the time I was unable to procure a copy of the pamphlet, busy imagination, attracted by so unusual a title, straightway fell a guessing what relation this new production of yours might bear to the subject matter of your previous works. These guesses were assisted, though, it turns out, led into a wrong direction, by a bare notice accompanying the advertisement that the tract concerned the Church somehow.

Here is a man, I said to myself, who began by writing on the arts generally—who then undertook to elucidate the principles of one of the fine arts in particular: now, I suppose, he is going to favour us with his notions on the application of the latter to a special purpose—he is going to tell us how churches ought to be constructed. Judging by the title of the tract, I conclude that he has got hold of some notion about the construction and arrangement of a church, drawn from the Scripture representation of the Church itself as a flock of sheep.

Possessed of this idea, I promised myself some entertainment from the perusal of your work, and was prepared to accord all due praise to the fancy and eloquence which you were sure to display; believing, however, all the time, that I should find your fancy and eloquence had been thrown away, because employed to strain an analogy into false conclusions.

I amused myself accordingly, by imagining, by way of answer to you, a number of treatises, all of which should tend to views equally one-sided. Each of them was to set forth a theory of the form and arrangement of a church, based on some one particular figure under which the Church is exhibited to us in Holy Writ. One, for example, was to be entitled, "Notes on the arrangement and culture of vineyards;" because the Church is the "LORD'S vineyard." Another: "Notes on the pillar and its foundation;" because the Church is "the pillar and ground of the truth." A third: "Notes on fishermen and fishing tackle;" because the Apostles were "fishers of men" and the Church "a net." A fourth was to be: "Notes on temples;" because the Church is "GOD'S Holy Temple." A fifth: "Notes on palaces and government offices;" because the Church is "the kingdom of God," and so on.

My imagination, however, greatly overshot the mark and led me astray. Yet the mistake was not unnatural; for how should one ever dream of looking for an attempt to define and draw conclusions from the Scripture meaning of the word "Church" under such a title as "Notes on the Construction of Sheepfolds?"

But I am not going to quarrel with the title of your pamphlet, which, however much it may be a misnomer, has had the effect of inducing me, and I suppose others like myself, to read a tract that might have

engaged less immediate notice under a more aptly chosen rubric. We shall have no quarrel about the title if we can agree on the matter contained under it, and on this I wish to converse with you a little.

The matter, as I have said, is not such as, considering the subjects of your previous works and the seeming relation of the title of this one to artistic questions, I was prepared to anticipate; yet as you address yourself, at the least, to the readers of your former productions, I shall assume this as an excuse (if any be needed) for entering with you on ground which possibly, though erroneously, may be considered foreign to the pursuits of an artist. You, at least, will not give in to the popular English absurdity of refusing to give a man the credit of doing more than one thing. You, at least, will not consider me disqualified from entering with you on theological ground by the fact of my being an artist, since both art and religion are subjects of equal interest and common to both of us; and if these pages should fall under the eyes of other classes of readers, I must simply shelter myself under the eminent examples which society now exhibits of clerical artists, and political, military, legal, and medical novel-writers, poets, and dissertators on theological, ecclesiastical and all other possible questions.

But to come to the matter in hand. Your object in the "Notes" is stated by you to be, "to limit the sense in which the word 'Church' should be understood, and to note one or two consequences which would result from the acceptance of such limitation." "It is high time," you say, "that *some* definition of the word should be agreed upon. I do not mean a definition involving the doctrine of this or that division of Christians, but limiting in a manner understood

by all of them, the sense in which the *word* should thenceforward be used." And then you proceed to notice that the word "Church" occurs in the New Testament about one hundred and fourteen times, bearing always "one and the same grand sense: that of a congregation or assembly of men;" bearing, nevertheless, "this sense under four different modifications, giving four separate meanings to the word." These are—

1. "The entire multitude of the elect," . . . from the beginning of time to the "consummation of all things."

2. "The entire multitude of professing believers in CHRIST existing on earth at a given moment.

3. "Any number of professed believers living in a certain city, place, or house.

4. "Any assembly of men."

The fourth of these meanings being, as you observe, "independent of all questions of a religious kind," and the second and third denoting merely the general or particular conditions of the Church in this world:—We have, according to your view, to deal solely with the first and second significations of the word.

Now it may, I suppose, be assumed that when you propose to "limit the sense in which the word 'Church' should be understood," you mean the sense in which it is to be understood and applied to the followers of CHRIST, living under the present dispensation, i.e., from the first to the second coming of the Messiah. I assume this, first, because the purpose of your tract implies it; and, secondly, because there is no dispute on any side respecting the meaning of the word "Church" when it is applied to the whole body of the faithful, *irrespective of their particular condition*, i.e., whether in earth or heaven,—before or after the

resurrection and the final judgment,—under the Jewish or Christian covenants. The whole question concerns the apostolic meaning of the word as it is applied to the followers of CHRIST under the present dispensation; if so, the inquiry will limit itself to the accuracy of the second meaning you assign to it. I accept that meaning; I agree that, to use your words, it is applied to “the entire multitude (or any particular section) of professing believers in CHRIST existing on earth at a given moment, including false brethren, wolves in sheep’s clothing, goats and tares as well as sheep and wheat, and other forms of bad fish with good in the net.”

So far, then, we are at one. “You desire,” you say, “only to address those who are willing to accept the apostolic sense of the word ‘Church,’ and with them you would endeavour to ascertain what consequences must follow from an acceptance of that apostolic sense.” Well; I consider myself addressed by you: for I am willing to accept that sense. Let us have your conclusions.

You wish to ascertain “what must be our first and most necessary conclusions from the common language of Scripture respecting these following points:—

- “1. The distinctive character of the Church.
- “2. The authority of the Church.
- “3. The authority of the clergy over the Church,
- “4. The connection of the Church with the State.”

“These,” you continue, “are four separate subjects of question; but we shall not have to put these questions in succession with each of the four scriptural meanings of the word ‘Church;’ for evidently its second and third meaning may be considered together as merely expressing the general or particular condi-