

**THE AMERICAN ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY
AT WAR WITH THE CHURCH; A
DISCOURSE, DELIVERED
BEFORE THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL
CHURCH AND SOCIETY, IN
CANTERBURY, CONN., JUNE 30TH, 1844**

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The American Anti-Slavery Society at War with the Church; A Discourse, Delivered Before the First Congregational Church and Society, in Canterbury, Conn., June 30th, 1844 by Walter Clarke

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WALTER CLARKE

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A

DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

First Congregational Church and Society,

IN

CANTERBURY, CONN.,

June 30th, 1844.

BY WALTER CLARKE,
PASTOR OF THE CHURCH.

HARTFORD.

PRESS OF ELIHU GEER, 26½ STATE STREET.

1844.

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**Published by request.**  
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DISCOURSE.

JOHN xvi. 2.—Yea, the time will come, when whosoever killeth you will think he doeth God service.

At the last anniversary of the American Anti-slavery Society, held in New York, May 7th, 1844, the following Resolutions were presented and passed.

- “ *Whereas* no institution is more hostile to the Anti-slavery movement, than the professedly Christian Church in this country; and whereas, from her permanent position, her high professions, her deep hold upon the affections of the people, and her immense influence, she ought to be first among the foremost in the ranks of freedom: and whereas, by continuing our connection with so base an institution, we do thereby surround the system of American Slavery with holy sanction, and entrench it behind religious bulwarks; therefore
- “ *Resolved*, As the deliberate opinion of this Society, that it is the duty of every true abolitionist, to withdraw entirely from the support of said institution, and to hold her up before the people, as hypocritical in profession, infamous in practice, as having usurped the name of Christian Church, and as being one of the greatest obstacles in the way of immediate emancipation.”
- “ *Resolved*, That fourteen years of warfare against the slave power, have convinced us that every act done in support of the American Union, rivets the chains of the Slave, — that the only exodus of the Slave to freedom, unless it be one of blood must be over the ruins of the present American Church, and the grave of the present Union.”*

* National A. S. Standard, for May 16th, and 23d.

My design in calling your attention to the character, the doctrines, and the objects of this Society, at the present time, is, that you may understand beforehand, what is the object of a convention that is to be held on the Green, in front of this house the present week. The American Society which passed the Resolutions that I have just read, has one, and as I am informed, only one auxiliary in this State, and that auxiliary is "The Windham County A. S. Society,"—the Society that proposes to hold its Convention in this place. I have therefore felt it to be my duty, to set before you the avowed objects and opinions of this Society, that you may not, ignorantly and unintentionally, give your countenance, or the sanction of your presence, to the meeting of a body of men, whose designs are such as the above quoted Resolutions and others of the same character, passed by the parent Society and by each of its Auxiliaries, adopt and proclaim.

I deem it due to myself however, to remark at the outset, that there are many persons in every community, who call themselves abolitionists, but whose feelings on the subject of Slavery I cordially respect, and whose opinions and aims I can most cheerfully second. This large and respectable class of citizens, while they hate Slavery, and can never consent to apologize for, or defend that unholy and infamous system which subjects the lives and dearest rights of millions of our fellow men, to the cruel will of irresponsible masters,—stand equally aloof from every traitorous combination to defame and destroy our Union, and every attempt to embarrass or ruin our Churches. Against the objects and opinions of such persons, I can never find it in my heart to lift my voice. But these persons must never be identified with that Society, whose Auxiliary is about to hold its Convention in this place. The members of that Society, and those who favor them, are alone responsible for the opinions published, and the measures contemplated in the foregoing resolutions. If you are a member of that Society, and do not adopt the views officially proclaimed in its name—then, let the public know it. Withdraw from its ranks. Or, at least, enter and publish your honest dissent from its opinions. Otherwise, you are justly considered, by the community, as equally responsible as any other member. It has heretofore been customary to exonerate the Society, and refer these extravagant and wicked opinions to individuals, declaring that they formed no part of the creed of the Society. But the Society has itself now forever forestalled this plea. In the name and by the published vote of that Society, at its great National Meeting, these opinions and objects are adopted, and incorporated into the Creed and Profession of the Society itself!

We learn from the Resolutions which I have read, and from the doings of the late general meeting, as well as from similar Resolu-

tions and doings of the Windham County Auxiliary, what is to be the object of the contemplated Convention in this place. The Society and its auxiliaries have fully and fairly defined their Creed.

It is the duty of every true abolitionist, to renounce that "base institution" the Christian Church. The slave can be freed only in one of two ways; by bloodshed and war; or by the ruin of the American Church, and the burial of the American Union. These are the "deliberate" and avowed opinions of that Society. And with equal perspicuity, has the Society declared its objects and intentions.

1. It professedly aims at the ultimate freedom of the Slave.

2. But inasmuch as the ruin of the Church and the Union is, in their esteem, an essential preliminary to this grand ultimate object, the Society intends first of all, to lay the Church in ruins, and to butcher and bury the Union; so that in their own language, "the Slave can come forth to freedom, over the ruins of the present American Church, and the grave of the present Union."⁶

And 3dly. They intend to ruin the Church, they say, by enticing every true Abolitionist who happens to be a church member, to turn traitor, desert the Church, and hold up the "base institution" before the people, as hypocritical in profession, infamous in practice, as having usurped the name of Christian Church, and as being one of the greatest obstacles to immediate emancipation.⁷

Thus has this Society fairly defined its position. We know from its own lips and its own official reports, just what opinions it intends to set forth — just what measures it intends to pursue — and just what results it intends to accomplish.

The question then arises, my Hearers, how shall this Society and its movements be met? There are several possible modes of encountering such an enemy. One is, by abuse and violence; — by resolutely and forcibly repelling their aggression and entrance. But this method is always impolitic, and, with very few exceptions, wrong. Error can neither be put to death, nor put to flight, by brute force. Besides, a persecuted and injured party ordinarily gains more, by a public sympathy for its sufferings, than it loses, by the violence you inflict upon it. Another favorite method of meeting such a Society as this, is, by having public debates and discussions, and attempting to *argue down* error. But, the moment you attempt thus to argue down every crazy dogma, which the prolific genius of fanaticism can bring forth, you convert the entire community into one great and factious debating society, and life itself into one prolonged and incessant discussion. For,

* Query: How "immediate" is this emancipation likely to be?

think ! what single truth can ever become so settled, that some man will not be found ignorant or conceited enough, to doubt it, and to wish to argue upon it. And, think for a moment, what would be the condition of things, if this spirit of debate should once be thoroughly diffused, like a universal solvent through society ! What would be the condition of the Church, were every congregation to begin to hold public and frequent debates, on the question — “Whether the Church ought not to be laid in speedy ruins” ? What would be the condition of our Federal Government, if every village should begin to hold monthly meetings, and all the people come together to discuss the question — “Whether the Union ought not to be slain and buried” ? Nay, what kind of a place would Heaven itself be, were all its inhabitants to throw down their harps, and quit their thrones, and dominions, and high duties, run to weekly conventions, and raise stormy debates, on the question — “Whether God ought to keep the Throne, and execute His will” ?

Things that are settled, do not need to be discussed. And if the great matters concerning the Church and the Union, the matters which this Society pretends to doubt, and actually denies with rude assaults, *are not yet settled*, then no question, within the whole sphere of human inquiry, can be settled, — and no truth can be relied on. Once admit, that these great questions need debating over again, and you declare, in that admission, that debate is absolutely useless, and absurd. What is debate good for, if debate on the same topic, must be prolonged for ever ; if we can never leave first principles, and go forward with Paul, unto perfection.” What is the utility of debate, if questions, that have been for centuries before the public mind, and examined every week, are yet undecided ? What can we hope from new discussion, if the disputes of a thousand years, have settled nothing, concerning the character and claims of the Christian Church ?

Another method of treatment is, to let error alone, and leave it to die by its own stings. This is always a good method, provided, you can persuade the whole community to unite with you, in letting it alone. If a man comes among us with a quantity of thistle-seed, and all the people will only agree to exclude him from their fields, his seed will do no hurt, while it is kept in the bag, or the measure. But, if one and another of the people will throw down his bars, and bid the man enter and sow, as he lists ; then the community can never secure their fields, by letting the matter alone. To let it alone, is the very way to ensure the spread of thistles, from lot to lot, and farm to farm, until a whole township is overrun and occupied. My own opinion is, that *it is best that error should die in all cases*. And if, in any case, error will die sooner, by letting it alone — we ought to let it alone. But, if it thrives