

**ADDRESSES OF REV. DRS. PARK.,
POST, & BACON, AT THE
ANNIVERSARY OF THE
AMERICAN CONGREGATIONAL
UNION, MAY 1854**

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EDWARDS A. PARK & T. M. POST & LEONARD BACON

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AT THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE

AERICAN

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THE FITNESS OF THE CHURCH TO THE CONSTITUTION OF, RENEWED MEN.

AN

ADDRESS,

DELIVERED MAY 10, 1854, IN BROOKLYN, N. Y., BEFORE THE

AMERICAN CONGREGATIONAL UNION,

BY

EDWARDS A. PARK,

ABBOT PROFESSOR IN ANDOVER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY.

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THE FITNESS OF THE CHURCH TO THE
CONSTITUTION OF RENEWED MEN.

ADDRESS.

EVERY one is familiar with the distinction between the positive and the moral, as applied to laws and institutions. It is well to retain these terms in their distinct sense. There are positive enactments of men, which are not moral, having no intrinsic propriety of their own. On the other hand, there are moral duties which are not positively commanded by human governors. Under the divine administration, however, the positive and the moral do not entirely exclude each other. Laws and institutions which are positive, have an inherent fitness, although not so apparent as those which are moral. On the other hand, laws and institutions which are moral, receive the positive sanction of Jehovah, although, apart from this positive sanction, they have an authority from Heaven. It is, then, in a modified sense, that *divine* statutes are called arbitrary or thetical; their intrinsic value being just as real, but not as obvious, as is the inherent worth of moral statutes. Thus we denominate the Christian Sabbath a positive institution; for, independently of the divine command, we should be slower to detect its importance, than the importance of supreme love to our Maker. It has, however, a moral or philosophical basis. It is adapted to the constitution of man. It meets the wants of the human body, as well as of the intellect and heart. It is so conformed to the structure of a nation, that our political as well as ecclesiastical prosperity depends upon our observance of the Lord's day. We prove the divinity of the Sabbatical ordi-

nance from its harmony with our constitution, and we infer its harmony with our constitution from its divinity. The ministerial office, also, is prescribed in the New Testament, and it thus has a positive, which is of itself a sure basis. But this basis overlies a moral groundwork. The adaptation of the office to the very make of the soul is a signature of its divine origin, and is alike a cause and a proof of its irrepressible influence. The religious sentiment demands a consecrated order of men, who shall be an embodiment of the religious idea. It insists on having a specific organ of communication between earth and Heaven. By their very nature, men are impelled to demand such an organ for expressing their devotedness to a superior power; because, themselves being disturbed by the turmoils of life, they confide so much the more in a selected band who dwell amid the stillness of the temple, and are imagined to have the spirit, as they are seen to have the marks, of unusual godliness. On the same principle, it is an impulse of nature that men desire a special organ for receiving their choicest gifts from Heaven; because, immersed as men are in the cares of life, they need a class of instructors from whom they may gain spiritual wisdom. They have a faith in the teaching, instruction, and example of those who devote their life to the mysteries of religion, as they have a faith in the instructions of professed mechanics, or philosophers, or jurists. Thus, if the Christian ministry were not prescribed in the New Testament, it would still be a divine institution. The Church, likewise, by which, in its Biblical form, I mean a society of ostensible Christians, bound together by covenant, and meeting together for the worship of God, the observance of sacramental and other divine ordinances, is justly called a positive institution. It was formed by Christ in the most solemn, though simple manner. Unless it had been expressly organized by its Divine Head, the authority of it would have been less clear than it is now. But the Church has, moreover, a moral ground. It is

beautifully accordant with the aims and aspirations of a devout mind. It is admirably fitted to express many deep thoughts, to address many fine sensibilities. It is none the less, but all the more divine, because it satisfies a class of wants otherwise inappeasable. It is none the less, but all the more accommodated to our wants, because it is divine. The wisdom of God is manifest in setting an ecclesiastical structure over against our religious sentiments, and making the outward significant of the inward. The dignity of man is evident from the fact, that he needs a divine sanction for his religious observances, and these observances lose their power over him if they be separated from his Maker. A Bible, as a positive revelation, must be added to natural instruction. Faith must combine with reason. Men were made for God, and God adapts his administration to men. We may augment our reverence for the divine government, if we consider the tendency of its various institutes to ameliorate the character and condition of our race. Therefore it will be the aim of the present address, *to specify certain principles of the renewed mind to which the Church, particularly in its purest forms, is fitted, and by which it educates men.**

It is obvious, in the first place, that the institution of the Church is fitted to express and to exalt our estimate of the soul's value. We have a consciousness that the mind is of rare dignity. The refinement of its thoughts, the grace of its sentiments, the loftiness of its aspirations, the wide and ever widening reach of its powers, have given to men the irrepressible conviction of their being so formed that they

* When we speak of "the Church, particularly in its purest forms," we, of course, imply that there are various forms of a true Church, some less, some more in unison with the Biblical standard. They range from the Church of the Pilgrims to the Church of Rome, and as they include both of these, so they embrace the intermediate churches.

may even please God by worshipping him. They have aspired to be like their Maker. They have conceived of him as the model of which they are the images. Even the Greeks, with all their nice regard to decorum, fashioned their divinities in the likeness of the most athletic or graceful men. The Bible heightens, rather than lowers our estimate of the soul's worth. It assures us that our nature, in the person of our Redeemer, is elevated to a seat at God's right hand; that the sublimest act of Jehovah has been performed in his union with man; that the glory of the Most High is not fully revealed except in the atonement which has identified our history with his. Such is the soul. This is the inspired record of its greatness. Our sense of its value needs to be expressed. How shall we express it? Not by pyramids to its honor, not by proud monumental inscriptions, so well as by assemblies convened for the praise of the Infinite Spirit; by a visible communion with the Sovereign who treats us, although his subjects, as his children. Here is the true dignity of men, that they band themselves together in a brotherhood for the reception of spiritual influences from the Father whom they adore. There is no man so beggared, but he may join with the company of those whom God calls his chosen ones. Superior to our Saviour's miracles of causing the deaf to hear, and the blind to see, and the dead to rise, was the ordinance that the sublimest truths ever revealed should be proclaimed, in the most emphatic way, not to the rich only, but "*to the poor.*" And the Church, even the most corrupt, has in some degree accommodated itself to the ignoble in all ages, even in the darkest. In the Romish communion, monarchs are seen washing the feet of paupers. At the Reformation, Luther addressed the men of learning and the men of authority; but his main reliance was on the people. His hymns fascinated the men, women, and children, who sung them in the fields and streets; his musical compositions were suited to the taste of the populace, as well as the