

**THE REFORMATION: A BRIEF
EXPOSITION OF SOME OF THE
ERRORS AND CORRUPTIONS
OF THE CHURCH OF ROME**

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The Reformation: A Brief Exposition of Some of the Errors and Corruptions of the Church of Rome by Alexander Viets Griswold

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ALEXANDER VIETS GRISWOLD

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3d ed.

BY THE

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THE REFORMATION.

THE objection so long and so much urged against the Protestant Episcopal Church, as having retained the errors of the Romish religion, is being revived. And with mortification and shame we must acknowledge the fact, that efforts are now making, by Protestant Episcopalians even, to stigmatize the Reformation as being without principle and without use, and even a departure from the true catholicism of the church of Christ.

Emboldened by this extraordinary movement, a bishop of the Romish Church has published a "Letter, addressed to the Bishops of the Protestant Episcopal Church," inviting them to union with the Papists, and more than intimating that there is now but little which separates us from them; that submitting to the pope is necessary to the saving of our souls; and that, unless we do it, *numbers may break from our ranks.*

Whether we shall be more sure of saving our souls by acknowledging as our spiritual father him whom St. Paul justly styles "the man of sin," usurping authority above God himself, (2 Thess. ii. 3, 4,) some will be likely to question; but it is not the question which I now propose to examine. They who are

disposed to *break from our ranks*, will do us less injury as acknowledged Papists; and the sooner they make the change, the better for us, though I fear not the better for themselves. In regard to the Roman religion, I desire chiefly that people may know fairly what it is: if any truly prefer it, 'tis a matter between them and their God. And when, in those countries, where Popery wholly predominates, there shall be the same toleration, the same liberty given to all to teach what they believe, and to read what they will, as with us is given to them, I shall never complain of their increase. That Popery has been instrumental of *good*, of great good, (if any so please,) I have no intention to deny, but would rather bless God for all good that is done. I would, with St. Paul, rejoice that Christ, in his true character and office, is preached by those even who, in other respects, are in error, and their motives not pure. The apostle did not rejoice in what was evil, but in the good done,—that the knowledge of Christ was promulgated, and souls converted to God. There is no denomination of sincerely religious Christians who are not made instrumental of some good. But who can count the *evils* which corrupt doctrines and usurped power have produced? We are not to follow a multitude to do evil, but to embrace the truth as it is in Jesus Christ, and leave the event with God.

It is not, I trust, more my duty than it is my desire, to treat all men, and especially those who are of the household of faith, with due respect. And it will not be improper to say something of the names by which Christians are distinguished. It is very common for particular sects to assume names, or to be usually distinguished by denominations, as peculiar to themselves, which might as justly be applied to others. And, for convenience, we give them those names, without acknowledging their exclusive claims. Some people are distinguished as *Deists*; but they

are far from being the only people who believe, what the word signifies, that *there is a God*. One sect of Christians are called *Friends*, and another, *United Brethren*; and yet other Christians are friends, and they unite as brethren. Some call themselves *Unitarians*, as believing in one God; though all the disciples of Christ believe that there is but one true God. We call some *Baptists*, which signifies baptizers; and, though we believe that other denominations also baptize, we consent that this one sect should be so distinguished. Those of our Church in this country are often distinguished by the word *Episcopalians*, when nine tenths, probably, of the Christians in the whole world, are also Episcopalians. The like is true of the term *catholic*, which signifies general, liberal, universal. It is somewhat arrogantly assumed by one sect or part of the universal church, as exclusively appropriate to themselves; and people are accustomed so to distinguish them. The Romish Church is usually called the *Catholic Church*; though it is but a part, and not the purest part, of the "One Catholic and Apostolic Church." And it should be always remembered that, when in the Apostle's Creed we profess to believe in "the Holy Catholic Church," we have no more regard to the Church of Rome than to the Church of England, or Russia, or Greece. We mean the whole body of those who, by baptism, have put on Christ, and are branches of him, the true Vine; and especially those who "are very members incorporate in his mystical body, — the blessed company of all faithful people." So far as the word means liberal, tolerant, or free, no church is less catholic than the Romish. There is, indeed, a manifest impropriety in applying this epithet exclusively to any one part or branch of the Christian church. The Church of England, or America, of Greece, or of Rome, cannot, of itself, be the Catholic Church, more than a part can be the whole. The Romanists, indeed, claim to be the

whole of the Church in which salvation can be obtained; and there are, perhaps, a few other denominations who make the like arrogant pretensions; but the truly catholic Christian has no such narrow views of that salvation which is by faith in Jesus Christ.

The whole system of the Romish religion most essentially depends on the Papal hierarchy, or the power claimed by the Bishop of Rome; and the word *Papists* is, of course, the most distinguishing and suitable appellation of the members of that communion. And for this reason it is that I use it, and not from any design or feelings of disrespect. There is the same reason and fitness in calling them Papists, as in calling us Prelatists or Episcopalians, and why the one should give any reasonable offence to them, more than the others to us, I cannot imagine.

The purpose of what is now proposed to be offered on the subject of the Reformation, is not any controversy with Papists or censures of Popery; but to show, (whether it be right or wrong,) what the Reformation is, — in what we profess to be reformed. What is now so confidently said, that there remains very little which divides us from the Romish Church, is, I fear, becoming the belief or view of many of our own people. It certainly is not merely fitting, but highly important, that they should be set right in this matter; that they should know in what and how many particulars the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States differs from what was generally held and practised in the church in the beginning of the sixteenth century, when the Reformation commenced.

Should it be said, that some of the particulars, which I may notice, are not held by the Romish Church, I rejoice if it be so, and have only to say, that at the time immediately preceding the Reformation, they did generally prevail, and were not, by

popes or clergy, condemned or opposed. We frequently hear it said of this point or that, though certainly taught and practised, where that religion fully prevails, is not required by their *church*. This seems to admit that such points are erroneous, and that we do well in rejecting them. They indeed who would know what popery is, should reside in the countries where it predominates, as in Italy, Portugal, and Spain. Where Protestants bear sway, as in England and in these United States, Romanism has a very different appearance. Or should it be said that the Romanists are, in some things, themselves reformed, we believe and rejoice in it; but we should not forget that this change for the better is the effect of the knowledge of the scriptures, and of the doctrines of Christ, which the Reformation has produced; and that the Romanists claim to be infallible,—to be free from all error, and that they never change. And so, too, if they give, as they very much do, plausible explanations, to obviate what seems to us objectionable, it shows that they are conscious that such explanations are necessary to reconcile their tenets to the holy scriptures, and that Protestants are wise in taking ground which needs no such explanation.

That the Church of Rome, under the pontificate of Leo X. and several of his predecessors, was, in doctrine, morals, and discipline, corrupt, very few, it is believed, who fairly consult the history of those times, will, at the present day, venture to deny. By the churches of several countries, those corruptions were, in the sixteenth century, more or less rejected; and some, we fear, in their zeal to remove the tares, have rooted up some stalks of the good wheat. It is enough, for our present purpose, to mention the Church of England, from which we emanate. As an independent National Church, she shook off the usurped authority of foreign powers, and asserted the liberty wherewith Christ has made her free.

What shall be said in the following pages may, it is hoped, help some to judge whether or not a reformation was necessary,—whether our Church has retained all that is essential to the religion of Jesus Christ, and has rejected any thing but what was a departure from the sure word of God, and was worse than useless.

And here I would briefly observe, that the claims of differing sects to be *Protestants* is no better argument against our use of the word, than their like claim to be *believers*, or *Christians*, or *disciples of Christ*, or *members of his Church*, is against our use of these appellations. The question is, Against what do we protest? If against any part of the truth of God, as revealed in his word, we err. I have, in these remarks, no controversy with the Papists, nor ill-will, I humbly trust, against any denomination of Christians. I desire to love all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and in truth. In my attempt to show what the Protestant Episcopal Church in these United States now is, and our reasons for rejecting some things which other Christians hold, no offence to any will be intended, and it is hoped that none will be taken. “Let every one be persuaded in his own mind,” and “to his own Master let him stand or fall.” Whether this our Church has rejected too little or too much, we invite a candid inquiry, and would have every one, after due examination, act according to his true convictions, and to the knowledge and grace given him.

§ I. It has been before observed that the system of the Romish religion most essentially depends on the papal hierarchy, or the power claimed by the Bishop of Rome. Of course, it is proper that this should be numbered as the *first* among the points against which we *protest*. It was said by one writer, (if I mistake not, by an English bishop,) that it seems unreasonable that any of the Protestant Episcopal