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A

SERMON,

DELIVERED JUNE SEVENTH, 1823,

AT THE OPENING OF THE

NEW PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

IN ARCH STREET, IN THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA,

FOR THE PUBLIC WORSHIP OF GOD.

BY SAMUEL MILLER, D. D.

PROFESSOR IN THE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY AT PRINCETON

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Philadelphia, June 7th, 1823.

*At a meeting of the Association for building a
Presbyterian Church on Arch near Tenth street.*

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED,

*That the Rev. Thomas H. Skinner, Dr. Charles
D. Meigs, and Mr. Thomas B. Darrach, be a com-
mittee to present the thanks of the Association to the
Rev. Dr. Miller, for the Sermon delivered by him at
the opening of the Church; and that they respectfully
request of him a copy thereof for publication.*

JOS. H. DULLES, Secretary.

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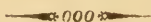
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II CHRONICLES, VI. 41.

“Now, therefore, arise, O Lord God, into thy resting place, thou, and the ark of thy strength!”

THE history of buildings and places devoted to the worship of God, especially in the earlier periods of the Church, is very obscure. In the patriarchal age, we have no distinct record of any thing of this kind. That the pious, from *Adam* to *Moses*, were no strangers to the social exercises of religion, can hardly be doubted: and if they had stated social worship, we must suppose they had particular places to which they resorted for that purpose. Accordingly, when *Cain*, by murdering his brother, had forfeited his former standing as a professor of religion, we are told that “he went out from the presence of the Lord;” by which commentators have generally understood to be meant, that he no longer associated with the people of God; that he no more frequented the place where sacrifices were

went to be offered; but became, literally, excommunicated from the visible church. In subsequent times we find the pious, wherever they sojourned, or fixed their residence, erecting altars, at which they, and probably their households, worshipped God. Thus did *Noah*, and thus, after him, did *Abraham* and *Jacob*, on a variety of occasions. The Tabernacle, reared by divine direction in the wilderness of *Arabia*, on the journey of the chosen people of God from *Egypt* to *Canaan*, more than twenty-five centuries after the visible Church was established, seems to have been the first moveable structure, and the Temple of *Solomon*, at *Jerusalem*, the first fixed edifice that was ever erected for a religious purpose.

The Temple of *Solomon* has been justly styled the wonder and glory of the East. It was certainly, on many accounts, the most remarkable edifice that was ever erected. Imagine, for a moment, a building of which "Jehovah himself condescended to be the architect." A building, in the construction of which, scarcely any thing appeared of less value than silver and gold. A building on which was bestowed the labour of one hundred and eighty thousand workmen for more than seven years. And a building in which there was, no doubt, a greater display of grandeur, taste, and beauty than in any other structure that was ever raised by the hand of man.

But all this external splendour and glory did not satisfy the pious mind of *Solomon*. After bestowing upon the outward adorning of this temple, all that his

exalted genius and his royal treasures, under the special direction of God, enabled him to afford, he still acknowledges, in his prayer at its dedication—of which our text is a part—that the ornament, the glory which he values most, is the PRESENCE OF JEHOVAH in the house which he had erected to his name. *Now, therefore, arise, O Lord God, into thy resting place, thou and the ark of thy strength!* As if he had said—“The art of man has done all that it can accomplish. But vain will be every thing, unless the Lord himself come and take up his abode in the temple which we have raised to his glory. Come then, thou God of the House, and crown our labours with thy presence! Come, thou, and enter in, and dwell here; and this will be the consummation of our desires!”

The Ark of God, to which the royal suppliant here refers, was the *Ark of the Covenant*, originally formed by divine direction in the wilderness, and deposited in the Most Holy Place, first in the Tabernacle, and afterwards in the Temple. On the interesting occasion on which the words of our text were delivered, this Ark was with much solemnity brought, and, for the first time, placed in the House of God, as the most precious part of its furniture. It was called the *Ark of Jehovah's strength*, because it was a pledge of his presence; and because it was attended, whithersoever it went, with most remarkable manifestations of divine power. And the Temple, in which it was now deposited, is represented as the *resting place* of God and his Ark, because, after many removals, for the space of several

hundred years, this symbol of the divine presence and glory, was, at length, fixed in the Most Holy Place in the Temple, as its permanent and final abode.

Although, in this prayer of *Solomon*, there was, no doubt, something asked which was *peculiar* to the Temple, and to the dispensation under which it was erected; and for which we, of course, cannot ask in behalf of any place of worship under the christian dispensation; yet there is also something in its import common to all ages, and which applies to every place in which God is worshipped. It, therefore, forms a proper subject of discourse at this time.

The blessing here implored is the presence and power of God; and that to be displayed in a house devoted to his worship. Let us inquire into the NATURE and the VALUE of this blessing. And while we speak of it, may the great *Master of assemblies* cause us to experience its blessed reality, to the glory of his holy name!

I. The first question which arises is, *what is the nature of the blessing here implored?* What are we to understand by that PRESENCE and POWER of God, in a house devoted to his worship, which, under the gospel dispensation, we may properly ask and hope to receive?

God is every where present. There is a sense in which, according to the language of the Apostle *Paul*, in his sermon at *Athens*, *He dwelleth not in temples made with hands*;—that is, he is not, as the Pagans imagined, concerning their deities, *confined* to particular buildings or places. All space is his temple. Every

part of the universe is his abode. This most impressive, and incomprehensibly glorious doctrine is suggested by *Solomon* in the very prayer of which our text is a part. *Will God, in very deed, he asks, dwell with man on the earth? Behold, the heaven, and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have builded!* This is the ESSENTIAL PRESENCE of God. It is the same at all times, and in all places. It is the same in heaven, earth, and hell. It pervades the universe; supporting, actuating, and controlling all creatures, and all their actions. The Most High can no more cease, for a moment, to be present every where, than he can cease to be God.

There is ANOTHER SENSE in which God was present in certain buildings and places, under the Old Testament dispensation; and which, so far as we know, was confined to that dispensation. I mean the manner in which he was present, and manifested his power at *Luz*, in the wilderness, when the patriarch *Jacob* cried out under a sense of it—*How dreadful is this place! Surely the Lord is in this place! Verily, this is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!** Jehovah was also present, in a similar manner, at the burning bush in *Midian*, when he appeared and spoke to *Moses*, and said,—*Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.†* Another example of this solemn presence and manifestation of the divine glory, was exhibited at mount *Sinai*, when the people were forbidden to approach the moun-

* Genesis, xxviii, 16, 17.

† Exodus, iii, 5.

tain on account of it; when *thunderings*, and *lightnings*, and *earthquake*, struck terror into the whole congregation of *Israel*, and constrained even *Moses*, with all his piety and heroism, and all his holy familiarity with God, to say—*I exceedingly fear and quake*.* And, finally, of this presence and manifestation of the divine glory, we have a signal example in the *Shekinah*, or visible token of the majesty of God, which, for ages, appeared over the Mercy Seat, in the Most Holy Place in the Tabernacle, and afterwards in the Temple. For, although there was considerable diversity of mode in which the divine presence was manifested in each of these several cases; yet they may all be regarded as coming under one general law, as referable to one general class. This may be called the **MIRACULOUS, OR EXTRAORDINARY PRESENCE** of God. It was a presence which addressed itself to the external senses. It was visible and audible; and it imparted a relative holiness to the places in which it was manifested. This relative holiness, in some cases at least, depended not upon the presence of worshippers. It was adherent, if I may so express it, to the buildings and places themselves. They were, properly speaking—especially those which were last mentioned—**CONSECRATED** buildings and places. Whether there was a worshipper or not in the Tabernacle, or in the Temple, still the *Shekinah*, or visible glory of God, overspread the Mercy Seat; and any one who profanely entered the sacred apartment, or even glanced an eye, contrary to the divine injunction, on the

* Hebrews, xii, 21.

august symbol, was considered as a capital offender against the majesty of heaven, and inevitably perished.

In this sense, we are not to expect, or to ask, the Most High to dwell in any building, or in any place, under the gospel dispensation. That particular mode of manifesting the divine glory to the Church, was chiefly, if not entirely, confined to the ceremonial economy; and, of course, terminated when that economy was abolished.

But there is a THIRD SENSE, in which God may be said to be present, in those places or buildings which are devoted to his worship. I refer to his SPIRITUAL and GRACIOUS presence. Jehovah dwells, by the power of the Holy Spirit, in every sanctified heart. *Thus saith the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, I dwell in the high and holy place, and with him also that is contrite, and of an humble spirit, and that trembleth at my word.** And in conformity with this representation, the Apostle Paul says to believers, *What, know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? As God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.†* Wherever, then, there is an humble, contrite, believing heart, there Jehovah is spiritually and graciously present; present to enlighten, to sanctify, to comfort, and to bless. Wherever a sincere and devout worshipper lifts up his soul in faith and love to heaven, whether in the closet or

* Isaiah, lvii, 15, lxvi, 2.

† I Cor. iii, 16. II Cor. vi, 16.

in the field; on the trackless ocean or in the lonely desert, he may find and enjoy a present God. In this respect, as was said with regard to his essential presence, God is confined to no times, to no places, to no forms. Wherever there is a holy heart, of whatever kindred or people, or nation, or tongue, He comes in to him, and makes his abode with him.

But, as Jehovah always has had, and always will have, a *respect to his covenant*, and will put honour upon the ordinances of his own appointment; so wherever his people are assembled for acts of social worship, He has promised to favour them, in a special manner, with his gracious presence:—and, in attending on the ordinances of his house, they are encouraged to expect the divine presence, in a manner which they may not ordinarily hope for in the neglect of these ordinances. *Where two or three are gathered together*, said the Saviour, *in my name, there am I in the midst of them.** *The Lord*, says the Psalmist, *loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. The Lord hath chosen Zion: He hath desired it for an habitation: this is my rest forever; here will I dwell, for I have desired it.†* Yes, my Christian friends—in the sanctuary, that is, in the place where the people of God habitually convene, wherever that may be, to hear his holy word, to sing his praise, to pour out the prayer of faith, and to receive the sacramental seal—there, in a special manner, Jehovah, the king of Zion is present

* Matt. xviii, 20.

† Psa. lxxxvii, 2. Psa. cxxxii, 13, 14.

with them: there He accepts both their persons and their offerings: there he manifests himself to them, as he does not to the world: there he draws near to them in mercy, and enables them to draw near to Him in the lively exercise of grace: there He *lifts upon them the light of his countenance*, and gives them *joy and peace in believing*: there He *brings them into his banqueting house, and his banner over them is love*.

The foregoing principles and remarks will, I conceive, enable us to determine in what sense we are to invoke, and to expect, the presence and the power of God, in places devoted to his worship, under the gospel dispensation, and in what sense we are not. We are not, by any means, as I just intimated, to invoke, or to expect this blessing in the same mode in which it was manifested in a number of cases, under the Mosaic economy; and especially in the tabernacle and temple of old. We are not to invoke or to expect it in any sense which implies either intrinsic or relative holiness in such buildings or places. *Intrinsic* holiness can be ascribed to nothing but the real, spiritual church,—the body of believers, whom the Redeemer hath purchased with his blood, and sanctified by his Spirit: and *relative* holiness can be ascribed to nothing but that which is devoted exclusively to holy purposes. The most Holy Place, under the ceremonial economy, could be entered by only one individual of all the nation of Israel, and by him only once a year. And even into the Holy Place none might enter or so much as look, but those who bore the sacerdotal character. But a little reflection

will convince us that *our* places of public worship cannot be holy, even in this latter sense, so long as they are open to the worldly as well as the pious; so long as we permit the profane and unbelieving to come and mingle in our assemblies, with the most spiritual and exemplary worshippers. When, therefore, we adopt the prayer of our text in reference to this house, it is not, that its seats and aisles, its columns and arches may have some mysterious sanctity impressed upon them, but that God may be pleased to manifest his spiritual presence—his gracious power to his people, when they shall assemble here from time to time: that here sinners may be convinced and converted, and saints edified and comforted; that here He may *bless the provisions of his house, and satisfy his poor with bread*: that here He may *clothe his ministers with salvation, and cause his saints to shout aloud for joy*. And the more frequently and powerfully these manifestations of his gracious, life-giving, and sanctifying influence are enjoyed, the more largely is the blessing implored in our text conferred.

It was said by the inspired Prophet *Haggai*, concerning the Second Temple, erected by a set of impoverished returning captives—*The glory of this latter house shall be greater than the glory of the former*.* What was the Prophet's meaning? The Temple of which this was spoken, was greatly, I had almost said infinitely, inferior to that which *Solomon* dedicated,

* *Haggai*, ii, 9.

when he uttered the words of our text. Inferior in cost, in splendour, in furniture, and in all its outward glories. It even lacked that *Ark of Jehovah's strength*, which adorned the first edifice, and that Symbol of the divine presence which overspread the Mercy Seat above. Yet still it was really more glorious than the former Temple. Why so? Because it was favoured with the presence of Christ himself, in a sense more truly valuable and glorious than any thing vouchsafed under the ceremonial dispensation. The Redeemer was present PERSONALLY, and by his BLESSED SPIRIT in this second Temple:—present in a manner far more adapted to enlighten, to purify, to elevate, and to bless, than that presence which had been the honour of the original structure. And, let me add, that the humblest and meanest edifice which is favoured with the spiritual presence of the king of *Zion*, is, in all cases whatsoever, beyond comparison, more glorious than the most magnificent temple, the glories of which are all of the outward and secular kind.

The primitive Christians, my friends, had no such temples for the worship of God, as that in which we are now assembled. They held their solemn assemblies in private houses,—in retired upper chambers,—in cellars,—in caves,—and even in vaults, in which the dead were deposited. It was not, as is generally believed, until some time in the latter half of the third century, that they began to erect houses for the express purpose of public worship. And even these, at first, were of the most plain and simple kind. It was

THEN—mark it well—when the disciples of Christ were persecuted on every side, and when they had neither the means nor the privilege of raising those expensive and splendid structures for the worship of God, which afterwards became so common;—it was THEN that they enjoyed, in a pre-eminent degree, the presence and the gracious power of their ascended Master. It was THEN that the blessing implored in our text, in its proper gospel sense, was, perhaps, more happily and gloriously realized than ever before or since. Yes, brethren, it was in those early times, when the Church had none of that external splendour thrown around her, which dazzles the eyes, and attracts the admiration of the worldly minded; when magnificent temples and rich ecclesiastical endowments were unknown; when all was simple and unostentatious, and humble:—it was THEN, pre-eminently, that the king of Zion dwelt among his people. Then *the word of the Lord had free course, and was glorified*. Then the Churches were *built up in the most holy faith—and converts, walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied*. Then, in a word, the Spirit and presence of Christ, dwelling and reigning among his people, and manifested in all the ordinances of his appointment, and in holy tempers and practice formed the brightest era in the history of the Church.

But when, in the fourth century, the fires of persecution were quenched; when the wealth and grandeur of the world began to take the side of Christianity; when *Constantine* the great loaded ecclesiastics with

multiplied honours, and lavished his imperial treasures on the erection and endowment of splendid cathedrals; when the ministers of the sanctuary, instead of directing all their attention to the true spiritual interests of the Redeemer's kingdom, began to expend their energies in the pomp and toil of a gaudy ritual, and to exceed Paganism itself, in outward glory;—then the spirit and power of Christ, in the same proportion, departed from the Church. As the *ceremonial* of piety increased, the *reality* of it gradually declined. The more splendid professions and mock consecrations were multiplied, the less power did real holiness maintain over the hearts and lives of men. In short, the more laboriously men strove to impart holiness to those things to which it never was, or could be imparted, the more miserably did they fail of manifesting it in those things to which it did properly belong, and in which it ought to have been manifested. Hence arose, in this century, for the first time, so far as history informs us, the pompous consecration of churches, with many superstitious notions relative to their holiness; and several centuries afterwards, the consecration of church-yards, church *bells*, and church *vessels*;—notions and practices which have generally had most stress laid upon them in those churches and times in which the genuine spirit of the gospel had least practical influence.

I mention these things, my friends, not by any means for the purpose of imputing blame to those who may differ from us in opinion on this subject; but merely to show how prone professing Christians have been, in all

ages, to mistake the real nature of that blessing of which we are speaking, and which it is a part of the appropriate service of this day to implore. To show that, in fact, where there has been most external magnificence and splendour, most laboured ceremonial, and outward glory, there has commonly been least of that spiritual presence and power of the King of Zion, which is the true happiness and glory of the church. And, on the contrary, that some of those periods which have been most remarkable for affliction and depression, with respect to the external church, have been distinguished by the most signal displays of her Master's power and love;—the word and ordinances have been accompanied with a peculiar Divine energy;—vital piety has been more deep and prevalent; the flame of faith, and love, and universal holiness, have risen far higher, and shone with a far brighter lustre than in more externally prosperous seasons. And happy is that church, the members of which, understanding the real nature of the blessing in question, and holding every thing else subordinate to it, cease not to pray for its attainment, and to pursue that humble, spiritual course, which is adapted, under the government of a faithful and prayer-hearing God, to draw it down in its most plenteous effusions!

Having thus briefly considered the NATURE of this blessing, let us

II. Attend to its VALUE. The wise man prays for it as for a most important object; as something which he deemed far more desirable and precious than all the

outward splendour that the wealth and the art of man could confer.

Need I stop, my friends, to show, by formal reasoning, that the wise man's estimate of this matter was correct;—that the presence and the gracious power of the great Head of the Church, is the richest, the most precious blessing that any church can receive;—that, however poor and depressed in her external condition, if she be favoured with a large measure of this blessing, she is rich indeed; but that, if she have it not, though loaded with all the wealth, and honours, and outward prosperity that a flattering world can bestow—she is poor and miserable, and would appear so in her own view, if she could see herself in a just light?

What, let me ask, is the great design of the Church? If it be, indeed, as many seem to imagine, an institution the chief object of which is to polish and adorn the surface of society:—if its grand purpose be merely to furnish objects which shall dazzle the senses, gratify the imagination, cultivate the taste, and soften the manners of men:—if it be intended, in short, to furnish a place for an elegant and entertaining lounge on the Lord's day; to supply on special occasions the pageant of an imposing ceremonial; to seal us with the Christian name, when we enter the world, and to solemnize with appropriate exercises our sepulture, when we leave it:—if such be the chief design of the Church—then, indeed, we might suppose, that the greater its external glory, the more perfectly it would answer the great purpose which it was intended to subserve; and

that nothing else was really essential to the attainment of its highest benefits.

But if the Church has been established by its all-wise and all-gracious Master, that it may be a nursery for Heaven;—if, to this end, every thing respecting it has been so prescribed by infinite Wisdom and Love, as to render it admirably adapted to become the birth-place of souls;—the means of convincing and converting sinners, and of enlightning and comforting believers;—if, in a word, the great design of the Church is to be the depository of Jehovah's truth and ordinances;—to bear witness to his Gospel and his glory, before an unbelieving world;—and to become the means of sanctifying the hearts and lives of men, and thus preparing them to be happy members of the society of their fellow men, in this world, and above all to be partakers of the holy joys of his presence in the world to come:—if such be the great design of the Church; the great purpose for which it was originally founded, and for which it is still preserved and supported;—then, surely, the gracious presence, the sanctifying power of Christ, is the most invaluable blessing that can be conferred on the church at large, or on any particular branch of it. It is the grand blessing which the friends of *Zion* ought to desire above all others, and for which they are bound to labour and pray without ceasing.

It is only so far as the gracious presence and blessing of Christ are vouchsafed to his church;—it is only so far as the King of *Zion* condescends to come and dwell in it, with the “ark of his strength,” that any

real spiritual benefits are enjoyed by his people. Without his gracious presence, there is no true spiritual worship, no profitable hearing of the word, no real benefit in ordinances. We may write upon them all—*Ichabod*—for *the glory is departed!* But when the King comes, in the power of his grace and love, into those places in which his name is recorded,—then his, *Word is quick and powerful*,—religion is revived,—*times of refreshing come*;—many hear the voice of *the Son of God*, and they that hear are made to live; multitudes are seen *asking the way to Zion*, with their faces thitherward, and saying—*Come let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant never to be forgotten.*

Further; it is the gracious presence and blessing of Christ which renders the service of the sanctuary *delightful*, as well as *beneficial* to his people. Without this blessing, all is dull and comfortless; but with it, all is light, and peace and joy. When this is enjoyed, and then only, the pious can say, with experimental pleasure, *How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts! A day in thy courts is better than a thousand. My soul thirsteth, yea even longeth, for the courts of the Lord. My soul is satisfied as with marrow and fatness. I set down under his shadow with delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.*

In short, what the light and genial warmth of the sun are to the natural world, that, and unspeakably more, is the presence of Christ with his Church and people. It brings life, and growth, and fruitfulness,

wherever, and in proportion to the degree in which it is conferred. It quickens the spiritually dead;—warms and excites to activity the cold and ice-bound believer;—and causes fruit to abound where all had been barrenness and sterility before. What is HELL, but being banished forever *from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power?* And what is HEAVEN, and the HEAVEN OF HEAVENS, but the uninterrupted and everlasting enjoyment of Him *whose favour is life, and whose loving kindness is better than life?* What is the essence of the celestial blessedness, but enjoying without a cloud, and without measure, that gracious presence of God which is vouchsafed in a degree whenever a soul *dead in trespasses and sins, is raised to newness of life, or a child of God filled with joy and peace in believing?* *I shall be satisfied, says one, when I awake with thy likeness. In thy presence is fulness of joy, and at thy right hand are pleasures forever more.**

Permit me, now, brethren, to employ the foregoing illustration of the text for the purpose of enforcing several practical considerations, which appear to be suggested by what has been said, and by the solemnities of this day.

1. And the first practical lesson which our subject suggests is, that professing Christians are every where bound, as far as possible, **TO PROVIDE THEMSELVES WITH COMMODIOUS AND COMFORTABLE HOUSES FOR THE PURPOSE OF WORSHIPPING GOD.** We are not,

* *Psa.* xvii. 15. xvi. 11.

indeed, bound, nay, I think, we are not at liberty, under the simple spiritual dispensation in which our lot is cast, to emulate, even if it were in our power, the splendour or expense of the Old Testament Temple. The unrivalled richness and glory of that wonderful edifice, were intended to answer great typical and ceremonial purposes, which called for every thing that was bestowed upon it. But the same thing, I apprehend, would not be lawful, without a special divine warrant, under the present dispensation. To expend millions upon a single place of worship *now*, while thousands of poor around us are suffering for bread, and while a great majority of our race are still covered with Pagan darkness, and perishing for lack of knowledge,—appears so unreasonable and criminal, that I hope we are in no danger of going to that extreme. But another, and perhaps, a much more common extreme, especially in *our church*, taken at large, is, contenting ourselves with mean and uncomfortable houses in which to worship God. Nay, it is not very uncommon, in some districts, for a number of the opulent members of our truly primitive and apostolical Church, to dwell themselves *in ceiled houses, while the house of God lies, comparatively, waste*. This, I will venture to say, is both disreputable and criminal. We ought always to be ready to serve God WITH THE BEST THAT WE POSSESS. No worshipper ought ever to be willing to live in a better house than that which he, with others, has devoted to his Maker and Redeemer. - And while, on the one hand, that splendour and magnificence

of architecture, which is adapted to arrest and occupy the mind, and to draw it away from spiritual objects, ought carefully to be avoided; and avoided, not merely on the score of *expense*, but of *christian edification*; so, on the other hand, that simple tasteful elegance, on which the eye is apt to rest with composed satisfaction; that studious provision for perfect convenience and comfort, which is calculated to place every worshipper in circumstances favourable to tranquil, undivided and devout attention, ought to be always and carefully consulted by every congregation, that is *able* to accomplish what is desirable in these respects.* And per-

* May it not be questioned, whether the principles which ought to regulate our conduct in relation to this subject, have been at all times duly regarded? It is a law of our mental, as well as of our physical nature, that two classes of emotions cannot be in a high, certainly not in a governing, degree of exercise at the same time. Whenever, therefore, we assemble for the worship of God in situations in which we are constantly surrounded and addressed by the most exquisite productions of art, which arrest and engross the mind, we are, plainly, not in circumstances favourable to true spiritual worship. Would any rational man expect to find himself really devout in *St. Peter's*, at *Rome*, even if the most scriptural service were performed within its walls, until he should have become so familiar with the unrivalled specimens of taste and grandeur around him, as to forget or cease to feel them? Or, would any one be likely to "make melody in his heart to the Lord," while the most skillful and touching refinements of music saluted and ravished his ears? Thrilled and transported he might be; but it would rather be the transport of natural taste, than the heavenliness of spiritual devotion. There never was a sounder maxim than that delivered in the plain and homely, but forcible language of the celebrated *Mr. Poole*, the learned compiler of the *Synopsis Criticorum*, so well known throughout the Christian world, in the Preface to a Sermon, entitled "Evangelical Obedience," and preached before the Lord Mayor of *London*, in 1660. Amidst much other excellent matter, the author observes—"the more inveiglements

haps it may not be improper to add, that all this is, in my judgment, peculiarly important in GREAT CITIES, where the point of taste is more generally consulted, and where the style and magnitude of surrounding objects seem to demand more attention to appearances, than may be absolutely necessary, or even truly useful, in a different situation.

You have, therefore, in my opinion, acted wisely, my Friends, in the erection of this Edifice. It was a measure which you owed to yourselves, to your children, and to the Church of God. Some of you have already vested, and others will vest, no small amount of property here. I pray you grudge not the investment. Perhaps it will prove to be the best part of your estate. It certainly WILL prove to be so, if you honestly desire and implore that blessing from the king of Zion of

there are to sense, the more disadvantage to the spirit." No one, of course, will consider this maxim as intended to teach, that, in order to promote the spirit of true devotion, it is necessary or desirable to be surrounded with that which is mean, irregular, or disgusting to the mind of taste. On the contrary, the fact is, that such mean and disgusting objects tend to arrest and draw away the mind in an opposite and painful manner; and are thus, perhaps, with respect to many persons, quite as unfriendly to the exercises of calm piety, as the utmost fascinations of art can be. The obvious inference from the whole, then, is, that, for the house of God no style of architecture or of music is so favourable to the most elevated exercises of pious affection, as that simple, correct, tasteful style, on which the mind rests with tranquil, composed gratification, without being either painfully occupied with emotions of disgust, or captivated and borne away by those of sensitive pleasure. The happy medium, in this, as in most things, is conducive to the highest degree of edification: while all short of it, and all beyond it, will seldom fail of proving injurious.

which we have been speaking. And, at any rate, if, by aiding to erect such a temple to the living God, as will be likely to attract and fix within the sound of the Gospel, many a wavering family or individual, you are made instrumental in conferring benefits, inconceivably precious in their nature, and endless in their duration, on many immortal souls, think you that you will ever regret the expenditure? No, my friends, rather will you have reason to rejoice in it more and more forever!

2. The spirit of our text seems evidently to intimate, that **THE PRACTICE OF OPENING HOUSES OF PUBLIC WORSHIP WITH APPROPRIATE RELIGIOUS EXERCISES, IS A RATIONAL AND LAUDABLE CUSTOM.**

I am no friend, my respected hearers, to many of those ideas, in relation to this subject, which have had much currency among serious people, in different ages, and which are now received by no small portion of the community; as if, by the solemnities which attend the first opening of a church for public worship, it became, properly, a consecrated building; in other words, as if there were a kind of inherent sanctity imparted to the edifice itself; a sanctity which communicated some mysterious efficacy to the religious services performed within its walls. I know of nothing, either in scripture, or in the records of the primitive church, which gives the smallest countenance to ideas of this kind. I know of no warrant, as I before intimated, for believing that holiness can be imparted to the walls, or arches, or seats, within which we assemble to wor-

ship God. And when we recollect the mischievous superstitions, and delusive hopes which have been so extensively generated, in all ages, by the doctrine in question, it surely cannot be considered as a very profitable, or even innocent doctrine.

But, in receding from an error on this side, let us not fall into one on the other. Because the idea of "consecrating a church," as that phrase is commonly understood, is really objectionable; because we cannot conceive of holiness, strictly speaking, being imparted to a material building;—let us not imagine that there is any thing, either unscriptural or unreasonable, in entering on the occupancy of a house intended for public worship, with appropriate exercises of religion, and, by these exercises, solemnly devoting or dedicating it to God. Is it unreasonable or unscriptural, when we commence the public occupation of such a house, to thank God for the power and the privilege of erecting it? Is it unreasonable or unscriptural to pray, that his blessing may rest upon the erection of it;—that he may meet his people there, from time to time, with the manifestations of his grace and his love;—and that his word preached, and his ordinances administered there, may be attended *with power from on high*? Is it unreasonable or unscriptural to begin by imploring from Him who has all hearts in his hands, that a building erected for his service, may, as long as it shall stand, be devoted to his glory;—that no false doctrine may ever be proclaimed, or criminal practice ever recommended within its walls;—and that it may always be the resort

of spiritual worshippers, and the scene of glorious triumphs over sin and satan? No, my friends, I must believe that this is all rational and scriptural. Nay, allow me to ask—does any Christian dare to enter on the occupancy of a HOUSE OF ANY KIND, as the residence of HIMSELF or his FAMILY, without beginning that occupancy with fervent prayer for a blessing upon it; without asking the God of all grace to smile upon his residence in it, and to make it, in the best sense, a place of comfort and prosperity to him and his; without in fact, in a sense, *dedicating it to God*? I say, does any Christian dare to enter on the occupancy of ANY HOUSE without this? I hope not. And if not, can he give vent to the best feelings of his heart, if he open the doors, and enter the seats of the House of God, without exercises of a similar kind, but, of course, more public, more formal, and, therefore, more solemn?

Accordingly, it has been customary, I believe, in all ages, in which the people of God were allowed and were able to erect houses for his stated worship, to open them with appropriate exercises of religion. It would seem, indeed, to be a dictate of nature, and to be no less countenanced by the word of God. That it is a practice liable to abuse, is no valid objection to its proper and enlightened use. Intelligent christians can easily distinguish between entering on the occupancy of a place of worship in the fear of God, and with a suitable acknowledgment of God; and cherishing those superstitious sentiments, and adopting those superstitious forms, in relation to this subject, which may be

attached to any thing, and which few of the institutions of religion, however precious, have entirely escaped in certain periods and portions of the church.

3. Again; it appears to me to follow, from what has been said, that after a house erected for the worship of God, has been solemnly set apart for that purpose, IT IS NOT DESIRABLE OR PROPER, IN ORDINARY CASES, TO EMPLOY IT FOR ANY OTHER PURPOSE.

Although neither intrinsic holiness, nor relative holiness can, properly speaking, be ascribed to the buildings or places in which God is worshipped, but only to the worshippers themselves:—although there are no buildings or places known to me, under the present dispensation, into which, like the *Holy Place*, or the *Most Holy Place*, in ancient times, it is lawful for none but consecrated persons ever to enter:—yet we are by no means, I think, to infer from this, that there are no sentiments of REVERENCE and SOLEMNITY which ought ALWAYS to be connected with those places in which holy services are stately performed. There is, my friends, a principle deeply implanted in our nature, which we commonly denominate the principle of *association*. This principle will always lead serious, devout minds to connect feelings of reverence with an edifice in which the people of God stately meet for public worship. They will always enter with mingled emotions of solemnity and pleasure, within those Walls which have long and often resounded with the glad tidings of salvation:—they will contemplate with delight those Seats in which the pious have often found com-

munion with their God and Saviour; and they will look with sentiments of sacred veneration toward that Pulpit from which they have stately heard the instructions and consolations of Divine mercy. Are these feelings superstitious? Are they to be proscribed? Far, very far from it! They are natural; they are commendable; they are scriptural feelings. They ought unquestionably to be cherished. Nay, I will venture to say, that the person who can enter a church without experiencing any of the devout and reverential emotions to which I have referred, has not in exercise the proper feelings of a man, certainly not those which become a christian man.

Now, when houses devoted to the worship of God are frequently, or even occasionally, employed for other and secular purposes, and especially for purposes connected with noise, disorder, and unhallowed mirth, the effect cannot fail of being unhappy. It breaks that devout, reverential association of which I have just spoken. It connects ludicrous images and recollections with the house of God. It takes away from the affectionate respect and awe with which it is always desirable to enter the sanctuary. And it will be well if, the next time it is entered, after such an incongruous scene, there be not a struggle before the mind can resume its wonted tranquil devotion. Would any good man, who was at the same time a wise and prudent one, be willing that the closet, to which he was accustomed daily to retire for secret devotion, should be frequently employed for purposes which, so far as he

thought of them, were calculated to disturb or banish every devout feeling? Surely I need not wait for an answer.

Guard, then, against every thing of this kind as far as possible. There are obstacles enough to a spirit of elevated devotion in the house of God, without unnecessarily adding to their number. Let nothing ever enter these walls, if you can possibly exclude it, that tends to inspire levity, to pollute the imagination, or to give you pain in recollecting it, when you afterwards come to worship God. Let nothing be exhibited here, which will render it difficult for you or your children, when you tread these courts, to feel as if you were withdrawn from the world. Let nothing, in a word, be transacted here, but what has a tendency to compose and spiritualize the mind, and to raise it from earth to heaven.

4. Finally, my friends, from what has been said, it appears, that the object of your most earnest and tender entreaty, this day, and at all times, ought to be, **THAT GOD MAY HERE BE PLEASED GRACIOUSLY AND LIBERALLY TO DISPENSE HIS SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS.**

Methinks the great Head of the church, to-day, addresses every devout worshipper who has an interest in this Edifice, in the language which an eastern monarch addressed to his beloved companion, as recorded in the sacred history;—*What is thy petition, and what is thy request?*—Happy will it be for this church of Christ, if the hearts of all are united as one man in replying—*Now, therefore, arise, O Lord God, into thy*

resting place, thou and the ark of thy strength! While you are thankful that the Lord has prospered you thus far, imagine not that your work is done, when the House which you have raised for God, is opened and dedicated to Him. Your work, in fact, in reference to this Sanctuary, is only now begun. Let it be your care, not only once, but constantly and perseveringly, to implore that spiritual presence of the King of Zion, which is the richest of all blessings that can be conferred on a Church, and which alone can render this edifice, and the occupancy of it by you and your children the means of real and lasting benefit.

Do you ask, *how* you are so to conduct yourselves as to invite, from time to time, this invaluable blessing? I answer—Besides continually asking for it, in humble, unceasing, persevering prayer;—let a diligent discharge of duty constantly testify that you really desire to obtain it. See that every thing be done for the welfare of the church which fidelity to our common Master requires. Study, at all times, to cooperate with your beloved Pastor in promoting your own best interests. While he preaches the Gospel with faithfulness and zeal, and dispenses the sacramental seals committed to him, with an enlightened fidelity; be it your care, my friends, to attend upon all his ministrations with punctuality, with meekness, and with love; to support him continually by your prayers; to encourage the hearts, and strengthen the hands of him and your other ecclesiastical Rulers, in the maintenance of discipline; to stimulate one another to every good word and work;

and, in one word, to endeavour, by all the means which the Head of the Church has appointed, to draw down the blessing of God upon your solemn assemblies, and upon all the individuals who compose them.

If ever the time should come in which the simple and pure doctrines of the gospel shall be either corrupted or kept back, by those who minister here in holy things:—if the divine glories, the vicarious atonement, or the justifying merits of the “Lord that bought us,” shall ever be denied by those who occupy this pulpit:—if the Sacraments of Christ’s house shall ever be habitually neglected or profaned within these walls:—or if the body of worshippers shall ever become cold, prayerless, and secular in their character:—whatever outward glory may continue to surround this House, I proclaim to you this day, that the Lord will depart from it, and that *the Ark of his strength* will no more display its power here.

God grant, my friends, that the blessed reverse of all this may be your happy lot, to the latest generations! *Peace be within these walls, and prosperity within these palaces!* May you, and your children, and your children’s children, long come to this house of God, and never come to it without a blessing! As the external glory of this *latter house* is greater than *the glory of the former* occupied by you, may the *latter*, in SPIRITUAL GLORY still more eminently excel the former! May the eye of Jehovah be ever open upon it, and his ear be ever *attent unto the prayer* that may here be offered up! May the word and ordinances here dispensed,

from sabbath to sabbath, be attended *with power from on high!* May this devoted edifice, as long as it shall stand, be a means of Christian sanctification, a seat of Christian enjoyment, and a center of Christian action! May revival after revival fill it with devout and holy worshippers! And when they shall successively take leave of it, may it be to enter a **House** of infinitely greater glory; *a House not made with hands, eternal in the heavens!*—Amen, and Amen!