

*from the author*

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## THE ANTITHESIS

BETWEEN

## SYMBOLISM AND REVELATION.

LECTURE DELIVERED  
BEFORE THE HISTORICAL PRESBYTERIAN SOCIETY  
IN PHILADELPHIA, PA.

BY

PROF. ABRAHAM KUYPER,  
*D.D. LL.D. M.P.*



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## THE ANTITHESIS BETWEEN SYMBOLISM AND REVELATION.

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MR. PRESIDENT, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, Availing myself with much pleasure of the opportunity which your kind invitation puts in my way, to say a few words to your honoured Society, it is not my design to give an elaborate lecture, but only to make a few remarks on a subject that falls within the limits of your interests and mine. This subject is the antithesis between Symbolism and Revelation, or the current of symbolical religion, which of late is becoming almost dominant in England, and now already in a considerable degree menaces our Calvinistic church-life.

The facts need hardly any proof. All over non-conformistic England there is no end of complaint, that so many of the children of the second generation are abandoning the paths of their fathers, and are publicly and earnestly declaring their preference for the episcopalian services. In one general assembly after another one of the chief topics in order has been the ever-returning question: how to keep the rising generation in the fold. In so much as you have followed the debates on this question, and the resolutions taken, you also know in what way improvement at times has been looked for. The astonishing proposition to make non-conformism more attractive, by connecting with the church a dancing or boxing school, or a large room for *indoor* and a broad field for *outdoor* sports, speaks volumes. I remember that two years ago a Con-

gregational minister touched a different chord, when he pointed his audience to the Calvinists in Wales and in Holland, who, in keeping more closely to their standards, had no difficulty whatsoever in kindling the love for their own churches in the hearts of their children. But his voice was a voice of one crying in the wilderness, and the uneasy feeling of an approaching ebbtide among Methodists and Congregationalists in England is still on the increase. Even outside the churches in the daily press this reflux in the general spirit is watched so keenly, and this increasing sympathy for Ritualism is considered to be of so far reaching consequences, that liberal papers ascribe to it for a large part, the overwhelming majority which Lord Salisbury secured at the last elections. For three-quarters of a century, as they frankly acknowledge, non-conformism had been the stronghold of the Liberals, and it is this remarkable change in the public mind, which, religiously being more in favor of Ritualism, turns politically to the advantage of the conservatives and unionists. The interesting coming forward of the unionists under Mr. Chamberlain was no doubt incidentally brought about by Mr. Gladstone's persevering support of home-rule, but was countenanced, as they tell us, in no small proportion by this same ritualistic movement. In the long run our human mind cannot forsake its oneness of impulse. The track which it beats in matters of religion, is almost spontaneously followed in social and political affairs. So much to convince you that this symbolical movement, if it carries the day, far from being a mere trifle in church-life, is on the contrary impregnated by an energetic principle, which menaces to react upon our whole human existence and upon the whole history of the world.

The second stage of this movement (for I emphasize that ecclesiastically it has three stages) is to be observed in the Episcopal church itself. In the first period the thirst of the non-conformistic renegade after more artistic worship is duly satisfied by the plainest service conducted by a low-church minister. But for the church of England people, things are very differently conditioned. The same attraction which the low-church is exercising upon a faltering and wavering non-conformist, the episcopalian himself undergoes

from the so-called high-church movement. The common prayer-book seems to them a dull sailing with quartering winds, or better still, a display of the flag at half-mast. The thirst for symbolism once felt is not quenched by half measures. The more such a passion is indulged in, the more it is aggravated. Thus from the low-church they stepped over into the high-church, and here they found the clergy and the bishop almost constantly engaged in rivalry to go *still* higher on, the highest also in this ritualistic competition always having the lead. I visited England, and I attended the episcopal services, twenty years ago, and I found that what was considered very high a quarter of a century ago, is now already in some circles most disdainfully condemned as being behindhand, if not a derision of the sanctuary. Almost every year a new item is added to the overburdened services, and no one can foretell, where finally this display of ritualistic inventiveness will stop. Fully aware of the danger that lurks behind all these paraphernalia Sir William Harcourt made an impressive and cogent speech, as you know, upon this matter in the House of Commons, and recommended that it should be thwarted by government; as if a deep spiritual movement could ever be checked by the executive power, and as if in such a case anything short of the reaction of *the opposite spiritual principle* could change the mind of the people.

Now there is finally the third stage, which this ritualistic action must of necessity develop for itself; viz., *the going back to Rome*. According to the Roman Catholic weeklies every month more than one thousand church-of-England people are making the decisive step. And this is quite natural. In every race there being a goal, the human mind cannot rest before this goal is reached; and this goal in Ritualism is presented in the most harmonious and perfect form by the Roman Catholic Liturgical performances. There you find the ripe fruit of a ritualistic development, of more than a twelve centuries standing. At this point Rome is not to be surpassed. Every particular in which the high churchmen are indulging themselves, is stealthily borrowed from *her* treasures. With Rome is the original, theirs is the apery and mimicry. What I called 'inventiveness' in the second stage, here evidently appears to be noth-

ing but mere imitation of the Romish pattern. Or if you like another simile, the high churchman carries a ritualistic *bouquet*, but the ritualistic *rose-bush* buds and blossoms under the shade of the Vatican.

Such is the condition of things in England. In Scotland, in your Eastern States, in the Netherlands, in South Africa, in fact, wherever the spirit of Calvin won a more thorough, more absolute and more permanent victory, this movement still stumbles and totters in its first stage. The voice that speaks from the blood of the martyrs is not stifled at once. It would, however, be closing your eyes against the reality to deny that, as the white ant, it has succeeded already in piercing also our walls and commencing its destructive work. Although very rarely, apostacies have occurred. Preaching, before all things, should be short. The differences between one denomination and another should be obliterated. In religious geology the dogmatical stratum should be underground and very thin. The common mind refuses to be wearied by such antiquated documents as confessions and catechisms. At this point the breach between parents and children is becoming wider and wider, with each succeeding generation. And especially among the more cultured classes the demand is more and more general for beautiful church-buildings, with lofty steeples and high spires, for dominating organ music, and for exquisite choirs and soloist's. Here and there these artistic requirements in every particular of the service are even pressed in a much more urgent way than the soundness of the Apostolic truth.

I do not want to exaggerate, and therefore I willingly add, that there are not a few important assets that counterbalance these liabilities. Christian liberality as it is exercised in our days was entirely unknown in the first half of this century. A spirit of reciprocal estimation has succeeded to the squabbles and jealousies of former days. The theological hatred, if not entirely put out and stifled, is glowing in mere embers. And, above all, there is an increase of personal and of combined activity in the missionary, the philanthropic, and the hospital domains, far exceeding

what has been achieved in the most glorious days of our fathers. Gains so highly valuable in my eye that, were the symbolical sympathies outside the boundaries of our own churches an isolated movement, I should feel inclined to connive temporarily at the lack of love for the Truth, accepting the assets, which I mentioned, as the prognostics of better times to come, and as fully counter-balancing the black points.

This however is impossible. Two, three drops falling from a little cloud, passing just over your head, will not disturb you. But if lifting up your eye, you discern from all sides much thicker and darker clouds gathering on the horizon, now and then rent already by a flash of lightning, you feel at once the approaching danger, and the two little drops become a serious warning. So now it is here. There exists an undeniable affinity between the, as yet, feeble symbolical action in our own churches and the dark ritualistic cloud pending over Great Britain. Both have a common origin. They are, the one as well as the other, the issue of a remarkable change in the common sentiment. And without the least danger of being disclaimed by the events as a false prophet, you may predict, that what is now seen elsewhere, is only the true image of what is awaiting yourselves. The same cause, if allowed to exert its full energy, is always bound in the end to yield identical results. There are local changes, not affecting the world outside. But as soon as, like here, a *universal* movement has set in, springing forward from the very entity of the human soul, you know beforehand that it *must* become general, and that it shall certainly find its way, digging its own bed like a torrent rushing down from the mountain-sides. In serious matters none of us here should like to be childish, and childish it would be, not to realize at once the inner connection between the general increase of love of the symbolical in literature, in painting, in sculpture, in service of worship outside our own churches, and the clearly distinguishable changes of religious appreciation *bij* which no keen observer can keep from being impressed in our own circles. In spiritual things also there is an *atmosphere* permeating the whole of life. As in the days of our fathers this atmosphere was saturated

with a strong *anti-symbolical* element, just so it is now impregnated by an ever more strongly distilled tincture of symbolism. A distinct change, which every thoughtful observer now already fully realizes, although the bulk of the people, soon accustomed to symbolism's peculiar fragrance, and themselves halfway intoxicated by it, are not in the least aware how far the scenes have been already shifted.

This ritualistic change, however, is not to be understood as a supplantation of the religious feeling by the aesthetical. It is not *art* but *symbolism* (and I once more emphasize the expression) that took hold of the mind; and the true conception of the new movement lies in the acknowledgement of the fact, that of late indeed *a new religious tide has set in*. The difference between the dominating spirit of the end of the former century and of ours, is well marked, in Europe at least, both in Protestant and in Roman Catholic circles. A hundred years ago Voltaire, now de Brunetière, gives expression to the French mind in leading classes. And if in the days of the French convention statesmen and belletrists, scholars and politicians, were vying in strong *anti-religious* utterances, now on the contrary an increasing number of eminent men of paramount influence, both in the university and in governmental circles, are deeming it a point of honour, publicly to declare their *religious* sympathies and to proclaim their predilections for *mystical piety*.

Only it should be observed that this newly-risen predilection for the religious element is of a very peculiar kind. It is absolutely devoid of every personal and definite character. Both in the days of the Apostles and in the times of the Reformation the revival of spiritual life originated from a yearning of the heart after the living God, for salvation and for eternal peace. In both instances the cry of the troubled conscience was: What shall I do to be saved? Now, on the contrary, no such struggle of the oppressed soul is witnessed. It is not Augustine confessing: *Inquietum cor meum donec requiescat in Te o Domine, i. e.: My heart remains unquiet until it can rest in Thee, O God.* It is not Luther creeping on the stairs of the vatican for the redemption of his soul. It is not Calvin, bidding every earnest man and woman not to rest

before they had discovered the source of their personal redemption in God's good pleasure. Oh, no! In this new religious tide there is no demand at all for deliverance from sin; there is no longing whatsoever after redemption; nowhere the desire for a conscious personal reunion with the living God, our Father in heaven, declares itself. The adherents of this *new religion*, belonging almost all to the highly cultured class, are well satisfied with themselves and with their position in this world, leaving their future lot in the world to come, if there is such a one, an open question. Their watchword is the merging of the soul in the ocean of the Infinite; the after-thrilling of the soul of the Cosmos in the vibrations of their own heart; the perception of an all-pervading power, inspiring them; and the coveting of an ever unattainable ideal. And if some of them are still appreciating some connection between the vocabulary of the old religion with their new sentiments, it is not the Father, and not the Saviour, whom they most beroently adore, but it is almost exclusively the Holy Ghost, not conceived as a personal God, but as an infinite, all-pervading Spirit. They borrow their choicest expressions more from the Indian Veda's than from the apostolic documents, and no doubt that pantheism, more than the adoration of the Triune God, is inspiring their songs and their pious utterances. Loosing themselves in an unfathomable divine Immanency, they are the most absolute Daltonists as to God's majestic Transcendency. And to resume it in one word, their constant endeavor is not to fear, to serve and to love the living God, their Creator and the Disposer of their destinies, but to enjoy fully the mystical titillations of a delightful religious feeling. Of course, the lower classes do not catch a suggestion of such religious delicacies. The movement therefore is a thoroughly aristocratic one. The persuasion however of the superiority of their own standpoint does not prevent these refined Buddhists from vouchsafing by a condescending altruism, the further use of the old Christian religion to the less cultured class, provided no attempt be made to urge it back upon their own mind, and the lead of society in every circle of life be guaranteed to their new born opinions.

Such is the general underlying religious stratum, in which

Symbolism stands rooted, or to express it in another form, such is the background from which Symbolism is radiating its polychromatic beams, and projecting its mysterious shades. The new movement in itself is devoid of color and outline. But as soon as its beams reach the existing churches, and pass through the prism of our Christian worship, the refraction sets in, and Symbolism, in its duly variegated forms, makes its influence felt. Therefore let there be no mistake, as if this new religious tide were related in some way or other to the Christian revival of the beginning of this century. The Christian revival, both in the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches, forever famous by the illustrious names of D'Aubigné and Vinet, of de Bonald and Chateaubriand, was the result of the horrors of the Napoleonic oppression, and led to the awaking of the Christian mind from its sinful lethargy. This was no religious *revolution*, but a *restoration* of what had been shamefully abandoned. A real coming back to Christ, and a longing for his salvation. With this revival therefore the new religious movement, from which Symbolism borrows its incentive, has no connection whatsoever; it boldly opposed it, and set fire to every field upon which its harvest was ripening. So much only can be granted, that both the Christian revival, and this new mystical religious movement, were a reaction against the ungodliness of the period of Voltaire and the low vulgarity of the so called "Illumination" of that time in Germany. But, except this general antithesis, the garments of both have no thread in common; and in order rightly to understand the inherent character of this new religious tide, we have to trace the threefold source from which it originated: The modern *philosophy*, the *historical school*, and the *aesthetical* development of our times.

First there was the new *German philosophy*, from Kant to Schelling, which in its splendid enthusiasm for organic oneness and systematical conception, felt painfully offended by the disintegration to which the French revolution had submitted our entire life and thought. There was in the second place the rise of the famous so-called *historical school*, of Niebuhr and de Savigny, which

in its deep reverence for the past, could not but scorn at the lightheartedness and flimsy superficiality, with which the French revolutionists cut off all historical process, and imagined themselves able by the whimsical utterance of the popular will of a single day to renew the face of the world. And in the third place there was the revival of *art life*, under the all permeating influence of Lessing and Goethe, which, in its adoration for the classical beautiful of the Greek world, must feel scandalized by the ridiculous extolling of uncultured nature, as was to the French revolutionists the real point of departure for their system.

At that time already the almost incredible defeat of Sedan has been prepared. The German mind, rising to its full height of energy, slew the French spiritually, before it annihilated the French army on the field of battle. The French revolution was a wild stroke of madness, bordering upon suicide. About the middle of this century France sank, Germany rose. In France since the second Napoleon came forward, we find only middling sized capacities; while in Germany a host of heroes and genii arose, and German thought, German science, German education ruled all Europe and took the lead in every department of science. The French by their insane upheaval had but roused the German mind and the German strength from their slumbers. In twenty-five years Germany worked itself up to the full measure of its grandeur, and then already it could have been prophesied that henceforward the combined spirit of the German philosophical, historical and artistic school should put its stamp upon the next period of our human culture.

Now in this threefold German movement there was one common trait: the going back from an uncongenial present to an attractive past, and in that past the attractive point was found not in the tragic cross of Calvary and the hills of Gallilee, but in the Academy of Plato and in the studio of Phidias. It was one running back from weak and deadly pale Christianity to old Greece in the acme of its blossom. Luther translated *the Bible*, Schleiermacher *Plato's works*; and the fundamental idea of pantheism, borrowed from the Stoa, revived, remodelled and deepened, on the whole glittering

philosophical line of great German philosophers. The artistic school followed in the track and supplanted the *Crucifix* and *Ecce homo* by the Apollo of Belvedere and the Venus di Medici. And finally the historical school came forward to justify this aversion to so sad a present, and to encourage a boundless admiration for the wisdom of the past. Moreover, you remember, how the πάντα ἔτει καὶ οὐδὲν μένει was once the watchword of the Stoā; and thus, by resolving everything in an uninterrupted historical process, this school joined the pantheism of the philosophical school; and the Infinite manifesting and developing itself in the successive stages of the finite, took hold of the mind as the leading thought, which had to direct our investigations. And all this was suggested and countenanced with such elaborate study, with such an overflowing treasure of detailed proof, in such a splendid style, and with such a logical cogency, that science itself, raised to the higher level of the *organic* conception, became almost indentified with this pantheistic worldview. They who dared to oppose it, were simply deemed unscientific, and, if clever, men willingly insincere, and guilty deceivers of the people.

In this abstract form, however, this new leading thought could not radiate from the German to the Anglo-Saxon mind. The Anglo-Saxon, as such, is neither a born philosopher nor an æsthetical fanatic. The German likes fluttering in the air and hovering on the wings of idealism; the Anglo-Saxon prefers to stand with both feet firmly on the ground. Hence it came to pass that the Anglo-Saxon world remained almost unaffected by this new German development until Darwin gave it its *material* basis, in the abolition of real species and the uninterrupted process by which the plant was metamorphosed in the vertebrate, the vertebrate in a mammal, and the mammal in man. The idea of the Infinite becoming phenomenal in the finite, by means of a material process, adapted itself to the Anglo-Saxon mind; and from that moment on the modern theory of the pantheistic relation between the Infinite and the finite has mastered the public mind, and encompassed the rising generation all over the world, sweeping everything before it.

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Now here is the very point at which the want of Symbolism announced itself. Every one who, moving in the finite, becomes aware of the existence of something Infinite, has to form a conception of the relation that exists between both. Here two possibilities present themselves. Either the Infinite reveals itself to man, and by this revelation unveils the *really existing relation*; or the Infinite remains mute and silent, and man himself has to guess, to conjecture, and to represent to himself this relation *by means of his imagination*; that is, in an artificial way. Now the first line is the Christian one. The Infinite at sundry times and in divers manners spoke in times past by the prophets, and in these late days has spoken to us by his Son—this Son being not a silent mystery, but the eternal, creating and *speaking Word*. Paganism, on the contrary, being destitute of revelation, wants the symbol, and creates it in its idols, “having mouths but they speak not, having ears but they hear not.” *Symbol* means a fictitious link between the invisible Infinite and the visible finite. It is derived from *συμβάλλειν*; *i. e.*, bringing two different spheres together. Symbolism is the grasping of something outward and material, upon which the imagination may put the stamp of the unseen and unspeakable. The symbol is the middle link, being related from one side to what you can see and grasp, and from the other side to what you feel, fancy and imagine. As soon, therefore, as the consciousness of the Infinite revives in the public mind, in antagonism to a God-given Revelation, the demand for the symbol necessarily and immediately declares itself. So it was in the Grecian world, so it is now. Of course there exists also an *unconscious, ever-changing relation between the Infinite and the finite in the actual phenomena of life*; but this relation, being always partial, successive and momentarily gauged, cannot satisfy the soul. What she is longing after is a comprehensive impression of the Infinite in its totality, in its all-pervading and all-permeating action; and this sensation no finite phenomenon is able to stir in us, just because it is finite. What the soul wants to realize is a grasping of the Infinite as such; and such an infinite sensation *Symbolism* only can produce, just because it puts an invisible stamp upon a visible or palpable phenomenon.

In the Freemasonry you see quite the same thing. Freemasonry aims at the Infinite, but rejects all revelation, and therefore it created from the very first, and still advocates, the most explicit and elaborated symbolism. Spiritism, on the contrary, is almost choked with thirst for revelation from the other side of the tomb, and consequently knows of no symbolical fancy whatsoever.

So *Revelation* and *Symbolism* are opposed one to the other by principle. Both have in view to establish a perceivable relation between the Infinite and the finite, but they are so diametrically opposed, that by the means of *Revelation* it is the infinite Being himself who unveils and stipulates the relation to be accepted by the finite creature *by faith*; — and that, on the other hand, on the field of *Symbolism*, it is the finite man who conventionally coins such a relation symbolically, to be grasped not by faith, but *by sensation*. Now the fact that German pantheism rejects and repudiates every supernatural revelation, no one will deny. From the very beginning its war has been waged against every dogma, every confession, and every divine authority ascribed to the Holy Scriptures. The idea itself of a God intervening in the process of history was absolutely excluded; yea, even thrust out and debarred. According to the *πάντα ἡσί*, the Infinite, strictly bound to the revealing of its essence in the course of successive events, could only throb and pulsate in the arteries of the cosmos and in man's soul. But, besides that, it had to be silent and mute as the idol. In the all-embracing antithesis between *Revelation* and *Symbolism*, therefore, the current opinion of the day could not but antagonize *Revelation* and side with *Symbolism*. And here Philosophy and Art found their natural alliance—*Philosophy*, by its oneness of systematical conception, raising the mind to the Infinite, and *Art*, by the wonderful power of its imaginative gifts, creating the corresponding symbols.

Such is the bifurcation of the way of life at the approaching close of this century. There are two crossing tracks. Pointing to the Orient, there is the old track of faith in a God-given Revelation, excluding every "will-worship." But this old track now is crossed by the new road of *Symbolism*, boldly exhibiting the word: *Will-worship*

on every guidepost till ist end. And such an all-important fact as the thriving of such a cross-purpose antithesis cannot stop its diverging result within the holy precincts. It must lead necessarily to opposite conclusions and issues, both for our social and political, our moral and scientific views. A fact which becomes self-evident by the simple observation that Revelation reveals not only holy mysteries, but also proclaims irrevocable principles and immutable ordinances demanding obedience; and that, on the contrary, under the sway of Symbolism all principles are man's own contrivances, and all moral ordinances self-made and conventional. The jurist in the symbolical camp does not hesitate publicly to declare that there is no right except that which is stated by the promulgated law, and that, therefore, what was right to-day becomes injustice to-morrow, as soon as that law is repealed.

No doubt, therefore, this all important and dominating antithesis should clearly have been caught by every student, and Symbolism at once antagonized by every Christian man, if in our actual life it had made its appearance *in its absolute form*. This, however, was nowhere the case at the rise of such a new tide. Even Freemasonry borrowed its symbols from the then existing church building corporations, and took care to hide its real meaning behind the mysterious curtain of successively higher degrees. So Symbolism always likes to unfold its full blossom only in its esoteric circle, and exoterically prefers the life of the parasite, stealthily entering its radicles into the delicate rind of the Christian stem. Accommodation to existing religion has always been its leading thought, and this accommodation it achieved at once by taking as *poetry* what the church confesses as the highest *reality*, by attaching to the holy history the alluring character of the legend and the myth, and finally by interpreting its actions of worship as mere symbolical utterances. I still remember how once I felt shocked by the church performances of a distinguished adherent of the new system, who in private conversation made no secret whatsoever to me of his absolute apostacy of the old Christian faith, and whom three days later I saw mounting the pulpit, solemnly reading what in the Book of the Kings is written about

Elias' miracles, and thereupon leading the collects of the common prayer. I confess frankly that I felt unable to explain such a bold contrast of personal conviction and outward performance. I thought it the essence of insincerity. But how greatly I was mistaken. "O, no, said he, there was no unfairness whatever. What do you think? Would it be unfair, if taking part in the play of your children, you performed, as earnestly as the little ones, the part of king which your boy had assigned you. What hypocrisy, then, could there be in one playing and singing with the children of God, as they call themselves, and of partaking in their worship? Of course if we ourselves considered all those performances as *real*, we could not join in them. But now, what, I ask you, could prevent us from enjoying your Christian high-styled poetry, or from ennobling our own feelings by partaking in your elaborate symbolics? Even the holy supper to me is a symbolical delicacy. It is these very church performances that unite the more child-like existence of the ordinary people with the more conscious and cultured life of the scientists."

Hence the preference, which in the opinion of these modern symbolistes, the Roman Catholic Church possesses above the Protestant, and among our various denominations the Episcopalian above the presbyterian, in all its branches. Already in the first half of this century the so-called Romantic school in Germany let to the conversion of a great many famous Lutheran scholars and artists to the Church of Rome; and this can not surprise us. As with the solution of every vital probleem, Rome's strength lies in her *compromise*. Rome understood perfectly well the two different principles involved in the antithesis between Revelation and Symbolism, and avoiding, as always, every absolute choice, kept to the Revelation in her confession, but at the same time indulged in Symbolism for her worship. So Rome possesses an elaborate dogmatical system, but without troubling the mind of the people by it. The church thinks for the people, their's is the "*fides implicita*" the implicit faith. In that „implicit faith" to adhere to the church is considered to be satisfactory for the laity. And thus the Revelation being secured, clergy and laity both are allowed to

indulge in the most exquisite, most splendid, and most artistic symbolical worship. The impression of a high-mass performance in the Saint Peter's, or in the Cologne or Milan cathedral is indeed overpowering and overwhelming. But the shady side is obvious, and at the end of the middle ages, the lower as well as the higher class could witness, to what sad results both for the church and for society, this compromise between Revelation and Symbolism had led. I do not refer here to the abuse. From abuse every system has to suffer. I draw your attention merely to what, at the end of the middle ages, proved the downright consequence of the system itself. God's holy Word almost ignored by the people. An overflow of mystical sensations darkening the mind. A general bluntness and dullness, rendering both the conscience and the consciousness dim and obtuse; and the distance between the lower and the higher classes wide and sharp. The laity overruled by the clergy. All vital energy broken. And the spirit of liberty and independence quite crushed down.

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At that critical period God sent as a saving angel, what we all still shall honour as *the Reformation*, and this powerful reaction against Roman symbolism, partly checked in the Lutheran, and more so in the Episcopalian church, has been wrought out fully only along the Calvinistic line, in the non-conformist churches. These churches therefore took a fully opposite stand. Instead of relying upon feeling and sensation, they appealed to Faith, and faith here meant both the *understanding* of the Revelation and its personal *application* to the soul. They denied absolutely the necessity of connecting the Infinite with the finite by symbols. God *had* revealed himself, *had* revealed the mysteries of salvation, *had* revealed his ordinances for every sphere of our existence, and according to what Jesus declares, eternal life was not to have agreeable sensations, but "to know Thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." Not symbols but the "*wisdom of God*" was the preaching of the Cross. "I speak as to wise men, judge ye what I say," interpreted the apostolic method of teaching,

expounding not to the clergy alone, but to all the saints, the mysteries of justification and redemption. — Here, therefore, lies the fundamental difference between our old Calvinistic churches with their bold confession, and Rome with its compromise. Of course there is the mystical working of hidden potencies in our mind, there is the perception of God in the conscience, there is the emotion in prayer, and there is the communion with the indwelling Holy Spirit. But these are the mystical gifts, and the aim of God's Revelation is not to abandon us to shady and dim perceptions, but to declare to us the truth, to lift us up to its understanding, and so to enable the children of the kingdom of heaven to kindle the pure and serene light of the Gospel, to become confessors of a sound and clear confession, and if necessary to shed their martyrblood not for mystical sensations, but for the inviolability of God's Revelation. Hence the circulation of their Bible among all social classes; the well defined confessions, which they unfolded as their banners; the substantial Scriptural content of their preaching; their purified and simplified liturgy; and finally their submitting of every creature to God's holy ordinances. So standing before the dilemma of feeling or faith, they choose for *faith*. Standing before the dilemma between sensation and understanding, they declared themselves distinctly for *understanding*. And as to the fundamental dilemma between Revelation given to us by God, and Symbolism conventionally coined by man, they firmly antagonized the symbolical system, and stood up for the all pervading authority of *God's holy Revelation*. This was the nerve of their strength, and to this staunch defense of Revelation over against Symbolism, they owe their imperishable glory in history. For it was by thus decidedly turning the wheel of life, that the human mind was roused from its slumbers, that the hidden energies of humanity came forward, that the direct union of the soul with God was restored, and that the liberty of conscience, the liberty of worship, and as its immediate consequence, the social and political liberties, were reconquered for every nation, following in their track.

The remarks thus far suggested to your attention, I trust, fully

elucidate my assertion, that the symbolical tide of our days is undermining in the most dangerous way the very foundation of all Calvinistic churches. The principle of Symbolism and that of Calvinism are just the reverse of one another. An abyss is gaping between them. Symbolism in the holy precincts stuns, blunts and stultifies the organs of understanding, and checks their function agnostically. Our churches, on the contrary, did not cease to pray, with St. Paul, and "to desire that all the people of God might be filled with *the knowledge* of his will in all *wisdom* and spiritual *understanding*." Symbolism throws us back to that *lower* stage of religious development, which could but stir the feelings and intoxicate the senses of the masses. Our churches, on the contrary, raised the religious life to that much *higher* level, which leads every believer personally to what St. John confessed, „that the Son of God has come and has given us the *understanding* that we might *know him*.“ And so also Symbolism subjects the laity to the mysterious performances of the clergy and hereby fosters aristocratic sympathies. Our churches, on the contrary, united both laity and clergy in one brotherhood, and thereby laid the foundation for the democratic pre-eminence of modern times.

Let therefore no one retort, that whatsoever catastrophe may be menacing elsewhere, neither Ritualism, nor Symbolism proper, has thus far made any noticeable intrusion into our Calvinistic services. May the fact be beyond question. But do you not know, that no good arithmetician will cast up the *positive* figures only, leaving out the *negative* ones. Now, in our case the positive is the intrusion of sensual worship, but here is also the negative item, viz., the darkening of the understanding and the slipping in of confessional indifference. Symbolism always begins by silencing the voice of the confession, and by instilling some slight aversion toward the dogma, so digging out the bed in which the glittering ritualistic stream is to flow. And now, as I am a foreigner here, you know your own churches better than I do. But are you sure, that this *negative* action of Symbolism is nowhere operating among you? Is the danger that the love for the banners which your fathers unfolded, be drowned in mere practical work and beautiful services

a chimerical one? And if not, if really among you also the fervent attachment to the revealed Truth is abating, and to a certain amount a share of confessional indifference here also moistens already, and thickens the spiritual atmosphere, then let the watchman of Sion mount the belfry, for then the gate stands ajar, and Symbolism lies in wait in the trenches before it. As little as the sailor can conjure the gale that hunts his vessel, but by keeping to his helm, so little can you check this symbolical current, if you do not emphasize your own church principle. For such a current is an all-permeating elementary power, to be checked only by the equivalent power of your attachment to the revealed Truth. Let us not deceive ourselves. Philosophic Agnosticism, Rome's „*fides implicita*”, Ritschl's anti-dogmatical school, the new school of Sabatier in Paris, Rome's concealing of the Bible, as well as the dethroning of it by higher criticism, and so also the increasing confessional indifference, are all moving on the same line, and the terminus of that line is no other than sensual worship and dim symbolical adoration.

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Meanwhile let there be no misunderstanding. Pointing to the serious danger with which Symbolism menaces the future of our Calvinistic Church life, and pleading for a decided return to our principle, and for a firm and staunch devotion to our holy vocation, I don't mean to lay all the fault at the door of our antagonists, and to exculpate ourselves entirely. There have been and there are abuses among us also. In the heat of the battle our fathers more than once became guilty of onesidedness and exaggeration. Our own churchlife was often far from being well balanced, and I at least should hesitate to assert that, without any further essential development, perfect harmony of the different elements in our worship could be attained. The appreciation of the sound understanding of the Truth has oftentimes led to an offending narrow-mindedness, to an odious quarrelsomeness, and to a self-conceitedness of the ignorant, by which Christian love was wounded and the Holy Spirit of God grieved. Assurance

of faith, resting on the dogmas of election and of the perseverance of the saints, more than once has been asserted in such a cool and outward way, as to bring down the mystical union with Christ to the freezing point. Justification by faith alone too often has become an excuse for the uncharitable and lazy to abstain from, if not to jest at, Christian works. And in our holy services both the ear and the eye were, and are still, frequently offended by such a neglect of what is beautiful and sublime, solemn and dignified, as if Christian faith and a fair and melodious utterance were antipodes. God in His Revelation always recommends the Beautiful. Even of Christ it is said: "Thou art *fairer* than the children of men."

Our decided opposition to Symbolism, therefore, should never silence the liturgical claims. Calvin with his musical friends, Goudimel and Bourgeois, tried the utmost to make the singing, not of a choir, but of all the people, thoroughly melodious and pure. And as to the Liturgy, let me draw your attention to a more elaborate Calvinistic Liturgy of a mixed Dutch and English character, which I had the privilege of republishing forty years ago in the works of John à Lasco. The Dutch Calvinists in the middle of the sixteenth century, were persecuted to death by Spanish cruelty, and then sought refuge under King Edward VI in London. There John à Lasco became their minister, and this sagacious man predicted to Cranmer now more than three hundred years ago, all the pernicious results to which the common prayer book is now effectually leading, and in every point proved himself to be as sound a Presbyterian as you or I can be. And that same man composed for his Dutch church in London such a splendid, touching, solemn and elaborated Liturgy, published in Latin (thus enabling every Calvinistic minister to read it) under the title *Forma ac Ratio*, that we have only to return to our old treasury in order to have at hand just the model we want. Let us never forget that what John à Lasco, by his rare penetration of mind, prognosticated in his time, is so much more true in our days. We *may* not always keep to the beaten track. Three centuries of increasing civilization have refined the public

taste in such a remarkable degree, that it should be an un-Scriptural disregard of the inner relation between natural life and the life of grace, if our churches did not discern these signs of the times. He who debars all equitable liturgical demands, and even deems it a point of honor to banish all that is solemn and harmonious from our services, may presume to oppose symbolism, but indeed it is he who makes its highway straight. All this, however, refers exclusively to the reform of *abuses*, to the balancing of what is one-sided or exaggerated, and to the harmonizing if you like, of discordants, but it leaves the *principle* itself, untouched and untried. Symbolism *replaces* Revelation and makes us fall back from *conscious* to *unconscious* religion. Calvinism places Revelation in the foreground, and tolerates no other performances than such as are able to echo it and remain carefully under its sway.

And now if finally, for I must come to my conclusion, you ask me, how we can discern the pernicious influence of the Symbolical, which we should antagonize, from the pure love for Liturgical reform, which is to be encouraged, see here, then, my answer. In case you have to deal with a gentleman or a lady, who pleads enthusiastically for splendid music, brilliant singing and richly decorated churches, but to whom the confession for which our martyrs died, is immaterial; not caring a bit for the most fundamental points of our confession; and almost refusing to give an answer, if a reason is asked of the hope that is in them,—then know that the symbolical blood-poisoning has commenced, and try to save them with meekness and fear. But if, on the contrary, the man who warmly and even with cogency vindicated the rights of a more dignified liturgical worship, becomes threefold more earnest and eloquent, as often as the foundations of the divine Truth are assailed, then do not be afraid, such a one has no drop of symbolism in his life-blood. In him speaks the true Calvinist. And, rather than mistrust him, you might better correct your own lack of obedience to the law of the Sublime and the Beautiful, which God has ordained.

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