

ADDRESS

OF

REV. DR. WYATT,

*On taking the Chair of the House of Clerical and Lay
Deputies, October 3d, 1844.*

Gentlemen of the Clergy and Laity :—to those who are honestly concerned for the sound morals and stability of the various classes of society, and consequently for the basis of the whole—right views of the Gospel—there are few moments of so much interest as that of the opening of what may prove a most eventful session of the great council of the church in this country. There are reflections, which although common to every mind, it may be useful to awaken with freshness and force, as appropriate to our government, in the transactions likely to take place. And it would be an unthankful return for your kind appreciation of my former services, expressed by a renewed appointment to this chair, should I fail through distrust of myself or of you, respectfully to offer them.

Gentlemen: it is impossible that the great interest of Christ's body, can be left at the final rising of this convention, as they now are—that is, neither impaired nor advanced by the measures that will be adopted, and the spirit which will be manifested, in the course of your deliberations. To this result, whether it be for good or evil, each individual of the body must necessarily contribute. A child may kindle a flame, which a multitude of men, as vigorous as wise, might fail speedily or without irreparable damage to extinguish. Who will not raise his spirit to the Great Source of every good, to be preserved from dishonoring and wounding, and to be enabled to sustain and protect, the church which Christ so loved, that he gave himself for it!

I need not presume to urge upon you, what I am sure is a familiar and abiding reflection, that especially while thus engaged—in God's Temple—before his altar—entrusted with the disposal of the means which he has ordained, for the conversion and salvation of the world, the heart is laid open to the inspection of the searcher of spirits, and that not only the principles which we *avow* and the motives of which we are *conscious*, but the secret, subtle combined impulses—often more efficient causes of action than those which lie upon the surface—all are subjected to the jealous scrutiny of Him, who will not suffer a stumbling block to be cast with im-

punity in the path of his little ones. If, in the common transactions of life, idle *words* shall be judged, how would God here record for judgment, the vain, proud, selfish, angry *imagination*s to which those idle words might owe their birth.

But there is another consideration upon which I may rather dwell. If, instead of the one or two thousand persons of different ages, conditions and capacities, who may here witness your proceedings, this council were held in a vast amphitheatre, beneath the vault of heaven, and in the presence of one or two millions of immortal beings congregated about us; if in that fearful mass, every ear could hear each sentiment and tone that was uttered by each one of you, what a salutary check would such a supervision inspire? With what caution would every speaker express himself! What anguish would one feel at the close of a debate if he found cause to apprehend that anything which had fallen from him, had produced upon the esteem in which the Church was publicly held, or even upon his own reputation—a disastrous effect! Now, let us realize that such is virtually the case. I believe it is not overrating the public sensibility, in relation to this present Convention, to suppose, that as many as some millions of our countrymen will be observant of all which takes place in your council. Through the agency of the Press, which, you know, has its shrewd and watchful instruments at the deliberations of every public assembly, through all the length and breadth of the land, as swiftly almost as the winds could waft them, will your words, and your tones of voice, and expressions of countenance, be made known—not then to fade as those tones will, upon the ear, and from the memory of your *colleagues*, but to be fixed, perpetuated, to constitute a paragraph in the history of the Church, one of the elements out of which strangers to the fold of Christ at the distance of a thousand leagues, will be conceiving their opinion of what the practical fruit of our Articles of Faith and of our ecclesiastical polity truly is. And this judgment to be derived from the indelible representatives of the Press, will be formed, not always by what you have actually said, but after it has been subjected to all the involuntary perversions and mutilations to which such sketches are in some degree inevitably liable. As Christian men then, we are bound not only to satisfy our own consciences of the uprightness of our intentions, but we must avoid the *appearance* of evil. No allowance is made by the world for effects of honest zeal in *you*. Earnestness is deemed passion. Decision is violence. Frankness has the stigma of rudeness. And devout veneration for the Church, and love of the crucified Son of God, are denounced as Superstition and Bigotry. Many are unable or unwilling to reason out a principle. All can read the mani-

festation of tempers. How then will the world triumph in those exhibitions of frailty, and of an excitable temperament, which if really existing, none would more sorely lament than ourselves!— Add to this reflection, that of the still greater multitude of spiritual beings, who we believe watch with holy but intense solicitude, the steps of Christ's sacramental host; and we shall be sensible that our most trivial acts here assume an unwonted importance; and that since we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, we should lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and with caution and patience, run the race now set before us.

I shall take the liberty of detaining you, with but one other brief consideration. As the organization of the Church in the United States, rapidly extends itself to the remotest territories, and the number of dioceses with their Episcopal heads are proportionably multiplied, it must be expected that opposite views and tastes, and sometimes principles, will be found to exist within her borders. Mankind cannot exhibit a different aspect in the nineteenth century and in this country, from what was ever beheld before.— Upon one characteristic, however, of the social state, we all profess to be agreed; that liberty of conscience is the inalienable right of every child of God; and that persecution for the propagation of religious faith, should be the offspring only of ages darker than our own. But, gentlemen, the scourge, the faggot and the axe are not the only instruments of persecution. We may attempt so to fetter the exercise of the judgment and conscience of our fellow-men, and so to visit their honest opinions which differ from our own, with the penalty of our harsh epithets and rebukes, as to show a *willingness* to inflict the utmost penalty which the civil law admits; and we may thus try the faith and firmness of the humble and the timid with a terrible conflict. We all renounce, with laudable zeal, the notion of an infallible *human* guide to the conscience. Let us not so condemn the convictions of our brethren, or urge upon them our own, as if we had received assurance, that *our* theories were infallible.— Should we reject the authoritative guidance and interpretations of the Church, with her ancient standards, may we not still attempt to enforce our own private opinions, and those of our friends, as if they partook of some principle of infallibility, denied to the Church; and as if Christ had given to us an indisputable and unerring power to interpret scripture and articles of faith, and to govern the conscience, not only for ourselves but for others also! It is only in the fervent invocation of the Holy Ghost upon our understandings and hearts, that we can be protected from so mischievous infatuations.—Let us always remember our Saviour's own words, "Woe unto

the world because of offences, for it must needs be that offences come, but woe unto that man, by whom the offence cometh."

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On motion of Dr. Strong, of Mass.,

Resolved, That the thanks of the house be presented to the President for his address ; that the same be entered on the journal ; and that 500 copies be printed for the use of members.