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ORGANIC UNION VS. INTER-DENOMINATIONAL FRATERNITY.

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It is so fashionable now to advocate church unity that anything on the other side is apt to be received with serious prejudice. He must expect to be denounced as uncharitable if not unchristian who shall venture to assert that in the present imperfect state of Christian sanctification the present condition of the Protestant world is fairly satisfactory, and for important reasons that condition is much to be preferred to any condition at present attainable in one consolidated organization. In this rage for church unity one denomination by its highest authority has issued a public manifesto advising everybody to unite with it; another denomination has in its highest court a large committee on church unity and federation, and another large committee on church comity, and almost every denomination has the subject up in its various judicatories in one shape or another. All this sentiment is greatly intensified by the enthusiasm of certain gushing people who always attend interdenominational conventions, and whose stock address consists in lamenting divisions in the body of Christ, and in applauding all interdenominational organizations, such as Young Men's Christian Associations, the International and State Sabbath-School Associations, the Y. P. S. C. E. Conventions, the Sabbath Associations, the Tract Societies, the Temperance Associations, etc., because these are leading the way to that happy day when all the denominations shall become one organic body. These gushing enthusiasts seem to hold that one denominational form must be divine and right, and that therefore every other is wrong, and all division is necessarily the sin of schism. With these one passage of Scripture is always quoted with an air of self-conscious assurance, as if it was the conclusive and overwhelming proof that

settled the whole question. That passage underlies the proposition of the House of Bishops for church unity on the basis of the Scriptures, the two sacraments, the Nicene Creed, and the historic Episcopate. The passage is John xvii. 21: "That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me."

But does it justify any such application? The first clause of that verse is not a sentence by itself. It is not a statement true irrespective of its connection. It is part of an argument accompanied by an illustration and leading to a conclusion. Do the illustration and preceding premise and succeeding conclusion justify the conviction that the unity there mentioned is the organic, external unity of Christians in contradistinction to the unity and fraternity that now exist between the denominations of Evangelical Christians? The chapter contains the Lord's intercessory prayer for His people; and at verse 20 He enlarges His petition to include not only those that already have believed, but also those who "shall believe on Me through their word: that they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me." Now a Unitarian may truly say that this means church unity without distinction of denomination, just as a Unitarian believes that the oneness of the Godhead is unity without distinction of persons. But the very pivot of the belief of the Trinitarian is that in the Godhead there is spiritual and substantial unity, while between the different persons of the Godhead there is distinction of personality and office work and relationship. Surely those who quote that verse do not mean

that it is essential that all external distinctions shall be obliterated between the Church and the Godhead, as according to their interpretation would seem to be meant by the phrase "that they also may be one *in us*." By what system of organic union can it be made out that the various Christians shall be in *each other* as the Father is in the Son and the Son in the Father?

The result prayed for is that the world may be convinced of the presence of Christ in the Church, and thereby be satisfied that Christ was sent of the Father. Formal unity in the shape of organic consolidation would, however, prove precisely the reverse of that which is here suggested. Dead uniformity is not the mark of the work of the Divine Hand. God's plan is external variety with a presence of essential unity. All plants have a similar life, but species differ from species. One species is no more a plant because of its specific peculiarities, nor less a plant because of its specific distinctions. Neither animals nor men are made alike by the Divine Hand. For reasons that are not apparent large numbers of individual birds and beasts will separate themselves from the other members of their own species into their own favorite flocks; and this separation into herds is not to the injury of either the particular drove or the general mass. In some cases these gregarious selections among men have an explanation, but in other cases they are due to inexplicable matters of taste. These denominational differences in the preferences of individual Christians may in some cases have no good reason; in other cases they may greatly tend to Christian growth, personal comfort and spiritual sanctification.

Men often say that the division of the Church into denominations is a great hindrance to outsiders in their attention to religion. Hundreds of outsiders make these divisions the plausible excuse for their neglect. But it is to be noted that no Scripture, either of instruction or example, any more than human experience, gives good ground to believe that this is a fact. The very people who make these differences between the denominations excuses for the neglect of the whole subject would find some other excuse if this was taken away. God, on His own authority, made distinctions for the better organization of His people, when there was no object for it but their good. Even in the wilderness the Israelites were organized into tribes; and when settled in Canaan this division was kept up. Surely no one will say that Benjamin and Judah and the rest should all

have been consolidated into one tribe for every purpose. There were twelve apostles; and Paul's objection to the divisions in Corinth was that the attempt was made to make Paul and Cephas and Apollos substitutes for Christ. The Old Testament synagogues were adopted as the model of the New Testament churches; and even in the same cities there were numerous synagogues, as in all the history of the New Testament churches there have been numerous congregations in the same neighborhood.

The evils which are proposed to be remedied by this union of denominations are far more serious as among individual churches than among denominations; and if to remedy these it is important to consolidate denominations, it will be still more important to consolidate congregations. The competition with one another for the favor and patronage of individual persons and families is much more active between individual churches than between the denominations. It is due largely to lack of good sense on the part of the individuals, and their stock of common sense would not be increased by putting them into the same denomination. Nine tenths of the evils of this competition, as it is generally described, exists only in the imagination of the enthusiastic orator, as he describes how other people would work if their souls were no larger than his own. As a fact interdenominational disputes, heated controversies, and angry debates do not exist. They never did exist to the extent to which they have been described. They exist to-day as earnestly in the jealousy and competition and backbiting of ministers and church-members in competing congregations in the same denomination as they ever did between the denominations. The remedy proposed in organic union, even if tried, would therefore be most disappointing.

The theory that external, organic unity is obligatory on the Church, and that every division is schism, is not only unscriptural and inefficient as a remedy for the evils it seeks to cure, but is destructive to the freedom and efficiency of the Church. When that theory becomes dominant, those in power become omnipotent. Whether that power is in the hands of a majority or in the hands of a single individual, it is equally destructive to the influence and freedom of minorities. When Pope Pius IX. proposed to declare in behalf of the Roman Church its belief in the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, thousands of their ablest scholars and bishops remon-

strated. Döllinger and others like him were only kept from breaking away to make an effort to establish the "Old Catholic Church" by a plea that this would only be to start another denomination. The Pope had the power and the prelates had not; and under the plea of maintaining external unity the Roman priesthood and people accepted the position before the world, of believing in the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception because of the infallibility of the Pope, when, in fact, they knew the Pope was not infallible because he had proclaimed the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception.

Precisely so it is with majorities. If they knew that however minorities protested they would do nothing but submit, no limit would be put to their overbearing oppression. Even in the broad sense in which the word Christian is used, each Christian is measurably held responsible for the conduct of every other Christian. In heathen countries Christians are often judged by the drunken sailors that come in the ships which fly the flags of Christian nations. In the narrower sense each individual member of a denomination must accept a measure of responsibility for the position of his denomination. The independent form of church government makes the nearest approach to escape from this oftentimes extremely odious responsibility. Yet independency does not relieve from responsibility, as the Congregational and Baptist churches have learned when they come to deal with immoral and sceptical pastors and congregations. As a practical issue, therefore, the only reasonable solution by which the oppression of universal formal unity is burdened on the one hand, and the temptations to which non-church-membership is exposed on the other, is in the present state of denominational coherence by which Christians having a common belief and agreeing to a common government, accept their share of responsibility for each other; and when dissatisfied take their membership to that other denomination whose doctrine and government they prefer. With these denominational distinctions the indwelling presence of the Deity, as the Father is in the Son and the Son in the Father, is entirely possible, and to a very large extent is now realized, with a possibility of its being intensified until it finally reaches the maximum, while yet the differences of statements of denominational beliefs and organic administration are maintained.

But it is often asked, Will not the Church of the millennium be a single denomina-

tion, and the divisions into denominations which now exist disappear as the final and perfect form of the Church manifests itself? Even if this was true it would be no argument that in the present imperfect state of the Church it ought to take on forms and methods which would be practicable in its perfect state. The very defence made in behalf of nude art and absolute communism is that neither clothing nor individual property existed before the fall, nor will they be needed when mankind cease their sin and selfishness. At present, however, sin and selfishness are as real facts as winters and diseases and hunger. Animals eat what nature provides without cooking; but men cannot avoid starvation without working. The question is not what would be the condition of things and the possibilities of society under different circumstances, with people constituted physically and morally wholly different from what the race now is, but what is best physically, socially, and religiously now that winters chill us and fevers burn us and human infirmities make religious life a struggle and religious peace a problem. Many good people get along fairly well together so long as they do not undertake to live in the same house. It may be said that they ought to be able to live in the same house, but the quarrels that would result from compulsion would be a poor compensation for the peace attained by each having his own house. So, remembering the differing tastes of Christians as to modes of worship and baptism and prayer and preaching, and the differing beliefs about non-essential details of Christian faith, consolidation of all into one denomination and the compulsion of all to abide by a common rule would only hinder Christian growth and destroy Christian peace. The plan is not God's plan in the first place; and in the second place, if it was God's plan for perfectly sanctified Christians, it would not be practicable now with imperfectly sanctified people until God gets done this sanctifying process.

THE FOURTH GOSPEL.

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THE application of the historico-critical method to the books of the Bible appears to many pious Christians even to-day as an