

**ALLIANCE**  
**OF**  
**THE REFORMED CHURCHES**

**HOLDING**  
**THE PRESBYTERIAN SYSTEM.**

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**MINUTES AND PROCEEDINGS**

**OF**  
**The fourth General Council**

**LONDON, 1888.**

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**(REV. G. D. MATHEWS, D.D., GENERAL SECRETARY)**

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for the world's sin. If, to attain that end, the Church had need of a faith that works, and that works by love, much more must infidelity find an unbelief that works, and that works by love. But, gentlemen, unbelief, scepticism, incredulity that works, and that works for the good of humanity; unbelief that loves and loves disinterestedly! It is a contradiction in terms. Unbelief is the atrophy of the human heart, the paralysis of all disinterested endeavour, and stifles every noble aspiration. None the less the necessity remains, the obligation imposes itself. If unbelief is going to abolish Christianity, it must be prepared to take the place of Christianity. This world has once got to know Jesus Christ—Jesus, with His spotless holiness; Jesus, with His unspeakable love! He has soothed its sorrows, He has healed its wounds, He has taken away its sins. Through His death it has lived again. In His life it lives. Without Him its best hopes would die. Oh, the world will never suffer Him to be taken from it except it be given in His place something better! No, gentlemen, it is not enough to refute Christ; they have got to replace Him. That is the task that confronts infidelity; that is the enterprise on which it has to enter. It is a task immense, a task superhuman. To achieve it one must be at least not less than Jesus, perfect Son of God, perfect Son of Man. This unbelief, this dreary, dismal, miserable unbelief—is it going to achieve that? No! A thousand times, no! The question asked by Alfred de Musset fifty years ago remains, and ever will remain, unanswered—

“*Jésus, ce que tu fis, qui jamais le fera ?  
Qui de nous, qui de nous, va devenir un Dieu ?*”

#### CHRIST'S METHOD OF RECONCILING THE ANTAGONISMS OF SOCIETY.

Rev. Dr. MOSES D. HOGG, Richmond (Presbyterian Church in the United States, South), said:—The ancient nations and the dominant religions of the old world alike looked to the past for their golden age. There was one exception. The prophets, the psalmists, and the devout people among the Hebrews looked to the future for their brightest era. There was much in their history to depress and even to extinguish this hope, but it survived all apostasies, all captivities, all the desolations of foreign conquest. With the light of morning in their eyes, and the anticipated glories of Messiah's reign thrilling their hearts, they hailed the coming of the day when His way should be known on the earth, and His saving health among all nations, and when Gentile and Jew alike, embraced in His all-enfolding empire, the discordant tribes and kindreds of the earth, in happy reconciliation, should be

blessed in Him, and together enjoy the peace which the Gospel brings.

Thus, while the poets, the historians, and the oracles of the old Pagan nations predicted ultimate disaster and overthrow, and while, one by one, their hopes of a happy future went down into the sad sea which never gives up its dead—Palestine, the most isolated, the most territorially insignificant of the old nations, lying directly in the pathway of rival kingdoms—its ground ever trembling under the tread of great armies—often provoking the wrath of its powerful neighbours—often conquered and pillaged by them—yet there, in the Hebrew heart, the hope of a radiant future glowed like a perpetual altar-fire, and found expression in those triumphant psalms which, beating time with trumpet and timbrel, have the ring of conquest in their melodious march!

Christianity inherited the hopes of the Theocracy. *Its* face too was turned toward the future. *Its* golden age was to find its consummation when the kingdoms of the world should become the kingdom of the Lord and of His Christ, reconciled in Him, and dwelling together as brethren in unity.

But since this implies the reconciliation of what the theme assigned to me calls "The antagonisms of society," it is now my pleasant task to show the world's growing recognition and appreciation of Christ's method of effecting this consummation.

Whatever one's personal relations to Christianity may be, all must admit that it is, at least, its *avowed purpose* to produce this result. Nothing can be clearer than the announcement of its beneficent mission. Over the fields where the shepherds kept their watch, the music which filled the night air was the angelic song whose burden was, "Peace on earth, goodwill to men."

When He whose office was thus heralded entered on His ministry, in His first sermon He not only proclaimed the golden rule whose observance would harmonise the world, but among the beatitudes which formed the introduction to that sermon He declares that the meek should inherit the earth—a much overlooked and little understood prediction—now lying almost latent—awaiting the coming time of its fulfilment by God's providence in history—the sure vindicator of the inspiring truth that gentleness, forbearance, sympathy, and charity shall at last overcome all the discords and enmities which have cursed humanity, and shall become the regnant and imperial powers which shall possess the earth!

"There are but two forces," Napoleon said, "that rule the world—Love and the Sword."

If it be objected that love does not constitute a bond sufficiently

strong and enduring to give unity and perpetuity to such a kingdom as that which Christ established, the answer is that, while the greatest empires of the earth, one by one, have toppled into ruin, this kingdom not only survives, but for near two thousand years has demonstrated its power by its triumphs over every foe and in every land; and he must be blind indeed who does not see in the aspect of the times in which we live the evidence that Christianity is now preparing for new conquests transcending in importance all that has hitherto been accomplished. Animating as this prospect is, we must not overlook the hindrances which retard the ultimate success of Christianity.

Among the antagonisms which are to be reconciled are those which spring—*first*, from the conflicting creeds and the intolerance and arrogance of despotic Churches; *second*, from the unequal distribution of wealth; *third*, from false theories of government and social order; and *fourth*, from those international conflicting interests which result in war.

*Conflicting Creeds and Despotic Churches.*

1. It is humiliating, indeed, to discover that a religion adapted to become the religion of the whole world to the end of time should have its unity and beauty marred by intestine feuds and strifes, thus placing a formidable weapon in the hands of adversaries, from the time of Celsus down, planting a stumbling-block in the way of honest inquirers, and furnishing a theme for the ridicule of scoffers. I need not stop to speak of the exaggeration which characterises these strictures, or of the logical fallacy of those who make the Church responsible for the indiscretion and imprudence of its members. The world cannot comprehend the intense earnestness of those who wage long, unyielding controversies for doctrine and forms of Church government, because it cannot appreciate the practical importance of the questions at issue. Nor does the world remember that before and since the days of Luther the empire of principle has been maintained to a large extent by controversy, but it has a right to judge and condemn the acrimonious, fierce, and bitter intolerance with which these controversies are often conducted. The world is wrong in condemning the division of Christendom into different denominations, for it does not appreciate such facts as that sometimes separation leads to peace, that truth is many-sided and cannot all be reflected by one surface of the clearest crystal, that theological thunder sometimes purifies the stagnant and stifling air of moderatism and indifferentism, that there is such a thing as being provoked to love and good works by seeing what others accomplish. But the world is right when it condemns the proselytism, the rivalry, the exclusive-

ness of the sects when they convert themselves into an archipelago of spiritual islands, between which briny and bitter separating waters roll; holding little intercourse with one another, affecting a supercilious ignorance of each other's existence, and a real indifference to each other's welfare. The world is quick to ridicule the Prelatic or Presbyterian Ironclad, carrying but one gun, which says, "I am the whole fleet;" quick to scorn the intolerance of the churchly cavalrman, who says to the foot-soldier, "You don't belong to the army because you are not mounted on a horse." The world is discerning enough to detect the self-contradiction and self-condemnation of those who blame the ancient Jew for supposing he belonged to the only people of God, and that all true religion was bounded by the narrow limits of Palestine, and yet who arrogate to themselves the adoption and the glory, and the covenants, and the sacraments, and the ministry, and the right to call themselves the Church of God; and while doing all this pity the poor bigoted Jew and rebuke his intolerance! These are the unseemly exhibitions of unholy tempers by which professed Christians often misrepresent the Church of Christ in the eyes of the world, and this is the spirit which the Great Head of the Church so emphatically denounced.

There is not only a growing realisation of the essential unity of all who constitute the true indivisible Church, but a growing manifestation of that unity. We see it in the changed style of controversy on the part of those who, in earnestly contending for the truth, conduct the contest in love, avoiding the vituperation and shameful personalities which once disfigured and disgraced Church polemics. We see it in the tone and temper of those who, while they cannot make concessions which conscience forbids, yet have discovered that even conscience performs its legitimate functions more perfectly in an atmosphere of prayer and Christian affection. We see it in the growing toleration of others who hold the views of doctrine and polity which they believe to be Scriptural, without branding them with ignorance or insincerity.

That is not the toleration of those who say it makes no difference what doctrinal system you hold, or what form of Church government you maintain, or what modes of worship you prefer; it is not disgust of denominations, nor contempt of creeds; it is not the sneering charity which would "not burn men for their opinions, because there are no opinions worth burning men for," but it is the true, rational, Scriptural toleration of men who have positive convictions of their own, and the courage to defend them, yet who believe those who differ from them may be equally loyal to the truth, equally honest in striving to discover it, equally conscientious in maintaining it, equally

sincere in propagating it ; the toleration of those who, without abating one iota of their devotion to their own systems of doctrine and polity, can cherish hearty affection for all who love the Lord Jesus in sincerity, and so maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, and thus attain to the triumphant and regnant charity which is the flower and crown of all the celestial graces.

It is by the infusion of such a spirit that Christ reconciles the antagonisms of the churches, and now in our own day we see, what our fathers never saw, the practical result of this unity in the growing disposition of the churches to co-operate in the great enterprises of Christian benevolence, especially in mission work in foreign lands. Combination for protection against the assaults of infidelity at home, and co-operation in carrying on the work abroad, is now the motto of the churches.

### *Conflict of Wealth and Poverty.*

2. The antagonism between wealth and poverty, and the means of reconciling them, constitute one of the burning questions of the day. When a boy I remember reading a series of essays entitled "The Natural Hatred of the Poor for the Rich." Even then I regarded the very title of the series as a libel upon the poor. There may be envy and discontent, such as belongs to frail human nature, awakened by the leisure, the luxury, and exemption from the necessity of toil enjoyed by the rich ; but hatred of them is not known when the wealthy classes recognise their responsibilities, and illustrate the Divine beneficence by the noble use they make of the gifts of God's providence as almoners of His bounty. The rich man's scorn, as well as the proud man's contumely, may, indeed, engender hatred, but not the rich man's sympathy and helpfulness. The antagonisms which exist in society would not have arisen but for the abuse of wealth ; and though they unhappily exist, they need not be perpetual. "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head." I do not say that these words are the coronation or the canonisation of poverty ; but they proclaim the identity of our Lord with the poor in outward condition. They open the fountains of sympathy on behalf of the needy, represented as they were by One who, though possessed of infinite riches, yet so impoverished Himself that He was born in a manger and buried in a borrowed tomb. We do not find in the discourses of our Lord any denunciation of an aristocracy of refinement and culture, or any condemnation of rich men because of their wealth. The rich churches of our land—I refer especially to those of the United States—are among the most munificent supporters of the great enterprises of

Christian benevolence, without which many of our most important undertakings would be most inadequately maintained.

When the woman having the alabaster box of ointment poured it on the head of Jesus, it was objected that it might have been sold for much, and the price given to the poor. But the instant reply was, "The poor you have always with you, but Me ye have not always." And so our Lord hallowed the gift first by accepting it for Himself; and having thus opened the fountain of love, He directed that it should henceforth flow in the consecrated channel of benevolence for the relief of the poor to the end of time. So, too, when one said to Him, "Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me," in declining to act as umpire in that case, He did not by any means dismiss it. It was not His custom to waste time in hewing and hacking at the branches of error, He struck directly at the root, and so said, "Take heed, and beware of covetousness." The error of the brother was in the greed which induced him to seize the whole inheritance, and now the error of the rich monopolist is in not considering who is his brother, and in withholding the equitable portion which rightfully belongs to him. This is the origin of the conflict between capital and labour, and of the widening breach between the wealthy employer and the poor wage-earner. Only the conscientious conviction of what is implied in stewardship, only the expulsive power of that new affection which casts out covetousness, and fills the heart with the sweet charities of Him who, for our sakes, became poor, can accomplish the cure and perfect the reconciliation. The happy consummation is not yet reached, but the leaven is working, and will work until the whole is leavened. We see the indications of it in the fact that the study of the whole Christian world is concentrating on the solution of this problem; in the fact that men of wealth are more and more appreciating, not only their duties, but their privileges and opportunities. You cannot open a daily newspaper without reading the announcement of some new and splendid benefaction for the relief of suffering humanity, and so the work goes on. And so the world is coming more and more to appreciate the Divine beauty of the Christ's method of reconciling the antagonisms between the rich and poor.

#### *Antagonism of International Interests.*

3. If Christianity is ever confronted by a foe, which it would seem impossible either to conquer or conciliate, it would be in the antagonisms resulting from the conflict of international interests which make their appeal to the arbitrament of the sword. When Hobbes of Malmesbury, in his *Leviathan*, declared that the state of mankind

in nature was a state of war, shocking as the assertion is, it would seem to have been verified by history. Never were the nations so armed and equipped as now. There is a gleam of hope in this very fact. The game is becoming too great for kings to play at, and nations hesitate long before the conflict is precipitated. But there is a better foundation for hope than that. If the state of mankind in nature is war, the state of mankind in grace is peace, and if ever Christianity becomes universal, as every member of this august Alliance believes it will be, then it follows of necessity, as has well been said, that offensive wars will become impossible, while wars of defence will no more be needed. If Christianity has not abolished war, there is encouragement in the fact that influences which will bring about that consummation are at work in every land where the Gospel has become a practical power. That influence is seen in the mitigation of the horrors of war when it is waged in any part of Christendom. Such indiscriminate slaughter of whole armies and cities, after surrender, as are detailed by Herodotus, Livy, and Tacitus, will never be recorded by future historians.

The annals of modern warfare are filled with happy illustrations of the more humane spirit in which the conflict is often conducted. During a sharp skirmish between two companies of Federal and Confederate soldiers in the late Civil War in the United States, two little brothers, strangely attracted by the firing, came out of a cottage to see the fight. The mother missed them, and in her anguish ran to the headquarters of both generals in command, fortunately not far apart, to make known her loss. The order was immediately given that firing should cease on both sides, and the men in blue and grey, so lately engaged in mortal conflict, stacked their arms and joined in their search for the missing children, and not another gun was fired until they were both found.

A Federal officer was mortally wounded in one of the battlefields of Virginia. As he lay upon the ground, far from his comrades, and conscious that his end was near, while the scattered soldiers of the Confederate army went swiftly by, he called to an infantry man who was passing to stop, and asked if he would offer a prayer for him. The man replied, "I am sorry I can't comply with your request; I have never learnt to pray for myself." But he did what he could; he moved the officer into the shade, put something under his head, gave him some water out of his canteen, then hurried on. Presently a dismounted cavalryman who had lost his horse came up. The officer called to him and made the same request, "Won't you stop and make a prayer for me?" The trooper knelt down at the side of the dying man, and commenced a prayer, but as he uttered one tender petition

after another, the officer used the little strength that remained to him in creeping closer and closer, until he placed both arms around the neck of the petitioner, and when the last words of the prayer were said he was lying dead on the bosom of his late antagonist in battle, but in the final moment one with him in the bonds of the Gospel, a brother in Christ Jesus, united in love for evermore. Yes, the Gospel is the great reconciler!

Last week we were reading with absorbing interest the inaugural speech of the young Emperor of Germany. Before his accession to the throne it had been suggested that he was full of the aspirations of the soldier, and apprehensions were expressed on that ground. But peace was the keynote of that memorable speech from end to end—like a sweet refrain it ran through every paragraph. The glory achieved by wars is enough; now let peace, the fruitful mother of national greatness, become the future policy of the Empire. Surely there is encouragement in such utterances from such a source.

Another hope is based on the growing regard of Christian nations for *international law*, as yet imperfect and recognised only to a limited extent, yet destined to settle international disputes without resort to the arbitrament of the sword. That this development is the result of Christianity is evident from the fact that Christian states only are engaged in formulating and perfecting international law. The result is already seen in the growing regard for the inviolability of treaties, and in the settling of national differences by arbitration instead of war, which settles no principle, and determines nothing but the question of comparative military strength. Modern history has splendidly illustrated the happy results of arbitration in some notable instances in which some of the countries represented in this Alliance were vitally concerned.

#### *A New Ideal for the World.*

4. I have reserved for my last illustration of the growing appreciation of Christ's method of reconciling the antagonisms of society, some memorable utterances of His which have given to the world a new ideal for its study, an ideal which produces a new life in those who strive to reproduce it in their own souls. "Let him that would be greatest among you be the servant of all;" "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister;" "I am among you as one that serveth." I say the example of Christ, the great Lord of all, shrinking from no office whereby humanity might be cleansed, comforted, and elevated, has given a new ideal to the world; a new form of beauty like a star has risen on the vision of mankind, and when men come fully, as they are now coming partially, to appreciate

the glory of service, then the strifes which mar the harmony of the Church, the arrogance of the rich, the discontent of the poor, the oppression of labour by capital, and the various and conflicting interests of nations leading to desolating wars, will come to a perpetual end. We begin to see the practical results of this teaching of Christ in the reconstruction of public opinion as to what constitutes the life worth living. More and more clearly we discover that the popular estimate of what entitles a man to influence, honour, and office is not the possession of hereditary rank or genius or wealth, except when these great gifts are recognised as so many sacred trusts, for which the holder will be held responsible, and which he must improve and employ for the public good, for the vindication of the rights, the promotion of the happiness, and the advancement of the spiritual and temporal interests of his fellow-men.

The day will dawn at last when one who comes seeking the support and suffrages of the people will be asked, not what he has done for his own aggrandisement, but in what channel of benevolence has he cast his life, what has he done for the community in which he lives, for his country, for his Church, and for his kind! In this visit to London I miss the noble Earl upon whom I did myself the honour of calling in all my former visits through gratitude for a signal service he rendered me many years ago in aiding me in an enterprise which would not have been successful without his timely help. Shaftesbury was a synonym for Christian charity throughout the whole Christian world, but his celebrity was not due to rank or fortune. It is true he bore an illustrious name, and held honourable position in the councils of the nation; but, as you were reminded by one of the speakers yesterday, he was greater as a philanthropist, greater when he organised thousands of little shoeblacks into societies for their improvement, and when he presided at their anniversary meetings; greater when he toiled for years to relieve the oppression under which half a million of factory women and children groaned, until their emancipation was won and their protection secured by just and equitable laws. Dr. Chalmers was great when he presided over the General Assembly of his Church, when he lectured in the Divinity Hall from the professor's chair, and when he electrified great audiences by his power in the pulpit all over Scotland. But never did he attract a more loving admiration and regard than when he was seen walking through the dark "closes" and filthy lanes of Edinburgh, with ragged children clinging to his fingers and his skirts, as he led them out and gathered them into schools organised for their benefit.

When the earth is filled with men animated by a kindred spirit

“the antagonisms of society” will cease, and it will be the joy of Christ and His servants to see a happy world.

Dr. BLAIRIE apologised for the absence of Dr. Walter Smith of Edinburgh, whose name appeared in the programme of this evening, but who had not been able to complete a tour in the United States in time to be present.