

THE AMERICAN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

Volume XVI

JANUARY, 1912

Number 1

MODERN LIBERALISM AND THAT OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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There is hardly a more deep-seated conviction of minds theologically conservative than that of the religious inefficiency of liberal movements. Devout natures are often averse to tendencies which claim freedom of thought and fresh initiative in spiritual life. They are so disposed, not always because they have canvassed the particular issues involved. They have a general impression that religious liberalism ends often in decline of enthusiasm and of the vitality of faith, of the power which moves men to great deeds and sacrifices. They dread this effect for themselves and their children, for the church and the world. They feel that zeal is often impaired by the intellectual emphasis, and co-operation in institutional religion is often sacrificed to the individualistic traits, which are apt to characterize liberal movements. They may acknowledge that there is lack of tolerance for divergent opinions among the orthodox. They may, however, have been called upon to endure the bigotry of liberalism. They witness the hesitations into which some who esteem that they possess a broader view often fall. They are able to point to practical achievements on the part of some who never knew such doubts.

They know that the eighteenth century closed and the nineteenth century opened with a great liberal movement which involved in almost equal degree Protestant and Roman Catholic

THE MOVEMENT AND MISSION OF AMERICAN CHRISTIANITY

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The church history of the United States has yet to be written. There are creditable accounts of denominations and other aspects of the general subject. But no Bancroft has yet appeared to set forth in orderly succession the movement of American Christianity as an organic whole, to present its genesis and growth and to show its distinctive features—all with reference to our inheritance from the old world and the problems to be solved here in the new world. This task is worthy of the best powers of a student of history. So far as I know, there has not yet been established in connection with any American theological seminary a chair or a distinctive lectureship of American church history.

The expression, American Christianity, should have more than a geographical significance. Though Christianity is one, it has been better understood in some ages than in others, and in some periods certain of its phases and applications have been brought into expression as they were not in other periods. The divisions into ancient, mediaeval, and modern Christianity primarily indicate differing conceptions of the significance of the teachings of Christ and differences of emphasis. It would be strange, if Christianity, transplanted to this virgin soil and starting, as it were, upon its career afresh, should not have developed some distinctive features and have some distinctive mission to perform in bringing about the full realization of what the kingdom of God means. Most certainly, the American church ought to emulate the church in the imperial city of Rome of which Paul declared that its faith was proclaimed throughout the whole world. But that cannot be all. What shall be said by some historian, standing on the ledge of some future century, as he seeks to set forth the part played by our land in the unfolding of God's purpose for his kingdom?

In setting forth the movement of American Christianity, I propose to dwell on some of the conspicuous and distinguishing elements which have marked its progress. In speaking of its mission, I shall emphasize several principles for which it seems to have been appointed to stand.

I. THE MOVEMENT OF CHRISTIANITY

1. The first noteworthy feature of American Christianity is that, in the discovery and colonization of the continent, the planting of the Christian religion was an avowed and prominent purpose. This is true of the enterprise, whether it was prosecuted from Catholic or Protestant Europe. In carrying the keys of the new world with him on the Santa Maria, Columbus was moved by religious motives as well as by the spirit of territorial adventure.¹ His agreement signed April 17, 1492, connected with his undertaking the rescue of the Holy Sepulcher, that glittering hope which had lured crusaders on for full two hundred years and was still, exactly two centuries after the loss of the last foot of Syrian soil, a part of the papal program. Before his fourth and last voyage, the navigator renewed to Alexander VI his vow to furnish troops to recover the tomb made sacred by the Lord's sepulture. On his second voyage he had with him the Vicar Apostolic of the Indies. In view of the facts, we may pardon the exaggeration of Leo XIII when, in his encyclical of 1892, he unduly emphasized the religious motive in Columbus' enterprise and declared that "one can not doubt that the Catholic faith superlatively inspired him in the conception of discovery and its execution, so that by this fact also humanity is not a little indebted to the church."

It is one of the weird freaks of history that the early possession of the western continent should have hinged on the arbitrament of the most wicked of the popes, Alexander VI. Time has rudely set aside his gift involving an unending right of tenure and made upon the basis, as he claimed, of the authority of the omnipotent God conceded to him in St. Peter and of his vicarship of Christ on earth. To Portugal and Spain not a foot of territory remains from Patagonia north, and the line of demarkation Alexander

¹ See Fiske, *Discovery of America*, I, 318.

drew has no existence except in his bulls dividing America between these two kingdoms.

In the minds of the Spanish sovereigns and the emperor, religion was a paramount concern in the occupation of the new world. Ferdinand and Isabella officially decreed that "the conversion of the Indians formed the principal foundation of the conquest, that which ought principally to be attended to." The six natives whom Columbus took back with him from his first voyage had these two most Catholic princes for their sponsors as they received the waters of the baptismal font in Barcelona. And when one of them died, he was said to be the first Indian ever admitted to heaven. In 1523, Charles V declared "his principal interest in the discovery of new lands to be that the inhabitants, who are without the light of faith, be brought to understand the truth of our holy Catholic religion . . . that they may become Christians and be saved." Such decrees we must accept as the ingenuous expression of a religious purpose in spite of the atrocities perpetrated by Spanish captains in their quest for gold. In 1538, De Soto distinctly stipulated that he would carry priests to instruct the natives. Nor may we forget the high place among the heroes of philanthropy occupied by that early Dominican apostle of the Indians, the Spaniard, Bartholomew de las Casas. Embarking with Columbus on his second voyage and following close upon the feet of De Soto, Coronado, and other explorers came the Franciscans, Dominicans, and Jesuits establishing missions from Florida to Santa Fe and rearing the convents on the Pacific slope. In summarizing this work of the Spanish friars from the Gulf of Mexico to San Francisco, Bishop O'Gorman exclaims: "It was a glorious work and the recital of it impresses us by the vastness and success of the toil." Let us not begrudge that judgment. The very names the Spaniard gave to the rivers, mountains, and towns of the new land bear the impress of the Christian faith as they also perpetuate the music of the soft Castilian tongue—San Salvador and Santiago, Santa Fe and Los Angeles. The first name they gave to the Mississippi was *Espiritu santo*, "the Holy Spirit." To this nomenclature an outward contrast is presented in the names given by the more vigorous and no less religious colonists of the

North who gave to their children such names as Oceanus Hopkins and Seaborn Cotton, or, as in Western Pennsylvania contributed to our maps such names as Slippery Spring, Sugar Creek, Lower Sandy, and Muddy River. But whether we be Catholic or Protestant, let the designation given to this new continent on the map of 1508 be accepted as the prophecy for all future time, *terra sancti crucis sive novus mundus*—"The Land of the Holy Cross."

In the North, the French missionaries furnished a notable chapter in the annals of zeal and heroism. Entering the St. Lawrence, they joined the work of religion with the adventure of the explorer, looked first with the eyes of the white man upon the Falls of Niagara, traced the bays and inlets of the Great Lakes, and followed the Mississippi to the Gulf. They encountered the enmity existing between the Algonquins and the Iroquois, an enmity which Mr. Fiske says has never been exceeded for bitterness. They founded churches, hospitals, and schools. As in the South at Vera Cruz the Spanish missionary set up the first printing-press, so here in the North, the Jesuits wrote the first series of connected annals of the continent—the famous *Jesuit Relations*. "Not a cape was turned, not a river was entered but that a Jesuit led the way" is Mr. Bancroft's tribute. That is a notable testimony which Le Jeune gave of his interest in his work at Quebec when he wrote back to France: "I have become a teacher in Canada and have a little savage on one side of me and a little negro on the other. Behold me, after so many years of teaching, returned at last to the A. B. C. with so great interest and satisfaction that I would not exchange my two pupils for the finest audience in France."² When one of our cool American historians, Parkman, warms with enthusiasm over the toils of this group of men, it would be ill grace not to join him in admiration. They kindled the first fires of piety in those colder regions and were ready to suffer privation and agonizing deaths in devotion to the cross and the church.

To Protestant institutions was given the preference in the occupation of this continent. Germany had no ships or naval navigator, but its Luther was already well along in his childhood when

² *Jesuit Relations*, V, 63.

Columbus set sail from Palos and the doctrines of the Reformer were deeply rooted, yea, the defeat of the Armada had already taken away the hegemony of the seas and given it to Protestant England when Spanish colonization was beginning to send out its first shoots north of the Gulf. Spain in the South was destined to give way to Anglo-Saxon and Protestant influences and the French empire received its death blow on the promontory of Quebec and at the junction of the rivers at Fort Pitt. Protestantism has had an unparalleled opportunity in North America and should it ever prove to have failed, the Catholic communion will have a just right to point to that failure as a decisive divine judgment.

In following the early Protestant settlers back to their European homes, one is struck with the large part which religious considerations played in starting them off in the direction of the West, the Puritan from England, the Scotch-Irish from Ulster, the Huguenots and Walloons from France and the Low Countries, the Quakers forced by persecution in the time of Charles II, the Palatines by the fierce ravages of Louis XIV, and the Salzburger by the sweeping enactment of the archbishop of Salzburg. Religion had far more to do in the movement of our early colonization than the quest for land, and George Herbert was expressing a deep feeling of his time when he wrote

Religion stands on tiptoe in our land
Ready to pass to the American strand.

At the outset of no other history except at the beginning of the Hebrew migration to Canaan was the religious purpose so prominent.³ In his *Wonder-working Providence of Zion's Saviour in New England* that staunch early Puritan, Johnson, declared "We chose not New England for the land but for the government that the Lord Jesus Christ might reign over us." The pact on the "Mayflower" was cradled in religious conviction, and with prayer the Pilgrims set forth from Delfthaven. Before coming to Salem, the Puritans solemnly declared that "the propagating of the Gospel

³ The words of Owen as quoted in Mather's *Magnalia*, I, 26, run: "Multitudes of pious peaceable Protestants were driven by their severities to leave their native country and seek a refuge for their lives and liberties, with freedom for the worship of God in a wilderness, in the ends of the earth."

is the thing we profess above all in settling this plantation." Not only to maintain and develop religion among themselves was their purpose, but also to bring the Indians in "God's appointed time to the obedience of the Gospel of Christ." The election sermons constantly called attention to this aim as an incitement to the descendants of the first stock to continue in the piety of their fathers. "It was love to God which brought our fathers to this wilderness," declared Increase Mather. And what people has ever received a more honorable characterization than that given to the first generation of American Puritans by Stoughton in his election sermon delivered ten years earlier? "They were men of great renown in the nation from whence the Laudian persecution exiled them. Their learning, their holiness, their gravity struck all men that knew them with admiration. They were Timothies in their homes, Chrysostoms in their pulpits, Augustines in their disputations." If in one breath they called their new habitation "this far remote and desolate wilderness" and "the going down of the sun," and in another "our paradise of New England," it was because of the religious commonwealth there set up.

With early Virginia we are apt to associate adventure rather than piety. As for the ministers, it was an early complaint that "as of all other commodities, so of them the worst were sent to us." But at the side of this unfavorable criticism, and the contrast which from a religious point of view the southern colony presented to New England, we may place the fact that the good Whitaker's tract, *Good News from Virginia*, was published in London in 1613, the earliest period of the colony.

In the settlement of the other plantations, religion was also a conspicuous aim and was always kept in the foreground unless it be in the Carolinas. In its extension of dominion, Rome's martial and conquering spirit was paramount. The Roman's attitude to religion did not involve the thought of religious missionary enterprise. In the early history of the occupation of this continent, whether it proceeded from Catholic or Protestant lands, it may emphatically be said that the religious element was paramount.

2. The second feature in the movement of American Christianity is that all the Protestant communions of the old world, as

also the Catholic, were firmly established on our soil when the Revolution came and united the colonies—Congregational, Lutheran, Reformed, Presbyterian, Episcopal, Moravian, Mennonites, Baptists, and Methodists. Each sought to be true to its traditions. What could be more characteristic than the beginning of Methodism in New York? It was a woman, Barbara Heck, stirred by the sight of her friends at a game of cards, who was moved to call upon Philip Embury to exercise his gifts. "Brother Embury," she said, "You must preach to us or we shall all go to hell." The first converts were musicians from the band of the British garrison. The soil has, since the Revolution, been generous in developing new religious bodies, and it might seem as if it had been ordained that every known type of the Christian faith should be brought together here to show that the virtues and hope of the gospel may be cultivated under each one of them.

3. A third feature is the development, from the earliest period, of all sorts of religious novelties and errors, so called. Scarcely had the Puritans gotten a foothold, than they were troubled with vexation of heart—ministers and legislatures—by the sprouting of the Familists, the Gortonists under the lead of Samuel Gorton of Shawomet, and other sectaries evidently moved by the wiles of the devil. The church at Boston was shaken to its foundations by the "set assemblies" of Anne Hutchinson, who told her hearers "how far they might go in trouble of mind" and made the startling assertion that all the New England ministers except her pastor, John Cotton, were held ensnared in the covenant of works. Poor woman, the 82 errors alleged against her in the synod called by the Massachusetts Court were twice as many as the load heaped upon Martin Luther by Leo X. In his chapter setting forth the great commotion in Boston circles which Cotton Mather heads *Hydra decapitata*, "The Serpent Beheaded," he remarks that it was the usual custom with sectaries to begin by "seducing women in their notions and by these women, like their first mother, they soon hook'd in the husbands also." For the moment that good divine seems to have forgotten that it was a man who was the father and founder of Christian heresy—Simon Magus. It is cheering to have the same author remark that for men of reasonable minds quota-

tions of Scripture "immediately did smite the Hutchinsonian error under the fifth rib." It is equally cheering to be informed by the earlier writer, Captain Johnson, that after "these foggy dayes, God caused the Heavens to cleere up againe in New England."

But the religious theories of Roger Williams, the agitation of the Antipaedobaptists, and the persistence of the Foxians and Quakers in breaking up the meetings of the orthodox continued to keep the religious waters of New England troubled. Nor were the Middle Colonies free from religious disturbance.

4. The stress laid on Christian education must be regarded as another feature of American Christianity. Harvard College bears on its seal the motto dedicating it to Christ and the church, and Yale College, founded by clergymen, has for its device an open Bible with a Hebrew motto and the words *Lux et veritas*. When the two Dutchmen, Jasper Dankers and Peter Sluyter, visited New England in 1680, they found the Harvard College building the "most conspicuous building in Cambridge." It is true also that they found the students' room which they entered so full of tobacco smoke that they could hardly see. This was a good deal for a Dutchman to say. But, no doubt, the students in later life joined with their elders in laying stress upon education as one of the foremost duties to be cared for by the church and the state. When the Massachusetts Synod in 1679 was considering the decline of religion, it prescribed the better care of Harvard College and schools as one of the remedies.

The Log College of Neshaminy, first of Presbyterian institutions, was the conception of a minister, the father of the Tennents. The first college of Virginia received, among its first bequests, funds for the training of the Indians in Christian culture. The first Scotch-Irish institution west of the Alleghenies was founded by a minister, and no line of the inscription on the monument of Rev. John McMillan, the pioneer of learning in those parts, is more significant than the words, "He was the founder of Jefferson College." Whatever view educators may take today of the part religion should have in the control of our educational institutions, the words of Jonathan Edwards on the subject are worth listening to, written at a time, to be sure, when almost all the students of

colleges were candidates for the ministry. He says: "Colleges should be so regulated as to be, in fact, nurseries of piety; otherwise they are fundamentally ruined and undone, as to their main design and most essential end."⁴ The traditions of the country are in favor of education, and the church as an agent in education.

5. One of the remarkable features in our history is the development in its middle period of an original school of theology. It was not, however, in the period of its height, so much a distinct school of opinion as a reproclamation and reinterpretation of the Calvinistic system. Church government was the first subject to engage the pens of New England writers. But from the publication of William Pynchon's *Meritorious Price of Our Redemption* in 1650, questions of dogmatic theology came more and more into the foreground. The close of the seventeenth and the early years of the following century were greatly troubled by the discussions over the Half-Way Covenant and Stoddardism. Churches such as the First Parish of Boston as well as ministers were divided by it. The New England theology was the effort to keep back the disturbing theological forces coming over from England and developing within New England itself. Jonathan Edwards, combining in himself rare metaphysical powers and mystical intuition, at once grappled with the deepest problems of the Calvinistic system and set forth the nature of Christian love and the progress of the Great Awakening. His distinction between natural and moral ability may be rejected where his nature of true virtue will be accepted, but by both discussions, as well as by others, he marks the classical period in theological thinking in the country and gave the impulse to speculation in the more difficult paths of theological truth. And so long as the history of American theology in the eighteenth century is studied, serious treatment of the great themes of Christian divinity will be held not to be in vain. He who is perhaps the most remarkable religious personality the country has produced led the way.

6. Another feature of our American Christianity is the evangelistic spirit which broke out into wonderful expression in the middle of the eighteenth century, and was contemporary with this

⁴ *Revival of Religion*, Part V, Am. Tract Soc. ed., 419.

high theological discussion. The name of Whitefield is associated with that most sweeping of American revivals. But the Great Awakening was felt before he came to these shores. It started with Jonathan Edwards at Northampton, and the evangelistic spark had already been kindled in the Log College under Tennent. With all his might, Edwards sought to counteract the feeling which had settled upon New England that all the unconverted could do was to sit still and wait. In describing the movement which broke out in his own church, Edwards exclaimed: "Had we but Mr. Whitefield's zeal and courage what could not we do with such a blessing as we might expect?"⁵ Gilbert Tennent, no doubt, yielded to the temptation to exaggerate when in his Nottingham sermon he sweepingly pronounced the ministry blind and unconverted, an utterance which brought down upon him and his friends condemnation from the Presbyterian synod. But there can be little doubt that religious torpor was widespread. The impression made by the preaching of the Tennents, by Whitefield, and by Edwards in such sermons as the sermon on "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" produced a most unusual impression.⁶ The church in New England was divided over the value of the evangelistic movement; and in the Middle Colonies the Presbyterian church was rent over the same subject into the Old Lights and the New Lights. But the experience of the American church at that period must be regarded as one of its most valuable assets. It is a perpetual rebuke to cold formalism and rigid ecclesiasticism, and a reminder that the beginning of the religious life is in the regenerating activity of the Holy Spirit. The movement of the eighteenth century was followed by the revivals in Kentucky, in Western Pennsylvania under Nettleton, under Finney in Central and Western New York, not to speak of other movements of the same kind.

7. Organized Unitarianism is another distinctive feature of American Christianity. I do not know that Unitarian thought has made any permanent contribution to the life of the church in England or on the Continent. The case is different with our-

⁵ *Revival of Religion*, 418.

⁶ See, for example, the description given by Rev. Mr. Parsons of the impression made by Gilbert Tennent's sermons in Lynne. Tracy, *The Great Awakening*, 138.

selves. Within the generation which witnessed the transition of King's Chapel to the Unitarian form of belief, the movement spread with great rapidity and orthodoxy in Boston and other parts of Massachusetts seemed to be in danger of being swept completely away. Harvard College passed easily over into the hands of the new party and the elder Bancroft, as afterward his son, Buckingham, Emerson, Walker, Jared Sparks, to mention only a few of the leading minds, broke away from the creed of their fathers and made the Unitarian circle of Cambridge one of the brilliant coteries in the annals of English literature and the most brilliant in our own. The religious genius, philanthropic purpose, and fervid eloquence of Channing have given him one of the foremost places among the religious personalities of the continent. The Unitarian movement was in part a rebound from the rigor of New England theology and the severity of religious enactment. It was a revolt of the heart as well as the head. Its rise should put prescriptive ecclesiasticism on its guard when it deals with an educated and thinking constituency schooled in the atmosphere of freedom of judgment. And, whatever may be thought of its theological conception of the Trinity and the spirit of religious negation which has flourished in Unitarian circles, it must be granted, I think, that in emphasizing the element of humaneness the whole American church is indebted to the Unitarian movement. It is pleasant to observe that Unitarian writers describing the early stages of Unitarianism speak not only of "religious liberalism" and the "fine literary taste" of the early leaders but also, in cases, of "their saintly life" their "sweetness of character" and their "singular benevolence." It would seem fair to say that Christian sympathy has been softened and extended and also a juster admiration for the things of the visible world cultivated because of the Unitarian propaganda.

8. The latest stage in the movement of our Christianity seems to be the development of lay activity in all forms of church work and the tendency to find in the co-operation of Christian forces a higher obligation than in the enlargement of any sectarian boundaries.

It would be a great mistake to suppose that the spirit of optimism prevailed in all periods of our early history. The novelties

which vexed the souls of the righteous in New England have already been referred to. "The Church of God," said Cotton Mather,⁷ "had not long been in this wilderness before the dragon cast forth several floods to devour it," and into the "briars of antipaedo-baptism" even a respected president of Harvard fell. A heresy trial and sharp conflict between the Scotch-Irish and Puritan elements in the Presbyterian church agitated the Middle Colonies. Righteousness of conduct and attendance upon church duties were not so general as we, in these later days, are apt to imagine. Bradford, Winthrop, and other New England writers and the early records of the Presbyterian synod are full of testimonies to the contrary. Governor Bradford could write that the Plymouth people had "been in a languishing state." At times leading men looked almost with despair upon the religious conditions. Increase Mather, in 1678, declared that "the body of the rising generation is a poor, perishing, unconverted, and (except the Lord pour down his Spirit) undone generation." John Eliot is represented by a visitor as deploring the decline of the New England church, especially in Boston, so that he did not know what would be the result. Although he could write so hopefully of the ultimate triumph of God's kingdom Edwards declared, 1747, that "vice and wickedness never did so prevail like an overflowing deluge as in this age." In 1739 the Presbyterian congregation of New York City lamented the small attendance upon the public meetings before the arrival of Mr. Whitefield, the large arrears of salary yearly increasing, and the growing discouragement of the minister. At length, so it wrote, six or eight windows in the church building were glazed which had been covered with boards about twenty years. Witches were put to death. Quakers were executed. At ordination suppers "plenty of good cider and ye inspiring Barbadoes drink" were dispensed.⁸ Equality in the sight of the Creator had scant recognition in the seating of the meeting-houses. The first, as well as the second, generation in New England was given to "extravagance in dress and ornament," and divers of the elders' wives were partners of the general disorder and helped to provoke the Massachusetts Court to provide corrective legislation. In fact, in those

⁷ *Magnalia*, II, 508.

⁸ Adams, *Three Episodes of Mass. Hist.*, 739.

good old times human nature seems to have been considerably like what human nature is today, and the best you can say is that the body ecclesiastic was, as Peter Cartwright said of himself, sanctified in spots. Comparing his generation with the days of the Reformers, Jonathan Edwards lamented that things had grown worse. He said "a prevailing licentiousness in principle and opinions" had grown up and there had been "an exceeding decay of vital piety."⁹ Nor were these the only evils. Before these days of Higher Criticism and all sorts of alleged nostrums, distinguished ministers had their doubts about the essential truths. Cotton Mather, descended from a famous ancestry, wrote in his *Diary* that "he had temptations to atheism and to the abandonment of all religion as a mere delusion." Remembering the treatment which Edwards himself received at the hands of the Northampton parish and David Brainerd from the authorities of Yale College and the presbytery of New Brunswick at the hands of its Presbyterian brethren of the other presbyteries, we need not be brought into any depths of discouragement by the threatening winds which seem to prevail in quarters of our church general today.

II. THE MISSION OF AMERICAN CHRISTIANITY

The discernment of the providential and prophetic elements in a movement is a far different thing from the discrimination of the past stages of a movement. It is, however, not going far afield to present the mission of American Christianity in several aspects.

1. Its mission seems plainly to be to demonstrate that the complete separation of church and state, as we have practiced it, is the principle most favorable for the development of the Christian religion. The self-government of the American church stands for a voluntary return to the condition in which the church found herself placed prior to the conversion of Constantine. The Reformers knew imperfectly of any other theory than the union of the two realms, and whether it was in Geneva or Wittenberg or Zürich, in Amsterdam or Edinburgh or Westminster, the idea of the church as an independent commonwealth, supreme in its own domain, was not known as it is among us. The customs of taxing

⁹ *Work of Redemption*, Worcester ed., 1808, II, 311.

the entire body politic for ecclesiastical purposes, of ratification by the civil power of the acts of church synods, and enforcing civil penalties for religious offenses came over with our early forefathers. If in the northern colonies banishment or death were made the penalties for denying the Bible to be the infallible word of God, in Virginia all failing to attend the Sabbath services or to pay due respect to the parish clergyman were soundly punished. It was with the advice of two godly Dutch dominies that the governor of Manhattan shipped the Lutheran preacher, Goetwasser, back to Holland, and Presbyterians have not forgotten how Francis Makemie of honorable memory was put into jail and heavily mulcted by Lord Cornbury. Nathaniel Ward, in his *Simple Cobbler of Agawam*, was representing the prevailing feeling in New England when he pronounced a state tolerating different religions "a bear garden, an aviary of errors."¹⁰ This was just about what Robert Baillie, journalist of the Westminster Assembly, said when he declared the toleration of any and every religion to be "so prodigious an impiety that the Westminster religious parliament cannot help but abhor the very meaning of it." The noble expression that God alone is Lord of the conscience, which the Westminster Assembly incorporated in its Confession, burns with a brightness its learned framers did not see.

Roger Williams, the advocate of soul-liberty, occupies, by common consent, a position in the Hall of Fame. He was erratic and would have been an uncomfortable bed-fellow for the most tolerant and amiable of our time. It is probable that were he living he would withdraw from all church connection now, as he did three centuries ago, and become a "seeker." But the spirit of religious liberty born in Rhode Island and practiced in Pennsylvania, and also in Maryland for a time, went into the code of the republic when it was formed. Nowhere, so far as I know, is the principle of the independence of the church of all state control better expressed than in the declaration of the first Presbyterian Assembly of the Presbyterian church in 1789. It runs: "We consider the rights of private judgment, in all matters that respect religion, as univer-

¹⁰ One of the most emphatic and amusing statements of this principle is made by Johnson, *Wonder-Working Providence*, Jamieson's ed., 145 ff.

sal and inalienable, and we do not even wish to see any religious constitution aided by the civil power, further than may be necessary for protection and security, and, at the same time, be equal and common to all."

A free, self-governing church is adapted to secure three things: sincerity in Christian profession, the wide participation of the laity in Christian activities, and a ministry choosing its vocation from spiritual motives. The voluntary system is here on trial. It is for the American church to show that the claim made for it is true, that it is the Scriptural method and is best adapted to develop Christian manhood, and to permeate society with the leaven of the Christian religion.

2. The second mission of the American church is to show the important part the laity may perform in the earthly kingdom of God. By the mediaeval practice and theory, laymen were little more than passive recipients of the instructions of the priesthood and the sacraments. In insisting upon the priesthood of all Christian men, the Reformers prepared the way for our American practice without anticipating it at all fully. Marsiglius of Padua had enunciated the principle before Luther and the Reformatory Councils had some idea of the principle. The exclusion of the laity from all church control was one of the three walls of Jericho which Luther pulled down in his *Address to the German Nobility*. In the Protestant churches of the United States the principle has been given full recognition, unless an exception be taken on the ground of the restriction put upon the representation of women in our church assemblies. It is essentially the Puritan principle.

In the popular stress laid upon the activity of the laity, there is connected a peril lest a certain counting-house sort of religious fussiness be taken as a substitute for religious conviction and all sorts of organizations for old and young be treated as the supreme channel of religious life rather than sound biblical and perhaps catechetical training. Bustle and statistics are in danger of clogging the way to the heart where streams of living devotion should be flowing. Nevertheless, it is true that in the Christian activity of the laity within the church walls, in missionary effort and benevolence, in all educational and public moral issues lies

a notable part of the strength of American Christianity and the hopefulness of its outcome.

3. The third mission of American Christianity is to show that an ample Christian experience and hearty Christian co-operation are easily compatible with denominational distribution. In the past our sectarian differences have been made subject of serious rebuke. In the judgment of Catholics, sects are regarded as a proof of the weakness and the human origin of Protestantism. Recently a statement was made by a Catholic priest, taking this position, that there were no less than 92 different Protestant bodies at work in China. In Germany the sectarian divisions of American Protestantism have never been understood, and the United States has been disparaged as the breeding-place of denominations. To such criticisms various reasonable and good answers may be given. Differentiations in the church may be as positive an indication of vigor of religious thought and conviction as differentiation in the vegetable world is an indication of inner fulness of life. And then it may be said that in no part of Protestant Christendom is the co-operation and fellowship between ministers of different church affiliations more general and more hearty than with us.

As for our American Christianity, the time seems to have gone by for the denominations to assail one another or for one denomination to hold itself aloof from the others as though it were the unique repository of the truth and grace of God. The Protestant bodies insist upon the unity of the faith and the essential unity of the church. Outward forms are of minor import, as are differences of language. Against the world we are one, as the German army of Blücher and the English army of Wellington were one against Napoleon. Unity is something higher than uniformity and we do not insist upon the latter in ritual and government so long as temperaments differ in this present earthly condition. The Apostolic succession appertains to all who are in the ministry of godly living and godly dying. It comes not by the laying on of hands but by the touch of the Holy Spirit. The fruits of the Spirit are distinctly recorded in the New Testament.

That the cause of the church has been hindered by the disputes and alienations of Protestant bodies since the time Luther refused

the right hand of fellowship to Zwingli at Marburg cannot be denied. We have been learning something, and one of the things learned is that the precise determination of the mode of the Lord's presence in the Lord's Supper has indeed its place, but the matter of supreme importance is that men, taking the words of institution, unite in devotion to the Lord, in fellowship with him and in considerate regard for all who call upon his name. The American churches have been brought to a realization of their unity and their obligation to be confederate in all good work from three sides—the antagonism of some of our modern learning to the supernatural origin and mission of the Christian church, the more fair and unsectarian exposition of the Word of God, and the study of the history of the church in past centuries, from which it appears that goodness of life has found high development, equally in all the various denominations. This result, so far as can be made out, has not been brought about by any propaganda that the church is in the bishop, as Cyprian alleged, or that it is tied up to any form of church government or ritual. The experience of Christians is coming to be felt to be just as important as the precise phraseology of Christian doctrine, or as this or that notion of prelacy and the Christian priesthood. Perhaps it is more important that Christendom includes the Episcopalian who wrote "Just as I am" as well as Charles Wesley who wrote "Jesus, Lover of my soul," the blind Scotch preacher with his "O Love that wilt not let me go," as well as our own Congregationalist with his "My faith looks up to thee" and our Baptist who wrote "My country, 'tis of thee." And of course the boundaries are to be extended far beyond these Protestant precincts. Love is coming to its own, the chief of all the virtues. It is better than the understanding of all mysteries and all knowledge; it thrives under the light of the cross. It grows strong and triumphant in ministries to men, as taught in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

I am one of those who do not share the opinion that the denominational variations in this country have been a bane. They have had their good mission. As between torpid ecclesiastical uniformity and controversial denominational rivalry I would choose the latter. Life is always interesting. A swift current with eddies

is to be chosen rather than a pond. The mind of man and the tastes of the aesthetic man must have freedom in the spiritual world, even as the flowers in our gardens. Unity does not call for monotony. There would be uniformity if all doves would return to the original slatey color, There is one Spirit but there are differences of administration; one Christ, but even obedience to him may show itself in differences of expression. One of the hopeful signs of the age is that the different Protestant churches are ready for a combination of forces, so only they may thereby secure religious efficiency at home and on the mission field. Prudence and business common-sense seem to be quite compatible with earnest supplication for the enduement of the Holy Spirit. If necessary to advance the kingdom of God in any community or in the world at large, private differences and methods must not stand in the way of combination and federation or even corporate unity.

How far the movement in the direction of denominational combination may go, it is hard to prognosticate. In Canada there is but one Presbyterian communion. In Scotland the spirit of union, which brought together in the first year of the century the United and the Free churches, is now moving to bring into closer fellowship and perhaps into corporate union the United Free and the Established churches. It has occurred to many to ask whether religious energy would not be increased if the various Presbyterian bodies of the United States should be united in one communion. Perhaps the time will come when geographical considerations will determine largely the organization of churches and we shall have the churches of New York and the churches of other provinces closely linked and bound together and each sectional church in healthy rivalry with others in doing the most good. The Catholic church realized in the Middle Ages the dream of one head for the entire church of Western Europe. Of the expediency of any such system opinions differ. It would not work in civil affairs. The mediaeval idea of the empire has been given up and the Protestant parts of Christendom think they have gotten along quite comfortably, enjoying recognition from the Head of the church without yielding to the idea of a single earthly authority.

4. Of course, there is another great mission of our national Christianity. It is to give the gospel to all the peoples that compose our population and thus to break down the barriers of race and to contribute to their fusion into one homogeneous body. The emigrant population, which has been coming to us heretofore—German, Swede, Irish, Huguenot, Scotch, and English—have become amalgamated. Now Bohemian, Italian, Pole, and other peoples are destined to mingle with Saxon and Celt. There could be no nobler task, no more brotherly task, no more patriotic task for the American churches than to bring to living embodiment in these peoples, the spirit of John Huss and Savonarola and John à Lasco, whether they remain in their mother churches or make transition to the Protestant communions. The strength of American Christianity must show itself adequate to cope with the problem which the influx of the new populations involves. Fortunately in no other country is the evangelistic spirit more free and more confident than in our own. It is not boastful exalting when we say that in the older lands Christianity is bound by certain traditions and long-established customs as we are not. One hundred and sixty years ago Jonathan Edwards, in writing of the Great Revival, expressed the prophetic opinion that “there are many things which make it probable that the glorious work of God which is to renew the world of mankind will begin in America. This new world is probably now discovered,” he continues, “that the new and most glorious state of God’s church on earth might commence there, that God in it might begin a *new world* in a spiritual respect, when He creates the *new heavens and the new earth*.”¹¹ Certainly American Christianity has had and is having an exceptional opportunity. With the great adjacent nation, it seems to be appointed to be the special distributing agency of the institutions of civil liberty and the individualizing yet unitive power of the gospel. In seeking to fulfil this appointed mission we may still continue to regard as prophetic the words of Bishop Berkeley:

Westward the star of empire takes its way;
The first four acts already past,
A fifth shall close the drama with the day—
Time’s noblest offspring is the last.

¹¹ *Revival of Religion*, 192.