

THE PRESBYTERIAN QUARTERLY.

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I. THE CHRISTO-CENTRIC PRINCIPLE OF THEOLOGY.¹

THE work to which special reference is here made is the product of an able and distinguished scholar, who is a theological professor in the Reformed (German) Church. He is the author of an article in the *Schaff-Herzog Encyclopædia* which clearly foreshadowed the distinctive principle of the work before us, and the moulding influence of that principle, as a constructive one, upon the whole system of theology. This assists us, in view of the fact that only the first volume of the "Institutes" has as yet been issued, in estimating the comprehensive sweep and the modifying effect of Dr. Gerhart's fundamental assumption, in relation to his theology as a whole.

It is not intended in these remarks to attempt an articulate examination of the doctrines maintained in the author's theological system, but to devote particular attention to its constructive principle. The whole system is based upon what is denominated the

¹INSTITUTES OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION. *By Emanuel V. Gerhart, D. D., LL. D., Professor of Systematic and Practical Theology in the Theological Seminary of the Reformed Church, Lancaster, Pa.* With an Introduction by Philip Schaff, D. D., LL. D., Professor of Church History in Union Theological Seminary, New York. New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son, 51 East Tenth street, near Broadway. 1891. 8vo., pp. 754.

III. SCRIPTURAL LIMITS OF DENOMINATIONALISM.

THE chaotic condition of Protestant Christianity is generally recognized and deplored. The sentiment of loyalty to Christ, as our common Saviour and King, is painfully crossed whenever we survey his realm and consider its disordered state. Wherever we turn our eyes we find the church militant lying like scattered encampments of Arabian tribes, not only independent, but animated by a discordant and often hostile spirit. It is the Lord's will that his people shall be one, in some important sense, and whatever may be our view of the unity he contemplated there can be no escape from the conclusion that it is not realized adequately in the church as observed by the world. On the contrary, the world cannot but discover many signs of unseemly rivalry and unbrotherly antagonisms between different sects and parties.

These facts, thus soberly stated, are too notorious to be denied. The spirit of loyalty manifestly calls for more cordial relations among Christian brethren. We cannot conceive of a pious heart indifferent to such an object. We assume that, wherever the love of the one Redeemer prevails, the desire must exist for a fraternal understanding among all his disciples. In various degrees this is felt and expressed by all parties. But it is counteracted in many ways, and thwarted by a thousand unfavorable influences in almost every part of the kingdom. That such influences are, to a great extent, unscriptural, unhallowed, and pernicious, is a truth so obvious that it needs no proof. The chief trouble lies in the disposition of obstructive parties in the church to lay the responsibility upon others. We find in fact that, in some cases the strongest appeals for unity proceed from denominations that claim an exclusive title to the divine sanction. It appears that such sects regard their own position as a powerful plea in behalf of organic union. It seems to furnish an unanswerable argument to less exclusive Christians, on the ground that the principles of the one party are more sacred and inflexible than those of the others.

The mountain is too great and immovable to yield. Therefore Mahomet must go to the mountain!

The fallacy of this plea will be exposed before we close. In the meanwhile let us examine the aspects of the church generally in the actual attitude of particular bodies, whether nominally liberal or exclusive. There are hundreds of such divisions in every free country; and in others, where despotism prevails, there are diverse opinions and interests in constant revolt against uniformity. Centrifugal forces operate in every sphere, physical, intellectual, moral and spiritual, and will probably never cease in our terrestrial experience. But the variations extend from the most beautiful diversity to the most reprehensible alienations. The unfraternal spirit may be seen under the most brotherly forms, and, for the most part, different organizations are formed to relieve antagonisms that disturb the peace.

Again, some sects are based upon differences of interpretation given to the Scriptures, upon post-canonical traditions, and still others upon expediency, as impressed upon them by their zealous founders. Some lay especial emphasis upon doctrine, some upon orders, and others upon ritual. All are animated, more or less, by earnest zeal for their distinctive opinions, and seek the growth of the kingdom according to their peculiar systems. There are some ecclesiastical leaders who contend for the success of their own denominations as the ultimate form of triumphant Christianity; whilst others support a sect as having a *special* mission for the benefit of a class or a temporal condition of society. The forms are many, but the motives for their propagation are far more numerous. They defy classification.

Out of all this confusion stand forth a few plain truths which cannot be questioned. They are like head-lands that guide the mariner through the intricacies of navigation. We wish to develop them so clearly as to reach definite conclusions.

1. Uniformity of thought and observance cannot be expected in a church destined to embrace all races and classes. Christianity appeals to the understandings and affections of men. It does not require us to shut our eyes and receive its truth blindfold. But free inquiry on the part of imperfect individuals ever leads to di-

versity of opinion and taste. All nations and all religions furnish examples of this tendency. But the church is a free commonwealth, and, more than any religious institution of a different origin, approaches us through the medium of instruction and persuasion. From the very beginning, there have been schools and parties in its bosom, and however lamentable these divisions have been, history demonstrates that violent repression intensifies without eradicating the evil. It was no purpose of the divine Lord to *force* men to believe his doctrines, or follow a ritual against their convictions and their wills; and he did not commission his church to employ temporal pains and penalties. Not only the Scriptures, but the experience and common sense of men, plainly teach us that coercion will not, and cannot, effect uniformity and organic union in the Christian church. Whatever may be the expectations of the Church of Rome, or the Greek Church, no Protestant sect in our day bases any calculation of its success upon the use of compulsion.

2 The only hope now entertained of an obliteration of sectarian lines points to harmony of views expected to result from a pertinacious series of argumentative and persuasive efforts. Actual unity, in the letter as well as the spirit, is fondly anticipated by many in some happy age when all Christian bodies shall become one through mutual concession or *absorption*. The latter process is the favorite conception of the exclusive sects. The Baptist brethren are confident that the whole Christian world will at last adopt their views, because they believe those views are now rejected through ignorance, prejudice or obstinacy. The Episcopal Church is equally assured that the veil will finally fall from the eyes of dissenters, and they will all be gathered into its fold through the influence of increasing light. As we remarked above, these bodies of Christians appear to think, not only that their logic is without a flaw, but that their lofty claims are the wisest policy. They flatter themselves that their zeal for unity will prove an effectual argument in behalf of their own systems when addressed to parties less tenacious of their views. The calculation is that the members of other Christian bodies may be aroused to enthusiasm for the union of the Lord's people, and

in this frame may be disposed to concede contested ground in order to accomplish that end. Without doubt the policy is shrewd and efficient. Observation convinces us that many dissentients are won by this process, as the extravagant prices placed by the oriental merchant upon his goods promote their sale.

But on the other hand, absorption is by no means an assured success. It has been tried for hundreds of years, and has promoted the growth of these denominations here and there, but at the same time confirmed the opposition of other bodies likewise increasing with marvelous rapidity. Protestantism on the continent of Europe has never countenanced High Church or exclusive views. They have been chiefly held by English-speaking populations. But the relative numbers have not changed in their favor. The Methodists have kept pace with the Baptists, and Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Reformed and American Lutherans are not behind the Anglican body. But even this church is not unanimous, and we can confidently affirm that *nine-tenths* of the Protestant world to-day repudiate the exclusive opinions entertained by those denominations first referred to.

3. The method of *compromise* is far more plausible, and has many advocates in all parts of the church. It is earnestly proposed to reduce the several creeds to such a minimum that they may be combined into one upon which all may stand. Two great difficulties have for ages stared the advocates of such a means of union in the face. One is found in the dissensions of Christians concerning the fundamentals of *salvation*. The other relates to the fundamentals of *organization*. Few Protestants can be discovered who identify these questions. All admit the salvability of sincere believers in Christ, but many distinguish between *covenanted* and *uncovenanted* subjects of the divine mercy. Extremists are not wanting who profess to hold that the spiritual condition of the latter class, numbering by our estimate nine-tenths of the whole, is far less hopeful than that of the former. But these fanatics are happily few. Most Anglicans, however high, and nearly all Immersionists, however inconsistent, refuse to shut the doors of heaven against brethren out of their communion. The trouble is that they refuse to extend official recognition to a large

majority of the saints of God, whose sincere piety they cannot question, but upon whom they nevertheless fix the charge of *in-subordination* to the authority with which Christ has invested his church. The one-tenth continues, from generation to generation, to require the nine-tenths to surrender their convictions and conform to prescribed conditions, on pain of a forfeiture of the promises. What ground can remain for their charitable admission that such Christians may yet enjoy the divine favor in heaven, we find it hard to imagine. Our own faith holds that none but covenanted disciples will ever be admitted to Paradise, and that, even there, the highest seats are not reserved for an upper class, who in this world refused to recognize many in whose foreheads the name of Christ was written.

Overlooking these inconsistencies, and giving the exclusive brethren credit for hearts more accordant with the spirit of the gospel than their logical systems, we find them still maintaining that others reject some of the fundamental principles of church *organization*. The immersionist holds that there is no valid organism composed of unimmersed members; and the Anglican holds that diocesan authority is essential to a valid administration of ordinances. Supposing these views to be entertained in the spirit of Christian fraternity, they involve a proposition almost too absurd to be written in words. They are equivalent to saying that the vast majority of Christ's true people are *outside* of his visible kingdom. To any sound mind, the probability of such a state of things must appear almost infinitesimal.

This posture of two leading evangelical denominations presents an obstacle to visible union of immense magnitude. These brethren profess to contend for great principles, but fail to consider the weight of *principle* involved in the opposition of their fellow Christians. One of the former bodies may be ever so conscientious in teaching that βαπτίζω in the New Testament always signifies submersion. But it is equally a conscientious tenet of all the other great Protestant bodies that this Greek word does not admit of translation into any one modern term. This solemn conclusion is permanently registered in both the old and the revised English versions. The same testimony is borne by the ver-

sions in other modern languages, and thus we have *principle against principle*, and one is as honestly held as the other. The Anglican Church is also firmly tenacious of its position that the "Historic Episcopate" is divinely instituted; but they should not forget that a presbyterial episcopate is held by others with a distinctness and honesty no less conspicuous than theirs, and with this immense advantage, that all modern accepted versions of the New Testament translate the Greek *επισκοπος* by words acknowledged by themselves to be equivalent to presbyter or elder. If the scriptural bishop was superior in order to the scriptural presbyter, these versions fail to show it.

These two exclusive denominations do not sufficiently appreciate the *principle* that denies their claims. They know that the other evangelical bodies do not unchurch them, and erroneously infer that they are *less conscientious* than themselves. But a Christian may reject a dogma as unscriptural, and yet recognize as a brother him who maintains it. A negative opinion may be as devoutly and persistently urged as a positive one. The only difference between the two opposite principles in religion which may be so classified, is that the frequent statement of the negative is apt to appear the more *aggressive*, because it more obviously refers to the other party. Protestantism is in terms almost necessarily an assault on popery. Hence in quiet times the affirmation of the immersion theory, or of the High Church dogma, proceeds without interruption, in acts, if not in words; but the opinions of those who reject them are not often expressed, because their very utterance appears to lack courtesy. At the same time, the spirit of the dissenting parties may be more in harmony with Christian brotherhood.

The actual union of Protestant denominations is, therefore, more seriously obstructed by those sects which especially urge its necessity than by others. The black flag makes peace impossible until extermination is complete. But, on the other hand, the less exclusive churches also recoil from such a consummation for reasons of their own. Union is difficult on their part on account of their creeds, orders and usages. The American House of Bishops, and the Lambeth Convocation, of recent date, have in-

deed signified a readiness to concede a relaxation of articles, and some freedom of ritual. But this is in view of a general submission to the "Historic Episcopate," which we may confidently expect to employ a tremendous pressure in favor of uniformity. In the matter of dogma, little urgency would be anticipated.

But independently of Anglican policy, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Methodists and Congregationalists, do not regard organic unity as of more importance than their own distinctive doctrines and principles. All of them exist separately for the purpose of expressing and illustrating views of Christian truth which they cordially believe and think worthy of careful preservation. Their differences are not vital to salvation, or even to valid organization, but too sacred nevertheless to be unnecessarily relinquished. If one visible head were clearly required in the Scriptures for all Christians in the world, they would feel compelled to abandon their Protestantism and return to the Church of Rome, which at the Reformation alone represented that principle. But the movement began with a recognition of the truth that spiritual doctrine is more important in the kingdom of Christ than union with a visible head; and so long as they are not papists, they must continue to protest against the hollow unity of Rome.

4. This leads to the last inquiry, whether a consolidation of all Christians into one visible body under one authority, is indeed contemplated by the Lord in the scheme of his kingdom; and if so, is its neglect by Protestants a fundamental error? In answer to these questions, we are forced to consider what is involved in the affirmative propositions to which they relate. If the independence of the Protestant sects is a fundamental error, the conclusion is very obvious that separation from the Church of Rome was, and continues to be, a sinful apostasy of the first magnitude. Protestants are thus in an awful *dilemma*, being driven by conscience to reject the fatal doctrines and corrupt institutions of Rome, and, at the same time, to submit to her authority as divine and final. The robust faith of our fathers did not fail to perceive that fundamental truths cannot conflict with one another, and the followers of Luther and Calvin chose the Scriptures and separation, rather than popery and continued union. The Gordian knot was boldly

cut with the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. It was plain to the eye of faith that union with the corrupt church in which they were reared, could not be a paramount obligation, if it forced their consciences into compliance with impious ceremonies. The example and precept of our Lord, in his vindication of himself and his disciples from the charge of Sabbath desecration, furnished abundant proof that some duties are greater than others, and loyalty to him is more binding than loyalty to the church. This doctrine is almost universal among enlightened Protestants, and those who question it will, like John Henry Newman, find their more congenial home in the Church of Rome.

But still there are in the Protestant ranks very many who insist that valid authority for the continuance of Christ's ordinances in a state of separation from Rome, must necessarily be derived through special forms of transmission from the Roman hierarchy. They claim that this valid connection is through certain historical names, and no others, and that, although salvation is possible otherwise, it is given by *promise* only to those who enjoy this advantage. There can be, it is urged, no authorized church without this connection, which is possessed exclusively by the Anglican communion, and the few remaining old Catholics and Jansenists of Europe. Some perhaps would include the non-papal oriental churches, but only such as would condone errors quite as grave as those of Rome.

It is impossible for us to discuss the question here, whether any authoritative connection is essential. We confine ourselves to the simple inquiry whether a more valid succession of commissions is enjoyed by the Anglican Church than by the Lutheran, or Presbyterian bodies. This question of validity, on the part of one portion of the Protestant world towards others, would never have been raised except in the interest of Episcopacy in the diocesan sense. Many of the Continental Reformers were ordained by the authority of Rome as completely as those of England, as we well know of Luther and Zwingli. The dogma that all valid orders proceed from the hands of a diocesan bishop did not affect the presbyters anywhere. It referred only to a supposed superior order, and to ordination *by* presbyters rather than *of* presbyters.

The Continental Reformers rejected the Romish dogma of ordination which the English at length adopted. We emphasize the fact that it is not a Protestant, but a papal doctrine, and one repudiated by the great mass of those who bear the Protestant name.

But yet further, we contend that the stigma of *invalidity* stamped upon the bulk of the Protestant churches was not originally so designed. The laws requiring diocesan or prelatical ordination were at first *national* in their scope. The first English Reformers did not ascribe invalidity to Lutheran ordinations in Germany, or to Reformed ordination in the Netherlands. They were reckoned fully valid where they were legal, and frequently treated so in England, where they were held to be illegal. We believe it can be shown that these early Protestants of England, when abroad, generally recognized the orders and ordinances of Continental churches to an extent which they now everywhere refuse.

This whole position of the Anglican bodies, as now held, is a gratuitous assumption directly in the teeth of the Scriptures. How Christians who repudiate other and more plausible errors of the Church of Rome can adopt such a dogma, discrediting nearly the whole of Protestant Christianity outside of their own communion, is an inquiry that baffles our intelligence. Eminent men are its advocates who would shine in a more favorable sphere, but on this subject are as irrational as abject papists.

The proposition is that there is no valid organic Christianity except in churches under *bishops* who are superior to presbyters. It is not formally claimed that they were *apostles*, although such is the usual argument. It is a "Historic Episcopate" that is offered as a fundamental article of union; and we give them credit for including canonical as well as patristical history under those terms. Now, unbiased reason would say that the New Testament is entitled among Christians to paramount respect on any subject. But our Anglican brethren refuse to see what all other Protestants see as plainly as the letters in which the words are written, that the bishops of the New Testament were the presbyters themselves. In the old and the revised versions the fact is patent, and both were the work of Anglican scholars chiefly. As we hold of immersion, that, if it is the only true version of βαπτισμος, it should

so stand in an English translation of the Bible, we repeat, in reference to *επισκοπος*, that if it signifies *apostle*, it ought to be so rendered. But this is not the demand of our brethren. They did not even suggest it. They do not in their formularies affirm such a doctrine. Bishop is their favorite word, and, undeniably, "bishop" is used in their own versions of the New Testament interchangeably with "presbyter," and not interchangeably with "apostle."

Without another word, it follows that organic Christianity does not depend upon the superiority of bishops to presbyters, according to *scriptural* history. The "Historic Episcopate" is patristic and Romish, and cannot survive one hour's examination in the light of history divinely inspired.

This investigation must reduce the different bodies of evangelical Protestants to an equality that removes the chief barriers out of the way of union, so far as union is possible. Inconsiderable minorities, which pertinaciously unchurch vast majorities in the kingdom of Christ, virtually commit themselves for all the future to an isolation which renders union a hopeless dream. But we are now to inquire whether the different sects, when approaching one another on equal terms, may not possibly effect a union of some kind, for which the church should pray. That some sort of unification not now realized was contemplated by the Lord, is too obvious to need argument. All parties agree in this, whether exclusive or inexclusive. But how far an approach to visible unity is practicable and desirable, is an open question for Protestants, as it is a sealed one to Romanists. In our humble judgment, it is desirable and practicable in equal degree, but there are limitations beyond which it cannot go. The unity for which the Redeemer prayed was one that should embrace all his people in all nations. In the present dispensation, there are obvious physical barriers in the way of one organization covering the globe. A representative council reflecting the mind of all Christians could not be assembled. One authority controlling the whole, especially if a majority of mankind were included, would necessarily be despotic and consolidated like the papacy. In fact, this impious usurpation by a local clique owes its birth to the error of an early age

concerning this very question of a visible union throughout the world.

The demand for such an organization, if consistently urged, would force an ignominious return of certain sects back to Rome. But we thankfully observe that this consistency does not prevail, since some of them maintain a local independence. The Episcopal Church in the United States is not *visibly* one with the English Establishment. Resemblance and correspondence are the only external ties by which they are united. It is fair, therefore, to assume that organic union is not an unchangeable article with that church, however much we might so infer from its theory of apostolic succession.

We cannot waste time on the claims of Romanism for universal dominion. If a man's conscience is a trust from God to him individually, he cannot surrender it to any pretended authority in the hands of others. The responsibility lies upon himself personally. This is an intuition, which is violated by those who ascribe infallibility to a priesthood, and allow other mortals, upon a false plea, to control their thoughts and actions. All true Protestants should hold back from such an abject submission. And all such repudiate the thought of a visible Protestant union embracing all nations, because it involves the errors against which their protest is recorded.

Not only is an organic unity of free Christians impossible for the world, but it is likewise impracticable within any national area. The difficulty is not altogether physical, but to some extent moral. We may even suppose all physical barriers removed, and yet be confronted with the same question. Leaving the future to determine the ultimate state of the church, we must still inquire concerning the facts and obligations pertaining to the present. Is it then practicable and desirable for all true Christians in a given state to be in one organization and government?

In order to meet this question, we must first ascertain what visible organic union is. It seems to us to imply not only agreement concerning matters of faith essential to salvation, but concerning principles and institutions that tend to preserve them. One might easily justify union with Rome on the basis of *some* of her articles.

But it is notorious that these are interwoven in her cunningly devised system with horrible heresies and abominable idolatries. A symbol consisting solely of truths whereby we must be saved, never has sufficed, and never can suffice, for the preservation of the integrity and purity of the church. There must be a creed embracing saving faith and many other points inseparable from it in a consistent system. The distinction recognized by the Presbyterian Church between truth necessary to salvation, and truth which must be taught, commends itself to every considerate mind. However brief and simple may be the expression of the former, the latter must obviously be explicit and definite. But we incline to the opinion that our system is defective in not providing for the progressive instruction of all its members, or requiring their final acceptance of its doctrines.

There are in the Church of Rome, and other old organizations in the East, a multitude of errors full of peril to the souls of their adherents, and too grossly incompatible with a pure scriptural worship to be tolerated in the name of Christ. Evangelical Protestants must exclude all such errors from their faith and practice. But this implies other statements than those required for salvation. The worship of images, saints and relics, prayers for the dead, authoritative absolution, and many other superstitious observances, require to be repudiated by those who profess to believe in Christ. But if this must be our attitude towards apostate communions, it must also mark our dissent from one another. A common creed for all evangelical Protestants must force us to express a culpable indifference towards the errors we object to in our fellow Protestants. The Arminian cannot conscientiously consent to the preaching of "the decrees of God," neither can the Calvinist cordially allow "the self-determination of the unrenewed will" to be credited with the sinner's conversion. It is the same in the matter of church government. The Episcopalian cannot, without a radical change of views, admit the parity of the ministry, whilst non-conformists revolt as much as ever at hierarchical pretensions. In the matters of worship and administration, the Baptist and the Anglican bodies are, on principle, wedded to certain *forms* which the other denominations cannot conscientiously accept as they are urged.

Proposals of organic union thus imply a surrender of principle on all sides, which may not involve anything absolutely fundamental, and yet may be so related to these prime articles that it cannot command the cordial acquiescence of honest minds. All parties judge from experience that the combination of discordant elements in one organization free from outside pressure, must intensify antagonisms and increase strife. It is true that a more exalted spirituality in the church would counteract this tendency; but this seems to suggest that the experiment cannot be safely made until that condition is realized.

All the facts conspire to force a conclusion that orthodox Protestantism cannot be brought under one visible authority. But with equal power they urge upon the separate bodies a unity of spirit and concord of purpose of which we yet have no experience. It remains as true as ever that the will of Christ requires relations among his people far more cordial than the prevailing sectarian spirit allows. The very thought of *absorption*, so fancifully entertained in some quarters, implies fraternal recognition and confidence towards other sects. Why should one denomination propose to embrace the members of another, on formal conditions, if confidence in their Christian character were not deeply felt? We may be sure that the exclusive bodies would promptly receive the others if they would yield to their special requirements by external conformity. However vain their expectations of future compliance, this attitude goes far to prepare all parties for a degree of fellowship more accordant with the gospel than that which is at present enjoyed.

The special obstacles presented by certain sects to fraternal and equal consultation, having been abandoned, the Protestant churches should then prayerfully and loyally confer together with reference to harmony and coöperation. The history of Foreign Missions, as it is now passing before us, illustrates the spiritual unity of which we speak. The increase and approximation of mission stations in different parts of the world, suggest more and more forcibly every day the necessity of some friendly arrangement to avoid interference and friction. Two obvious evils result from the occupation of common ground by rival sects. One is of an economical

nature that chiefly affects the Christian world. The other is spiritual, and exerts an unfavorable influence upon the unevangelized masses.

Christian bodies which, at home, are held apart by considerations which the outside world cannot understand, soon discover in a strange land that the cost of missions is vastly increased by separate enterprises. In Japan and Brazil, the several classes of Presbyterians there engaged in the same work, have cordially united for the purpose of consolidating their efforts and increasing their relative efficiency. The economical reasons for a similar union will soon be seen elsewhere. It is probable that in the near future the same bodies will be fused in China and India. But a similar regard for business principles, as well as higher motives, has prompted most of the Protestant missionaries in Mexico to enter into a convention, or *modus vivendi*, by which they propose to assign cities and towns of a certain population or under to particular denominations, that churches, schools, and other mission agencies, may be maintained at a minimum of expense.

On this aspect of the question we need not dwell. Far more important and inviting is the other consideration. Christianity suffers immensely by division in the eyes of the followers of other religions. Its pure and holy doctrines and precepts appear to be contradicted by teachers who profess to serve one master and yet refuse fellowship to one another. The law of love, urged upon the rest of mankind, seems to be wanting in themselves. The heathen cannot understand the minute explanations offered, and these dissensions among brethren prove stumbling-blocks to millions who are compelled to witness them. Missionaries realize the fact in almost every field. Spiritual motives, far more than the suggestions of economy, induced almost all Protestant laborers in Mexico to establish an understanding among themselves, and occupy different localities. The same spirit will be required wherever the faith is extended.

We use Foreign Missions simply for purposes of illustration. The evils resulting from opposition of interest between sects are apparent wherever arbitrary power does not render division impossible. In free and civilized nations religion everywhere

multiplies its forms. But Christianity maintains itself by a constant conflict with sin and unbelief. Sectarian rivalries and antagonisms furnish its enemies with arguments, and foster the spirit of resistance among the masses of the people. Organic union is impossible, but some symbol of unity of spirit, some formal expression of fellowship, is both possible and necessary, in order to remove scandal and expedite the conquest of the world.

Fearful responsibility rests upon all sects in proportion to their bigotry and spontaneous isolation. The conscience of the church is asleep on the subject, because the evil is not obvious in large cities which are the centres of influence. Crowded church buildings may be found side by side, whose worshippers, differing widely in their principles and institutions, are unconscious of the rivalry they represent. They avoid a sense of antagonism, as they escape collision on the street. But the systems are in conflict nevertheless in hundreds of villages, and rural communities, and, in our own country, on thousands of miles of frontier. In the cities the agreement to differ is an established usage of society, fostered by secular interests, and church leaders in such localities become blindly indifferent to the results in the respective fields of Domestic and Foreign Missions. Whilst we write, the well-bred representatives of several rival denominations are doubtless exchanging courtesies in many casual meetings, whilst others of the same opinions are elsewhere experiencing the bitter results of strife and mutual interference.

The diplomacy of the world achieves a thousand successes which war could never secure. All history proves that treaties and conventions express the anxiety of nations to preserve the peace. Civilized governments recognize one another as legitimate members of a brotherhood with common interests under different forms. Protestant Christianity, whilst preaching peace on earth and good will to men, knows nothing similar to international law, and refuses to establish any rule of comity and mutual intercourse. Too many of its flags are so contrived that ordinary salutation is impossible. One church refuses to recognize another by any official act, and the reproach of *illegitimacy* directed against kindred organizations is emblazoned in a heraldry of unconquerable pride.

Not only is there a want of written law regulating the intercourse of sects, but there is no established usage, such as society everywhere observes in temporal affairs. Signals at sea, and oral rules on land, constrain the conduct of men to observances that are absolutely necessary for peace and comfort. But the general understanding that prevents ships and wheels from colliding in the harbor and the city, and teaches even the pedestrian *to keep to the right*, is unknown to the churches. In thousands of localities they contend with eager competition for paramount influence, and divide small communities into little sections that prove vexatious to one another and burthensome to the church at large. One village or rural neighborhood is compelled to support several organizations with their ministers, where one church and one pastor would suffice.

We are confident that the insufficient supply of ministers, so generally lamented in almost all denominations, is largely due to this local subdivision of the people of God. There are, perhaps, preachers enough to supply all the evangelical bodies with pastors, if they were wisely distributed. And the support of pastors by their flocks would be so general as to render Domestic Missions a policy for the frontiers alone. These great facts are undeniable, and yet few ecclesiastics seem willing to consider them. Inferior questions absorb our attention, and a crying evil unknown to primitive Christianity, and oppressing with its dead weight the church of God, is not allowed a moment's regard.

Jealous rivals among armed nations do not hesitate to treat with one another in order to secure a basis of amicable intercourse. But here are communities of Christians, all the subjects of our divine King, that refuse to one another all overtures looking to an understanding. They are willing to absorb a rival sect, but strangely resolved not to negotiate with it for fraternal relations. Religious principle is the plea for an arrogant attitude, such as belligerent nations dare not maintain. Such a principle is indeed sacred, if not confounded with pride of opinion or traditional prejudice. But this is the error against which all Christians should protest. There is *no principle* adverse to brotherly comity among the sincere disciples of Christ. It is a spirit alto-

gether inconsistent with his cross, that holds a brother by the throat and refuses to be reconciled unless he surrenders his free opinion on a matter not vital to salvation. The prayer of the Redeemer that his people may be one, referred, in the light of common sense and charity, to a spiritual rather than a formal relation, and is obstructed far more by sectarian exclusiveness than by denominational independence.

In view of the facts reviewed, we cordially endorse the suggestion made by some of the leaders of Christian thought, of a federative alliance, or formal treaty, with a few stipulations binding the parties to a decent and respectful understanding with one another. No common government or tribunal should be contemplated. But a code of rules regulating correspondence and intercourse would serve to harmonize the operations of the various bodies, and restrain them from unfraternal conduct.

That the will of Christ, expressed in his prayer, demands a unity not now realized, is plain enough. But if this will is frustrated, there is enormous guilt at the doors of reluctant denominations. To assume an isolated position, and urge all others to find unity in the bosom of *our* favorite system, is an easy way to deceive ourselves, but is practically schismatic and obstructive to the very cause which it proposes to promote. When that cause triumphs, it will certainly not be accomplished as narrow sectarians imagine. The unity of the Spirit will precede the union of denominations, and the attraction must be mutual. The day will come when "Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim." There will first be peace, then brotherly consultation and agreement.

That some sort of unification among Protestants is an obligation and necessity in the presence of the enemy is a proposition so familiar as to have little effect. All admit it, and all sit still in despair. We point to a solution which requires no sacrifice but that of pride. When will the church learn to distinguish between unchangeable truth and fanatical obstinacy? When will she cease to confound her own prepossessions with the revealed will of God? Let her prayer be more earnest in all her assemblies for deliverance "from all false doctrine, heresy, and schism." And let her

learn with all humility that error may lurk under the form of an ideal perfection. Above all, we would say, let the Presbyterian Church realize her advantage as the leader of such a movement, by reason of her catholicity. Any sincere Christian is now welcome to her communion; any Christian minister may enter her service on terms not arbitrary, but scriptural. We honestly believe that this establishment of concord by negotiation among orthodox Protestants is as plainly required by the gospel as the commands of the Decalogue, and that it devolves upon the Presbyterian Church to take a leading part in securing it. It is *not* her duty to abandon her principles. It *is* her duty to extend them as a basis of fraternal Christianity throughout the world.

J. A. WADDELL.