



## ARTICLE IV.

## A WAY OUT OF CHURCH DISUNION.

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THE question of church unity is of quite perennial interest. It is a question very dear to the heart of Christendom. The church, we are told on apostolic authority, is the body of Christ, the place where his honor dwells, the pillar and ground of the truth. But, to the casual observer, that body seems to be severed into countless fragments, with very little regard for one another, with little concern for the unity of the body, and with each fragment claiming to be the whole body. Both within and without the church there are many mournful reflections on the present state of things. There can be no question but that the present denominational differences are confusing to the moral sense of the world, that they are embarrassing to many inquiring souls, and that they are wasteful in the extreme. We are all more or less familiar with the various overtures, compromises, and schemes of federation that have been proposed and promulgated. But, with it all, the Master's high-priestly prayer for the unity of his followers seems very far from realization. Thus far, division seems to be the actual fact, and unity to be the empty dream.

In what follows there is no attempt to construct one more plan of federation, or scheme of unity. My aim is to indicate some of the causes which have resulted in disunion, and to state some of the conditions implied in all real unity.

Two great causes have coöperated to bring about disunion: (1) A narrow conception of the church; and (2) a wrongful abandonment of primary Christian truth.

For a moment let us turn our eyes away from the present, and fix them upon the church of the first century. Every student of the New Testament has been impressed with one fact: Jesus Christ wrote nothing. Other teachers have carefully written out their thoughts; they have rewritten and revised, and have done all in their power to be correctly represented to posterity. Here is one who speaks to all peoples and for all times; he assumes as a matter of course that his words shall be known throughout the world to the end of the ages. Yet never a word does he commit to writing. Those words which he calls the words of life are committed to the frail and fading memories of untrained men. Neither did he give any developed teaching to his followers. In his lifetime he framed no system of ethics or theology; he formulated no confession of faith; he outlined no synthetic philosophy for the guidance of his disciples. He drops a few great seminal truths which he allows the disciples to unfold under the Spirit's tuition. The Master assumes that great changes are before men; that the truth he casts into the ground shall grow and spread until it has filled the whole earth. New relationships will be formed among men, and new associations will be required; a church will be founded, a society bearing his name and continuing his work. Yet, so far as we can affirm, not one word was uttered concerning the form of this new society; there is no systematic teaching concerning its functions and officers; no rules are given, no constitution is framed for the future church. But Jesus knew whom he was trusting; the Spirit will be with them, and, out of their own experience, shall take of the things of Christ and show them to men; the self-organizing life of the Spirit in the body shall determine the form

of the new society. So far as we can gather from the teachings of Jesus, the form and constitution of this church held a very subordinate place in his mind. A polity is necessary to the church; but no polity is prescribed by the Founder of the church. The reason for this is obvious. Had he constructed a rigid and unchangeable institution, and prescribed its exact functions and methods, he would have made it impossible, by that very fact, for the church to be efficient in all lands and in all ages. Just so far as it would be efficient in one set of social conditions, it would be inefficient in a different set of conditions.

All through the apostolic age the same thing obtains. A hard-and-fast ecclesiastical institution, with its mold of doctrine, its forms of worship, its officers and functions all defined, is utterly unknown. During the first century everything is fluid, free, and spontaneous; everything is determined by the self-organizing life of the Spirit within the church. There is no prescribed form of organization, no exact definition of doctrines, no universally recognized order of officers. The church appears as a society of God-inhabited men, loyal to Christ, associated for the promotion of holiness of life, organized for the one purpose of carrying out the Master's commission, providing a free and open field on which heavenly righteousness may be trained, and seeking in all ways to uplift and purify the common life of mankind. All the churches are bound together in the unity of the Spirit, but there is no visible expression of that bond. The church was a body of believers in union with Christ, a body in which his Spirit dwelt, a body which existed for the training of men in righteousness, and which laid upon its members the obligation of love and holiness. Throughout this age the emphasis of thought and act falls upon the work of the church and the conduct of its members. Forms of organization, modes of worship, molds of doctrine, and questions of polity hold a very sub-

ordinate place; indeed, it may be questioned whether they are more than merely incidentally mentioned.

But not always is this happy Christian state of things to continue. During the next three centuries, Christianity spreads far and wide, and gets itself firmly established in the East and West. Christian truth has won recognition in the schools of Antioch, Alexandria, and Rome. That Christianity should now take on a philosophic cast is not strange; that errors should creep into the church is not unexpected. At any rate, account for it as we may, between the close of the apostolic age and the beginning of the fifth century a great change has come over the life and thought of the church. In the earlier part of this period the emphasis falls upon the conduct of the disciples and the work of the church. This is shown very clearly in that early writing "The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles." This primitive manual of Christian teaching is concerned wholly with the moral and spiritual elements of Christianity. Love to God and love to man, with all that these imply, are emphasized as the great duty of life. This is "the Way of Life." The tests of membership are wholly moral and spiritual. "Whoever cometh and teacheth you all these things aforesaid, receive him." By the correspondence between his life and the moral precepts of the gospel a man's fitness for membership was tested. The more nearly we come to the apostolic age, the more clearly do we see that the church is an assembly of men with a passion for holiness and an enthusiasm for God's kingdom.

But by the time we reach the middle of the fourth century we find that the basis of Christianity has entirely changed. Those men who assembled at Nicæa were terribly in earnest; but, from their conduct in the council, one would hardly expect much light and truth. The very fact that such a council should be, demonstrates beyond question that a great change has taken place in the life

and thought of the church. It shows most conclusively that the emphasis has been shifted from a passion for righteousness to the discussion of theological subtleties. The so-called Athanasian Creed, though belonging to the next century, shows the drift of things: "Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary, that he hold the Catholic Faith; which faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly." The change from the moral and spiritual teaching of "The Two Ways," to the fifth century with its elaborate creed full of metaphysical mysteries and verbal subtleties, is like the change from the Sermon on the Mount to a session of the Talmudists. In this later period the catechumens are no longer trained in the moral requirements of "The Two Ways"; rather they are instructed in the mysteries of creedal statements. Agreement of opinion, which has formed the basis of union in the schools of Greek philosophy, has more and more come to be the bond of fellowship within the churches. The church no longer appears as an assembly of earnest men hungering and thirsting after righteousness, and seeking the kingdom of God; it has become a hard-and-fast institution, with well-defined forms of worship and carefully elaborated creeds; intent on preserving uniformity of belief and practice. "The church became, not an assembly of devout men, grimly earnest about living a holy life—its bishops were statesmen; its officers were men of the world; its members were of the world, basing their conduct on the current maxims of society, held together by the loose bond of a common name, and of a creed which they did not understand."<sup>1</sup>

With modifications these tendencies have existed down to our own day, and are at work around us. This tendency has divaricated in the progress of history; one branch

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Edwin Hatch, *Hibbert Lectures*, p. 349.

has developed the ecclesiastical aspect most fully, and the other the theological. The tendency to emphasize the ecclesiastical aspects of Christianity has been most fully represented in the Romish division of Christendom; on the other hand, the tendency to emphasize the creedal aspects has found expression in the Protestant world. The first has made fitness for membership turn on conformity to ecclesiastical forms and practices, and the submission to ecclesiastical superiors. The second has tested fitness for fellowship by the acceptance of theological conceptions and the acquiescence in creedal statements. In one case, deviation from rituals and forms has been proscribed; in the other, variations from confessions and formularies. Thus, from one cause and another, the basis of Christianity has been changed from the spiritual religion of Christ to the speculative and formal ecclesiasticism of Christendom. Very significant is that word of Dr. Edwin Hatch: "Christianity has won no great victories since its basis was changed."<sup>1</sup>

Closely allied to this is a wrongful abandonment of primary Christian truth. Turning to the Gospels, we find that one great idea dominates the Master's life, and colors all his teaching. This leading idea of his life, "at once its historical basis, its logical aim, its ethical aim, and its religious impulse," was the kingdom of God on earth. In all the teaching of the Master, the kingdom was center and circumference. He ever lived and spoke in the categories of the kingdom. The nature of the kingdom, the conditions of entrance and the privileges of its members, make up the substance of his teaching. With hardly an exception, his parables set forth some aspect of the kingdom,—its nature, its conditions of growth, the attitude of men toward it, its requirements, rewards, and retributions. To seek the kingdom and its righteousness is at once the

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Edwin Hatch, *Hibbert Lectures*, p. 349.

beginning and the sum total of human duty. After our Master, we are instructed to pray :

“ Our Father who art in Heaven:  
Hallowed be thy name,  
Thy Kingdom come,  
Thy will be done,  
On earth even as in heaven.”

The kingdom of God as a good to be realized here, and now, and upon this earth, fills all the foreground of the Master's thought. The Sermon on the Mount, which has been finely called “The Magna Charta of the Kingdom of God,” is concerned wholly with the relations of man to man, and man to God, in the life that now is. The purpose of Jesus, as it can be gathered from his life and teaching, was the establishment of a kingdom of love and righteousness in the earth, a kingdom in which the truth he taught and the life he lived were the basis and the inspiration; in a word, the creation of a pure, orderly, and holy condition of the universal life of mankind.

This kingdom is not an institution, and it cannot be embodied in one. One of the most tremendous and fatal errors of the past has been the identification of church and kingdom. Now while the kingdom is not an institution, it is designed to be the vitalizing and informing idea and ideal of every man, society, and institution on earth. The great truths of the kingdom are architectonic; that is, they are at once the regulative ideal and the constitutive power of a new order of things. Just as the sunlight which fills the heavens and floods the earth seeks to get itself reborn in the rose and the wheat-field; so the life and righteousness of that kingdom which is over all seek to get themselves incarnated in human lives and manifested in human relationships. Three institutions there are which may well be called Divine in origin,—the family, the state, and the church. Each has its own functions, though occupy-

ing much the same sphere. Each is called of God to be a field for the manifestation of the life and righteousness of the kingdom, and an instrument for its establishment in the life of humanity. Each of these is a medium through which man ascends to God, and through each the life of God is getting itself reborn into the life of humanity. Each exists for the sake of the kingdom, and just so far as they are true to themselves they conform to the ideals of the kingdom and seek its righteousness. Each is a realm for the manifestation of the reign of God, and, when each is perfect in its own sphere, and all together have reached their goal, the kingdom of God will be fully come. The kingdom only is final and ultimate; these institutions are simply means to the one great end, and parts of a greater whole.

Because of their narrow conception of the church, men have mistaken a part for the whole, and have sought to cement a strong church organization rather than to seek a kingdom. Because of a wrongful abandonment of primary Christian truth, men have divided at the wrong point, and have tested opinion and conduct by their relation to an organization, rather than measured them by the life and righteousness of the kingdom. Hence division became inevitable.

Men have mistaken a part for the whole, when they have sought to cement a strong churchly organization, rather than to extend and bring in a kingdom. The church is an instrument; the kingdom only is ultimate. The kingdom of God is infinitely higher and larger than any church or sect, or than all the churches or sects combined. But, over and over again, we have seen this church or that sect claiming to be the whole church, assuming that it is coterminous with the kingdom, and only by an illogical stretch of charity admitting that members of other communions may be in the kingdom at all. Such a sight—



and it is repeated to-day—would be comic, were it not so pathetic. As well might one man try to obtain a monopoly of sunlight as for any institution to claim that it embodies all the truth of the kingdom. Men may contend for one form of church organization as against another; but no man can claim, with New Testament warrant, that any particular polity is essential to the being of a Christian church. The particular polity, whether Episcopal, Presbyterian, or Congregational, is a secondary matter, and does not inhere in the essential idea of a church. It is absolutely impossible for any man to find a clear warrant in the first century for one particular form of organization as against another. In fact, the three forms, the Episcopal, the Presbyterian, and the Congregational, all seem to have their representatives in those early churches. We see that the church is bound to no one type of organization, but has power, through the indwelling Spirit, to adapt its institutions to the needs of mankind and its own position in the world. Of this we may be sure: had any type of organization been necessary to the being of a Christian church, it would not have been left in such obscurity.

Besides all this, it ought to be understood, after all the experience of the past and present, that forms of organizations, modes of worship, and official functions have value just so far as they enable the body of disciples in their time and place to carry out most effectually the will of the reigning Christ. The church does not exist for the sake of the polity, but the polity for the sake of the church. That form of church organization is best which best enables the body of believers to extend the kingdom of God. That mode of worship is most Christian which most effectually fosters true devotion and gives a spiritual uplift to the soul. It must not be forgotten that effort of any kind, method of any sort, is valuable just so far as it furnishes opportunity for the Spirit of God to achieve results.

It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh and the form profit nothing. To-day our insistence on forms and places, our discussions of altar cloths and modes of ordination, our contention for ceremonies and polities—what are these but the old, dead issues of Gerizim or Jerusalem? Just so far as the churches become formal institutions, emphasizing times and places, exalting doctrinal opinion and ceremonial observance above life, refusing fellowship with all who cannot accept their ritual and repeat their Shibboleths, just that far they are faithless to Jesus Christ, and have become entangled again in the yoke of bondage.

Again, men have divided at the wrong point when they have made intellectual conceptions, rather than vital righteousness, the test of fellowship. Religion is the life of God within the soul; at best, dogma is a theory of that life. A correct theory of life may be desirable, but it is not necessary to life itself. Christ is Christianity; he was the truth, the truth was a life. Christianity cannot be incarnated in creeds; it cannot be settled once for all in some mold of doctrine; it cannot be formulated into a system of thought. You cannot describe the sunshine by a scientific statement, nor convey the aroma of a rose by a verbal formula. Christianity is a divine life within the soul, a personal experience of a personal Christ, a new vision to every open eye. One is not justified because he entertains correct opinions of the cross of Christ, nor is he delivered from sin because his mind has worked through certain intellectual processes. William Law said one day to John Wesley, "The head can as easily amuse itself with a living and justifying faith in the blood of Jesus, as with any other notion." Truer words pointing out a real danger were never uttered. "The true doctrines of Christianity," said Richard Baxter, "may be believed by a faith which is not true." And John Wesley has said in strong and vigorous phrase, "A man may be as orthodox as the Devil,

and as wicked." The very essence of Christianity is a moral faith which works by love, a personal and loyal attachment to a personal Christ. It is not the man who can say, "Lord, Lord," that finds entrance into the kingdom of heaven. Christianity is the participation in a Spirit, the acquisition of a life, the achievement of a salvation.

The secret of sect, it has been said, is undue stress upon dogma. Lines of separation between man and man, and church and church, should not be run according to questions of opinion and polity, but by the great landmarks of the kingdom—righteousness, peace, and gladness in a Holy Spirit. It is a sad commentary on our divided Christendom that nearly all the divisions have started at the point of opinion, and are confessedly over non-essentials. Theological hair-splitting is always a sign of a decadent faith and a waning spirituality; the insistence on forms betokens a lack of confidence in the all-controlling Spirit. As a rule, the sin of division is to be laid at the door of the older body, which has become formal and unspiritual, rather than at the door of the separating body, which is compelled to separate in order to be true to the larger truth. The attempt to maintain uniformity of opinion and worship and method has been the prolific source of division and trouble. The insistence on dogma tends inevitably to schism. It were a thousand times better that uniformity be sacrificed, than that it be secured by the suppression of personality, or should be maintained by the exclusion of faithful men.

Because speculation has usurped the place of faith, and dogma has been emphasized, rather than love, charity has vacated her high seat, the seamless robe of the Master has been divided, and his body has been broken into a hundred fragments. Because Christendom has substituted a speculative religionism for the pure, spiritual religion of Christ, divisions have arisen, and disunion has prevailed.

How to get together again, and thus remove the reproach that lies upon the church; how to get together, and thus fulfill the Master's commission, and prove to the world that God has sent forth the Christ to be a Prince and Saviour, is now a great and urgent question. But two considerations negatively, and three positively, must be kept clearly in view. Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid; not until we build on this foundation can our house stand.

#### NEGATIVE CONSIDERATIONS.

1. *Unity does not mean uniformity.*—Truth is manifold and many-sided; men are different, and must be reached by different methods and at various angles. For this reason, uniformity of thought, method of work, and mode of worship are not only impossible but undesirable. Just so far as any church adventures its fortunes upon any definite form and any fixed method, it thereby limits itself, and attains only a partial success. By the very necessities of the case, great sections of life will lie outside its sphere. The churches have inspired warrant for becoming all things to all men, that they may by all means win the more. In order that the whole circle of Christian truth may be known and emphasized; in order that the whole range of human life may be covered; in order that the full-orbed kingdom shall be sought,—there must be men who shall emphasize certain truths, and work by special methods. There is no such thing as a universal man or a universal organization. The principle of Christian charity now comes into play. Men whom God has permitted to see the truth at one angle must not separate themselves from their brethren in the Lord who see the truth at a different angle. Neither must we forbid the man who follows not us in method of work, lest we incur

the rebuke of the Master for our intolerant and unchristly spirit.

The Spirit when he comes is to lead men into all truth; he is to take of the things of Christ and show them unto men. But it is no part of the Spirit's work to lead men into a unity of speculative thought and ceremonial practice. He did not come for this purpose. The time will probably never come when all men will think alike on the great metaphysical problems of theology and life. Suppose the personalities of men could be suppressed, and a uniformity of thought and practice could be secured: what would be gained? We would have a great body in which all thought alike, we would have a great company repeating the same formula, bowing together, rising in unison, wearing the same livery, and accepting the same form of government. As an achievement, what would all this be worth? Where two men think just alike, we may be sure that one man has done no thinking at all. Repeating the same formula in unison does not imply oneness in Christ. The result might be the perfection of mechanism, but it would be the extinction of all life. Such a society would be intolerable to itself, and would soon die of inanity and stagnation. Of course to one who can see no unity that does not mean uniformity, such a consummation is to be wished; but in reality it would be a most pathetic sight. No; all those who claim the name of Christian might be gathered in one flock, repeat the same confession, accept the same polity, and, with it all, the kingdom of God not be brought one hair's-breadth nearer.

2. *Unity does not mean compromise.*—It will probably be admitted by all, except the most narrow and intolerant bigot, that each of the great denominations of Christendom has had a mission in the world. Each has borne witness to certain truths which were little emphasized or regarded by the other churches. So far as the history of the church

teaches anything, it teaches this: diversity has been necessary, in order to maintain the balance of doctrine, and to keep before men the whole circle of Christian truth. But this is no reason why any denomination, with its segment of truth, should claim to be the whole circle, or should refuse fellowship with disciples witnessing for other truths. Each segment is the complement, and not the rival, of the others. In the early church, at least three types of doctrine are manifest,—the Pauline, the Petrine, and the Johannean. But there was no such thing as a Pauline, a Petrine, or a Johannean church, each unchurching the other, and claiming to be the true and only church. Against the tendency to divide in this way, Paul utters his most vigorous protest: "For while one saith, I am of Paul, and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal," and walk as men? "Therefore let no man glory in men, for all things are yours. Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas . . . all are yours." We have four Gospels, each presenting different aspects of the Master's life and work, each different yet each true, and each the complement of the other. The variations are as essential to the perfect picture as are the agreements. So in Christ's church; only by the various denominations, with their varied methods, types, and doctrines, can the breadth, the richness, and the manifoldness of the gospel be made manifest.

The recognition of this complementary nature of all truth and of all denominational types is one of the first factors in any consideration of unity. Not by a compromise of differences, not by a cancelling out of variations, will unity be secured; nor should it ever be sought at such a price. Not one of the denominations can be spared until the truth that it represents has been accorded its rightful place in the great circle of Christian truth. Instead, therefore, of adopting a compromise course, and agreeing on certain selected truths, the true way, the Christian way,

is to take a broader sweep of the field, and to seek some wider synthesis in which all variations find their legitimate place. Every diversity that rests upon a real conviction should be regarded as a gift to the church universal, and should never become the occasion of dispute and division. "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit." Not yet have men become sufficiently broad-minded and universal to accord each type of theological thought and ceremonial practice its proper emphasis and relative value. For this reason, for a long time to come, we may expect these various types will be more or less represented by different men and schools. But nothing could be more unfortunate, as nothing could be more unchristian, than for each school to isolate itself from all others, and to exclude all other types from its pale. The closest fellowship is necessary between them, that each may supplement the other. A great many Christians may be firmly persuaded that a particular ordinance should be observed in a particular way. What shall they do? Shall they claim their segment of truth, separate themselves from the great body of believers, and thus divide the robe of Christ? That may have been the usual way; but it is neither the wise nor the charitable way. For all truth belongs to the humblest citizen of the kingdom. The moment an idea becomes the watchword of a party, its value is exaggerated by its adherents, and it loses its attractiveness for men of other parties. Not for a moment would we counsel any man who is persuaded that particular ordinances should be observed in a particular way to give up his conviction. But, as the value of each and every ordinance to the believer depends upon the believer's own conscience, the accessories and forms of the ordinance should be a personal matter. One man esteemeth one form above another; another man sees no special value in the form itself. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. It is not

for one disciple to lord it over his fellow-disciple and usurp the prerogatives of the Judge. To his own Master each man standeth or falleth. Neither should men divide along theological lines. The Pauline type of theology is important; but, taken alone and to the exclusion of all other types, it does not give a complete conception of Jesus Christ and his work. No one would be more ready to admit this than the great apostle himself; no one has been more earnest in protesting against the policy of isolation and division. Just so far as we are Calvinists, or Arminians, or Lutherans, or Methodists, or Baptists, or Episcopalians, we are carnal, and walk as men.

#### POSITIVE CONSIDERATIONS.

1. *All real unity must be a unity of faith in one Lord.*—The one, only object of faith is the Everlasting Father as he is revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Christ's consciousness of God, of man, of sin, of salvation, and of duty must ever remain the one norm of truth and the one basis of faith. Jesus Christ is a person; a living faith is a personal trust in this personal Christ. Faith in Christ is faith in Christliness; it is a vision of his moral grandeur, and the aspiration to make his kind of life the law of one's life. To believe in Christ, as Matheson points out, means to believe "in the beauty of goodness, in the desirableness of purity, in the right of righteousness to be ultimately triumphant." It is thus far more important that faith be sincere than that it be fully informed. In all ages there has been a tendency to turn faith from a moral vision into a logical process and an intellectual acquiescence. So marked has this tendency become, that the God of Protestant theology is a metaphysical formula, rather than a spiritual and ethical being; Jesus Christ is a theological abstraction, rather than a living, personal Saviour and Brother; and the Holy Spirit is a mystical and impersonal in-



fluence, rather than an ever-present, immanent life-giver and guide. Beyond question, many of the divisions which have rent Christendom have grown out of the attempt to define what might well have been left indefinite; what truthfulness compels us to admit it is impossible to define. Besides, no formal assent to declarations about Christ avails aught in the salvation of the soul, or its acceptance with God. It is not the Christ without us who is the hope of glory, but the Christ within. Our faith does not stand in the words of man, but in the power of God. The very essence of Christianity is a moral faith which works by love. Faith in Jesus Christ entitles one to membership in his kingdom. Correct definitions of the objects of faith, and correct explications of the redemptive processes can never become the basis of universal church fellowship. For these objects can never be fully defined, and these processes can never be fully explicated. All who have a living faith in the personal Christ walk in the light, and have fellowship with one another.

2. *All real unity is a unity of life in one Spirit.*—It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh, the mode, the form, profit nothing. The Master's high-priestly prayer will not be answered when all his followers are gathered in one flock, repeat the same words, and worship in the same way. Variety is the rule of grace and the evidence of the Spirit's presence. In the Apocalypse the church appears under the figure of a candlestick, a seven-branched light-bearer. The pure, white light, spectrum analysis shows, is the combination of the seven prismatic colors. Harmony in music is not the repetition of one note, but the happy combination of different notes. Completeness through diversity; diversity yet unity is the law of nature and of grace. The fact that men of other churches are living true lives, are doing Christ's work, and are receiving his blessing should be to us the sign that they are accept-

ed of God and are partakers of his Spirit. The new creature is evermore the sign of the Spirit's presence. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof; but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth. So is every one that is born of the Spirit." We cannot shut up the Spirit within our narrow pinfolds; we cannot cause his graces to flow only in our sacramental channels. Those whom God has received, and to whom the Spirit has been given, are members of the body of Christ. By what authority do we forbid such a place in our fellowship, and refuse our coöperation in the work of the kingdom? To us it may seem that they have minimized certain commands and have omitted certain duties; but who are we to set ourselves above the King himself, and reject whom he has sealed with the Spirit? Our denial of fellowship and coöperation is logical on this ground only: that God refuses to seal them with his Holy Spirit. But when the seal of the Spirit is given, our refusal of fellowship betokens one of two things: either we deem ourselves wiser than God, and refuse whom he has accepted; or we blaspheme the Holy Spirit by attributing his works to some other agency. Since God has accepted them we dare not withhold our approval. "But they are in error in many things," the sectarian says. That may be; but who has given us the warrant of infallibility? All believers, of whatever age or place or name, who have a living faith in the one Lord, and have been sealed by the one Spirit, belong to the one great church of God, and should have fellowship with one another. For those who are partakers of the same life, and are living in the same Spirit, to refuse fellowship with one another, is both Pharisaic and unnatural.

3. *All real unity must be a unity of endeavor in one kingdom.*—The church is not an end in itself. Its one only object is the extension of the kingdom of God in the

earth. Thomas Arnold has given this most Christian definition of the church: "The true and grand idea of a church is a society for making men like Christ, earth like heaven, and the kingdoms of this world the kingdom of our God." Forms of organization, methods of work, church officials and functions, are valuable and Christian just so far as they enable the church to do most effectually the work of the kingdom, and no farther. "The church is only a means to an end. It is good in so far as it is Christian. There is no merit or profit in mere ecclesiasticism. Whatever reveals the true Christ is of value, and will live. Whatever hides Christ, be it pope, priest, or presbyter, sacraments or ecclesiastical misrule, is pernicious, and must pass away."<sup>1</sup> By the kingdom and its standards the worth or worthlessness of all institutions and endeavors must be judged. To seek the kingdom is the supreme mission of every disciple of the Lord Jesus. The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; it is not a matter of ordinances, modes of worship, and types of church government. No; it is righteousness, peace, and gladness in a Holy Spirit." And we are assured that "he that in these things serveth Christ is accepted of God and approved of men." Men seem to have forgotten this great word of the Apostle; they seem to have forgotten also that clear statement of the Master himself: "Whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." The only party that should exist within the church is the party of good against evil. Christianity, as it has manifested itself in history, has too often been made to appear as the fosterer of division, rather than the promoter of unity. To be sure, Christ does speak of sending, not peace on earth, but a sword; he does teach that his truth shall divide men. But all the enmity he ever manifested or allowed was the enmity of the good against the evil. And

<sup>1</sup> Bruce, *The Kingdom of God*, p. 272.

in his sight, Pharisaism, with its formalism, its presumption, its exclusiveness, was of all evils the most pernicious and hateful. Not always have his disciples done as he did; too often they have opposed, as evil, things in themselves indifferent.

The issues that divide the churches to-day are not the clear, eternal distinctions between good and evil. No: with hardly an exception, they rest upon non-essentials. In our regard for the mint and anise and cummin of the law, it is to be feared that we have sometimes passed over the weightier matters of the law, as judgment, mercy, and truth. Nine-tenths of the divisions of Christendom have no deeper foundation than the mere surface questions of opinion and mode, which in no way belong to the essence of Christianity. No one will pretend that these controversies are in themselves the conflict of good with evil. Can it be pretended, for one moment, that on one side there is nothing but absolute right, and on the other nothing but absolute wrong? Concerning the great requirements of the kingdom,—righteousness, peace, and gladness in a Holy Spirit,—men have never divided. Beyond question, men that in these things serve Christ are accepted of God, and should be approved of men. Two men living in communion with the Master and seeking his ends, must, by the very necessities of the case, be in fellowship with one another. Just so far then as men are seeking first the kingdom of God and its righteousness, just that far will they be glad to fellowship one another, to plan together, to join hearts and strike hands in the fulfillment of the great commission. On the other hand, just so far as men and churches refuse this fellowship and withhold this cooperation, that far they prove to all the world that they are seeking first of all, not the kingdom of God and its righteousness, but the honor and glory of their own particular denomination.

A divided Christendom is proof positive that Christianity has been shifted from its true basis. No real unity is possible or desirable on any other than a Christian foundation. Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid. The throne of God is against all efforts based on a creedal uniformity, an ecclesiastical polity, or a liturgical conformity. Not until we come back to the spiritual religion of the Son of man, and make the kingdom of God the supreme object of endeavor, will the hope of unity be other than an empty dream. The only unity worthy of the name is a unity of faith in one Lord, a unity of life in one Spirit, and of unity of endeavor in one kingdom. In one great sentence the Apostle gathers up the argument of his Epistle, and brings to a head its ethical import: "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but a new creation." "And as many as walk by this rule, peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God." Not yet have we grown up to the tremendous and wide-reaching import of those words. All such things as forms, and rituals, and ordinances, and apostolic succession have an infinitesimal value, compared with the faith which worketh by love. The word of Paul for it, though a man be never so sound in doctrine, though he understand all mysteries and all knowledge, though he have all faith, so that he could remove mountains, and have not love, he is nothing. Without love all other things are vain and useless, the merest garnishings of the sepulcher. Where love is, there is peace and unity and every good work. "The man who says there is no church, speaks falsely," says Principal Fairbairn, "but not so falsely as the man who says, There is no church but mine."

But some one says: Men must have creeds, and confessions of faith; they cannot be left alone to their own uninstructed understanding; they will fall into all kinds of errors and vagaries. We are not so sure that this will

be the case; rather, we apprehend that an earnest devotion to Christ's ideal of life, a full opening of the life to the indwelling Spirit, and a supreme endeavor after the kingdom will be a sufficient bond of fellowship and a sufficient protection against vagary. Nor need we fear that such a Christianity will be a boneless, pulpy affair. To aspire after Christlikeness, to live in the Spirit, and to seek the kingdom of God means a virile, intense, safe, and Christian religion. It is only an unspiritual, intolerant, and timid faith which wants a confession that can be carried around in the pocket and shown to all inquirers. To the man who says that men cannot be trusted alone with the Holy Spirit, it is sufficient to ask, "Into what then were ye baptized? Did ye receive the Holy Ghost when ye believed?" Creeds and confessions may have their place and value as guides to inquirers; but they never should be elevated into tests of fellowship. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty; and there is also the truest unity. Jesus Christ died to liberate men from the law of commandments contained in ordinances. Somehow the churches have become entangled again in the yoke of bondage. To-day these handwritings must be taken out of the way, that men once more may be at peace who now are burdened, and may be reconciled who now are divided. With freedom did Christ make us free; let us see to it that we are not entangled again in the yoke of bondage. "Are ye so foolish; having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" The efforts of men to find the true church grow out of a total misapprehension of the nature of Christianity. The true church cannot be identified by such external and arbitrary signs as creeds, ordinances, and apostolic succession; all such things are but the old, dead issues of Gerizim or Jerusalem. They belong to the true church who in every age or land worship God in sincerity and in truth, who have no confidence in the flesh, and seek

the kingdom of God and its righteousness. That is an apostolic church which has the true apostolic faith, and zeal and love. Any other apostolic succession than this is a cheap and trifling thing. Not circumcision nor uncircumcision, not the Thirty-nine Articles, not the Westminster Confession, not the New Hampshire Confession, nor the Lambeth Proposals, can be the basis of the unity for which the Master prayed and the world waits, but the faith which works by love, and the life which is hid with Christ in God.

We conclude that unity can come only through a synthesis sufficiently broad to comprehend all modes of worship, whether ritualistic, extemporaneous, or quietistic; all types of doctrine, whether Pauline, Petrine, or Johannean; all forms of polity, whether Episcopal, Presbyterian, or Congregational. The mode, the type, the form, are secondary matters; they are not essential to the being of a Christian church; they should never be allowed to obtrude themselves into the front rank; they should never become the occasions of division between brethren in the Lord. The object of all endeavor is not an institution, but an ideal; a life, and not a formula; we seek a kingdom, and not a church. The one goal of all effort and prayer is the kingdom of God. Through every prayer and in every plan, through every sermon and in every hymn, there breathes the one great hope and longing, "Thy kingdom come." Men whose eyes are fixed upon this great goal look across and above every institution that now exists; they see things in their true relations and proportions; the barriers sink down, and they see eye to eye. That man who would behold the true Christian goal must rise above the barriers of sect; when once he has beheld that glorious and inspiring goal, the barriers of sect no longer constitute his horizon line.

For the present, therefore, instead of trying to devise

schemes of unity made up of concession and compromise, let those whose hearts respond to the Master's prayer for unity endeavor to exemplify most faithfully Christ's life, have most of his Spirit, set forth most plainly the real work of the church, and seek most devotedly the kingdom of God. Let the Pope of Rome, instead of trying to bring all men back into the fold, endeavor to purge that church from all harmful errors and traditions of men. Let the Episcopal bishops, instead of trying to frame a quadrilateral proposal, endeavor to purge that church from all worldliness and to bring it close to the throbbing heart of humanity. Let the Presbyterian Assembly, instead of appointing a committee on overtures, endeavor to humanize its creed and to honor the Spirit more fully. Let the Baptist brethren, instead of trying to bring all the world around to their mode of administering an ordinance, endeavor to bring all who claim the Baptist name to be fully obedient to all Christ's commands, and most faithful in the extension of his kingdom. When as churches we are seeking first the kingdom of God and its righteousness, all other things will be added—unity, peace, and fellowship. The very day the churches come back to the spiritual religion of Jesus Christ, and seek first his kingdom in the earth, that very day the way out of church disunion will disclose itself, and Christ's people will find that they are one.