

The Union of the Churches

AND THE

Coming Presbyterian Assembly.

By Rev. P. B. Fraser, M.A.

A MEMBER OF THE UNION COMMITTEE.

WITH LETTERS AND CRITICISMS OF
"THE ARTICLES OF THE FAITH"

FROM

BY PRINCIPAL RAINY, D.D., REV. PRINCIPAL DYKES, D.D.,
RIGHT REV. HANDLEY MOULE, D.D., LORD BISHOP OF
DURHAM, REV. THOMAS WHITELOW, D.D., REV.
PROF. C. W. HODGE, PH.D., REV. PROF. B. B.
WARFIELD, D.D., LL.D., REV. PROF. W. M.
M'PHEETERS, D.D., AND REV. E. B.
HODGE, D.D.

Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.—1 Thes. v. 21.

"Hold fast the form of sound words."—1 Tim. i, 13.

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VII.

Reply from Rev. B. B. Warfield, D.D., LL.D.,
 Professor of Systematic Theology, Princeton Theological
 Seminary.

Princeton, N.J., U.S.A.,
 February 19th, 1904.

My Dear Mr Fraser,—Your letter of December 21st reached me so long ago as January 18th, and I have delayed replying to it in the hope that I might find time to write you somewhat fully on the interesting points which your enclosures suggest. I am afraid, however, that I shall not soon be able to obtain the requisite leisure, and I do not feel justified in delaying longer at least acknowledging the receipt of your letter. In doing so, you will, I am sure, permit me to give expression to two feelings which the reading of your enclosures have awakened in me.

The first of these is a feeling of satisfaction with the overture you are preparing, and especially with the criticisms which, in clauses 7 to 11, you pass upon the Articles which have been proposed as a suitable basis of Union between the Presbyterian and some of its sister Churches.

The second of them is a feeling of surprise that a recension of doctrinal Articles, in which so little justice is done to fundamental items of evangelical religion, could come into serious consideration as a suitable basis for a Union, one of the parties to which is to be a Presbyterian Church, with all in the way of inheritance in doctrine and life which that implies. I find myself unable to account for this rather portentous phenomenon except on two suppositions, which are plausible enough, at all events, to justify me in adducing them.

I seem to myself bound to suppose, in the first place, that the somewhat unmeasured zeal for external, or, as it is more fashionable to call it, "organic," Union which seems to be everywhere rampant among the Protestant Churches of English speech, has penetrated to New Zealand also. I do not know what can be the origin of this excessive desire for "organic union," unless it be one result of the propaganda which has been waged in its behalf by the Prelatic Churches. In them it has, indeed, a logical justification; their doctrine of the Church as an external body, determined by external marks, and organised under external forms, outside of which there is no Church of God, requires of them to seek to bring under this single organisation all the fragments which they would fain recognise as destined to form part of the Church of Christ. But surely those who know that God's Church consists fundamentally of His elect children, and, in its external manifestation, of the "congregatio sanctorum," should remember that its unity is more hopefully sought by a common determination among us to become and remain "saints"—

with all that that implies with respect at once to faith and life—than by any crude attempt to build a great house around a divided family. The unity for which our Master prayed in His high-priestly prayer, the unity to which we are exhorted in the Apostolic Epistles, is not an artificial “unity” of external organisation, but an inward unity of thought and feeling and life. It can never be attained by surrendering our testimony to truth already perceived. Christ’s entire people will never unite in destructive errors. There will always be left a remnant who have not bowed the knee to Baal; and the real core of the Church will be with this remnant and not with the multitude who are willing to content themselves with being but partially Christian in order that they may be in a greater company. The effort to secure “unity” by “compromising” is necessarily as futile therefore as it is unfaithful. A story is told of a rustic who, wishing a hive of bees, caught all that visited his flowers and shut them up in a box together, only shortly and quite thoroughly to learn the difference between a hive and an aggregation. It seems too late in the day to continue such experiments in the Church. No aggregation of discordant elements can make a unity in the Church. The attempt to do so is treason to the true idea of Christian unity.

All this is so elementary, as well as fundamental, that I seem to myself bound to suppose further that the true nature of the Articles proposed as a suitable basis for Union between the deliberating Churches is not thoroughly understood by the Presbyterians of New Zealand. Under the spell of zeal for a false “unity”—which is really only a not very thoughtful piece of sentimentalism—it is distressingly easy to deceive ourselves as to the real meaning of a series of smoothly-sounding phrases, without inquiring very closely into what, in the way of omissions especially, they commit us to. Of one thing we may meanwhile, however, be very sure. The intellectual, emotional, and spiritual life of a Church may unhappily very readily fall below its organised testimony to truth. In periods of general decline it is pretty sure to do so; because its official teachers may prove unfaithful and the sheep be left unfed. But never will the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual life of a Church permanently stand above its official testimony. This great fact is illustrated by every page of the history of the Church, and in it lies the tremendous importance of making our doctrinal formularies full and wide, clear and strong. Formally speaking, in them is hidden the standing or falling of a Church. The admirable criticisms which your overture offers upon the proposed Articles of Union will no doubt open the eyes of the Presbyterians of New Zealand to their serious defects, and I am persuaded that when their real nature is clearly apprehended, they will no longer seem possible of adoption.

The feature in the proposed Articles which strikes me most forcibly is what appears the studied attempt made in them to make a place in the united Churches for unevangelical

doctrine, and therefore for unevangelical religion. What is the essence of evangelical religion? Is it not first utter dependence on the grace of God? Where the "Soli Deo Gloria" sounds with conviction in the heart, there, and there only, is a truly evangelical doctrine present, a truly evangelical religion possible. The intrusion of the least particle of human performance into the ground of salvation is the intrusion of the evil leaven, and bears with it the promise and potency of all that is unevangelical. To be and remain truly evangelical there must resound in thought and heart and life alike the good confession of Augustine: "O Lord, Thou Thyself, and Thou Thyself alone, art our only power." But the most striking feature in the alterations proposed by the present recension to be made in the Articles of the Presbyterian Church of England is the elimination they propose of everything in those Articles which shuts man up to trust in God as the sole power unto salvation.

The way for this sad result is prepared by the alteration proposed in the Article of the Fall. For this an Article entitled "of Sin" is substituted. In this new Article the whole doctrine of the Fall is omitted, and with it the entire doctrine of Original Sin, with all its implications. There is left no "race sin" as such; for it is substituted only universal sinning on the part of individuals. This, of course, involves the denial of all the subjective effects of sin; and accordingly no subjective sinfulness is allowed in this Article. Sin here is "guilt" alone. It has estranged us from God, brought us under condemnation, and made us subject to the penalty of death—from which we cannot deliver ourselves. But it has not made us corrupt and depraved, and, because corrupt and depraved, not able to act uncorruptly or undepravedly. We are able, in a word, to do "good works." Pelagius himself, it is safe to say, would have received this Article with acclamation.

The succeeding alterations betray the same unevangelical tendency. We are no longer, it seems, to be permitted to say that the work of Christ "fully satisfied the divine justice" (Article VIII.), or that it was "solely on the ground of Christ's perfect obedience and atoning sacrifice" that our sins are pardoned and we are accepted as righteous in God's sight (Article XIII.). How then is the divine justice fully satisfied? What more is asked than Christ's blood and righteousness? The text is so altered, in a word, as to leave room for the intrusion of "work-salvation"—a salvation that proceeds on the ground of repentance and faith, works of our own—and not solely on the ground of Christ's substitutive work. It is in the same interests that the whole of Articles XII. and XVI. are stricken out, carrying with them not only the most precious doctrines of the whole revelation of God to the sin-smitten sinner—the Election of Grace and the preservation of God's people—but also the cardinal doctrine of regeneration by the almighty power of God. We call this the cardinal doctrine

with emphasis, because on it as a hinge everything else turns: and here at its sharpest emerges the great evangelical question: Is it really by the power of God and not by my own power that I am saved? After such eliminations it seems scarcely worth while to observe that the open assertion of eternal punishment is also balked at (Article XXIII.). After God has been pushed into the background in the whole process of salvation, need we talk much about His eternal justice at the end of the story?

It does not seem to me possible, my dear Mr Fraser, that the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand is seriously contemplating purchasing external union with sister Churches at the cost of her testimony to that pure evangelicalism which it is her mission to proclaim. She will surely remember, when it comes to action, that it is her part not to sell the truth, but to give it.

I am, very truly yours,

BENJ. B. WARFIELD.

The Rev. P. B. Fraser,
Otago, New Zealand.

VIII.

Reply from Rev. C. C. Hodge, Ph.D.,

Professor in the Theological Seminary, Princeton, U.S.A.

THE PROPOSED CHANGES IN THE ENGLISH PRESBYTERIAN ARTICLES.

Mr Fraser says in his pamphlet* that there are three things upon which the Presbyterian people of New Zealand wish to have accurate information—(1) "Have the members of the Assembly's Union Committee unanimously adopted Dr Gibb's new Creed?" (2) "If not unanimously, who are the persons that have assented to that Creed, and are responsible for its now being before three Churches as the Creed of the Union Committee of the Presbyterian Church?" (3) "What is this new Creed? What is its attitude to the Presbyterian Creed, to the Reformation doctrines, to the catholic faith of Christendom?" It is on the third of these questions that I shall say a few words. This is the most important question of the three, although the other two are, or should be, of great importance to the Presbyterian people of New Zealand.

The Creed upon the basis of which it is proposed that the Union take place is "The Articles of the Faith Approved

*"An Inquiry into the Origin and Sanction of Dr Gibb's Articles of Faith."