

Union of the Protestant Churches in Canada.

From the Bishop of Saskatchewan and Calgary.

BISHOP'S COURT, CALGARY.

Editor *Presbyterian Review* :

SIR,—Replying to your favor: If I thought my individual opinion on this most important matter would influence public opinion I would gladly give it, but as I don't think it would, I refrain from an expression of it, and beg to refer you to the action taken by our General Synod last autumn, which received my unqualified support.

Following are the resolutions of the General Synod referred to:—

MESSAGE FROM THE UPPER HOUSE, NO. 7.

The President of the Upper House begs to inform the Very Rev. the Prolocutor that the following resolution has been adopted:

Resolved (the Lower House concurring) that the following be adopted and published:—

"We desire hereby to make it known that we adopt and set forth as forming a basis for negotiation with any of the bodies of our separated Christian brethren, with a view to union, the following Articles agreed upon by the Lambeth Conference held in London in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and eighty eight, viz:—

"1. The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as 'containing all things necessary to salvation,' and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith.

"2. The Apostles' Creed, as the Baptismal Symbol; and the Nicene Creed, as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith.

"3. The two Sacraments ordained by Christ Himself—Baptism and the Supper of the Lord—ministered with unfailing use of Christ's Words of Institution, and of the Elements ordained by Him.

"4. The Historic Episcopate, locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and peoples called of God into the Unity of His Church."

Moved by His Honor Judge Macdonald, seconded by the Very Rev. Dean Norman.

That this House do concur in Message No. 7 from the Upper House.—*Carried.*

John Laing, D.D., Moderator of Assembly, 1890.

As becomes a subject so important and difficult, it is with no little diffidence that I venture to answer the queries sent by you for replies:

I Query. Is it desirable that there should be a union of the various Protestant denominations of Canada?

From man's point of view it may seem desirable for certain ends he thinks wise, that all the children of God should be united in one external, visible, corporate organization to be known as the Church of Christ. But as I read Scripture such is not the purpose nor the will of God; neither in the past has such an organization existed, nor as seems to me can it ever exist. God's works are invariably characterized by diversity in unity, and the Church is a work of God's not one of man's.

1. The desire for such a visible corporate organization arises when spiritual life is low and the spiritual nature of the Church of Christ is ignored, or wittingly set aside. Then a demand is made for something visible, tangible discernible by the senses to fill the void; for something belonging to this sense-world subject to the conditions and laws that regulate human society. Such was Israel of old, a worldly, temporal organization; such was the Jewish church, an outward symbol of the spiritual reality. But the Church of Christ is not like that, it is a spiritual reality.

2. The bonds which unite the several parts of an external sensuous organization, must also be external and sensuous. (1) Participation in obligatory external rites (2) common subjection to a visible centre of authority or head—for example, the Historic Episcopate, the Czar, the Pope—this visible head must control, regulate, and energize the organization or body in every part. A visible body without a visible head would be an anomaly, a monster. The necessity of such a visible head or centre of authority underlies the idea of the Papacy.

3. Christ alone is the Head of His Church; Christ, present not in the flesh visibly and sensuously, but by His Spirit dwelling in every believer. All the members of that spiritual body are united to the Head by spiritual bonds, viz., faith and the spirit of grace. External rites performed by the hands of men in the flesh cannot unite a man to Christ; the efficacy of the sacraments depends

wholly on the faith of the recipient and the work of God's Spirit in him.

4. The use commonly made of certain Scriptures is proof of the oneness of the external visible church is not to be justified. John xvii: 11 and 21 teaches only a spiritual, not an external, visible, oneness—"As thou Father art in me, and I in thee," (surely spiritually) so "they may be one in us." This is not a visible, external, but a spiritual oneness. Nor in Romans xii: 5 and 1 Cor. xii: 12 etc., is the one body spoken of a visible, external organization. It is the company of spiritual men who are one with Christ the Head, and with one another by "being baptized in the one Spirit into one body," not in external rites, such as baptism with water and the laying on of episcopal hands. So also in Ephesians iv: 40 there is no reference to the visible church, the "one body" spoken of is like "the one Spirit, one Lord, one Father, one baptism, one God and Father," not an external, corporal and carnal, visible thing, but a spiritual reality.

II Query. Can a basis of union fairly acceptable to the leading Churches be devised?

I think not. But if acceptable to the Churches I do not think it would be acceptable to God.

1. The regular Baptists insist upon an external rite as essential to membership in the Church of Christ, viz: The Baptism of professed believers when adult by immersion under water. They cannot, therefore, unite in forming one Church with Christians who do not practice that rite.

2. Protestant Episcopalians, equally with Romanists, insist upon an external rite as essential to membership in the Church, nay to its very constitutions, viz: The laying on of Episcopal hands in confirmation and ordination. This Historic Episcopate they regard as "a sacred trust, which they may not betray," and as "being of the essence of the constitution of the Church of Christ." They therefore cannot unite with such Christians as take Holy Scripture alone as authoritative regarding the nature and constitution of the Church, and disdain to practice the rite, or to acknowledge the doctrine of Prelatic superiority in bishops as successors of the Apostles.

The Presbyterians, Methodists, and Congregationalist bodies have so much in common both in doctrine and practice that there seems to be no barrier to prevent their union. But I can conceive of no basis on which regular Baptists and High-Church Anglicans can stand alongside of these Churches.

III Query. To what extent and in what direction would the Presbyterian Church be justified in making concessions for the sake of such a union?

Anything in Presbyterian usage not essential may be conceded; nay, no such thing should be required in order to membership in the Church of Christ. On the other hand nothing without warrant and authority from Scripture can be made by the Church's authority essential to the constitution of the Church or obligatory on Christians. The Presbyterian Church, as now constituted, allows for difference of opinion and practice among its members in all matters not injurious or forbidden in the Word of God. I know not what more there is to concede. Certainly no office, ordinance, practice or usage of mere human device and institution can be made binding on Christians, or have conceded to it the place of an essential element in the constitution of the Church. "God alone is Lord of the conscience," and He has left us free from the commandments and traditions of men.

The future will undoubtedly see the nearer approach to each other of Evangelical Christians, and the removal of many misconceptions and prejudices, and of non-Scriptural practices which they have inherited from their God-fearing fore-fathers, this, however, will be the effect of more Scriptural and larger knowledge, and of increasing spirituality and devotedness among Christians. It may be also that God's people will be found closer together by opposition and perhaps persecution at the hands of Churches used for political ends, and of the avowed enemies of God and Revelation, when they find themselves able to deprive Christians of their liberties, and proscribe the religion of Christ.

The wish to spread the knowledge of the love of Jesus Christ is a strong overmastering impulse in every man, in every woman, who really knows and loves him. The absence of any kind of anxiety for the spread of the truth implies spiritual paralysis, if it does not imply actual spiritual death. The man who knows the happiness of "peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ," cannot but desire that other men should share it; and this desire, in its higher, its stronger, its more heroic form, is one of the greatest gifts of God to His Church.—*Canon Liddon.*