

practice, is there expressed with that clearness which a revelation from Heaven required. We are directed there to search and to judge for ourselves; for religion, to be profitable to the individual and acceptable to God must be the result of free inquiry and the determination of reason. To suppose then, that the gospel would authorise a *deprivation of this right*, or that such deprivation is necessary to its support and progress, is to *cast an unworthy reflection upon the gospel itself*; it is to suppose, that a religion which utterly disclaims all dominion over the faith and consciences of men, which is the most friendly to the essential rights of mankind, and which indeed, cannot exist where they are invaded, still requires to be supported by their destruction.

Besides, the very attempt, in matters dark and disputable, to prevent diversity of opinion, is vain and fruitless. It hath existed and must ever exist among all christians, *even those of the same society*, so long as human nature continues the same. The God of nature hath for wise purposes bestowed upon different men, different degrees of reason and understanding; so, that, if they think at all, they must necessarily think differently upon those dark mysterious subjects, which, however, are often reduced into the form of articles of faith. Nor can such difference cease, until the same *precise portion of intellect be imparted to every individual of the human race*. To attempt then to prevent diversity of opinions upon such subjects, is to oppose the very laws of nature, and consequently vain and fruitless.

But, in truth, that diversity of opinion, which most churches have been so sedulous to prevent, is neither any disgrace to a christian society, nor incompatible with its peace and good government; *unless it be disgraceful to men that they are men, and unless the christian dispensation is incompatible with the nature of man*. On the contrary, such diversity may be considered as most favourable to the progress of christian knowledge, and should also be equally favourable to christian peace, by teaching us, that dark and disputable points instead of being made articles of faith, and standards of orthodoxy, should rather be considered as trials of our christian temper, and occasions to exercise mutual charity; or, that those things alone should be held as essentials; which our Lord and Master, hath fully and clearly expressed, and which, therefore, cannot require the supposed improvements and additions of men. That christian unity, so strongly recommended to us, as the bond of perfection, does not consist in uniformity of opinion upon abstruse, metaphysical subjects but upon the great fundamentals of our religion, and in the unanimity of affections, love, peace, and charity, which is enjoined on the brethren in Jesus Christ, who all walk by the same rule, and acknowledge one and the same Lord.

But still it may be thought, that theological systems, or seminaries of faith are necessary to exclude from the bosom of a church, men whose principles might endanger its very existence. But doth experience, or do just observations upon human conduct justify such a belief? He will not be retarded in the accomplishment of his designs, or in the gratification of an avaricious appetite, though 19, 20, or 30,000 articles were presented to him. Trust me articles will never