

THE DUTIES OF CHRISTIAN CHURCHES TO EACH OTHER.

What is the duty of these denominational Churches of the Church? Just recognition. If we are bound to recognize Christ as Christians, we are bound to recognize the Church as a Church; and as we cannot alter the definition of a Christian so as to exclude any who really deserve that name, so no one has the right to alter the definition of the Church so as to exclude any organized body of Christians in whose persons Christ dwells. The Christian is a man united with Christ by the indwelling of his Holy Spirit. The Church is a body of such men, really such, and by credible profession such, who are organized for the worship of Christ and the diffusion of his Gospel. That is a Church. I do not see how you can alter that. It seems to be the scriptural idea of the Church, and therefore wherever there is an organized body of credible professing Christians, organized for Church purposes, there they have a right to be recognized by every other denominational Church as a true Church. There is involved in this intercommunion. As in the Apostolic Church, a man who was a member of the Church of Jerusalem, was a member of the Church of Antioch and of Rome. And then it is involved in the recognition of denominational Churches that the one and the other of them should regard as valid the sacraments and orders one of the other. If the validity of the sacraments depends upon the virtue of the man who administers them, then none are valid but those who have this supernatural power to render them efficacious.

But if it depends upon that being done that Christ demands, under the authority of the Church and with the sincere intention of obeying the command of Christ, then the sacraments of the Church are valid, and should be valid in the eyes of another. So for ordination. If it be as Rome has it, the confirmation by supernatural power, then no man is really ordained except by those who have the exclusive power of giving this. If ordination be analogous to an appointment to office, as a king or president appoints a man, then no man is a minister who has not been commissioned by due authority. But if, as we Protestants believe, I think I may safely say all Protestants do believe that the call of the ministers is by the Holy Ghost, and no Church can make a minister any more than it can make a Christian—then the office of the Church is simply to authenticate and testify to this divine call given by God. I know that there is a theory of the Church very different from this. It makes the form every thing; but if a thing external be essential for a man to be a Christian, then nothing external is essential to the being of the Church.

Another duty of these denominational Churches to each other is non-interference. The field of the Church is the whole world; it is great enough. They have no right to interfere with each other. Lastly, the duty of such Churches is co-operation, joining each other as brethren in Christ in promoting Christ's cause and kingdom in the world.

If these principles be correct, it is of the last importance that they should be carried into practice. If we are all of one mystical body, in a sense we don't yet understand, if all local bodies constitute a visible Church of Christ on earth, if all these bodies were bound to recognize each other as Churches, and their sacraments and orders as valid, and to avoid interference and to exercise co-operation, then instead of conflict we should have harmony; we should have mutual respect and confidence, and the whole Evangelical Church throughout the world, of every name and denomination, would appear in the sight of man, as it does in the sight of God, as one great sacramental host, marching in different corps, all under one great head, and all devoted to one great object.—*Extract from paper by Rev. Dr. Hodge.*