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The Reunion of Christendom

(Continued)

Examining the basic principle of unionism, "In essentials (fundamentals), unity—in non-essentials (non-fundamentals), liberty,"⁶⁾ we need to call attention to some additional points. We have to point out, in the first place, that in urging the acceptance of their principle upon us the union-men occasionally misapply a sound principle of theology. It is good theology to distinguish between fundamental and non-fundamental doctrines, the fundamental articles being those which form the basis of faith, the non-fundamental articles those "which are indeed found in Scripture but are not the foundation or object of faith in so far as it obtains forgiveness of sins and makes men children of God" (Pieper), those parts "of the Christian doctrine which one may be ignorant of or omit and yet be saved" (Hollaz). The doctrine of the angels, for instance, is non-fundamental. Our faith in the forgiveness of

6) The reader will recall how the unionists apply this motto. Here is another typical statement. The United Methodist Church (of England), in its Response to the Report of the Lausanne World Conference, declares: "Even so, we do not anticipate that all differences in conviction can be adjusted. We are persuaded that *many questions will need to be left open* as not of the essence of the Christian Faith, but as questions on which Christians, without disloyalty to Christ, their Lord, may agree to differ." For instance: "This Conference sorrowfully recognizes that the Table of the Lord which should unite Christians is precisely that which frequently divides them, and it joins in the earnest prayer 'that the differences which prevent full communion at the present time may be removed.' It is, however, sensible that such 'full communion' is only possible if a *large freedom is allowed* in respect to the interpretations to be put upon the Sacraments." Then, what are the essentials? "The way to union will be found not primarily in a unification of thought about Christ and His saving purpose and method, but in a faith in Christ Himself as Savior and Lord—a faith that issues in an experience of salvation which is the common possession of all Christian believers, and in an allegiance to Christ which shows itself in the whole-hearted doing of all that is believed to be His will." (See *Convictions*, edited by Rev. L. Hodgson, pp. 40, 42.) That is sufficiently indefinite.

sin does not rest on the fact that the good angels serve us and the evil angels harm us. This doctrine comforts us, warns us, calls for the exercise of faith, and is therefore an important doctrine, but it has not, by far, the importance of the fundamental doctrines. This distinction is a good one. It is of practical importance. The Christian teacher must know which things come first in his preaching and instructing. Our distinction also answers the question whether a religious body is a Christian Church or not. It may deny non-fundamental articles, but as long as it teaches the fundamentals, we are assured that there are believers in its midst; it is a Christian Church. (See F. Pieper, *Christliche Dogmatik*, I, p. 102. J. T. Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics*, p. 56.)

This distinction, however, does not mean that while there must be unity in fundamentals, there is liberty in non-fundamentals. The fact that one doctrine is of less importance than others does not and cannot mean that this doctrine may be ignored or denied. "It is self-evident," says Pieper, "that the purpose of distinguishing between fundamental and non-fundamental doctrines cannot be to grant a dispensation from accepting certain doctrines of the Bible. No man has this right; yes, it is expressly forbidden in Scripture." (*Op. cit.*, p. 89.) But now we find that unionists are doing this very thing. They use the legitimate distinction between fundamental and non-fundamental doctrines to break down our resistance against the wicked principle: In non-fundamentals liberty. They attempt to befuddle the mind of the people with the illogical argument: since men are saved in a church which denies certain non-fundamentals, why do you insist on the necessity of keeping these non-fundamentals pure instead of treating them as indifferent and unimportant? A classical example of such argumentation was furnished by the Great Elector, Frederick William I of Brandenburg, in his attempt to unite the Lutheran and the Reformed churches. After forbidding controversial sermons and the like, "the climax came when, Aug. 21, 1662, he ordered the Lutheran pastors to meet the Reformed ministers for a discussion of the question 'Whether there was anything taught in the Reformed Confession because of which the individual who believes and teaches it must be condemned by divine judgment or whether in the same there was anything denied or omitted the unacquaintance with which on the part of an individual will make it impossible for God to save him.'" "Again you see," comments Prof. Th. Hoyer, "the footprints of Calixtus and the Helmstedt theology: the fundamentals of religion are the doctrines necessary for salvation; where men agree on these, a union may be established. The Elector had worded his question adroitly, and the plan, of course, was evident. He asked: Can a member of the Reformed Church be

saved? When this had to be admitted, he drew the conclusion: Then the differences are unessential; unite on the fundamentals. Just like the present-day unionists the Elector would not or could not see the fallacy involved in this conclusion. In the matter of church union it is not at all a question of what or how much the individual must believe in order to be saved; there the point is: the Church is obligated by Christ to teach men to observe all things whatsoever He has commanded them. A union with a church which by its own plain confession does not teach all that Christ has commanded is disobedience to His Word. A move of that kind would be based on indifferentism." (*Proc. Syn. Conf.*, 1938, p. 26.)—It is a rather clumsy fallacy; to say that a doctrine is not of the first necessity is not saying that it is not necessary at all.

Dr. Walther wrote much on the matter of non-fundamentals. And he knew full well that there are true Christians who are in error regarding some non-fundamental articles. He was ready to bear with them in great patience. (We shall take this up once more in the final installment of this series, on the *Christian* reunion.) But he did not commit the fallacy of the Great Elector. He declared: "No man has the liberty, and to no man may liberty be given, to believe or teach differently from what God has revealed in His holy Word, whether the matters in question pertain to primary or to secondary fundamental articles of faith, to fundamental or non-fundamental doctrines, to matters of faith or matters of life, to matters of history or other things that are subject to human investigation, to important or apparently unimportant things." (*Lehre und Wehre*, 1868, p. 298. See the entire series of propositions, translated in *CONC. THEOL. MTHLY.*, XI, p. 298.) On page 112 of *Lehre und Wehre*, 1868, we have this statement of Dr. Walther: "Would men actually try to bring about peace by declaring a matter to be an open question simply because it does not concern a fundamental article of faith? Which man, which angel can give a dispensation from obeying God's Word? Is it not Antichrist alone who arrogates this right?"⁷⁾

A clear mind can easily grasp both propositions: 1. The articles of faith differ as to their importance; 2. The articles of faith

7) Cardinal Bourne, Archbishop of Winchester, writes: "Furthermore, it is never lawful to employ in connection with articles of faith the distinction invented by some between 'fundamental' and 'non-fundamental' articles, the former to be accepted by all, the latter being left to the free acceptance of the faithful. The supernatural virtue of faith has as its formal motive the authority of God revealing, and this allows of no such distinction." (*The Reunion of Christendom*, Marchant, p. 22.) At the Malines Conversations "an attempt to draw an abstract distinction 'between fundamental and non-fundamental articles' was turned down by the Roman Catholics." (*Ibid.*, p. 173.)—This does not contradict Walther's statement concerning Antichrist. Nor does it prejudice his case.

do not differ as to their binding force. Dr. Pieper could do it. "One must certainly distinguish between the articles of faith revealed in Holy Scripture. There are doctrines which every Christian must know and believe; saving faith cannot exist without the knowledge and acceptance of them. Then there are doctrines which one through weakness may fail to know; yes, concerning which he harbors errors and still may remain a Christian. This distinction is very important for answering the question who may still be a Christian. But when the question is what sort of unity in the faith the Lord demands, no distinction between doctrines may be made. Here the Lord says that *all* doctrines revealed in God's Word must be accepted by all." (*Proc. Syn. Conf., 1888, p. 10.*)⁸⁾

We shall have to point out, next, that the principle "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty" springs from, and operates with, doctrinal incertitude. Unionism does not want men to be certain of some of the teachings, of many of the teachings of their Church, and of their own teachings. In the atmosphere of unionism men have come to believe that the lack of conviction in the field of doctrine is a virtue. Unionism asks men to be sparing with "affirmations"; in essentials, yes; but in the realm of non-essentials as little of them as possible. In this realm uncertainty and doubt must rule.

Are we saying too much? The motto "made popular in the 'Reformed' branch of the Evangelical Reformed Church by its most famous theologian, Prof. Ph. Schaff, is: 'In essentials unity;

8) Dr. M. Graebner is equally clear. We read in *Proc. S. Nebr. Dist., 1939, p. 27 ff.*: "That is the way unionism began among the sects of our own country. . . . The question immediately arose, What are essentials and what are non-essentials? . . . We sharply distinguish between non-fundamental doctrines and open questions. A non-fundamental doctrine still remains a doctrine, a teaching, and while we do have a right to ascribe greater importance to some doctrines than to others, we have no right to make any difference in their authority. . . . To summarize our position as to true unity: 1. True union demands common adherence to all clearly revealed doctrines of the Holy Bible whether fundamental or non-fundamental. . . ." (*Proc. S. Nebr. Dist., 1939, pp. 27 f., 33, 37.*) — The fourth proposition reads: "True unity does not demand unanimity in open questions, that is, in matters not clearly taught in the Holy Bible." (P. 37.) In the discussion of "essentials and non-essentials" some have used the term "non-essential" as denoting matters left to the decision of Christian liberty. With these men we have no quarrel. In the article "Essentials for Church Unity" (*The Living Church, June 4, 1941*) the statement occurs: "The ancient Liturgies, the customs and traditions handed down through the centuries from the Fathers, these are dear to reverent souls, but if by sweeping them away we could really bring all Christians, or any considerable part of them, together in the unity of the Mystical Body of Christ, we could not in loyalty to our Lord hesitate." In such non-essentials there certainly is liberty. "It is not necessary that rites and ceremonies should be everywhere alike." Augsb. Conf., Art. VII. Form. of Conc., Art. XI, 5.

in things doubtful liberty; in all things charity.'” (*The Christian Century*.) “Schaff and Nevin, representing the mediational theology of Germany, of which Schleiermacher was the leader, . . . popularized the motto of Meldenius: *In necessariis unitas; in dubiis libertas; in omnibus caritas*—in things necessary unity; in doubtful things liberty; in all things love.” (*The Luth. Ch. Quart.*, 1942, p. 276.)⁹⁾ What is the meaning of “doubtful things,” which Schaff substituted for the original “*non-necessariis non-essentials*”? It cannot mean that in things in which Scripture is silent—open questions, ceremonies, etc.—Christian liberty obtains. Nor that on dark and doubtful passages of Scripture different interpretations are permissible. It did not take the prophetic voice of Meldenius to inculcate that. No, Schaff makes a distinction between the *doctrines* of the Bible and demands that some of them—the essentials—be accepted by all, but would have those in which, say, the Reformed and the Lutheran Churches differ called non-essentials or, preferably, doubtful. That must be his meaning; else his motto would be useless to the unitists. The context, too, shows that. For on page 645 we read: “Zwingli thought that differences in non-essentials, with unity in essentials, did not forbid Christian brotherhood. ‘Let us,’ he said, ‘confess our union in all things in which we agree. . . . There will never be peace in the churches if we cannot bear differences in *secondary points*.’” And those doctrines, the doctrine, for instance, of the Lord’s Supper, Schaff and *The Christian Century* and all the unionists call “doubtful things.”

We are not saying too much when we state that the unionists classify all those doctrines on which the Christian churches differ as “doubtful things.” They say it themselves. There is no room for doubt as to the Lordship and Saviorship of Jesus, but as for the other doctrines, Lord’s Supper, Baptism, Means of Grace, Inspiration, the Grace of God (limited or universal? *Sola gratia*, or *gratia infusa*?), Conversion, etc., the matter is doubtful; no man may speak with finality on these teachings; Scripture itself is not clear here; before God has, somehow or other, clarified these Scripture statements, one interpretation is as good as the other. We heard John Dury say: “Agreement in the essentials is sufficient and the differences should be tolerated until the Lord give further enlightenment.” We hear Charles S. Macfarland declare: “The fact is the last word was not spoken yesterday and will not be today. It is a vain search. . . . Let us have all the Creeds, for

9) Schaff writes: “On the origin of the sentence: *In necessariis unitas; in non necessariis (or dubiis) libertas; in utrisque (or omnibus) caritas*. This famous motto of Christian irenics, which I have slightly modified in the text,” etc. (*History of the Christian Church*, VI, p. 650.)

all the light they give, but let us not call them 'faith.' Let theology remain the queen of sciences, but perhaps the noblest achievement of the human intellect is the realization of its fallibility and frailty. . . . We shall not reach unity of faith by discussing *filioque* and *homoousion* with the patriarch of Constantinople or the difference between *ex opere operato* and *sola gratia* with the Committee of Archbishops or by reasoning on *hoc est corpus meum* with the Lutherans." (*Christian Unity in Practice and Prophecy*, p. 158 f.) Report of the Lambeth Conference, 1930: "With this penitence must be combined the humility in which each Church is willing for a change of mind in regard to its customary teaching in one respect or another. If these customary teachings are to be combined in the united Church, they will inevitably be to some extent reshaped in the process. But the humility required must go further; it must lead to a readiness on the part of each Church to admit that in some respects it may have been wrong." (*Op. cit.*, p. 372.)¹⁰ How much of our doctrine is true and certain? The unionist cannot say. Which Church is right? He cannot say. He says with Longfellow: "Lutheran, Popish, Calvinistic, all these creeds and doctrines three extant are; but still the doubt is where Christianity may be." And the unionists are ready to console themselves with the thought: "Perhaps all can be right, even though they differ. . . . 'There is no unalterable doctrine . . . no system of doctrine which shall be valid to all eternity.'" (*The Christian Century*, Feb. 10, 1937.)

10) The unitists are unable to make definite statements even on such an important point of doctrine as *Sola Gratia*. The pamphlet *The Theology of Grace* contains the report of the Theological Committee appointed by World Conference on Faith and Order, Lausanne, 1927. We read on page 27: "*Sola Gratia*. The Reformers emphasized the principle that salvation is due wholly to God's Grace in Christ, in opposition to self-righteousness and the doctrines of merits; the Roman Catholic Church has attempted to define more and more exactly the limits between Grace and human action respectively." Well, who is right? The report goes on: "We agree, however, that the marvel of human salvation by the Grace of God cannot be reduced to any precise intellectual calculation, and that it may be described alike as the sovereign activity of the Grace of God in Christ and as His awakening of man's spiritual powers to a life of personal freedom and responsibility." That means that this doctrine cannot be expressed in precise terms; the thing must remain hazy and uncertain.—The Report adds this thought: "Finally, in the course of our discussions it has become increasingly apparent that there are marked differences of emphasis and expression between different Churches on their formulation of the message of the Gospel concerning Grace. These differences have arisen in the course of history and imply to a certain extent differences of racial temperament, religious experience, and historical environment. We wish, therefore, to record our conviction that, provided the different Churches agree in holding the essentials of the Christian faith, such differences would form no barrier to union between them." Note that *Sola Gratia* does not belong to the "essentials" in which there must be unity; it is one of the "non-essentials," "the doubtful things."

Dr. Walther was not wrong when he said: "Even in circles of so-called believers people act as if they were shocked when they hear some one say: 'I have found the truth; I am certain concerning every doctrine of revelation.' Such a claim is considered a piece of arrogance. . . . The professors say warningly to their students: 'Never speak of the Christian doctrine in terms of finality.'" (*Law and Gospel*, p. 30.) Likewise *The Watchman-Examiner*: "Once we stood for certain definite principles and proclaimed them positively, and our message carried conviction. . . . Now we have come upon the blessed day of the 'open mind,' which means that we have no convictions any more, but opinions only; that is, that we hold our faith so lightly that we can easily let go of it and take hold of some other notion if the wind of popular favor changes; we are 'blown about by every wind of doctrine,' as the uncompromising Apostle says. . . . Among our scholars we have the scholar's hesitancy that prompts such uncertain utterances as these: 'I am inclined to believe the Virgin Birth,' etc." (See *Theological Monthly*, 1927, p. 302.)¹¹⁾

The doctrines on which the churches differ, say the unionists, belong to "the doubtful things" because the differences are due to different interpretations, and since one interpretation is as good as the other, since both are *human* interpretations, there can be no certainty of doctrine on these points. It would be wicked, they say, to invest one's interpretation with divine authority. The Reformed interpret the words: 'This is my body' differently from the Lutherans; hence the doctrine of the Lord's Supper must be classified as 'doubtful,' 'non-essential,' concerning which there need not be unity. Dr. A. Ray Petty declares: "The time has surely come for us to set aside our outworn divergencies and to discover our eternal agreements. . . . Jesus does not lend his support to any one type of interpretation. . . . Let us forget some things non-

11) K. Barth thus describes the doctrinal flabbiness inherent in the Reformed and modern Protestant theology: "There is no such thing as Reformed doctrine, except the timeless appeal to the open Bible and to the Spirit which from it speaks to our spirit. Our fathers had good reason for leaving us *no* Augsburg Confession, authentically interpreting the word of God, *no* Formula of Concord, *no* 'Symbolic Books' which might later, like the Lutheran, come to possess an odor of sanctity. They left us only *creeds*, more than one of which begin or end with a proviso which leaves them open to being improved upon in the future. The Reformed churches simply do *not* know the word dogma, in its rigid hierarchical sense. . . . The question of right doctrine cannot be opened up without the discovery and the acknowledgment of a great perplexity. Perhaps it is the greatest of all perplexities. Our disparagement of 'doctrine' is the fox's disparagement of the grapes. *Had* we something more essential and authoritative to say, *had* we a theology convincing to, and accepted by, definite and increasing groups of people, *had* we a gospel which we *had* to preach, we should think differently." (*The Word of God and the Word of Man*, pp. 220, 229 f.)

essential that have separated us." (See *Watchman-Examiner*, June 12, 1930.) The Lutheran Church has no right to charge the Reformed with false teaching on the Lord's Supper, says *The Luth. Ch. Quarterly*, 1942, p. 105 ff., since the Reformed interpretation may be just as good as the Lutheran interpretation: "The synods affiliated with the Synodical Conference have taken their stand unreservedly on the principle that there cannot and shall not be any altar or pulpit fellowship with members of the Reformed faith; for the peculiarities of the Reformed Confessions are looked upon, not as a possible understanding of the Scriptures different from the Lutheran interpretation, but as a perversion of Scriptural truth. . . . The Lutheran Church differs from the Reformed Church in its interpretation of doctrine; in the opinion of the Missouri theologians, the Reformed interpretation departs from the Word of God, and any kind of fellowship whatsoever with false doctrine, they maintain, is forbidden by God and detrimental to the Church. . . . When these theologians speak of false doctrine, they, of course, assume that their own interpretation of the Bible is absolutely free from error." The idea is that no man can be sure that he understands Scripture correctly so long as others understand the passage differently. Since Calvin interprets John 3:16 as teaching limited grace, our understanding of it as teaching universal grace may be wrong. Hence all the distinctive doctrines belong to the "doubtful things," concerning which there must be liberty. Dr. Walther describes the situation exactly: "What a long list of doctrines which they allege are not clearly and unmistakably revealed in Scripture! But the principle that Scripture contains doctrines of faith which are not clearly and unmistakably revealed and must therefore be counted as open questions inevitably leads not only to unionism and syncretism, but also to thoroughgoing skepticism and indifference in doctrine, even to the most shocking unbelief. . . . What is the language of the unionists, all the way down the line to the most rabid unbelievers, when they are confronted with the letter of God's Word? 'Yes,' they say, 'those words are indeed written, but who will incontrovertibly prove to me that your or my exposition is the correct one? Does not all strife in Christendom arise out of human interpretation?'" (See *CONC. THEOL. MONTHLY*, 1939, p. 833.)

What of this theory that a lot of our doctrines are vague and hazy, uncertain and doubtful, and that the attitude of him who is certain of the truth of his teaching smacks of presumption and self-conceit? St. Paul did not hold this theory. He admonished Timothy: "Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of" (2 Tim. 3:14), and he asked the preachers to "hold fast the faithful word" (Titus 1:7) and wanted the Colos-

sians to be "established in the faith, as ye have been taught" (Col. 2:7). And Luther held with Paul: The word, which is "faithful," πιστός, certain, reliable, produces not doubt, but certainty in the Christian. "*Homo est certus passive, sicut Verbum Dei est certum active*. . . . Faith is, and must be, a standfast of the heart, which does not waver, flutter, quake, shake, or doubt, but stands fast and is sure of its case" (III:1887). St. Paul believed in affirmations and assertions. Titus 3:8: "These things I will that thou affirm constantly" ("Concerning these things speak with confidence"). And Luther believed in affirmations and assertions. "Not to believe in assertions is not the character of the Christian mind; nay, he must delight in assertions, or he is not a Christian. . . . I speak of this that those things must be firmly asserted which God has revealed to us in Holy Scripture. . . . Allow us to be assertors and to study and delight in assertions, and do *you* favor your Skeptics. . . . The Holy Spirit is not a skeptic" (XVIII:1675 f.). "We are sure," says the Lutheran Church, "concerning our doctrine and confession," sure concerning the *distinctive* doctrines of the Lutheran Church. (Preface, Book of Concord, p. 21.)

To take a different attitude would be saying that Scripture is not reliable in many of its doctrinal statements. It would be saying that Scripture is not a clear book. It would be upholding the Popish claim that Scripture is obscure and in need of the interpretation of men. No, we are sure concerning our doctrine and confession and will not become guilty of the blasphemy of saying that certain doctrines of God's Word cannot be held with assurance. To be sure, your and my "interpretation" may be fallible. But we are not offering you our "interpretations," but God's own word, the word as it stands, the clear word which needs no human interpretation. Dr. Pieper: "Die lutherische Kirche behauptet nur deshalb, im Besitz der gewissen ganzen Wahrheit zu sein, weil sie das gewisse ganze Wort Gottes annimmt, wie es lautet." (*Proc. Syn. Conf.*, 1888, p. 18.)

Have done with this foolish talk of doctrine resting on human interpretation! Do not tell us that because the Reformed theologians have a different interpretation from ours, we must begin to doubt the truth of our doctrine. We are telling you that our doctrine of the real presence is not derived from our "interpretation" but rests on the plain Scripture. We are not going to tell our people that they need something beyond the text itself to establish their faith.

We might also point out that the principle under discussion is not observed in earthly affairs. No scholar of any standing, no scientist, philosopher, statesman of any standing will wait till all have come to share his own views before he forms any definite

conclusion. The fact that a statesman finds much opposition to his plan does not, of itself, shake his convictions. But let that go! What is of supreme importance is that the principle under discussion makes all doctrines doubtful. You are saying that these "non-essential" doctrines, those on which the Lutherans and the Reformed differ, are doubtful because it is all a matter of different interpretation. Then what about that doctrine which the Lutherans and the Reformed consider essential, justification by faith without works? You cannot appeal to Rom. 3:28, because the Catholics have a different "interpretation" of that text. And what about the doctrine which the Lutherans and the Reformed and the Catholics consider essential, the deity of Christ? You cannot appeal to Rom. 9:5 and John 20:28. The Unitarian will say: I have found a different interpretation of these texts.

We agree with *The Lutheran Companion*, May 19, 1934, when it says: "Denominationalism is the embodiment of a sincere interpretation of Scripture." We certainly believe that the Reformed think they are right in their interpretation of the Words of Institution. But certainly their sincerity cannot change the text. Nor can it unsettle our conviction. And it is a monstrous proposal that we should give up our convictions—declare the distinctive doctrines doubtful—for the sake of mere external union. We heartily agree with what *The Lutheran Companion* says further on: "But to seek unity by ignoring real differences of convictions would be to violate individual consciences and a virtual denial of the truth; would confuse honest souls and be nothing but hypocrisy. To compromise one's honest convictions is worse than debasing the coin of the realm. If the latter destroys confidence and credit, the former destroys faith in the revelation of truth itself."

Is doctrinal incertitude, called for by the slogan "In things doubtful, liberty" a good thing? *The Lutheran Standard*, May 20, 1933, answers: "To work or worship with others with whom we are not one in doctrine is unionism, and those who practice unionism must be said to be 1. ignorant of doctrinal differences or 2. possessed of no firm convictions as to truth and error or 3. indifferent to divine truth. No. 1 is inexcusable. No. 2 is contrary to God's admonitions; see Eph. 4:14; 1 Cor. 14:7; Heb. 13:9. No. 3 is sin; see Rom. 16:17; Jude 3; 2 John 10, 11."

It is contrary to God's admonitions, and it inflicts untold harm on the Church. Dr. Walther: "The unionistic bodies imperil the Church more than the worst sect; for the worst sect at least acknowledges that nothing but the pure doctrine ought to be preached in a church; but unionism stands for the pernicious principle that man can never find out and possess the pure truth and that, consequently, contending for the truth is wrong." (*Epistle Postil*,

p. 77.) *The Living Church*, Oct. 26, 1938, asks men to heed the warning uttered "by Bishop Perry of Rhode Island, in the foreword of his book 'Affirmation': Christianity in our time is subject to two dangers. One is the frontal attack of skepticism, attempting to overthrow the faith. . . . The other menace, more deadly to the Church and proceeding from foes in its own household, is an uncertainty of thought which undermines the foundations of belief." The Church needs men who stand up for the truth and certainty of all Scripture doctrines and will not permit any of them to be treated as doubtful. "Oh, for that fire of deep, honest conviction which burned in the hearts of our fathers and made them love and cherish the doctrines of the Bible as an immovable and everlasting foundation! Their firm conviction amounted to a consuming passion for the sacred teachings, which would not entertain the thought of a compromise with the gainsayers. Where you have such staunch convictions, unionism does not find a fertile soil." (Dr. W. Arndt, in *Theological Monthly*, 1926, p. 326.)

The motto "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty" is, finally, the voice of indifferentism. Doctrinal indifference, which goes hand in hand with doctrinal incertitude, "equalizes all religions and gives equal rights to truth and error." (See Webster's Dictionary.) It declares the doctrinal differences of the Christian churches to be unimportant and grants men the right to reject or accept this or that teaching without prejudice to their standing in Christian theology. And unionism is essentially indifferentism. Dr. Pfotenhauer states: "Das Wesentliche des Unionismus ist, dass man Lehrunterschiede gering einschätzt und grundsätzlich den Unterschied zwischen Wahrheit und Irrtum aufgibt." (*Lutheraner*, 1936, p. 339.) And Dr. M. Reu wrote in *Kirchliche Zeitschrift*, June, 1939: "Until his dying day Melancthon undoubtedly held to the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper, even though he was ready to unite with Calvin in one church. That is often the case in unionism, for by entering such a union an individual need not give up his own convictions, but merely tolerates another viewpoint. *Doctrinal indifference is both the root and the result of unionism.*" What do the unionists say to this charge? "F. J. Stahl, in his famous book *Die Lutherische Kirche und die Union*, speaking of the Prussian Union, has probably found the shortest definition for church union: 'uniting of Lutheran and Reformed churches by treating their doctrinal differences as differentials (declaring their doctrinal differences to be a matter of no importance or non-essential).'" (Dr. J. H. C. Fritz, *Religious Unionism*, p. 3.) And Stahl remained in the Union, held office in it, and insisted that the Lutheran Church must not leave the Union! Are the unionists indifferentists? Hear their

answer: "In non-essentials, liberty!" The distinctive doctrines are indifferentials! They may be waived!

For that matter, doctrine in general is an indifferential. "I would be glad," said the Federal Council president Cadman, "to see a holiday given to all theological speculation for fifty years." "A plague on all your doctrines," says Edwin Lewis, "is on occasion an understandable enough exclamation," and he speaks of "The Church's debt to heresy." (*The Faith We Declare*, pp. 146, 164.) C. S. Macfarland: "The way of Christian unity is so simple. . . . The Master elaborated no *corpus confessionum* of truth, no exact or exacting subtleties of doctrine, etc." (*Op. cit.*, p. 321.) *The Laymen's Foreign Missions Inquiry* asks the churches to get "away from sectarianism toward unity and co-operation, away from a religion focused upon doctrine toward a religion focused upon the vital issues of life; the exact formulation of doctrinal phrases will have less significance." And "it is clearly not the duty of the Christian missionary to attack the non-Christians' systems of religion." (See Macfarland, *op. cit.*, pp. 239, 246.) No *corpus confessionum*! No *lex doctrinae*! Union not by way of oneness in doctrine, but by way of "allegiance to Christ in the wholehearted doing . . . of His will." (See footnote 6.) In popular language, "No creed but Christ!" Is not life more important than doctrine? Why, even a Lutheran Church periodical protests against the statement that doctrine is the chief concern of the Church. "A synod which says that 'doctrine is the most important matter in the Church' and that 'indoctrination is her chief concern,' fails in the realization of the whole will of God." (*The Lutheran Church Quarterly*, 1942, p. 112.)

So, even the essentials do not mean everything; and when they get to the non-essentials, the slogan is: these doctrinal differences do not mean a thing. They do not form a bar to the reunion of Christendom. It is the duty of the Christians to ignore them. A crime was committed when the Church split on the question of the Real Presence; Verbal Inspiration is not so important that disagreement on it should keep churches apart. The Bishop of Winchester, Dr. F. T. Woods, wants the Christians "united in one organism, holding a common faith, united in the fundamentals, but allowing, and gladly allowing, very wide divergencies in secondary matters. . . . We are compelled to construct the framework of a reunited Church in which, through mutual self-denial and forbearance, room is made for our divergencies in reasonable proportion, but in which the members are drawn together in a unity which far transcends these divergencies." (Marchant, *The Reunion of Christendom*, pp. 108, 131.) You must get rid of these differences by ignoring them, said Peter Ainslie, head of the Christian Unity

League. "We can never reach Christian unity by discussing doctrinal differences. We can resolve doctrinal differences, if it is necessary to resolve them, only by affirming and practicing Christian unity. Doctrine is not prior to unity, but unity takes precedence over doctrine." And for that sentiment Editor C. C. Morrison praised him highly. (*Christendom*, 1935 [Autumn], p. 5.)

Get rid of this unnecessary baggage, says Georgia Harkness. "We must span the widest theological differences to express our common faith. . . . It is noteworthy that both the Twelve and the Seventy were little democratic fellowships, entrusted with a burning message, but unencumbered with superfluous physical or creedal baggage." (*The Faith By Which the Church Lives*, pp. 10, 118.) The Federal Council, the rallying point of the unionists in America, comes up to these specifications. It has cast off this superfluous creedal baggage. In its midst not only the distinctive teachings of the Protestant churches are treated as indifferentials, but also the difference between the conservatives and the modernists. Its Secretary Emeritus says so. "It is interesting to note the essential unity in the Federal Council between men known as modernists and those who are known as conservatives, excluding, of course, the violent extremes in both directions. . . . One of the most striking experiences has been the constant unity of these diverse elements. In the Council, on its executive and administrative committees, have sat side by side theologically liberal and theologically conservative members." (Macfarland, *op. cit.*, pp. 99, 156.) *Kirchliche Zeitschrift*, 1943, p. 57, is fully justified in speaking of the "Federal Council's constitutional indifference over against all doctrinal, even strictly fundamental Biblical truths." Unionism is the incarnation of indifferentism.

The thoroughbred unionist wants doctrine and doctrinal discussions reduced to a minimum. He considers the time spent on studying doctrinal differences with a view toward removing them as time wasted; for these minor differences, he says, are not a bar to the reunion of Christendom. What did Peter Ainslie say? And Cadman? And the pity is that this impatience of doctrinal discussions is found also in Lutheran circles. Years ago a writer in *The Lutheran Observer* voiced a protest against holding a "doctrinal conference"; he was opposed to studying the Augsburg Confession article by article, "as though full unity in doctrine were necessary"; "the thing now in order would be a conference for practical fraternal co-operation." (See *Lehre und Wehre*, 1888, p. 84.) And in *The Lutheran* of Jan. 20, 1943, we read: "The writers of this page" (Oscar F. Blackwelder and Ralph W. Loew) "believe the time for theological debate among Lutherans is far, far past. We hold that it is lack of intellectual poise to fail to see

the unity which now exists among Lutherans." 12) — This antipathy to "theological conferences" is a clear symptom of the unionistic indifferentism. It is the logical application of the principle "in non-essentials, liberty."

It is not surprising that the indifferentists like the phrase "petty differences" (see statement at the beginning of this study) in denouncing those who insist that the agreement in the saving doctrine must be made the basis of the reunion of Christendom. We can well understand that men who hold that these doctrinal differences concern "non-essentials" have no patience with those who hold out for full agreement. C. M. Pfaff of old had no patience with them. He said that "the doctrinal differences between the Lutheran and Reformed Churches amount to a mere war of words." *The Lutheran Companion* of April 7, 1938, declared: "There are those who have begun to quibble about the words used in this 'testament' and about 'spiritual presence,' 'in, with, and under.'" E. S. Jones: "I was once pleading with a great crowd of Hindus and Moslems to see this living Christ, when I was flanked by the Christians. Before the great crowd of non-Christians they insisted on the literalness of the words, 'This is My body,' and they did it with much vehemence and bad temper. It all seemed so wooden! I could not help feeling that we were haggling over a statement about the literal body of Christ while the real Body of Christ was being torn to pieces before the non-Christians!" (*The Christ On Every Road*, p. 148.) *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 1939, p. 259, describes the unionistic indifferentists thus: "In these days of lax thinking we often hear the exhortation: 'Don't quibble over non-essentials. Preach the Gospel, and don't be captious over unimportant details.'" *Lehre und Wehre*, 1871, p. 2, quotes men as saying: "Es handelt sich nur noch um ganz subtile Differenzen"; "um der 'vier Punkte' willen zu streiten, ist mikrologische Haarspalterei." But bear in mind that these terms, "subtle differences," "micrological hairsplitting," "trivialities" are employed also in connection with very essential matters, with the

12) The sentence preceding the one quoted is: "One of our Washington colleagues asked this question at the close of Dr. Ralph H. Long's address [on the National Lutheran Council], 'Where do you suppose the priest and the Levite were going when they passed the broken and robbed man on the road to Jericho in Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan?' Our colleague thought they were perhaps headed for a theological conference to draw up some 'articles of agreement.'" — We might as well give also the statement preceding this one. "Since the only generation we have is the present, we see no reason for delaying an aggressive move for organic union within the framework of the Council. *If our fathers had the right to separate, their sons surely have the moral right to unite.* Why must certain ultraconservatives who 'are not ready' determine the speed of this movement?" We have not the time to analyze the sentence we italicized.

Lord's Supper, with Inspiration, etc. H. L. Willett: "The controversies over the inspiration of the Scriptures . . . creation or evolution . . . the meaning of Baptism . . . are ceasing to be counted worthy of causing divisions among the friends of Jesus. There is a growing sentiment that, if God is really concerned about matters of that nature, he is a trivial God." (See *The Christian Century*, Jan. 27, 1937.) The question of Inspiration a triviality? Even Lutherans speak in this strain. Prof. T. A. Kantonen: "Scriptural theology will not quibble over such questions as whether the Bible is the Word of God or contains the Word of God." (*The Lutheran Church Quarterly*, 1934, p. 114.) — *The Lutheran Herald*, Jan. 26, 1934, speaks of "straining at the gnat" and the article "A Common Denominator for Unity" (March 9, 1943) complains: "We will continue with our conferences, quibbling over correct ways of expressing our faith. . . . We must have our organizations, and they must be built upon distinctive articles of some kind or other in order that they may have a way of perpetuating themselves." *The Lutheran Standard*, Jan. 16, 1943: "Brush aside hairsplitting philosophies of doctrinal theology." "Dr. T. O. Burntvedt, president of the Lutheran Free Church, told the American Lutheran Conference: 'There is no Church where the differences which do exist are more magnified.'" (*The Lutheran*, Dec. 2, 1942.) — "Our petty divisions seem pitiful." "Our minor differences are not fundamental, moral, and religious differences." Etc. Etc. Now, if a man really looks upon the distinctive doctrines as non-essentials, he will be compelled to use the harsh language noted. But then we are compelled to characterize his attitude with the harsh term "indifferentism."

Indifferentism is opposed to polemics. Naturally so; for if the doctrine in question is a matter of liberty or of no moment, it would be morally wrong to engage in a controversy simply because somebody happens to disagree with you. And so unionism, which is constitutionally indifferentism, frowns upon, and anathematizes, doctrinal controversies. In unionistic society it is bad form to have polemics, to unmask and denounce false teaching. Within the Federal Council the conservative is not supposed to antagonize the Modernist. Why, not even the teachings of the pagan religions should be made the subject of controversy; much less may one attack the brethren for their "false teaching" on such minor matters as the Lord's Supper, Inspiration, Conversion, etc.

Controversy, they say, is an evil thing, and they like to give it bad names. Dr. Adolf Keller reported on the World Conference at Lausanne in this wise: "A large part of the time is given to devotional exercises, and it is deeply felt that unity is perhaps better prepared by common prayer than by the forging of common

dogmatic formulae whose elaboration is not seldom done in a tempest of *rabies theologica*." The keynote in Bishop Brent's opening address at Lausanne was: "Conference is self-abasing; controversy exalts itself. Conference is a measure of peace; controversy a weapon of war. Conference looks for unities; controversy exaggerates differences." (See *Theological Monthly*, 1928, p. 40 f.)

In days gone by, men took doctrinal differences seriously, but such "theological disputes belong to a kindergarten stage of religion. We ought to outgrow it and reach a matured religious consciousness which will take fundamental truth for granted and compel us to go forward to a higher stage of action. Love is the solution of world problems." (*The Living Church*, Feb. 28, 1931.) Twesten was glad that his age had outgrown the kindergarten stage, that, "while in the seventeenth century Paul Gerhardt resigned his office rather than to refrain from condemning" the Reformed errors, "there will be hardly any one found in Prussia nowadays for whom the Electoral edicts of 1661 and 1662 would require to be renewed" (Herzog, R. E., 16, 676. See the article in *Theological Monthly*, 1907, p. 107 ff.: "In Behalf of Paul Gerhardt and the Elenchus"). And what is the situation today? Charles Augustus Briggs: "Polemics, in the main, was unfruitful of good and only productive of evil. . . . Thus Polemics became discredited, and in modern Theology has been well-nigh abandoned. . . . It is not probable that Polemics will be much cultivated in this generation, for there is a remarkable lack of enthusiasm for the differences between the religious bodies among scholars really competent to distinguish them properly and to maintain them." (*Theological Symbolics*, p. 19 f.)¹³ — The *Christian Union Church* near Nevada, Mo., has this motto over the pulpit: "Christian Union without Controversy." It should be inscribed in all unionistic churches.

They denounce controversy as wicked and harmful and praise "tolerance" as a great Christian virtue and the panacea for the ills of the disunited Church. If there must be "liberty in non-essentials," differing views must, of course, be tolerated, and if all practiced this mutual toleration, the reunion of Christendom would naturally be effected overnight. Hear Zwingli plead for tolerance. "There will never be peace between the churches if we cannot bear differences on secondary points." In the Age of Enlightenment,

13) Dr. Briggs naturally set great store by the slogan: "In non-necessariis, libertas." In an article on the origin of this axiom, in *The Presbyterian Review*, 1887, p. 496, he writes: "This sentence of wisdom and of peace has long been the watchword of Protestant Irenics. It is the motto of the Evangelical Alliance. . . . Baxter writes, Nov. 15, 1679: 'I once more repeat to you the pacificator's old despised words, Si in necessariis sit unitas; in non-necessariis, libertas; in utrisque, caritas, optimo certe loco essent res nostrae.'"

when rationalism was in flower, "tolerance" was the universal fashion.¹⁴ And it has not gone out of fashion. Tolerance is demanded in the name of love. Bishop Woods enforces his demand that "room be made for our divergencies" thus: "And this because we have tasted of the love of Christ." And on page 144 f. of *The Reunion of Christendom* Alfred E. Garvie declares: "If there is any useful and hopeful discussion of Christian Reunion, there must be an open mind allowed to others by those whose minds may be closed on these questions by their distinctive convictions. . . . If under the providence of God, with the guidance of His Spirit, different types of creed . . . have emerged, the conclusion is forced on us that uniformity cannot be insisted on, that liberty must be granted, that charity must be exercised." The Evangelical Methodist Church of France declares: "We believe that the Christian spirit of tolerance and brotherhood ought to make Intercommunion possible in all the Evangelical Churches." (See *Convictions*, p. 46.) Of the nineteen barriers to the reunion of Christendom enumerated by the January, 1926, *Christian Union Quarterly* the seventh is "Lack of theological liberality."

Bear in mind that the unionists are not asking for the tolerance which the *State* exercises in its political wisdom, but want the *Church* to grant equal rights to what may be wrong and what may be right. They take the position of the Prussian Elector who pleaded for "*mutua tolerantia* und *Vertraeglichkeit*" and favored those theologians in the Lutheran and in the Reformed Church who "have proved that the *dissensus* in the Evangelical parties is not fundamental and that a *tolerantia ecclesiastica* might well be established." (*Theological Quarterly*, 1907, p. 112.) Note also that when they demand toleration with respect to non-fundamentals, non-essentials, they have in mind what the old Lutherans call fundamentals, essentials. Why, we hear enough voices in the unionistic camp insisting on toleration for any kind of religious

14) J. P. Koehler, *Lehrbuch der Kirchengeschichte*, p. 506: "Die Aufklaerung des 18. Jahrhunderts hatte folgende Merkmale: 1. Einseitige Wertschaetzung der Vernunft. . . . 3. Auflehnung gegen die Autoritaet der biblischen Offenbarung, woraus die Umsetzung von Glauben in Moralitaet und kirchlicher Indifferentismus (Toleranz) folgten." Fr. Uhlhorn, *Gesch. der Ev.-Luth. Kirche*, II: "Der Unterschied zwischen dem Christentum und anderen Religionen wurde fuer gleichgiltig erklart. An der Einweihung der Synagoge zu Seesen nahmen lutherische Superintendenten und Prediger, ein reformierter Geistlicher und katholische Priester teil. Das war wohl der Gipfel der Toleranz. Es ist nicht zu bestreiten, dass die Aufklaerung durch die Forderung der Toleranz sich unvergaengliche Verdienste erworben hat, aber diese Toleranz wurde zuletzt zur voelligen Gleichgiltigkeit gegen jede besondere Religion." (P. 66.) "Friedrich der Grosse ist der grosse Vertreter des Toleranzgedankens, den er selbst in die Worte gefasst hat: 'In meinem Lande kann jeder nach seiner Fassung selig werden,' aber diese Toleranz hat ihre Wurzel in der religioesen Gleichgiltigkeit des Koenigs." (P. 28.)

belief. William T. Ellis describes the situation thus: "A *Charming Heresy*. In our day's noisy intellectual circles it is very much the fashion to cry aloud the glories of tolerance. Some religious leaders even profess that tolerance is the fundamental virtue. It is the vogue to hold meetings of Protestants, Catholics, and Jews—and sometimes Hindus and Moslems and Confucianists are added—to sound aloud the pre-eminence of tolerance. According to this amiable cult, no one should ever try to change anybody else's belief. Missionary leaders declare that Christianity should not seek converts from other faiths, but should merely promote a better understanding of them."

Should one tolerate false doctrine? "False doctrine"—the unionists do not like that term, seldom use it. Where we speak of false doctrine, they speak of divergencies, different views, different interpretations, different emphases: and the other man's view is as good as yours. *Gleichberechtigung der Richtungen!* They will even say that we should be glad of these divergencies.¹⁵⁾ Tolerance, then, would hardly be the proper term to use. We tolerate what is not so good but cannot well be avoided. The unionists, however, ask "tolerance" for that which in their view is good or may prove to be good. But let them use whatever word they wish, we know what they mean: they hold the fight for "pure doctrine" to be wicked intolerance. They make the difference in doctrine an indifferential. And they praise this indifference as a virtue.

That is "the alarming indifference to the Word of God as it manifests itself in the mighty movements to unite all churches into one large body." (Dr. Behnken.)

It is not a Christian virtue. It is an evil thing. It is disobedience to God's word and command and therefore outright sin. Recall the statement of *The Lutheran Standard*: "Those who practice unionism must be said to be 1. ignorant of doctrinal differences or 2. possessed of no firm convictions or 3. *indifferent to truth*. . . . No. 3 is sin. See Rom. 16:17; Jude 3; 2 John 10, 11." Would you say that Rom. 16:17 breathes doctrinal indifference? Does St. Paul say that it does not matter much what kind of doctrine would be

15) It is a good thing that the Roman Catholic Church has different views from ours. P. Althaus says so. "Die roemisch-katholische Kirche ist fuer uns auch eine besondere Gestalt der Kirche Christi, die ihre eigenen Gaben hat. . . . So begruendet die Erkenntnis des Nebeneinander individueller Gestalten auch fuer uns Duldung, mehr als Duldung, Freude an dem andern eben in seinem Anderssein." (Italics in original.) "Wir sind gewiss, dass die kommende Einheit nur so zustande kommen wird, dass die anderen auf ihrem Wege weitergefuehrt werden, nicht auf unseren uebertreten. Diese Aussicht begruendet Demut, Geduld, Toleranz in dem Ringen mit den anderen." (*Theologische Aufsätze*, II, pp. 116, 120.)

taught to his congregations? St. John, too, will not have his children display a careless, indifferent, neutral attitude as to what is preached in their pulpits and taught in their churches. He admonishes them: "Try the spirits. . . . Many false prophets are gone out into the world." 1 John 4:1. And St. Jude exhorts them to "contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints," v.3. For how much of the faith must the Christians earnestly contend? The Lord said: "Observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." Matt. 28:20. Not a word here about the principle that with regard to essentials care must be observed, but with regard to non-essentials liberty and indifference must rule. God's Word forbids us to tolerate any doctrinal error. It does not command us to shun controversy as something unbecoming the Christian. "Reprove, rebuke!" 2 Tim. 4:2. "Holding fast the faithful word . . . convince," convict, rebuke, "the gainsayers!" "Rebuke them sharply!" Titus 1:9-13. Tolerance of error has no place in the Christian Church. "In the State it is in place; there patience must be exercised, and you must go easy. . . . But in the Church there must be no yielding to any sect, no yielding of one tittle of Scripture." (Luther, V:398.) "*Non valet neutralitas in regno Dei.* Matt. 12:30." (Bengel.) All long-suffering with the weak indeed, but no toleration of error!

St. Paul says: Hold fast the faithful word! Hold fast the sound doctrine! (Tit. 1:9.) And the unionist says: A plague on all your doctrines! — Indifferentism is not in accord with God's will. It is sinful.

Furthermore, indifferentism violates the sense of truth created by God's Word in the believing heart. Truth is intolerant of error, and the Christian, who loves the truth of God's Word, will not tolerate any infringement of it. He loves the truth (Zech. 8:19) and hates the lie (Ps. 31:6; 119:104, 113). He loves the truth as it is revealed in God's Word and cannot bring himself to suppress or ignore any teaching of it. He trembles at God's Word when it presents essentials, when it presents non-essentials. One little word of Scripture means more to him than all considerations of carnal wisdom and the alleged advantages of a false peace.¹⁶⁾ But this spirit of truth cannot live in the unionistic atmosphere. Indifferentism deadens the Christian sense of truth, of loyalty to Scripture.

This indifferentistic tolerance sins against Christian charity, too. It is not Christian love when you refuse to rebuke the erring

16) Dr. Walther: "We do not separate ourselves from the errorists because we consider ourselves better than they. . . . But we consider God's Word as more worth than heaven and earth and would rather lose the friendship of all than lose this." (*Proc. Iowa District, 1879, p. 39.*)

and warn them against succumbing to false teaching. Dr. W. Koren, President of the Norwegian Synod, 1894—1910, made the axiomatic statement: "To our opponents we owe truthfulness, because we owe them love." And H. Sasse puts it thus: "We are serving neither our church nor any other church if we sink the teachings of our confessions in the deep sea of unionism which is today threatening to engulf entire denominations. Neither is it charity, at any rate not Christian charity, not New Testament charity, if one, in order not to hurt the feelings of the others, no longer makes an issue of truth or error." (From an article reprinted in *Kirchliche Zeitschrift*, Feb., 1938, p. 125.) Dr. Walther: "Ach, das ist nicht Lieblosigkeit, sondern die wahre Liebe. If a scoundrel had poisoned the wells in our neighborhood and people came running to sound the alarm, would we say: What matters a little arsenic? . . . Why, these people are our best friends." (*Proc. Iowa Dist.*, 1879, p. 38 f.)¹⁷⁾

The tolerance lauded by the unionists is anything but a Christian virtue. William T. Ellis continues his discussion of it thus: "The defect in it [the demand for tolerance] is that it ignores the nature of truth and the clear commands of the Bible. Nor does it sensibly appraise the nature of tolerance; which, after all, is a second-rate virtue. Loyalty to truth necessarily takes precedence of it. Tolerance is only a virtue for those who first of all sincerely believe something. Tolerance, as a moment's clear thinking makes plain, is only a handmaiden of truth; a subordinate virtue for persons possessed of convictions. In the cold light of common sense, the attempt to make a religion out of the negative virtue of tolerance is rather ridiculous." (See *Globe-Democrat*, Feb. 28, 1931.) Prof. G. W. Richards is a leader in the Evangelical Reformed Church, which is merging with the Congregational Christian Church, and this is what he thinks of this tolerance: "Much has been said in praise of tolerance, which often is rooted in indifference and not based upon a firm and even defiant adherence

17) We ought to hear a few more of such Lutheran pronouncements. *The Lutheran Herald*, Feb. 24, 1931: "Because all departure from the true doctrine of God's Word is sin, you make yourself by the practice of unionism a partaker in the sins of others. And not that alone, but you are also confirming them in their mistaken conviction that there is nothing dangerously wrong about what they believe and teach. . . . If their activities bear all the earmarks of sincerity and of a deep personal piety, that does not lessen, but rather increases, the harm to the Church which their false teachings will do, namely, by increasing by so much the power of their influence to lead men away from the truth in the points of doctrine in which they teach falsely." C. P. Krauth: "To go to the same table with those whom we know to be in error in regard to any truth which Christ has revealed, is not only to hold the truth of Scripture cheap, but to make such persons all the more settled in their error or indifferent to the importance of truth."

to truth as it is heard and proclaimed by one or another Church. . . . Church union by tolerance, without change of mind and heart, for the sake of a show of power consisting of numbers, wealth, and regimentation, and in the hope of thus winning the world, is a snare and a delusion. Such a union would be far worse than sincere and consistent division. For a mere sentimental and thoughtless toleration is evidence not of strength but of weakness. Perhaps the tolerance of Voltaire is more to be deplored than the intolerance of Calvin. Luther may have been further on the way to true union of the churches when he said to Zwingli: "You are of a different spirit from us" than Frederick the Great when he declared that every one should go to heaven in his own way." (See *Christendom*, 1939 [Spring], p. 267 f.) I. M. Haldeman: "The word 'toleration' must be cut out of the Church vocabulary. It is not a nice word. It is a word much used by middle-of-the-road men. It has in it always, no matter how much dissimulated, the crawling, creeping movement of surrender. It is, as a rule, the word of men who accept all sorts of treason against the Word of God, and then fight against every endeavor to repress that treason. It is a word under which conspiracy and treason have been hatched. . . . It is a word that is used again and again with that other word, 'interpretation.' To talk about the right of interpretation, to have any discussion about it, is simply playing the game of matching wits, or playing the fiddle while the penknife cuts and the fire burns." (*A King's Penknife*, p. 164 f.) — Religious toleration is a virtue when exercised by the State; when the Church grants immunity to false teaching, it becomes a crime.

And this sin of indifference is not a harmless sin. Its product is havoc and disaster. It plays havoc with the Christian doctrine. It may result in the loss of the whole body of the Christian doctrine. When a man applies the principle "In non-essentials, liberty," to one single unessential, he has broken down the authority of Scripture. And nothing but the grace of God can then keep him from applying it to all non-essentials and all essentials. Indifferentism is a cancerous growth which inevitably spreads. "Wer einmal indifferent ist," says Walther, "der geht immer weiter." Necessarily so; "when error is admitted into the Church, it will be found that the stages of its progress are always three. It begins by asking toleration. . . . Indulged in this for a time, error goes on to assert equal rights. It is bigotry to assert any superior right for the truth. We are to agree to differ. . . . What the friends of truth and error hold in common, is fundamental. Anything on which they disagree is *ipso facto* non-essential. . . . From this point error soon goes on to its natural end, which is to assert supremacy." (Krauth, *The Conservative Reformation*, p. 195.) The

cancer grows in malignity. And in extent. "Es ist ein teuflischer Anlauf, so fordert, dass man solle etwas weichen und einen Irrtum zugut halten; damit er uns sucht also listiglich vom Wort zu fuhren. Denn wenn wir solches annehmen, so hat er schon Raum gewonnen und bald eine ganze Elle genommen, da ihm ein Fingerbreit gewichen waere, und so bald gar eingerissen." (Luther, IX:832.)

When the authority and majesty of Scripture is weakened or destroyed, entrance is given to any and all error. It is because of this, that Luther uses such strong language in characterizing the unionist: "A teacher who will condone error and still claims to be a true teacher is worse than an outspoken Enthusiast and does more harm through his hypocrisy than a heretic." (XVII:1180.) And J. G. Machen declares: "The calamity [of Marburg] was due to the fact that Luther (as we believe) was wrong about the Lord's Supper; and it would have been a far greater calamity if, being wrong about the Supper, he had represented the whole question as a trifling affair. . . . Such indifferentism would have been more deadly than all the divisions between the branches of the Church." (*Christianity and Liberalism*, p. 50.)

It is not well that leaders of the Church belittle the danger and derisively speak of "hypothetical forebodings of what might happen." Indifferentism, letting down the bars at one point, imperils the whole body of doctrine.

And thereby brings disaster upon the Church. The Church is not served when false doctrine is granted equal rights with the pure doctrine. They do not build up the Church who give the errorists a free hand. Men who refuse to combat false doctrine are not benefactors of the Church. The true friends of the Church are those who are ready to take upon themselves the odium of theological controversy. "Let us picture to ourselves as vividly as we can the situation that would have been created in the early Church, when errorists like Arius, Nestorius, and Pelagius arose, if men like Athanasius, Cyril, and Augustine had not earnestly opposed them. . . . Again, suppose Luther, after learning the truth, had not entered into conflict with the Papacy, what would have happened? Christianity would have remained under the soul-tyranny of the Roman Antichrist, and we should all still be subjects of it." (Walther, *Law and Gospel*, p. 350.)¹⁸⁾ We must quote

18) In *Lutherische Kirche* H. Sasse quotes a similar statement from Walther's *Epistelpostille*, p. 468, and adds: "Vielleicht ist die Zeit nicht fern, wo sehr viele Christenmenschen, die uns heute noch nicht verstehen, begreifen werden, dass dies Feststehen der lutherischen Kirche, diese scheinbar dogmatische Borniertheit ein Segen fuer die ganze Christenheit gewesen ist."—We read in the *Proceedings of the Western District*, 1870, p. 55: "Wahrlich auf dem entschiedenen und fortwaehren-

one more statement from *The Lutheran Herald*, Feb. 17, 1931, which shows why the Church cannot thrive in the unionistic atmosphere. "Among all the dangers which threaten the existence of God's true Church on earth unionism is one of the greatest. And that for several reasons. In the first place, because comparatively few recognize it as a danger. . . . And furthermore, because it rests on a principle which in its very nature threatens to deprive the Church of the truth of God's Word, upon which the Church is built as on its divine foundation. It is founded on indifferentism, that is, indifference as to whether what is believed or taught is in full harmony with Holy Scripture or not. And this indifference, again, is a fruit of doubt as to the clearness and sufficiency of Scripture in all matters of saving faith. . . . 'If the perspicuity of the Bible and that certainty of faith which is built on God's clear Word are once brought into doubt, so that on account thereof it is considered a matter of small importance to be in full agreement in matters of faith, then it will not be long before one after another of the fundamental truths of Christianity are held in contempt and denied, and our people will for a time fill the churches of the Unitarians and the Universalists until they at last end in infidelism.' (V. Koren.)" ¹⁹⁾

Indifferentism saps the Church of her strength. The strength of the Church is derived from the Word of God, from the sacred teachings of Scripture. Therefore "this very determined, inexorable tenacity in clinging to the pure teaching of the divine Word by no means tears down the Church; on the contrary, it is just this which builds up the Church." (*Law and Gospel*, p. 28.) And it is just this indifference of unionism which weakens the Church. For every doctrine of Scripture which a church body treats as inconsequential, indifferent, neutral, that body loses just so much

den Zeugen und Predigen der Kirche ruht mehr Wohlgefallen und Segen Gottes als auf allen kirchenpolitischen Experimenten und schriftwidrigen Unionistereien. Oder was waere wohl aus der lutherischen Kirche in Amerika geworden ohne rechtglaeubige Synoden? Haetten sich vor fuenfundzwanzig oder dreissig Jahren die paar Lutheraner mit ihrem Glauben in den Winkel gesetzt, so gaebe es heute hierzulande schwerlich eine rechtglaeubige lutherische Kirche." *The Proceedings* go on to show that the Lutheran Church, thus strengthened, exhibited great spiritual vigor.

19) Just by the way: It is not necessary that those who hold the Unitarian and Universalist beliefs join the Unitarian or Universalist Societies; they find a church home in those Protestant churches which have succumbed to indifferentism. *The Christian Century*, Sept. 24, 1941, points out that "the numerical growth of the Universalist denomination was early checked, chiefly perhaps by the increasing tolerance of orthodox bodies for the more generous doctrines of the liberals." While the Universalist Society has no representation on the Federal Council, churches which enjoy this representation gladly harbor Universalists. The same applies to Unitarianism.

of its spiritual vitality. And when indifferentism gets into its blood, it will die of anemia. In that condition it cannot perpetuate itself. It has nothing to transmit to its children. It is sterile. In the words of John Musaeus: "When such a union—based on indifferentism—claims to be a type of Lutheranism, it is a denominational neuter that cannot propagate its kind because there is no kind to be propagated." (See *Proc. Syn. Conf.*, 1938, p. 26.)²⁰⁾

As to the Lutheran Church, it cannot survive under indifferentism. Unionism digs the grave of Lutheranism. "Die Union ist," says Dr. E. Deneff in *Kirchenblatt*, Nov. 13, 1937, "wie die Geschichte zeigt, allemal das Grab der lutherischen Kirche." The unionistic union requires the Lutheran Church to yield up its distinctive doctrines and become a mongrel. That holds good with any Church. But on one point it is only the Lutheran Church which loses out in the unionistic deal. The Reformed bodies, in general, are characterized by doctrinal indifference. The Lutheran Church stands for doctrinal purity and exactitude. And on this point the Lutherans have everything to lose, the others everything to gain. "Die Union ist allemal das Grab der lutherischen Kirche. . . . Fuer die lutherische Kirche ist auf diesen Weltkirchen-Konferenzen nichts zu holen. Der lutherische Erzbischof von Finnland sagte: 'In dieser Welt-Konferenz stellt man die Glaubensfragen beiseite. Die lutherische Kirche hat viel von den Sekten der Reformierten gelitten, und eine Hebung des lutherischen Glaubensbewusstseins waere vonnoeten, aber diese Welt-Konferenz wird eine solche nicht geben. Ihr Programm verspricht der lutherischen Kirche nichts Gutes.'"

Again and again the gravediggers had been summoned to prepare for the burial of the Lutheran Church. That has been going on for four hundred years. In *Here We Stand*, p. 179 f., H. Sasse points out how four hundred years ago the Lutheran Church was sentenced to death for refusing to come to terms with the Pope; how in modern times she was told that unless she were willing to give up her irrational dogmas and unflexible belief in

20) It follows that honest controversy is the mark of a vigorous church, the abhorrence of polemics the symptom of spiritual decay. Krauth: "A church which contends for nothing either has lost the truth or has ceased to love it." John A. Broadus: "It must not be forgotten that religious controversy is inevitable where living faith in definite truth is dwelling side by side with ruinous error." Machen: "Indifferentism about doctrine makes no heroes of the faith." (*Loc. cit.*) *Watchman-Examiner*: "The periods of exciting religious controversy, like those in which Athanasius, Augustine, and Luther engaged, have been epochs of intense spiritual vitality." Even *The Christian Century* was constrained to say on Oct. 28, 1931: "It is the idea that church papers should skirt 'controversial issues,' that they should be written in a milk-and-water fashion free from any hint of an 'aggressive spirit,' that has reduced many a church paper to colorless sterility."

the Scriptures, she must die; and how the unionists kept telling her that unless she was ready to introduce altar fellowship with the Reformed, she will perish from the face of the earth. And the Lutheran Church still lives! But mark this: if and when she dies, it will be by her own hand. If she succumbs to the spirit of indifference, compromising the truth of God's Word in order to gain the good will of men, she has dug her own grave. Hear the warning cry of Werner Elert: "Should our several Lutheran churches sell the birthright of the pure preaching of the Gospel for all kinds of syncretistic pottage, they would not only be digging their own grave, but would also defraud Christendom of the message which God has given to us in trust for all the others." (*Allg. Ev.-Luth. Kirchenzeitung*, Nov. 18, 1927.)

This, then, is the Lutheran answer to the unionistic slogan: "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty," as given by Dr. W. H. Greever, editor of the *American Lutheran Survey*: "No part of the Lutheran Church can consistently practice unionism without disloyalty to the truth which it confesses and without unfaithfulness to the tasks which are specifically its own. . . . To concede any part of the revealed truth is to go against conscience and to become disloyal to truth, and to compromise it is to concede it. No part of the revealed truth may be conceded because of the unity of truth as well as because of the essential value of all truth." (See *Theological Monthly*, 1926, pp. 322, 324.) A Lutheran woman, writing in *The Farmer's Wife* (St. Paul, Minn.), gives the same answer: "When Lutheran Christians are criticized in these 'unionistic' days by their Protestant friends for their strict adherence to God's Word and are asked to join in forming one big united Church including all denominations, they show these friends how impossible and wrong that would be for them, for they would have to sacrifice clearly revealed truths of God's saving Word and thus prove faithless stewards of His sacred trust." TH. ENGELDER

(To be continued)

Huldreich Zwingli, the Father of Reformed Theology

II

In the doctrine of atonement Zwingli merely repeated the traditional language of the Church. Zwingli tells us that, long before he even heard of Luther, he learned from Thomas Wytttenbach, one of his teachers at Basel, that "the death of Christ is the sole price of the remission of sins" (III:544). This was nothing unusual, for such statements can be found in many Catholic writers before Luther. The eighteenth and nineteenth of Zwingli's Sixty-seven