Supplementary Readings

To be used with *The Shaping of American Congregationalism*

*Readings in the History and Polity of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches*
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Rev. Dr. Arlin T. Larson, editor
Learning about the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches is not easy. No comprehensive history has been written. Only a few of the founders remain active. No seminary offers a course tailored to it. Months or years of participation, informal contacts, and overhearing the scuttlebutt are usually required. The "Congregational History and Polity" course is designed to accelerate the learning curve by immersing the student in modern Congregationalism's traditions and practices, as well as in the more comprehensive Congregational story.

We see this as essential for seminarians seeking a firm foundation in the community they are preparing to serve. Equally important is educating the many ministers who come to Congregationalism from other traditions. Church members seeking a better understanding of their faith may also appreciate a package that brings widely scattered materials together.

The first volume, for instance, of *Readings in the History and Polity of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches* collects Congregational reflections of the nature of the church(es) as recorded in the *Congregationalist* magazine. The articles collected are neither comprehensive nor definitive; we are not even certain to what extent they are representative. What can, however, be said is that the authors are men and women active in the Association whose views the magazine's editors deemed worthy of distribution.

At the very least the readings collected inform the reader of the parameters of discussion within the NACCC. They will additionally provide an introduction to leaders of the Congregational way and hopefully some insight into this movement's peculiar contribution to the Body of Christ.

This project is in its early stages. We would appreciate your suggestions and notice of our errors and omissions.

Rev. Dr. Arlin T. Larson, editor
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Channing, William Ellery. 1819. "Unitarian Christianity." Ordination sermon and manifesto of liberal Congregationalism


Basis of Union. 1949. The rationale and understandings presented to Congregational churches for the proposed United Church of Christ.


Committee on Free Church Polity and Unity. 1954. "Report of a Study by the Committee on Free Church Polity and Unity." Study of Congregational practices by representatives of both sides of the merger debate.
INTRODUCTION

Though of paramount importance to the sixteenth century founders of Congregationalism, and to the twentieth century founders of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches, polity concerns have never constituted the sole focus of Congregationalism. Congregationalists have been deeply involved in the full range of American intellectual, cultural, social, and political life. The Supplementary Readings will engage you in this wider scope of concerns. Most are excerpted from longer works, hoping to give the flavor of the authors’ style and letting them define the issues in their own terms. Perhaps you will want to follow up with the complete version of some. The Congregational Library in Boston is available to help you find documents that are no longer in print.

These authors expressed concerns and views in ways considered exemplary or definitive by their contemporaries. It behooves us to pay attention. To understand earlier sections of the path we are now on. To gain insight into contemporary situations. Perhaps even to be awakened to issues and modes of understanding to which our ancestors were better attuned than we. Are certain actual events the will and action of God & others not? When, for example, Edward Johnson marvels at the “Wonder-working Providence of Zion’s Savior,” which he sees at work in the Puritan migration, it makes our contemporary sense of God’s working seems vague & indefinite. As mainline Protestantism is challenged by Pentecostalism and evangelicalism, the early Congregationalists’ focus on conversion and church membership again becomes relevant. Urbanism, multiculturalism, immigration? We have still not resolved the issues attended to by Josiah Strong and Washington Gladden.

Some works may feel vaguely alien, even objectionable, from a twentieth century perspective. It could be literary style. The use of “f” for “s” and “v” for “u” (and vice versa), the “thee’s” and “thou’s” of the seventeenth and eighteen centuries. Or it may be more substantive. Jonathon Edward’s “angry God.” William Ellery Channing’s debunking of traditional doctrines. Josiah Strong’s celebration of (and challenge to) the “Anglo-Saxon” race. The point, however, is not so much to judge as to understand the depth and scope of Congregational faith, and to appreciate its enormous creativity. Hopefully to let our minds be expanded by our forebears and join the dialogue with them in contemporary circumstances.
The Works

William E. Channing, D.D.

With an Introduction

New and Complete Edition, Rearranged

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The Perfect Life
THE WORKS

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Scripture is this, that the Bible is a book written for men, in the language of men, and that its meaning is to be sought in the same manner as that of other books. We believe that God, when He speaks to the human heart, conforms, if we may so say, to the established rules of speaking and writing. Hence those of the Scriptures avail us more than if communicated in an unknown tongue.

Now all books and all conversation require in the reader or hearer the correct interpretation, and that is not to be obtained by continual comparison and inference. Human language, you well know, admits various interpretations; and every word and every sentence may be misapplied and explained according to the subject which is discussed, according to the nature of the writer, and according to the genius and idiom of the language which he uses. These are acknowledged principles in the interpretation of human writings; and a man whose words are spoken to us, and to whom we should be answerable, may hold these principles would reprove us justly with a criminal want of candor, and with an intention of obscuring or distorting his meaning.

Were the Bible written in a language and style of its own, did it consist of words which admit but a single sense, and of sentences wholly detached from each other, there would be no place for the principles now laid down. We could not reason about it as we do about other writings. But such a book would be of little worth; and perhaps, of all books, the Scriptures correspond least to this description. The word of God bears the stamp of the same hand which we see in his works. It has infinite connections and dependences. Every proposition is linked with others, and is to be compared with others, till its full and precise import may be understood. Nothing stands alone. The view taken and the conclusions drawn from one part is to be compared with another, and the Bible itself is to be compared with all the world. The Christian dispensation is a new creation of the Jewish, the completion of a vast scheme of providence, requiring great extent and depth of the reader. Still more, the Bible treats of subjects on which we receive ideas from other sources besides itself,—such subjects as the nature, passions, relations, and duties of man; and it expects us to restrain and modify its language by the known truths which observation and experience furnish on these topics.

We are not here to consider a book which claims a more frequent exercise of reason than the Bible. In addition to the remarks now made on its innate connections, we may observe, that its style now prevailing, the science or the accuracy of definition. Its language is singularly glowing, bold, and figurative, demanding more frequent and more serious departure from the literal sense: that of our own age and country, and consequently demanding more continual exercise of judgment. We find, too, that the different portions of this book, instead of being confined to general truths, refer perpetually to the times when they were written, to states of society, to modes of thinking, to controversies in the church, to feelings and usages which have passed away, and without the knowledge of which we are constantly in danger of extending to all times and places what was of temporary and local occurrence only. And it is evident too, that some of these books are strongly marked by the genius and character of their respective writers, that the Holy Spirit dealt with them as with men; that he suspends the peculiarities of their minds, and that a knowledge of their feelings, and of the influences under which they were placed, is one of the preparations for understanding their writings. With these views of the Bible, we feel it our bounden duty to exercise our reason upon it perpetually, to compare, to infer, to look beyond the letter to the spirit, to seek in the nature of the subject and the aim of the writer his true meaning; and, in general, to make use of what is known for explaining what is difficult, and for discovering new truths.

Need I descend to particulars to prove that the Scriptures demand the exercise of reason? Take, for example, the style in which they generally speak of God, and observe how naturally they apply to him human passions and organs. Recollect the declarations of Christ, that he came not to send peace but a sword; that he would eat his flesh and drink his blood; that we must hate father and mother, and pluck out the right eye; and a vast number of passages equally bold and unlimited. Recollect the unqualified manner in which it is said of Christians that they possess all knowledge, and can do all things. Recollect the virtual contradiction between Paul and James, and the apparent clashing of some parts of Paul's writings with the general doctrines and end of God's Revelation. And extend the enumeration indefinitely, and who does not see that we must limit all these passages, words, or phrases to the objects for which they were written, so as to give the language a quite different import from what it would require had it been applied to different beings, or used in different connections.

Enough has been said to show in what sense we make use of reason in interpreting Scripture. From a variety of possible interpretations we select that which accord with the nature of the subject and the state of the writer, with the connection of the passage, with the general division of the Scripture and of the world, with the known character and temper of God, and with the obvious and acknowledged laws of nature. In other words, we believe that God never contradicts one part of Scripture with the teachings of another: and never contradicts revelation by a new interpretation.

And we therefore distrust every interpretation which, after deliberate attention, seems repugnant to any established truth. We reason about the Bible precisely as civilians do about the constitution under which we live: who, you know, are accustomed to limit one provision of that venerable instrument by other provisions, and to fix the precise import of its parts as they are in the general spirit, into the intentions of its authors, and into the prevalent sentiments, impressions, and circumstances of the time it was framed. Without these principles of interpretation, we frankly acknowledge that we cannot defend the divine authority of the Scriptures. Deny us this attribute, and we must abandon the Bible to its enemies.

We do not announce these principles as original, or peculiar to ourselves. All Christians occasionally adopt them, not to stem the flood of error, but to save the great question of its truth. All Christians are compelled to use them in their controversies with infidels. We employ them in our warfare by which we can be pressed into the service of their own weapons; and only complain of it when its use makes some reason more frequent than those from whom we differ. It is astonishing what a fabric they rear from a few slight facts about the fall of our first parents, and how ingeniously they extract from detached passages in the New Testament doctrines about the divine nature. We blame them for reasoning so abundantly; but for violating the fundamental rules of reasoning, for sacrificing the plain to the obscure, and the general to the particular.

We object strongly to the contemptuous manner in which human reason is often spoken of by our adversaries, because it leads us to believe, to universal darkened by the fall of our first parents. If reason be so dreadfully marred by the fall of original sin, what are we to do? Can we leave the Bible in the hands of men? Can we leave the Bible in the hands of men?

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to exercise reason on nature and society because men have erred for ages in explaining them. We grant that to passions and prejudices, and sometimes to error, disturb the rational faculty in its inquiries into revelation. The ambitious controve to find doctrines in the Bible, God has given a present of wisdom. The timid and dejected discover a gloomy system, and the mystical and fanatical a visionary theology. The vicious find examples of sin, and the child of a late repentance, or of acceptance on easy terms. The falsely refined controve to light on doctrines which have not been soiled by vulgar handling. The passions do not disturb the reason of religious any more than in other inquiries which excite strong and general interest; and thin faculty, of consequence, is not to be renounced in religion, unless we are prepared to discard it universally. The true inference from the almost endless errors which have darkened the Bible is, that what we are to neglect and disapprove, but to exert more patiently, circumspectly, uprightly, the worst errors, after all, have sprung up in that church which was charged with reason, and demands from its members implicit faith. The most pernicious doctrines have been the growth of the darkest times, when the General Establishment had led men and enthusiasts to brood their dreams and inventions, and to stifle the faint remonstrances of reason by the menace of everlasting perdition. Say what we may, it has given us a rational nature, and will call us to account for it. We may let it sleep, but we do so at our peril. Revelation is addressed to us as rational beings. We may wish, in our sloth, that God had given us a system demanding no labor of comparing, limiting, and inferring. But such a syst

tem would be at variance with the whole character or the present presence; and it is the object of wisdom to take revelation as it is given to us, and to interpret it by the help of the faculties which it everywhere supposes, and on which it is founded.

To the views now given an objection is commonly urged from the character of God. We are told that God being infinitely wiser than men, his discoveries will surpass human reason. In a rev

olution from such a teacher we ought to expect propositions which we cannot rec

onize with our analysis, nor which may seem to contradict established truths; and it becomes us not to question or explain them away, but to believe and adore, and allusion to the divine word. To this objection we have two short an

swers. We say, first, that it is impos

sible that a teacher of infinite wisdom should explain to us the way by which he would teach to infinite error. But if once we ad

mit that propositions which in their literal sense appear plainly repugnant to any other, or to any known truth, and still be literally understood and received, what possible limit can we set to the belief of contradictions? What shelter have we from the wildest fanaticism, which can always quote passages that, in their literal and obvious sense, give support to its extravagances? How can the Protestant escape from the substance of its doctrine most clearly taught us, if the submission of reason, now contended for, be a duty? How can we even hold fast the truth of revelation if, of all contradictions, the prophet be true, so may another, and the proposition, that Christianity is false, though involving inconsistency, may still be a verity?

We answer again, that if God be infinitely wise, He cannot sport with the understandings of his creatures. A wise teacher discovers his wisdom in adapting himself to the truth of his pupils, not in leaving them with what is unintelligible, not in those figures which hide from them the apparent contradictory, put in filling them with a scepticism in distrust of their own powers. An infinitely wise teacher, who knows the precise extent of our minds and the best method of enlightening them, will surpass all other instruc

tors in bringing home truths to our apprehension, and in showing its loveliness and harmony. We ought, indeed, to expect occasional obscurity in such a book as the Bible, which was written for past and present, as well as for future generations. But God's wisdom is a pledge that whatever is necessary for us, and necessary for salvation, is revealed too plainly to be mistaken, by the sound and upright mind. It is not the mark of wisdom to use an unintelligible phraseology, to communicate what is above our capacities, to cause and settle the intellect by appearances and contradictions. We honor our Heavenly Father much more to ascribe to him such a revelation, to the power of belief. A revelation is a gift of light. It cannot make our darkness and multiply our perplexities. If by this we mean Jesus' interpretation, we shall proceed to consider some of the views which we derive from that sacredook, particularly those which distinguish us from other Chris

nians.

In the first place, we believe in the doctrine of God's unity, or that there is one God, and one only. To this truth we give infinite importance, and we feel ourselves bound to take heed lest any man spoil us of it by vain philosophy. The proposition that there is one God seems to us exceedingly plain. We under

stand by it that there is one being, one mind, one intelligent agent, to whom we owe obedience, and to whom we are accountable. We conceive that this single word, which we have been taught to say, contains no other meaning than to live and be accounted people who are set against the depositaries of this truth, and who were incapable of understanding those being with distinctions between being and person which the capacity of later ages has discovered. We find no intimation that this language was used to be taken in an unusual sense, or that God's unity was a quite different thing from the one

ness of other intelligent beings.

We object to the doctrine of the Tri

nity, that, whilst acknowledging in words, the unity of God. According to this doctrine, there are three infinite and equal persons, pos

sessionless of supreme divinity, called the Father, the Son, and Holy Ghost. Each of these persons, as described by theologians, has his own particular conscious

ness, will, and properties. They love each other, converse with each other, and delight in each other's society. Each of these persons is a different part in man's redemption, each having his appropriate office, and neither doing the work of the other. The Son is mediator, and the Father sends the Son, and is not himself sent; nor is He con

scious, like the Son, of taking flesh.

Here, then, we have three intelligent agents, possessed of different consciousness, wills, and different per

ceptions, assuming different acts, and sustaining different offices, and that these things do not imply and constitute different beings, but are utterly at a loss to know three minds or beings are to be formed, is difference of properties, acts, and consciousness, which leads us to the belief of dif

cent intelligent beings, and if this mark fails, we have no right to say that the agents and persons in the universe are not one and the same mind. When we attempt to conceive of three Gods, we can do nothing more than represent to ourselves three agents, distinguished from each other by similar marks and properties which separate the persons of the Trinity; and when common Christians hear these persons spoken of as conversing, or having similar powers, and perform different acts, they do not regard them as different beings and different minds.

We do, then, with all earnestness and fervent heart, the unprofitful and un

scriptural doctrine of the Trinity. To us, as to the Apostle and the primitive Chris

tians, there is one God, even the Father, as the only living and true God.

We are astonished that any man can read the New Testament and avoid the con

clusion that the Father alone is God. We hear our own powers continually appro

priating this character to the Father. We find the Father continually exhibited from Jesus by this title. "God sent his Son," "God anointed Jesus," "Now, how singular and inexplicable is this phraseology, which all the New

Testament, if this title belong equally to Jesus, and if a principal object of this book is to reveal him as God, as partaking equally with the Father in supreme divinity! We cherish the present, our opponents to adduce one passage in the New Testament where the word God means three persons, where it is not limited to one person, and where, unless turned from its usual sense by the con

text, it does not mean the Father. Can stronger proof be said that the doctrine of three persons in the God-
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Not one word is uttered in its defence and explanation, nor a proof drawn from its premises. This argument has almost the force of demonstration. We are persuaded that, had three divine persons been announced by the first preaching of Christianity, all equal and all infinite, one of whom was the very Jesus who had lately died on the cross, this peculiarity of Christianity would have almost absorbed every other, and the great labor of the Apostles would have been to repel the continual assaults which it would have awakened. But the fact is, that not a whisper of objection to Christianity on that account reaches us, in a pure apostolic age. In the Epistles we see not a trace of controversy called forth by the Trinity.

We have further objections to this doctrine, drawn from its practical influence. We regard it as unfavorable to devotion, by dividing and distracting the mind in its communion with God. It is a great excellence of the doctrine of God's unity, that it offers no excuse for ignoring the subject of supreme homage, adoration, and love, One Infinite Father, one Being of beings, one original and fountain, to whom we may refer all good, in whom all our fears and affections may be concentrated, and whose lovely and venerable nature may pervade all our thoughts. True piety, when directed to an undivided God, is simplicity, singleness, most favorable to religious awe and love. Now, the Trinity sets before us three distinct objects of supreme adoration; three infinite persons, leaving equal claims on our hearts; three divine agents, performing different offices, and to be acknowledged and worshipped in different relations. And it is possible, and not improbable, that if the weak and limited mind of man can attach itself to these with the same power and joy as to One Infinite Father, the only First Cause, in whom all the blessings of nature and grace really meet as their center and source? Must not devotion be distracted by the equal and rival claims of three equal persons, and must not the worshipping of the conscious, consistent Christian be disturbed by an apprehension lest he be withheld from one or another of these his due proportion of homage?

We also think that the doctrine of the Trinity injures devotion, not only by uniting to the Father other objects of worship, but by taking from the Father the supreme affection which is his due, and transferring it to the Son. This doctrine of the Trinity, it is a most important view. That Jesus Christ, if exalted into the infinite Divinity, should be more interesting than the Father, is precisely what might be expected from history, and from the principle of human nature. Men want an object of worship; and they would preserve the Father, and the great secret of holiness lies in this propensity. A God, clothed in our forms and feelings, wants and sorrows, speaks to us in language more strongly than a Father in human form, in human spirit, invisible and unapproachable, save by the peculiar offices ascribed to Jesus by the popular religion, make him the most attractive person in the Godhead. The Father is the depository of the justice, the vindicator of the rights, the avenger of the laws of the Divinity. On the other hand, the Son, the brightness of the divine glory, stands between the sacred Deity and humanity, makes head to the storms, and his condescension to our extent to the sword of the divine justice, our whole load of punishment, and purchases our whole blood and every blessing which descends from the Father. Need we state the effect of these representations, especially on common minds, for whom Christianity was chiefly designed, and whom it seeks to bring to the Father as the loftiest being? We do believe that the worship of a bleeding suffering God tends strongly to absorb the mind, and to make us forget that there is anything but the Godhead in which we are saved. We believe, too, that this worship, though attractive, is not most fitted to spiritualize the mind. It awakens human transport rather than that deep veneration which is the moral perfection of God, which is the essence of piety.

2. Hears this given our views of the unity of God, we proceed, in the second New Testament of Jesus Christ. We believe that Jesus is one mind, one soul, one being, distinct from the one God. We complain of the doctrine of the Trinity, that it is not satisfied with making God three beings, and it makes Jesus Christ two beings, and thus introduces infinite confusion into our conceptions of his character. This want to common sense and to the general strain of Scripture, is a remarkable proof of the power of a false philosophy in disfiguring the simple truth of Jesus Christ, according to this doctrine; Jesus Christ, instead of being one mind, one consciousness, intelligent being, whom we can understand, consists of two minds, one the divine, the other human; one the weak, the other almighty; the one that is God, the other omnipotent. Now we maintain that this is to make Christ two beings. To nominate him one person, one being, and yet to suppose made up of two minds, infinitely different from each other, is to abuse and confound language, and to throw darkness over all our conceptions of intelligent natures. According to the common doctrine, each of these two minds in Christ has its own consciousness, its own will, its perceptions. They have, in fact, no common properties. The divine mind feels none of the pain and sorrows of the human, and the human is infinitely removed from the perfection and happiness of the divine. Can you conceive of our minds in the universe more distinct? We are so taught that one person was constituted and distinguished by one consciousness. The doctrine that one and the same person should have two consciousnesses, two wills, two hearts, infinitely different from each other, this we think an enormous tax on human credulity.

We say that, if a doctrine so strange, so difficult, so contrary to the previous conceptions of men, be inserted into a part, and an essential part, of revelation, it must be taught with great distinctness, and we ask our brethren to point to some place in the passage where Christ is said to be composed of two minds infinitely different, yet constituting one person. We find none. Other Christians, indeed, tell us that this doctrine is necessary to the harmony of the Scriptures, that some texts refer to Jesus Christ human, and others divine properties, and that to reconcile these we must suppose two minds, to which these properties may be referred. In other words, for the
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is called God, and by a class of passages, not very numerous, in which divine properties are said to be ascribed to him, we are again to learn another answer. We may say that it is one of the most established and obvious principles of criticism, that language is to be explained according to the knowledge and sensibility of the subject to which it is applied. Every man knows that the same words convey very different ideas when used in relation to different personalities. When Solomon built the temple in a different manner from the architect whom he employed; and God reveals himself differently from man. Now we maintain that the known properties and circumstances of Christ, as he ascribed to God all the power and offices, — these acknowledged properties of Christ, we say, oblige us to interpret the comparatively few passages which are thought to make him the Supreme God, in a manner consistent with his distinct and inferior nature. It is our duty to explain such texts by the rule which we apply to other texts, in which human beings are represented as gods, and are said to be partakers of the divine nature, to know and possess all things, and to be filled with all God's fulness. These latter passages we do not hesitate to modify, and restrain, and turn from the most obvious sense, because this sense is opposed to the known properties of those beings to whom they relate: and we maintain that the same principle, and use no greater latitude, in explaining, as we do the passages which are thought to support the Godhead of Christ.

Trinitarians profess to derive some important advantages from their mode of viewing Christ. It furnishes them, for it shows them an infinite being suffering for their sins. The doctrine with which this fallacy is repeated astonishes us. When pressed with the fact whether they really believe that the infinite and insupposable God suffered and died on the cross, they acknowledge that this is not true, but that Christ's human mind alone sustained the pains of death. How have we, then, an infinite sufferer? This language seems to us an imposition on common minds, and is very derogatory to God's justice, as if this attribute could be satisfied by a sophism and a fiction. We are also told that Christ is a more interesting object, that his love and mercy are more felt, when he is viewed as the Supreme God, than when he is viewed as the Son of God. This is to take humanity and to suffer for men. That Trinitarians are strongly moved by this representation, we do not mean to deny; but we think their emotions altogether founded on a misapprehension of their own doctrines. They talk of the second person of the Trinity's leaving his throne and his father's bosom to visit and save the world. The second person, being the unchangeable and infinite God, was evidently incapable of partaking with the least degree of his perfection and felicity. At the moment of his taking flesh, he was as intimately present with his Father as before, and engaged in his Father's filled heaven, and earth, and the universe. This Trinitarians acknowledge; and still profess to be touched and overwhelmed by the amazing humiliation of this immutable being. We do not only disbelieve their doctrine, when fully explained and understood, as the result of Christ's humiliation to a fiction, it almost wholly destroys the impressions with which our cross ought to be viewed. According to their view, Christ was comparatively no sufferer at all. It is true, his human mind suffered; but this, they tell us, was an infinitely small part of his nature, the proportion to his whole nature being a single drop to the whole body, or a drop to the ocean. The divine mind of Christ, that which was most properly himself, was infinitely happy, and infinitely the avenger of the suffering of his humanity. Whilst hanging on the cross, he was the happy being in the universe, as happy as the infinite Father, so that his pains, compared with his felicity, were nothing. This Trinitarians do, and must, acknowledge. It follows necessarily from the immeasurableness of the divine nature which they ascribe to Christ; so that their system, justly and justly, claims his death of interest, weakens our sympathy with his sufferings, and is, of all others, most unfavorable to a love of Christ, founded on a sense of his sacrifices for mankind. We esteem our own views to be vastly more affecting. It is our belief that Christ's humiliation was
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real and entire, that the whole Saviour, and not a part of him, suffered, that his crucifixion was a scene of deep and unmixed agony. As we stand round his cross, our minds are not distracted, nor our sensibility weakened, by contemplating him as the instrument of our conversion and infinitely differing minds, and as having a balance of infinite felicity. We recognize in the dying Jesus but one mind. This, we think, renders him not suffering for our sins, but suffering with and in us. We respect nothing but excellence; we respect nothing but perfection; we respect nothing but holiness; we respect nothing but in its heavens. We venerate not the loftiness of God's throne, but the equity and goodness in which it is established.

We believe that God is infinitely good, kind, and in the proper sense of these words, — good in disposition as well as in act; good not to a few, but to all; good to every individual, as well as to the general system.

We believe, too, that God is just; but we never forget that his justice is the justice of a good being, dwelling in the same mind and acting in harmony, with perfect benevolence. By this attribute we understand God's infinite regard to virtue or moral worth expressed in a moral government; that is, in giving excellent and equitable laws, and in communicating justice, goodness, and holiness. We reply, that it is very possible to speak of God magnificently, and to think of him meanly; to apply to his person both the greatness and the grandeur of his government; that he is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the true and almighty Lord of the universe; and that this coincides with benevolence; for virtue and happiness, though not the same, are inseparably conjoined.

God's justice, thus viewed, appears to us to be in perfect harmony with his mercy. According to the prevalent systems of theology, these attributes are so discordant and clashing, that to reconcile them, we acknowledge, would be incompatible with justice, and also with enlightened benevolence. God's mercy, as we understand it, desires strongly the happiness of the guilty, but only where the individuality of a human being from the first moment of his moral agency; and it also teaches that the offence of the child, which brings into life this ceaseless tendency to unfulfilled desire, exposes him to the sentence of everlasting damnation. Now, according to the prevalent principles of morality, we maintain that moral constitution of the mind, unceasingly disposing it to evil, and to evil alone, would absolve him; that to give existence under this condition would argue unseemly cruelty; and that to punish the sin of this unhappily constituted child, with the endless ruin of a wrong unparalleled by the most merciless despotism.

This system also teaches that God selects from this corrupt mass a number to be saved, and places them by a special influence, from the common condition; that the rest of mankind, left without that special grace which their conversion requires, are commanded to repent, under penalty of aggravated woe; and that forgiveness is promised them on terms which their very constitution habitually disposes them to reject, and in regard to which they cannot and will not receive the punishment otherwise due to them. These professed of forgiveness and evidences of redemption, to beings born under a blinding curse, fill our minds with a horror which we want words to express.

This religious system does not produce all the effects on character which might be anticipated. We are most joyfully admitted. It is often, very often, counteracted by nature, conscience, common sense, by the general strain of Scripture, by the example and precepts of Christ, and by the positive declarations of God's universal kindness and perfect equity. But still we think that we see its unhappy influence. It tends to disfigure the timid, to give excuses to the bad, to feed the vanity of the fanatical, and to offer shelter to the bad feelings of the malignant mind. It serves, as it does, the fundamental principles of morality, and by exhibiting a severe and painful picture of the world, it tends strongly to pervert the moral faculties, to form a gloomy, forbidding, and servile religion, and to lead men to substitute contempt, bitterness, and persecution, for a tender, enlightened, partial charity. We think, too, that this system, which begins with degrading human nature, may be expected to
end in pride; for pride grows out of a consciousness of high distinctions, however illusory, and no distinction is so great as that which is made between the elected and the rest. The false and dishonorable views of God, which we have been taught, we feel ourselves bound to reject unconditionally. Other errors we can pass over with comparative indifference. But we ask our opponents to leave us to a God who is love, truth, and trust, in whom our moral sentiments may delight, in whom our weaknesses and sorrows may find refuge. We cling to the divine perfection. We meet them everywhere in creation, in the Scriptures, we see a lovely image of them in Jesus Christ; and gratitude, love, and veneration call on us to assert them. They appear, as we often are, by man, it is our consolation and happiness that one of our chief offences is the zeal with which we vindicate the dishonored good name of God.

4. Having thus shown the unity of God, of the unity of Jesus, and his inferiority to God; and of the divinity of the character of the Father of Light, we now proceed to the consideration of the divine mission of Jesus, and of the purposes of his mission. With regard to the great object which Jesus came to accomplish, there seems to be no possibility of mistake. We believe that it is not the Father to effect a moral or spiritual deliverance of mankind; that it is, to rescue men from sin and its consequences, and to bring them to a state of everlasting purity and happiness. We believe, too, that he accomplishes this sublime purpose by a variety of methods,—by his instructions respecting God's unity, paternal character, and moral government, which are admirably fitted to reclaim the world from idolatry and impiety, to the knowledge, love, and obedience of the Creator; by his promises, to the repentant, and his divine assistance to those who labor for progress in moral excellence; by the light which he has thrown on the path of duty, and his own spirit of exaltation in the lovelessness and subility of virtue shine forth to warm and quicken as well as guide us to perfection; by his threatenings against incorrigible guilt; by his glorious discoveries of immortality; by his sufferings and death; by that signal event, the resurrection, which powerfully bore witness to his divine mission, and brought down to men's senses a firm belief in his continual intercession, which obtains for us spiritual aid and blessings; and by the power with which he is invested of raising the dead, judging the world, and conferring the everlasting rewards promised to the faithful.

We have no desire to conceal the fact that a divinity of this kind exists among us in regard to an interest of considerable part of Christ's meditation. — I mean, in regard to the precise influence of his death on our future. Many suppose that this event contributes to our pardon, as it was a principal means of confirming his religion, and of giving it a power over the mind; in other words, that it procures forgiveness by leading to that repentance and virtue which is the great and only condition on which forgiveness is bestowed. Many of us are dissatisfied with this explanation, and think that the Scriptures sufficiently prove that Christ's death with an emphasis so peculiar that we ought to consider this event as having a special influence in removing the necessity of faith and repentance. Although the Scriptures can, in no way, contribute to this end.

Whilst, however, we differ in explaining the connection between Christ's death and human forgiveness, — a connexion which we all gratefully acknowledge, — we agree in rejecting any sentiments which prevail in regard to this mediation. The idea which is conveyed to common minds by the popular system, that Christ's death has an influence in making God placable or merciful, in awakening his kindness towards men, we reject with strong disapprobation. We are happy to find that this very distinguishing and honorable notion is disowned by intelligent Christians of that class from which we differ. We recollect, however, that they are not content to rest the case on this argument, and that some of the divinity is named in the Bible, to the penitent, and of the divine assistance to those who labor for moral progress in moral excellence; by the light which he has thrown on the paths of duty, and by his own spirit of exaltation in the loveliness and subility of virtue shine forth to warm and quicken as well as guide us to perfection; by his threatenings against incorrigible guilt; by his glorious discoveries of immortality; by his sufferings and death; by that signal event, the resurrection, which powerfully bore witness to his divine mission and brought down to men's senses a firm belief in his continual intercession, which obtains for us spiritual aid and blessings; and by the power with which he is invested of raising the dead, judging the world, and conferring the everlasting rewards promised to the faithful.

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dience to his precepts. For ourselves, we have not so learned Jesus. Whilst we gratefully acknowledge that he came to rescue us from punishment, we believe that he was sent on a still nobler errand, namely, to deliver us from sin itself, and to form us to a sublime and heavenly virtue. We regard him as a Saviour, our Lord; as the light, principle, and guide of the dark, diseased, and wandering mind. No influence in the universe seems to us so glorious as that over the character; and no revelation, however of thankfulness as the restoration of the soul to purity. Without this, pardon, were possible, would be of little value. Why should the sinner from the hurry and turmoil in his own breast? Why raise him to heaven, if he remain a stranger to his sanctity and love? With these impressions, we are accustomed to value the gospel chiefly as it abounds in effectual aids, motives, excitements to a generous and divine virtue. In this virtue, as in a common centre, we see all its doctrines, precepts, promises meet; and we believe that faith in this religion is of no worth, and contributes nothing to salvation, any farther than as it uses these doctrines, precepts, promises, and the whole life, character, and history, of Jesus, as the means of purifying the mind, of changing it into the likeness of his celestial essence.

1. Having thus stated our views of the high mission of Christ's mission, that it is the recovery of man to virtue, or holiness, I shall now, in the last place, give our views of the nature of Christian virtue, or true holiness. We believe that all virtue has its foundation in the moral nature of man, that is, in conscience, or his sense of duty, and in the power of forming his temper and life, according to conscience. We believe that these moral faculties are the grounds of responsibility, and the highest distinctions of human nature, and that no act is praiseworthy any farther than it springs from the exertion of these faculties. We believe that no dispositions infused into us without our own moral activity are of the nature of virtue, and therefore we reject the doctrine of irresistible divine influence on the human mind, moulding it into goodness as hewn into a statue. Such goodness, if this word may be used, would not be the object of virtue and devotion lose all their dignity, they have abandoned themselves to extravagances which have brought contempt on piety. Most certainly, if the dignity of the heaven on the heart, as the understanding and the conscience, as the receiver of heaven as a state who the love of God be excised from the unbounded fervor and piety which we revere, in our pilgrimage here, to the spirit of that better life. I do not think that religious warmth is only to be valued when it springs naturally from an improved character, when it is not enforced, and in the medium of comfort in so far as it is the warmth of a mind which understands God by being like him, and when, instead of repressing, it exalts the understanding, makes conscience, gives a pleasure to common duties, and is seen to exist in connection with cheerfulness, religiousness, and a reasonable frame of mind. When we observe a fervor called religious in men whose general character express little understanding and elevation, and whose piety seems always to be affected, we pay it little respect. We know religion too much to give its sacred as the truest, least feverish, forced, fluctuating zeal, which has little power over the life.

Another important branch of virtue we believe to be love to Christ. The greatness of the precepts of Jesus, the spirit with which he executed it, and the sufferings which he bore for our salvation, we feel to be strong claims on our gratitude and veneration. We see in nature no beauty to be compared to the loveliness of his character, nor do we find in earth a benefactor to whom we owe an equal frame of mind. We read his history with delight, and learn from it the perfection of our nature. We are particularly affected by his death, which was endured for our redemption, and by that strength of character which triumphed over his pains. His resurrection in the foundation of our hope of immortality. His intercession gives us boldness to draw near to the throne of grace, and we look up to heaven with new desire when we think that, if we follow him here, we shall there see his benign grace consummate, and enjoy his friendship for ever.

I need not express to you our views on the subject of the benevolent virtues.
We know that zeal for truth in the case for this usurpation of Christ's prerogative; but we think that zeal for truth, as it is called, is very suspicious, except in men whose capacities and advantages, whose facetious deliberation, and whose improvements in humility, mildness, and condescension, are such as to make us hope that their views are more just than those of their neighbors. [Much of what passes for zeal on truth we look upon with pity it seems to us, to thrive most luxuriously where other virtues shoot up thinly and feebly; and we have no gratitude for those reformers who would force upon us a doctrine which has not sweetened their own tempers, or made them better men than their neighbors.

We are accustomed to think much of the difficulties attending religious inquiries,—difficulties springing from the slow development of our minds, from the power of early impressions, from the state of society, from human authority, from the neglect of the reasoning powers, from the want of just principles of criticism and of important helps in interpreting Scripture, and from various other causes. But we believe that on no subject have men, and even good men, ingrained so many strange conceptions, wild theories, and fictions of their own. Clarion, forbearance, as we do, that we ourselves are sharers of the common frailty, we dare not assume infallibility in the treatment of our fellowmen; and however much we believe that we are the only Christians, who have little time for investigation, the habit of denouncing and condemning other denominations, perhaps more enlightened and virtuous than their own. Clarion, forbearance, as we do, that we ourselves are sharers of the common frailty, we dare not assume infallibility in the treatment of our fellowmen; and however much we believe that we are the only Christians, who have little time for investigation, the habit of denouncing and condemning other denominations, perhaps more enlightened and virtuous than their own. Clarion, forbearance, as we do, that we ourselves are sharers of the common frailty, we dare not assume infallibility in the treatment of our fellowmen; and however much we believe that we are the only Christians, who have little time for investigation, the habit of denouncing and condemning other denominations, perhaps more enlightened and virtuous than their own.
in the church, we hope, under God's blessing, from the progress of the human intellect, from the moral progress of society, from the consequent decline of prejudice and bigotry, and, though last not least, from the subversion of human authority in matters of religion, from the fall of those hierarchies, and other human institutions, by which the minds of individuals are oppressed under the weight of numbers, and a Papal dominion is perpetuated in the Protestant church. Our earnest prayer to God is, that He will overturn, and over-