

THE UNION SEMINARY REVIEW

VOL. XXIX.

JANUARY, 1918.

No. 2.

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT.

This number of the Union Seminary Review is devoted largely to the vital question of Presbyterian Union or Federation. There is no more important question before our Church at this time. The following letter which was addressed by the editor to nine Southern Presbyterian ministers in nine capital cities will explain the way in which the thoughtful articles which go to make up this issue of the Review were secured:

"Last May the Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A., appointed a committee to confer with our Church on organic union and requested our Assembly to appoint a similar committee to confer with their committee (see Minutes of our Assembly, p. 27). Our Assembly in reply appointed a committee to consider the question of the federation of all the Presbyterian bodies in the United States (see Minutes of our Assembly, p. 53). These two committees have held a joint conference in Atlantic City and will hold another meeting in Richmond on December the 18th.

It is evident that there is a great deal of unrest in both of these great Presbyterian Churches as to the present relationship existing between them and as to the relationship existing between the various Presbyterian bodies in this country. It is also evident that there are many in our own Church who feel that something ought to be done. This feeling is intensified by the reports of unrest which come from some of the border States where the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A., and the

ORGANIC UNION OR FEDERATION.

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I am requested to give an opinion on the question of "Church Union or Federation," as applied to the Presbyterian Churches, U. S. and U. S. A. The limit of this article is three thousand words. I prefer to submit a brief—more can be included than in a fully developed article, and, if it is rather condensed, the Review readers are accustomed to pondering over things "hard to understand."

Presbyterianism has a genius for division and reunion. This is probably an evidence of vitality.

If the Presbyterians in the United States of the first half of the nineteenth century and following had been as diligent in preserving their unity and missionary effectiveness as they were keen to discover occasion for differences and separation, this country would be overwhelmingly Presbyterian to-day.

The Methodist Bishop was right who said, "when once the Presbyterian and Reformed forces of America 'find' themselves they will take this country for Christ."

Our present relation with the U. S. A. Church is a friendly one, that is neighborly. The pigs and chickens give a little trouble occasionally.

A. What is the situation to-day?

(1) The Council of the Reformed Churches has brought the Presbyterian family into a better acquaintance. It served a most useful purpose for the Churches U. S. and U. S. A., by preventing hasty efforts for organic union a few years ago; by furnishing an official channel for fraternal feeling; and by providing at least a temporary test of providential leading.

(2) Conferences of committees (1915) of the two Assemblies concerning the El Paso, New Orleans and Springdale cases—there was an agreed settlement—a subsequent modification of it, and natural dissatisfaction. These cases should be referred to the Council.

(3) Renewal of question in 1917 Assemblies.

(a) By Dallas Assembly—for organic union.

(b) By Birmingham Assembly—for federation.

The matter in hands of committees now.

B. *What are we to do?*

This is not advice to the conference committees, but a candid word about the big problem that will be left even after they have finished their labors.

I. I would like to see more emphasis placed upon the Council of the Reformed Churches, which is in fact a great inter-church committee on matters of mutual interest. No other kind of committee could be devised that would be better equipped for working out the problems of closer relations.

II. It is either organic union, federation, or stay-where-you-are, so far as our Church and the U. S. A. Church are concerned. Federation of all Presbyterian and Reformed bodies, if heartily undertaken, would please me better; and by providing for Provincial Assemblies it would allow some branches of the Church to go into it, and yet feel it as little as possible. Federation necessarily involves the whole Presbyterian family, and is out of the question when only two parties are concerned.

III. If we shut up to organic union or the *status quo*, the situation as it hinges on organic union appears to be:

1. *Considerations Against Organic Union.*

I confess that I feel some strong sentiments against it. It is no new thing for the feelings to be one way and the judgment to be another way.

(a) **The Cumberland Blunder.** It has certainly muddied the water in extensive sections of our Church. Very few U. S. A. leaders understand this. It put a heavy brake on a strong movement in our Church toward the U. S. A. Church (no lack of esteem for the Cumberland Church, which was, and is, frankly Armenian).

(b) **New York Presbytery.** True, it is a small part of a great and evangelical Church, but it is a very noisy part. It spoils a big lot of fine ointment.

(c) **Disposition by Some Elements in the U. S. A. Church to Force Matters.** To announce that organic union is inevitable, and that the sooner we surrender the better it will be for us, is unchristian spirit and foolish. It is an attempt to invoke terrorism, and it will have no more success in the South than it has had in Belgium and France.

2. Considerations Favoring Organic Union.

(a) **It Is Natural.** We were separated by a storm. A scattered covey of birds, after the storm or trouble which separated them has passed, begin to call softly to each other, and soon all are together again. By birth and inheritance we are one; spiritual affinity; denominational and family consciousness are moral imperatives.

(b) **Cordial phrasology and half-way meeting places will not satisfy the demands and needs of close spiritual relationship.**

(c) **The U. S. A. Church is as sound, as evangelical, and as honored and used of God as our own Church.** Facing the facts, and knowing the men in the U. S. A. Church, have forced me as an honest man to this position.

(d) **The Advantage of a "Big Church."** Any one who voices the objection against a "Big Church" is doing all he can to make his own work and his own Church a big one. If the big Church is pure and evangelical, the bigger the better. Oh, for it to be big enough to hasten his coming!

(e) **I feel the force and wisdom of the principle clearly set**

forth by the founders of the Southern Presbyterian Church in 1861. They were justifying the separate existence of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States, and were assuming that it was the will of God that the Confederate States should be a permanent and stable government. They said: "In the Protestant countries Church organizations have followed national lines. The Presbyterians of Ireland belong to a different Church from the Presbyterians of Scotland, and the Presbyterians of this country constitute a Church, in like manner, distinct from all other Churches on the globe. That the division into national Churches, that is, Churches bounded by national lines, is, in the present condition of human nature, a benefit, seems to us too obvious for proof." It called for a Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America then. It seems to call for the Presbyterian Church in America today.

(f) The Need of To-day. The world needs a Christian America; America to be Christian needs all that Presbyterianism can contribute; for Presbyterianism to be at its best, it needs all its elements and parts to be perfectly adjusted to each other, and dedicated to the mighty task; and finally:

1. I refuse to become excited over the matter. We have more sense, and grace also, than when we used to war over these questions a few years ago.

2. With United States facing an unprecedented world condition of need and opportunity, it would be nothing short of a crime for one of its most important spiritual social and economic forces to be weakened by unnecessary division.

3. I am willing to follow the leadings of Providence; and I am inclined to believe that a chosen method of providential guidance is in awakening convictions of duty and aspirations for His glory in the hearts of His children. Moreover, I think it is altogether probable that the indications of His will for our guidance may be found *before* us rather than behind us.