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ART. XXXIX.—THE SECT SYSTEM.

HISTORY OF ALL THE RELIGIOUS DENOMINATIONS, &c., *Second improved and portrait edition of Rupp's work, published by John Winebrenner, V. D. M. Harrisburg, Pa.*

Second Article.

1. Our sect system is exceedingly *irrational*. We can conceive of divisions in the church that might be in a certain sense rational and necessary, and so capable of some scientific representation. The original distinction of Protestantism from Catholicism, and the resolution of the first again into the two great confessions Lutheran and Reformed, have this character. They have their ground in the idea of Christianity itself; they form necessary *momenta*, or moving forces, in the process by which this idea is carried forward to its final completion; they can be studied accordingly, and understood, in the way, for instance, of comparative symbolism. But nothing of this sort can be affirmed of our reigning modern sects. No idea underlies them, by which they can be said to have a right to exist. Their appearance is in defiance and scorn of all such objective reason. It is their boast, to be sprung for the most part of mere private judgment and private

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will. They start generally, by their own confession, in the most outward and accidental occasions. A Jacob Albright is awakened, and finding no congenial religious connections immediately at hand, makes his subjectivity the basis of a new sect, which in due time swells into an evangelical church. A John Winebrenner takes it into his head, that every body is wrong but himself, and being put out of the old church, complacently offers himself to the world as the nucleus of a new one, that may be expected to work better. Elder Randall is pushed aside by the Regular Baptists, and forthwith originates the Freewill Baptists. Mr. Cowherd (p. 124,) is led to inculcate the doctrine of abstinence from the flesh of animals, as well as total abstinence from all intoxicating liquors, "on the testimony of the Bible," and has many other private fancies besides on the same testimony; and so we get the *Bible Christian Church*; still happily in the wilderness and out of sight. Dr. Abner Jones, of Vermont, has "a peculiar travel of mind in relation to sectarian names and human creeds," and to rectify the evil sets in motion a sect of his own, which falls in afterwards with two other equally providential accidents, and helps in this way to form the body calling themselves "Christians." And so it goes, to the end of the chapter. Can anything well be more accidental and capricious, than the rise of sects in this way? Who does not see, that we might as reasonably have five hundred in such form, as fifty or sixty? Have there not been hundreds of men, who had just as much vocation in their circumstances as Albright or Winebrenner, to found new churches, that might have had just as much character and meaning too, as theirs, or possibly a good deal more? It is the easiest thing in the world to moot new questions in religion, scores of them, that might just as fully justify division as half of those that have already led to it, provided only the proper zeal were got up in some quarter to push them out to such extreme, "for conscience' sake," and to put honor on the Bible. Will any pretend to reduce such a system to any sort of intelligible method or scheme? It has none. It is supremely irrational, so far as all inward reason goes, by its very constitution. We might as well pretend to systematize and genealogize the clouds, driven hither and thither by all conflicting winds. It is a chaos, that excludes all science.

Who will dream here of a Sect Symbolism, generically unfolding the inward sense of each upstart body, as related to all the rest and to the whole system, its historical necessity, its complementary contribution to the full idea of Protestantism? Who will find it needful for the right understanding of theology, to pursue the history of its doctrines through the mazes of our present sectarianism, as held, for instance by the United Brethren, the Cumberland Presbyterians, and all manner of Baptists; in the same way that all true theology does require undoubtedly such a prosecution of doctrines, through the life of the ancient Greek Church, the life of the Roman Church, and that of the original Protestant Church under both its grand confessional distinctions. Take one wing only of the system, the Scotch Secession, which has been accustomed from the first to make the greatest account of its own *theological* significance, in this way; and what after all, we ask soberly, is the value of all its witnessings put together, in this country, for the cause of universal Christianity, whether in theory or practice? Is there any inward reason in its divisions and subdivisions, its abortive unions and consequent new sections, till the whole has become a tangled web in the end which it is a perfect weariness of the flesh to pretend to unravel? Altogether we have some ten or twelve bodies in this country, (possibly more,) conscience split for the glory of God, who stand unitedly, while severally excluding one another, not only on the Bible, the sure foundation of all sects, but on the Presbyterian sense of the Bible also as embodied in the Westminster Confession. Can there be any meaning or reason in such a phenomenon? Has historical theology any real interest whatever in the questions that lie between Old Covenanters, New Covenanters, Associate Seceders, Associate Reformed Seceders, and Reformed Associate Reformed Seceders, clear out to the tip end of orthodoxy in the last *wce* Associate Presbytery of Pennsylvania? To ask the question, is to provoke a smile. Who understands this field of church history? Who cares to thrust himself into its briery waste? Do these sects understand themselves? Is there, in truth, anything in them *to be* understood; or that is likely to weigh a feather hereafter, under any separate view, in the mind of God's Universal Church? Alas, for the *unreason* of our reigning sect system!

2. The evil just noticed is greatly aggravated by the consideration, that very few sects remain *constant* at all to their own origin, or make it their business to understand and maintain them. If this change were the result of a true inward process, serving to develop the sense of some mission they had at first, it might be all very well; but every body may easily enough see, that this is not the case. The movement is altogether negative and outward, and amounts to nothing. Once formed, the body floats hither and thither according to circumstances, till finally its original moorings are lost sight of almost entirely; only it still carries its old name and has gradually accumulated a certain historical substance of its own, a body of recollections and traditions, shibboleths and hobbies, prejudices and pedantries; whereby all manner of selfish interests and ends are enlisted for its support, and room made for a few men in the saddle, by humoring its fancies, to rule and guide it almost at their pleasure. Thus the original irrationality of sects is made for the most part more irrational still, looses any little grain of reason it may have had at first, by the meaningless fluctuations of their subsequent history. The starters of a sect, fifty years afterwards, in many cases, would hardly recognize their own progeny. Happy is the sect, that is able to define at all its own distinctive position, or that can give any show of reason whatever for its existence, under such form as it actually carries. In the great majority of cases, this cannot be done even by the ministers themselves. And then as to the people, poor sheep in the hands of their leaders and pastors, what can *they* be expected to know of their own denominational "whereabouts," or of its rational necessity, in the general pell-mell of conflicting "persuasions" with which they are surrounded? As a general thing they know nothing about it.

3. The system is constitutionally *tyrannical*. Every sect pretends indeed to make men free. But only consider what sects are; self-constituted ecclesiastical organizations, called forth ordinarily by private judgment and caprice, and devoted to some onesided christian interest, under perhaps the most superficial and narrow view; educated polemically to a certain fanatical zeal for their own separatistic honor and credit; and bent on impressing their own "image and superscription," on all that fall be-

neath their ghostly power. Are these the circumstances that favor liberality and independence? The man who puts his conscience in the keeping of a sect, is no longer free. It might as well be in the keeping of a Roman priest. In many cases indeed this were far better. Have the Baptists no traditions? Is there no slavery of intellect and heart among the United Brethren? Pshaw! The very last place in which to look for true spiritual emancipation, the freedom of a divinely, self-poised catholic mind, is the communion of sects.

4. The narrowness and tyranny of the sect spirit, unfriendly to all generous christian life, is of fatal force in particular against the cultivation of *theology*, without which in the end it is not possible for the church to have any true prosperity. Theology can be no science, except as it has to do with the whole of Christianity, and is thus at once both churchly and historical in the full sense of these terms. The sect life, by its very conception, kills it, by turning it into a petrification or causing it to evaporate in the way of thin abstraction. Facts here are very plain. Sects, as they actually exist, have no theology, save as now mentioned; the miserable residuum only, so far as it may have any value at all, of the church life they had to start upon in the beginning, carried along with them as a mere outward tradition. Sects have no pleasure in theology, as a science. It has nothing to expect from this quarter. It is no libel on our American sects in particular, to say that they have not thus far contributed anything at all to the advance of this most noble and excellent of all sciences; and it needs no prophet's gift to say, that they never will do so in time to come. If any service has been rendered to it in any quarter, it has been by such as have been able to surmount the system in some measure, forcing their way upwards into a more catholic region. No sectarian theology can ever be of any permanent value.

5. The sect plague has no tendency to work out its own *cure*; unless it be in the way of a deadly malady, that ends itself by ending the life on which it has come to fasten. It is vain to look for a reduction of the number of sects, by their voluntary amalgamation. No two have yet been able to make themselves one. The difficulty is not in their theological differences. These

are for the most part of very little practical force ; with the great mass of the people, we may say, indeed, of absolutely no force at all. In nine cases out of ten it is a matter of sheer accident, that this man is an Albright and his neighbor a Cumberland Presbyterian, that one phase of the Baptist faith prevails here and another phase of it ten miles off. All this, however makes no matter ; and it would make very little matter, if it were brought to be never so clear that the causes of separation in any case had completely fallen away. There would still be no union. It is the curse of the system, that it can never of itself break the chains it has thus forged for its own slaves. On the contrary, it tends perpetually from bad to worse. It is easier by far to divide one sect into two, than it is to splice two sects into one. There is not the least reason to expect accordingly, that the system will ever reform itself into any better shape. It is plain moreover that it has no necessary end ; on the contrary, its capabilities and possibilities are indefinitely boundless. No multiplication of sects can exhaust the principle from which they spring.

6. It is well to note how generally the sect system adheres to the article of *justification by faith*, and how prone it is to run this side of Christianity out to a false extreme, either in the way of dead antinomianism or wild fanaticism. With many persons, at this time, the test of all soundness in religion is made to stand in the idea of salvation by grace as opposed to works, Christ's righteousness set over to our account in an outward way, and a corresponding experience more or less magical in the case of those who receive it, which goes under the name of evangelical conversion. But now it falls in precisely with the abstract mechanism of the sect mind, to throw itself mainly on this view of religion, to the exclusion or at least vast undervaluation of all that is comprised in the mystery of christianity as the power of a new creation historically at hand in the church. It is common for sects, accordingly, to make a parade of their zeal, in such style, for the doctrines of grace and the interests of vital godliness ; and this is often taken at once for a sufficient passport in their favor, as though any body of religionists professing faith in free justification and violent conversion, must needs be part and parcel of Christ's Church, however unchurchly in all other

respects. But surely for a sober mind, it should be enough to expose the fallacy of such thinking, to look over the array of sects which is here presented to our view, and see how easy it is for almost the whole of them, if need be, to legitimate their pretensions in this way. All fragments of the Scotch Secession of course are one here, however divided in their "testimonies" at other points. They make election the principle of christianity, turn justification by faith into a complete abstraction, and so nullify the law in one form, only to come too generally under the yoke of it again in another. The Baptists, through all their divisions, meet here also as on common ground ; with antinomian tendency in one direction ; with a tendency to fanaticism in another direction ; but with common intolerance, all round, to every view of religion that is not found to harmonize with their own abstract scheme. The Winebrennerians hold justification by faith without works, (p. 177,) and are great in their way for revivals and wholesale conversions. So of course the Albright Brethren (p. 277.) So the United Brethren in Christ (p. 564.) These and other sects indeed ambitiously strive to outdo one another, in the business of saving souls in the most approved style, "getting them through" as it is called, according to the abstract scheme now noticed. The one grand requisite for fellowship in the Campbellite communion is, (p. 225,) "an entire reliance upon the merits of Christ alone for justification ;" it is founded we are told, (p. 223,) "upon the two great distinguishing principles of the Lutheran Reformation, viz: the Bible alone as the rule of faith, to the entire exclusion of tradition, and the relying only upon that justification that is obtained through faith in Jesus Christ." Even the "Christians," with no faith in Christ's divinity, and the Universalists too, when it suits, can go in for some sort of abstract magical justification, and on the strength of it bring into play the common revival machinery with quite good success. All this surely deserves to be well laid to heart. There are, it is but too plain, "depths of Satan" here, as well as in other quarters, against which we need to stand solemnly on our guard. Let no one feel that it is safe to go with a sect, simply because it may seem to be *evangelical*, (O most abused word,) in this quacksalvery style. What can it be worth, if it be dissociated wholly from the old church consciousness embodied in the creed ?

7. For one who has come at all to understand the constitution of this abstract supernaturalism, it can produce no surprise to find the sect system marked universally by a *rationalistic* tendency. A Rationalism that denies the supernatural altogether, and a Supernaturalism that will not allow it to enter into any concrete union with the natural, are at bottom much of the same nature; and the last needs only the force of true consecutive thinking always, to pass over peacefully into the arms of the first. Sects start usually in abstract supernaturalism, with an affectation of hyper-spiritual perfection. But the rationalistic element comes at once into view, both in their thinking and practice. This is clearly exemplified in the Baptist scheme, as already noticed; a divine statute book, outwardly certified to be from heaven; christian *laws* drawn forth from it in a like outward way; the mechanism of salvation brought nigh to men all outwardly again, in the form of thought or credited report; its application magically affected by an outward impulsion from God's Spirit, carrying the soul through a certain process of states and feelings. No sacramental grace. No true union with the life of Christ. So with sects generally. Their idea of private judgment; their notion of religious freedom; their low opinion of the sacraments; their indifference to all earnest theology; their propensity to drive religion by might and by power, rather than by the still small voice of God's Spirit; all betray a rationalistic habit of mind, and lean inwardly to still more decidedly rationalistic consequences and results. When Mr. Campbell makes Christianity to be "simply and solely," (p. 233,) the belief of certain testimony, and obedience to certain laws, outwardly offered to men in the Bible, what less is it, we ask, than the very genius of Rationalism itself; although most of the other sects probably would accept the same definition, as altogether satisfactory and sufficient. The sect life tends to destroy faith, as it is notoriously unfriendly also to every thing like reverence. It is not strange at all to see it running out into "Christianism;" or to hear, in certain quarters, of converts being taken into the church, (so called,) without baptism! There is too much reason to fear, that the virus of a low vulgar insensibility to the divine fact of Christianity has come to pervade the popular mind, in some sections of our country,

under the forms and shams of this unchurchly religionism far beyond what most persons have ever been led to imagine, or suspect.

8. It is encouraging however, as well as curious, to see how the sect system is made to lend *testimony* throughout, against itself, to the idea of the Holy Catholic Church; not unlike the devils in the New Testament, who were forced to acknowledge Christ, while fighting against him or fleeing from his presence. Every sect, in spite of itself, is forced to acknowledge, at least indirectly, the necessary attributes of the Church, as one, holy, catholic, and apostolical. It cannot be a *mere* particular corporation, society or persuasion, however much in some views it may seem disposed to be nothing more. To stand at all, it must put on the character of a church, and then carry out as it best can what this character is felt by a sort of inward necessity, to imply and require. Some sects openly claim the prerogatives and powers of the Universal Church, as belonging to themselves alone, in such a way as to exclude all that is not of their own communion; and this certainly is the most consistent course. Generally however no such claim is made; but the sect professes to look upon itself only as a tribe of the true Israel, a section or wing in the sacramental host of God's elect. And yet it goes on, in these circumstances, to arrogate to itself within its own bounds full church powers; such powers as have no meaning, except as conditioned by the idea of a catholic or whole church; powers which cannot be fairly asserted, without virtual limitation upon the equal independence of sister sects. The inward ecclesiastical economy of every sect, as to its ordinations, admission of members, church censure, supervision of both faith and practice, &c., is so ordered as to involve throughout the assumption of an absolute and final and exclusive supremacy in matters of religion. The idea of the Church, however dimly and obscurely present, will not allow it to be otherwise. It *must* be one and universal, the *whole*, that of necessity excludes all beyond its own sphere. In this way every sect, so far as it can be called a church at all, becomes necessarily a caricature of the catholicity with which it pretends to make war, and so, like every other caricature, bears witness to the truth, which is thus distorted by it and brought into con-

tempt. In some cases, we have surprising confessions in favor of the true idea of the Church, where they might seem to be wholly out of place. Mr. Winebrenner (p. 175,) insists on visibility, unity, sanctity, universality and perpetuity, as the necessary attributes of the church. "An invisible church that some divines speak of," he tells us, "is altogether an anomaly in christian theology." So again: "The union of sects, into one general evangelical alliance, or into one human organization diverse in character, faith and practice, from the one true church of God, as characterized in the Bible, we have no belief in nor sympathy for." So we meet in Mr. Alexander Campbell many traces of a sound and right feeling here, which we may well regret to find overwhelmed again, and made of no effect, by the power of the unhistorical sect mind which is allowed after all to prevail in his system.

9. The posture of sects, being such as now described, involves them unavoidably in endless *inconsistency* and *contradiction*. There is a lie always at the bottom of it, from which it can never fully make its escape. It is the part pretending to be the whole, while it proclaims itself still to be nothing more than a part. The sect acknowledges the christian consciousness to be something deeper, more comprehensive, more absolutely necessary and real, than its own modification of it as a sect; and yet, this modification, the relative and partial sect consciousness, is in fact exalted above the other and clothed with powers which appertain of right only to the idea of christianity in full. The sect wills itself above the church, calls itself modestly *a* church, as one of many; but then goes on, almost in the same breath, to play itself off as *the* church, virtually sinking all other catholicity into a fiction as opposed to such high usurpation. Here is a tremendous contradiction, which runs through the entire system. The very features it is most ready to quarrel with in Romanism, it thrusts upon us again in new shape as its own. It hates church tradition; will hear of no binding force in church history; but straightway manufactures a log chain of authority in the very same form, out of the little yesterday of its own life, which it binds mercilessly on the neck of all its subjects. It will have no saints nor fathers; but forthwith offers us instead its own foun-

ders and leaders, and makes it well nigh blasphemy to speak a word in their dispraise. It is great for private judgment; which it takes mighty good care however to regulate, by bit and bridle, to one single track, and that generally of the most narrow sort. It is loud for the Bible, an open Bible, the Bible *alone*; but only as read through the medium of its own theological habit, and wo to the wight who may presume to read it in any other way. So throughout. The very things it protests and fights against in the church of Rome, it is ready the next moment to assert in its own favor, under some altered form; only with this difference that the old catholic truth which in every case underlies the Roman abuse, is with sects generally treated as part of that abuse itself, so that the new exercise of power brings no such sacred sanction along with it for the pious heart. It is counted dreadful that the church should be placed under the *human* headship of the pope, or of a pope and council; but has not every sect its human headship—whether one man, five men or twenty is of no account—whose supremacy is complete in all its religious affairs, only by its own confession *without* right divine? This headship, moreover, with all its pretended humility, is in no case slow to assume the exercise of divine powers. Popery, we are told with horror, presumes to fix doctrines, make laws, use keys &c., all in virtue of its own right and power, instead of simply following the letter of the Bible. And what sect, we ask, is not continually doing the same thing, in substantially the same way? Has not each sect its system of doctrines, or at least of notions, derived through its own prophetic headship, its particular founder and standing leaders, from the divine record, and legislated into authority by its own circle of reading and teaching, as absolutely as any faith that prevails in Rome? Has it not besides its *index expurgatorius* too, in fact if not in form, its particular world of religious thought hedged in carefully by its approved books and tracts, or possibly by a powerful "book establishment" even, that contrives to monopolize in great measure the business of thinking for the body at large? Rome, it is said, dares to create ecclesiastical rules, ceremonies, rites, &c. And what sect is it, that has not done the same thing? The Holy Church Catholic, by its very idea, includes in itself the whole power of the Saviour's

Mediatorial life, under its three functions, prophetic, priestly and kingly. To say that these functions are exercised by Christ only under an outward and separate form, and that the Church, his mystical Body, does not also include them in her constitution as "the fullness of him that filleth all in all," is a profound absurdity; an absurdity so profound indeed, that no religious body can assert it, and still claim to be a church, without at once falling into the most gross practical contradiction; that, namely, of repudiating the true powers of christianity in the only view in which they *are* true, and then trying to force them into its service again under another form that involves of necessity what is wrong and false. In claiming church rights and church powers accordingly, and in pretending to exercise church functions and satisfy church wants, every sect does in truth lay claim to a true prophetic, true priestly, and true kingly character, at the same time; as without all this, the other pretension is reduced to empty smoke. That is, every sect puts itself forward as an infallibly safe expositor of the true sense of Christianity and the Bible, a perfectly trustworthy and sufficient depository of God's grace and the sure medium of reconciliation with him for sinners, the legatee in full of the commission of the keys as originally given to Peter and his fellow apostles. And yet on the other hand, no such divine powers are acknowledged, as necessary at all to constitute the Church; and other sects are allowed to have just as much right to play prophet, priest and king, in the same ecclesiastical style, as the body in question; which at once turns all such exercise of church functions into a merely human assumption, resting on no general necessary ground whatever, that is, into the very essence of popery itself. In such perpetual self-contradiction is the sect system doomed everywhere to move, by trying to uphold the conception of the Church, while it shows itself at war with all the attributes that enter into its constitution.

Every sect, in claiming to be a church, claims rights and powers which it has no ability whatever, to make good, and invites a faith and trust for which it can offer no sort of commensurate ground in its actual constitution. Take, for exemplification, the large and respectable body of the Narraganset Brethren. Of its origin, tenets and ways, the case does not require that we should

speak. Enough that it rose in the way of protest against errors and defects which were supposed to prevail in the rest of the Christian world, threw itself on the sole guidance of the Bible, and has all along shown itself very zealous for evangelical religion and its own revivals. It allows now that there are other churches besides itself in the world; that the sects generally, are such churches; and is ready indeed, on fit occasion, to make a great parade of liberality and toleration, in the way of shaking hands with other denominations, to express what it conceives to be the "communion of saints." Still it puts itself forward, for all who can be induced to listen to its claims, as the comprehension in full of what the idea of the Church requires; that is, it arrogates to itself prerogatives and resources, which are absolutely universal in their nature, and as such exclusive of every like claim in any other quarter. The sect calls on all men, as they value their salvation, to take refuge in her communion. She does not simply offer them the Bible, but along with it her own tradition also, her sacraments, her ministrations of grace. She is not content to make them christians, but seeks to make them also Narragansets. Her mission is to spread and build up Narragansetism. This for her is identical with absolute and complete Christianity; she expects the whole world to become Narragansets, if not before, at least in the blessed millenium. This same feeling she tries to infuse into every soul, that falls within the range of her ecclesiastical domain; and she exacts from them accordingly, at the same time, full faith in her separate sufficiency for all church purposes and ends. She assumes in regard to them the full stewardship of Christ's house. She makes herself responsible for their souls, engaging if they do but trust her guidance and care to see them safe into heaven. She carries the keys of the kingdom of heaven, to bind and to loose, to open and shut, at her own pleasure. All this implies *universal* validity in her acts, validity for all men and not simply for some men; and in no other view can it ever be the object of Christian faith and trust. But see now the contradiction of the whole case. Narragansetism does not pretend to assert these universal powers in a truly universal way, but only within a given circle, the compass namely of her own membership. It is the church, with all its divine

resources, for one man who has got into its communion, but not at all for another, his neighbor, who belongs to another communion. It is charged with the salvation of one it may be in a family, where all the rest are cared for in a wholly different way. It exacts a faith and obedience of one, which it never thinks of requiring in the case of another. It calls for sacrifices and services in the first case, all for the glory of God in the promotion of Narragansetism, which it never dreams of demanding or exacting in the second. Its privileges and opportunities are for Narragansets only, not for Christians generally, save as they are willing to put on the Narraganset livery, and so make this to be identical with the profession of Christ. The censures of the sect too are taken by herself to be of universal force for those on whom they fall; although acknowledged to be of no force whatever, should it be pretended to hurl them over the sect fence, into any part of the Christian world that lies beyond. Thus one man is excommunicated, put out of the whole church, by a power which would be only laughed at if it undertook to disturb in the least the ecclesiastical relations of another, close beside him, only within another communion, involved in precisely the same offence. Nay, the man who is thus amenable to Narraganset jurisdiction to day, may to-morrow clear himself of it completely by taking letters of dismission from his sect, with all its universal powers, and passing over to the jurisdiction of some other evangelical body, which exercises the same universal powers, with equal independence, in like circumscribed and particularistic style.

How can church powers carry with them any truly necessary and universal force, such as all church faith is felt to demand, exercised in this arbitrary and conventional way? Plainly, in this whole order of things, the church has no necessary existence whatever, but is the creature and product simply of the men who belong to it, with such powers as they may be pleased to lodge in it for present use. There is a sore contradiction here in our whole sect system, the thorn of which those only can fail to feel sharply, who have never yet been brought earnestly to reflect on the true nature of the Church itself. No wonder that sects find it hard often to distinguish themselves from mere voluntary societies, in the service of morality and religion. No wonder, that their sacraments sink so

readily into rationalistic signs, and that the assertion of supernatural objective powers, as something immanent in the constitution of the Church itself, is apt to fill them with offence. It is hard indeed to conceive of all this in the communion of a sect, which I am at full liberty to forsake to-morrow, if I so please, for the communion of another. How can I yield to such a body ever, as such, the faith and homage that are due to the Church as a divine reality, and which crave the presence of this Church in full as a necessary object, to make room for their exercise? If I may thus leave one sect, why not twenty; and if twenty, why not all? On what principle of common sense am I bound to confine my ecclesiastical vagrancy to the range of actually existing sects, (accidents as they are too generally at best,) instead of bidding adieu at once to the whole of them, and originating a new communion, more to my taste, in the bosom say of my own house? To all such questions the sect system can make no satisfactory reply. It tends, with inward necessity from the beginning, to subvert completely the whole idea of the Church.

10. It is owing in part at least, no doubt, to the vast inward lie which the sect system thus carries in its very constitution, that its influence is found to be so *unfavorable actually to honesty and godly sincerity*, in the case of those who surrender themselves to its power. This is a wide subject, which we will not pretend here to take up in its details. All experience however shows, that the sect mind, as such, has a strange tendency to run into low cunning, disingenuous trickery and jesuitic policy. Religion degenerates with it into a trade, in which men come to terms with God on the subject of their own salvation, and lay away their spiritual acquisitions as a sort of outward property for convenient use. The object is required to bend and bow to the subject; becomes a thing indeed for private appropriation, and under such partial apprehension is made to stand falsely for what is the whole. Sect piety is constitutionally unequal, inconsistent, fantastic and pedantic. It never has been, and never can be, sound, calm, full, catholic and free. By the very falsehood of substituting the sect for the Church, it is involved necessarily in hypocrisy, which reaches always with fearful power at last into its entire life. It has a tendency universally to run into sham.

It abounds notoriously in cant. It is full of hollow pretensions, phrases and forms that have parted with all life. It delights in all sorts of quackery. Nor is this dishonesty confined to the sphere of religion; it is very apt to infect the whole life. Hypocrisy towards God begets naturally unfaithfulness towards men. It is not meant of course to charge all sectarian christianity with the moral defect now noticed. We speak only of the *tendency* it has this way. Good men, in the bosom of a sect, may rise superior to the danger; but in doing so, they lay aside to the same extent the sect consciousness itself, and are brought into conflict thus with its ordinary pretensions and claims. On all sides, however, we have examples enough of the bad power, which belongs to the system in the general view here presented. This book of sects sheds no small amount of illustration on their habit of carnal policy and jesuitic calculation. Still wider evidence of it is to be found every day, in our common sectarian religious press. What sectarian paper is trusted beyond the limits of its own denomination, on any question involving sectarian interests and relations? It seems almost the necessary character of every such publication, to be disingenuous and unfair; without thought, it may be, or premeditation; which itself, however, serves only the more fully to show how completely natural such want of catholic integrity is, for the whole system out of which it so easily and readily springs.

11. It is truly amazing, that any person should pretend to justify the sect system, as either agreeable to the true idea of Christianity or conducive to its interests. Some, however, still do so openly; while a much larger number would seem to acquiesce in the thought, indirectly, at least, and by implication. Every such imagination, however, is itself, but a sign and proof of the evil nature of the system, for which it thus seeks to raise an apology; for it carries in itself, we may say, the principle of annihilation in the end, for all that is comprehended in the faith of the holy catholic church. Not only is our sect system in flat contradiction to the letter of the New Testament; it is at war besides with the divine constitution of Christianity itself. It wrongs the idea of the Church, withdraws it as an object of faith from the Christian world, and in this way mars and spoils the symmetry, and full-

ness, and force, of the Christian life throughout. The bad fruits of the system, in this view, stare us in the face from all sides. Our theology is sickly, lame and lean. Our piety is angular and hard, running much into narrow technicalities and traditionary forms. Every denomination has its own small world of theory and experience, which it affects to regard as universal Christianity, without the least account of the other little worlds of like sort, with which it is surrounded. It is gross falsehood, to say that the influence of sects on one another is wholesome, and favorable to the general cause of Christianity. Their emulation is not holy; and any gain that may seem to come of it, is no better than "the hire of a whore or the price of a dog" brought into the house of the Lord, which he has declared to be an abomination in his sight (Deut. xxiii. 18). It is not by any such rivalry and strife, that the glorious gospel may be expected to prevail in the world. All zeal for religion is rotten, and will be found at last to stink, that springs not from a true interest in religion for its own sake. Our sects do not love each other. Their relation to each other, at best, is one of indifference. To a fearful extent, it is one of quiet malignity and hatred. What sect takes any active interest in the welfare of another, rejoices in its prosperity, sympathizes with its griefs and trials, makes common cause with it in its enterprises and works? Every body knows, rather, that the charity of sects stops short for the most part with the lines of circumvallation that surround for each one its own camp, and that it is cold as winter towards all that lies beyond. The jealousies and collisions of sects, not loud, mainly, but in the form rather, of quiet still fanaticism, are the source of endless religious mischief throughout the land. Altogether the system is a plague that calls for mourning and lamentation in every direction.

12. For one who has come to make earnest with the church question, and who has courage to face things as they are in the way of steady firm thought, the whole present state of sect christianity is full of *difficulty* and *discouragement*. In the first place, it is not possible for him to identify any one sect with the idea of the whole Church. Whether he be a Methodist, or a Presbyterian, or a Lutheran, or of any other denomination, he sees clearly that it is a desperate business to think of making out a full agree-

ment with primitive christianity in favor of his own body. He owns too, at any rate that other bodies are included in the Church, as it now stands. Of course, his own is but a part of the Church, not numerically only, but also constitutionally. Hence it must be regarded, when taken by itself, as a one-sided and defective manifestation of the Christian life; and so the consciousness, or state of mind, which it serves to produce, and in which distinctively it stands, can never be rested in as evangelically complete. It is not possible thus for a true church consciousness, and the particular sect consciousness, Presbyterianism, Lutheranism, or any other, to fall together as commensurate spheres of life; the first is something far more wide and deep than the second, and cannot be asked to yield to this as ultimate in any way, without the sense of incongruity and contradiction. Then again, it becomes impossible, of course, to acquiesce in the denominational position as final and conclusive. No position can be so regarded, that is not felt to be identical with the absolute idea of Christianity, the true sense of it as a whole. What earnest minded man now seriously expects that his particular denomination, Methodist, Presbyterian, or any other, is destined to swallow up at last all other types of Christianity, and so rule the universal world? Nor is the case relieved at all, by imagining the different sects, as they now stand, to continue collectively in permanent force. It is not possible at all for a truly thoughtful spirit, to settle itself in this as the legitimate and normal state of the Church. The very sense of sect, as related to the sense of the Church, requires that the first should pass away. The whole sect system then is interimistic, and can be rightly endured only as it is regarded in this light. And yet the system itself is opposed to every such thought. It cannot will its own destruction. Every sect demands of its members a faith and trust, as we have already seen, which imply that it is to be taken as absolute and perpetual. It plays, in its place, the part of Christ's one universal Church. Here, then, is a difficulty. To cleave to the sect as an ultimate interest, in the way it requires, is to be divorced in spirit necessarily, to the same extent, from the true idea of Christ's kingdom, whose perfect coming cannot possibly be in such form. To become catholic, on the other hand, is necessarily to rise above the standpoint

of the mere sect, and to lose the power thus of that devotion to its interests, separately considered, which it can never fail to exact notwithstanding, as the test and measure, in such relation, even, of universal Christianity itself. How much of embarrassment and confusion is involved in all this, the more especially as the sect system has no tendency whatever to surmount its own contradiction, but carries in itself the principle only of endless disintegration, many are made to feel at this time beyond what they are well able to express.

J. W. N.
