

The name *Μαρία*, Maria, is curiously set off by an uninstructed imagination in the Latin Hymns as derived from *mare*, the sea, — “Ave maris stella.”<sup>1</sup> But we must rather identify it, as its other form *Μαρίαμ* shows, with the Miriam of the Red Sea song, even if her name does mean “rebellion.” The Miriam is lost in the Mary.

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#### ARTICLE IV.

### THE TRUE BASIS OF FELLOWSHIP IN THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES.

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THE following Article was prepared for “The General Congregational Association of Illinois,” in fulfilment of its appointment, and is now published at its request.

The topic assigned me is :

“What is the True Basis of Fellowship in the Congregational Churches?”

Fellowship is the natural consequence of adoption. When we have become members of the family of God, we are joint-heirs with Christ of the inheritance which God grants to his children. Fellowship is the participation, through the Holy Spirit, of each believer in the sufferings and glory of Christ, and in the blessings which all believers receive from Christ, and enjoy with him. It is not implied that each Christian receives the same degree of divine aid, but that all draw from a common treasury, and that each receives advantage from what is bestowed upon any one. The term, therefore, designates a necessary relation of Christians to one another and to their Lord. It expresses their partnership in a common possession.

The Greek word translated fellowship is *κοινωνία*, and might be translated the commonwealth. But the wealth or

<sup>1</sup> See March's Latin Hymns, p. 267.

weal of the followers of Christ is mainly spiritual, consists in sentiments and aspirations, hope and faith, love and Christian experience; therefore a word expressive of these things is chosen, rather than a word almost appropriated to a certain form of state government. The apostle does, however, by reference to the commonwealth of Israel, show negatively, and then positively, what true fellowship is, in Eph. ii. 12, 19: "That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise"; but when the Gentiles were converted, he could say to them: "Now, therefore, ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God." The follower of Christ, then, through his fellowship or partnership, has a claim to the blessings which Christ as Redeemer bestows upon men, and also, to some extent at least, enters upon present possession of his rights. In partaking of the inheritance common to all the saints, one renounces a claim to all that which, by being personally his own, would abridge Christ's authority as the ruler of the commonwealth, or as the chief and controlling person in the entire fellowship. The converts at Jerusalem, at the Pentecost, made the fellowship of the saints prominent and visible by holding all things common. It is not probable that all the property of the disciples was then actually put into a common stock; but they were ready to give all, and did give whatever was necessary, for the common good. The fellowship of the Christians of the present day manifests itself chiefly in more spiritual forms.

In the development of Christian life, it *must* manifest itself in diverse ways; but the different forms it puts on should not lead us to suppose that there are various kinds of fellowship. It may impose upon us duties which vary according as our relations with the brethren are more close or more remote; but the bond which unites those under the same covenant in one church is essentially the same with that which binds us to any of the sick and imprisoned who represent Christ.

Were the question before us, then, What is the basis of *Christian* fellowship? we could give a very brief reply: It is adoption into the family of God. But if we interpret the question so that it shall include the following: What are the evidences on which we recognize our own Christian fellowship and the Christian fellowship of others? then a more careful and extended reply is needed. But the present inquiry is still more restricted: What is the basis of fellowship in those churches which are congregational in their polity? Here the fellowship cannot be merely that known to God, but that recognized among believers, and accorded by them to each other.

It will aid us, in a reply to the latter question, to answer, first, this: What are the evidences on which fellowship may be recognized? or, How may one, inquiring as to his own spiritual state, know himself to be of the family of God? In treating this question, it would not be proper to satisfy ourselves with a mere statement of the grounds on which one in youth, perhaps in childhood, or one as yet untaught, might be admitted to a church. In such a case there is much implied which is not expressed. The pastor and the maturer members of the church assume many things which the candidate does not think of. The inquiry before us is: On what is a *claim* to fellowship in the church based?

1. None have come into the Christian fellowship except those whom God has called into it. The goods, or good things, of which we participate are those which God has prepared, to which he only can give a claim, and a desire for which he only can create in the mind. This truth is implied in 1 Cor. i. 9: "God is faithful, by whom ye were called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord." A more positive assertion is found in John vi. 44: "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him."

The drawing of the Father to the Son is by very gentle means; it often is not observed by those who are called; but still every person's Christian experience has this divine origin, and some trace of the influence of God upon the soul

before conversion can generally be found. No one can be considered a follower of Christ who would deny that it was grace, opposing his own nature, which led him to the Redeemer for salvation.

2. Christian fellowship leads to a knowledge of the truth. The Bible is explicit and emphatic on this point. Paul prays that Philemon's fellowship of faith may be energetic in producing a knowledge of all the good which Christ bestows upon his disciples. John affirms that fellowship must be accompanied with light, cannot co-exist with darkness. "If we say that we have fellowship with him [God], and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth; but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another" (1 John i. 6, 7). Paul commands Timothy to withdraw himself from, i.e. refuse fellowship with, any man who consents not to wholesome words and to the doctrine which is according to godliness (1 Tim. vi. 3-6). In the Gospel of John vii. 17 we read; "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine." It is a principle which pervades all the scriptures, that real communion with God leads to a correct understanding of the truth. Fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ (1 John i. 3), and must, from its nature, be accompanied by a submission of the mind to God, and an acceptance of Jesus Christ as Mediator.

We may rest fully assured, therefore, that those persons are not in fellowship with God and his people who have not clear ideas of the fundamental truths of the gospel, and who do not soon come into clear views of the special doctrines of grace. Those persons who tamper with error, those who pet their doubts, those who are not enlightened in mind so as to see clearly that salvation must be by Christ, by regeneration through the Spirit, by self-renunciation and by simple grace through a Redeemer, cannot be considered to be in a state of Christian fellowship. They may seem to us honest seekers for the truth; but the Bible forbids us to believe that they are enlightened.

3. It is a part of the same idea, but worthy of separate notice, that the fellowship of Christians delivers them from errors. The mind enlightened by communion with God sees the want of consistency between Christian truth and error. This effect of fellowship, and indeed the entire doctrine, with its consequences, is very forcibly stated in the first chapter of Colossians. The following words indicate the spirit of the passage: "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son." A more explicit statement is found in 2 Cor. vi. 14, 15: "For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?" There may be a temptation, sometimes, to admit into church fellowship those who cling to error, if they seem to indicate a love of truth, and especially if they exhibit a love of Christ. But there are many kinds of emotion that may be called love; and we must accept as a ground of fellowship only that which delivers one not only from essential religious errors, but from those tendencies of thought which are more accordant with infidelity than with faith in Christ.

4. Christian fellowship naturally separates one from men who teach error, as well as delivers the mind from their doctrines. A somewhat prominent member of a Presbyterian church in the state of New York was excommunicated, some years ago, for the habit of attending on Sabbath the services at the Universalist church of the village, where he heard lectures from Mr. Garrison and popular speakers of the class to which he belonged. The accused defended himself on the ground that he heard good things at the church; but was condemned on the ground that he spent the Sabbath with those from whom he was liable to hear false and evil things. In revivals in colleges there are almost always some whose consciences are aroused, but who decline to take an open

position in favor of religion on the ground that they can exert a better influence on the more wayward and hardened if they do not break away from them.

Such facts as these lead us to observe the general principle laid down in the New Testament, that those who are in fellowship with Christ will also be in fellowship with the followers of Christ, and will find the society of those who are unchristian, who teach error, who are profane and godless, repulsive to their feelings. True Christian fellowship evokes nothing more clearly and distinctly than likes and dislikes. There is no love without hate, and to love the brethren is to hate that which weakens and distracts the brotherhood. The texts which bear upon this point are numerous. Paul commands the Ephesians (v. 11) to "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." And he says to the Corinthians: "I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils." He says to the Galatians (i. 7): "There be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." The apostle John says: "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed; for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds" (2 John 10, 11).

We may set it down, therefore, that any one who is in real and living fellowship with Christ and his followers, who lives in the fellowship of the Spirit, will fulfil the joy of Christians, which was the joy of Paul, will be like-minded with the brethren, will do nothing through vain-glory, will with lowliness of mind seek to serve the church; but will avoid teachers of error, will detest a new gospel different from that of the Lord Jesus, will find his rest and satisfaction in associating with those who live by faith, and rest on the promises of God. I need not say that such a spirit is consistent with a bold and earnest search for truth; but I also do not need to say that it is neither boldness nor earnestness, but the Divine

Spirit, the pure heart, the docility of love, which lead to the truth.

5. Those who are in the fellowship to which God calls us will keep the commandments of God. There is no antinomian piety. Those who are the friends of God will feel themselves called to this discharge of duties, and feel assured that, if they neglect them, they give evidence that they are still aliens from the divine commonwealth. It is true, we are not saved as a reward of obedience; but we are doubly condemned if we continue in disobedience after we have been enlightened, and know the reasonableness and wisdom of the divine requirements. Indeed, obedience to the commandments of God is the external mark of love to God. Much has been said of late about love as the true evidence, the sufficient evidence, the only evidence of discipleship. But such assertions amount to little till love is defined. As all know, it is not an emotional affection merely; it is that state of submission to God which Edwards calls consent, propensity, and union of heart with him. Love is sometimes said to be the sum of all Christian graces; it certainly secures the Christian graces, and its manifestation is keeping the commandments. Christ accepts no love which is not a determination of the will towards himself. We should have been saved much mawkish sentimentalism, if certain writers and preachers had remembered this truth. Our Lord seems almost to have despised a love that consists simply of emotions. He says: "If ye love me, keep my commandments." There seems to be a kind of impatience indicated in his rebuke of those who claimed to be his followers without being obedient: "And why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?"

It has been said that Christ's only question in examining men for a place in his church was, "Lovest thou me?" The blunder as to facts is not greater than the blunder in interpreting the question itself. Christ intended to teach the boastful Peter that love such as he felt on the night of the supper was not enough to make a stable disciple. Show your

love by work, was his direction. "Feed my sheep"; "Feed my lambs." In the last chapter of Revelation, the ground on which man's blessedness is secured is sounded forth in tones which seem fit at once to awe and enchant a world: "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city."

Thus far we have noticed only traits of character indispensable to Christian discipleship. It might be that some of these characteristics would manifest themselves but feebly in certain cases; but where any of them could be positively denied to exist, the demonstration would be perfect that the ground of fellowship did not exist. One who should fail to find in himself the above-mentioned traits could not honestly suppose himself to belong to the family of God. Those who were of the household of faith could not welcome to their embrace one whom they were assured the Lord Jesus had not welcomed. And if an inevitable judgment should exclude those not affiliated in sentiment to the children of God, much more would the subtle sympathies, the quick, susceptible sense of brotherhood exclude them from a recognized place in the divine household.

The question before us, it is to be remembered, is not the broad one, "What is the basis of fellowship among the children of God?" but "What is the basis of fellowship in our churches?" We must inquire, then, Does the church from its nature exclude from its fellowship any who belong to the company of Christ's disciples? A little reflection will convince any one that an affirmative reply is, at least, not an absurdity. It may now be the common assumption that the church exists simply for the purpose of gathering into a safe retreat the true followers of Christ. But even *this* work, and it is not *all* its work, might forbid the instant acceptance of some true disciples into immediate, formal fellowship. The object for which a church exists, according to the old and often-expressed view, is that the people of God may become visible and militant. In other words, the disciples

of Christ form themselves into churches in order that God's grace among men may acquire a manifestation and a practical efficiency. The church must therefore be an intelligent witness to certain Christian truths, and bear intelligible testimony to them. There may, therefore, be many who enjoy the fostering care of the church, who yet are not fitted to fulfil the offices of membership. The work of the church is not exhausted upon those who sit down at the communion table, but is directed with special earnestness towards those not found there. Children may be, often are, the more carefully watched because they are not able to make a clear confession of their faith. It is mere sentimentalism to argue the propriety of admitting children to the church from the fact that lambs need the shelter of a fold as well as sheep. As good a counter argument (each being good for nothing) is: Chickens are well cared for, if the hen is well sheltered in the coop. To receive the nurture of the church and to profess its faith are two things. And a profession without a confession is simply a pretence.

It will be in place, then, to notice some things which a member of a church by his simple position affirms, and, if the church is not as broad as humanity, affirms with some degree of intelligence.

1. In order to be fitted for a place in the visible church, a person must be able to understand the character of Jesus Christ, as the Son of God and as the Messiah. Near the close of our Lord's ministry, he called his disciples into a remote and secluded region, beneath Mount Lebanon, and examined them as to their faith, and organized his church. This seems to be a fair interpretation — at least it is a common interpretation — of Matt. xvi. 13-20. He asked the disciples, "Whom say ye that I am?" Peter answered, apparently for them all: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus said this was a revelation to Peter from the Father in heaven, and added: "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church." Whatever may be the particular thing here designated as a rock, there can be

no doubt that the foundation of the Christian church is a correct understanding of Christ. Any confession which makes him less than the Son of God, which denies that he is the Anointed of God, the King for whom the Jews were looking, and the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, is not a confession on which church-membership is to be based.

2. In order to come to the sacrament of the Lord's supper properly, one must be able to discern the Lord's body. "For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body." All will assent that this passage requires the following things :

One, in order to come to the communion-table properly, must confess his own sinful state, his entire ruin because of sin, and his present condemnation by a holy law.

He must confess, also, that pardon cannot be granted him out of the mere mercy of God, but must be bought by a sacrifice by one who has borne our sins in his own body, and died for them.

He must profess, also, that he finds evidence in his own experience that he has received the benefits of Christ's death in his own soul, so that his own life manifests new traits of character which have become his by divine aid.

He must also profess himself to be rather a member of the church than an independent person ; profess that his life is a church life, and for the church, rather than a life having its springs of action in itself. In a word, he must profess devotion to the church. This thought seems to be clearly contained in 1 Cor. x. 16, 17 : "The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ. For we, being many, are one bread and one body ; for we are all partakers of that one bread." Alford says the meaning is : "By partaking of that bread, we become not figuratively, but literally, one bread ; it passes into the substance of our bodies, and there is in every one who partakes, a portion of himself which is that bread." Such a partaking of the bread sets forth our partaking of Christ, or our fellowship with Christ and with his followers.

3. The very existence of the church demands that those in its fellowship accept the Bible as the rule of faith. The chief things of which we partake in common are objects of faith, and unless these be the *same*, the communion is a mockery. We must have one faith, as well as one Lord and one baptism. And our common faith must embrace all the doctrines essential to the Christian system. The evidences of Christianity are, indeed, addressed to our natural judgment; but when we are convinced that God has sent his Son into the world, and that through him and the apostles the way of salvation is taught, then we have no choice but to accept the teachings of the scriptures, without conditions, and without cunning and far-fetched interpretations. If the scriptures were of private interpretation, a rationalizing spirit might so abrade the sharp outlines of the doctrines—even of those most prominent, like the atonement, regeneration, the resurrection, and eternal punishment—that they would seem quite other doctrines than those found by the ordinary reader in the word of God. But in the nature of things a revelation is not given to be explained away; we might as well be without the revelation. What men need is a disclosure of truth for the common mind, and that we have in the Bible, or we have no Bible. This point the apostle has argued with great clearness and cogency in the first two chapters of the First Epistle to the Corinthians. He shows there, and in other places, that a Greek is no better than a Jew; in other words, a philosopher is no better than a formalist—each must come for life and light to Jesus Christ. He declares that he avoids the wisdom of this world; that he preaches the mysteries of the gospel not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual (or setting forth spiritual things in spiritual forms).

4. No one has a right to be within a church who does not seek the order and harmony of the church. It is very clear that God is specially regardful of order, propriety, and peacefulness in his own house. The apostles urge their

followers to avoid schisms, confusion, contention, anything which engenders strife, and command their converts to live peaceably with all men. There were, probably, peculiar reasons for such entreaties in the early ages of the church; but it still remains true that a harmonious and united church presents a most pleasing spectacle to the eye of God. There is no doubt but discipline should be enforced in a church — enforced for the sake of order and peace. There may be times when earnest men must protest against the delinquencies of the church, and even separate those who are Christ's from those who are not; but this does not change the fact that God calls upon his children to be men of peace, of gentleness, of meekness, avoiding such as walk disorderly, seeking to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace; not striving for pre-eminence, but in honor preferring one another.

All these conditions, indispensable to a witnessing to the truths of the gospel, should be insisted upon as a basis of fellowship in all our churches. But the question before us is subject to a still further restriction.

What is the true basis of fellowship in the *Congregational* churches? This is a twofold question, and we will consider it, understanding by fellowship, first, that which exists within a single church; and secondly, that which exists between different churches.

No one will doubt that, in the present imperfect state of human knowledge and varied faiths, it is better that persons of *like* views *combine* in forming churches, so that the harmony within a church be as complete as circumstances will admit. We should, any of us, advise one agreeing wholly with a certain denomination to connect himself with that denomination, if convenient. And there might be cases — there have been cases — in which we should be obliged to refuse church-fellowship to one whom we believed to be a true disciple of Christ, even though it were impossible for him to find the sect with which he agreed in doctrine.

There are, doubtless, many really converted persons in

the Roman Catholic church ; but they could not properly be admitted to a Congregational church, bringing with them their Romish views. Their ideas of the pope and the Virgin Mary would exclude them from us. They could not be, indifferently, Romanists or Congregationalists, as convenience should dictate. There are probably Universalists who are true followers of Christ ; but if any one should declare that the assertions of eternal punishment in the Bible must be interpreted consistently with the doctrine of universal salvation, because God would not punish men forever, he could not properly be admitted to a church holding that the scriptures are the only and sufficient rule of faith.

A distinguished theologian of the old school has recently expressed his belief that Schleiermacher is now singing the praises of Christ in heaven. Yet he represents the doctrines of Schleiermacher as being far from those taught in the scriptures. No one should teach that Christ's *work* is of little account, that his *power* is in manifesting a true humanity, and in thus awakening the dormant elements of a true humanity in degraded men, that his mission is saving men by developing their latent virtues, could be admitted to a Congregational church.

A man who should reject the Old Testament from the canon of the scriptures and throw out parts of the New Testament, or one who should deny the inspiration of the scriptures, could not be admitted to any of our Congregational churches.

It is not questioned that immersionists are true Christians ; but a person who should declare a Congregational church to be no church, and that all its members must be immersed before he could join them, would find a twofold reason for his exclusion from its communion-table.

The church is not intended to be simply a receptacle of all those who are to be saved. Heaven will receive its own at last. Some will be taken who never entered the church militant, and some will be rejected who will claim to have done efficient work in his kingdom on earth. The church

is, in truth, the body of Christ; but we cannot consider any to belong to that body except those who visibly belong to it.

I shall speak but briefly on the second point under Congregational fellowship, viz. that existing between the churches. Some of my remarks will be suggestions, rather than assertions, inasmuch as the Congregational polity does not seem to be fully developed at this point.

1. It is obvious that the churches must agree in polity, in order to hold the intimate relations necessary in the same denomination.

The platform of the Council of 1865 (published, however, within the present year) affirms that, "A church desiring the approbation and assistance of other churches in the ordination of its officers cannot wisely or courteously ask such approbation and assistance from churches in whose professed theory of government all ordinations must be by a prelate, or in whose theory the power of ordination is given only to a presbytery ruling over many congregations. In like manner, if it desire counsel in any case involving questions of doctrine, it cannot wisely or courteously ask such counsel of churches not accepting that general system of doctrines which is the well-known basis of mutual confidence and intimate communion among evangelical churches of the Congregational polity."

If the mere question of polity is to be considered in searching for the basis of fellowship, much more are doctrines relating to the salvation of men to be considered.

2. Fellowship among the churches should be conditioned upon agreement as to the fundamental doctrines of the Christian religion. One Congregational church cannot enter into fellowship with another of like polity, if it deny the Divinity of Christ, the entire depravity of man, the eternal punishment of the wicked. A church adopting a different polity from ours, but holding to the evangelical doctrines, or the distinguishing doctrines of the New Testament may come into far more intimate relations with us than a church with our polity which rejects our view of the system of grace.

3. The fellowship of the churches ought to be based upon, then ought to secure and maintain, an agreement of the churches and of the ministry upon the practical doctrines relating to Christian ordinances and the evangelization of the world. It would be a misfortune to have an exclusive immersionist settled as pastor over one of our churches. It would be a misfortune to have a pastor bring into one of our churches the Romish views of communion. Perhaps the good sense of those opposed to us secures us from any danger on those points, but our own good sense ought also to secure us. I think it would be no less a misfortune to have in our churches preachers who should proclaim that man in his natural state has no religious duties, that his conscience cannot and ought not to condemn him for disobedience to God, till God has given him a gracious ability to obey. Such doctrines cut the very sinews of morality. The preachers of such doctrines are indebted for the Christian virtues of their own congregations, in some degree, to the sounder preaching of their neighbors, as well as to the inherent force of the conscience,

Our Congregational churches are therefore bound by their fellowship to co-operate in educating a ministry which shall be in substantial agreement not only as to the doctrines of salvation, but also as to the methods of proclaiming and applying those doctrines.

4. It is worthy of inquiry whether it ought not to be a fundamental principle of fellowship among the churches, that the ministry in its official work be in some way amenable to councils or associations. The Congregational polity at this point seems not fully developed; for the common sense of the churches has required of councils the exercise of powers not granted them in some of our theories.

One theory is, that a man is a teacher or preacher in virtue of his office in a church; yet practically all our missionaries, our preachers without charge, our clerical teachers in colleges and seminaries are preachers, and accepted as such, though their church connection be with a church a thousand miles away.

A theory is, that the local church ordains a minister, giving him thus the privilege of preaching; but in practice a council can depose him from the ministry. The same body should have power to confer and withdraw the privilege. Moreover, there should be some method of calling a council for the purpose of deposing a minister of scandalous life, other than the mere motion and inclination of the church to which the minister may belong.

A theory is, that ordination is simply the induction by a church of a man into the office of teacher in that church; but practically it gives him power to preach anywhere.

A theory is that a council gives access to the neighboring churches by extending the right hand of fellowship to a newly-settled pastor; but if a church hire a previously-ordained preacher for a year or a month, he has practically the same access to the neighboring churches.

In theory an installation is an attenuated ordination, yet practically ordination is an advanced step to a permanent position in the ministry.

There are thus duties imposed upon councils which the individual churches calling them do not impose. When the Board of Missions wishes to send a young man to one of its stations, it asks the church in Sailem to call a council of the churches in Preachem and Teachem for the purpose of ordaining their missionary. It is a mere ecclesiastical fiction to hold that the church calling the council is the prime and responsible mover in the work. But the remarks here made are intended simply to raise the inquiry whether the Congregational system cannot be made more complete than it now is.