

Conflict of Ages

The Great Debate
on the
Moral Relations of God and Man

by
Edward Beecher, D.D.

adapted and edited by

Phillip A. Ross

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Edward Beecher (1803–1895)

Picture courtesy of The Harriet Beecher Stowe Center, Hartford, Connecticut.

Dedicated to
Joseph Aloisius Ratzinger
also known as
Benedict XVI
who serves as
Bishop of Rome
the Sovereign of the
Vatican City State
and the leader of the
Catholic Church,
the largest branch of Christianity

in the hope for Christian Resolution

PREFACE

YOU have in your hands a dangerous book, dangerous because it deals with perhaps the most serious conflict in history, and I commend it with some trepidation. That conflict began in Genesis and has continued unabated through history. Many people believe it to be a conflict between believers and unbelievers, and a great many people, traditions and religions have framed the conflict in these terms. The Old Testaments prophets described the conflict as between the one true God and the many false gods, or the true prophet and the false prophets. Both conceptions are equally true, but the latter is to be preferred because the former suggests that those who oppose the God of the Bible don't believe anything, when in fact they believe as strongly as believers, but believe falsely.

And yet to even say that they believe falsely is not quite right, because what they believe has every bit as much logic, reason and experience to back it up as any argument provided by believers. And this is why this conflict has continued. It cannot be won by arguments, logic, reason or experience. In fact, it cannot be won by argument at all! It is not an intellectual or academic matter, though it involves intellectual and academic concerns. It is a matter of the heart, of faith and belief.

Those who don't believe and trust the Bible to be true, find it to be unbelievable and untrustworthy on the basis of sound logic, reason and experience. Don't get me wrong here! I'm not arguing against the veracity of Scripture. I'm arguing from the perspective of presuppositional antithesis, a Christian understanding forged by Cornelius Van Til and sharpened by Greg Bahnsen.¹

1 Van Til, Cornelius. *The Defense of the Faith*, 3d ed.; Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1967. See also www.vantil.info. Bahnsen, Greg L. *Pushing the Antithe-*

Edward Beecher preceded both Van Til and Bahnsen, but he was aware to some extent of the equally logical, reasonable and experiential arguments coming from both sides of this chasm. Beecher does an admirable job of justifying both perspectives, and shows that both are in fact woven into Christian history. The fact of the presence of this conflict in Christian history should give us pause, particularly because both sides claim the Christian high ground. It involves the dispute between God's sovereignty and human free will.

I will let Beecher lay out the argument, which he does very well. But because I think that he has seriously failed in his final analysis, he also errs in his conclusion and remedy. And yet, there is great value to his work because he appears to be a serious believer in every respect. He did his best, which is all we can expect of anyone. And he is a creature of his time, as are we all. But because our time follows his by a century and a half we have more history to evaluate and better tools of evaluation. We have Van Til, Bahnsen and others to draw upon.

DISCOVERY

I stumbled upon this book quite by providence, as the old divines would say. I currently live in Marietta, Ohio, which is a unique place, as most every town undoubtedly is. Marietta's uniqueness comes from its founding in 1788 by an act of Congress, and its establishment on the most Western Frontier of the fledgling experiment known as the United States of America. Marietta is known for having the oldest church in Ohio—First Congregational Church, organized in Marietta in December of 1796.

I was working on a project regarding the Nineteenth Century religious history of Marietta, Ohio,² and discovered that the first honorary degree granted by Marietta College was given to Edward Beecher in 1841 (Doctor of Divinity). The leaders of Marietta College must have been pleased with Beecher's earlier book, *Statement of Anti-Slavery Principles* (1837), which encouraged a growing theme in American society at the time. Indeed, slavery has proven to be one of the most important and enduring themes of all American history.

The Beecher Legacy stands today as a crown jewel in the treasury of American culture, though it is full of conflict. The Beechers have

sis: The Apologetic Methodology of Greg L. Bahnsen, American Vision, 2007.

2 Summers, Thomas J. *The Religious History of Nineteenth Century Marietta—Reflections*, Pilgrim Platform, Marietta, Ohio, 2012, Phillip A. Ross, editor.

been a prolific, cantankerous, well-placed and very human family. It seems to have begun with Lyman Beecher, Edward's father. He survived three wives and was the most consistent person at the source of that legacy, firing up his children with the great concerns and big questions of life and history. For the most part Harriet Beecher Stowe has cornered the market on the Beecher legacy, to the paucity of the available treasure, I should add. Nothing against Harriet, but there is much more to this legacy than Harriet's work. All of the Beecher children were serious scholars, writers and theologians and are worthy of serious study and reflection.³

In my estimation, this book by Edward Beecher needs to be re-considered from a slightly different perspective. Or, because he has been forgotten by history, it needs to simply be *considered*. He was consumed with both temporal (historical) and eternal concerns, and those concerns and his treatment of them may significantly contribute toward the renovation that is so needed by the Christian church in our day.

His book was originally published when America was deeply conflicted over the Great Awakenings and the New School/Old School controversies that set the stage for the American Civil War. During that same time Protestantism in general was also very displeased with "Romanism," Beecher among them, who published *The Papal Conspiracy Exposed* in 1855. It was during this time period, roughly the Nineteenth Century, that Christianity of most every stripe took a giant step decisively away from historic Christian orthodoxy, note the small "o" in *orthodoxy*.

Of course, depending on your tradition (Catholic, Orthodox or Protestant) you will see the roots of this departure differently. Of interest on this point will be the work of John Williamson Nevin, who decisively argued that the second generation Calvinists had already departed from the original Calvinism of Calvin, and which may be at the root of both the Great Awakenings and its detractors. You will find references in several footnotes in this book.

DEDICATION

People may wonder why I have dedicated this book to the current Roman Catholic Pope. Be assured that it is not to provide any sort of

3 For a brief description of the Beechers see: http://www.harrietbeecherstowecenter.org/hbs/beecher_family.shtml.

affront, nor to carry water from the wells of the Nineteenth Century spirit of anti-papalism, nor to further the flawed ecumenical efforts of the Twentieth Century. The ecumenism of the Twentieth Century built upon the errors of the Nineteenth. A different approach to ecumenicism is needed, and I have written much about these things through my own literature, so interested Christians can learn more there. But it may be that Edward Beecher has made a significant contribution to this cause, as well, if people can get beyond the errant presuppositions about him and about Christianity, and examine the issues with new eyes.⁴

I have dedicated this book to the Pope because he represents the largest group of Christians in the world today, and genuine ecumenism or Christian unity cannot avoid the inclusion of Roman Catholics. I also want the Catholic leaders to consider Beecher's argument, so I have edited his language a bit to make it less offensive. I think that Beecher's work may benefit the wholeness and unity of the Christian church by contributing to the correction, renewal and renovation of the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox church, the various Protestant churches including the various Reformed churches—even the Unitarian and Mormon churches, and even possibly Islam, which I understand to be another Christian heresy.

In the same way that I'm calling for this book to be reevaluated afresh in our day, we must also reevaluate each and all of the various denominations and movements that have made it into the Twenty-First Century. Of course, much such evaluation has been going on for some time as many people have come to realize that something very fundamental or basic has gone awry in Christendom and in the world. There are calls for reformation and revival coming from nearly every corner of the church and the world today.

Beecher was actually quite catholic in his outlook and treatment of the theology of his day. In particular, he identified a very basic theological problem and suggested a solution that is worthy of our best and most attentive consideration, though such consideration will be quite difficult for a number of reasons. But if he was right or even partly right—and that is the question that I hope to put on the table in our day by republishing this book—his work could provide serious grist for the ecumenical, catholic, Christian reformation and revival mill.

4 Jordan, James W. *Through New Eyes—Developing a Biblical View of The World*, Wipf & Stock, 2000.

It is important to understand the problem and see Beecher's solution in the context in which he presented it, and then in the way I propose to tweak it in the Appendix. He labored to frame the problem in its historical context. Consequently, it will help readers to have much Christian history and theology, including German theology, under their proverbial belts simply to perceive Beecher's systematic or holistic approach to the problem and his recommended solution—and mine.

In Beecher's day, the dominating problem that beset the churches was the ongoing argument between Calvinists and Arminians, or the Old School and the New School (or New Light) factions, or the Protestant churches and the newly founded Unitarian church. Beecher will show that these arguments can be traced back to the dispute between Augustine and Pelegius, and his analysis is sure to surprise and offend you, regardless of where you stand. Please bear with him—and me. Try to understand his argument and not simply dismiss him out of hand, so that you can consider the correction that I will suggest.

Be aware that I am not suggesting any sort of ecumenical union of Christian churches and denominations as if Christian unity is a matter of adding together all of the errors and idiocies of Christian history into a great administrative conglomeration and call it *unity*. But I am suggesting that our human understanding of God's Truth is cumulative, and that we need to embrace what is true according to the best measures of our contemporary tools and abilities, and to simultaneously abandon what is not. Genuine learning involves the willingness to admit our own errors and embrace ideas that are new to us.

Though Beecher is not up to speed regarding contemporary theology or science, we can learn much from his openness, keen wit, historical breadth and depth, and his unabashed commitment to Jesus Christ and to the history of Christ's church. Most people identify Beecher as a Unitarian or Arminian, but it seems to me that such an identification is short-sighted, inadequate and fails to understand the crux of his argument. As a staunch Calvinist myself, I implore you not to dismiss Beecher before you understand him.

Obviously, Beecher's work will not solve our internecine problems today because it is nearing two centuries since he first penned it, and there is much that has since happened and much that he simply didn't know. Nonetheless, there are indications in my opinion that his work was misunderstood and neglected by his Mainline contempo-

aries in the midst of the theological controversies of his own day—but adopted and adapted by many people who were fleeing the dissension that was destroying and dividing the churches.

Beecher demands that we ask, consider and answer the deepest questions about the thorniest problems, not to avoid them. He was solidly committed to the best understanding of both theological and scientific truth available to him, and he was willing to follow it wherever it led. Following Beecher's lead, I pray that all who read this manuscript will approach this book with as much patience and objectivity as they can muster. It is not an easy read, but it is worthwhile.

An additional reason to dedicate this book to Pope Benedict XVI is that he is German, and much of Beecher's scholarship was based on contemporary (in his day) German sources. It is likely that Pope Benedict is familiar with Beecher's German sources. He may also be familiar with this book, as well. I don't know. What I do know is that most Christian scholars today are not. My hope is that the most serious Christians today will be the most serious about fixing Christianity, which appears to be broken across the denominational spectrum. Many of the problems that Beecher intended to solve with this work, have been greatly exacerbated since it was first published in 1853.

I pray that the Pope (and others) will have the humility to receive this book in the spirit in which it is offered—in the simple hope for Christian resolution and advancement. Few are the denominations that don't believe that Christ has called His church into a unity of the highest caliber. But our world, and Christ's church, don't need any more revolutions, nor anymore reformations or revivals like those of the past. Those days are over. We cannot return to any previous time or historical epoch, and all such efforts in that direction are flawed. History does not flow backwards. The future always lies ahead in uncharted territory.

It would be difficult for the Pope to argue that the Roman Catholic Church is beyond correction, given the onslaught of sexual abuse suits it has received in the past thirty to forty years. I pray that he will see that the problem in the Church is larger than a few wayward priests, larger than a few wayward Protestant denominations, larger than anything the church has heretofore known. It seems to me that his admission of such things would help to significantly advance the establishment of Christianity.

The problems in every denomination go back to deep seated and long standing theological conflicts and rampant confusion about all sorts of things. But such thoughts are not for me to speculate about here. So, kindly join me in prayer that the best and most sublime Christian inspiration—with all of the various hopes and ideals that drove Beecher to write this book in the first place, and are driving me to republish it—will provide the context for its usefulness to all of God’s many and diverse people—to the Pope, to Christ’s Church and to the watching world.

Allow me to prepare you for some of Beecher’s ideas and to then suggest some further analysis in the Appendix *after* you have read his arguments. He speaks much of “new-created minds” being at the source of the problem, but doesn’t formally define the term. The term refers to the birth of individual human beings. The term is related to Beecher’s solution to the problem, which he calls the *doctrine of preexistence*. Please don’t rush to judgment or think that you understand what he means by this idea before you have seriously considered his argument in full.

I will argue that Beecher failed to adequately understand the Trinity, and that failure caused him to look for something that shapes human predilection such that God could not be blamed for creating people with an innate propensity to sin. Because of his commitment to individualism, he posited the idea of preexistence, such that people had earned God’s damnation in some unknown previous state of existence. This way Beecher could hold the doctrine of total depravity without blaming God for creating people who cannot avoid sin. I believe that the Trinity better solves the problem without introducing a host of related difficulties.

I found myself thinking of this idea of preexistence as a kind of antediluvian human cultural remnant out of which God called Abraham. Abraham’s father, Terah (whose Hebrew name means “Ibex, wild goat,” or “Wanderer” and “loiterer”) was a priest of a very ancient religion, possibly related to the god, Sin.⁵ Abraham was called out of that

5 Stein, Robert H. “Sumer,” ISBE 4:653–662. According to Sumerian myths, Sin was the child that resulted from Enlil’s rape of Ninlil. Sin’s wife was Ningal. Together they had three children, each of whom became prominent deities: Shimachu, the sun-god, Ereshkigal, queen of the underworld, and the youngest, Inanna (known as Ishtar in Semitic lands), who became Queen of Heaven. (from James W. Bell’s *Ancient Sumeria*. http://www.jesuswalk.com/abraham/0_intro.htm). See also, Ross, Phillip A. *Peter’s Vision of The End in Second Peter*, Pilgrim Platform, Marietta, Ohio,

culture to create a new culture that we know as Old Testament Judaism, which was to be a blessing to all nations, all peoples of the earth (Gen. 12:2-3). The culture of Judaism got bogged down in self-centeredness, whereupon Christ came to liberate the Gospel of God to once again be a blessing to all nations, all peoples of the earth. Understanding Beecher requires an understanding of the “big picture” of God’s mission to the world. And my correction requires understanding the role of the Trinity in that mission.

DELIVERY

My approach to putting this book together has been to reproduce it in a way that maximizes its understandability without being a slave to academic accuracy. And this has been quite a task because Beecher was a scholar whose universe of discourse was quite broad, but the academic standards of his day leave much to be desired. My intent is to put Beecher’s argument in the hands of contemporary Christians as broadly as possible in order to encourage conversation and discussion about it. However, I must forewarn you because it is a very big idea, and fully worthy of your most careful consideration.

Regarding the text, Beecher’s words have been preserved pretty much as he wrote them. I have added or changed a word here and there as a correction or improvement. The most significant change I made was to substitute Beecher’s idea of “misadjustment” with the more contemporary language of “misunderstanding.” He argues that Christianity has been “misadjusted” since Augustine, and that this “misadjustment” has produced various theological and philosophical misalignments. I think that Beecher’s idea will be more clearly communicated with the language of *misunderstanding*. At least, it is for me.

I have also changed the layout to better suit contemporary standards, by stretching out the text so that the reader is not simply presented with page after page of unformatted text and incredibly long paragraphs—by pulling out quotations and providing more white space. While Beecher was quite a scholar, his method of scholarship (footnoting sources in particular) pales in comparison to contemporary standards. Correcting this deficiency is certainly needed, but is beyond my intentions here.

I have also added footnotes to provide identification and context for the many people he mentioned. My footnotes are in the page font,

2012, chapter 8, “Lot’s Lesons,” section “Sodom,” p. 69.

and Beecher's are in *Arial*. I am astonished and humbled by the many people he cited and referred to. My reading of Beecher has convinced me of how little I actually know, and how much there is to know.

Let me also remind the reader that this book, like my other books, is not intended to be a scholarly treatise. I'm not opposed to scholarship, but it can and often does impose categories upon those who engage in it that are oblique to the message of the Bible. Consequently, I hope to make Beecher's scholarship understandable and more readily available to those not inflicted with the scholarship gene. I'm more interested in the ideas of the book than its pedigree or historicity. That work can be done much better by others more qualified—and I hope it will be. There is always an optimal balance between detailed focus and breadth of scope to be sought.

Finally then, I am deeply grateful for my wife, Stephanie, and her work, support, encouragement, persistence and perseverance with me, especially as I have endeavored to write. I simply could not do what I do without her doing what she does.

May the Lord bless you as you read this book. Please consider it carefully and prayerfully. And if you make it all the way through it, join the conversation.

Phillip A. Ross
April 2012
Marietta, Ohio

DEDICATION

My honored and beloved brethren in Christ, of every name.

I AM induced to dedicate this work to you, because its subject is one in which you all have a deep and common interest. You will doubtless observe that I do not address you as a controversialist, aiming to promote the interests of any existing theological party, but simply as a Christian brother, endeavoring to remove the causes of paralysis and division from our common Christianity, and thus to promote the interests of the church as a whole. I think also that you will not deny that the issue which I present to you is of sufficient magnitude to deserve and demand your candid and careful consideration. The great conflict of which I speak is, on the whole, the most prominent and important fact in the history of the church. So great a fact must have an adequate cause. Moreover, a cause powerful enough to produce, for so many centuries, such stupendous results, must also be powerful enough seriously to affect the adaptation of Christianity, as a system, to accomplish all that is involved in the great work of the conversion of the world. It is not enough that the existing system can do some good, or even much good; we need a system that shall give us the power intelligently to meet and logically to solve all of the great religious and social problems which we are called on to encounter in the great work of converting the world, and thoroughly reorganizing human society; for this work is not to be done, even in part, by infidel philosophy, but solely by the gospel of Christ, in its purity and power, as applied to all the relations of human society.

Animated by these considerations, I have endeavored to point out, as the cause of the conflict, an element foreign to the system, and which creates constant and powerful tendencies to pernicious errors in philosophy and in doctrine, divides the church, depresses

the tone of piety, and thus paralyzes the energies of Christianity, and unfits it to accomplish the great enterprise which it has undertaken.

Whatever, my Christian brethren, may be your ultimate conclusions concerning the truth of my views, I cannot but believe that every intelligent man will concede that they involve interests so great as to merit a thorough and prayerful consideration.

From this I do not shrink,—nay, I earnestly desire it. My prayer is, *Let God guide His church into all truth, and let the truth prevail.* I feel that such, too, are the momentous relations of the subject that He cannot be indifferent to it; and that if we seek His guidance in true humility, and free from the power of previous committals, it will be freely given. The most profound inquiry, conducted under His guidance, I do not fear. I fear nothing but a partisan spirit and sinful excitement, and those narrow and local views to which they give rise.

But so great is the power and the grace of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ, that I look for better things in you, and things that accompany salvation. God is giving increasing enlargement of views, fraternal affection, and Christian dignity, to the leading minds of His church in the various Christian denominations. Moreover, I think with great and constantly increasing pleasure of that widely-extended circle of sanctified and highly-educated minds, in every Christian body, whom it is my privilege and honor to call my beloved brethren in Christ. I rejoice in the thought of their intellectual and moral power and ample resources, and of the cheering fact that they are all consecrated to the service of our common Lord and Savior. I rejoice still more in the assurance that we are in daily communion with one common God and Father, who is over all, and in all, and through all; and that nothing is too much for us mutually to ask for each other, and to expect to receive through His grace, and the mighty working in us of the power of the divine and sacred Spirit.

May He, therefore, guide you into all the truth, till the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be seven-fold, as the light of seven days; till the watchmen shall see eye to eye, and together lift up the voice and sing, when the Lord shall turn back the captivity of His people, and cause all the nations of the earth to rejoice in His salvation!

Yours, in Christian affection,

E. Beecher, Boston, August 27, 1853.

INTRODUCTION

NATURE OF THE CONFLICT, END AND COMPASS OF THE WORK

OF the heroes and the conflicts of war I do not propose to speak. It were, indeed, a more exciting theme. The vivid delineation of floating banners, flowing plumes, gorgeous apparel, glittering armor, and the stately march of embattled squadrons, agreeably stimulates and excites the imagination. The fierce onset of contending hosts, and the unutterable horrors of the conflict, arouse the deepest emotions of the soul.

A narrative of the conflicts of minds has not these advantages for popular effect. Such conflicts do not appeal to the senses, nor stimulate the imagination; nor is it easy to create, with respect to them, a popular excitement which shall be powerful and all-pervading. Nevertheless, all intelligent and thoughtful minds feel in them an interest deep and lasting, even though it be less exciting than that which is felt, for a time, in the conflicts of war.

Moreover, if in such intellectual conflicts the deep and honorable emotions of the heart can be unveiled, the interest rises, and often becomes intense.

The conflict of which I propose to write is, and ever has been, in its deepest recesses, a conflict of the heart. Not that gigantic intellectual efforts have not been abundantly put forth, but that the deepest and most powerful impulses have ever been those of the heart.

It has, indeed, often assumed a repulsive external aspect. In the huge volumes of the fathers, or of the scholastic divines, it has been presented in forms wearisome, and devoid of the decorations of rhetoric and the refinements of taste. In modern times, too, the techniques of theology have sometimes rendered it mysterious and repulsive.

Yet beneath all this there has always rolled a deeper tide of pure and honorable emotion than has ever flowed from the heart of man on any other theme; moreover, the intellectual aspects of the conflict, viewed from a proper point of vision, have ever been majestic and sublime.

The subject of this conflict has been the greatest and most affecting that can interest or excite the human mind. It has been no less a theme than *The Moral Renovation Of Man*.¹ Through a long course of centuries, the Christian world has been divided into opposing parties on this great question.

On the one side have been the advocates of that system the peculiar characteristic of which is the doctrine of a supernatural regeneration rendered necessary by the native and original depravity of man, and effected according to the eternal purposes of a divine and mysterious sovereignty.

This system has always been exegetically developed from the epistle of Paul to the Romans, as its center and strength. At the same time, however, all other parts of the Word of God are appealed to in its support. Augustine² in ancient, and Calvin in modern times, have been preeminent in its development and defense. It has accordingly been called sometimes Pauline, at others Augustinian, and at others Calvinistic theology. It was substantially the theology of the Reformers, and of the Puritans. By the confession of all, it has exerted great power on the destinies of the world. Of its ablest opponents, some have honorably conceded that it has always elevated the tone of morals where it has prevailed. A leading historian of this age also concedes that it has led the van in the conflict for popular liberty. "For a century and a half," says Bancroft,³ "it assumed the guardianship of liberty for the

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- 1 Brown, William Lawrence, D.D. *A Comparative View of Christianity and the Other Forms of Religion*, Charles Tate, London, 1826, Vol II, Part IV, Chap. III, "The Great Object of Christianity is the Moral Renovation of Man, or His Sanctification."
 - 2 Augustine of Hippo (354-430). According to Jerome, Augustine "established anew the ancient Faith." In his early years he was heavily influenced by Manichaeism and afterward by the Neo-Platonism of Plotinus. After his conversion to Christianity he developed a unique approach to philosophy and theology, accommodating a variety of methods and different perspectives.
 - 3 Aaron Bancroft (1755-1839), born in Reading, Massachusetts to Samuel Bancroft and Lydia Parker, was an American clergyman. He served as a minuteman in the American Revolution, and was present, at the battles of both Lexington and Bunker Hill. He graduated from Harvard in 1778, taught, studied theology and spent three years as a missionary in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia. In 1785 he settled in Worcester,

English world.” “In Geneva, in Scotland, wherever it gained dominion, it invoked intelligence for the people, and in every parish planted the common school.”

Yet, in all ages, ever since the days of Celestius,⁴ Julian⁵ and Pelagius,⁶ there have been, in large numbers, men highly estimable for intelligence and benevolence, and animated by a strong desire of urging society onward in the pursuit of moral excellence, who have, nevertheless, earnestly, perseveringly and with deep emotion, opposed this system, as being at war with the fundamental principles of honor and right, and hostile to the best interests of humanity. In the wide interval between these extremes, other intermediate parties have arisen, attempting in various modes, but hitherto without success, to reconcile the combatants, or in any other way to terminate the conflict. Indeed, these intervening parties have often contended violently among themselves, as well as with each of the extreme parties. The long duration and the astonishing vigor of this conflict indicate that it is not without some permanent and powerful cause. I propose, if possible, to discover that cause, and to state a mode in which all true Christians can, without any sacrifice of principle, be at harmony among themselves. I shall, in doing this, attempt to redeem the first-named system from a just liability to such attacks as it has sustained, by showing that all of its fundamental elements may be so stated and held as not to be inconsistent with the highest principles of honor and right.

I propose at the same time to do full justice to the motives and principles of those who in different ages have opposed it, as has been stated. So far as their principles of honor and right have been correct, it is my purpose to vindicate and defend them; at the same time, endeavoring to explain how it has happened that they have been brought into

Massachusetts as pastor of the Congregational church, and remained in the same post until his death in 1839. During the middle of his life his theological views shifted toward Arminianism and by his advocacy of liberalism he became a noted leader in the early period of the Unitarian schism.

- 4 Celestius was a follower of the Christian teacher Pelagius and the Christian doctrine of Pelagianism, which was opposed to Augustine of Hippo and his doctrine in original sin, and was later declared to be heresy.
- 5 Julian of Eclanum (386–455) was bishop of Eclanum, near today’s Benevento (Italy). He was a distinguished leader of the Pelagians of 5th century.
- 6 Pelagius (354–420/440) denied the need for divine aid in performing good works. For him, the only grace necessary was the declaration of the law. Human beings were not wounded by Adam’s sin and were perfectly able to fulfill the law apart from any divine aid.

conflict with the system which they oppose. I shall endeavor to point out a needless misunderstanding of the parts of the system, by which these principles have been brought into collision with the fundamental facts on which it is based.

To effect these purposes, it will become necessary to give a compendious view of the various efforts of the human mind, in different ages, to remove this antagonism. Such a view, properly given, will exhibit the deep interior emotions, as well as the logical and philosophical reasons, of that great controversy on this subject which has so long existed, and show the relations of its various parts to each other.

I earnestly desire, if possible, so to effect this as to remove the acerbities of feeling which have been caused by the controversies of the present or of past ages on this subject. The merely logical encounters of powerfully developed intellectual systems tend rather to irritation and alienation than to sympathy and confidence. Nevertheless, beneath every benevolent man's intellectual efforts on this subject there has been a deeply affecting personal experience, which, if known, would show, in a manner adapted to awaken deep sympathy, why he has reasoned as he has. Indeed, there is a great heart, not only of natural honor, but, still more, of sanctified humanity, which, from beginning to end, underlies this momentous controversy, the deep workings of which must be developed and appreciated, before the controversy can be properly understood. No honorable mind can see these workings uncovered, and not be touched with deep emotion in viewing the struggles of our common humanity, in endeavoring to resolve the deepest and most momentous problems of the present trying and mysterious system. This experience I aim to unfold, and thus, if I may, to create on all sides a feeling of sympathy and mutual interest, by pointing out those benevolent and honorable impulses, and that regard to truth,—mixed, it may be, with other motives,—by which the various parties have been actuated, and to produce a candid and united effort to eliminate error, and to develop the whole truth.

I am no less anxious to do what I can to save the minds of future inquirers from those painful and exhausting conflicts to which such multitudes have been exposed in ages past, by developing the entire range of the controversy, and sketching the outlines of the whole subject, and thus showing that from the greatest difficulties there is always a possible relief. I aim, moreover, to evince that, in order to a firm and decided defense of the whole Christian system, it is essential that we

no longer confine the mind to those limited views of the relations of the church of God in eternity to His whole kingdom, in which it has hitherto generally moved, but that we should rather enter other and more extended fields of thought.

It is also my hope that I may furnish some small contribution to aid in advancing the future triumphs of the kingdom of Christ, by showing the relations of these more extended views to intellectual philosophy, education, and the proper organization of the ecclesiastical, civil and social system.

A due regard to the friends and advocates of certain opinions, which have been long received, but are here controverted, leads me to say that the views which I have presented are not set forth in haste. For more than twenty years, so far as I could judge, I have regarded them as substantially true. But I have, nevertheless, deemed it my duty often to review and reconsider them in the light of past as well as of existing controversies, and also of the word and providence of God. I have been, moreover, in part induced to defer their publication till this time, by a respect to the judgment of honored friends. Still, however, my chief motive for delay has been a desire no longer to watch this great controversy of ages in its present developments, and even to its close,—if, indeed, there should ever be a satisfactory close,—and to ascertain whether anything new could be suggested to give rational relief and unity to the mind of the community, and, at the same time, to mature my own thoughts, so that, if possible, I might avoid a crude and ill-digested presentation of so great a theme.

In reviewing the opinions of others, I have uniformly felt that men who have honestly labored to elucidate so difficult and trying a subject deserve sympathy and respect, and never severity, much less ridicule, even if their results may seem to us in many respects unreasonable or untrue. In this way only can a subject so difficult be treated, with any rational hope of benefiting all whom it concerns. May I not hope that, if any shall consider it their duty to review or to controvert any of my opinions, they will follow the same general principles?

Certainly, if any of my views are false, or any of my arguments unsound, they can be thoroughly exposed, and refuted with calmness, dignity, candor and kindness. Such honorable treatment is what I expect, if any effort shall be made to refute my views. But if, instead of this (which I will not anticipate), my arguments should be encountered with invidious remarks, or ridicule, or appeals to prejudice, then

there will be sufficient reason to conclude, and all candid judges will conclude, that there is a conscious want (both desire and lack—Ed.) of anything better with which they can be opposed.

Is it not, however, to be hoped and expected that God, at length, will give to His people such faith in Himself, as the only perfect defender of the truth, that they will practically believe that no degree whatever of sinful feeling can be of any avail, in defending the doctrines of the Bible; nay, that, so far as it exists, it separates the soul from the great source of life and of truth, biases its judgment, and destroys the keenness and discrimination of its perceptions?

Is not the history of the church, in all ages, full of warnings on this point? How prone is depraved humanity, imperfectly sanctified, to be influenced by such considerations and emotions as God abhors! As hating sin, and infinitely exalted above its pollutions, He cannot but regard with utter repulsion any remaining pollutions of His people. He is entirely free from the narrowness of local interests, from envy, from rivalry, from ambition, from sectarian prejudice, from national bias, and from the errors of the age. He is light. He dwells in light; and the essential element of that light is love. How, then, can he who walks in the darkness of sin commune with Him?

He has assured us, moreover, that into this light His church, at length, shall come. To her it shall be given to put on fine linen, clean and white, which is the righteousness of saints. To her shall be given that full knowledge of God which is implied in the marriage supper of the Lamb. To her it shall be said, "Arise! shine! for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee!" (Is. 60:1). To her it shall be said, "The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee; but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself; for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended" (Is. 60:19-20).

If such things are near at hand, may we not hope, or rather, believe, that God will give to all of His own people, who may engage in this and other investigations, so much of His Spirit that they shall walk in His light and dwell in His love?

BOOK I

THE CONFLICT IN ITS PRINCIPLES

CHAPTER I: THE CASE STATED

IF into a community but little skilled in the laws of nature and the principles of mechanics a steamship were to be introduced, and if it were stated, as the common traditional direction of mechanics and philosophers, that the wheels should be so adjusted that they would revolve in opposite directions, it may be that the ignorance of the men of that community, and the force of traditional authority, would induce them, at first, to comply with the direction. But if, as would surely be the case, it was found by experiment that, when the wheels so adjusted were put in motion, the boat, so far from obeying her rudder, or taking an onward course, would do nothing but revolve incessantly round, without progress,—and, moreover, that her whole frame was unnaturally wrenched and strained by this method of procedure, and that, meantime, she had no power so to resist the winds and currents that they would not drift her wheresoever they would,—then, in all probability, the men in that community would repudiate the traditional direction which they had received, as inconsistent with the necessary and immutable laws of mechanics, and introducing discord and conflict into the system to which it was applied. And if, on adjusting the wheels so that they would both revolve in the same direction, it was found that the boat moved straight on in obedience to her rudder, and was able to resist the power of winds and currents, they would feel abundantly confirmed in their conviction of the essential falsehood of the traditional direction; nor could any amount of authority avail against this practical demonstration, taken from the working of the system itself.

An argument of the same kind, and of no less power, would rationally arise from the practical workings of a system of theology, against any traditional adjustment of its parts, if it had been found, on trial, to cause its main moving powers, in like manner, to work against each other,—thus introducing perpetual internal conflict into the very vitals of the system.

No question can be more interesting or important than whether there is good reason to believe that such a traditional misunderstanding has been introduced into the current system of Christianity; and whether, in consequence of it, the main moving powers of the system have been made, from age to age, to work against each other; and whether at this hour there is an internal conflict in the system, which no wit or skill of man can remove or overcome, till the traditional misunderstanding from which it springs has been repudiated. For, if such be the fact, never, till the misunderstanding is removed, will the moving powers of the system work together,—never, till then, will the internal conflict cease. Whether such is the fact is the question to be considered.

CHAPTER II: PRESUMPTIVE ARGUMENT

THAT this is the case, we may derive a presumptive proof from the history of certain recent wide-spread theological controversies among ourselves. No controversy in the theological world has excited a deeper interest among those who are reputed—and that justly—the decided friends of orthodoxy, than that between those who are familiarly called, in the Congregational and Presbyterian churches, “the Old School” and “the New School” divines.¹ These terms have, in themselves, little significance. Their import will be more fully disclosed as we proceed. It is sufficient here to remark, that New England has been the great fountainhead of the new divinity, and that the theological seminary at Princeton has been conceded to be the strongest citadel of the old theology. The two denominations among whom this conflict has been most fully developed have exerted, from the beginning, a very powerful influence in forming the character and shaping the destinies of this nation. The influence of the controversy has also extended to other denominations. If, then, we view our relations as a nation to the world, no one can properly say that this is merely a local controversy. Affecting deeply, as it does, the religious interests of this nation, it affects, also, those of the world. No one who is familiarly acquainted with those engaged in this controversy can deny that the great body on both sides are eminently pious, devoted, laborious, useful men. They profess, alike to be followers of the great reformers, and to regard with peculiar favor the system of doctrines developed by Calvin. They are, alike, the antagonists of formalism, and of ecclesiastical despotism, and the advocates of spiritual religion, of collegiate and popular education, of revivals of religion, and of the benevolent enterprises of the age. There is no good

1 The Old School-New School Controversy was a schism of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America which began in 1837. Later, both the Old School and New School branches further split over the issue of slavery, into southern and northern churches. The Old School were Calvinists, and the New School were Arminians and Unitarians.

reason, therefore, why they should not have loved each other with a pure heart fervently, and no reason, so far as the great fundamentals of doctrine and practice are concerned, why they should not have been perfectly joined together in one mind and in one judgment. Brotherly love, in its elevated forms, is one of the happiest experiences of the human mind; nor is there any manifestation of which is more honorable to God, or more powerful to produce conviction of the divine origin of Christianity. How much, then, might these Christian brethren have enjoyed, how much might they have honored God, how much might they have blessed the world, if they had been united with the full power and fervor of common convictions and brotherly love!

And yet, instead of this, for years there has been between them an incessant controversy. In it, an incredible amount of intellect, emotion and energy, has been expended. Each party has been filled with alarm at the dangerous tendencies, or alleged pernicious influence, of some fondly-cherished principles of the other, as threatening either to subvert the gospel or to destroy its power. They have, therefore, conscientiously put forth great efforts to destroy the influence and arrest the progress of each other. As a natural and necessary result, in the course of this controversy there has been, in various ways, a vast amount of mental suffering. Pious men, deeply devoted to God, and earnestly laboring to effect the moral renovation and salvation of their fellow-men, have been cut to the heart by a keen sense of injustice, when suspicions have been created and disseminated, or even direct charges made, that they were unsound in the faith, and dangerous heresiarchs. Others have been pained and irritated by the charge of holding gross and exploded absurdities, dishonorable to God and ruinous to man. The amount of influence thus employed by good men to neutralize each other's power has been immense, nor has it failed to produce its natural effects. The internal struggles and convulsions thus produced in this large body of churches have wasted an amount of energy great almost beyond imagination. The Presbyterian church has been twice rent asunder. The New England Congregational churches, incapable, by reason of their organization, of such a division, have yet been, in fact, thrown into opposing parties, and agitated and torn by incessant and painful strife.

Meantime, in the eyes of intelligent spectators, riot familiar with theological debates, religion itself has been dishonored. How can it be otherwise, when such eminent men as have figured in these unhappy

controversies, on both sides,—men who have had no superiors in the land,—have not only been arrayed in strife against each other, but have brought against each other charges of the most serious and injurious kind? We have, by custom, become familiar with this state of things, and do not at once apprehend its unspeakable evils. But, if we could suppose entire confidence and ardent brotherly love to have existed for the last century among the leading minds of these churches, and all their energies consecrated to the great departments of education, religious revivals, and benevolent enterprise, who can conceive how much greater the impulse that had been given to the cause of God, not only in our own land, but throughout the whole world!

And when these intelligent spectators ask, what are the points on which these good men are so divided, and in view of which they expend so much energy in destroying each other's power, it is very hard to give a reply which shall be brief, intelligible and satisfactory to the common mind. No one or two great, prominent, definite, intelligible scriptural doctrines can be stated by which a fundamental line of distinction can be drawn between them. They profess, in fact, to hold the same great revealed doctrines, and to differ only in certain modes of stating, explaining, and defending them.

Nor are developments of this kind limited to the last fifty or one hundred years, nor to the Presbyterian and Congregational churches of this land. The controversy has not, indeed, always been developed under its present names, nor with the same extent and system. But its essential elements have existed—as I shall soon show—as far back as the third or fourth century since Christ, and have been developed, in various forms, in each succeeding century, to this day, and in almost, if not quite, every Christian body.

It has been, moreover, in all ages, as it is now, a controversy among sincere Christians. It is, in this respect, entirely unlike the atheistic, pantheistic, infidel, and other controversies, in which all real Christians are on one side. But by this controversy, in all ages, as now, real Christians are divided against real Christians.

It is also worthy of special note, that this is a controversy in which no permanent and radical progress has as yet been made towards a final settlement. Good men are at this day as really and as thoroughly divided against good men as they ever were. At one time, the New School Theology (so called), proceeding from New England, seems to be carrying all before it in the Presbyterian church. Then there is a di-

vision, and a combination, not only without, but also within New England, to react upon it, and to restore the Old School theology to its original power. So has it been, in other ages and climes. Action and reaction have followed each other, but no substantial progress towards a termination of the controversy has ever been made.

Until at some future time this controversy shall cease, no one can tell how much it has weakened and paralyzed the whole church of God, and fatally destroyed its onward and impulsive power. Like the ship supposed, she has obeyed no rudder of universally admitted principle, but has drifted at the mercy of the winds and currents of controversy.

And yet no serious suspicion seems ever to have been awakened, that, after all, the difficulty lies, not in the alleged points of difference, but in some false adjustment, in which both parties agree, and by which the great moving powers of the system have been made to act against each other; and that, until this false adjustment is removed, there is a necessary and inevitable conflict in the system itself.

Is it not time, then, to consider this aspect of the case? Is not such a thing supposable? And does not this endless conflict of good men, with no progress, and no result but to cripple and neutralize each other, render the supposition in no small degree probable?

Such probability, however, is not all the evidence that the case demands, nor, happily, is it all that exists. It is possible, not only to show what are the two great moving powers of Christianity, but, also, to prove that they have been so adjusted that they do, in fact, work against each other, and thus produce necessary division and conflict in the system. Of this it now remains to adduce the proof.

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