

split down the middle by what came to be called the "Arian heresy" out of which came the document we know as the Nicene Creed. For it concerned the person of Christ. If the Arians had won we would be worshipping a Christ who was neither truly human nor truly divine. There was also a vital question at stake behind all the bluster and acrimony of the Reformation period. It was not a matter of whether or not to say prayers in Latin, or what vestments the clergy should wear, or just how much attention to pay to the Mother of our Lord. Fundamentally the disagreement was about the means of salvation and the recovery of the New Testament Gospel of "by grace through faith," without any other mediation than Christ. Today it takes much insight to distinguish where an essential of our faith is being challenged, but there will always be points at which the Christian who really cares has to risk the consequences of open disagreement.

Yet surely those who threaten to divide congregations, or split a denomination is some of the current controversies should think and pray with both solemnity and humor before they break ~~and~~ <sup>and</sup> given communion. Our own denomination has been ~~riven~~ <sup>riven</sup> by disagreement in recent years on such questions as allocations of funds, and other tensions between what are called conservatives and radicals; but so far a spirit of comprehension and a desire for Christ's peace has prevailed. There are actions of our General Assembly in matters of policy, liturgy, and even of beliefs, with which I strongly disagree but so far none dealing with matters so essential that I would feel compelled to leave the denomination. The present upheaval that is affecting nearly all of the great Christian communions may prove to be a sign of renewed vitality -- if we all learn in gratitude and humility to keep our minds and hearts open to the arbitration of Christ's peace.

"To crown all there must be love," says the apostle. On another occasion he sums up a description of the great variety of gifts within the Church -- and the rivalry and even jealousy they sometime provoke -- with the words: "Yet show I unto you a more excellent way, Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal." In the Christian disagreements ~~across our world~~ across our world today we can hear the sounding brass and the tinkling



cymbals. Beneath them thank God -- we can also hear the prayers of those who listen to these commanding words: "To crown all, there must be love, to bind all together and complete the whole. Let Christ's peace be arbiter in your hearts: to this peace you were called as members of a single body. And be filled with gratitude."

