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REUNION : THE IDEAS BEHIND THE IDEAL.

BY THE REV. A. R. WHATELY, D.D.

WHAT we miss so constantly in various controversies among Church people—in the Prayer Book controversy no less than in the Reunion controversy—is a clear and steady recognition of *underlying* differences. When we “meet to discuss our differences,” it is so easy and so tempting to regard the meeting as intended directly for their minimization, and to slur the necessary process of probing even to depths where no agreement is practically possible. It is so much more pleasant, at all such times, to seek for agreement of substance under difference of terms than for difference of substance under sameness of terms. And yet the broadest outlook is surely not that so much which merely emphasizes the common denominator as that which accepts differences boldly, and their necessity : which acknowledges that we all alike have our treasure “in earthen vessels,” and looks forward to the time when that which is perfect is come.

The movements for reunion of the churches at home and abroad are certainly not prompted solely by the ultimate theological principles that lie behind them. It would be an obvious exaggeration of what we have just said so to regard them. And one would be sorry indeed to represent them as the movements essentially of any party in the Church. But that differing conceptions of the Church profoundly determine our attitude is inevitable, if we are not utterly inconsequent in our thinking. We may even come to conclusions on the main question differing from those held by most who share our general doctrinal position ; but at least the former must be viewed in the light of the latter ; and we must never forget that the same rule applies to others also. The closer scrutiny of facts, again, may profoundly affect our views, and even react upon our theology. But the truth remains that we must get down to these deeper levels if we are to understand the point of view of others, or even to *understand* our own. And, at the same time, if we seek to understand, we must also seek to explain.

It is desired in this article to suggest a few considerations respecting the logic of the question of reunion with the non-episcopal churches, in view of the differing conceptions of the Church held by those concerned with the matter. It is written definitely from one of these standpoints, but of course my particular points commit no one. And it is a defence of principles, not of any special view of the facts that determine their precise application.

The broad question of what we used to call home reunion, but which must now be viewed as a world-wide problem, or set of problems, can only be solved by the action and reaction between

theory and fact. A simple way to reach the heart of the subject will be to take our start from a paragraph in an article (very sympathetic in spirit) by the Rev. W. H. G. Holmes, of the Oxford Mission to Calcutta, in the *Review of the Churches*, January, 1930, relating to the South Indian scheme. It is, of course, only the principle itself that here directly concerns us.

Mr. Holmes, on page 78, objects that, if the spiritual reality of the Nonconformist ministries is not to be called in question, "it seems a grave and terrible error for the members of the Anglican Communion to have remained out of communion with their fellow Christians for all these long years." It is not a question, he says, whether God has blessed such ministries or no, for the general operation of the Spirit cannot be confined within the limits of Christendom. What is permissible for thirty years is permissible for ever.

First let it be noted that the attitude here taken toward the non-episcopal ministries differs, at least in form, from that adopted by some High Churchmen, as, for instance, by Lord Hugh Cecil in a recent pronouncement.¹ It is not here said that we grant to these ministries all that they claim for themselves, and only claim for ourselves what they deny. They are classed with whatever corresponds to them in the heathen and Moslem world. The argument certainly appears to be this: that, if these ministries are to be recognized, we ought not, on any consideration, to be out of communion with the Christian communities they serve; but that, if God's evident blessing on them be the "sole test" for their recognition, we who affirm their validity are open to the *reductio ad absurdum* that non-Christian religions would have the same claim to recognition.

Now if this test—the Divine blessing—be really and strictly taken, in and of itself, as the sole test, then, so far, the reply may be allowed to stand. But surely it is not necessary to take the weakest and narrowest interpretation of an opponent's meaning. Surely behind this plea is the assumption that the Christian religion does not owe to any "validity" of ministry or sacraments its unique and effective position as the Kingdom not only of the universal Father, but of the incarnate Christ. Even Mr. Holmes seems to recognize this; for, as in the words we have already quoted, he manifests a strong sense of the claims of "our fellow-Christians" as such, claims that ought not to give way for a moment to anything less than those of a valid ministry. But, if so, the position of non-episcopal Christian ministries and that of non-Christian ministries are *not* the same.

We may put the matter another way. When Mr. Holmes says that "we shall have to apply the same principle to Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism," we may take up the challenge, and say that we are quite willing to apply it—*so far as it is applicable*. The qualifica-

¹ Limits of space make it impossible to notice the various Liberal Catholic irenical views. I would do so with great sympathy and respect, but must here confine myself to sharp antitheses.

tion, surely, comes in as a matter of course. There *must* be a *mutatis mutandis* clause, and that, once admitted, shatters the whole parallel. For Christian fellowship is the expression of Christian ideas. It is fellowship in the incarnate Christ. Whatever margin of possibility there may be of religious union with non-Christians, compatible with full loyalty to our own religion, may be illustrated by the occasion (there may have been many occasions) when, under the stress of famine, or some other great public calamity, Christians, Hindoos, and Mohammedans met for prayer. One can understand, at any rate, the position of those who might say that we, who pray in the Name of Christ, ought not actually to pray *with* those who do not; and, in fact, there is no need to discuss the right or wrong of the matter at all. The simple appearance of marginal cases like this brings into relief the definiteness of those main conceptions which the margin presupposes. These conceptions, it may be said, are expressed in the institution of the ministry. But, as a simple fact—the fact that creates the problem—they are not tied to it; and the more we emphasize the claims of our fellow-Christians as such, even with emphasis also on the ministerial order, the harder it is to treat the South Indian and such-like proposals as resting on no firm logical foundation.

We are brought back, as we regularly are, I think, in these controversies, to the antithesis of two standpoints from each of which it is hard to do full justice to the other. It is this larger antithesis that we require at least to understand, even though it cannot be resolved.

The mere appeal to the evidences of grace outside episcopacy, even if the common Christian basis is tacitly assumed, is not really sufficient. We must somehow get behind it and justify the whole connection of thought which makes it paramount in our own minds. And yet one is disposed to ask, in passing, whether the very necessity to adopt the exclusive attitude should not raise questionings tending to the revision of the ecclesiology that involves it.

But before offering a brief suggestion of how, theologically and fundamentally, the counter-position may be stated, it may be well to complete the direct reply to such challenges as that in the article before us. Mr. Holmes' main point seems to be this. Breach of communion with our fellow-Christians is so profoundly serious that nothing but his strict theory of the ministry ought to justify our not having completely and in face of all possible objections united ourselves with them long ago, and our not doing so at all costs now. But who are the "we" to whom the plea is addressed? If it means the Anglican Church as a whole, as her position *would* be if as a whole she rejected Apostolical Succession, then, so far as we are able to envisage a merely hypothetical state of things (which would differ in many other ways which we cannot reconstruct *a priori*), we should probably most of us assent, at least as regards regular intercommunion. But then the question is a merely abstract one. But if, on the other hand, it is the more Protestant section of the actual Church of to-day that is meant, then we may well

ask why it should be "illogical" and "un-Christian" to try not to heal one schism in such a way as to create another.

But now, in a very few words, I would venture to give some slight formulation of the general ideas that give to such proposals a *primâ facie* claim to support, without prejudice to the full consideration of criticisms which do *not* presuppose theological differences. Though writing, generally, in defence of a common position, I quite recognize that particular points are my own and commit no one.

First, it must be said that no one is competent to approach the discussion of the subject who is still in the toils of the preposterous delusion that Protestantism is essentially *mere* individualism. It is just precisely because, in its truest and most constructive forms, it so appreciates the social meaning of the individual that it finds the terms of Institutionalism inadequate to the understanding of the Divine Society. Whether or no certain denials into which this perspective sometimes leads it—or even some of its positive assertions—are justified must needs be matter for difference of opinion. But it is essential to understand what that conception of the Church is that its teachers are solicitous to follow up whithersoever its light leads them.

Where corporate Christian life is, there, *ipso facto*, is the Church. We see no grounds in the New Testament, or in inferences from the terms of its Gospel, to build our ideas on any narrower basis. The Church, on this primary basis, is neither on the one hand the mere combination of previously-made Christians, nor, on the other, an institution offering a covenanted social membership narrower than the sphere of those who confess the Name of Christ, and do mighty works in His Name. We take our stand on the analogy of human society. The individual is inherently and by definition social, in nature, as, we believe, in grace. Now the expression of individual discipleship is faith. Not merely faith in a general sense—bearing fruit in high ideals and good works—but specific faith in Christ, is to be found outside the ministerial succession, and even outside all sacramental fellowship. And we cannot deny to faith that covenantal character of which, by its very meaning, it carries within itself the assurance. And we regard grace and faith correlatively. As it is *impossible* to divide faith into "general" and "specifically Christian" otherwise than by reference to its Object—God in Christ or some vaguer sense of the Divine—so we at least are unable to divide general and specific *grace* at any other point.

That is only our starting-place, but it determines the direction of our thought, and we have one eye upon it all the time. We advance from it, not in order to supplement its deficiencies, but in obedience to its own demand.

And does it follow from this that institutions are mere appendages, and that episcopacy, being not of the *esse*, is negligible? Surely not. If the logical *prius* of the institution were merely a loosely-knit society of Christian believers, this might be so. But,

for us, the *prius* of the institution is the *de facto* spiritual community, personal and inter-personal, the social Life of the Spirit, that not only contains the individual, but is contained within him. Institutionalism is an essential aspect of its realization on earth, but it is not the whole, nor the matrix of the whole. Christ created a community, and a community is not an institution.

Now to us for whom the idea of the community as such, rather than that of the institution, is the dominant factor, other pivotal differences reveal themselves in various directions. But these lie outside the range of the few slight hints that are here offered towards the winning of a better understanding from those who differ from us. But, in any case, we shall never admit that we are treating the official ministry of the Church as negligible if we regard it rather in the light of the self-consolidation of the Spirit-guided society (which reunion itself is in another way) than as the covenantal basis of her existence. For us the concrete realities of corporate spiritual life and work to-day, the progressive movement of the Spirit in the Church, are the primary fact.

But the very principle that places us outside the limits of the theory of validity leads us, if broadly and truly applied, to take the fullest account of the *de facto* dominance of this theory among the realities that create the situation. And, be it insisted, this is not to say that we merely make concessions to what we believe to be error and prejudice. The logical jig-saw puzzle that theology is and must be does not exhaust its meaning. We are all struggling towards an ideal of comprehensive truth, and our intellectual visions are harmonized in God. The significance of the dominant position of sacerdotal and hierarchical conceptions of the Church in the actual situation is on the one side divine, if on the other human. "We all are wrong," says Barth; "only God is right."

One word more. Between the Church as the "blessed company of all faithful people" and the organized system stand the Sacraments. Of these it is the Sacrament of Holy Communion that comes into our direct line of thought. If the sacramental principle on the one hand and the ministerial institution on the other are necessary expressions of the life of the Church, which is primary? In other words, is it right to say "This or that community is (on the sacramental basis) a true part of the Church, because, in spite of ministerial deficiencies, it celebrates the Holy Communion," or to say "It is not part of the Church, because of these deficiencies, and therefore does not truly celebrate the Holy Communion at all"? The former alternative is ours. "We, who are many, are one bread, one body, for we all partake of the one bread." It would be radically against our whole conception of the Kingdom of grace to admit that the divine ordinance, celebrated in the Name of Christ, loses its covenantal meaning outside the limits of an institution. Whether we are right or wrong is another question. But no one can enter into our feeling with regard to intercommunion who does not keep this in view. If the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is, within the sphere of ordinance, the fundamental creative

factor of our corporate life as the Body of Christ, then it is above all conditions of validity. We cannot think of it as having grace merely *attached* to it when celebrated within a previous defined circle, delimited as such by correctness of organization. It has no "validity" but what is immanent in its own direct meaning, in the simple command of its Author, and in the intention of those who would carry out that command. And if some Christians of later days have failed fully to apprehend their Master's will in respect of the ministry, this no more stultifies their faith in Him as the Giver to them of the Sacrament than does any other of our failures and blindnesses that does not belie the sincerity of our profession. The Sacrament presupposes the spiritual community, but not the consolidated institution. This, at any rate, is our cherished belief.

If, then, we seem to emphasize the (relatively) immediate needs of our missions at the expense of fundamental principles, we must reply, directly and decidedly, that, *so far forth*, our principles themselves diverge from those of our critics. This is not opportunism, but what we claim as a vision of God immanent in the *changing* life of the concrete community, as it strives to realize itself as such upon earth. And this compels us to regard our institutional heritage rather as one factor interacting with others than as an iron law for all ages. That heritage is a very powerful factor, both for its value in our eyes and for its more than value in ranges of Christian thought other than our own. But we know no covenant defining the basis of Christ's Church but that which is immanent in the terms of the Gospel, and no criterion of the validity of the Sacraments that they do not carry within themselves.

AS IT WAS IN THE BEGINNING. By Mary Gould. London: S.P.C.K.
2s. net.

Parents and teachers who have to unfold the meaning of some of the earlier Biblical narratives will welcome this little book in which Genesis is "told anew," and in which helpful illustrations abound. Although the several stories are told again there is really nothing new and on the whole Miss Gould has accomplished her task with sound judgment.

Messrs. Charles J. Thynne & Jarvis have added to their "New Evangelical Library" *Where go the Dead?* by the Rev. C. W. Hale Amos, to which the late Dr. Casher contributed a Preface in which he commends the work as a scholarly contribution to the literature of the subject, and refers to the fullness of illustration and appeal which should impress the candid and thoughtful student. The subject is treated in two parts—"Prediction" and "Revelation"—in both of which much valuable information is brought together.