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The Road to Unity

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THE late Professor Briggs, of New York, proposed that there should be recognized as a necessary branch of theological knowledge what he called *eirenicis*, the study of the efforts at reconciling differences and removing divisions in the Christian Church. It is undeniable that many of these differences have arisen from causes within corrupt human nature which are analogous to those which have caused the present war. As Dr. G. T. Slosser wrote in the Preface to *Christian Unity*:¹ "Too many Christian leaders and too many Church historians would re-write Paul's concluding words to his classic on Love by insisting that 'The greatest of these is' faith, or probably polity. The highest points in the history of the Church have been when love was made to be uppermost, that love not being compromising weakness, but holy love which puts error and evil to rout by the power of the Spirit of God manifested in a crucified resurrected Christian life. . . . Sometimes genuine love leads to division. But the time has probably arrived when the setting up of any more standards in rival camps merely increases the already disgraceful scandal of division."

Those are wise and weighty words.

We must, however, know what the Churches stand for and this is the first step towards reunion. Unity will be dearly bought if it is the result of compromise and not of true comprehension. We must know what is really vital to our own position, and also we must have accurate knowledge of what other Christians believe.

I believe with Hugh Martin in *Towards Reunion*² that we should find on closer study that most of our present differences are complementary rather than antagonistic; differences of emphasis and proportion rather than of fundamental

¹ Kegan Paul Trench, 1929.

² S.C.M., 2nd Edition, 1937.

conviction. He goes on to say: "But it is vital that we should ask ourselves, if we are to discuss unity seriously, whether we are prepared to share in Christian fellowship with those who maintain beliefs with which we disagree—beliefs about Church order, or Sacraments, or Biblical inspiration, or the Atonement. Do we expect, do we even want, a Church in which everybody agrees with us? If we do, is there any denomination to-day in which we could find such unanimity?"

This is true not only of the denominations but even of various parties in schools within the Churches. What a wide difference there is between, say, the most extreme member of the F.E.C. and the most extreme member of the A.E.G.M.!

In 1933 Williams and Norgate published *The Necessity for Catholic Reunion* which dealt *inter alia* with the tragedy of the divisions of Catholics and advocated Reunion with Rome. On p. 157 we find some suggestions! Number 7 is: "That the Reunion of Anglican Catholics with the Holy See gives the best hope for the religion and morals of England." Proposition 8 lays down: "That the Church of England is growing more and more unsafe for Christ's little ones, and that Reunion (with Rome) is the only remedy"; while the next one declares: "The Anglican Catholic party is becoming more and more divided in faith and morals, and has before it the choice of Reunion or disintegration."

The authors of this book advocate (p. 161) that "when possible, new churches, schools, and presbyteries be vested in trustees who could transfer them to the Church in communion with the Holy See when Reunion is brought about."

One of the most astounding assumptions made by the author of this book, the Rev. T. Whitton, is based on statements made by the Rev. Spencer Jones who contributes a Foreword. Mr. Whitton quotes Mr. Spencer Jones (p. 128), as writing: "It is plain that the power to formally change her position which is denied to the Church of Rome, is a conspicuous characteristic with the Church of England"; and, "When we come to ask how this change (i.e. reunion) is to be effected, we are confronted by facts which deserve to be recognized: the fact, namely, that Rome cannot formally change, and the further fact that during the last

three hundred years change has been one of the characteristics of Anglicanism."

One knows, of course, that the Church of Rome's boast is that she is *Semper Eadem*. Superficially this claim to be always the same is one of the Roman Church's most impressive features. Dr. F. J. Paul in *Romanism and Evangelical Christianity* (1940) writes (p. 71): "In all lands Rome employs the same ritual in her sacred ministrations. She waits on the new-born child to baptize it as soon as possible after it is born, for if it dies unbaptized it goes to hell for ever;¹ she waits upon the dying, to strengthen him by her rites against the 'last great enemy.' Both these rites, at the beginning and end of life, as well as all, or almost all, between, are carried out all over the world (with a few exceptions) in — the same dead language, equally intelligible and equally unintelligible, to the ordinary worshippers everywhere." He adds justly: "The Church in which all the most important rites are performed, throughout the world in a 'dead language,' may impress the unthinking, but valuable elements are absent from her services which are present in an American negro-meeting round a camp fire."

Historically, however, the facts are absolutely against those Anglican Catholics who have allowed their dislike of change in their own Church and their admiration of the unchanging character of the Roman Church to dominate all their thought and dictate their future policy. There is no such unity in Rome to-day, and historically her teaching has altered at least five times.

About 1150 the Church of Rome was dominated by the Lombardic Theology which, on the important matter of human salvation, taught that Justification arose from grace accompanied by Good Works. About 1250 the Scholastic Theology succeeded which taught that salvation was secured by human works done by God's command. But this teaching was variously interpreted by the three Scholastic divisions, the Thomists, the Scotists and the Occamists. A little later, what may be called for want of a better name, the Monastic Theology arose. This taught that human salvation was attained by Papal Indulgences, Works of

¹ Trid.-Cat., pl. ii, Chapter ii, Q. 30.

Supererogation and Will Worship. It was this which brought about the crisis of the Reformation and for a short time deeply affected the teaching of the Roman Church, bringing into being the Intermediate Theology which held that salvation was obtained by faith in Christ springing from love, but that good works were necessary. Lastly we have the Jesuitical Theology, which taught that salvation is secured by Good Works which "compel" God to deal favourably with the sinner.

Anglican Catholics who hold the view that Rome is the centre of unity also forget the Great Schism (1378-1415) when, for a period of more than thirty years, there were two and sometimes three popes, each excommunicating the other and the other's followers. Where was the unity of the Church during that period?

Now it is remarkable that we are witnessing to-day a movement in the Totalitarian States which is comparable to that movement which we see in the Totalitarian Church. In the Middle Ages the assumption by the One Church of full authority over the bodies and souls of men led to a scandalous misuse of power from which mankind was partially delivered by the Reformation. To-day it is the State in various countries which advances this claim. A Totalitarian Government is one which claims to dominate, control and direct the whole life of the community and of its individual members. It lays claim to man in the totality of his being, declaring its own authority to be the source of all authority and, consequently, refusing to recognize the independence in their own sphere of religion, culture, education and the family. It aims through education to create a type of man which shall serve the ends of the State.

In the Soviet Union this claim is pushed to the extreme limit. Every subject of the State must accept the principles of Karl Marx. "Religion must be rejected for good, without reservation or camouflage," is the statement made in a series of resolutions adopted by the Communist Party. In the Italian Fascist State, Mussolini has respected religion, and he entered into an agreement with the Roman Church in 1929. But the watchword of the Fascists is: "Nothing against the State; nothing outside the State; everything for the State." The result is seen in the really pitiable position of the Pope. It will be recalled, for example,

that during the Christmas season when the Pope spoke decidedly about the opposition of the Nazis to the Catholic Church, Mussolini presented Hitler with a villa in San Remo!

In Germany under Hitler all the resources of the State have been and are being used to create a new type of German manhood. There can be no escape from the question how far this new type of man is to be a Christian type of man, and the readers of *THE CHURCHMAN* know what the answer is. The National Socialism of Germany has already come up against the German Evangelical and the Roman Catholic Churches. What is noteworthy, I think, is that all these States hold that social unity can be achieved only by compelling everybody to believe the same thing.

In our country Mr. H. G. Wells opposes Communism, Fascism and National Socialism. But he believes in the World State. Under his scheme the new World Government which he hopes to see established will be relentless in suppressing contrary opinion. It will not brook the competition of rival religious systems. It will ultimately have no place for Christianity. As he says: "There will be one faith only for the world, the moral expression of the one world community."

At this period in the history of the world when all the Churches are engaged in a fight for the existence of the Church, it is a grave danger that we should be so hopelessly divided. Behind the struggles of the State in various countries to gain unity, uniformity of control, and final authority, there lies one of the deepest needs of man—

THE NEED FOR COMRADESHIP.

Men have found comradeship in many different ways; in the family; in the tribe; in the State; in their business or profession; in their social class, club or lodge, and in their race.

The simplest meaning of our Lord's prayer: "That they all may be one," seems to be that the Church of Christ should be a world-wide Christian Comradeship. The Christian Church has its members in all nations and among all races. Through union with Christ, the Head of the Church,

we become part of a great company which no man can number, whose members, differing though they may in race, language and customs, yet know that they are sons of one Father and have one leader, Jesus Christ. The Church is not the only international society. There are industrial, political and educational international unions—but political unions, however successful, must always be incomplete since international politics rests upon interests which are largely external and often temporary. Industrial interests only appeal to certain sections of the population and even education is less comprehensive than humanity. Religion alone touches, or should touch, the whole man in the totality of his being, body, soul and spirit. Only a religious society can be, in the fullest sense, international. Moreover, this Great Society is not confined to the living. It includes also the departed. Christian faith does not admit that death is the end of life. In the Church we have fellowship with all who have preceded us—not in memory only, but as comrades in the same task. Dr. Timothy T. Lew, a Chinese professor, wrote: "Before we can win the peoples of the world by teaching them the love of Christ we must set an example to them how we love one another within the Christian fold. To me the significance of the brief sojourn of the Master on this earth was to teach us, among other things, the supreme value and necessity of fellowship. Christ's prayer for His disciples was not for their individual success but for unity and love of the group. Love and unity were indeed the two corner stones of the Christian Church. The Church grew out of fellowship. It was carried on by love." I have read the history of the Reunion movement and am familiar with the various findings of Lambeth, Lausanne, Mansfield and other conferences. I claim to have read widely on these matters in the best books that are available but I do not think the Christian Churches will march along the road to Unity until we really face up to the issue involved in the words: "One is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren." I do not despair of Conferences and Schemes of Union but I am sure that we need a new spirit of comradeship in Christ before these can make much progress.

THE CALL TO UNITY IS A CALL TO THE REVIVAL OF
TRUE RELIGION.

Only as we rally around the Living Christ shall we banish our prejudices, enlighten our understandings, and correct our mistakes. In 2 Chron. xxx. 12 we read: "The hand of God was to give them one heart." The circumstances of King Hezekiah's time remarkably resemble our own, and he saw that only a religious revival could turn back the evils which were coming on his people. So he sent them a message: "Turn again unto the Lord your God . . . yield yourselves . . . and serve the Lord." In our day Mr. John Oxenham has stated it as follows:

"Only one way there is by which this load
Of coming ill may yet be turned to good,
ONE ONLY WAY
Come back to God."

THE CALL TO CHRISTIAN UNITY IS ALSO
A CALL TO OBEDIENCE.

In Exodus xxiv. 3, we read: "All the people answered with one voice." Moses came back from the Holy Mount where he had been in communion with God and when he declared God's will they said: "All the words which the Lord hath said we are willing to do." In this day of broken brotherhood and yet of world-wide opportunity and responsibility can any one of us claim that we are "willing" in the day of God's power?

THE CALL TO UNITY IS ALSO A CALL TO ACTION.

Judges xx. 8, says: "All the people arose as one man." That was a sorry time in Israel. Corruption had polluted the land and public opinion was at a low ebb. But the people of God made up their minds to put away the evil from among them and prepare the way of the Lord. When we think of the need of the world for Christ, and of the multitudes outside the Christian Churches to-day, must we not give fresh heed to the Master's words: "That they all may be one, that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me?" Nothing has been so distressing to some of us as the cleavage

within the ranks of evangelicals. Is it not our obvious Christian duty to join hands with those who are nearest to us in our own Church, whose road to union is at no point very far away from ours? Joining them we shall be nearing others all the time until we appear every one of us in Zion. We have grown apart in days of peace. We must draw closer to one another in days of war. By reading each other's writings, by personal friendship, by restraint of judgment, by kindlier thought and by public and private prayer we must first reduce the distance between us and those who are our nearest of kin. Above all, by concentration upon the mind and will of the Lord Jesus Christ, by surrender to His Spirit, and by loyalty to the fundamental obligations of our membership in the world-wide family of God the Father, we must move forward, assured as travellers to a common end, that our ways will meet in Christ and in the attainment of Christian brotherhood.

“ Lord, haste the day Thou hast foretold
When all Thy flock within one fold
Shall live in peace, by love controlled,
Obedient to Thy Will.

Constrain Thy children everywhere
To live for Thee, Thy cross to share;
Resolved, in faith, by work and prayer
To win the world for Christ.

Let love, and joy, and peace abound
Where'er Thy hallowed name is found,
Till Christ, in earth and heaven be crowned
Triumphant LORD OF ALL.