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SOME OBSERVATIONS BEARING ON THE QUESTION, "IS A SYNTHESIS OF PRESBYTERIANISM AND EPISCOPACY POSSIBLE?"

If what is offered in these notes represents at best a very general and indeed preliminary approach to the subject before us, it is partly because the time allotted for its discussion does not permit of any more exhaustive survey. But partly I have felt that the state of relations which, officially at least, exists at present between the Episcopal and the Presbyterian Churches, does not afford the material for an exact assessment of the possibility of their fusion. Episcopacy, as it seems to me, has not yet made a resolute effort to appreciate Presbytery's claim to represent a phase of Catholic Christianity. It has operated, I feel, with too external and formal a conception of what is Catholic. Presbytery, on its side, despite its declared Catholic claim, has been too self-centred, too absorbed in its own history, and too content with its own task to develop an adequate œcumenical sense of its responsibilities in this matter.

It is, therefore, not an easy task which falls to one who, under these conditions, is required to debate the possibility and the implications of a Presbyterian-Episcopal synthesis. He has to take account of the facts of the situation whatever the direction of his personal predilections may be. It is a situation in which there needs to be candid speaking, and who am I that I should undertake to judge and to apportion blame for this and that defect as between two great historical communions? It is a case where heart and head may well find themselves in conflict, where the unitive instincts and affections which reach out, as they sincerely do in me, towards a larger comprehensiveness, are pulled up sharp and short against the obstinate facts of past and present history. One may, indeed, find a certain relief and distraction by distinguishing between the various levels at which the problem comes before our minds. When we ask "Is a Synthesis of Presbyterianism and Episcopacy Possible?", it has to be considered what precisely we mean by "possible". Do we mean (*a*) theoretically and logically

conceivable as an abstract idea, (*b*) morally and ecclesiastically desirable as a goal of effort and aspiration, (*c*) historically and practically feasible as a programme for action in a given situation? All these aspects are present in the impact of the question.

As to the possibility of the synthesis on the first two of these levels there is not, to my mind, any shadow of doubt. Presbytery and Episcopacy are not in themselves contradictory or mutually exclusive conceptions. As the South Indian Plan of Union and now the "Basic Principles" of our American brethren sufficiently indicate, the two systems, upon any reasonable interpretation of what they respectively stand for, admit of being excellently welded into one. Ideally and morally, too, if we have any conscience for the œcumenical character of the Church as the One Body of Christ, the synthesis of the two systems is a most desirable end. Indeed, I would go further and say that no other synthesis in the field of œcumenical relations is half so desirable or so important as this. Other approaches to union, East or West—I desire to speak here without offence—possess at the most an academic or sentimental interest. The union of Episcopacy and Presbyterianism, as that of two systems co-established but divided against each other in the one house, is of primary importance, and indeed the crux of the Œcumenical problem is here.

It is just here, however, where we come face to face with the problem on its third or concrete level, as something which is bound up very closely with an historical situation, that the real hardness of the approach to a solution appears. Presbytery and Episcopacy are both entangled in difficulties which are not entirely of their own creating, and which are certainly not of their present creating. Each of them has a considerable history behind it, in which, in this country at least, kings and political parties, as well as bishops and presbyters and the Churches' own intolerances have played a part, and with which accordingly old political and social, as well as ecclesiastical oppositions and grudges are identified. These have indurated the division, and they make it harder to-day for the Christian spirit in either communion to liberate itself sufficiently for a proper effort at a mutual reconciliation.

To say this, however, is not to exonerate the two communions now from the obligation for Christ's sake to seek a nearer approach in honour and in interchange of confidence.

Such action, if undertaken, will help to neutralise prejudice even in popular circles, and may lead—who knows?—one day to such a synthesis as many in both Churches pass not a day without seeking.

My point is that, if such a synthesis is to be made possible, there must be preparatory work on both sides: *work*, not the mere expression of pious sentiments tending to unity. We must be prepared, where opportunity can be devised for it, to overstep the narrow bounds of established precedent and tradition, to do unusual things, and not to be disappointed—for the sake of such an end—if the risks which we take do not seem immediately to be justified. The Cross ought to appear from every high point of the road which we tread.

Anyone who speaks for the Church of Scotland is bound to confess that the old attempts to force Episcopacy on the country by royal decrees and Acts of Parliament have pre-disposed the popular mind unfavourably with regard to the larger vision of Church Union. They have created a complex in which the ecclesiastical position is inextricably bound up with features of the national struggle for independence: “Stands Scotland where she did?” etc. That the same conflicts involved a degree of ultimate injustice towards our separated Episcopal brethren is overlooked in popular quarters of Presbytery, but is not forgotten in the like quarters of the other communion. All this is as regrettable as it is natural, and I wish there existed in the offices of the Church some kind of Confessional for repentance for and absolution from the sins of history. One effect of it all is that in modern days, when the Kirk of Scotland has long been drawing her life abundantly from all the springs and sources of devotion and thought open to her in Christendom, her œcumenical interests at certain points have remained somewhat stunted. She has developed great world-relationships through her Foreign Missions. She has a remarkable network of interests and obligations connecting her with every country on the Continent of Europe. Her attitude to Church Union movements in the wider world, including the South Indian and the present American movements, is consistently and unqualifiedly benevolent. But she has not come specially to identify her own œcumenical future with the interests of Presbyterian and Episcopal reunion at home. History has been too much for the mass of her people, as it has also been for the

mass of her separated brethren. But this is not the only difficulty. In higher circles, where historical prejudice has dropped away and only a national situation is left to continue practical difficulties, there is a feeling of regret that recognition of the Catholic status of the Presbyterian order of things has not been more generously accorded from the Anglican side of the house. So long as constraint is felt in the latter quarter to use the word "irregular" of the Scottish ecclesiastical order, while it may not pass the wit of Presbyterian Churchmen to discern and allow for the local conditions inspiring the choice of such language, it does not help these Churchmen with their peculiar historical problem, and it retards œcumenical progress. It is not that the implied dogmatism hurts the feelings of the Kirk of Scotland, for the latter has no priority-claim to special consideration on this score, but it hurts her understanding, which is based on a profound sense of God's sovereign action at great crises in the history of His Church, and this is a more serious matter. She is disposed to think that theology, doctrine of God, must have a voice in such matters, and that in the past, tradition rather than doctrine of God has had the upper hand.

I cannot, and I do not suggest that Anglican Churchmen should in their position be able to show a freedom from embarrassment which their Presbyterian counterparts cannot exercise on theirs. There are embarrassments on both sides, though they are different, for Presbytery has always recognised Anglican orders. But I am trying to bring out honestly the kind of situation which we must seek to mend, or it will mar us. I would suggest that our future approach to a synthesis will be less hindered by history than it will be promoted by doctrine of God. The œcumenical consummation of the future has to do with doctrine of God, and I shall try to develop this issue a little further.

I

If such a synthesis as we are considering is to be made possible, it will be upon the basis of a larger understanding of history in relation to the term "Catholic". The recent criticism with which the publication of the American "Basic Principles" was received by some in this country has not altogether tended to create confidence in this direction. Indeed, I would say that,

if the kind of historical dogmatism which a part of the criticism revealed represents the spirit in which we face the Œcumenical problem, the union of the Churches, even if it could come about under these conditions, would not be worth while. One would wish to see a fuller recognition of the call of God to the Church in this matter, a keener sense of the reproach of a divided Christendom in the present world-situation, a willingness to believe that God in His sovereignty of grace wills new things to happen in history, and a more liberal use of the historical knowledge on which we can now draw. "*Quod semper*", we say, "*quod ubique, quod ab omnibus!*" That is a principle upon which we are all united, in so far as we take our stand upon the Bible and upon the faith once delivered to the saints. But how far does the implied uniformity take us? Does it extend in every case from the doctrine which we hold in common to the forms in which the ministerial priesthood in the Church, the office of the Word, is exercised and its powers distributed? Can we consider that the episcopal powers which Christ committed to His Church are valid when concentrated in the hands of a single bishop in a diocese, and not when retained in a commission of presbyters? Obviously, whether we are interested in œcumenical readjustments or not, the "*Quod semper*" principle falls under the Christian rule that we should look at all things in the light not of the letter but of the spirit. If the God in whom we trust is the living God, we should find room in our philosophy of history for new and even paradoxical things to occur at crises in the Church's life. We should look for instances of variety in what the Apostle calls "the manifold wisdom of God". We should acknowledge that at great moments the principle "*Quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus*" needs to be supplemented by what I would state in the form "*Quod nunquam, quod nusquam, quod a nemine*". I imagine that St. Paul tacitly appealed to that principle in his argument with the hesitant apostles and saints at Jerusalem. Certainly there is canonical authority for it. "Behold, I will do a new thing", saith the Lord, "now shall it spring forth; shall ye not know it?" (Isa. xliii. 19).

We must remember, so far as we are really interested in a right approach to an œcumenical synthesis, that we cannot give to the Church a unity which is not already its own in God. We should, therefore, start from what we hold in common,

not from what divides us, and we should seek the ground, if not the completeness, of catholicity in the common element. As a matter of fact, the stress which was laid upon order in the first days of the Church had for its object to guard the purity of the Church's faith—that, and nothing else! So in Ignatius with his fervid cry: "Do nothing without the bishop!" and in Irenaeus with his calmer insistence on the continuity of the apostolic *paradosis*. Incidentally, I would point out that the injunction in question is one which has been equally honoured in Presbyterianism and in Episcopacy. The Ignatian rule, "Do nothing without the bishop!", comes out in the Presbyterian principle that no spiritual court of the Church, from the Kirk-Session to the General Assembly, can meet, or be constituted, or transact any business without a clerical Moderator. I quote this example to show that the "*Quod semper*" principle does not, upon a proper understanding of it, cover with authority only one type of organisation, or only one pattern of ministry. There may be unity in variety, equivalence in disparity, authority in freedom, and catholicity in reformation.

When Italian Art in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries turned, in the persons of Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Raphael, from the traditional and accepted types of religious beauty to find its Madonnas, Apostles, Saints, and Martyrs in the living folk of everyday life, it signified a considerable outward break with the past. But would anyone say that the essential life or history of Italian Art was thereby departed from or lost? Surely not! The less so, because in assuming this freedom it was at the same time falling back on the ancient forms of Christian Art, the Art of the Catacombs and the early Church mosaics and frescoes. The illustration is apposite because if the Anglican service of Holy Communion reflects more the medieval model, the Scottish ritual of the service conforms more to the "Last Supper" of Leonardo da Vinci.

When the American colonies in the eighteenth century threw off allegiance to the British government and Parliament, it signified a breach of the old historic relations. It meant the repudiation of the British monarchy, because the Crown was on the side of the oppressors, and the setting up of Republican institutions. But ought we to talk of any discontinuance or forfeiture of the genuine principles of English constitutional

life, or of its traditions of liberty, order, or democratic government? We cannot, for the colonists, in setting up the Republic of the United States, were falling back on political ideas which had been nourished in English breasts. The Church of Scotland is, *quoad spiritualia*, more republican in its form of government than monarchical, but is one to think for that reason that it does not continue, under its simple forms and in its special province, the life of the Universal Church?

When Scotland in 1560 broke with Rome, and presbyters set up the Reformed phase of Church government, should not the world accept their own interpretation of their action, when they say as they do, "I believe in the Holy Catholic Church"? The first Scots Confession was a glowing and passionate reaffirmation in Evangelical terms of the Apostles' Creed. Let it be remembered that, whereas in England kings and bishops from the start put themselves at the head of the Reformation movement, in Scotland they were dead against it. So the work had to go forward without the bishops. But this was no arbitrary act, making a total breach with the past. The presbyters who reformed the Church and adopted for their purpose the Genevan model were falling back on the principle, clearly enunciated in the older Conciliar controversies, that presbyters, as well as bishops, had a share in the responsible government of the Church, and it was also clear to them that there was a first age of the Church when bishops and presbyters were one.

Lest it should seem that I am merely offering an apologia for the Church to which I belong, may I say (*a*) that I have been dwelling on things which the Kirk of Scotland does not ordinarily consider necessary to be said, (*b*) that I have done so to help forward the cause of something greater than Scottish Presbytery and greater than Anglicanism, the vision of one visible Church of our Lord Jesus Christ. Anglicanism, too, had to justify her break with Rome by her philosophy of history as well as by her life and works, and even a Scottish presbyter cannot put from his brain the dream that an Anglicanism less troubled about Rome might yet liberate herself enough to take her place at the head of a great Evangelical Catholicism for the sake of the Gospel and of the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

II

The question of a Presbyterian-Episcopal synthesis in this country takes us beyond Church questions to matters of national interest and importance. Here I would only say a word. Presbytery and Episcopacy are for us not abstract ideas, but are bound up inextricably with the history and life of two peoples, and with all that is distinctive in their genius, sentiment, imagination, tradition, literature, and political philosophy. It is obvious that an ecclesiastical synthesis, if it could be brought about, would be one which safeguarded these traditions. We should, therefore, have to think of Scotland as a distinct province of the united Church, of which the constitution would secure the essential liberty of all its parts, and the continuance, subject to natural development and coalescence, of their distinctive traditions in worship. But it is premature, and unnecessary, to dilate on such conditions now.

III

It is more important to stress at present the necessity of the two systems devising ways meantime of coming closer to one another by more definite public recognition of each other, and by more community in religious life. Presbytery and Episcopacy have come much nearer to one another than in older days, because as parallel streams in which the life of the Western Church has been continued after the break with Rome, they have gathered thought and life from the same springs of idea and devotion. Our Scottish ministry owes not a little to Anglican scholarship, saintliness of life, and beauty of worship: John Keble means much to us, though we have our own Horatius Bonar. On the other hand, Presbytery has something to give to Episcopacy by the theological quality of its Churchmanship, by its solution of the problem of the spiritual independence of the Church, and by the balance and effectiveness of its democratic system of Church government. But further, it is probably familiar that one of the queries before the mind of a contemporary Commission of the Scottish General Assembly is whether the episcopal oversight exercised by

Presbyteries is adequate to the spiritual and administrative needs of the hour, or whether "Superintendents" should be set up again. That question is not decided. Some of us would prefer that the issue was stated in more œcumenical terms as one between Presbytery *per se* and the episcopate, but it has to be recognised that the œcumenical transformation of thought has not yet sufficiently advanced for any proposals of that kind. Meantime, however, it should be remembered that the actual position from the Presbyterian side is that the episcopal powers committed to the Church are not absent, but held in commission of presbyters.

On a different level Presbytery has the chance to contribute to the Church life of the future—and this is a point on which I would dwell more fully if there was time—the lay office of the Eldership, one of the creative institutions of the Geneva Reformation. If I mistake not, one of the needs of Episcopacy to-day is to strengthen its Church Councils: and here in the conception of an office created to assist in the government and discipline of the Church, and which is (*a*) not clerical, but lay, (*b*) not secular, but spiritual, and (*c*) bound by religious vows, there is something of very great value for that purpose. The two systems have thus much to offer towards the fulfilment of each other's life.

Yet, if synthesis is to be made possible in the future, there would need to be a willingness now to study means and ways for a closer fellowship, even at the cost of taking down and removing some of the shutters which the past has put up to screen from each the other's life. And this not for diplomatic reasons merely, but to give effect to the common purpose inspiring us. I wish we had honorary representation of some kind or other in each other's Church courts or convocations; or if the time is not ripe for that, some larger measure of fellowship in religious life. Steps towards this were proposed some years ago, but remained stillborn. I know the practical difficulties which beset the conception of Inter-communion; but some advance in this matter would seem to me necessary as a step to warmer, closer relations. The view is, I know, taken that Inter-communion should only come as the final seal upon corporative oneness: and those of us who have taken part in the Faith and Order Movement have deferred to that idea. But I have the deep feeling, and it is very strong in Presbytery,

that the Sacrament of the Holy Communion is not only, or even primarily, the sacrament of the Church's corporative oneness, but the sacrament of the reconciling, redeeming love of Christ which makes the Church one. I feel personally that there is ground for further thinking in this matter. Certain I am, in any case, that if some healing of the wounds of the riven Church could be brought about in the things of the spirit, the ultimate adjustment of our differences might some day be arrived at along lines not dissimilar to those recently propounded to us.

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