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## UNITY—THE MINISTRY AND THE SACRAMENTS.

BY THE REV. G. FREEMAN IRWIN, B.D., Vicar of  
Wandsworth.

"WITHIN the Christian Church, the social nature of the Gospel of Christ and its world-wide outlook have been more fully realized than in former times. The modern movement towards Christian reunion is instinct with the consciousness of both principles. God and His Kingdom and His Will for man are all unifying in their nature. 'There is one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all' (Ephes. iv. 4-6). It is St. Paul's expression of the truth which inspires the whole prayer. More and more, in spite of great difficulties, the duty of seeking a united Christian Church is pressing upon the hearts of Christian men of all kinds."

The Archbishop of Armagh, in his recent book *The Christian Outlook in the Modern World*, indicates in this passage the high motives which are inspiring the movement towards unity among Christian people. It is generally recognized that the consideration of the subject ought appropriately to begin with the interpretation of our Lord's words in the High Priestly prayer recorded in St. John xvii. 20 *et seq.*:

"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word. That they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee, that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that thou hast sent me."

The unity indicated in this passage is a spiritual reality. It is the unity of all Christian people in Christ. It is a frequent thought in St. Paul's Epistles. He says "the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ" (1 Cor. xii. 12). And again:

"For we being many are one bread, and one body, for we are all partakers of that one bread" (1 Cor. x. 17).

"But now are they many members, yet but one body" (1 Cor. xii. 20).

"Ye are all one (man) in Christ Jesus" (Gal. iii. 28).

"So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another" (Rom. xii. 5).

"Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body" (Col. iii. 15).

This spiritual reality consists in union with Christ by faith in Him, and by love for Him. "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity (unconspicuousness)" (Ephes. vi. 24). The movements towards reunion are fundamentally endeavours to secure the outward expression of this spiritual reality, to make the visible expression of Christianity in organization correspond to the inward fact.

Some have endeavoured to represent the desire for unity as

merely an effort on the part of the authorities of various religious organizations to secure economy and to prevent the overlapping of the various sects in districts where it is now difficult to support more than one Church. The sneers at Pan-Protestantism have been inspired by such representations. While there has no doubt been a desire and a very natural one to effect necessary economies, it is unfair to regard this as the chief or even an important element in the movement towards unity. The spiritual motive is fundamental and is the driving power behind the whole movement.

This is, at any rate, clearly the motive behind the South India Scheme. The basis of that scheme, as stated in the *Proposed Scheme of Union* (p. 15), is this :

“ The uniting Churches are assured that the unity of His Church for which Christ prayed, is a unity in Him and in the Father through the Holy Spirit, and is therefore a reality of the spiritual realm. They seek the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. But this unity of the Spirit must find expression in the faith and order of the Church, in its worship, in its organization, and its whole life.”

The same desire is expressed in the preliminary statement of *The Purpose and Nature of the Union*, and with such high spiritual aims in view it is necessary to examine carefully the obstacles which stand in the way of their attainment. The hindrances to such a unity, if they are to be allowed, must be shown to be fundamental in character. They must be definitely proved to be contrary to the mind of Christ, and therefore insuperable. It is our present purpose to examine some of these obstacles and to see if they can be regarded in this light.

In the first place there is a very large measure of agreement. The four points of the Lambeth Quadrilateral have been accepted as a basis of union.

For purposes of reference it may be well to state them as they are given in the *Appeal to All Christian People* of the Lambeth Conference of 1920.

“ The Holy Scriptures, as the record of God’s revelation of Himself to man, and as being the ultimate rule and standard of faith ; and the Creed commonly called Nicene, as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith, and either it or the Apostles’ Creed as the Baptismal Confession of belief :

“ The divinely instituted sacraments of Baptism and the Holy Communion, as expressing for all the corporate life of the whole fellowship in and with Christ :

“ A ministry acknowledged by every part of the Church as possessing not only the inward call of the Spirit, but also the commission of Christ and the authority of the whole body.”

From the Report of a Joint Conference held at Lambeth Palace between representatives of the Church of England and the Federal Council of the Evangelical Free Churches of England issued in May 1922, it is clear that there was general agreement as to these terms.

The only point on which there were any serious differences of interpretation was in regard to the ministry, but this was not even then apparent in the Report.

The Lambeth Conference statement on the ministry issued in 1888 required the acceptance of:

“The Historic Episcopate locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and peoples called of God into the unity of His Church.”

The statement of the Joint Conference on the Episcopate was:

“In view of the fact that the Episcopate was from early times and for many centuries accepted, and by the greater part of Christendom is still accepted, as the means whereby this authority of the whole body is given, we agree that it ought to be accepted as such for the United Church of the future.”

This readiness to accept the Episcopate was, it must be acknowledged, a considerable step on the part of the representatives of the non-Episcopal Churches. It was a departure from their traditions and showed the depth of their desire to secure unity. Since this resolution was adopted there has been a distinct cooling of the warmth of this desire, and this is practically due to the insistence of a section of churchpeople on a theory of Apostolical Succession which cannot be accepted by Presbyterians, Wesleyans, Congregationalists and Baptists.

The Proposals in the South India Scheme of Union show that the uniting Churches are willing to accept the fact, but that they will not be bound by any special theory of Episcopacy. They say:

“The uniting Churches, recognizing that the episcopate, the council of presbyters, and the congregation must all have their appropriate place in the order of the life of the united Church, accept in particular the historic Episcopate in a constitutional form as a part of their basis of union, without intending thereby to imply, or to express a judgment on, any theory concerning Episcopacy.” They further add: “Continuity with the historic Episcopate shall both initially and thereafter be effectively maintained, it being understood that no particular interpretation of the fact of the historic Episcopate is thereby implied or shall be demanded from any minister or member of the united Church.”

This practically represents the position of Evangelical members of the Church of England at the present time. They do not accept the views of Anglo-Catholics on the Episcopate, but there is little practical difficulty in the life of the individual Church member.

In South India and in other parts of the Mission Field the position is different, and practical difficulties in regard to Holy Communion have required some adjustment to be made. The Sacrament of Unity which ought to be the means of expressing the reality of the spiritual unity has become a means of indicating and accentuating the differences between the Episcopal and non-Episcopal Churches.

Through the comity of missions, to prevent overlapping, large areas are set apart for the workers of the various sections of the Church. One district is reserved for workers of our Church,

another for the Presbyterians, another for the Congregationalists, and so for other bodies of Christians. The native Christian who has been taught in a district of our own Communion, may move into that of one of the non-Episcopal Churches. The problem then arises in an acute form. Is he to be commended to the Christian Community in his new home? Is he to partake of Holy Communion administered by a ministry without Episcopal ordination? Not to do so implies excommunication, and that in the eyes of a native Christian is a punishment of a severe character reserved for serious offences. No one can believe it right for such a Christian to cut himself off from association with the small band of Christians maintaining their cause in the midst of the overwhelming mass of their heathen fellow-countrymen.

The grounds of the demand for unity have been well expressed in the often-quoted statement of Nehemiah Goreh, the Indian scholar and saint.

“The difference between the Hindu who worships a cow and an Indian Christian who has ceased to do so is so great that any theological differences there may be between Indian Christians make no impression on us.”

These differences turn ultimately upon the nature of the ministry, and their practical difficulty is most clearly evident in regard to the Holy Communion.

The Roman Catholic Church does not recognize the validity of the Holy Communion in Anglican Churches, because it does not recognize the validity of Anglican Orders. We are told that we lack the true Episcopal succession. Our own Communion in practice does not at present recognize the validity of the Sacrament of Holy Communion in the non-Episcopal Churches, because it does not recognize their ministries owing to their lack of the Episcopal succession. We thus have a system of exclusion based on the character of the ministry.

In the South India Scheme this difficulty is to be met by giving Episcopal ordination to all who enter the ministry of the United Church, but for a period of thirty years the present ministries, Episcopal and non-Episcopal alike, are to continue and to work side by side, each ministering to their own people.

At the end of this period there will be an episcopally ordained ministry throughout the Church, and there is no doubt that this will be regularly maintained.

This proposal has given rise to objections in the minds of some members of the Church of England who hold “that an episcopally ordained ministry which has descended in orderly succession from the Apostles is the only legitimate ministry of the Church.”

This rigid theory of the necessity of an apostolical succession raises not alone a question of historical fact, but also one of ecclesiastical theory. Is the succession necessary for the transmission of grace by which alone a valid communion service can be held? Can there be no exceptions to this rigid theory of the episcopal ministry? As we have seen, the episcopal system is acknowledged as the best,

the most ancient and the most suitable for the future unity of the Church, but does the validity of the Sacraments depend upon it? The ambiguity involved in the word "valid" has been recognized. The validity of a Sacrament can only be known to God. We have to accept such tests as are available. Does the Sacrament unite the believer to Christ? Does it build him up in holiness of life and conduct? "It is clear that if a Sacrament answers to these two tests, its character as valid is vindicated."<sup>1</sup> Bishop Gore, in *Orders and Unity*, says—

"There have arisen Christian Churches with a noble and continuous record of spiritual excellence—exhibiting, both in individuals and corporately, manifest fruits of the Spirit alike in learning, in virtue and in Evangelical zeal. To deny God's presence with them, and His co-operation in their work and ministry, would seem to me to approach to blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. We cannot express in words too strong our assurance that God has been with them and that we are meant to learn from their saints and teachers, and to sit at their feet as before those who possess God's Spirit." (Quoted in this connection in *Episcopacy and Unity*, by H. A. Wilson.)

The point has been raised acutely by some who ask the question: Who can claim a right to differentiate between the two Sacraments of the Gospel and put Holy Baptism in a different category from Holy Communion? In cases of necessity it is acknowledged that a lay person can administer the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. It is not claimed that its validity depends upon the character of the ministry of the person who administers it. Why then is it claimed that the validity of the Sacrament of Holy Communion depends upon the character of the ministry of the celebrant, and that it can never in any circumstances be administered except by a priest in the apostolical succession? In Dr. C. H. Turner's essay on "Apostolic Succession," in *The Early History of the Church and Ministry* (p. 144), the view of St. Augustine is given: "The Sacraments derive their reality not from the minister, who is nothing except an agent, but from Christ as the only source of grace and power, and His power is the same everywhere."

Can it be maintained, as such an exclusive view of the validity of the Sacraments would imply, that the succession of the ministry through the episcopate from apostolic times is the only channel of covenanted Grace? It is difficult to believe that if this were the will of God we should be left without some very clear and definite statements of the Divine purpose—such statements as would remove all uncertainty and doubt in regard to it. It is clear from the writings of such scholars as Lightfoot, Hort, Hatch and Gwatkin there is considerable doubt and an absence of certainty.

There is nothing resembling a definite command either by our Lord or by His Apostles. There is no direct evidence as to our Lord's method of commissioning the Apostles, and it is clear, from the earliest days of the Church's history, that the succession of the bishops from the time of the Apostles was not regarded as a guarantee

<sup>1</sup> H. A. Wilson, *Episcopacy and Unity*, p. 244.

of the transmission of grace, but as an assurance of the maintenance of sound teaching and orthodoxy of belief.<sup>1</sup> Dr. Streeter has recently shown in *The Primitive Church* that it would be difficult to prove that a succession of bishops was universal in the early centuries of the Church. The position of the Church in Alexandria has often been cited. The succession was one of Presbyters till the fourth century.<sup>2</sup> Down to the fourth century there are instances of deacons administering the Holy Communion.

There are a number of historical facts which tell against the rigid theory of apostolic succession as maintained by a section of the Church of England. In England at the time of the Black Death in 1348 deacons were allowed to minister the Eucharist. In Ireland in the reign of Elizabeth, owing to the scarcity of Roman Catholic bishops, a special dispensation was given to consecrate bishops by one bishop and two presbyters.

From the year 1552 to the year 1662 the formularies of our Church were not so precise as they were made in the latter year, when episcopal ordination became a requisite for admission to the ministry of the Church. There are several instances in that period of men who had received Presbyterian orders, or the orders of the Continental Reformed Churches occupying offices in the ministry of the English Church. The views of some of the most learned divines of our Church are against it. Bishop Andrewes wrote in 1616 :

“ Though our government is by Divine Right, it follows not, either that ‘ there is no salvation ’ or that ‘ a Church cannot stand without it. ’ He must needs be blind that sees not Churches standing without it ; he must needs be made of iron and hard-hearted that denies them salvation.”

Bishop Cosin’s opinion on ordination in the French Reformed Church is well known,<sup>3</sup> and it is recorded that in 1643 he communicated with the French Presbyterians during his stay at Charenton.

At a much later date S.P.G. and S.P.C.K. employed Lutherans as clergy in their missionary work in India.

This evidence of the views of leaders of the English Church in the past can be supplemented by reference to Archdeacon Hunkin’s recent book, “ *Episcopal Ordination and Confirmation in Relation to Inter-Communion and Reunion*. A Collection of Anglican Precedents and Opinions.”

Two quotations may appropriately be added from the writings of the Rev. N. Dimock, an exponent of Evangelical views, whose books are not as widely known and appreciated as they ought to be. He was an ardent student, a capable theologian, a most accurate thinker, always reliable in the record of his researches and careful to express himself with moderation.

<sup>1</sup> “ Irenaeus taught that in the apostolic successions of the bishops lay a divinely ordered guarantee for the truth of Christian doctrine.” Dr. C. H. Turner, *The History of the Early Church and Ministry*, p. 133.

<sup>2</sup> Dimock’s *Christian Unity*, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in *Episcopacy and Unity*, pp. 122-4.

In *Church Unity*, written nearly twenty years ago, he said :

" Who can look on with cold heart, unmoved with a feeling of joy and praise, to see how in the mission fields the evil and weakness of division—division among those who should be at one in the love of the Saviour, and for His sake in the love of one another—is being felt, or beginning to be felt, as that which should be overcome and put away as far as possible by united effort, so that our warfare against the powers of darkness may be led on under one banner, the banner of one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one army moving onwards with all lowliness and meekness, with long suffering, forbearing one another in love, giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace ? " (p. 71).

" It is for the true sons of the Church of England thankfully to maintain and faithfully to defend our precious inheritance of primitive faith and Apostolical order. But we need not fear that we shall be laying down our Churchmanship or opening our hearts to too wide a sympathy if we learn to say : ' Grace be with all them that love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity ' " (p. 85).

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