

The Present Position of Church and Dissent.

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THE issue between Church and Dissent is now of very old standing, and it is perhaps not unnatural that many of us should be inclined to regard the breach as perpetual, and to think sadly that it can scarcely be worth while to handle the question once more. But is this an attitude to which we ought to resign ourselves? We are professedly the followers of Him who came to bring peace and goodwill among men. It was His parting prayer for His disciples that they should all be one, as He and His Father are one, and in proportion as our love for Him is true, we must love heartily all those whom He loves. We may, indeed, hold that while men differ as they do in temperament, training, and circumstance, there will be different denominations of Christians, and hence regard the unity of the Churches as a far off, divine event—a something that cannot be realized until the consummation of this world-order in the new heavens and new earth. Yet even so, it is our duty, and should be our delight, to be “looking for and hasting unto” that ideal perfection of the Church of Christ.

But if, as Christians, we should strive for the union of Christ's members in general, then in particular, as Dissenters, we should watch for opportunities of rapprochement with the Church of England. This is the lesson of our history, rightly read. We are known as “Dissenters.” Dissent is necessarily relative to some body from which it dissents. It branches from a parent stock, yet it has still something of the character of that stock. It has, indeed, much of its essence in common therewith. It does not profess independently to supply a new Christianity. It differs merely on certain points. Of course, these differences, though partial, are to it vital—so much so, that it conceives it has no alternative but to separate from the parent body, so long as that body excludes them from its contents. But Dissent, at least in the best of its representatives, separated only from a sense of hard necessity, with reluctance and grief. And it remains true to its original temper only as it feels a constant sorrow over the separation, and shows a constant readiness to find ways of reconciliation.

The urgency of this standing obligation is greatly intensified at the moment by the political situation, both national and international. Wherever we look to-day, there is the menace of strife—at home between class and class, abroad between nation and nation—and of strife that threatens to run to ruinous extremes, unless it can be checked. We see also that the one thing needful to check it is *goodwill*. Without goodwill, bargains between masters and men, or between nation and nation, are worthless “scraps of paper.” And of effective goodwill among men—men of different classes and races—Christianity alone holds the secret. But a *divided* Church can never bring home to men’s consciences the lesson of mutual goodwill. In the view of a critical world, while the Churches preach love and fellowship in the name of a common Father in heaven, they do not practise it among themselves. And in this matter, as always, deeds speak louder than words. All our explanations, our justifications of division, our illustrations of its tonic effect, etc., are nothing to the world. The world looks at the broad fact—the practical issue. These Christians are endlessly divided among themselves. And herein the world happens to be substantially right. It is the Master’s own test. “By their fruits ye shall know them,” He declared. And more specifically for our present purpose, “By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one toward another.” The world is justified in neglecting our message while we cannot convince the world that we have among ourselves that hearty kindness which we recommend to it. Is it too much to say that the prospects of a successful aggression of the Church upon the world, at home and abroad, are the prospects of a real rapprochement between the various Churches?

Now what are these prospects? I venture to believe that in recent years there have been modifications of attitude whether on the side of Church or Dissent, which promise an effective contribution towards an eventual understanding between us. The object of this address is to register some of the more significant of these changes, and try to indicate the issues that are still outstanding—assured that the cause of Christian unity cannot be furthered by our waiving anything that appears to us vital truth, but endeavouring always to speak truth in love. We shall be concerned with questions of Church and ministry, worship and sacraments.

In such an enquiry, however, we could not proceed far without becoming conscious of a prior question—the question of authority. The Catholic Church recognized tradition as well as Scripture, and interpreted Scripture in its light, with the effect of making tradition the final authority. The Protestant State

Churches put the authority of Scripture in the place of that of the Catholic Church with its tradition. But they compromised in a greater or less degree, and eventually retained a good deal that was based on tradition rather than Scripture. Those who separated from them did so in the name of New Testament Christianity, rejecting everything for which express Scripture testimony could not be adduced. For them, the final authority was the Scripture, as read by the individual believer, with the aid of the Holy Spirit. To the genuine believer, the Scriptures were an open book. This view was naturally accompanied by a theory of the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures. Their author was the Holy Spirit, His human instruments being negligible. They are a sufficient declaration of all that is necessary to man's salvation, and hence of the principles and practice of the true Church of Christ. It is all plain, at least to him that understandeth!

Now, it must be obvious to us all that the appeal to the authority of Scripture is materially affected by the acceptance of modern critical views of Scripture. To say the least, the appeal loses in simplicity and immediacy. These views are sometimes briefly characterised by saying that they recognise the human element in Scripture. But such a statement seems to imply that you can *distinguish* the divine and human elements—as though you could sublimate the purely divine essence from the human dross. That is not the case, and in the statement still lurks a leaven of the heresy of infallibility. A truer statement would be that the Scriptures are the literary transcript of their experience of the Lord Jesus Christ by Christian men—inspired, certainly by the Holy Spirit of God, but not thereby raised above the limitations of their individual humanity, and their age, and hence not above the possibility of insufficiency or error. We believe that our Lord alone, of all the sons of men, was raised above the liability to sin or to error in matters of religion. But only men, themselves raised above such liability, could fully comprehend and report perfect goodness and divine wisdom; for these are morally and spiritually discerned. Hence we cannot expect to find in the New Testament a perfect picture of Jesus, but only Jesus—His person, teaching, and behaviour—as apprehended by the men of the primitive Church. It follows that in the New Testament we have not immediate access to the "mind of Christ." What we have is the best possible help to finding the mind of Christ for ourselves—the reminiscences or experiences of those who knew Him in His earthly mission. There is, of course, a sense in which the mind of Christ is given to every believer—i.e. in germ or principle. But to learn the developed expression of this principle

—what it means in application to the various problems of individual and church life—is the task of Christian experience. And whether for individual or Church, this is a gradual and progressive task. The mind of Christ, then, is not a datum—a criterion of Christian teaching and practice supplied to us ready made, but in the first place a problem to be solved by the patient, devout, and united enquiry of Christian people. And there is no guarantee that the conclusion reached in a given case will be infallible. Actually we find that different enquirers often do not succeed in reaching the same conclusion. Clearly, then, the appeal to the authority of Scripture is embarrassed. But the difficulty thus created is not equally great for both parties. This point is seized by Archdeacon Greig in his book on *The Church and Nonconformity* (1913). He says: “Though the consequences of the changed ideas about the Bible are being felt among us very strongly, we have our shelter from the storm. There are, e.g. the Creeds, our Prayer Book, the Sacraments.” And he goes on to claim that in times of unsettlement, episcopal organisation affords a great advantage over merely congregational—“You want the steadiness, and the slow, deliberate wisdom that belong to a large body—something that cannot be rushed, as a single congregation by the influence of one man,” etc. In other words, the Church has its tradition of venerable antiquity, conserved and maintained by the authority of a bishopric of the whole church. We might be tempted to insinuate that even with its tradition the Church has its own difficulties; that in the Prayer Book there is such a thing as the Athanasian Creed, or that there are individual clergy or congregations which episcopal authority seems powerless to control. But let this pass. Relatively Dr. Greig’s statement remains true. The difficulty is unquestionably greater for those who refer exclusively to the Scriptures. Suppose we challenge the decision of Scripture on a question of church organisation or worship. It may be that Scripture is wholly silent. In fact, the New Testament is anything but a comprehensive and systematic manual of instruction for incipient Church members. Its documents are all addressed to Christians, and take a good deal of familiarity with Christian teaching and practice for granted. For the most part, they deal with problems or difficulties of detail which had arisen in particular communities. Where other questions are touched, it is often only incidentally, and the information obtainable is neither full nor clear. (We have only to put almost any question about the status or duties of church officers in New Testament times to evince the truth of this statement.) Again, the precedent afforded may be (expressly or actually) only applicable to a merely temporary situation. Moreover, in this connection, we

Dissenters must admit that we ourselves have not at all points strictly adhered to primitive ideals or precedents. We cannot in this place forget (e.g.) that our trained and professional ministry is not primitive. This last admission, however, may appear a dangerous one. The Churchman may seize upon it, and say, It seems, then, that you Dissenters also recognize such a thing as legitimate growth of church institutions and ideas—that modifications of them may come, along with changing conditions of the Church's life, and that these may be sanctioned and passed on—in other words, you too have a tradition. Then the only difference between us is that you do partially and timidly what we do thoroughly and confidently. Why not frankly recognize and appeal to tradition as we do?

Because, we answer, tradition may include extravagant or unwholesome developments. We need a safeguard against these, a criterion of genuine and false development. In the history of the Church, this safeguard has been found once and again in a return to Scripture, interpreted by the devout lay mind as opposed to the ecclesiastical. But, it may be retorted, that has been on the naive assumption of the infallibility of the letter of Scripture. And you can no longer appeal to that letter as final. Even so, we answer, we have the advantage, in attaching fundamental importance to the primitive documents of the faith, apart from tradition. For, at the lowest estimate, these give us access to those disciples who themselves knew the Lord in the flesh, and their records must always be the starting-point of our endeavour to get back to His mind. But, it may be further objected, to do this requires the work of criticism. And for it the ordinary church member is not equipped. He must depend on the scholars, and scholars (notoriously) often and seriously disagree. But waiving this, there arises the further difficulty—that the Christian laity become dependent on the authority of a new hierarchy—a hierarchy no longer of ecclesiastics but of scholars. And I have known one of them affirm roundly that if he must have one or the other, he would much prefer the Papacy! But is there not a lack of discrimination here? We are not bound to accept the doctrine of scholars as a Catholic that of his priest. We are, indeed, dependent on them in questions respecting the text of documents, their origin and date, their original meaning, etc. But these are not directly religious matters. The religious interpretation of the documents, and its application to the church of to-day is another matter. And that is for the consideration of the Christian community, under the guidance of the Spirit.

This, then is our ultimate authority—the mind of the Spirit, as manifested from time to time in the body of Christian people.

We may regret the loss of an authority given once for all in an inspired book. It would doubtless be more congenial to our natural indolence! But such an authority neither is nor can be forthcoming. It is the task of each generation to discover the mind of Christ for itself. And advance in the comprehension of it depends upon advance not merely in scholarship, but above all in fulness and depth of Christian life. "If any man willet do His will, he shall know of the teaching." There is much we do not know. This fact should make us humble, largely charitable, and tolerant towards the views of others. We may be readier to acknowledge the consonance of elements in the Church's tradition with the Spirit of Christ. But in the last resort we must keep and exercise our freedom of judgment as Christian people. It is an inevitable part of the burden of faith.

We can now—with, let us hope, duly chastened spirits—proceed with our proposed enquiry. Perhaps, following time-honoured precedent, we should begin with doctrine—the Christian gospel as presented in the Scriptures. Over this head, however, I shall pass quickly, contenting myself with a general remark. Dr. Greig (*op. cit.*) observes that doctrinal understanding between his Church and Nonconformity has been considerably facilitated by the weakening of Calvinism among the Free Churches, and this remark is certainly true. The Church of England wholeheartedly detests Calvinistic theology (Recently I heard an earnest Church Missionary from South Africa stigmatise the Calvinism of the Dutch Reformed Church as the most devilish religion ever invented). But this type of theology even the more conservative of Free Churchmen have now largely abandoned. It would take too long to detail the points in which we have diverged from Calvin, and thereby come nearer to Catholic theology. I must speak very summarily, and risk the possibility of being taken for a Jesuit in disguise! We have to-day a theology less exclusively centred upon the doctrines of conversion and justification, and proportionately more open to give adequate recognition to the breadth and richness of a Scripture theology. In a like proportion we become more ready to acknowledge that the darkness of mediaeval Catholicism was not total. Dr. Greig marks with joy our increased readiness to find good things in the religion of the Middle Ages. Anglicans, on their part, show a disposition to meet us by making room within the four corners of their communion for a Protestantism thus modified. A more recent Anglican writer, Mr Rawlinson, in his *Authority and Freedom* (p. 166), says that if we believe in a Providential leading of the Church's development, we must legitimate Protestantism as well as Catholicism, and that the Church of England ought to make room within her pale for

Protestant as well as Catholic churchmen. With such conciliatory movements on either side, the prospect of eventual understanding should be brightened. We may forecast that the chief outstanding issue will relate to the significance of the Sacraments in the genesis and growth of the Christian. To this we must presently refer. But first let us say something concerning the Church which observes the Sacraments and the officers who administer them.

I need not remind you that one of the main questions on which our spiritual forefathers separated from the Established Church was that of the nature and proper constitution of the Church. They held that the Church consists of the truly converted or regenerate. As these are certainly known to God alone, the Church is strictly invisible. On earth the true church exists wherever a number of genuine believers voluntarily unite to form a community. They could not endure to remain in a state church which included all the population as matter of course, and in which there was no guarantee of the genuine godliness even of the ministering clergy.

This theory has encountered more or less serious criticism. It is pointed out :

(1) That there is increasing agreement among the best scholars of all schools that the distinction of a visible and invisible church is not found in the New Testament writings, correctly interpreted.

(2) That the attempt to insist on a membership exclusively of the regenerate breaks down in practice. To begin with, there is no satisfactory criterion of a truly converted person. No examination by church officers (or deputies), however competent, can discover the state of a human soul in relation to God. But often the persons appointed have been pathetically incompetent. We repudiate the Church's use of creeds as tests, and the conception of faith as intellectual assent implied in it. Yet the questions asked of candidates in bygone days were largely leading questions as to the doctrinal beliefs they professed. More recently the justice of this criticism has been acknowledged, and young people attaining adolescence have often been almost automatically drafted into church fellowship. True, they may first have been put through a preparation class. In so far as we do this, we make an approach to the catechism and confirmation of the Church. On the other hand, we take pains to be assured that the seed sown has found receptive soul, and our ceremonies of admission to church fellowship have nothing of the sacramental character of Confirmation—the notion of a grace of the Spirit imparted through laying on of a bishop's hands. We have, then, in considerable measure, relinquished the attempt to decide the question of fitness. But at the same time (it is pointed out)

(3) We have lost the safeguard which is the necessary complement of our conception of the Church as a community of true believers. Originally, discipline was exercised on members whose behaviour proved them unfit—whether temporary suspension or final expulsion from the church's fellowship. We have not found it possible to maintain this discipline. Generally it has fallen into disuse, being only exercised in the case of one or two flagrant sins, while other glaring breaches of the law of Christ pass without personal rebuke to the offender.

(4) Another charge frequently levelled against us is the accusation of an excessive *individualism*. Our churches are said to have no proper corporate consciousness, as parts of the one body of Christ—of the Church Universal. Like-minded Christians of their own choice form themselves into a fellowship: it is a creation from below, not above; i.e. the initiation is human, not divine. Such a community is rather a religious club than a divinely constituted church, and accordingly it lacks any effective principle of cohesion. One congregation is not bound to another in a common unity. And within the individual community there is often grave dissension, issuing too frequently in permanent separation. In short, says the Churchman, we are infinitely "fissiparous!"

But not only the churchman. The same warning was given us, with unsurpassable cogency and earnestness, by our own Dr. Forsyth, and not the least part of our great debt to him is for the wise words with which he sought repeatedly, to make us feel, as heirs of a common salvation through Christ, an infinite obligation also to the Church in which Christ unites us. We can claim, then, that the confession of our defect has been heard within our own house. But more than that: so far as the lack of inter-organization of congregational churches is concerned, we have made a beginning towards modifying our hard-shell independency by the institution of area superintendents. Churchmen, on their side (e.g. Dr. Greig), have noted this development with satisfaction, and regard it as the germ of an episcopacy, without the name. The superintendent is as yet far short of a bishop. Among the Baptists, at least, his proper function is the "moderation" of changes of pastorate in churches aided by the Sustentation Fund. Perhaps the office is capable of further development, and in course of time it may undergo developments that would assimilate it much more to the episcopate. But there is one difference between the two which must always remain. We can never accept the sacramental ordination of the Anglican Church—with its underlying idea that impartation of the requisite grace for ministry is mediated by laying on of episcopal hands.

So we come to the question of the ministry. Our spiritual

ancestors insisted, with the New Testament, on the priesthood of all believers; and denied any specific distinction between clergy and laity. They maintained that in relation to the community, the minister was not sacerdotal, but representative. He was a man fitted for ministry by spiritual gifts and consecrated life; himself conscious of a divine call to minister, and giving proof of it by successful exercise of those gifts, and specially set apart by the community to render certain services in their behalf.

With this position some notable agreements can be recorded in recent utterances of churchmen. Bishop Gore recognizes in principle the priesthood of laymen when he says in his *Holy Spirit and the Church*, that "Both St. John and St. Paul appear to have a robust confidence that the good man—the spiritual man—will come to a right conclusion" (p. 171). Dr. Greig (*op. cit.*) is far more express: "What we do indeed more sorely need to-day throughout Christendom is . . . to insist on and realise the priestliness of the so-called (but never in Scripture) laity." As "principles of the Christian ministry," he recognises, besides "the conveyance through the "body" of "empowering grace," "the divine call of the individual, [and] its acceptance and ratification by the body." Better still, he asks whether there can be a serious doubt that a ministry so fruitful as that of many Nonconformist ministers is owned of God, or that the Sacraments administered by them fail to convey the appropriate grace to devout recipients. He complains, however, that while we attach importance to ordination for our ministers, we do not seem to realise its implication, i.e. a real distinction between clergy and lay. And he contends that the bishop is necessary, not merely as channel of the grace of ministry to the candidate, but also to do as the Church's representative, what she cannot do as a body—examine and approve candidates; and afterwards watch and control their activity as clergy.

We are grateful for the concessions the Doctor makes, and hope that they represent the thought of many of his clerical brethren. But we must continue to resist his conception of ordination. We cannot consent to make the necessary gifts for ministry conditional on the imposition of episcopal hands. The doctrine of apostolical succession remains for us a transparent fiction. We must insist that the qualification for ministry is spiritual in its source and nature. And we cannot consent to subject to the indignity of reordination by a bishop these honoured servants of God whose ministry Dr. Greig himself so generously appreciates.

Perhaps we ought not to pass from the subject of the Church without any reference to the relation of Church and State. Let us at least register one or two significant modifications of attitude on either side. There is no need to recapitulate to this

audience the evils which have resulted to the Church from alliance with the State. But it is worth while to notice an increasing recognition of them on the part of churchmen. One quotation will suffice. Bishop Gore affirms, "The real disaster happened when Christianity became the established religion. . . . It seems to me that no departure from the principles of Christianity has been so serious as that which allowed membership of the Church to become a matter of course" (p. 130-1). Another thing we cannot fail to mention is that to-day an increasing number of churchmen are willing to see their Church disestablished. It may be true that most of these are found among the High Church Party, who want greater freedom to introduce Catholic ceremonial. But this should not prevent us from welcoming a desire for more of the freedom which is the birth-right of Christ's followers. Among ourselves, perhaps, we may discern a growing consciousness that religion, as (to say no more) a supreme factor in human culture, ought to have due recognition in the life of the state? Many of us feel an imperative need that it should take its proper place in *education*, at school and university. Scholars in the critical adolescent stage, trained in institutions where religion finds no public recognition, grow up to think it negligible—a mere matter of individual taste. Others, again, in whose training Church religion is an integral part, feel its fascination, and leave us for the Church of England. On the Nonconformist side, it must be recalled that during the war we had our own chaplains, recognised and paid by the State. Perhaps some of us scarcely realise as yet that this was to recognise the principle of a connection between religion and the State. Surely these significant concessions on both sides might encourage us to think again that the solution of the liberation problem is practicable. It ought to be possible to devise some plan by which, without State preference of any Church, or interference with its autonomy, both the Episcopal and the Free Churches could have their catechists in State-aided schools, as well as their chaplains in the universities and the army.

Our last topic is that of *Worship and Sacraments*. Here we have to reckon with a fundamental difference in the conception of the nature and purpose of divine service. Anglicanism lays the chief stress on the worship of God by (or for) the Church, and finds the principal channel of grace to the worshipper in a sacrament—preaching being decidedly subordinate. The Protestant Free Churches tend to lay the chief stress on edification of the worshippers, and give the central place to the preaching of the Word. With such wide divergence in general idea, it is not surprising that the two parties should find much to criticise,

precisely in one another's mode of worship. Yet it is specially in the domain of worship that in recent times *we* have become conscious of defect, and shown readiness to learn from the Church. Let us briefly enumerate some of the criticisms that are levelled at our worship by our Church friends.

They accuse us of a false, or excessive *spirituality*. We are fearful of attaching importance to adequacy and beauty of outward form rather than to right disposition of the worshipper's heart. In recoil from such formalism we go to the opposite extreme. There is a noticeable bareness or even ugliness in our architecture and forms of worship: and our demeanour tends to be positively lacking in reverence—we sit to pray, and loll at sermon, to say nothing of allowing ourselves to converse in the house of God. Another reproach is that of an undue '*subjectivity*.' In various ways we put not God, but man first. In an eagerness to evangelize we go too far in the endeavour to make the service attractive to outsiders. We countenance instrumental music that is secular in suggestion and obtrusive in execution, and anthems more calculated to illustrate the choir than to glorify God. Our hymns are often unsuitable, expressive less of the praise of God than of individual religious sentiment. Specially vulnerable is our public prayer. It is utterance of the minister rather than of the people. It is apt to be *too long*. Unfamiliar beforehand to the congregation, it makes an undue demand on their sustained attention. It is apt to be *too individual*, reflecting the transient experience of him who prays rather than the standing needs of God's people in general—sometimes even his personal views and sympathies on public questions. Worst of all, it is frequently rhetorical, with an elaboration and balance of form, designed more for the ear of the congregation than the ear of God—sometimes almost a second sermon, giving the Almighty information He does not need, and doctrinal instruction which of course is aimed really at the audience. Lastly, as to our preaching, we are told that, from a laudable desire to testify only things which we have seen and known, we are in danger of being too narrowly experimental—to give a doctrine reflecting the limits of our individual experience. If we escape this defect, still we are prone to be bounded by the traditional theology of our school, as distinct from the full range of Bible truth. These faults beset us when we are in full earnest. When we are not, there is the ever-present temptation to the sensational and catchy, in both matter and manner. Our subjects are topical, sometimes to the verge of downright secularity, and often there is no serious attempt at imparting any systematic doctrinal and ethical teaching. (Similarly scrappy and unsystematic is our public reading of Scripture.) The manner of the preaching is marred and disgraced

by merely verbal points, extravagant overstatements, cheap diatribes and vulgar pleasantries. And all in vain; the world is not attracted, and God's children are starved and saddened.

I will cut short this melancholy catalogue, and hasten to say that in these criticisms we are prepared to recognize a good deal of truth, and are doing something to rob them of their point. There is perhaps a growing feeling among our younger ministers, that their primary business is to feed and build up God's people, and that to do this there must be a serious attempt to state systematically and validly the doctrines of the faith. As to place and forms of worship, we have begun to recognize that artistic beauty has a positive value in the expression of religious feeling. Further, forms of service are being drawn up and increasingly adopted, and along with their use there is (I am fain to believe) a growing feeling in favour of quiet and reverential behaviour in the house of God. And our Free Church liturgies are heavily indebted to the Book of Common Prayer—that is to say, ultimately to the great Catholic liturgies. Perhaps we hardly realize yet, that wherein we depart from it, it is lamentably for the worse. Naturally we are slow to make the discovery which Ruskin records in his *Praeterita*, that *all* the good prayers are Catholic! We cannot, on the other hand, adopt the Prayer Book as it stands. Setting aside for the moment those features which reflect the peculiar doctrine and organization of the Church, we want more freedom in prayer than it allows, and in particular, we want escape from some forms of prayer that are hopelessly antiquated, and do not answer to the aspirations of a Christian congregation of to-day. The Church of England herself (we all know) begins to find the yoke of the Prayer Book intolerably restrictive. It is true that the proposals for revision put forward by different sections of the Church differ enormously, and probably we should do well not to be sanguine as to the likelihood of any of them obtaining official sanction. But even if they should not, and the Prayer Book should remain substantially unchanged, there is no doubt that there must and will be much greater latitude in its actual use. That is to say, there will be more *freedom* in worship. In this connection it is interesting to note that Bishop Gore regrets the disuse of the primitive "spiritual gifts" in the church, and that Dr. Greig advocates the introduction by his church of some non-liturgical services. On the church side, we should be ungrateful not to note also an increased attention to preaching. Even among high churchmen there is a welcome movement towards making the sermon a means of conveying serious and regular instruction to their people. We must, however, still ask that this preaching should be truly Scriptural in content, instead of being devoted to laudation of Catholic ex-

crecences like invocation of saints, or a one-sided sacramentalism. I have heard of a clergyman whose sermon on a Sunday evening was a monition that it did his congregation no good to come to evensong, and that they had all they needed if only they were punctual in attendance at early celebration.

This brings us finally to the question of the Sacraments, and especially the Eucharist. (Of ordination we have spoken already.) On the subject of *baptism*, we of the Free Churches have our own differences, not negligible. But on the main issue can we not unite as against the Anglican conception, and refuse to subscribe to the doctrine of baptismal regeneration? We should not admit that the individual—infant or adult—is “made a child of God” by undergoing at the priest’s hands the ceremony of baptism. Neither can we agree that the grace necessary to maintain the believer’s spiritual life is mediated primarily and chiefly by the ceremonial of the altar. Our Anglican brethren hold this, and hence are quite consistent in urging frequent communion, whether hearing of the word be added or not. And naturally they object that we reduce the sacraments to a distinctly secondary place. Dr. Greig complains that to-day we are neglecting baptism, and Mr. Rawlinson says that the teaching and practice of Protestantism give the impression that the sacraments are secondary or even dispensable elements in it. To us it seems that the Anglican Church by its stress on the Eucharist tends to give a onesided prominence to our Lord’s Passion, which leads to a relative relegation of other important elements of the gospel—His teaching and general example. Also, that its doctrine of the Real Presence leads to superstitious or unwholesome consequences, such, e.g., as reserving the bread for the purpose of adoration (I note that Mr. Rawlinson speaks of this as a “simple and natural” observance).

In view of such differences in idea and tendency, it might seem that the prospect of mutual understanding is not hopeful. But this may prove a hasty and superficial judgment. The writers I have been quoting so much this evening betray at least some consciousness of the dangers of their position. Mr. Rawlinson says “It is important (the word is certainly not too strong!) that the children of Christian parents should subsequently enter individually and consciously into the implications of Baptism and membership of Christ, upon a basis of personal faith.” (p. 76). Bishop Gore frankly acknowledges that the sacraments “very easily become charms” (p. 25). And Mr. Rawlinson is ready to let any form of Christianity stand or fall according as it makes its adherents more like Christ or not (p. 161).

It is again Mr. Rawlinson who points out that the Eucharist acquired for Christian faith a sacramental significance, in virtue

of the fact that it *did* (as it still does) serve to mediate communion with the risen Lord (p. 151). Is there not suggested here a possible common ground between his party and ourselves? I mean the ground of a common experience. All theories, Catholic or Protestant, are attempts to construe theoretically the experienced fact that believers devoutly observing the Lord's Supper as He observed it with His first disciples, do realize in a peculiar sense His living presence and grace. This experience, like all the great experiences of human life, finally eludes definition. We err when we insist on complete and clear definition of what can, after all, never be fully and clearly defined. Perhaps both are over-dogmatic, the Churchman positively, we negatively. The Churchman, by his doctrine of the Real Presence, dogmatically affirms more than he knows or can prove—that the presence of Christ is in the consecrated elements. And on our side, we perhaps tend to err in an opposite direction—dogmatic denial of what cannot be rationally proved, viz., that somehow, albeit in a quite ineffable way, the Lord Himself is present and does make a peculiar impartation of His grace to those who observe the Holy Supper in devout dependence on His word. Dissenters have often carried to a wrong extreme their recoil from the Romish mass and its attendant superstitions. We are not warranted in asserting that the Lord's Supper is *commemorative* merely—and nothing more. Transparently, that is to do less than justice to the solemn words "This is My Body, My Blood." If we entirely believed in the spiritual presence of Christ with His communicating disciples, we should celebrate the ordinance more reverently than has sometimes been the case with us: and we should supply in our worship something, of which the felt need tempts not a few of our members to the communion of the Church. But we can never cease to resist any doctrine or practice which submerges or obscures the facts (1) that our Lord's gift of Himself in the Supper is conditioned by the believer's intelligent grasp of His word, and humble reliance upon it: and (2) that Christ gives Himself also to the believer who seeks Him in prayerful study of Scripture, and that the peculiar realisation of the Lord's presence in the Supper is due to the fact that the elements set Him forth with peculiar vividness, and particularly in the supreme act of His self-giving for us.

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