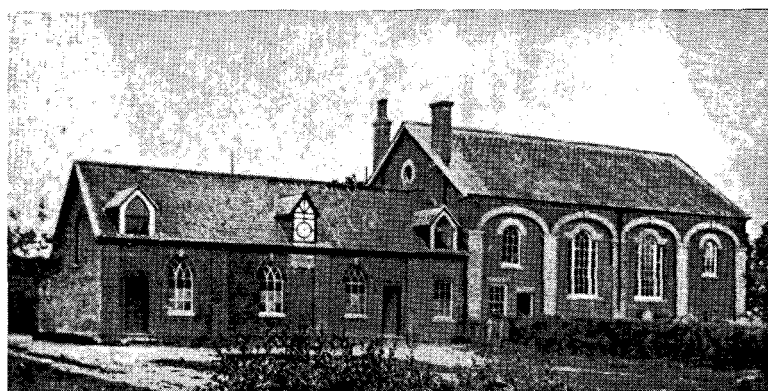


SANDHURST, KENT.



BAPTIST CHAPEL,
From the south-west.



SCHOOL AND CHAPEL,
From the north-east.

Laymen and Reunion.

OUTSTANDING in the religious life of the last two decades has been the movement towards Christian unity. It has not been restricted to any particular Church or country, but has had world-wide significance. It is found in notable strength in Canada, which six years ago saw the union of Congregationalists, Methodists and Presbyterians in the United Church of Canada; and in South India, where negotiations between Anglicans, Methodists and the South India United Church have proceeded for eleven or twelve years; while Australia and the United States provide other important examples. The homeland too has come within the sphere of the movement's influence. Two years ago witnessed the union of the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church; and two years hence the lengthy negotiations between the Wesleyan Methodist Church, the Primitive Methodist Church and the United Methodist Church will reach their consummation. Furthermore, the Conferences between representatives of the Established Church and the Free Churches, held at Lambeth Palace from 1921 to 1925, not only brought "representative members of the Churches concerned into closer fellowship and to better understanding of each other's position," but also revealed a large measure of agreement on vital and fundamental things of the Christian faith. This world-wide diffusion of the desire for unity should move all Christians to thanksgiving.

The movement in this country is likely to receive fresh prominence during coming months, as the Archbishop of Canterbury has sent an invitation to the Federal Council of Evangelical Free Churches to appoint representatives of its constituent bodies to meet representatives of the Church of England to resume conversations in the hope "that some further step may be taken towards at least fuller understanding and fuller spiritual co-operation, or, if it may be by God's will, towards even closer union."

It is hardly surprising that Free Churchmen have not received the invitation with overwhelming enthusiasm. The earlier Conferences left a feeling of disappointment. The lofty idealism of the "Appeal to all Christian people," the vision of "a Church, genuinely Catholic, loyal to all Truth, and gathering into its fellowship all 'who profess and call themselves Christians,' within whose visible unity all the treasures of faith

and order, bequeathed as a heritage by the past to the present, shall be possessed in common, and made serviceable to the whole Body of Christ," naturally won glad response. But as the conversations proceeded from "Episcopacy to Creed, from Creed to Sacraments, from Sacraments to Episcopacy," the apparently impassable *bergschlund* which exists between the Free Church conception of Orders and that generally held by the Established Church, was unmistakably revealed. Again, words of unity need to be followed by acts of unity; and truth and frankness compel the reluctant admission that, despite many charming and undoubtedly genuine expressions, it is difficult to discover any real extension of these in the six years since 1925. Inter-communion has been definitely discouraged by the Church of England, and remains, according to Resolution 42 of the Lambeth Conference, 1930, "the goal of, rather than a means to, the restoration of union." It is doubtful if pulpit exchanges have increased in number; and little, if any, advantage has been taken of national occasions to abrogate even in a small degree the privileges of the Establishment that impressive examples of unity might be given. The six years have, however, witnessed :

(1) the proposed revision of the Prayer Book with its weakening, in the opinion of practically all Free Churchmen and a not unimportant minority of the Anglican Church, of the Protestant character of the Church of England;

(2) the practical adoption of this Revised Prayer Book in many dioceses, despite two refusals to sanction it by the Parliament from which the Church claims all the privileges of Establishment;

(3) the retention of the authorised Prayer Book in other dioceses with little intention to observe it or use it in the manner intended by law; (2 and 3 not only involve deep moral issues, but also illustrate the impossibility of cramping the genius of religion within the confines of State ecclesiastical law).

(4) the steady advance in the influence and authority of the Anglo-Catholic section of the Episcopal Church;

(5) the 1930 *Encyclical* with its emphasis apparently strongly turned towards the Old Catholics and the Orthodox Churches of the East, rather than to the Free Churches at home.

Such happenings unfortunately cannot fail to have their repercussions in Reunion Conferences.

So far as can be gathered from Bell's *Documents on Christian Unity* and kindred literature, the *functions of the laity*, and the possible reaction of the laity to the questions which were being discussed, did not receive consideration in the 1921-25 Conferences. It may not, therefore, be out of place

for a layman who has some knowledge of the point of view that is being expressed by many laymen of Baptist Churches, both in London and the country, to suggest that, even assuming the representatives reach such agreement as to the Historic Episcopate and the Recognition of the Free Church ministry, *sub conditione* or otherwise, as would be accepted by the ministers of the Churches concerned, it by no means follows that the Free Church laity would unhesitatingly acquiesce in the implications of the harmony thus engendered. Moreover, assuming further the acceptance of the agreement both by the ministers and by the laity, there would remain for discussion the equally important question of the functions of the laity, for whom, from one point of view, all Churches and all ministers, including Bishops and Archbishops, exist.

What then are the functions of the laity in, for example, the Baptist Church? A broad general answer is that they are the same as those of the ministry. There is no position held by a minister, nor function exercised by a minister, which is not equally capable, under certain conditions, of being held or exercised by a layman. The term "layman" does not exclude anyone on the mere ground of sex. To avoid misunderstanding it may be well to particularise. A layman can be President of the Baptist Union, a position which, while not of the same national importance, nevertheless among Baptists is not less honourable than the See of Canterbury among Episcopalians. To this position the holder is *elected* by the members of the Assembly, not *appointed* by the Prime Minister, and of the fourteen elected since the close of the War, seven have been ministers and seven laymen. Should the Baptist Union, as an official part of the Annual Assembly programme, arrange a Communion Service in any year when the President was a layman, it would not only be in accordance with the Constitution and Standing Orders for the President to preside, but it would also be considered fitting and seemly. A layman can be Secretary of the Baptist Union, Secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society, as was the late Alfred Henry Baynes, or indeed hold any office in the gift of the Union, the Missionary Society, or other Denominational Society, including that of General Superintendent under the Ministerial Settlement and Sustentation Scheme. In connection with this Scheme, it is interesting to recall that, at their regular meetings, the ten Baptist General Superintendents are presided over by a layman, Mr. Thomas S. Penny, J.P., in the same way, although from a somewhat different angle, that the Bishops were presided over by a layman, one Thomas Cromwell, Earl of Essex, as Vicar-General of Henry VIII., the Supreme Head of the Church of England. A layman can be the appointed

minister in sole charge of a Church, and exercise all the functions of a minister, including "administration of the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion, ministry to sick souls, building up the faithful and evangelising the needy multitude." Examples are, the late William Peddie Lockhart of Liverpool, Joseph Benson of Belle Isle, and others, who also followed their secular callings, and thus continued in the true Apostolic succession of fishermen, tentmakers and the like. In the nature of things such examples are exceptional, and far more usually a layman who possesses the necessary gifts of heart and mind exercises his preaching ministry in any Church or Churches to which he may be invited. There is no Baptist Church which would exclude him from its pulpit solely on the ground of his being a layman. Probably about 2,000 laymen are thus engaged in Baptist Churches every week. In the event of the layman's visit falling on one of the Sundays when the Lord's Supper was to be celebrated, either he or one of the deacons of the Church would preside at that sacred service. A layman can hold any office in his own Church—trustee, deacon, secretary, treasurer, &c., and it would be a very narrow interpretation which restricted the diaconal office to what are generally understood as *material* duties. As conceived among Baptists, the office of deacon implies also *spiritual* leadership. During an interregnum between two pastorates, a retired or neighbouring minister may be asked to be moderator of the Church, or the position may be filled by the senior deacon, or the church secretary, or another officer duly appointed by the local Church. By courtesy and custom, but not by virtue of any right or Orders, the preacher occupying the pulpit for the day, whether ministerial or lay, would usually be asked to officiate at the Communion service. If occasion demanded, however, the duty would be undertaken by the lay-moderator, and it would not be considered unseemly, but quite in accord with the fitness of things, for him to preside at the service of induction of the new minister, or to offer the prayer for the new ministry, or to close the service by pronouncing the benediction.

The possession by the layman of certain spiritual qualities and general suitability for the position are the prerequisites to his election or appointment by the Association or Church. He can take none of the positions to himself, but, having been duly elected or appointed, *no human ordination is requisite*. It is almost unnecessary to say that his election or appointment would be carried through with due dignity and in humble dependence on the Holy Spirit's guidance, and by prayer he would be commended to his work. Baptists believe that this doctrine of the laity is taught in the New Testament,

where they find, not a priestly class charged with the dispensing of supernatural grace, but that all Christians are called to minister, according to their "gift," and therefore, that there is "no right which cannot be exercised upon occasion by every true Christian, lay or cleric."

The enquiry may reasonably be made, "What then is the position of the Baptist ministry? If the functions of the minister and the layman may be identical, is the minister no more than a full time layman?" In the writer's opinion such a deduction is far too bald and does not do justice to the Baptist conception of the ministry. Levelling up the laity to the spiritual level given them in the New Testament does not imply a levelling down of the ministry from the place of special honour in which Baptists hold them. The reply to the Lambeth Appeal adopted by the Baptist Union Assembly in 1926, and therefore an official statement, declared "The ministry is for us a gift of the Spirit to the Church, and is an office involving both the inward call of God and the commission of the Church. . . . For us there is no more exalted office than a ministry charged with preaching the Word of God and with the care of souls. Those called to devote their whole lives to such tasks are held in special honour." In three important respects at least, Baptist ministers differ from Baptist laymen :

(a) *The minister has heard and responded to the inner call of God to devote his whole life to the preaching of the Word and to the work of the ministry; and with the Apostle he can say "necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" That call the layman has not heard, or, if heard, he has not responded to it.*

(b) *The minister has given years to the preparation of himself, intellectually and spiritually, that he may be used "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." That preparation the layman has usually not undergone.*

(c) *The minister's inner call has been attested by the call of a particular Church which is desirous to have his services as a minister. On entering this pastorate he is "ordained" or "set apart" for the ministry at a solemn religious service, and this ordination, impressively conducted and valuable both to minister and Church, is a recognition by the Church that the minister has heard and responded to an inner call to a vocation that no man takes to himself. It does not "make the minister, or add anything in the way of supernatural grace which makes his ministry 'valid' as it would not be without it." After due probation, the call of the particular Church is, in most cases, ratified by the recognition of the*

Association with which the Church is in membership and of the Baptist Union. When a Church asks a layman to occupy the pulpit, it attests his call to be a preacher of the gospel, but that is different from corroborating a man's inner call to give himself wholly to the ministry and to have the pastoral care of a flock of God.

The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is perfectly consistent with such a separated ministry, equipped by special qualities and training to carry out the spiritual functions of the pastoral office. As we have already seen, laymen who are possessed of the necessary qualities of heart and mind are in no way disqualified from exercising those functions as occasion requires and opportunity offers, but it is not only in the interests of order and effectiveness, but also in the highest interests of the Church, that these functions should normally be carried out by those whom special opportunities and special experience have fitted for the performance of such solemn duties.

An examination of the functions of the laity in the Established Church reveals a different atmosphere. Instead of the opportunity of unrestricted Christian service and the deep abiding privilege of spiritual witness, the layman finds restrictions for himself and privileges for the priest. Practically all offices and positions involving leadership are reserved to the episcopally ordained priesthood, and the Church has little to compare with the lay service and witness of the Free Churches. Licensed Lay Readers can give help in mission-rooms, or, subject to certain very definite restrictions, in consecrated buildings. A further possibility of service is revealed by the Lambeth Conference, 1930, which resolved that "in order to meet the present pressing need, the Conference would not question the action of any Bishop who, with the sanction of the national, regional, or provincial Church concerned, should authorise such licensed *Readers* as he shall approve to administer the chalice at the request of the parish priest." This very cautious resolution is the nearest approach of the Church of England to anyone other than the priest administering the communion or pronouncing the blessing. The other main offices in the local Church open to the laity are those of a churchwarden, whose duties were considerably curtailed by the Enabling Act, and membership of the Parochial Church Council, which had fairly widespread powers of finance and property management conferred on it by such Act. The general powers and privileges of this Council appear somewhat attenuated when compared with those of the Deacons' Court of a Baptist Church, as, while *spiritual* matters are definitely

the prerogative of the priest, in many *material* matters the Council is subject to the supervision of the Diocesan Authority.

These widespread variations in the functions of the laity of the Established and Free Churches are not the outcome of chance. They are founded on deep convictions which arise from differing conceptions of the Church, its Ministry and Sacraments. The Anglican emphasises the Historic Episcopate and the Priestly element in the Church; for him, the priest is all-important, he alone is the "Dispenser of the Word of God, and of His Holy sacraments." The Free Churchman, on the other hand, emphasises the prophetic element and the priesthood of all believers. As Dr. Nixon points out in his recently published work, *Priest and Prophet*, "It is impossible to doubt that there have been from the beginning, and that there are to-day, two types of religion represented in the history of the Christian Church. They are strongly antithetical, and one cannot see at present how they can be reconciled. We may call them the Priestly and the Prophetic types. . . . The questions at issue work down in the last resort to one. Is Christianity a religion of law, or of grace? If it is a religion of law, then a priestly type of religious authority can best express it. . . . If, on the other hand, Christianity is a religion of grace, then it would seem that the prophetic type of religion is best suited to express it."¹ The Free Churches feel themselves to be especially the heirs and the guardians of the prophetic witness, and it will readily be understood that laymen trained and nurtured in that belief felt that the acknowledgment of the 1920 Lambeth Conference "that these ministries [i.e., the ministries of those Communion which do not possess the Episcopate] have been manifestly blessed and owned by the Holy Spirit as effective means of grace," was really no more than an acknowledgment of the obvious. However God may reveal Himself, and through whatever ministries He may be pleased to work, the whole experience of the Free Churches testifies to the power He has imparted, and the real authority He has given, to the ministries thus acknowledged. Undoubtedly, such acknowledgment marked a great advance on anything that would have been admitted in the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth or nineteenth centuries, and the acknowledgment was couched in generous language, but no brethren striving after Christian unity could have said less.

The representatives to the Joint Conferences assembled at Lambeth Palace for their first meeting in November, 1921, with the knowledge that reconciliation of the Priestly and Prophetic

¹ Chapter 10 from which this quotation is taken should be referred to, that Dr. Nixon's argument may be read in full.

conceptions of the Church presented almost insuperable difficulties. They were further aware that there was not the slightest chance of Free Churchmen entering into organic union with an *Established* Church, or into a Federation with it so closely knit that some connection with the State would be implied, as Free Churchmen would never submit to the indignity of the civil power having even limited authority over their spiritual affairs. On the other hand, among many Free Churchmen and many Anglicans, there was an earnest desire for such things as :

co-operation in aggressive efforts to spread the evangel of Jesus Christ, and to enthrone Him more completely in national life ;

united efforts to spread the principles of peace and social righteousness ;

full recognition that, in suitable cases, such acts of unity as occasional interchange of pulpits and occasional inter-communion were as desirable and permissible between Anglican Churches and Free Churches, as previously they had been among the various Free Churches.

The opinion of most laymen probably would be that the Joint Conferences of 1921-25 missed a great opportunity. Instead of facilitating acts of unity, the representatives spent four years in prolonged and interminable discussions on the Historic Episcopate, the Sacraments, and the Authority of the Free Church Ministry. These discussions may be of particular interest and inspiration to the clerical mind, whether of the Anglican Church or of the Free Churches, but the average layman, not being ecclesiastically minded, finds it difficult to understand why, amid all the gestures and conversations concerning Reunion, there should be so little practical attempt to present unity in ways which are obvious. He further finds it difficult to understand why men of different communions should not be able to join together in a common celebration of the Lord's Supper ; why it should be so difficult for various sections of the Church of Christ to hold common meetings for prayer ; or why any pulpit, if it is a Christian pulpit, should be denied to any man who is manifestly a Christian preacher of approved ability. Points such as these may appear amateurish to the ecclesiastical mind ; but the layman, although not possessing the technical training of his minister or vicar, at least knows and feels something of the needs of the congregation, and is able to express the yearnings of the congregation even on the deepest matters of the Christian life.

The layman's point of view concerning the matters which were considered, is not without importance, and extended

reference could be made. It could be suggested, for example, that the emphasis on the adjective *Historic* when referring to the Episcopate is hardly justified by history, as, even if it could be proved that the origin of the Episcopate dates back to the Apostles, it is, as the 1930 *Encyclical* admits, "hard to recognise the successors of the Apostles in the feudal Prelates of the mediæval Church, or in the 'peers spiritual' of eighteenth-century England." Something could also be said as to the assertion, often made dogmatically, that episcopacy is of the *esse* of the Church, and as to the very great difficulty of so adding adequate Congregational and Presbyteral elements to the Episcopal, that the result would be acceptable, whether to Anglicans or Free Churchmen. Furthermore, the layman's standpoint as to the sacrament of Holy Communion is worthy of thought. An indication of its line is contained in the suggestion that there is little similarity between the simple and homely first Supper at which our Lord presided, and the priestly service of the Anglo-Catholic, with its practice of Reservation and doctrine of the Real Presence. For the purposes of this paper, however, it will be sufficient to express somewhat fully what layman, or more particularly, Baptist laymen, think as to the authority of the Free Church Ministry and the scheme by which it was proposed that Free Church ministers might be recognised as priests and deacons of the Anglican Church. It was on the 19th June, 1925, three-and-a-half years after the first Conference, that the Church of England representatives presented their *Second Memorandum on the Status of the Existing Free Church Ministry*, and one welcomes the high tone of the Memorandum and the spirit in which it was written. The authors were faced with the grave difficulty of conveying, as kindly and generously as possible, the unpleasant intimation that, although Free Church ministries had been "manifestly blessed and owned by the Holy Spirit as effective means of grace," and that, although "the Word was admitted to be Christ's Word, and the Sacraments to be Christ's Sacraments," nevertheless, because of difficulties which were genuinely felt and courteously explained, the Church of England representatives could not admit that such ministries had due authority. In their judgment this "lack of authority was the main defect in the Free Church ministries," and to give this authority they offered two suggestions: (1) That a solemn authorisation be conferred by the laying on of hands by a Bishop, or (2) that Ordination *sub conditione* be accepted, that being an act of Episcopal Ordination prefaced and governed by a condition expressed in some such words as "If thou art not already Ordained," and followed by such

part of the form of Ordination and Authorization in the Ordinal of the Church of England as was considered necessary. Strangely, the Archbishops and Bishops who prepared the *Second Memorandum* thought this latter plan "would have the merit of dealing straightforwardly with the actual facts of the situation." To the ecclesiastical mind this may be straightforward, but to the lay mind, and particularly to those laymen whose business contracts belong to that class known as *uberrima fides*, the attempt to conceal differing convictions on vital issues by an ambiguous formula appears somewhat doubtful.

After the writer of this article had read and re-read the *Second Memorandum*, he thought of the three ministers under whom it has been his great privilege to sit during the last twenty years; men of devout, earnest spirit, honoured and loved for their own sakes and for their work's sake; men in the succession of those who were given "some to be apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers"; men whose call to the ministry has been recognised by their own Churches and their own denomination; men whose scholarship cannot be questioned, for each is the graduate of at least two Universities, and two of the three possess the highest Divinity Degree conferred by the University of London. With the greatest respect to their Graces and Lordships, the suggestion that the ministries exercised by such men "may be in varying degrees irregular or defective," and that to give them due authority they need a Bishop's Ordination, either full or *sub conditione*, is begging the question, and not far removed from impertinence. Just as reasonably, or unreasonably, might Free Churchmen say to the Bishops and Priests of the Church of England, "We cannot find New Testament warrant for your priestly conceptions of the ministry, and we question your right to claim any authority for your ministry other than that which is conceded by you to the ministries of the Free Churches when you say that they have been 'manifestly blessed and owned by the Holy Spirit as effective means of grace.'" The *Second Memorandum* is couched in courteous and brotherly language, but that does not alter the fact that deep down its attitude to the Free Church Ministry is that it is irregular, defective, lacking authority, and definitely less in value than the Ministry of the Established Church. Surely such an attitude is mildly reminiscent of the Pontifical Bull of 1897, in which the Pope of Rome declared concerning Anglican Ordinations "Wherefore, strictly adhering in this matter to the decrees of the Pontiffs, Our predecessors, and confirming them more fully, and as it were, renewing them by Our authority, of Our own free will and from certain knowledge, We pronounce and declare that Ordinations carried

out according to the Anglican rites, have been, and are, absolutely null and void." Perhaps the perfect commentary on both the *Second Memorandum* and the *Pontifical Bull* is found in a little incident nearly two thousand years old, "Master . . . we forbade him because he followed not us," but Jesus said, "Forbid him not."

In a recent letter to *The Times*, the Dean of Durham asked what advance the Free Churches had made towards the Church of England, and he proceeded to answer his question "So far as I am able to form a judgment, these Churches stand to-day exactly where they stood at the time of the Lambeth Conference in 1920, and even before it." Very largely this is so, as Free Churchmen believe themselves to be "the guardians and exponents of principles that go back to the very beginnings of the history of the Church," and to those principles they must be true. The Episcopal path of Faith and Order along which they are invited to walk does not appear to them to lead to those "higher pastures where celestial breezes blow." They feel that the attempt to scale the majestic mount of Christian Unity has been begun from the wrong direction, and that endless time may needlessly and fruitlessly be spent on this *Furggen Ridge*. It is obvious, when account is taken, not only of the Churches which took part in the Lambeth Joint Conferences, but also of the Roman and Eastern Churches, that Church Union in the sense of one organised visible Church is not within the realm of practical religious politics. Moreover, scholars are far from agreement among themselves that when our Lord prayed "That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee," He had in mind a visible corporeal unity. It is equally, or possibly more, probable that our Lord had in mind the greater unity of the spirit. In the words of a fine paper on "The Nature of the Church," read at the invitation of the Bishop of Gloucester at Conferences on the Lausanne findings, "Unity is a spirit—love is its centre. Is not *that* the only thing that matters? When once the river flows it makes its own channel. I enter my plea for the greater unity—a unity which will leave every Church free to work out its own perfection among the diversities of gifts and administration in which, I believe, our Lord rejoices." A vast uniform organisation is no necessary channel of the Spirit's working, nor proof of its presence, and it is contrary to our particular ethos. Dean Inge perhaps gives the final word in his *Lay Thoughts of a Dean*: "The upshot of all this is that the institutional unification which some desire, is neither practicable nor desirable. An independent nation must be independent in the spiritual as well as in the secular sphere. . . ."

The unity of Christendom which alone we can desire and rationally seek to promote is not the unity of a world-wide centralised government, but unity of spirit based on a common faith and a common desire to see the Kingdom of God, which is 'righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost,' established on earth. There will be diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit; differences of ecclesiastical organisation, but the same Lord."

The Church of England has a great history, and in her ranks have been some of the greatest theologians and saints. Alongside a fine reverence for history and tradition, she has the desire to make her organisation more adequate and perfect for the needs of to-day, and in her worship and devotion is much that would enrich the Free Churches. On the other hand there is something in the spiritual genius of the Free Churches and in their history and traditions from which the Anglican Church might learn and by which she might be enriched. The writer of this article feels that the Christian Unity for which both Anglican and Free Churchmen strive cannot be reached upon the basis of a minimum formula, and that the Cause of Christian Unity is not helped by avoiding issues which sooner or later must be faced. Failure to be perfectly frank would result in a unity devoid of that whole-hearted response that is essential to practical effectiveness. Fortunately, one of the great advantages of the Age is that we have learned to recognise that no one point of view, whether Catholic or Protestant, Anglican or Free, expresses all truth, and that God who fulfils Himself in many ways, is continually teaching those who are humble and willing to learn. So the Christian Unity that is much to be desired must take up into itself all the rich diversity of the varying streams of Christian experience. Surely, therefore, the highest interests of all Churches and of Christian Union would best be served if the main business of the Conferences which will spring out of the Archbishop's invitation was to arrange "fuller spiritual co-operation," for discussions on abstruse and hairsplitting points of Faith and Order are of very little value if all the time the crowds pass by the Church, untouched by the essential message the Church has to deliver.

SEYMOUR J. PRICE.