

Reunion at Home and Abroad.

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THE question of Reunion as affecting the Church abroad and the Church at home cannot be considered separately. It is a mistake to think, as some seem to have thought at Kikuyu, that union abroad can be engineered or promoted, or enjoined by representatives of the Churches at home, still refusing to unite. On the other hand, practical reunion in Christendom will not only form an irresistible lead for union in heathendom—it may be, in God's hands, the potent agency for making Christendom itself Catholic. The thesis, then, which I propose to discuss is as follows: Our Lord prayed for, and in His High-Priestly prayer He enjoined on His followers, unity, union. He did not, we confidently assume, accept “charitably agreeing to differ” as a substitute for unity; nor “federation,” save as a long step towards unity; nor “co-operation” between still dissenting bodies—but union, corporate, visible, tangible; for the world was to see it, and be mightily, yes, savingly, convinced by the spectacle that the Father had sent the Son (St. John xvii. 3 and 21). If this be accepted as an axiom, I ask further, Have we any inspired definition of unity? St. Paul supplies us with such a definition, and it will not do to set it aside as applying to unity only in a single Church, as that in Corinth. Divisions, differences, disruptions, schisms, will be as fatal to union in the Church Catholic as to the Church Corinthian; and union must be expressed along the same lines in the universal as well as in the local Church. This, then, was Paul's prayer and desire, and thus surely he expounds the unity prayed for and enjoined by his Lord, “That they all speak the same thing.” I am not so dogmatic as to assert that here we have the principle and genius of an ordered creed for solemn profession and repetition, and the justification for forms of

common prayer, as a help to, if not a condition of, perceptible unity. But it was significant that special attention was given at the Kikuyu Conference to this very subject of a definite order for public worship, with the underlying ideal, surely, of speaking the same thing about the same heads of worship and praise; and that the idea of a book of Common Prayer for the Church Catholic, all in all lands and all tongues saying the same thing at least once in the Lord's Day, in ordered worship, is not wholly chimerical, nor quite outside St. Paul's scheme of unity. I may record my impression that those keen younger missionaries are mistaken who would have you believe that the ideas of organization in a Church, and of a liturgy, are wholly foreign to the Eastern mind—mistaken, I fancy, about India, which is their chief area of dogmatic theorizing, but most certainly mistaken about the Farther East, which I know well. Organization and form in the construction of a Church, and a liturgy in worship, accord very completely with the genius of the Japanese and of the Chinese also.

It can hardly be doubted, however, that St. Paul, in his description of unity—"that ye all speak the same thing"—very definitely enjoined unity in verity. This, too, not the false and hazy, but most fatally popular idea of unity—viz., the charitable comprehension within the Christian fold and the family of God of persons agreeing to differ; of pretending to say the same thing, but coloured and distorted, and rehabilitated and restated, according to the prejudices of each—the belief, for instance, in a Supernatural Incarnation of the Lord, but the denial of that mode of Incarnation related by St. Matthew and St. Luke; the belief in a supernatural after-life of the Lord and the blessed saints, but that not by the resurrection of the body, but the substitute of another; that amiable but precarious "unity of spirit," that fallacious "bond of peace," which regards the faith which is in the forefront of the unity of the Church as a mere matter of opinion, if only your life be in the right. Call Jesus Christ a mere man when on earth, fallible, swayed by environment, neither wiser nor more foolish than the Jews of His time,

and you are as good a Christian and as good a Baptist minister—ay! and as good a Bishop's examining chaplain—as one who accounts Him to be Very God of Very God, and we are all really saying the same thing, they will say, only in a different way. I am speaking of real happenings (to use a disagreeable modern word)—the Baptist I have met with in China, and the chaplain I have heard in England.

It is interesting to notice, though so often forgotten, what prominence the Prayer-Book of the Church of England gives to this idea of the faith, the truth, Divine verity, as the absolutely indispensable element and atmosphere in which alone unity can "live, and move, and have its being." "Inspire continually the universal Church with the *spirit of truth*," and then "of unity and concord." "And grant that all they which confess Thy Holy Name may agree—may unite, or reunite if once severed—in the *truth of Thy holy word*, and live *there* in unity and godly love." We pray for "the good estate of the Catholic Church" every day, that it may be so guided and governed that "all who profess and call themselves Christians may be led into *the way of truth*." There is no royal road or by-path to that reunion which we are discussing save by the way of truth, and then, "holding the *faith*, we may hope for unity of spirit, for the bond of peace, for righteousness of life." Well, says and sighs and prays St. Paul, as a solemn Amen to the Lord's prayer for unity, to all speaking the same thing—accepting and holding and spreading and proclaiming the word of the truth of the Gospel, and in an ordered ministry and solemn worship and harmonious life—do not break this unity; "Let there be no divisions among you . . . be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." Do not set up your denominational differences, your schools of thought, your demands for freedom—*i.e.*, licence—in matters of faith and order; your private interpretations of the prophets and Evangelists; your criticism, not of the text of the Scriptures handed down, searching for the closest to the original, but your criticism of the inspired text itself, with not the same mind and the same

judgment, not with assured results, but with the shattering and sweeping away of the first bond of unity—supreme, complete faith in the Word of God written, and in the Word of God incarnate. I must confess that with this ideal in view, unity in verity as the one prerequisite for corporate and practical union, and verity to be given and assured by the inspired scriptures of truth alone, I grow increasingly restless when I hear, not Modernists alone, or extreme higher critics, but Evangelical leaders sometimes going out of the way to protest that of course they recognize as brought to light by modern research “the human element in Holy Scripture.” If that phrase means, as it doubtless does with the extreme critics, an element of ignorance and prejudice, which implies and causes mistake, the true answer is that *there is no such element*. If the meaning is rather that the language, the phraseology, the style, are human, then we may dismiss the subject by saying that the whole element is human, and that this is no new discovery.

In either case the human is by the theory and fact of inspiration so arrested, annexed, borne along, and inspired by the Divine Spirit, that error and misstatement and false doctrine are supernaturally rendered impossible. The same recognition of the power and prerogative of the Holy Ghost’s inspiration in Holy Scripture should make certain up-to-date yet conservative critics pause before they, with almost supercilious patronage, relegate a soberly stated belief in verbal inspiration to the position of a mere “pious opinion.” For it is possible that such a superior condemnation of what may be a Divine fact will turn out to be the very reverse of a pious opinion! It is a significant symptom, as showing the intimate connection between faith in the Word of God written and in the Word of God incarnate, that Modernist writers are suggesting that this human element is so entirely human as to be in a sense independent of the Divine, or, at any rate, that the subconscious Divine element in our Lord was hampered and warped and hindered in the expression of truth or fact by the imperfections and flaws of the conscious human element.

This ambiguous assumption is nevertheless necessary if destructive criticism is to have free course and be glorified in its assumptive course. This human element of kenosis must be admitted or forced through, because the testimony of the Word Incarnate is so clear and decisive to the inspiration of the Word of God written. Are not these speculations, or dallyings with speculations, direct *foes to unity*, as weakening faith in the oracles of God, the one inspired source of that verity which is the prerequisite for well-founded unity? The same feeble yielding to bold or calmer assumption is noticeable in the Modernist plea, with which some more orthodox apologists seem disposed to sympathize—to wit, that the developments of modern thought, and the “assured results” of modern scholarship and scientific research, demand as our first duty restatement and rehabilitation of the facts and doctrines of Christianity to meet and satisfy these developments. These assumptions assume that modern thought is all wise and true—which it is not—that truth is thus evolving, whereas the very intellect and reasoning powers of men show rather signs of deterioration; while science, still in its infancy, is still empirical in its so-called results, and the results of destructive criticism of the Bible are notoriously not assured.

Well, now, my thesis proceeds thus: Nineteen hundred years ago our Lord prayed, and thus prophesied, that His people, the true members of His Church and Body, should be one. St. Paul prayed for this same unity for the early Churches of Christians. There was, we believe, a certain and very notable, and indeed supernatural, fulfilment of this prayer and ideal in the Apostolic and sub-Apostolic periods, and this continued as the rule, perhaps, though with ominous tendencies to wilfully easy and ill-considered separation, even in things external, so sadly pursued by Nonconformists since the Reformation, as I shall notice below; and such is assuredly a wound to unity, and as such *wrong*. Schism without sufficient cause is indefensible for a Christian. But then later came the great Nonconformity of Christendom, the false and anti-Christian doctrines, and the

arrogant assumptions of Rome, and the long sleep of medieval artificial unity in rule and subjection, and the apparent death-blow to the unity in verity of the Church Catholic. From this long-drawn-out Nonconformity to the Truth, the Reformation, through God's abounding mercy, rescued Western Christendom. The Church—the same notably in England and Wales, the Apostolic, Primitive, Catholic, Bible-founded and Bible-inspired Church, the old garden free from weeds, the old order and discipline, free from all error, and embracing all truth—emerged in England, most complete and orthodox of all the Churches of that great return to the confessing of the faith and verity of the Church; and thenceforward—by whose fault I stop not now to discuss, but, instead of a speedy and rejoicing fulfilment of our Lord's prayers and words, the Church which had done more than any other to rescue Christendom from Nonconformity must needs be dissented from and broken off from by those very Christian bodies who owed their liberties and their glorious light so very largely to this great centre of Conformity. To refuse to conform to error is Christian and upright; to refuse to conform to the centre of Conformity and the great champion of the truth and verity of God is, however excused, explained, condoned, passing strange, and a dire calamity. We know it at home. I have lived and moved amongst it for half a century abroad, with eighty-two non-Roman religious bodies, not all speaking the same thing, not perfectly joined together. I thought in my earlier years in China that, though unfortunate, it was not fatal. It did not seem to perplex the Chinese mind. They thought formerly that we were like different regiments and squadrons in the same army, with one Commander-in-Chief—uniform, march, and methods of warfare different, but with one heart and love and object and loyalty. Some tell me that there is a kind of unconditioned and inarticulate unity amongst all non-Roman Churches in China, recognized like a masonic sign by themselves, but not quite understood by the world, who know that Christians are not *one*, but who yet regard the real differences and schisms as between Rome on the one side and the rest on the

other. But I found as years advanced that there was restlessness on this subject, both amongst missionaries and the native Churches; and the grave question has been stirring in my mind, and I believe in the thoughts of a great multitude of Christian people everywhere, whether this state of armed neutrality, as it is in some cases; of agreeing to differ in other cases; of a kind of mob with independent units, not a united Church; of attempted co-operation perhaps, of projected federation—whether all this is a fulfilment, and not a travesty, of our Lord's prayer. What may suit certain temperaments or races, or circumstances or prejudices, must be our guide, they say; not what the Lord of Lords, the King of Kings, the Head and Redeemer of the Church, requires. And this we have kept Him waiting for 1,700 years and more. Is not the delay almost intolerable? And the effect on the Chinese thinking world is, if not disbelief in our Lord's own mission, certainly disbelief in our mission—*q.d.*, "If you were loyal Christians at all, you would be one in your Church, not many; we therefore regard you all as mistaken, and must work out our own Church for our own salvation."

Therefore, on all occasions when I was able to exercise any influence at all I have made bold to urge as of imminent urgency the only scheme for unity with which I am acquainted. I must not weary my readers by a narration of the efforts which my brother, Bishop George Moule, now with God, and I made during our half-century in China towards *rapprochement* with Rome if it were possible, which it was not, and then more hopefully with the non-Roman Churches of Europe and America. Such a narrative would show that I am venturing now to discuss this subject, not without previous training and experience; and though I confess to a feeling near to despair as to the feasibility of the scheme which I have advanced above, yet I feel sure, at the same time, that if our Lord's wish and command for unity is to be regarded, and not our own idea of what is possible, this, and this alone, remains for Christians.

You may say that this is too drastic a statement. Shall

I supplement it by saying that I fear we are *too late*, and that the supreme opportunity for the English Church as this reuniter of Christendom is fast passing from her—is it by her own fault?—and that the Lord Himself, wearied by our long delay, will Himself by His own coming and presence strike unity through our protracted councils, and compel what we should have so feebly rendered? My thesis, then, is that, if you propose to reunite, you cannot reunite with nothing in particular, or with units of union one by one, but surely with some central body, the survival, if it may be, of the once Apostolic and Catholic Church—"I believe in the Holy Catholic Church"—a centre and heart, a fold and a home, where all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, and who hold the faith once delivered to the saints, will not be absorbed and merged and lost and unrecognizable, but where you will be welcomed as to a long-lost home, and recognized and incorporated, if you will for the future keep the simple rules of the home; and where you will find, not diverse and strange doctrines, but the whole body of truth—your own favourite and emphasized tenets there too, but in harmony, not in the exaggeration of isolation. This Church, the Church of the Living God, you will find comprehensive of all truth and truth-lovers, exclusive of all errors or dallying with errors; a Church ancient and Apostolic, probably deriving its orders, and certainly its origin, from the Rome of St. Paul. Aristobulus, cousin to Barnabas, consecrated by St. Paul, came, did he not, as first Bishop to the Britons long before the arrival of Augustine from Roman Rome; and through the British Church, the Church of which we speak is thus coeval with Pauline and Petrine Rome itself. A Church, too, modern and reformed, risen from the dead almost, adapted, not in doctrine or sacrament which cannot change, but in elasticity for modern life and work. All this, surely and certainly, you find in the English Church. And with the acceptance of this invitation and welcome to unity, of corporate union, and conformity in orders and organization of all who are one with the Church in the primal unity of verity, the Church herself the while unfailing

in her adhesion to the faith—thus the reunion of Christendom and of Christians in heathendom may be assured.

A twofold, or perchance a threefold, objection may be raised by the "Churches" to this call and almost summons of the Church in her Lord's name: (1) You say, Come to us as the centre of orthodox Christendom. Why should we not say to you, *Come to us?* Honestly, I do not believe there is a single Church of the Reformation, or sect of the Reformation, which could or would wish to make such a proposal or prefer such a claim. There is rather a quiet but growing recognition among Nonconformist thinkers that the position of the Anglican Church is unique. "There may not be," says Dr. Roberts of St. Andrews, "any form of Church government which can claim a *jus divinum* in the strict sense of the words; but, of course, *Episcopacy has the prestige of antiquity*, and seems to me in some important respects the most expedient." Dr. Campbell Fraser writes: "The Anglican branch of the Church has seemed to me the most likely centre of this unity, if it should ever come about, with the strong presumption of history, and of most of Christendom in favour of its Episcopal constitution"; and, further, Tulloch allowed "Episcopacy" to be an Apostolic institution, and one of great practical utility; "and many of the great Presbyterian Church are ready to accept Episcopacy if the manner of its acceptance could be tempered so as to avoid subjecting them to humiliation." Much earlier, Casaubon testified "*Totius Reformationis, pars integerrisima, ni fallor, in Angliâ est*"; and, much later, an eminent Roman Catholic in France has expressed the opinion that if Christians are to approach one another, it is from the Church of England that the movement should proceed.¹ All this could not be said of any other Church of the Reformation. And in connection with one of the remarks of the Presbyterian brethren just quoted, we are met by the objection that if the Church of England requires conformity to her order and orders as a centre of union, and that if this implies the necessary confession that their present

¹ See Dimock.

orders are invalid, and to be repudiated and condemned, this will be both *humiliating* and *unjust*, I think we may confidently reply, and on the authority, amongst others, of Sir William Palmer, the eminent Tractarian writer,¹ that "the great majority of the English theologians and Bishops from the time of the Reformation did hold these Churches of the Foreign Reformation, and those spiritually descended from them, *as a part of the Catholic Church*; and if errors and heresies were taught by some of their members, they were wholly superior to the Roman Church, in which idolatries and errors of a far worse description were widely disseminated." I doubt not but that a general readiness on the part of orthodox and ordered Nonconformist Churches would be met by the English Church, not compromising in any sense her deposit of truth, nor altering in any way her organization and constitution and sacred customs, but by meeting the Churches thus: "We believe that the Episcopal authority is both Apostolic, Scriptural, primitive, and highly operative for the unity and continuity of the Church, and that it has received Divine sanction and blessing. But we do not thereby doubt or deny the validity of your orders, nor the efficacy of the sacraments ministered by your ministers thus ordained; and to demonstrate this we are prepared to recognize for the time past your ministers without fresh ordination, as we recognize your baptized members to be truly baptized; and as in the days of almost passionately earnest strivings after union, John Knox and Richard Baxter were offered bishoprics of the English Church, and some Bishops were quite prepared to collate Presbyterian ministers to Anglican livings without fresh ordination, so, on the condition of conforming to the Episcopal order and to our standard of truth and doctrine for the future, we admit to the full privileges of the Church and to her ministry your present ministers." Or if it be further objected thus: "Recognizing, as we do, with all the great thinkers and theologians of the past, that if there be any conflict or comparison between the unity of verity and the unity of orders and

¹ Quoted by Dean Wace.

organization, the unity of verity must always predominate, then why, if you have the assurance that our best teachers are one with you in doctrine, do you make unity in order a *sine qua non*? Why thus, by shutting fast the side door, slam to the main door as well"? we reply: "Turn rather the question round, and ask yourselves, if you have offered to you the great privilege and delight of vital and corporate union with the Church, and of obeying thus your Lord's command, and being one at last, and not manifold, why should you allow so small a thing, as you call it—this conformity to orders—to hinder your obedience to that Divine command? You observe that we do not assert that Episcopacy is the only possible form of Church government on which God's blessing and promises rest. We do not appropriate the sole *esse* of a Christian Church: you have enjoyed that with us. But, on your side, you cannot deny that God's blessing and presence have rested on Episcopacy from the earliest times, in its nobler and purer form, all down the ages, and now too. We do not annex the *esse*, but we avow the *bene esse*, and remind you that it was created for union, not for dissent; and that it will, if thus adopted by the Church universal, prove to the world's eye the fact of union." In fine, should such a movement towards union emanate from Nonconformity, we should not upbraid them. However strong our persuasion must be that Nonconformity since the Reformation has been unnecessary, and an undeserved wrong to the faithful English Church, yet we shall prefer here the silent belief in the conscientious action of the Nonconformists generally—from imperfect knowledge of the true position of the Church, and perhaps imperfect recognition of our Lord's Divine prayer and injunction of unity.

I cannot think that our controversy and argument for union is much helped by belittling unnecessarily the origin and authority of Episcopacy. It may be strictly and scholarly true that the Episcopal order precisely as with us now can hardly be found in the New Testament, even as the *words* "Infant Baptism" were not, as our Baptist and Brethren friends assert,

so used and enforced by our Lord. But as the welcome, and the call, and the blessing, and the necessity and sealing sign, are most definitely and positively named by our Lord for the babes and little children, so most surely the genius—if I dare use such a word—and the principle, and the function of a Bishop look us in the face in the New Testament. What were the Apostles but ordaining, organizing, superintending, visitationing, confirming Bishops—possibly like the Bishops of the American Methodist Episcopal Church (a legacy possibly of John Wesley's stanch Churchmanship); perhaps *pro hac vice*—visiting, disciplining, ordering, and ordaining on a special tour and for a time. What is most suggested by the province and responsibility and ministry of the "angels of the seven Churches"? Surely some kind of Episcopacy. And it is hard to imagine the general adoption, except in the case of Alexandria, of the Episcopal order and office so soon after the Apostolic age, and after the interregnum and trial of the College of Presbyters for a time as an ordaining and ruling body, if there had not been well-known and recognized Apostolic hints at least, if not lead and direction, in this matter; so that while unbroken and exclusive Apostolic succession cannot be proved or asserted, yet our Church may claim, as she does, that our orders are Apostolic, and one mark and method of the continuity of the Church.

Before I close what is, I fear, a nearly interminable discussion, I must mention a few hopeful signs, both at home and abroad, of ripeness for union, and that with the Anglican Church. The Baptists, especially the American Baptist Church, are perhaps, outside the Church of Rome, the greatest obstacle to union. But this symptom is passing; I am informed that at home it is now the general custom to hold a special dedicatory service of prayer for infant Baptist children. They bring their children now definitely, and with believing prayer, to the Saviour's arms. What do they ask and expect there? Dare they ask less than regeneration and salvation, and the Holy Spirit's grace even from the mother's womb, for their infants?

This they ask, and it is promised ; and the seal and sign of faith and of grace they cannot much longer refuse. Is this practical removal of obstacles to unity spreading? Congregationalists and Independents are, I hear, feeling more and more the need of such central control, and not the isolation of independence. I have propounded thus my thesis. I believe it is sound and practical—shall I say again the only practical solution of reunion? A definite step in the direction has been taken in China, where the Anglican Mission Churches from England, the U.S.A., Canada, and Australia, have united in one Church of China, with Canons, Constitution, and Synods, and with Holy Scripture prominently recognized as the supreme rule of Faith—Chinese outnumbering Western delegates manifold—and a Chinese Episcopate is in the very near future. This has been courteously and earnestly and affectionately offered to Christian China as the rallying-point for all. The response so far has been amiable interest, but no acceptance. We dare not close with a repetition of the warning, startling note, *too late*. Yet is it so, that this one, and once fulfilled heart and centre and root and stem of Christendom, the English Church, is struck to the heart with the double cancer and poison of returning Romeward error and of incoming Modernist doubt; and if she purge not herself from all these at once, she will be unrecognizable any longer, and uncatholic as a centre of verity and a pillar and ground of the truth? And is it so that, while Rome refuses reform, the free Churches are honeycombed in their liberty with false thinking and doubt and “new theology,” and that the downward grade, which Spurgeon so feared, is quickening in its fatal descent? If so, reunion will be, of course, both useless, undesired, and impossible.

Yet ever above the divisions and deliberations and wrongs of Christendom flies our Lord's own banner, and rings out His most blessed prayer and call for union—“that they all may be one”; “that the world may believe.” Thy will be done, Lord Jesus Christ! Come, take to Thyself Thy great power, and reign, and make us one!