

The Possibilities of Reunion.¹

THE conscience of Christendom is rapidly becoming quickened to realize that the grievous divisions in the visible Church constitute one of the chief barriers to the victorious sovereignty of Christ in the kingdom of the world. But not only is the conscience of the Church awakening, but the world, too, is realizing more and more the shock of the sundered Church, and it is becoming increasingly clear that there must be Reunion if there is to be continued power to speak in Christ's name with any hope that the world will give heed.

I believe our own Church occupies a unique position in the matter of the "Possibilities of Reunion," for, with all her faults, she has retained through the centuries the fundamentally catholic bases without the exclusive claims of Rome, or the formalism and superstitions of the Greek Church.

However little our own sympathies may lean that way, no efforts at Reunion can be considered complete which do not take into account the Churches of the West and the East as well as the non-episcopal Churches.

What, then, are the Possibilities of Reunion with the Greek and the Latin Churches?

We are frequently warned by those in our Church, whose eyes turn almost exclusively to these ancient Catholic Churches, that any hasty steps towards Reunion with non-episcopal bodies will hopelessly ruin any chance of Reunion with East and West, and therefore thwart the efforts at Reunion itself. A very brief consideration will suffice to show how little this need weigh with us. I am not sufficiently conversant with the present position of negotiations with the Greek Church to speak with confidence of the absence of any possibility of Reunion here. It is by no means so hopeless as with that of the West, for the Greek Church does not, or at any rate till the issue of the Vatican decrees did not, regard herself as constituting the universal Church. After those decrees were

¹ A Paper read at the Annual Gathering of Clergy and Laity at Eastbourne, June 17, 1918.

promulgated, some on her behalf claimed that "the true faith survives in Russia only. In the West it is utterly lost." "We," they said, "are orthodox and there is nothing for others to do but to become orthodox also."

We shall see later that she does not, however, slam the door and bar it against us.

The Western Church.

This is precisely what the Roman Church has done, and it is simply self-blinding to allow hopes of Reunion with Rome to limit our freedom to act in the direction of mutual approach with the non-episcopal bodies. However exclusive in action Rome had been up to 1870, no doctrinal ground sufficient for continued and necessary separation existed, but the Papal decrees of July 18, 1870, effectually slammed and barred the door.

Not content with such primacy as the prestige of the metropolitan see would naturally have given her, she made then impossible claims which must constitute, as long as they stand unaltered, an impassable barrier to any Reunion. Her position is expressed by one of her writers to be this:

"The Church's call, whether to individuals or communities, is a summons not to treat but to surrender. She sits as judge in her own controversy, and the only plea she admits is a *confiteor*, the only prayer she listens to is a *miserere*."

A fictitious infallibility compels her, on principle, always to drag her errors after her like a ball fastened to her heel. She shows not the slightest official desire for Reunion upon any terms short of absolute absorption. The foolish attempt made by Lord Halifax and others, in 1896, to obtain her recognition for Anglican Orders was met with an absolute rebuff. She will not allow her members to unite even in prayer about Reunion. The "Association of Anglicans and Romans to Promote Union by use of Intercessory Prayer" was interdicted.

Any who differ from her claims are ruthlessly expelled, no matter how great their scholarship or devout their lives—witness such men as Döllinger, Tyrrell and St. George Mivart.

The only hope in this direction is the slow penetration of truth—the work of the Holy Spirit of God. The whole Papal claim is a house built on sand. The artificial edifice of Roman absolutism.

cannot but fall in process of time. The War may help much towards this, for, despite the Pope's Apologia, the world has been shocked by his failure to face clear moral issues no matter what the cost to his hopes of temporal power might be. As has been well said, "In the way of peace nothing is possible except to men of good will," and such good will being absent there is no possibility of Reunion with Rome.

We turn, therefore, to the *Non-Episcopal Churches*, assured that there is no occasion for delayed action in any hope of Reunion in the direction just considered. Indeed, I do not doubt that a really strong united Protestant Church, including the non-episcopal communities, will be in a better position to meet the inflated claims of a church which seems to have so great a position through her marvellous discipline and unity, when we arrive at that stage. In support of this, one may quote a Dean of the Russian Orthodox Church, "As one of a Church outside the Anglican or Protestant Churches, I certainly feel that the first step at this moment, towards realizing the purposes of 'the Conference of Faith and Order' is really to embrace your Protestant Churches all together. You may not be able at once to get into full sympathy, but all could be brought into such relations that every Christian can pray in comfort with his brother. If you cannot do *that*, how can you expect to reconcile such differences as exist with the Eastern Orthodox or the Roman Catholic Church? How can they be approached, or very well answer to your call?"

It is important at the outset to clear our minds as to what we mean by "Unity."

One of the objections made to the attempt is that Reunion means Compromise, and compromise means arriving at the "least common denominator," and that this reduces the "basis of Union" to a point so insignificant that the result is not worth the effort. Many important joint conferences recently held have made it abundantly clear that not compromise but "essentials" are the crux. Neither is it uniformity which is desired. Life is complex. Human nature is infinitely varied. Uniformity is poverty. "There are diversities of gifts but the same Spirit, diversities of administrations but the same Lord, diversities of workings but the same God, Who worketh all things in all. All these worketh the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will." It is, therefore,

neither possible nor desirable that there should be one uniform system either of government or worship.

Nor can Union be of the nature of a *clever scheme* to mask differences. No cast-iron scheme will suffice for a living Church. "It is a vital process, not," as one has said, "Company-promoting." A unity of life—the life of the spirit and not of organization, although outward and visible evidence of unity there must be as showing the "unity of spirit" which must underly all. There must be emphasis on the points of agreement and careful study of those of difference. There can be no forced unity, but only one which carries with it the free consent of the members. In this connexion, we, of the Church of England, ought never to forget how seriously sundered¹ within the outwardly united body we are ourselves. The schismatic spirit within a single organization may well be a more evil force and a worse sin than any separations without.

A bright day seems to be dawning in the healing of the divisions in non-episcopal bodies themselves. For the lack of unity in these bodies has hitherto formed an added barrier to any reunion with ourselves. A partial federation of the Free Churches took place in 1896, and this was further cemented in 1910. A most important conference was held in 1915, followed by an historic gathering at Bradford in 1916. Interchange of pulpits, prevention of overlapping, especially in villages, etc., have resulted. In Canada, proposals for organic union between Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational bodies have been considered. In Scotland, the two great Presbyterian Churches amalgamated in 1900, and there is now a very hopeful movement towards union of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland and the Established Church of Scotland. All this is to the good and clears the ground for union with the Church of England.

Having agreed, if we do, that there is no need or desire for a uniform organization, it becomes necessary to examine the present grounds of agreement and to resolve clearly the issues between us.

- In seeking a basis of essentials on which to build, it is most hopeful that the "*Lambeth Quadrilateral*" should prove so wonderfully a common ground of agreement. There is real agreement on the first three, namely, (a) the scriptures, (b) the two sacraments, (c) the two creeds.

The *Episcopacy* proves the first real difficulty. In view of the recent Cheltenham and Oxford Conferences it is hardly necessary for me to enter with any fulness into the question of the episcopacy. The battle will be fought not around the episcopacy as such, but about *theories* of the episcopacy. It may be at once acknowledged that the non-episcopal churches do not any longer object to the episcopacy as of admitted value, but not as essential to the being of a church, and it would be well to recognize that any such insistence on our part will close the door to Reunion as effectively as Rome does. Dr. Gore, voicing the Anglo-Catholic view in his brochure issued after Kikuyu, claims that "A Bishop is necessary to the existence of a church, and therefore is of the 'esse' and not merely the 'bene esse.'"

Upon such a difference hangs, of course, the validity of the ministry and sacraments in non-episcopal bodies. It is wrong to argue as he does, that if the episcopacy is not necessary it is a mischievous ornament which ought to have been repudiated in the Church of England long ago. The theory of "Apostolic Succession" giving a prescriptive and exclusive power as a channel of grace can no longer be held. Even Dean Robinson, in his sermon before the Lambeth Conference, said, "We can and ought to recognize that where the first three conditions (i.e., of the Lambeth Quadrilateral) are fulfilled, and where there is an ordered ministry, guarded by the solemn imposition of hands, there our differences are not so much matters of faith as matters of discipline, and ought with humility and patience to be capable of adjustment."

As a matter of fact our Church has never in her formularies refused to recognize the gifts of the Spirit without episcopal channels. Nor indeed can we, in face of obvious facts, deny the evidences of the Holy Spirit working in non-episcopal bodies. Dr. Pusey himself admitted this. There is, therefore, no need for any definition of the episcopacy. If, however, the episcopacy is to be accepted, as it evidently may well be, by non-episcopal churches it must be a *reformed* episcopacy in several ways:

(1) It must be divested of every shred of prelacy. The Bishop must be a "primus inter pares," ruling as chairman of brother priests and the priesthood of the laity.

(2) It must be freed from the serious injury of State appointment. In the first place the Bishop was the elected representative

of the Christian community, and the Christian community must resume the power of choice. It is futile to claim, as we Evangelicals especially are wont to do, that the present system has worked very well on the whole, and has given us a wide selection of men of ability, and sheltered us from the unrestrained control of a party. This may be so, but the method is indefensible for all that, and liberty must be attained in this, even at the cost of the "establishment" if need be.

The method by which episcopacy will be accepted by non-episcopal bodies has yet to be worked out, but at present there appears no likelihood of consent to *re-ordination*. It is held, and I think rightly, that such a demand is not warranted by either scripture or history. There should be no difficulty, however, in combining the episcopal, presbyterian and even congregational principles in one act of ordination for future ordinations, leaving a generation of non-episcopally ordained men to die out by flux of time.

Dr. Garvie (a prominent Nonconformist leader) says: "While the demand for Ordination of the Ministry by laying-on-of-hands is legitimate, and in future in a Reunited Church, the presence of the Bishop along with Presbyters might be properly insisted on, the validity of the orders of men now in the ministry should not be challenged, and a common consecration of all ministers might introduce the new order of human penitence and faith and bring a Pentecostal filling of the Spirit."

It is vain to suppose that such a condition will be lightly accepted. Dr. Gore stands by his utterance at the Church Congress at Cambridge in 1910, and he speaks for a powerful section of our Church: "That the Anglican Communion would certainly be rent in twain on the day on which any non-episcopally ordained minister was formally allowed within our communion to celebrate the Eucharist." If the reason for this is that *Grace* and not merely *Order* is involved, then the validity of the orders of Ministers who have not been episcopally ordained is challenged indeed denied, whether we attach any definition to episcopacy or not. Though it is easy to bring evidence to show that episcopacy cannot rightly be held to occupy such a position in the Church of England—*vide* Bishop Lightfoot, Hooker, Cosin and others, yet in healing one breach there is great risk at present of making another. This

may be inevitable as many think, but if so, let it be on clearly defined and safely founded grounds.

Turning now to the still more difficult crux of *Intercommunion*, we must all realize that not only *without* but also *within* our communion, that sacrament which was intended by our Lord to be a sacrament of demonstration of unity, has become the high ground of keenest division. To be quite candid, I am conscious of a wider gulf between myself and those who hold a materially localized presence of our Lord in the elements by the consecrating act of a priest, than between myself and those who in the simplest way divide bread and drink water in a non-liturgical service, conducted by a minister non-episcopally ordained. The mere fact that we all are members of one Church does not secure the least real union between myself and those, for example, who in London the other day, in endeavouring to foist the Service of Benediction on the Church, claimed that it must be done without any secrecy, as "the Lord was in the 'monstrance,' secrecy would be an insult to Him."

Intercommunion includes reciprocal acceptance. Take the case first of permission for and invitation of those of other communions to attend the Lord's Table in our Church. *Confirmation* at present *appears* to block the way. I say appears because there is a strong difference of opinion as to the extent of reference of the Rubric inserted in 1662. The contention with which most of us would agree, that this was intended only to refer to the Church's own children, being come to years of discretion, has the weighty support of such men as Archbishops Tait, Benson, and Temple, and Dr. Creighton.

The *Communion Office* itself defines the mystical body of Christ as "the blessed company of all faithful people." In face, too, of the careful, if clumsy, expression of the XIXth Article: "The Visible Church is a congregation of faithful men in which the pure word of God is preached and the Sacraments duly administered according to Christ's ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same"—in view of this liberal and broad comprehensiveness no Church, however valuing for itself a certain rule as "convenient to be observed," should exclude from participation in this sacrament adult and duly accredited members of the Christian Churches who have conformed to the rule prevail-

ing in their own body. The removal of this obstacle would, however, be only one side, and not the most serious of the difficulty. It is not reasonable to expect that the non-episcopal bodies should be content to be received at our tables. "Kikuyu" did not go much further and yet the confirmation of the Kikuyu proposals will rend the Church as at present minded. There can be no doubt that the Lambeth Conference due this year would have confirmed them had the war permitted it to be held, and you are familiar with the threats of rending of the Church that have been liberally thrown out. Intercommunion must, however, be *reciprocal*. It has become clear through the close study given to this question that the time is not ripe for such a step, for any movement in the direction of Intercommunion must be with the *corporate* consent of the bodies concerned to be of any real value. As Canon Burroughs says, "Measures of intercommunion which wantonly blurred the trace of nature in the existing denominational articulation of the Church would not be in the true line of progress."

The utmost that the present stage of thought permits would be to claim a guarded right of intercommunion with non-episcopal Churches, enough to show we do not regard our Sacraments as of different value or validity just because we preserve episcopal orders, but not enough to encourage a dangerous and sterile promiscuity. Special occasions, like the conclusion of the Revision of the Bible in the past, or January 6 in the present, would offer sufficient demonstration to the world of a corporate intercommunion; and for the rest, reception at each other's sacrament of qualified persons of other bodies.

Possibilities of Reunion, then, centre round the following important points:

(1) *The Universal Acceptance of an Episcopacy* reformed, purified, and appointed by the Church herself, and this with no insistence upon any *theory of necessity* as channel of Grace. Less than this we cannot accept, and more than this non-episcopal bodies will not.

(2) *No retrospective act casting reflection* on the validity of Orders of existing ministers would be acceptable, the utmost possible being an all-inclusive act of re-consecration. This probably cannot be obtained, so that future ordination, with Bishops and Presbyters co-operating, with an awkward intervening period of confusion, is the only practical possibility.

(3) *Intercommunion of an absolutely reciprocal character*, at present unattainable as a *regular* practice, but possible for exceptional occasions. Towards these ends certain immediately fruitful efforts are not only possible but absolutely demanded by the hour.

(1st) *Intercession, especially united*. Prayer together for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, for the spirit of penitence for a common sin, for more love, would be like a mighty magnet drawing us together because mutually drawing near to the one Lord and Saviour.

(2nd) *Study together*, in groups widely distributed, of the points at issue. The Conferences already held have hastened the day of Reunion appreciably.

(3rd) *Increase of Common Action* on all opportunities.

(4th) *Saturation with the idea of Unity* till its beauty and power obsess us.

(5th) *Limited and occasional acts of Intercommunion*, but not by local Kikuyus independently organized in face of authority; and

Lastly, but most essentially, a *greater devotion to our common Lord and Master*.

I cannot close without suggesting that we help these possibilities by keeping ever before our minds the dream of a United Church. Visualize what it would mean. Think of its influence, each contributing some treasure to its store. How mighty would be its power as a force for righteousness in the world! The comparison of such a dream with the reality that faces us to-day is enough to kindle in our hearts a passion to see in our day the answer to our Lord's Prayer that "they may be one that the world may believe."

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