

## THE PROBLEM OF UNION AND FREEDOM IN THE CHURCH OF CHRIST.

BY JOHN R. CLARK HALL, M.A.

THE recent world-war has given an enormous impetus to the movement towards reunion which had, for some years before it broke out, been steadily growing in force among Christian people. The line between the Christian and the non-Christian was becoming blurred, when suddenly the war gave it a sharper edge, and made us feel that we must take sides more definitely, and prepare for a serious struggle, in which it will be urgently necessary that we should be a united and a disciplined force.

In this article I propose to consider, from the point of view of a lay Churchman, the question of the reunion of the various Christian sects and confessions, and (more especially) of unity and liberty within the Church of England. For we must admit at the outset, that our own Church is anything but a united body.

Whatever minor lines of cleavage there may be, Church people are clearly divisible into four great classes. These are—

1. *The Ministerialists*,<sup>1</sup> who stand firmly by the Reformation Settlement and the Thirty-nine Articles, and repudiate the doctrine of a sacrificing priesthood. Their general outlook is towards the Free Churches, and many of them think that the Sacerdotalists have no business in the Church of England as at present constituted.

2. *The Sacerdotalists*,<sup>1</sup> who insist strongly on the sacrificial character of the priesthood, and believe, implicitly or avowedly, in the infallibility of the Catholic Church, which they regard as including the Roman, Greek and Anglican Churches, and no other. Their outlook is towards Rome, and their whole history is that of a movement in the direction of Roman Catholicism.

3. *The Moderates*. A great many of the clergy and laity must be classed under this head. So far as they think at all, they must necessarily be Sacerdotalists or non-Sacerdotalists (i.e. Ministerial-

<sup>1</sup> I have chosen these names for the two outstanding parties in the Church because those generally current are either faulty as definitions (e.g. both parties claim to be Evangelical and Catholic) or more or less opprobrious. I hope the term Sacerdotalist will not be considered offensive—I do not intend it to be; and it is the one used by Bishop King of Lincoln to characterize his position.

ists), but they try not to think, and their position is illogical. They are often admirable Christians—like many members of the two preceding classes—but their Churchmanship is not full-blooded enough. In practice they are a help to whatever party is in power at the moment.

4. *The Indifferents.* I am afraid this is the largest class of all. They are a drawback to any spiritual community. If they show any leanings at all, they too are disposed to support the party in power, from sheer laziness. They should be the first people to be evangelized, and they would probably be the most difficult.

We may leave the last two classes out of account for the purposes of our inquiry, since they may, as we have seen, be grouped potentially with the other two. Their importance lies, not in their views, but in their numbers. Thus we have to consider how far the Ministerialists and Sacerdotalists, who are nominally members of one religious body, can be brought closer together, or if nothing can be done in that direction what can be done in order to give them more freedom within the imperium of the Anglican Church.

There are two great obstacles to real union, the most serious being the violent incompatibility of the views held by the two parties. Let any outsider take up and read such a book as Vernon Staley's *Catholic Church*, and follow on with (say) Barnes-Lawrence's *A Churchman and his Church*, and I venture to say that he will ask how on earth the writers can be members of the same religious denomination, or rather, what can be the rules of a religious body which admits persons of such discordant views among its official teachers. One is not surprised after that to find another of the officials saying "I attended recently a conference of theological teachers representing different denominations—Baptist, Congregationalist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Anglican, etc.—and I firmly believe that the differences between the Anglican representatives there were greater than those exhibited by the representatives of all the other bodies."<sup>1</sup> He goes on to say that from one point of view that is not a bad thing, and that it shows how comprehensive the English Church is.

No doubt. In a way we are all aiming at more comprehensiveness; but the problem is to attain it without surrendering precious

<sup>1</sup> Rev. H. D. A. Major, *What is the Christian Religion?* National Mission Papers on Christian Faith and Practice, No. 252.

freedom, the problem being especially difficult when we try to comprehend downright opposites, and to put divergent doctrines into practice in the conduct of public worship and the education of the young.

High Churchmen often try to disarm us by saying that they only differ from us on minor points, and exhort us to consider the important doctrines which we hold in common,—the divinity of Our Lord, the Atonement, the Resurrection, and so forth. Now it is quite true that there are these common dogmas, and that they are the foundation truths of our religion, and it may be observed by the way that they are held by many sects outside the Anglican Church, so that if they furnish a reason for unity within the Church, they supply an equally good one for union with the other denominations. The difficulty which exists does not arise on account of such dogmas, however, but on account of the very points which are here assumed to be less vital; and it arises because the Sacerdotalist party insist on considering them as of the first importance. It was in defence of these, and not of the foundation truths of Christianity, that Maconochie and Tooth went to prison. The party has never offered to give up one of them for the sake of peace and harmony in the Church.

Here we are met by the second difficulty. The idea that the Catholic Church is infallible not only leads Sacerdotalists to attach enormous importance to Catholic practice, but to be intolerant of anything else. Toleration indeed becomes a wrong, aggressiveness a duty, and compromise an impossibility. They are, of course, not the only people in the Church who consider themselves infallible, but the point is that in their case it is an essential part of their creed. In the unceasing warfare which they have carried on against us in the Church for the last half century, I can recollect nothing but advance on their part towards the usages and ritual of the Roman Church, and retreat or concession on ours. The campaign has been continued even in war time. The battle for the "six points" has been won, the crusade against Evening Communion has been so far successful that the Bishop of Gibraltar can refuse sanction to it in a case where practical need was alleged, on the ground that it has "become the badge of a party," and we may look forward to the time when some other Bishop will deprecate mattins at eleven on the ground that it has "become the badge of a party." Then,

besides the movement in favour of making the Eucharist the principal service, we have a determined attempt to alter the Communion Service and to legalize reservation. Many of the Bishops themselves, like his Lordship of Gibraltar, give us no quarter.

It will be seen from what has gone before that our Church has two features which militate greatly against closer internal union—an over-comprehensiveness which includes opposites, and a theory of wide embrace side by side with much narrowness in practice.

I once heard a Sacerdotalist Archdeacon say that if only we could get rid of the extremists, all would be well. But who are the extremists? Are we, who used to constitute the Church of England in 1800, to be classed as extremists now? Are others, who would have been classed as extremists in 1850, to be classed as moderates now? If so, may not the extremists of to-day claim that they may be the moderates of to-morrow? This plan, to be effective, would have to provide for the exclusion of the whole Ministerialist party, or, alternatively, of the whole Sacerdotalist party, from the Church, and this seems to have passed beyond the range of practical politics.

Some years ago I suggested another remedy, or perhaps I should say palliative, for the present distress. It was that the clergy should lay themselves out to provide services acceptable to both parties in the Church, if requested to do so by a reasonable number of their parishioners, say by having an early morning Eucharist with the fullest ceremonial allowed by the law, and a simple Communion Service in the evening. I was not particularly surprised when I found that Sacerdotalist clergymen would have none of it, but I must own to being disappointed when a Ministerialist Vicar said that it would be an outrage to his conscience to adopt such a plan, although I proposed to him that he might explain to his congregation periodically, from the pulpit, that he did not regard the ritual as having any doctrinal significance, but observed it in deference to the wishes of certain members of his flock.

The truth is that this and the preceding idea are somewhat on the principle of the bed of Procrustes. The Archdeacon's bed is too small, and mine too large, for a great many of the Anglican clergy, and something else must be thought of.

There is another method which finds favour with the higher dignitaries of the Church. It is to rope into Boards and Committees members of all parties, in the hope that they will understand each

other's position better and so draw closer together. As to this I will state what my own experience has been. For many years I had kept myself as much as possible to my own parish and parish church, at which the services were as much to my liking as I could reasonably expect any services to be. I have a great dislike of religious controversy—polemics so often mean war against a man's own soul—and avoided it by shutting my eyes as far as I could to what went on around me. But one day the Bishop of the diocese issued an urgent appeal to us not to be parochial, but diocesan, and the result of it was that when I was proposed as a member of the Diocesan Board of Finance I felt that I ought not to refuse to act. Now this Board, on which I have served ever since its creation, has on it a large majority of Sacerdotalists, and I must say that it has been a real pleasure to me to sit on it. The members are honourable gentlemen, evidently anxious to do their best for the Church without reference to party, and the discussions are characterized by courtesy and good temper, but I have not been able to detect any sign that unity within the Church has been brought nearer by their working in common. The reason that we have been able to get on so well together is that questions of doctrine have been tabooed, or perhaps it would be more correct to say that they are outside our sphere. We are really administrators of a trust, and there is no reason why our work should not be perfectly well done by a reputable firm of solicitors consisting of a Roman Catholic, a Baptist and an Agnostic. The only difference between us and such a firm is that they would be working for reward and that we give our services for the glory of God and the good of our Church. When we get to other bodies, such as Diocesan Boards of Missions, where questions of doctrine may come up, there is electricity in the air, and conflict is only avoided, if it is avoided, by the exercise of much tact. The differences are not lessened a bit, but they are often kept below the surface. The more level-headed members of the Ministerialist minority will not unfrequently allow a piece of Sacerdotalist aggressiveness to pass unchallenged, partly because they are a minority and partly because they hesitate to stir up religious controversy, but it must not be supposed that because they are silent they do not feel the position keenly and even bitterly.

Some people appear to think that the new constitution proposed by the Archbishop's Committee on Church and State will put every-

thing right. Now it seems to me desirable, in spite of Colonel Seton Churchill's criticisms in the *Nineteenth Century* of September, 1917, that there should be a constitution on the general lines indicated in the Committee's Report. If, as is probable, it has the effect of increasing the power of the ruling party, that will be unfortunate for us, but it is not a sufficient reason for opposing a reform which is urgently needed on general grounds. One thing is fairly certain: party differences are not less likely to be absent from the various Councils proposed to be set up, than they have been from Parliament and Convocation, and we need not therefore consider them further in relation to the special object of this paper. We may at the same time admit that, quite apart from their primary use, all these official Church bodies—Convocations, Conferences, Councils, Boards and Committees and so forth—are of value in teaching us lessons of self-control, and in increasing our personal regard for one another, so that our sorrow at some of the things done is not accompanied by anger, and whatever bitterness we feel tends to become more and more impersonal.

If it is agreed that perfect solidarity in the Church is not within the range of practical politics, the next question to be considered is what can be done to improve the position in face of a united and determined enemy. There is the policy of drift, favoured in the past by so many of our bishops, and the closely allied but more substantive policy of shouting with the largest crowd, which is favoured by the Bishop of Oxford now that his crowd is the largest, or at least the most powerful. Both these policies are calculated at the present time to weaken the Ministerialist party and to force out of our Protestant Church the Protestants still remaining in it. Most fatal of all is it to shut our eyes to "our unhappy divisions," which are admitted by Ministerialists and Sacerdotalists alike to be the chief cause of the paralysis from which the Church is suffering. The evidence that they exist and are a source of grievous weakness is overwhelming.

I will give a few instances from my own observation and experience to show how detrimental to the interests of the Church as a whole the present state of affairs is. Take, for example, our Diocesan Board of Finance. Certain parishes—a small minority—have steadily refused to come into the scheme, and there is a tendency on the part of the majority to look upon them as the Trades Unions

look upon blacklegs, and to brand the whole lot as melanoscele. Fortunately the Bishop, who is a fair-minded man, expressly stipulated at the outset that no parish was to be made to suffer because it chose to stand outside the scheme, and attacks at meetings of the Board have been nipped in the bud. But the objections of the unwilling parishes, and of the very large number of churchpeople in willing parishes of a Ministerial type who decline to put money into the coffers of the Board of Finance, are more or less ignored, and it is worth while to consider what they are.

First and foremost is the unwillingness to pay for the dissemination of doctrines in which they do not believe. I must say that the regulations of our own Board of Finance do meet this objection as far as is possible with the present composition of the Church, as all subscribers are perfectly free to assign their contribution to any one of the objects to which the fund is devoted. But all the bodies which have charge of these objects are under the control of the Sacerdotalists—that is, they are in a majority on every one of the managing authorities. By far the most important of these authorities is, from all accounts, perfectly fair, in the allocation of its funds, and gives no preference to any party; but it has—or used before the War to have—an official organ, paid for out of the funds of the Society, in which a series of articles was allowed to appear in praise of the highest Anglican Catholicism, and even of the Roman variety.<sup>1</sup>

Again, we have within a stone's throw of the church which I attend, on one side an important residential Diocesan Institution for Church workers, and on the other a Presbyterian Church. The next nearest Anglican churches outside the parish are a comparatively moderate Sacerdotalist one and another which is so extreme that a Roman Catholic friend of mine told me recently that the "Mass" as celebrated there was only distinguishable from that of the Romish Church in some very unimportant respects. The residents in the Institution in question ignore their parish church as completely as they do the Presbyterian Church hard by, and attend the other two churches which I have mentioned, and yet, by direction of the last Diocesan Conference, the Board of Finance is to provide a substantial sum for the upkeep of the Institution and our parish is, of course,

<sup>1</sup> The official organ of the Diocese itself seems to be edited on the quiet assumption that the Sacerdotalist party is the Church. References to the *Mass*, for instance, are allowed to go in uncensored.

asked to provide its quota. Nearly two-thirds of the money raised by our Board goes to the Society which has to pay out this sum, and it is hardly to be wondered at under the circumstances that the work of the Board has not aroused much enthusiasm amongst our parishioners, and that the response to appeals for money has not been encouraging.

I am not sure whether any of the Diocesan Boards have made it a rule not to give financial support to any parishes where the incumbents break the law of the Church, but I know there are many churchpeople who decline to have anything to do with diocesan finance schemes when such a rule is not in force. Others point out that however liberal the constitution may be, and however impartially demands upon the funds may be dealt with, it is practically impossible to be sure that the moneys of Ministerialist lay folk will not go to help Sacerdotalist objects. Conversely, I have heard that in one diocese the evangelical parishes get more out of the diocesan fund than they pay into it,—which is just as bad. No wonder that people prefer to give their money to evangelical societies and ensure that every penny—no more and no less—is expended on objects of which they approve.

Outside the sphere of finance, the Bishops, with few exceptions, have much to answer for in connection with the existing disunion. They, or their predecessors, are responsible for allowing the excessive latitude which is at the root of all the trouble, and they constantly arouse the distrust of Ministerialist Churchmen by the way in which they exercise their patronage. There seems to be an unaccountable bias, even among comparatively moderate prelates, in favour of the Sacerdotalists. Many of us, although strongly opposed to private patronage in theory, are advocates of it in practice for that reason. For the same cause there is a reluctance on the part of some Ministerialists to agree to and support the creation of new dioceses for which there is urgent need.

All these things, and many others, interfere with the harmonious working of the Church as a whole. It is no use to cry peace when there is no peace; and although there is a natural tendency to do so among those elements in the Church which are having things their own way, steps have recently been taken by those in authority which involve a recognition of the fact that we are a divided house. Such are the issue, in connection with the National Mission, of four

separate series of papers on Christian Faith and Order by different schools of thought. These, which can easily be grouped under the heads of Ministerialist, Sacerdotalist and Moderate, are frankly antagonistic on several important points, notwithstanding that the controlling Committee, with some lack of humour, asked the writers to exclude controversy. Such, also, is the movement in favour of an alternative form of service for the Holy Communion.

Unofficial indications of the same cleavage are the existence of important rival Societies and newspapers representing the two schools of thought and each claiming that they stand for correct Churchmanship. There is, moreover, a *Tourist's Guide* for the Sacerdotalist, which tells him which churches to attend and which to avoid, and a *Ritualistic Clergy List* for Ministerialists, in which, by the way, one is somewhat surprised to find men stamped as Sacerdotalists who have adopted the Eastward Position.

And now as to remedies. The most obvious and logical would be so to reform the Church as to turn one or other of the incompatible parties out of it. But this would involve martyrdom, and although it is true that the blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church, it is also true that martyrdom is the trump-card of the fanatic.

Then there is the suggestion (made in the *Hibbert Journal* of January, 1910) that the Church should resolve itself by fission into two independent churches of equal standing, but it was not favourably received, and since it was put forward it has occurred to me that there is a more excellent way, by which the unity of the Church might be preserved, while a large measure of freedom would be secured to its members.

In Bishop Creighton's *Life*, he is reported to have said (vol. ii. p. 177) that "The restoration of the unity of Christendom will be, not by affirming any one of the existing systems as universal, but by a federation," and I believe the principle to be a sound one. What I would suggest is that federation should begin within the Church; that is, that the Ministerialist and Sacerdotalist sections should be treated, within the Church, as federated units in somewhat the same way as (say) the Baptist and Presbyterian Churches would have to be treated if there were federation among the Free Churches. A good deal could be done in this direction without any alteration of the law; for instance—

1. In each diocese an Assistant or Suffragan Bishop might be

appointed to represent the Ministerialist and Sacerdotalist schools respectively.

2. Each parish in the diocese would have the right to determine whether it wished to be classed as Ministerialist or Sacerdotalist, and would be under the control of the Bishop representing that side of the Church. Here it may be observed that, as stated by the Bishop of Zanzibar at the recent Kikuyu Conference, it is not essential that a bishop should have exclusive control over a specific area.

3. The Diocesan Bishop would supervise all parishes not wishing to fall into either of the two preceding classes, and would rank as superior over the two junior bishops, who would act under his directions in all matters affecting the diocese as a whole. He would be the connecting link—the pontifex, the bridge-builder—between the two sides of the Church in his diocese, and might arbitrate in the event of any dispute, but ordinarily he would leave all questions relating to the distinctive doctrines of the two parties to the Assistant Bishops.

4. The Diocesan Bishop would delegate his powers of patronage as regards Ministerial and Sacerdotalist parishes to the Assistant Bishops, reserving to himself a right of veto.

5. There would be three separate funds, supervised by three Committees of the Diocesan Board of Finance, which would still continue and would hold somewhat the same position as a Board of Mission does in relation to the various Missionary Societies.<sup>1</sup>

6. Similarly, there would be separate Councils for each of the three sections of the Church, and a General Assembly for the whole, on which each section would have equal powers. Nothing affecting any particular section would be done by the General Assembly without the consent of that section.

This last provision is very important. The dictum of Sir H. Campbell-Bannerman that "minorities must suffer," bad enough in politics, is unbearable in religion. The truth—or at least the complete truth—does not always reside with the majority, otherwise we should all have to be Roman Catholics. Majorities can usually take care of themselves pretty well, and it should be a primary

<sup>1</sup> A very similar suggestion to this was actually made by Mr. Andrew Williamson at the London Diocesan Conference when the Board of Finance for that diocese was being set up.

function of all Parliaments, Convocations and such-like bodies, to see that the minorities have fairplay.

7. Aggressiveness on the part of either section of the Church in relation to the other to be discouraged by every possible means. Each party may say "Codlin's the friend" if it likes, but it must never add "not Short." Best of all if it would say, "Short is a real friend too. Ask for his programme and see which you like best. But do think for yourselves."

8. Nothing to be done separately which could be done jointly with advantage, and by agreement.

This is a very sketchy outline, and is capable of being filled in, or modified in many ways. It is however submitted, with the respect which is due from a layman whose occupations and training only allow him to be an amateur, to those who have been able by their position, as clergy or otherwise, to give more time and expert knowledge to the subject, as a basis for a concordat within the Church of England, and for union or reunion with other churches outside it.

The scheme could be greatly improved as regards our own Church by some alterations in the law, but even with things as they stand, I suggest that it would be of great advantage.

Some time ago the Bishop of Zanzibar asked, very naturally, what the Church of England stood for. The Bishops of that Church have never ventured to give an answer. Although they talk much of unity, they are either not united themselves as to what the answer should be, or feel unable to draft one which would not estrange large numbers of the faithful. Under the proposed scheme there would be a general declaration by the Diocesan Bishops, which should be drawn as widely as possible, so that it would require little or no modification when an outside Church wished to join the Federation, and separate statements by the Ministerialist and Sacerdotalist authorities as to what would be required as a condition of membership of each of those branches of the Church.

The energy and money spent on internal controversy would be diverted to substantive religious work, and it would be possible to do away with such Societies as the English Church Union, Church Association and National Church League,—perhaps even to bury Mr. Kensit.

The Diocesan Bishops, all of whom have far too much to do, and

whose work suffers in consequence, would be materially relieved, and would no longer have to ride round the circus with their feet on two not over-quiet horses.

One of the most serious grievances at present felt by Ministerialist Churchmen, especially in country districts, arises from the way in which they have been deprived of the kind of ministrations and services which they would have desired, not only by the action of private patrons, but of partisan Societies and even of Diocesan Bishops. Something might be done by agreement to meet this grievance, but not more under the scheme than could be done already if Bishops and parochial clergy were willing, and it could only be completely removed by a drastic alteration of the law. The enormous powers of incumbents over their parishes would have to be curtailed, so as to allow of the compulsory formation of new ecclesiastical districts wherever a sufficient number of Ministerialists or Sacerdotalists required it, and could make adequate provision for their endowment, whether permanently or for a good number of years.<sup>1</sup> Such districts, as well as ancient parishes, should be capable of being dissolved or altered much more easily than under the existing law, and generally there should be far more flexibility in dealing with these matters than we now have.

Again, there might be an extension of the system of proprietary or private chapels. If it is admitted, as seems to be the case, that "the parochial system has broken down," there need be no hesitation about getting rid of the clerical privileges which are its worst appanage, and there is no question but that the inclusion of the Free Churches in our federation will involve a sweeping rearrangement and to a great extent an abolition, of the territorial principle.

Provided those churches accepted the principle of episcopacy, to which they need not attach any particular theory, here is a framework into which they could be fitted, and, if it is successful in its operation within our Church, a pattern which they might be attracted to follow. At present, instead of being an encouragement to them, we are a warning, as a very thoughtful Nonconformist once said to me.

With such freedom as is outlined here, there need be no limit to the comprehensiveness of the Catholic Church, provided its members

<sup>1</sup> The Church Services (Wales) Act, 1863, is the nearest approach to a precedent for such a step, and might be referred to with advantage.

agreed to recognize the unique deity of Our Blessed Lord, and the paramount authority of Holy Scripture.

The proviso would exclude no important sect which claimed to be a Christian Church except the Unitarians. None who love the Lord Jesus Christ in incorruption, and who accept from the heart His atoning sacrifice and His supreme lordship, would be outside the pale of the United Church,—or United States of Churches,—and if I read St. Paul aright, none ought to be. In that view none of the various sects and confessions, Catholic and Nonconformist, ought to be accused of rending Christ's holy coat, because they merely impose vestments of various kinds upon it.

The various non-Anglican Churches in each diocese or kindred area, would be arranged in separate groups with a "pontifex" representing the highest common measure of agreement between the Churches in that group, and answering to our (reformed) diocesan bishop.

No doubt the Universal Church which is thus contemplated should have power to refuse the admission of any particular body into the federation, or it might become the home of all sorts of fantastic beliefs, and the entry of some communities would certainly lead to the exit of others, so that the Church would lose on the roundabouts what it gained on the swings. Apart from this it might perhaps be made a general rule that no Church should be federated which had not been in existence as a separate corporation for at least fifty years.

Everything in this world is relative ; God alone is absolute. So we must recollect that no scheme that can be devised will give us absolute freedom or absolute unity. And not only are freedom and unity relative, but they are related to each other in such wise that, as a rule, the more you have of the one the less you have of the other, so that the problem of securing the maximum amount of each in the Universal Church of the future is one which will require very delicate adjustment. By not going far into details, I have no doubt avoided pitfalls, but it is my conviction that with sincerity and patience, with brotherly love, and prayerful reliance on the Spirit of God, a settlement could be arrived at on the lines I have suggested, to the glory of the Ineffable Name.

JOHN R. CLARK HALL.