

[*Cheltenham Conference Paper.*]

THE POSITION OF THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION IN THE CHRISTIAN WORLD.

II.

BY THE REV. STUART H. CLARK, M.A., Vicar of Tonbridge.

THE heading under which my name appears in the Conference Programme at first greatly perturbed me. So I wrote to the secretary, and he assures me that "The position of the Anglican Communion in the Christian world" is "the heading under which a general paper on Reunion would best come." I know the value of obedience to secretaries; so with entire disregard to the letter of my subject, I plunge at once into its spirit, and talk about Reunion in the Anglican Communion.

The logic of events has persuaded me that this is the critical spot at the moment in the history of that wider Reunion which is in all our minds.

Let me explain. Three years ago a few Evangelicals stretched out a hand towards Free Churchmen, and were beyond words drawn by the warm, kindly grip of true response. So under the genial influences of the Holborn Restaurant, we walked right through the hedges, and found first-rate human friendship in the fellowship of Christ. We knew each other from the very start. The personal movement of the soul towards the personal Christ was familiar to every one of us. We were Evangelicals of different folds, but a single flock.

So we met again, and yet again, deepening and widening our fellowship. Individual thought crystallized in corporate discussion, and from time to time we put out our results in resolutions, and also in book form, not challenging any one, or assuming finality, or anything evil or absurd of that sort, but just suggestions, queries, if you like, asking Christian people everywhere whether any progress could possibly be made along lines which seemed so fruitful to us.

Agreements were as easy on the whole as they were delightful. The kindly fellowship of it is still a warm memory with all of us. But there soon grew a feeling that we must make haste slowly; that we must take other schools of thought into our councils, and we grew into the Third Mansfield Conference.

The resolutions of that Conference were passed in perfect good faith. At the suggestion of one of the highest Churchmen present, we all went straight at the close into Mansfield College Chapel to sing the *Te Deum* together, as the only adequate expression of our praise and thanksgiving to Almighty God. One leading Free Church Minister said afterwards that he had never understood the *Te Deum* properly before, so perfectly did it voice our emotion and our devotion at that moment.

So the resolution passed into the press, and the trouble began. Men who had not moved with us step by step under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, could not follow us. Misunderstandings arose under the pressure of criticism on all sides, until at last a most responsible and weighty manifesto was put forth which was not unjustly called a counterblast.

I hope the Conference will forgive this bit of history by way of preface. It serves to illustrate, and I think prove, that the critical spot in the history of a wide Reunion is reunion within the Anglican Communion itself. It is this then of which I wish to speak to-day.

A Free Church correspondent in one of our Church papers went straight to the heart of the real point. He complains that "the Church which absorbed all the cultures (as Harnack described the Catholic strain) cannot understand a Church of Grace Absolute. The Church of the Logos, with its rational mentality and its mystical sentiment, cannot readily understand the more primitive and central Church of the Kingdom, with its moral redemption and its Holy Spirit." This I think is profoundly true, and, although the correspondent does not admit it, the converse is true too. The gospel of moral redemption in its deepest heart has scant patience with a divinity which absorbs, and is apt to lose itself in the humanities of culture and fellowship, and to forget the deep surges of divine redemption in the human soul.

But, I submit, both are securely set in Christianity through St. John and through St. Paul; and we simply must find our way out into the broad path that accepts, and reconciles them both.

These strains, of course, are called the Catholic and the Evangelical. They strike right across all the divisions of society and race, piercing to the dividing asunder of a single home, and even of an individual life. Try as we will, it is hard to see the other side of the mountain of truth, without a mental disturbance which endangers stability itself. Some men can sometimes see it intellectually, and even express it verbally, but not *vitally*. The arguments for it are easily forgotten, when they have not gripped the soul. It is an age-long difference, wide in history and deep in the human heart. Augustine could not piece them together, though he saw them both with a clearness that went straight to the heart of each. That spacious personality was content to let them lie side by side in his own mind, as unreconciled antinomies of life. His *Confessions* and his share in the Donatist Controversy witness to the reality of the struggle to adjust these conflicting truths.

We meet it again to-day in a crucial form. There are now eager Catholics of both the Anglican and the Free Church sort. It is scarcely too much to say that we are witnessing a strong movement within the Evangelical Free Churches towards Catholicism; and notable Anglo-Catholics are moving towards definite Evangelicalism. It is high time to take careful note of this new phenomenon.

But around this softening of outline due to the variety of men, there are the two outstanding contraries of which I have spoken.

There is the cultured, orderly, mystic, universal sacramental Catholicism, and the rugged, free, plain, personal, moral Evangelicalism, which in its deepest heart glories in none of these things. But let us Evangelicals admit it at once. There is divine truth and power in both. If there is in the one strain, an emphasis on the human side of order, and culture, and sacrament, it is all bathed in a rich glow of mystic adoration and devotion to the one Lord of the whole earth, our Lord and Master Jesus-Christ. If in the other, the emphasis seems to rest on the free, strong, silent movements of the Divine Spirit in the individual soul, it all finds its true expression in a moral robust vigour, and uncompromising witness amongst men to the realities of spiritual life. We cannot admit any monopoly of spiritual life in either strain; nor can we allow them any longer to exclude or oppose each other. There is breadth in one, and depth in the other, and height in both, and the height and breadth and depth of the Kingdom of our Redeemer are all equal. There is in our judgment, no mere question of mechanical versus spiritual, in the ultimate, as some seem to argue. There is no controversy among the saints, who take no sides, but are found in every Church. Nor is it a simple matter of order in the Christian society, as against the freedom of the individual; or any other easy antithesis of phrase or fact. Nor can we content ourselves with some *via media* or compromise, which lays down two great lines of apparently conflicting truth, and asks that every Christian shall take his choice, within the defined limits of faith. Neither fellowship nor power lie that way. The Christian society that cannot secure vital fellowship in faith, will still wander wearily on through history, broken and forlorn, with no voice or presence or power that will convict the world of the reality of Christ, the Captain of the Hosts of God. "Terrible as an army with banners" the Church of Jesus may yet be, when she finds a new-born unity and fellowship of faith. It is left to our generation, at this great watershed of Time, to move at least one step towards the fulfilment of the prayer and purpose and passion of our Lord, "That they *all* may be one"—one in heart and mind and soul, in the deep unities of love and truth and faith—"even as Thou, Father, art in Me and I in Thee." Let the words "even as" burn into our consciences, as they unveil that perfect union of the Father and the Son; for the day that sees the perfection of unity within the Church will see the great awakening of the world,—"that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me." Nothing less than this can satisfy the Christian heart that has once seen the vision of one, pure, and radiant Body of Christ, *which is His Church.*

I apologize to the Conference for this long preamble, but it may serve to point to the critical moment we have now reached. We must face it, as men and as Christians, and seek the wisdom and the grace which come from God only. The solution of the problem when it comes will be vital, not verbal, because it is human; it will be simple, not complex, because it is divine. In simplicity and in life, we find the solution of all our deepest needs.

A word of reconciliation which may prove fruitful will, I think, be found in the saying of an old Father, that it is a nobler form of faith to find the spiritual in the earthly, than to find the spiritual in the purely spiritual.

I desire to suggest to this Conference that this word defines the true position of the purest Catholicism, and the truest Evangelicalism.

At this point let us be quite clear. I am *not* at all thinking of the man who has turned, let us say, to the sacrament, with devotion and passion, because it vaguely seems to stand for some mystic experience which he does not share; the man who knows that there is something there, even Some One there, but finds it all a matter rather of obedience than of joy. In reality, the pure sacramentarian is finding only the earthly in the earthly, though it is earth bathed in a mystic light. Still, let us try and find in our hearts some true sympathy for a brother who is really seeking the pearl of great price even superstitiously, thinking that if he may but touch His garments, he may be whole.

But I am thinking of many true Evangelical minds to whom the mystery of the Gospel is nothing less than, "*Christ in you*, the hope of glory"; and who feel in their soul the danger of losing the Christ in His robes of beauty, goodness and truth. He dreads the possibility of finding himself wandering in a culture, or a system of sacrament and order, saying, "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him." He knows deep in his heart, that man is *not* his own Holy Ghost; and that the spiritual man is not man at his best, renewed by sacrament, but a new creation of God. So he often instinctively turns from the earthly, to find the spiritual only in the spiritual. To him Bible and prayer are the only vital things, for there God speaks direct to his own soul, and his own soul to God.

And I am thinking too of some noble Catholic minds, whom it is my privilege to know, who have passed through the gate of the Sacrament, ordained by Christ Himself, into the wider prospect of the Lord of all good life. He has tasted and seen the essential spiritual reality of the material body, and of mother earth, through the Holy Communion. He has succeeded in drawing up the earthly into the spiritual, and has found it to be a true and glorious vehicle of spiritual life. He now can gather in all the humanities into the broad bosom of his Lord.

He contends that a religion which begins with a physical Incarnation, and ends with a psychical Resurrection, embraces all that is human in the Divine; and that the Sacraments are at once the proof and the extension of that truth. We may not, and probably do not agree with his expressions of his faith; but let us see that we at least understand it, and can weigh justly the measure of its truth.

We shall all gladly bear witness to the purity of soul, and honesty of purpose, of both the men of whom I am speaking. But if the early Father is right, he is pleading that we shall try and grasp

afresh the *greater* grandeur of a faith that wants passionately to assert the essential spirituality of every earthly thing, humanity in all its physical and spiritual forms, and finds in sacrament, alike its expression and its power.

It may well be that somewhere here lies the secret of that Catholic influence, which is alike so impressive, widespread and prevailing.

I have not, I fear, spoken directly of Reunion, but of the rock on which every scheme of Reunion will break, unless we move just now on both sides with great charity, wisdom and grace. We see the hardening process in full swing on both the Church and the Free Church sides. Both Catholics and Evangelicals are asserting their views as final utterances of the whole truth. For instance, the *Church Times* and the *British Weekly* have lain down in wait together to destroy the Mansfield resolutions, while both remain curiously dumb on any constructive alternative. Neither of them can suggest anything that has not been given a fair trial during the last 300 years of growing separation. They remind us of the lay view of it all which finds expression in the *Manchester Guardian*: "It is, of course, true that nobody, or almost nobody, declares himself the enemy of union. On the contrary, we are all ready to pay to it at least the homage of our lips. The pity of it is that so often out of the same mouth come blessing and cursing: blessing for union as a general principle, and cursing for every practical proposal that seeks to give effect to it."

We supremely need at this moment, at least so it seems to me, constructive proposals which will bring together the two great strains in history and in modern life, the Catholic and the Evangelical, the only two as it seems that will count in the long run; and I venture to invite this Conference to endorse and strengthen the hands of the Mansfield group towards this end. There is no doubt, misunderstanding as to the meaning and purpose of the resolutions, but there is both meaning and purpose in them. They are at least constructive, and have this outstanding merit that they have never yet been tried. Rightly interpreted, and set in the atmosphere of devotion and fellowship, they have reconciled in conspicuous instances, the two divergent elements of which I have spoken; and they may do so again, if we can only get rid of mutual suspicions, and try and see the features of the Master in the face of men from whom we differ most.

This, as I see it, is the present position of the Anglican Communion as it concerns Reunion. It must recover unity within itself, amongst the true lovers of the Lord, before it will reach union with those that are without. And it is a first charge on Evangelicals to move out with freedom, wisdom, and prayer to its recovery, in these urgent days.

