

[*Cheltenham Conference Paper.*]

FELLOWSHIP OF THE CHURCHES.

(c) IN THE MISSION FIELD.

BY THE REV. G. T. MANLEY, M.A., Secretary of the C.M.S.

IT is well that we should undertake the consideration of so important a subject as Fellowship of the Churches with a proper sense of geographical proportion; and I hope I may assume at the outset that the order of our programme which puts the Mission Field after the Churches at home is not intended to represent the order of importance. Among the many causes of division in Christendom not an infrequent one has been the lack of the geographical sense: for we are all disposed to magnify the importance of the locality in which we dwell, whether that locality be England, or Rome, or Zanzibar. Let us therefore remember that the importance of the Church of England in England is very different to its importance in the world. In India the Anglican Christians are less than one-seventh of the whole Christian population: in the rest of the Mission Field they are in a smaller proportion.

In the United States of America the Episcopal Church reckons a membership of one million, or making a liberal allowance for children, a population of four millions, out of ninety millions, or less than one twenty-second of the population. Moreover, the best equipped and the most rapidly expanding Missions to-day are those of the American Churches, notably of the Baptist, Presbyterian and Methodist Episcopal bodies, and this whether gauged by the number of baptisms or by the strength of their material and educational equipment.

If we would render real service to the Church of God in our own day and generation, we must face the facts and not live in a dreamland of our own devising. We must remember that the membership of our Anglican Communion abroad is but a small proportion of the Protestant body, and that the Native Christian Church includes also in most parts of the world a very large number of Roman Catholics. In the light of these facts I ask, what is our aim in regard to the Fellowship of the Churches in the Mission Field?

In general terms the answer is easy. We pray and we work that the universal Church may be inspired with the spirit of truth, unity and concord; and that all who call upon God's Holy Name may agree in the truth of His Holy Word, and live in unity and godly love.

On this general aim we are agreed: but if our agreement is hearty and sincere it will, I think, carry further our consent to three general propositions which I wish to put before the Conference, and each of which I will endeavour briefly to illustrate. These three propositions are:—

- I. It is our duty to pass on to the Native Churches our heritage of catholic belief and worship based upon God's Holy Word.
- II. It is our duty to inspire all who call on God's Holy Name with a spirit of unity and godly love.
- III. It is our duty not to hinder unity by the unwelcome importation of foreign distinctions.

The first proposition is that it is our duty to pass on to the Native Churches our heritage of catholic belief and worship based upon God's Holy Word. We pray that they should agree in the truth of God's Holy Word. Is this prayer deep and sincere? If so, we shall endorse the solemn basis of the Kikuyu Alliance, which runs as follows:—

“The basis of the Alliance shall consist in the loyal acceptance of Holy Scripture as our supreme rule of Faith and Practice: and of the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds as a general expression of fundamental Christian belief; and in particular, of belief in the absolute authority of Holy Scripture as the Word of God, in the Deity of Jesus Christ, and in the atoning death of our Lord Jesus Christ as the ground of our forgiveness.”

The restriction of the Alliance to those who accept the historic creeds and the supremacy of Scripture is, I believe, a divinely guided limitation, and one which we shall do well to follow. It has also been adopted as the basis for the proposed union between the Episcopal Synod of India and Ceylon and the South India United Church.

The common acceptance of this basis by the C.M.S. with the concurrence of the two bishops concerned, by the Church of Scotland Mission through their Assembly, by the United Methodist Mission and by an interdenominational Mission like the Africa Inland Mission was surely no small triumph of Christian fellowship. If the Kikuyu Alliance had effected nothing but this, it would have done much. But it did much more in the direction we are considering.

It also brought to the front the value of our catholic heritage of worship. It has been agreed that in all the Missions there shall be taught and used in worship not only the Apostles' Creed but also the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, prayers of confession and forgiveness, for church and state, for country and for all sorts and conditions of men, also Psalms and acts of General Thanksgiving. A common hymnary with translations of many ancient hymns is also being prepared.

Furthermore, mutual agreement has been reached as to the establishment in all the Missions of a native ministry, ordained with the laying on of hands, after a minimum course of training generally approved, and for the administration of the sacraments through this ordered ministry.

I think it would be generally conceded by other Protestant Christians that one of the chief contributions which the English and Scotch Churches have to give is the established order of their ministry of the word and sacraments and their fidelity to truly catholic tradition. If this be so it is a really great thing that in

East Africa this catholic heritage is being passed on not only to a section, but to the whole number of Protestant Christians. If the same could be done in other parts, especially in India and China, how immense would be the gain! The heritage which belongs to all Christians by right will become theirs also in fact in proportion as the principles and the spirit of the Kikuyu Alliance gain general acceptance.

Some would add to the catholic heritage which we are bound to pass on that which is commonly called episcopacy. I propose to leave the discussion of this point to a later stage in this paper, and to pass at once to my second proposition.

My second proposition is that it is our duty to inspire all who call on God's Holy Name with the spirit of unity and godly love.

The Scripture saith that all who call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved: and however we interpret this, it is at least our duty to inspire all such with the spirit of loving unity in Christ.

Now in reality this is a hard thing: and because it is hard, it is worth doing. Unity in the name of the Lord and the exercise of Christian love is the very marrow of Church life, and Church life is more important than Church government. Any one with a lawyer's mind, and some experience, can draft Church rules: but to inspire unity and godly love tests the very foundations of the spiritual life, and can only be done by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Let us illustrate this by some actual difficulties in the Mission Field, and by considering how unity and godly love may be promoted in such cases.

Ex. 1. At the Kikuyu Conference in 1913 one group of missionaries were inclined to insist upon abstinence from alcoholic liquor being made a necessary condition of baptism, to which the remainder were opposed.

Ex. 2. A native clergyman, a strong and godly man, and an earnest soul-winner, is nevertheless unwilling to accept the regulations which govern the Church body to which he belongs, and deliberately breaks these regulations.

Ex. 3. A "free-lance" Mission, through premature and unwise dealings with government officials, raises difficulties for all the neighbouring Missions.

Ex. 4. A group of native Africans split themselves off upon the question of polygamy.

These are not imaginary, but real cases, and in every instance they have threatened or broken Christian Fellowship, and the reflections to which they give rise have practical importance.

In the first place unity begets unity. Our broken unity is the greatest hindrance to the maintenance of a high standard of morals, of discipline, and of broad-minded charity. If an individual Christian, setting himself against the order of his own Church, finds another Christian body ready to receive him, all discipline is weakened. And if a small Mission receives a protest against some action, only from a single neighbouring Mission, such protest has far less force than an appeal presented by all the Missions combined.

Again, in questions like polygamy it is a strong universal Christian opinion only that can effect real changes : and in all things the weakness of one member of the body is the weakness of the whole body. All Christian Missions *are* one body whether or no they like to recognize the fact.

For this fundamental reason every act of Union or Alliance which strengthens the bonds between the branches of the Church of Christ tends at the same time to raise the standard of godly love and of Christian discipline.

But deeper still is the need of a great increase of brotherly love, not only to those with whom we agree but to those from whom we differ, to the erring and recalcitrant, to those who are guilty of schism, and to those who injure the cause by their injudicious actions. It must be extended freely to all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity ; patience and charity will be the most potent factors in winning the unwise and the narrow-minded.

Let us finally look at our third proposition, namely, that it is our duty not to hinder unity in the Mission-Field by the importation of unwelcome foreign distinctions.

On this point there is a large measure of agreement. The Bishop of Zanzibar and many others have expressed their desire to do away with any arbitrary and unmeaning distinctions.

In South India when several Presbyterian bodies of different origins united, and when later there was an accession to this union of other bodies, there was a chorus of approbation on all sides.

Such acts of union involving no fundamental principle of doctrine or order are universally approved. The real crux is admitted to be the distinction between episcopal and presbyterian ordination, a distinction European in origin and arising from historical causes long dead and almost forgotten.

Now, the writer of this paper wholeheartedly accepts the Church of England ordinal with its threefold order of Bishops, Priests and Deacons, and is convinced there is nothing in it contrary to the Word of God. But when the distinction between this order and that of the sister Church of Scotland is presented as a real and vital issue, his intelligence completely fails, even after reading Lightfoot's famous essay, Gore's book on the Christian Ministry, and our chairman's illuminating writings on the subject.

The distinction of name and form is obvious enough : but when we come to deal with reality, where does it lie ?

It surely does not lie in the form of service used, for all would admit that the Churches which framed these services could modify them. It does not consist in any distinction laid down in the New Testament, for all know that the words *ἐπίσκοπος* and *πρεσβύτερος* are there used interchangeably of the same persons. It is not found in the laying on of hands, for from apostolic times that custom has been preserved in both Churches. In both Churches also the laying on of hands is by those, both presbyters and so-called bishops, who have themselves been similarly ordained, so that in both cases the ministerial succession goes back to the earliest ages of the

Church. On what real thing then is this elusive distinction founded, upon which such real issues are made to turn?

The outsider might imagine it to consist in the difference between a monarchical and a democratic system of church government. But the Bishop of Zanzibar tells us expressly that it is not so. In a recent address at Kikuyu he said, "Episcopacy need not involve us in a monarchical diocesan episcopate. Many Bishops may serve one local church. The bishops should be freely elected, and should rule with the clergy and laity. Nor is it essential that we hold any one view of episcopacy on the doctrinal side, provided the fact of its existence, and continuance, be admitted." From the other side we have a specially appointed sub-committee of the Assembly of the South India United Church accepting in almost identical terms "the principle of the historic episcopate . . . as a basis of unity," and no responsible body asking us either to abandon episcopacy or deny its existence.

What then, in the name of God, really divides us, or requires us to excommunicate our brethren? Can it be that we are separated by a mere name, and that were moderators called bishops, or vice versa all would be well?

I have wearied you with this search after a distinction which eludes the grasp of the ordinary mind. But if you are wearied who are accustomed to this controversy, how utterly fatuous and unmeaning must it appear to the Indian or Chinese intelligence? Can we wonder at Bishop Azariah's indignant protest that divisions should be thrust upon the Indian Church which in their essence are not theological but geographical?

Does not the real difficulty lie elsewhere, in the vain hope that emphasis on episcopacy may hasten reunion with Rome? But this is a dream whose futility must soon be recognized. On the contrary, nothing is so likely to hasten the larger unity for which we also pray as a strong union of Protestant Churches which will force the Roman and Greek Churches to consider the duty of seeking such unity by the only possible way, namely, by the reformation of their life and doctrine in accordance with the revealed Word of God.

One word in conclusion. The Kikuyu Alliance and the Nairobi Conference in 1910 which preceded it have set an admirable example. Leaving aside "strifes of words," they set to work to face the facts, and to build up the Christian Church in their country in a practical manner and with a view to the spiritual realities of an existing situation. We need to follow their example: for wherever love is practically exercised; wherever missionaries meet for common counsel and realize their common interests; wherever they are prepared to subject individual opinion to the common judgment, believing still that God's Holy Spirit guides the catholic church; wherever the united body shows patience and persevering love to persuade the erring or foolish few to unity of action; wherever the members of older or stronger nations and Churches are willing to foster and strengthen those that are younger and weaker; these will be real acts of fellowship, and there God will give His blessing.