

[*Cheltenham Conference Paper.*]

FELLOWSHIP OF THE CHURCHES :

(c) IN THE MISSION FIELD.

II.

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WE are all agreed on certain points :—

(1) That it was, and is, our Lord's divine plan that there should be real unity in His Church. His prayer was "That they may be one"—a statement enlarged and uplifted beyond our finite understanding by the succeeding clause—"As we are one." It is well that we should think what those words may mean. "There is to be a unity in love, for God is love. . . . The rub of difference often robs us of all sense of love, of all inclination to speak loving words. . . . The unity of the Father and the Son is a unity of will. "I came, not to do my own will, but the will of Him that sent me." How much wilfulness there is yet left in us all! The unity of the Father and the Son is again a unity in work. "The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father doing; for whatsoever things He doeth, these also the Son doeth in like manner." How strange to the modern worker is the key-note of that unity in work: it is dependence, not freedom; it is dependence, not originality. . . . The unity of the Father and the Son again is, in some sense which we infer from our Lord's words rather than apprehend, a unity of diversity. Yet diversity means between us Christians competition, if not jealousy and mutual exclusiveness. But how far those last three ideas are from any notion that we have learned of the unity of the Father and the Son. We have learned that the divine richness consists in the diversity within the divine unity. This is to be our standard of the ideal unity of the Church." We cannot rest until we have shown the diversities not to be contradictory to one another, till we have secured that they have ceased to be competitive."—(Bishop of Bombay, *Reunion in Western India*, p. 31).

(2) That the want of fellowship between the Churches—their actual dis-union—means bewilderment of the convert, inefficient working, and is a source of danger, for it renders impossible one definite strategic plan, and so throws open the way to a break in the battle-front—a break which may imperil the whole line and necessitate a general retreat.

I will comment on only one point; the others are too obvious to need any discussion.

The bewilderment of the convert. Yes, I believe that our distinctions and little hedges are absolutely bewildering to the convert—not understandable at all. It is hard for us who have been brought up in a Christian country and have been accustomed to hear

of various bodies of Christian people all our lives, and even to discuss their various distinctions, to realize how very different is the position of one who has taken the tremendous step of passing over the gulf between heathenism and the service of the living God, of passing from darkness to the light of Christ, with all that that entails. The question is not then one of the subtle distinction between different denominations, but rather it is the clear cut one of Christianity versus Paganism.

Forgive me, if I illustrate from personal experience. For a good many years now I have had fairly close dealings with many of the Chinese students who have come to Great Britain for the purpose of study. I have taught some of them; I have been in conference with them; I have lived with them in holiday times; I have seen them under varying conditions and have been honoured with the personal friendship of many, yet never have I heard the question raised among them, either individually or collectively, about differences in the Churches. It simply never enters their minds. The one thing that is asked about a new-comer is always, "Is he a Christian, or is he not?" That is all that matters. They would not understand if, when in conference with them, I were to say some Sunday morning, "I cannot administer the Holy Communion to Wong because he is a Presbyterian, and to Li because he is a Wesleyan, and to Oon because he is a Baptist. I am an English churchman and so can admit to the Communion Chow only because he has been confirmed." They all acknowledge Christ as Lord and Master, they look to God as Father and trust to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Why should not they be one united body? I must confess I agree with them—and act on that belief.

Again, in other cases it is not so much perhaps bewilderment that is caused, but rather that the whole thing is viewed from another angle altogether—that the differences are secondary things and so non-essential. I have had the joy of preparing a number of these men for Baptism and have always felt it to be my duty to impress upon each candidate the necessity of attaching himself quite definitely to some branch of the Church. In common fairness I have tried to explain broadly and simply what caused there to be different branches of the Church, yet over and over again the matter has been set quite calmly on one side as being of no importance. I well remember one case in particular—a young science student, a graduate of one of the Scottish universities, who when I talked of these things asked, "Well, what are you?" and when I replied that I belonged to the English Church I was promptly faced with the retort, "But I thought all Christians were one," and there was the naïve afterthought, "Oh, well it doesn't matter. I'll be the same as you!" It was a revelation at the time to me of the young convert's state of mind—of his estimation of the point at issue. You and I may not be able to view the matter in the same perspective exactly, nor to wipe out all differences so easily, but I am not sure that that Chinese student was not more in the right than we. Was it not one instance of what must be happening over and over again to thousands of con-

verts across the seas? (In passing, I may say that the student in question was baptized into Christ's Church and the Anglican Office was used. He was later confirmed, but now out in China he worships with the Presbyterians and is a member of their Church—for it is the only Christian community in his town. I rejoice that there has been no bar of sectarianism.)

(3) My third point of agreement is that in view of the fact that the appeal of the Christian Church loses force while she shows a lack of fellowship and is disunited, in view of the fact that such a state of affairs causes her to fail in carrying out her commission to the full, something must be done. If knowing the facts and seeing some of the obstacles in the way, she does not set herself to remove all that hinders-fellowship, nay unity, she is blameworthy, for she does not manifest the spirit of Him whom she calls Master.

Enough has been said. Now it is time something should be done.

The question has, during the last twelve years, become increasingly pressing, and we can only pray God that at the forthcoming Lambeth Conference some real lead shall be given, not only to the Anglican Church, but to the Church of Christ as a whole—that some broad general principles shall be laid down, which can be worked out in each province according to its own local circumstances, something clear, wide-*visioned* and definite. We cannot reasonably expect more. It would be absurd to think that even the different parts of the Anglican Church can speak for the whole of its own body, e.g., that the Church in South Africa with its own particular outlook can legislate in detail for the Church in Canada or in the Province of Armagh, where entirely different conditions prevail. I say it would be wrong to expect the Lambeth Conference to settle details, but we have the right to expect that broad outlines of policy and action shall be drawn clearly and decisively—not pious resolutions, but something which can be put into practice. The Lambeth Conference of 1888, with the first three proposals of its Quadrilateral, did much to clear the ground, even if its fourth has proved a stone of stumbling.

All I would say here about those first three is that they seem to offer a generous basis for fellowship and ultimately full reunion—one that we cannot well minimize.

(a) "The full recognition of the Holy Scriptures as the supreme rule of Faith and Practice." We have to face the danger in the Homeland of a recognition that is less than this on the part of some. The danger is no less in the mission-field. Bishop Molony, of Chekiang, told me only a few days ago of an instance which had come under his notice of an American Missionary returning from furlough in the States and saying that she had brought back with her the New Testament only; for she had no further use for the Old! I am not for tying people down to any one line of interpretation—we can catch the light from many facets of a diamond—but if the Rule Book be thrown on one side, many other things will necessarily follow. There can be no ground for Christian fellowship, let alone

reunion, if the Bible be not loyally accepted as "the Heart of God in the Words of God."

(b) "The loyal acceptance of the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds as a general expression of fundamental Christian belief."

Again I do not press for any one interpretation of the different Articles, but surely there must be a general acceptance of the Creeds as a whole. "The Creed is not a strait waistcoat to cramp spiritual movements" (Bishop of Bombay). Even the Bishop of Zanzibar will allow this. "While in our Communion there is an official Creed, there certainly is no official interpretation thereof" (*Ecclesia Anglicana*, p. 10). But a still more important particular—the kernel of the whole, is to be found in the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ. "Whom say ye that I am?" is still the vital question for man to-day. The Bishop of Bombay in his report, *Reunion in Western India*, issued in 1910, declared that one of the great obstacles in the way was the vagueness of Christological thought—a tendency towards Unitarianism. The same tendency is at work to-day in the student world, and if the Church be not wise she may have sometime in the future to face another Council of Nicæa. A Chinese correspondent in a letter received quite recently wrote to me about the looseness of much of the teaching concerning the Person of Christ, which is being given to-day in China. "Now Christianity owes its vitality to the belief in the truths formulated in the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, perfect God and perfect Man"; and unless the Church is sound on this point there can be no bond of union which will stand the test of time or strain. A real substantial Creed is a necessary condition of anything approaching unity. It is interesting to note that this is being realized in China to-day, for there the Congregationalists and Presbyterians have agreed to set on one side their own Confessions of Faith and to adopt the Apostles' Creed as a basis of union.

(c) "The regular administration of the two Sacraments, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, ministered with unfailling use of Christ's words of institution, and of the elements ordained by Him." This proposition is quite clear in what it does, and in what it does not, demand. It insists on the things which are essential and leaves other questions open. Any difficulty that may arise surely springs from its connexion with the fourth proposal, i.e., that the question of validity rests upon episcopal ordination. . . . One might well bear in mind the wise and cautious statement of Dr. Sanday, "On the broad general question of the validity of a particular ministry, it seems to me that no human tribunal is really competent to judge" (*The Primitive Church and Reunion*).

(d) "The historic Episcopate, locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and peoples called of God into the Unity of His Church." To-day the movement towards Episcopacy in some form seems to be spreading, and the matter of the fellowship of the Churches even upon this basis is more and more one of practical politics. During the time of the C.M.S. Congress in Birmingham I stayed in the same house with Bishop

Azariah and had the opportunity of many interesting talks with him. He then told me of a conference which had been held in his own diocese in South India where members of all the various Christian bodies had met and had discussed this very question of Episcopacy. With the exception of two dissentients all had agreed that they could accept the fact of Episcopacy. (Details of this conference will be found in the Report of Reunion Proceedings all over the World, which has been prepared in readiness for the Lambeth Conference, and is due to be published by the S.P.C.K.) It will be the *fact* of Episcopacy that will be accepted, not the Tractarian view of the Office—the *fact* as a desirable thing, without any theories attached. If this can be the attitude of the Church in general, the question of validity will not arise. It will be great gain if the Lambeth Conference can bring itself to view the fact in a detached manner, if not, I fear nemesis will overtake it. Doubtless we shall hear a good deal about the threat of schism at the time of the Anglo-Catholic Congress at the end of this month. But, as was pertinently said to me by a Bishop of the Church in India a little time ago, if the Lambeth Conference holds back through fear of a schism caused by a small body of extremists in the provinces of Canterbury and York, which are but a fraction of the whole communion, the Anglican Church may have to face the really great loss of a united Indian Church—numbering many thousands of adherents.

“There is a real logic of facts. Action outruns theories—it is often better than the theories of the actors.” You and I are face to face with facts.

(1) The mission-field is full of potential Kikuyus. Practices of fellowship are already in force to some extent, while discussions all over the field are paving the way for closer union. You have only to think of: (a) the remarkable letter sent by the Presbyterian Church of Australia to the Anglican Church there; or of (b) the definite reunion of many non-episcopal bodies in different parts of the field.

(2) “By their fruits ye shall know them.” Are we not much in the position of St. Peter when he was dealing with Cornelius? “If then God gave unto them the like gift as He did also unto us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I, that I could withstand God?” We cannot deny the fruit of non-episcopal missions.

(3) The overwhelming necessity for the Christian Church to have a united front, in view of the menace of Islam, of indifference, of materialism, in view of the clamorous call of the nations. Lord Thurlow when preaching the ordination sermon in Durham Cathedral last Sunday morning said to the candidates: “Let your home service in this diocese be used to test your vocation for service abroad. And in reckoning the forces in any area do not underestimate the value of those which are furnished by other Christian bodies, differing indeed in some important details of organization, but actuated by the same ardent love of Christ and by the same divine Spirit. It is by unity amid diversity abroad in the face of a common foe that we

shall at length achieve unity amid diversity of operations at home. A league of Churches is an indispensable preliminary to a league of nations." *A league of Churches!* If that be needful, and I believe it is, why cannot we give a lead in the home Church? Is China or India or East Africa to set the example to so-called Christian England?

We must not be content with fellowship, we must pass on to a closer organic union. It is for the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace that we need to unite in supplication to-day. Let the Church to-day dare like the Council of Jerusalem, after conference, with reliance on God's will and the guidance of the Holy Ghost realized, to look facts in the face and act. May she build up a constructive policy and by the practice of acts of love bring about, not only fellowship, but that unity in love and will and work for which our Lord prayed.

SHORT REVIEW NOTICES.

The Rev Laurence Bomford has used his leisure from parish work (he was formerly Vicar of Colney Heath) to give us some "Studies in the New Testament," and these are included in a little volume, *Their Angels*, just published by Mr. C. J. Thynne (1s. 6d. net). They are six in number, and deal respectively with St. Matthew xviii. 10-12; 1 John iii. 9 and kindred passages; St. Luke x. 36; references in St. Luke and the Acts to the expression "full of the Holy Ghost"; 1 Timothy iii. 15 and St. Matthew vii. 15. The "studies" are interesting if slight.

The death of the beloved Bishop of Durham calls fresh attention to one of his last volumes, *Christ and the Christian* (Marshall Bros., 2s. 6d. net). It is made up of a revised reprint of the Bishop's addresses at the Keswick Convention last year, not the least interesting of which was the one on "Possessing our Possessions," in which he told the beautiful story of how he came to be a "Keswick."

Two missionary books—*Heroines of India* (for senior girls) and *O Hana Sara*—may well be commended. Miss Edith Williams tells of our Indian sisters, and Miss Constance C. A. Hutchinson pictures for us the girl of Japan. Both are published by the C.M.S.

A series of "childhood pictures" is given by O.K.C. in his entertaining volume *When all was Young* (Arthur H. Stockwell, 4s. net).

Prebendary H. P. Denison in *The Blessed Sacrament: Faith and Works* (Robert Scott, 2s. 6d.) sets out to show that the Blessed Sacrament is "per se Adorable." He thinks this is the point on which official Church of Englandism has not quite made up its mind. He, however, has no doubt on the matter, and with his belief he is prepared to defend the service of Benediction against all comers.

The title of the volume, *Some Dimensions of the Cross*, by the Rev. W. Taylor (Robert Scott, 2s. net), is a little misleading. It is not concerned with the geometry of Calvary's Tree, but with the breadth, and length, and depth and height of that Divine Love of which the Cross is the fullest exposition. "Its great purpose," as the late Bishop of Carlisle wrote in the introduction, "is to lift up the crucified Saviour." Its special appeal is to those who "in the anguish of these stricken years have climbed the Hill of Sacrifice and laid upon the altar their dearest and their best." But it will be read with profit by others as well. It is strong in its spiritual uplift.