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THE OXFORD CONFERENCE OF EVANGELICAL CHURCHMEN

(IN CONTINUATION OF THE CHELTENHAM
CONFERENCE)

HELD AT

ST. PETER'S HOUSE, OXFORD,

April 7, 8 and 9, 1930.

SUBJECT : GOD'S CALL TO UNION.

INAUGURAL ADDRESS BY THE REV. CHRISTOPHER M. CHAVASSE,
M.C., Master of St. Peter's House.

MY dear Brethren,—It was my privilege last year to welcome you for the first time to St. Peter's Hall. We were then only a Hostel, and living in a corner of what seemed a busy mason's yard, with building going on feverishly all round us. Building for twenty additional sets of rooms is still proceeding on the northern extremity of our property; otherwise we can entertain you in these well laid out and pleasant surroundings, where forty undergraduates are already taking their full share in the activities of the University. It is a great satisfaction thus to have the opportunity of showing you the encouraging progress of the last twelve months, especially as very many of you have interested yourselves most actively in the project of the Hall. And it is a mark of their faith in the future of St. Peter's which led the Committee of this Conference to change its name from "The Cheltenham" to "The Oxford Conference." Thereby they have brought all the fine traditions of scholarship and service for which these gatherings of Evangelicals became famous under the chairmanship of the Bishop of Chelmsford, when he was Vicar of Cheltenham, and have planted them here in Oxford, when the creation of this Hall offered a new and more convenient home.

I would, then, remind you that one of the great reasons for the founding of St. Peter's was that it might thus afford a much-needed meeting place for Evangelical fellowship and discussion. And I am bold to pray that the Oxford Conference may influence the Church and serve the Evangelical School even more effectively and faithfully than those much-blessed gatherings at Cheltenham, for which we shall always thank God.

MISSIONARY REUNION AND INTERCOMMUNION.

Last year the subject of our discussion was that of Reunion; and we were able, in Findings which carried much weight, not only to arouse the whole Church to consider the paramount importance of the South India scheme, which will be laid before the

Lambeth Conference this summer; but also to disclose much opposition to the scheme, and to bring it into the open, where the light of Christian principle, historic precedent, and sanctified common sense might play upon its objections. Thanks to the correspondence which ensued in the papers, to pamphlets, and to weighty books, we can congratulate ourselves, I think, that the Church is educated on this question, and is alive to the issues on which the Bishops will have to decide. As Lambeth, therefore, will meet in a few months' time, the Committee makes no apology for bringing up the question of Reunion once more for our discussion. Reunion is the matter of the hour, and its cause is a sacred trust for those who have been called to this hour. A false move at Lambeth would be fatal indeed; and the principles at stake demand all the energy of our thought and study, our work and our prayers. Also, our findings of last year have been discussed all over the world, and often challenged. In the light, therefore, of all that has appeared in the way of manifestoes and statements during the last twelve months, we wish to review the position, strengthen our case, or, if necessary, modify our opinions. It is truth, and truth alone, that we seek. Especially do we wish to be practical; and all our discussions will have, as their special objective, the two burning questions of Missionary Reunion, and of Inter-Communion at home. In these two respects Reunion has passed beyond the stage of discussion into that of action. The Bishops will have to declare upon them; and we desire, God helping us, to put forward the contribution of the Evangelical School.

My object this evening, will be an attempt to clear the air for free and unfettered thought, by facing frankly one great weapon that has been employed, often ruthlessly, against all proposals of reunion and intercommunion with "our sister Churches of the Reformation." The arguments against such proposals have been chiefly *ad hominem*—"Bishop Gore is not in favour of the scheme"; and then *ad baculum*—"Well, anyway, if Reunion comes you will force a secession from the Church."

As regards the former—much as we honour and admire Bishop Gore, I agree with a distinguished religious leader in this University that "it is time the Church of England ceased to be afraid of Bishop Gore." But as regards the latter an issue is raised which must be faced. Though the threat is often used, very unfairly, by those who are shown by after events to have no intention of seceding at all, yet there are some (though not many, I believe) who will leave the Church if active steps are taken towards reunion with the Free Churches. And the charge is levelled against us that whereas we prate about Christian unity, in reality we are effecting a schism in our own Church. It is not necessary for me to point out that the advocates of Reunion with the Free Churches extrude no one; and that those who warn us that their position will thereby be made intolerable in the Church, really mean that they must leave the Church unless we agree to let them fashion

the Church and its doctrines into something quite different from what they have been either in primitive times or since the Reformation.

AN ANGLO-CATHOLIC SECESSION INEVITABLE.

But however that may be, I believe that some sort of secession on the part of a few extreme Anglo-Catholics is inevitable, and that we had better recognize the fact and see what may be done about it.

For many years past two statements have been made repeatedly about the Church of England for which no proof is offered and concerning which no facts to the contrary are accepted. Instead, the statements are merely repeated till by constant reiteration many believe them to be accepted truth.

First, as regards Holy Communion, it is stated that the Church of England teaches that in some way the Consecrated Elements contain the Presence of our Blessed Lord. Secondly, as regards the ministry, it is stated that the Church of England holds that the ordination gift can only be bestowed by the hands of bishops, through whom it has come down from the Apostles ordained by Christ Himself. That is, the apostolic succession is to be held not only as an historic fact, but as being an essential channel to communicate grace, by which alone a Church can exist. The Church will authoritatively repudiate both these statements before the year is out. The former has already been denied by the new Prayer Book, and the latter must be by the Lambeth Conference. In which case I cannot see how some devoted but extreme Anglo-Catholics can any longer remain in what must be an intolerable position in the Church of England. It is true that there have always been a group in the Church who have held such views, though not with such intensity, or to such an extreme, as their successors to-day. But it is one matter for the Church to allow great latitude of private opinion; it is quite another when the Church is called upon to authorize such doctrines for public teaching, and to legislate or to administer order in accordance with them.

The new Prayer Book (not to mention the present book) definitely declared against all modern interpretations of Transubstantiation when it refused to make any provision for the sacrifice of the Mass, and instead categorically forbade Reservation for purposes of adoration. For both these practices are logically necessary, and indeed inevitable, if any doctrine of a localized Presence of Christ in the Elements is allowed. Furthermore, by licensing the new Book when Parliament refused to authorize it—a proceeding which the Primate himself has confessed to be morally dangerous—the Bishops have sealed the solemn pledge they gave when first they pressed the book upon a reluctant Church—that they conscientiously intend to regulate Church worship according to its provisions. Some Bishops have already begun to do so; and unless the whole Bench follows suit they will stand self-condemned before the world. This means that they must,

as Christian leaders bound by their sacred word, forbid, by strong action, the Consecrated Elements to be Reserved either for public or private devotions. We are told by many that such practices are essential for their faithful ministry in the Church of England. Holding the doctrines that they do, I agree with them, and fully sympathize with their position, which is quite impossible. But will their link with the Church, thus strained already to breaking-point, be able to survive a declaration on Reunion which, if it does not in so many words repudiate the interpretation of Apostolic Succession which they hold to be essential, will yet as effectively deny it (even as they point out) by encouraging that which their theory would make impossible?

THE CRUX OF THE WHOLE SUBJECT.

For what is the crux of the whole vexed subject of Reunion with the Free Churches, as now brought to a head by the South India proposals? We believe with all our hearts, that as the preface to the Ordinal puts it, "From the Apostles' time there have been these Orders of ministers, bishops, priests and deacons. Which Offices were evermore had in . . . reverend estimation." We would countenance no scheme of Reunion which allowed an unepiscopal ministry. We are absolutely faithful to the Lambeth Quadrilateral. But we also hold other forms of orders in reverent esteem. Not to do so would be to accompany St. Peter to Caesarea and yet to deny the Holy Ghost when He came upon Cornelius. We therefore believe that unepiscopally ordained ministers can consecrate a "valid" Sacrament; and in the present emergency we are as willing as were the Elizabethan and Caroline Bishops to allow Free Church ministers to minister in a United Church without requiring them to be episcopally ordained, so long as the combined Episcopal and Presbyterian ordination, which is the rule of our own Church, is thenceforth adopted and so regularizes the position after one generation. Such a course is Christian and obvious, and has good precedent behind it. It would no more invalidate our Orders for future hopes of Reunion with the Orthodox or Roman Communion than the same action which has taken place in the past, and which is now almost forgotten. But such a course (which is proposed for South India) is to reassert the doctrine of the Church of England that Episcopacy is the *bene esse*, not the *esse*, of the Church. And we are warned that such a declaration would make inclusion in the Church impossible for some whose position within its borders is already most unhappy. The fact is that for nearly a century there has been a sustained and determined effort to force the Church of England to enlarge its already wide limits of comprehension. To this end, and with this hope, earnest, but to my mind misguided, men have been content to remain in a Church whose doctrines could not satisfy them. It is a Church of Henry VIII that they desire; a Roman Church, but without the Pope. In their own eyes, they have been loyal

to the Church of England and have loved it. But their loyalty and love has been given not to the Church as Reformed and as she actually is, but to the Church as they thought she ought to be and as they believed she might become. The Prayer Book controversy and the Reunion question have opposed a decisive "No"; and, their hopes frustrated, some kind of a secession seems inevitable. What is the right and brotherly course for us to pursue under such circumstances? It is quite evident that there is not room in the Church of England for their doctrines and the Sixth Article. May I recall to your minds the secession of the Non-Jurors, whose history roughly embraces the first half of the eighteenth century? I believe that from their experience we may discover the right solution. You will remember that the occasion of the secession was a political one. Eight bishops and 400 clergy refused to take the oath of allegiance to William and Mary, because they had given it already to James II, his heirs and lawful successors.

But behind this occasion there was a distinct and definite sacerdotal doctrine which after their secession wrought them into a new Church of England, very different in character from the Established Church which accepted William, Anne, and the Georges. The Non-Jurors certainly believed in the divine right of Kings (to whom they would only offer passive resistance), as distinct from the divine right of the Pope on the one hand and of the People on the other. But this belief was strongly engendered in them, because, in Erastian days, "they held the existence of the Church as a distinct spiritual society with laws of its own, whose connection with the State, however beneficial, was purely accidental." Therefore they insisted on their independence, and denied the right of any king or government to turn them out of their spiritual offices.

A VERY SACRAMENTAL DOCTRINE.

Thus the political cause of the schism soon lost its force, and one of their Bishops described their communion as "a distinct spiritual society, whose object was to revive the practices of the primitive and undivided Church." As was natural with their high conceptions of the Church, their doctrine was very sacramental, and their worship centred round the Holy Communion, which they invested with a strong sacrificial character. The chief usages they advocated were four in number, the mixed Chalice, Prayers for the faithful departed, the Invocation of the Holy Spirit upon the elements, and an Oblatory Prayer in connection with the elements. At first many non-juring priests used the first Prayer Book of Edward VI. which contained all these usages; but in 1717 a new Prayer Book was introduced which split their communion into Usagers—those for the New Book, and Non-Usagers—those who still held to the ordinary Prayer Book. And though in 1732 the Usagers joined up once more with the Non-Usagers, after declaring that all these usages found a place or were implied in the Book of Common Prayer, it was yet repeated splits which

finally dissolved their communion even more than the death of the Pretender in 1788.

All through these years Bishops had been duly consecrated and priests ordained for what was sometimes termed "the ancient British Church"; they had kept in communion with the Episcopal Church of Scotland, which had certainly consecrated one Bishop for them, and accepted the oversight of the London congregation on the death of its last Bishop; and ineffectual overtures had been made for communion with the Greek Church.

If needs must, would it not be possible for a similar Church with much the same doctrinal outlook to take shape once again, but which this time should be treated only with respect and consideration by the Established Church? Like the Non-Juror Church it would still be a Church of England, inheriting all its traditions, and moreover it could remain as much in communion with the Established Church as is the present Episcopal Church of Scotland.

The piety and learning of the Non-Juror leaders was a real loss to the Church of England; and no one can face the secession of some devout Anglo-Catholics without great searchings of heart.

But if communion between two such Churches of England could be maintained, then not only would England at large be free to accept the unfettered ministrations of extreme Anglo-Catholics but the Established Church would still benefit from their undoubted spiritual contribution to religion. Even in the case of the Non-Jurors, though bitterness ran high, yet personal friendship largely existed between Churchmen and their non-juring brethren; many Non-Jurors, including some of the Deprived Fathers, worshipped in Established Churches; and William Law's writings had far more influence among ordinary Churchpeople (indeed, they may almost be said to have occasioned the Wesleyan Revival) than among those of his own communion, who hardly approved of them. To-day, by mutual agreement and prayer, it should be possible for the schools of thought in England to regroup themselves without bitterness, and with ties of fellowship still maintained. Thus, there must be no such re-grouping as I have outlined (for I will not call it secession) without just and generous provision being made by the Established Church in the matter of buildings and endowments. And though an Anglo-Catholic Church of England would inevitably have to forgo all claim to cathedrals or to power and position in the State, yet this would not, I think, trouble them, for no one has ever accused Anglo-Catholics of place-hunting or of lust for worldly honour.

But if, instead of copying the hopeless example of politicians and exploring avenues to discover formulæ which shall unite us by meaning several different things at the same time, we could only agree to differ, then I see three great advantages that would accrue to the benefit of all.

THREE GREAT ADVANTAGES.

First, our Anglo-Catholic brethren would be free to develop what they believe to be true and essential, with no opposition either on the part of the authority or of their own conscience. Their present position in the Church of England is not only cramping but definitely bad for their morals. Character is injured by this wholesale taking of oaths by priests who feel they cannot conscientiously keep them and have no intention of doing so.

Secondly, we shall then have the right of seeing that a church with Prayer Book worship is available for every inhabitant of this country. In towns little hardship exists at present, for the parish system has broken down and town dwellers can generally choose a suitable church within reasonable distance of their homes. But the position in villages is quite monstrous. It is nothing short of a crime that in many a village loyal members of the Church of England should be faced with the alternative of attending Mass or a Chapel Service; and that when they wish their children to be confirmed, they must send them to one who will teach what is generally regarded as superstition, and is definitely repudiated by the Prayer Book and the Articles. Whatever the future may have in store, some action must be taken with regard to village worship.

Then thirdly, if such re-grouping must come, it would make possible the definite hope of our Reunion with the great Wesleyan Communion. Here is another secession from the Church, of which we are bound to take account! We are often reminded that we owe duties to our Anglo-Catholic brethren, who are the spiritual children of the old Non-Jurors (though infinitely more advanced in doctrine), and who are already practically speaking a Non-Juring Church within the Church of England itself. But we owe a far greater duty to our Wesleyan brethren, lost to us by our own folly, and whose doctrine is indistinguishable from our own. It is only the accident of schism that divides the Church and the Wesleyans to-day. Would, think you, the great Head of the Churches counsel our generation to acquiesce in such a position? The fact of the separate Wesleyan Communion is not our fault, but it becomes our sin if we tolerate it.

IN CHRIST'S FOOTSTEPS. By Rev. Alfred Thomas, M.A., F.R.S.L.
London: Skeffington & Son, Ltd. 3s. 6d. net.

The Vicar of St. Barnabas', Jesmond, is not by any means a stranger to our readers, and most of the addresses in this volume were originally given to his own congregation. The volume contains eleven discourses well suited for Lenten or devotional reading.