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REUNION.

AN APPEAL FOR THE EXCLUSION OF EXCLUSIVENESS.

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FOR many years now, the subject of Christian Unity has been to the fore, but it must be admitted that with a few notable and honourable exceptions, progress has been extraordinarily slow. Scottish Clergy and English Free Church Ministers have certainly occupied some of our pulpits, but often not without protest, such as that which broke out in the Exeter Diocese recently. And yet the prospects of union among the English and Scottish Reformed Churches should be extremely bright. With few exceptions, we hold the same Faith, have the same Sacraments, and broadly the same methods of worship. We read the same books, and sit at the feet of the same Theological Teachers. We have a common heritage of Church Music and especially hymns. We have a common heritage of religious and ethical ideas. Why cannot we have Inter-communion at once, as a step towards interchangeability of clergy and more complete union later on? The barriers are already happily being broken down by individuals, but why not make the breaking down of the barriers official? What is the obstacle that blocks the way?

The answer to this question is in itself simple. There is a body of opinion in the Anglican Communion extremely vociferous and mainly clerical that all ordination to the Ministry, other than Episcopal Ordination is, to say the least, irregular, and that the Sacraments administered by non-episcopally ordained clergy are probably invalid. In practice this harsh view is usually softened by the admission that the Non-Episcopal Ministries often have been and are "God-blest." This concession, however, does nothing to remove the obstacle. It is not Episcopacy, of course, as a method of Church government that blocks the path of union; but Episcopacy regarded as a means of the transmission of Grace. Those who hold this view claim that inasmuch as the English Church retained her Episcopate at the Reformation she remained part of the Catholic Church, while the other Reformed Churches and our own Free Churches, in setting aside the Episcopate, lost their inheritance in the Catholic Church. It may be remarked in passing that it is an ecclesiastical curiosity that though "Catholic" means "Universal" those most fond of using the term invariably want to exclude somebody.

Officially, the Church of England contents herself by vigorously emphasising the regularity of her own Episcopal Ordinations, and ruling that in all cases her own clergy shall be Episcopally ordained; but carefully refrains from passing any judgment on others. Moreover, from the Reformation to the Restoration non-episcopal orders

were allowed, and the change to a more rigid rule was made only as a part of the extremely human but utterly unchristian and vengeful legislation, known as the "Clarendon Code."

But opposition to Inter-communion certainly does not come from any undue respect for the Law of the Church as contained in the Act of Uniformity, and the Prayer Book Rubrics which are legally a part of that Act. Those who use Restoration Law as a barrier against Inter-communion have been the first in other matters to treat both Act and Rubrics with contempt. The trouble is not a matter of law at all, but the belief that the continuation of the Episcopate as a guarantee of the validity of Ordinations and Sacraments is essential to make good the claim of any body of Christians large or small to be part of the Universal or Catholic Church of Christ in the world. According to this view, the Roman, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican and a few other Episcopal Churches form the Catholic Church, and all the Non-Episcopal Churches are excluded. Obviously this is a tremendous claim to make, and if it were generally accepted in the Church of England and carried to its logical conclusion, it would make the cause of Inter-communion quite hopeless; since the Non-Episcopal Reformed Churches—and especially the Church of Scotland, with its strong sense of corporate Church life—claim with as much insistence as the Anglican Church that they are true parts of the Catholic Church. The Church of Scotland—whose standard of scholarship is, to say the least, as high as our own—has already bluntly informed the Church of England that she claims to be on equal terms with her. Therefore, because of the momentous nature and tremendous consequences of the claim that the Episcopal Churches form exclusively the Catholic or Universal Church in the world to-day, it is nothing less than our duty to submit this view to thorough examination and searching tests.

To start with, the Roman Church utterly repudiates this theory and denies the Catholicity of the Church of England.

The Anglo-Catholics, of course, who are the special exponents of this view, counter this by suggesting that Rome beaten in her attempt to prove that the succession of our Bishops was broken at the Reformation, has taken refuge in the Doctrine of "Intention" as a last defence against the recognition of Anglican Orders, and that this defence is weak, not to say frivolous! In actual fact, Rome's reason for denying the validity of Anglican Orders, far from being weak or frivolous, is overwhelmingly strong and perfectly logical. The Doctrine of Intention means this: that according to the Roman view, the supreme duty and privilege of a Priest is to offer the Sacrifice of the Mass. A Roman Bishop ordains a Priest for this supreme purpose. But at the Reformation, the Church in England repudiated the Sacrifice of the Mass, and for some three hundred years Protestant Bishops ordained Protestant Ministers. In declining to recognise such a Succession, Rome is not only logical, but honest and spiritual. Our Bishops may be crowned with mitres, wear the most gorgeous copes, and have

pages to carry their trains ; they may even adopt Roman Catholic phraseology, but that Protestant gap still remains, and can neither be bridged nor camouflaged !

The fact is, whether the Reformation was a glorious event or a terrible disaster, what actually happened cannot be explained away or glossed over ! And what happened was this : the English provinces of Canterbury and York repudiated the authority of Rome, and were thus separated from the other provinces of the Western Church, being still the Church of England, but under the protection of the Crown ! And the English Church was then, and is still, regarded as schismatic and heretical by the Roman Church. Except by distorting facts, it cannot be contended that the Protestant Episcopate has the sacerdotal character of the Medieval Episcopate under the authority of the Pope !

After all, Augustine came armed with Papal authority. He haughtily endeavoured to bring the British Bishops into subjection to Papal authority. The two provinces of Canterbury and York were formed under Papal authority ; and under Papal authority they remained until the Reformation ; and until the Reformation each Bishop received his spiritual authority from the Pope.

In answer to this, of course, the following contention will be put forward :

It will be asserted that in the first few centuries of Christianity all Bishops were equal, and that the additional prestige enjoyed by the Bishop of Rome was merely that of a first among equals—owing to Rome being the Capital of the world ; and that the later domination of the Bishops of Rome was, and is, an unjustifiable usurpation ! It will be urged then that the English Bishops, at the Reformation, were perfectly justified in returning to the equality of the early centuries, and that in so doing Catholic continuity was by no means lost. This is a contention that as members of the Church of England we are bound to agree with ! It is a contention that we stand by. But the trouble is that it proves a great deal more than many who advance it wish to prove. For if we claim that the English Bishops at the Reformation were justified in returning to the equality of the early centuries of Christianity, and that in doing so they by no means lost the Catholic continuity of our Church, we are bound also to allow that the Scottish and Continental Reformed Churches, and our own Free Churches, were justified in appealing to the still earlier days—the days of the Book of Acts, and of the Apostles themselves, and remodelling their systems accordingly—that is, returning to the time when Bishop and Presbyter were equal, and merely different names for the same office ; and that in so doing *they* did not lose their place in the Catholic Church.

The Roman point of view that the English provinces broke from the main body of the Church of the West and lost their Catholic continuity is both logical and comprehensible ; but the view, seemingly held by some in our Church, that it is legitimate to appeal to the early centuries of Christianity, but illegitimate to appeal to the

New Testament and the days of the Apostles themselves, is neither !

Strange to say, there is an attitude of mind prevalent in our Church at the moment, which delights to exalt everything that can be justified by Medieval thought and practice, but declines either to go forward to the Reformation or back to the New Testament. But delight in Medieval thought and practice, the introduction of frankly Roman services and terminology, are absolutely of no avail whatever to bridge the Protestant gap made by the Reformation and make the Church of England "Catholic" in the eyes of Rome ! From the early days of the Oxford Movement until now, courageous and logically minded men have realised this ; and so beginning with Newman and Manning, many High Churchmen or Anglo-Catholics, as they like now to be called, have drifted to Rome.

Our line of argument then leads to this conclusion, that the contention that the Roman Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Anglican Church, and certain other Episcopal Churches form exclusively the Holy Catholic Church in the world to-day completely breaks down, since on the premises on which Rome bases her judgment, she is perfectly justified in denying our claim to be a part of the Catholic Church ; while on the premises on which we make our claim, namely the right to appeal to an earlier and purer tradition, we are not justified in excluding the Non-Episcopal Reformed Churches.

We must not allow the Anglo-Catholics to put us into the foolish and undignified position of the man who tries to grasp the hand of one who deliberately withholds it—while he refuses the hand of one who cordially extends it.

In spite of the unfortunate rigidity of Restoration Law, already referred to, our Church gives no official sanction to the exclusively Episcopal conception of the composition of the Catholic Church. Moreover, none of her greatest leaders prior to the Oxford Movement would have subscribed to that view.

Article VI declares the supremacy of the Scriptures (the Title Deeds of the Faith) : "So that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an Article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to Salvation. . . ." Thereby proclaiming the right of appeal to the Scriptures.

Article XIX declares that : "The Visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly administered according to Christ's ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same. . . ." Thereby proclaiming a liberal and wide view of the Catholic Church.

Article XXIII declares that we ought to judge those to be lawfully ordained to the Ministry "which be chosen and called to this work by men, who have publick authority given unto them in the Congregation, to call and send Ministers into the Lord's vineyard." These words pass no judgment as to "Apostolical

Succession " either as a historical fact, or an Ecclesiastical Theory. They apply as easily to Scottish Presbyteries as to English Bishops ; and make valid ordination depend not on the past, but—on having authority in the Church as the whole body of Christian people to-day.

I have kept the New Testament test to the last. It is exceedingly simple and to the point. "By their fruits ye shall know them."

Is it possible to maintain that the Episcopal Churches are any way ahead of the Non-Episcopal in the type of Christianity produced? Can anyone possibly maintain that the Roman Church in Italy, or France, or Spain, or Mexico, or South America can produce greater piety and care for righteousness than—say, for example—the Scottish Church and the Churches allied to her? Take one example, "Mercy to animals." In this matter the standard in Protestant countries is definitely higher than the standard in Roman Catholic countries, in some of which kindness to animals seems hardly to have been thought of. Then—to take another example—is it possible to maintain that the achievements of the Church of England—which has preserved Episcopacy—are more fruitful and more heroic in the Mission Field than those of the Church of Scotland—which is Presbyterian.

I submit then that the view of the Catholic Church as consisting exclusively of the Episcopal Churches cannot be reasonably maintained. I plead that we should have the courage to go forward on the path of reunion. And I plead that those of us who hold liberal views on this and other matters should be no less courageous in emphasising them in word *and action* than the Anglo-Catholics are. And I dare to hope that some day the Catholic Church, the whole Catholic Church, will be reunited. But—if this hope is ever to be realised—exclusiveness must be excluded.
