

THE REUNION OF PROTESTANT CHURCHES.

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IS it possible to have corporate reunion at present—or must we confine ourselves to co-operation?

In a recent letter to me from the Dean of Christ Church, Dublin, he writes that “a sub-committee of four a side, representing the Church of Ireland and Presbyterians, had several friendly meetings and that there was good hope of a formula being found for some scheme that would draw the two Churches together. But owing to the excesses of the Anglo-Catholics here, there was a cooling off on the part of the Nonconformists in Ireland, and nothing practical resulted. There is an earnest desire for closer corporate reunion as distinguished from co-operation, but the reformed communions in Ireland are held back by a feeling of loyalty to their respective communions in Great Britain and farther afield.”

I have had a letter also from Rev. G. H. Harris, of the C.M.S., to say that—“As far as the large majority of the mission field is concerned, the native Christians and many of the foreign missionaries passionately desire unity in the interests of Evangelisation and the upbuilding of a unified Church.” He makes an exception of Japan, where a large amount of co-operative work is carried on by the non-Roman communities.

A strong desire for unity was expressed in the Jerusalem Conference.

There are many disadvantages in separation—such as overlapping—proselytising—jealousy and weakening of the line—the common line of defence—against Rome. Christianity, as we have it now, has no organic unity. Perhaps the spirit of toleration prevents us from realising the danger of disunion.

As A. C. Jennings says in his *Manual of Church History*: “The triumphs of modern Christianity in the ethical province more than compensate for any loss of corporate cohesion. Working through ecclesiastical organisations of the most varied character, its spirit has won victories which the age of organic unity never attempted.” He mentions “the abolition of slavery, the countless institutes for raising the moral and social condition of the poorer classes, the keener realisation of the sanctities of life, the universal deprecation of needless cruelties in war and in peace.” And he concludes: “Whether the ethical and practical influences which owe their existence to the Saviour’s teaching will ever be again centralised in a united Christian Church, and if so, by what concordats or concessions on the part of the representative bodies of Christianity, it is at present impossible to foresee.”¹

We are at the beginning of a big movement, and our work is

¹ *Manual of Church History*, Hodder, II, 232.

spade work, breaking down barriers—barriers of prejudice, and Church policy and organisation many centuries old. There may be also barriers of principle. That is a matter to be investigated.

Christian love will help us to understand each other's difficulties, different points of view, different traditions. And the Spirit of our Common Saviour will help us to appreciate the splendid Christian work of those who hold different Church views and discipline from our own.

There are bound to be mutual sacrifices made for a mutual common good. We may have to water down our views; and they may have to level up theirs. The real basis is belief in Christ and His revelation as supreme. We must start to build upon that basis. This principle will show us that the differences between us are due largely to tradition, temperament, and training. Some minds are historical, others practical, some æsthetic, others emotional. Some are highly complex; others are profoundly simple. But all these different gifts are administered by the same Divine Spirit, "dividing to every man severally as He will" (1 Cor. xii. 11).

The Spirit of Christ is the first thing to be cultivated in our movement towards co-operation, which may lead eventually to co-ordination and corporate union.

As the Archbishop of Armagh said at Lausanne: "The Unity of the Spirit must come before the unity of the body. We have, I think, in the past counted too much on settling our disputes by the method of inventing a formula or framing a scheme."

There are people who do not regard our divisions as unhappy. They say they would be unhappy without them. God is not a God of uniformity, but of unity amid variety. Without variety of experience there can be no thought, no life, no beauty, no freedom, no art, no poetry, no interest in life. No two people are made or constituted or think alike. In addition, you have the differences caused by environment, training and tradition.

The parties in the State serve a purpose. They save democracy from becoming a bureaucracy. They prevent Master Demos from becoming a monster tyrant. In an orchestra many different instruments combine and co-operate to produce one grand effect. Their variety of sounds is requisite to the unity of the result.

Apply the principle to ourselves. Suppose a Presbyterian is fed up with Presbyterianism. He would fall out of public worship altogether, if there were no forms to select from. The same applies to the Anglican, Methodist, Congregationalist. This is why so many of the French people are atheists, because the Free Churches were almost annihilated by Roman Catholic massacres and persecutions, and the logical and moral inconsistencies of Rome have turned away the majority of the French people from her fold, and made them atheists. There would be no beauty in a garden if all its flowers were of one kind and colour.

At the same time we must present a *common front to a common foe*. Some missionaries tell us that the natives say: "Settle your

differences and then come out and teach us." But is not that because the Oriental mind does not understand change or development? At all events, this saying shows us that there should be no overlapping in the mission field. Where one denomination has taken up a district, that district should be left to it, even if it be a Roman Catholic Mission, provided that they observe the same rule. At home there are also complaints about the lack of man power and money to carry on Christ's work. But how will you make Chapel folk go to Church, or Church people go to Chapel? Is it by giving the Chapel an Anglican priest, and the Church a Methodist parson? Does not the Chapel attract one kind of mind, and the Church another? People enjoy the services which they love, and understand, as did their fathers and mothers before them. Some like a liturgy, others do not. The Congregationalists have ten short forms that are optional. But there is no likelihood that that will develop into an Anglican Liturgy. By talking to people about this subject I have found out that the laity do not want any change. For example, I asked a Presbyterian—a fine type of man—"Would your people in Scotland like reunion with the Church of England?" "No," he answered, most emphatically. I asked many Churchmen would they like reunion with the Free Churches. They answered "No." There may be a few Chapel folk, a very few, that would just tolerate the idea, but the vast majority would resent it. And if you are bent on some scheme of amalgamation you will have to take the laity into account. You must consider their wishes. The first thing you have got to do then is to prove to them that there are spiritual advantages and other advantages—for English people are very much alive to those other advantages—in a reunion. When you have got the laity ready for reunion, you will have to draw up some common scheme. And that scheme cannot be forced upon them. They must be allowed to debate, discuss, and disapprove, if they desire. Otherwise your attempt at formulating a scheme for reunion will result in making a bigger schism than the one you want to heal.

A reasoning person would say that the first condition of all such efforts in the direction of reunion is that each community desiring reunion should be at unity with itself. Recent incidents in our distracted Church show that it is more distracted than ever, while the Presbyterians and Methodists are settling their own affairs, and putting their houses in order. If certain Bishops would meet certain representatives of the Free Churches at a Round Table Conference, and issue a common report, *after sounding the various lay communions they are connected with*. I don't mean such a memorandum as that drawn up by Drs. Frere and Garvie, *Church of England and Free Churches*, p. 79, which makes the chimerical suggestion of quadrupling the already too numerous and too unwieldy episcopate—but one which will deal practically with the difficulties I have mentioned.

At present the movement towards reunion is entirely clerical or quasi-clerical. To be successful it must have public sentiment

behind it. As Abraham Lincoln said : " Any worthy cause cannot be a failure with public sentiment behind it." We have got to understand our own position as well as the position of others. The first thing to do is to consider the different positions. *Great Thoughts* some years ago published a symposium of articles by different theologians : " Why I am a Presbyterian," " Why I am a Baptist," " Why I am a Methodist," " Why I am an English Churchman," etc. These articles might usefully be reprinted with others bringing the symposium up to date.

Another point is this, that the tendency of the age is towards an *informal* religion. The decline in Church attendance is not merely due to the wireless ; or to apathy, but to other Christian movements outside the borders of all the Churches, e.g. the Brotherhood and Sisterhood movements. Within the borders of the Churches there is loss ; but it is possible that outside their borders the Kingdom of God is gaining by their loss.

We have to overcome the *odium theologicum*, which made things innocent noxious and grievous faults. We have to cultivate that spirit of charity which thinks no evil and is kind. More things unite us than divide us. Sometimes our own differences help to accentuate the underlying unity. We should take Irenæus, not Cyprian, as the model to follow. There were many differences and disputes in the Church of his day, especially regarding the Fast of Lent. He wrote a letter to Victor, Bishop of Rome, admonishing him, and telling him how Christians settled their differences. He said : " They had peace among themselves. The very difference about the fast establishes their concord in the faith."

Irenæus has much to teach us. He insisted on the historic episcopate on one hand, and on the other hand upon the spiritual bond of unity formed by love. He distinctly tells us that Paul " summoned the presbyters and bishops of Ephesus." And although he calls the Roman¹ bishops presbyters, he does not call presbyters bishops. His pen glows when he writes of love—" more excellent than all other gifts." And if he was indignant with those who broke up the unity of the Church, he would have been the first to recognise that the Spirit was working in the Free Churches. He emphasises the catholic or universal nature of the Church, saying—" the Church is everywhere, because they who receive the Spirit are everywhere," and " where there is the Spirit of God there is the Church." And more than this—he speaks in three different passages of the *apostles and prophets* as workers in the Church. On several occasions he proved a peacemaker in the Church. His spirit could rise above the non-essentials into the pure realm of the essentials—the things that are catholic, truth, freedom, love—the spiritual union of all men in God the Father, the Son and the Spirit. And the Spirit will see to it that amid the variety and diversity of methods there will be a unity in aims and ideals in the Christian Body of the Catholic or Universal Church.

¹ Although he says the Roman Church was established by Paul and Peter, he counts Linus as the first bishop.

History teaches us that if we wish to form a *consolidated State* we have to begin with a federation. In the days when the powers of the Greek States were at their height, they formed an *Amphictyonic Council* at Delphi, generally representative of the Greek States—a *federal Church council*—but it fell to pieces because it allowed jealousy and rivalry to enter into its councils; and because it interfered, like Rome, in politics. That is a warning to us. We want first co-operation, and co-ordination. How can we have corporate union when we have not these?

The first step to be taken is to set up a Common Board, representative of all parties in the Church Universal in England, and request them to see that there is no overlapping, no attempt to draw away people from other non-Roman communities, and to settle all disputes between the Christians that may arise, and to arrange also conditions of transferring a clergyman from one church to another, if he so desires, and is not actuated by ambitious motives. The question of *conditional reordination* and acceptance of episcopacy might be settled by a revival of the charismatic ministry of apostles and prophets. If I understand Bishop Wordsworth,¹ he holds that the bishops in their corporate capacity have the power of recovering the old charismatic ministry of apostles, and prophets, evangelists and teachers which existed in Syrian Antioch. "It (the charismatic ministry) remains in the background as a possibility, which may emerge at any time into actuality; and indeed in various forms it is constantly emerging."²

Take the case of the Hospitals. We have free or voluntary hospitals and municipal hospitals. The latter must be brought up to the same level of efficiency as the former. This cannot be done by amalgamation; but by co-operation. Accordingly we find to-day that the hospitals are demanding co-ordination—to prevent overlapping and to secure the advice and help of the staff of the voluntary hospitals for the municipal authorities. The Churches should follow this good example.

Some people believe in reunion. Others do not. It requires vision and imagination to conceive a United Universal Church.

There are many of us, on the other hand, who can imagine and visualise an ideal Church—finding "in Christo unitas," and showing "in omnibus caritas," in all things charity.

We see the Church of Christ now, like the revelation of God "in many parts and many fashions." And it grows—Irenæus conceived it growing like a beautiful flower throwing the bloom of its youth around its earthly vessel. You remember that Goethe compared the soul of Hamlet to a beautiful flower bursting through and breaking asunder its earthly vessel. And as it grows, it develops new forms of Christian life; and expresses new parts of the Divine economy. And will do so—until it has developed into the perfect medium of the self-realisation of the Christ; a perfect mirror of the glory and beauty and life of God.

As such the inspired writer beheld her—the holy city, the new

¹ *Ministry of Grace*, p. 150.

² P. 149.

Jerusalem—descending out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband (Rev. xxi. 2). “Come hither and I will show thee the Bride, the Lamb’s wife. And he showed me the holy Jerusalem descending from heaven, having the glory of God.” This is the Church glorified, the apostolic Church—not the Jewish—*founded on the twelve apostles*, filled with the glory and presence of God and the Lamb. This is a vision of the Universal or Catholic Church, living in communion with God, needing naught but God. That was the kingdom for which Christ prayed in the Temple—John xvii. A Church—not proceeding from the world, but from God; a Church sanctified or made holy by the truth; a Church made perfect in a spiritual unity that reflects the unity of God; a Church that gazes upon the glory of Christ, and is with Christ—and has the joy of Christ fulfilled in itself (v. 13).

“Perfected into one.” These words of Christ show us that as we grow more perfect, we become more united by that grand, unifying principle of love. It is for a unity of the Spirit our Lord is praying, not a formal unity; for it is no formal unity that makes the Father and the Son one. “That they may be one even as we are one” (v. 22). St. Paul has the same image of the Church as St. John—a Bride—in Ephesians v. 27. He looks forward into the future because he is a man of vision and imagination. Under the old prophetic figure of a bride he thinks of the Church. “Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for her that He might sanctify her, and present her to Himself as a glorious Church, without spot of sin or wrinkle of age, holy and without blame” (v. 27).

No one could imagine that Paul is thinking of the visible Church on earth, in all its imperfections. It is of the Church idealised, redeemed, regenerated in the kingdom of God. A picture of the ideal Church is given in Hebrews xii. 22—“Mount Sion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, myriads of angels, a festal *ecclesia*, or church of the firstborn, whose names are enrolled in heaven”—a spiritual passage in images taken from the Old Testament. The Church in its idealised condition—that is, the invisible reality the visible church is to express—is described as Zion, the seat of God’s throne, the heavenly Jerusalem. This is the city that is to come (Heb. xiii. 14). Of the same ideal church St. Paul is thinking when he says: “Jerusalem which is above is free which is the *mother of us all*” (Gal. iv. 20). He is not thinking of any visible mundane Church; and yet the bishop of Rome says she is “the mother of us all.”

St. Paul had a great mind and many ideas. Another image of his for the Church was *the body* of which Christ was the head. This image he took from Plato, who saw in man a miniature state with its three classes of citizens—having its perfection in *unity*; and in its threefold classes representing the wisdom, the will power, and the desire of man; an analogy which Plato saw could not be pressed because no single man is independent or “*self-sufficing*.” St. Paul’s figure of the *body*—the Church as the body of Christ—may not be pressed either. And yet it illustrates the principle that the

Christian must be so dominated by Christ, so devoted to Christ, so directed by Christ that he may be said to be completely in Christ, and Christ may be said to be in him. Christ must be the environment as well as the principle of life, the directing *head* as well as the sufficing Spirit.

When the Church of Christ, those who believe and love him, form a real unity, they are, as it were, His body, of which individually they are parts, a body so united and consolidated and harmonised that it is one living organism—"the fulness of Him Who filleth all in all." But this ideal can never be realised by human flesh and blood. As Plato's ideal state existed only in heaven,¹ Paul's ideal exists only in the *heavenlies*—an expression frequently in the Ephesians, which shows the exalted state of the apostle's mind—lifted as it were above the things of earth to the holy of holies, to the serene atmosphere associated with the Divine habitations of the glorified sons of men. So idealised, glorified, and spiritualised the Church is more real than any earthly one—because she is in touch with the great realities, and reflects them in her life and action. No union of visible Churches; no reunion of separated sects can approach the apostle's idea. We can never realise that unity here in any visible society—because it is spiritual and divine. As Westcott says of this figure of the Church as the Body of Christ :

(1) "The unity of the whole is consistent with a wide variety of the parts."

(2) "The essential bond of union is not external but spiritual; it consists not in one organisation; but in a common principle of life."

(3) "It follows that external visible unity is not required for the essential unity of the Church" (*Ephesians*, p. 177).

The body is the neatest and most manifest expression of unity in variety. Divisions, as we see them, are, indeed, a witness to human imperfection. But if we regard the imperfection of our nature, division appears to be the preliminary of that noblest catholicity, which will issue from the separate fulfilment by each part in the measure of its proper function to the whole (Eph. iv. 16). "A man perfect," *teleios* (iv. 13), that is the idea to be realised by the present imperfect body of Christ—that is, a man perfect with the perfection of God, who realises completely the Divine ideal of his existence. The Church when she acts as the body of Christ, in obedience to His will, filled with the energy of His Spirit and His love, expressing in her various and multitudinary activities the operation of His Spirit—may be represented as a "man perfect in Christ."

Who can say that Paul had not vision? He borrowed Plato's figure, but he spiritualised and exalted it. He proceeds—"the fulness of Him Who filleth all in all," words which are thought by some to mean that the Church is the extension of the Incarnation, that it helps to complete the Christ who would be incomplete with-

¹ *Republic*, 592. "Doubtless the pattern is laid up in heaven for anyone who desires to see."

out it. But the Greek words are against that meaning. And Paul could not say that "Christ as yet is being made." It is the Church that is in the process of being made. Our Lord's personality is a complete unity. He can develop Himself: we cannot develop Him. The Church is the medium in which and through which Christ realises Himself, finds His self-realisation in the goodness, truth, love, in which He is realised by the Church. The passage may be rendered: "the Church *in so far as it is (hētis)* His body is the medium of His self-realisation and is also the medium by which man realises Him."

The passage is logical. We pass from a "body" (*sōma*) to a "vessel" (*skeuos*), another Pauline term for body, and a "vessel" is to be filled with something, which is its *pleroma* or contents. But the Church is the "body of Christ," and therefore, the *pleroma* of Christ, because it can be filled with Him. It is His *pleroma*; not that which fills Him up, but that which He fills, with His Spirit, His love and His energy. It is Christ in us and we in Christ. Christ fulfilling Himself in us that we may fulfil ourselves in Christ. If Christ expresses Himself, His ideal and His love through the Church, the Church may be regarded as His self-expression, that which expresses Him, but only because and so far as He expresses Himself therein. The noblest conception of the Church is St. Paul's: "the medium of the self-realisation of Christ."¹ But it is a spiritual, heavenly and ideal conception. It can only be gradually realised, if ever, on earth.

As Salmon says: "This carries the idea of a Church far beyond the limited conception of a concrete or an outward visible organisation, lifts us to the grander conception of a great spiritual fellowship which is *one* under all varieties of external form and constitution, in virtue of the presence of Christ's Spirit in it, and catholic, as embracing all believers." The unity Christ prayed that His people might have was a spiritual unity, a vital unity consisting in the Life and Spirit of Christ. To have Christ dwelling in us is to have membership in His universal, eternal *ecclesia*, which soars above all ecclesiastical forms and differences into the serene atmosphere of "the heavenlies."

For Paul the Church is ideally what Plato's republic was for him—a scheme for the realisation of a divine idea in human life through the framework of a social organism—an *ideal* state, the model of which is stored in heaven. But whereas Plato's state was a *social absolutism*; Paul's Church was a spiritual kingdom, whose King was the invisible Christ. The principle of government in Plato was an external force or compulsion of a visible order, crushing out individual effort, making all after one pattern. The principle in Paul's Body of Christ was the internal force of a Divine love. Plato's state has ended in failure, and led to Romanism: Paul's *politeia* is ever producing new forms of Christian life and service.

The Holy Catholic Church hath continued the same not by con-

¹ See Article, *Expositor*, Aug., 1922, by present writer on this subject, "The Pleroma as the Medium of the Self-realisation of Christ."

tinuation of one and same visible Church, but by continuation of the same Catholic Faith, the same Catholic Spirit.

There is a treatise on the Church by Dr. Thomas Jackson (1626)—Pusey said of him, "One of the best and greatest minds our Church has nurtured." He upheld the invisibility of the true Church. The Church is *invisible as a Church though not with respect to its members*. This was his idea. The Tractarians argued that a man becomes united to Christ by being made a member of the Church; according to Jackson, a man becomes a true and real member of the Church by being united with Christ. He says: "Men may be visible members of the holy catholic and apostolic Church and yet not members of any present visible Church." He also declared that the doctrine of Papal Supremacy and infallibility was an entire apostasy from the apostolic faith.

One of the last official acts of Archbishop Sancroft, the Non-Juror, was an admonition to his clergy—"that the clergy warmly and most affectionately exhort them (people) to join with us in daily fervent prayer to the God of peace for an universal blessed union of all reformed churches both at home and abroad against our common enemies; and that all they who do confess the holy name of our dear Lord, and do agree in the truth of His holy word, may also meet in one holy Communion, and live in perfect unity and godly love."¹

Bishop Cosin (1650), writing on the orders of foreign reformed churches, in a *letter to Mr. Cordel*, referring to ministers ordained in these French churches, said, if any such "came to incorporate himself in ours, and to receive a public charge or care of souls among us in the Church of England our bishops did not re-ordain him before they admitted him to his charge, as they must have done, if his former ordination in France had been void. Nor did our laws require more of him than to declare his public consent to the religion received among us, and to subscribe the articles established."² Bishop Saunderson, of Lincoln (1660), in a treatise on the Church, declares it is used in several senses (1) chiefly the invisible Church—the whole company of God's elect, (2) and the visible—all those who by doctrine and worship make profession of the name of Christ.

I have two suggestions: (1) To regard the Free Church ministries as the revival of the charismatic ministry of the early days—apostles, teachers, evangelists. (2) To emphasise the fact that the *whole ecclesia* is a sacerdotal society, "a kingdom and priests unto God and the Father" (Rev. i. 6), and that all Christians have a priestly character. We find that idea of the priesthood of the laity where we would not expect it.

In the Liturgy of St. Basil—immediately after the words of institution, come the words: "Ye are an elect race, a *royal priesthood*, a holy nation" (1 Peter ii. 9).

In the Canon of the Roman Mass, where the people (*plebs sancta*), as well as the priests, offer conjointly a pure sacrifice. "Wherefore, O God, we Thy servants, *and also Thy holy people*, do offer to Thy

¹ *Two Treatises on the Church*, William Goode, London, 1843.

² Wilkins, *Concilia*, IV, 619.

Glorious Majesty out of Thine own gifts a pure sacrifice." They assist at the Mass. It is because the people have selected the clergy as their ministers—e.g. in our "*Si quis*"—that they are entitled to minister to them. In our Church—the Holy Communion must not be celebrated without a congregation. We must emphasise the priesthood of the laity, that the laity have an important place, as they had in early days, in all corporate functions, such as the election of clergy, bishops and in conciliar deliberations. The clergy are simply representatives of the whole Church community. Our Lord's commission was given to the disciples—as a commission to the whole Christian society. It is the Christian Society that gives us our Commission—appointing some to a ministry of office—a local ministry; and others to a ministry of enthusiasm. The Lord gave His authority to the whole society as a whole; not to any official class among them.

"There is nothing in the context," says Westcott, "to show that the gift was confined to any particular group." So says Hort (*The Christian Ecclesia*, p. 30). "The Twelve sat that evening as representatives of the Ecclesia at large, they were disciples more than they were apostles."

I FOLLOW THE ROAD. By Anne B. Payson. Putnam. 3s. 6d.

This is an account of a modern woman's search for God, and in an introduction Dr. Stanley Jones tells us of a meeting with the authoress after she had read his book, *The Christ of the Indian Road*. It is an attempt to work out a technique for Christian living largely along psychological lines. Mrs. Payson has for the past six years found great help in living the Christian life through spiritual discipline, more especially along the line of "thought patterns." Her life had been influenced by Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* and by the writings of Mrs. Eddy and Troward, but "since my stroll on the Indian Road I wanted to be of Christ's company. I wanted, for the first time, to live in harmony with His Teaching. I even wanted to go to church—if I were sure it were right and if I shouldn't lose Him in what was said of Him."

The story of how this modern woman disciplined her own life, until from being an inveterate smoker she gave it up and became a surrendered believer and a helper of others, is most interesting. This book will make clerical readers think furiously. It helps one to understand why so many educated people leave the Churches severely alone. Students of religious psychology should not miss it.

A. W. P.
