

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

THE
CHURCHMAN

DECEMBER, 1896.

ART. I.—REUNION.

IN any consideration of the question of the Reunion of Christendom, the intermediate position of our own Church will be felt to have special interest and importance. We stand between the Church of Rome on the one side and the Non-Episcopalian communions on the other. I am not forgetting the Eastern Churches, or their high claims on our sympathy and respect; but we in England are less closely in contact with these than with the great Latin Church and the Protestant bodies which have dispensed with the Episcopal succession. Those of us who yearn for reunion are looking, as our leanings incline us, either towards Rome, or towards Non-Episcopalian Protestantism; we are considering on what terms we might consent to be joined again in some way to the Roman Church, or by what concessions any Protestant communions might be induced to coalesce with the English Church.

I think it will be universally admitted that negotiations aiming at actual reunion on either side are at the present time quite hopeless. As regards Rome, *Roma lacuta est*. The demands of the Papal See are more exacting than ever. Leo XIII. is the most benevolent of Popes, most anxious to commend himself and his Church to all non-Papal Christians; but in his recent Encyclical letter on the Unity of the Church he declares as positively as possible that he will hear of nothing on the part of those who are now separated from Rome but absolute submission to the chair of St. Peter, absolute acceptance of every dogma affirmed by the Vatican Council. And there is no movement in the Roman Catholic Church pretending to overbear the personal authority of the Pope. Anglicans may go over to Rome individually, as they have done; of no other way of reunion can they entertain at

present the slightest hope. Nor is there any desire of corporate reunion with the Anglican Church, here, or in the Colonies, or in the United States, stirring in any single Non-conformist communion. Dissenters find it a simple matter to join the Church, and this way of reunion is the only one thought of.

At the same time it is reasonably urged that aspirations after reunion cannot be without effect; that if the sense of the unchristian nature of schisms in Christendom is growing deeper and more acute in Christian minds, such a feeling must be a breath of the Spirit of Christ; and that it is most desirable that we should let our hopes play freely about ideals of Church Unity. Ah, yes! Christians ought surely to be intolerant of disunion amongst professing Christians; they ought to be convinced that there is something wrong, something to be corrected, if believers in Christ cannot worship and labour in unison. I know what the sectarian spirit has found to say. This is the language it is accustomed to use: "It is no doubt very deplorable that there are so many of those who call themselves Christians who do not entertain right views in religion; the fact is a mystery, and not the only mystery in human existence; but truth is truth, and, whether those who hold the truth are many or few, the truth must be maintained firmly and without compromise; those who have been taught by Christ and the Spirit cannot consent to associate with themselves any who have not been thus taught." What can sound more plausible? Thus have churches and sects and cliques wrapped themselves in cloaks of self-complacent separatism. But it is one good thing in our age, that the bulwarks set up to divide Christians from one another are being undermined. In all denominations we are not so sure of ourselves; we see in those who are not of our communion signs of truth, proofs of goodness, which forbid us to assume that Christ has not taught them, that His Spirit has not moved in them. The Pope may still be obliged to tell us that he is very sorry, but he can only regard us as rebelling against Christ so long as we decline to accept the minutest particulars of what the Church of Rome teaches; but good Roman Catholics do not feel like that. And we of the Church of England are happily not bound to "unchurch" Roman Catholics—whatever unchurching may mean. You may easily meet with delightful instances of intimate Christian fellowship between Anglicans and Roman Catholics, the letter of repulsion proving powerless against the spirit of attraction. And as regards Dissenters, when we see our High Churchmen, including bishops and archbishops, inviting dissenting ministers to join them in prayer-meetings, we want no other proof that

Christian union can live and work underneath denominational differences.

The desire of reunion with Rome may indeed mean nothing but uneasy misgivings as to the safety of our Anglican position. Those who are always dwelling on the "Nulla salus extra ecclesiam" may well be anxious to know for certain what the true Ecclesia is. The question, "Is the Church of Rome the true Church or not?" has haunted and troubled many Anglicans until they have succumbed to the pretensions of the Church which at all events claims, as no other does, to be the one only Church of Christ. And those who cannot bring themselves to the point of going over would find comfort in getting their Church recognised in some way by Rome. But with this kind of craving for reunion I do not deal. I assume that we here are interested in, and sympathize with, that nobler Christian longing, which is troubled by the divisions of Christendom as violating the unity for which Christ prayed. As I have said, we can find no encouragement in the signs of the times to pursue any scheme of corporate reunion. But we do find encouragement, wonderful encouragement, to follow after Christian fellow-feeling, by cherishing a common belief that Christ is seeking all men, a common tenderness towards each other's pious prepossessions, a common desire and hope that all the world may be subdued to Christ. In that direction, we may confidently believe, Christ is pointing.

I can understand its being doubted whether it is desirable to get over the repugnance to popery and the dread of Papists which have been the traditional instincts of Protestants. Such a change of feeling is a very serious matter, and mere indifference to dogma is not a state of mind in which earnest Christians can find comfort. But where Christ leads it is safe to follow, even if the path is an untried one. And to the simple and teachable Christian mind there is a great deal that is attractive and of high promise amongst Roman Catholics at the present time. There is a new interest in the Scriptures, a new desire to get at their real meaning, which may inspire the best hopes. And in a multitude of pious lives we may see that what is dominant, what is vital, is that devout, overmastering reverence for the true Christ which makes all Christians one. With that it cannot but be right to sympathize; and when any mutual approach between Roman Catholics and ourselves is prompted by Christian sympathy, we shall not think it necessary to guard ourselves from misunderstanding or infection by some solemn repudiation of Romish error. The one thing that offers the best promise for the future is that in every section of Christendom hearts should be increasingly drawn towards Christ and increasingly

influenced by the Spirit of Christ. It does not matter so much that errors of belief should remain in the formal profession, if they are tending to drop out of the real religion of those who profess them. Churches and denominations are terribly clogged with the mistakes of past generations, and it is difficult to see how false doctrines are to be got rid of; but the first necessity is that they should wither and grow dead—which is a thing that may easily happen.

But if Christians in all Churches and sects were to be moved to cultivate spiritual sympathy and mutual respect towards each other in Christ, might not this disposition tend to make them satisfied with a Christendom cut up into a multitude of denominations, and be dangerous to belief in that unity of the Church on which stress is undoubtedly laid by the Apostles, as well as by all the later Fathers of the Church? The fear of such an influence has given birth to that pathetic pleading on behalf of the unity of the Church which the Pope has addressed to the Christian world in his recent Encyclical letter. This manifesto is a declaration against the possibility of any kind of union of Christians except under one absolute earthly government. There is nothing new in the Pope's doctrine concerning the Church; he asserts, as he could hardly help doing, that there is but one Church, that the Roman Church is the one Church, that all who do not belong to it are cut off from the grace of Christ, and that if they call themselves Christians they are rebels against Christ; but we seem to trace in this letter a new shrinking from the old sentiment and language of Rome about non-Roman Christians. And there is a certain novelty also, if I am not mistaken, in the ground of the Pope's argument. "Christ the Lord," he says, "instituted and formed the Church; wherefore, when we are asked what its nature is, the main thing is to see what Christ wished, and what, in fact, He did. . . . It is so evident, from the clear and frequent testimonies of Holy Writ, that the true Church of Jesus Christ is one, that no Christian can dare to deny it. But in judging and determining the nature of this unity many have erred in various ways. Not the foundation of the Church alone, but its whole constitution, belongs to the class of things effected by Christ's free choice. For this reason the entire case must be judged by what was actually done. We must, consequently, investigate not how the Church may possibly be one, but how He who founded it willed that it should be one." That is precisely the modern method of inquiry, commonly called the historical method. And it is the Protestant method also, inasmuch as the appeal is to Holy Writ. And the inquiry to which the Pope invites us is of primary interest to all who are thinking about reunion. For we are anxiously

asking ourselves what we are to make of a Christendom divided as we behold it. Is the one Church of Christ conceivable except as a single organized community? Is it the first thing for a Christian to do, to find out which of the competing communions is the true Church, and to "unchurch" all the rest? Or is it safe to hold that a Christian ought to respect the particular calling he has received in his birth, and that his first duty is to believe in and follow Christ to the best of his knowledge and power in the denomination into which he has been born? Let us welcome this appeal of the Pope. We cannot do better than go with him to the New Testament, to see what we can learn as to the original making and form of the Church.

But the Pope soon disappoints us sadly. To find out about the Church of the first days, we should look as a matter of course to the Acts, the Epistles, the Revelation; but all this larger part of the New Testament the Pope ignores, as completely as if he did actually in the more proper sense of the word ignore it—as if he was entirely unacquainted with it. He quotes the familiar words addressed by our Lord to St. Peter: "Upon this rock I will build My Church;" "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not;" "Feed My sheep." Disregarding his own principle, he lays down *a priori* that "Christ must have given to His Church a supreme authority, to which all Christians must render obedience"; that Christ "was obliged, when He ascended into heaven, to designate a vicegerent on earth"; and then he concludes that the supreme authority which Christ was bound to delegate was given to Peter and to his successors. "God confided His Church to Peter, so that he—Peter—might safely guard it with his unconquerable power;" "Jesus Christ appointed Peter to be the head of the Church; and He also determined that the authority instituted in perpetuity for the salvation of all should be inherited by his successors, in whom the same permanent authority of Peter himself should continue." But the Pope does not go on to exhibit to us even Peter, whilst he lived, exercising authority over the universal Church, and guarding it with his unconquerable power. What we do see in the sacred history is a very different state of things: we see Paul founding the Gentile Churches, defiantly declaring that he holds no commission from the Twelve, rebuking Peter, making himself the autocrat of his own Churches. The Pope makes no allusion to all this. Certainly nothing that Roman Catholics can say can explain away the fact that neither in the Acts, nor in the Epistles, nor in the Revelation, is there a single hint that St. Peter had any authority over St. Paul or St. Paul's churches.

To all Christians, and not only to Roman Catholics, there must be something very surprising and not easy to account for in the calling and ministry of St. Paul. It is undeniable that Christ in the Gospels bestows on the Twelve a most definite commission and a special training; that He promises them the twelve thrones of His kingdom; that He gives them much tender and solicitous instruction about the work they were to perform as His representatives and envoys. The Pope adds something, with the usual Roman freedom, to the facts when he says, "To the Apostles and their legitimate successors alone these words have reference: 'Go ye into the whole world to preach the Gospel;' 'Baptizing them;' 'Do this in commemoration of Me;' 'Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them.' And in like manner He ordered the Apostles only, and those who should lawfully succeed them, to feed—that is, to govern with authority—all Christian souls."

But it is evident that on the Day of Pentecost and for some time after the Apostles understood their commission as giving them jointly supreme authority over the Church, and that their authority was recognised without question. But in course of time Saul of Tarsus appears on the scene. He was not one of those to whom the Lord Jesus had given the special apostolic commission. He declared that he had a commission given to him directly from heaven. The Twelve were not informed by their Master that He was giving to another an extraordinary apostolic commission; and—as we should have expected—they regarded him who claimed this appointment with some suspicion and jealousy. St. Paul, for his part, desired to be as a Christian brother with the Twelve, but he would in no way put himself under them. After a while it was recognised by the Apostles and the Church in general that Saul or Paul had a calling from Christ to carry the Gospel to the Gentiles; and he did his work with such effect as to found churches, which included Jews and Gentiles, in a multitude of Gentile cities. He earnestly desired to preserve unity with the Christians of Judæa, and with the Apostles, to whom they looked up; but he maintained his absolute independence. And he was led to do this with the more emphasis because his position gave great offence to many followers of the Twelve, and they denounced him as an unauthorized teacher, who rebelled against the authority which Christ Himself had set up in His Church. St. Paul's defence, as we know, was that his churches were themselves his credentials.

Well, then, when we ask Holy Writ to tell us what Christ willed and actually did in founding and constituting the one Church, it presents to us a number of societies, one section of

which is subject to St. Peter and the Apostles, to whom Christ in His lifetime gave plenary authority and power, and the other to St. Paul, who professed to have received a commission of his own from Christ in heaven. The Pauline Churches were in fellowship with the Petrine, but on a footing of independence and equality. That was the state of things which existed during the active period of St. Paul's Apostleship. It would seem that Christ, when He had sanctioned the principle of formal regularity and order in appointing the Twelve, and keeping the Church subject to them for some time, chose to violate that principle surprisingly and conspicuously in the interest of direct heavenly action and spiritual life, by making an irregular Apostle the greatest and most successful of the founders of the Church. I do not know what we can infer from this actual choice and operation of Christ, by which the Pope so rightly lays down that we should be guided, but these two conclusions: (1) That order and succession and transmitted authority are good; (2) that they are not so good as the Spirit and life.

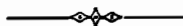
St. Paul stands before us unmistakably a Divine exception a heavenly justification of irregularity, an authoritative intimation that God may choose to interfere with His own ordinance. And we may find a great deal in human history that answers to this revelation. From all parts there arises evidence that order and transmitted authority cannot guarantee to men goodness and life; nay, that, with all the benefits which it belongs to them to bestow, they have a dangerous tendency to ally themselves with lifelessness and corruption. The best external order may tempt men to look to it, rather than to God. Our Lord and those whom He called had known the Jewish priesthood, and had seen to what ungodliness the sacred institutions of Israel might be made to minister; and must we not believe that Christ foresaw that it would not be well for His Church that it should become one organized body, governed by one external authority? Let us thank the Pope for so emphatically putting before us the living action of Christ for our guide; and let us consider what was implied for the instruction of the future Church when He that wrought for Peter unto the Apostleship of the circumcision, wrought for Paul also unto the Gentiles.

Meditating on the true unity of the Church, in judging and determining the nature of which many—as the Pope says—have erred in various ways, let us note that Christ did not set up a vicegerent to rule the Church and the nations; that He kept the supreme authority in His own heavenly hands; that when the Twelve were actually governing the whole Church, in the belief that they had received from their Master a com-

mission to do so, He did not will that this order should become universal and permanent, but sent another Apostle out of due course to be independent of the Twelve, and to labour more abundantly and with more success than they all; that it may be called a law of God's kingdom that, when order grows stagnant, life is brought in some irregular way from above; that no regulated credentials, no authorized transmission of power, should be so sacred to God's children as His own Spirit working in the hearts and lives of men.

If we can believe in Christ as the living Head, we may take His one body to be something more perfect than any of the earthly organizations by which it is so imperfectly set forth, and may see a true limb of the body in each of these organizations, just in so far as it is faithful to Christ and instinct with His Spirit. We are under no compulsion to circumscribe any one or more of the societies which profess allegiance to Christ, and to force upon ourselves the distasteful conclusion that Christ owns all within the circle, and disowns all without it. For ourselves of the Church of England, we may rightly prize and hold fast all the advantages that have come down to us, and especially our Church's unbroken history and national form, so long as these do not move us to arrogance, but to thankfulness and a desire to serve. I believe that St. Paul would say to each Christian society, See that you fill your place in the one body of Christ through earnest obedience to the Head, and submission of your hearts to the Spirit, and wait the time of Christ for such readjusting of the Churches as may be necessary to the perfect organization of Christendom.

J. LLEWELYN DAVIES.



ART. II.—BISHOP HAROLD BROWNE.¹

PART I.

A CURSORY observer might remark, on seeing the announcement of this biography, "Is there not already a plethora of biographies of ecclesiastical dignitaries?" Blomfield, Whateley, Hampden, Alford, Hook, Stanley, Fraser, Bickersteth, Manning, Harold Browne, Thorold, and still more recently Magee, have all been set before the reading public within half a century; if the process continues, they

¹ "Edward Harold Browne, D.D., Lord Bishop of Winchester": a Memoir, by S. W. Kitchin, D.D., Dean of Durham. (John Murray.)