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

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

The Problem of Home Reunion.

BY THE REV. CANON H. HENSLEY HENSON, B.D.

THE religious situation in modern England is sufficiently indicated by a little episode of the recent Miltonic commemoration. At a special service in Hereford Cathedral, the Bishop invited the distinguished Nonconformist, Dr. Horton, to read the lessons, an invitation which was as courteously accepted as it had been courteously conveyed. It might have seemed impossible that so manifestly becoming an arrangement—for Milton himself was a famous Nonconformist—should have been twisted into an occasion for an insulting assertion of Anglican exclusiveness. Yet the *Church Times*—the most popular and powerful of Anglican journals—was equal to the task. A characteristic note in the "Summary" denounced the "absurdity" in Hereford Cathedral, and the "eccentricities" of the Bishop, who was said to have acted "in total disregard of both the letter and the spirit of the Church's plain rules." Nor was Dr. Horton himself left unrebuked. "As for Dr. Horton, it is surprising that he submitted to the indignity of being allowed to do only what a layman may do. The humblest deacon might have preached the sermon, and the obscurest priest might have celebrated at the high altar, but Dr. Horton could get no farther than the lectern, and that only through the complacency of certain officials who apparently pay no regard to the obligations and requirements of their office." I do not here comment on the legal doctrine of this offensive paragraph (which, however, I believe to be false), nor on its bad taste (which is, of course, extreme), for I desire to fasten attention on the ecclesiastical theory which it presupposes, and the arrogant spirit which it breathes. The *Church Times* has made itself very prominent in educational discussions. Do the writers and readers of its pages ever ask themselves what right they have to expect from Nonconformists any serious attention to their voluble asseverations about religious equality in the schools,

when they cherish so tenaciously whatever symbolizes religious inequality in the churches? Do they ever reflect on the origin of such legal disabilities as are held to hinder the interchange of pulpits between Anglicans and Nonconformists? Can they expect Nonconformists to forget that those disabilities are the sole surviving relics of that code of persecution, which disgraced the "golden age" of victorious Anglicanism? When Dr. Eugene Stock describes the practical difficulties of restoring unity of organization to English Christians, and finds himself carried to the conclusion that only by the triumph of the indispensable Episcopate can such unity be secured, we do not so much disagree as feel impelled to seek from him some preliminary explanations.

The very phrase "Home Reunion" is unfortunate and misleading. It suggests an historically discredited conception of Christian unity, and it almost necessitates acceptance of a gravely inadequate conception of the Church.

"Union" in the old sense can never be the rightful object of an Evangelical Christian's hope and effort. In the past there have been two kinds of religious union in this country—the pre-Reformation, based on sacerdotalism, and the pre-Toleration, based on political policy. To which of them does "reunion" point? The Episcopalian, of course, has his answer ready. He would re-establish the kind of union which existed before the breach with Rome, merely substituting the Bishop or the Bishops for the Pope. He has even imagined a medieval Anglicanism after the fashion of his own ideal, just as the new critics tell us that the postexilic scribes created the tabernacle in the likeness of the Temple. The guarantee of union is to be the Episcopate reigning with exclusive authority by right Divine. Dr. Eugene Stock, of course, repudiates Episcopalianism of this kind, but he is hard put to it when he seeks a formula which, without endorsing the sacerdotal principle, shall justify the exclusive claim. A politically secured union, such as the Tudors and Stuarts maintained, is manifestly out of the question. In an almost petulant sentence, Dr. Eugene Stock complains that

some Evangelicals, when they repudiate the notion of an essential Episcopacy, are really disloyal to Episcopacy itself. "I sometimes think," he says, "to judge by the utterances of some, that they really mean, not *bene esse*, but *male esse*; while I, for my part, entirely believe in the *bene esse*." Here is manifest confusion of thought. The two conceptions of Episcopacy are not related as phases of a single belief; they represent mutually destructive beliefs. To hold, as every English Churchman must be presumed to hold, that Episcopacy is a desirable form of ecclesiastical government, though not an essential form, is really to *deny* its exclusive authority, and to repudiate the *dogma* of Apostolic succession, even though, in some rather hazy sense, the *fact* be affirmed. When, moreover, it is said that Episcopacy is "not of the *esse* of the Church," it is plainly implied that an Episcopacy which claims to be essential is really, by reason of that injurious and unwarrantable claim, of the *male esse*. Dr. Eugene Stock himself certainly believes this, though he is deceived into thinking he does not by the old fallacy of using one word in different senses. Episcopacy as an essential element of ecclesiastical life is one thing; Episcopacy as one form of legitimate Church order, albeit the best, is another. The first was the belief of the medieval Church; the last is that of the reformed Church of England. When, therefore, Dr. Eugene Stock tells us that "we cannot possibly hope for reunion except on the basis of the historic Episcopate," we are entitled to retort that union on that basis has been already tried, and lies behind us in history discredited beyond recovery.

It may, indeed, go without saying that some single form of ecclesiastical polity is properly connoted by the phrase "Home Reunion," and it is at least natural in an Anglican to think that some adaptation of Episcopacy must provide that form. It does not, however, appear very helpful to emphasize this aspect of the general subject, for not only is the emphasis apt to stimulate on the Anglican side certain notions which are misleading and divisive, but also on the non-Anglican side it creates prejudice which is eminently unfavourable to reconciliation. If ever Epis-

copacy again receives universal acceptance in this country, it will be because its practical advantages have become patent to all, not because its theoretical claim has been made out to the satisfaction of everybody. On practical grounds, some form of Episcopacy is likely to commend itself to every extending Church. The early rise and universal extent of Episcopal government in the Church are sufficient proofs of its practical convenience; the same needs will continue to suggest the same arrangements for their satisfaction. While, then, I agree with Dr. Eugene Stock in thinking that, if ever the Christians of England are again included in a single organization, that organization will probably be Episcopal, I fail to see any advantage in emphasizing that opinion at the present stage of the question, and I see many grave disadvantages.

Few things have astonished me more in recent discussions than the wide acceptance of the notion that Episcopacy, conceived of as essential, is *favourable* to the visible unity of the Church. Christian history tells another story. "Our Apostles knew through our Lord Jesus that there would be strife over the name of the Bishop's office," wrote St. Clement of Rome at the end of the first century. Experience soon gave melancholy emphasis to that melancholy foreboding. "I am disposed to avoid every assembly of Bishops," wrote St. Gregory Nazianzen in the golden age of Episcopal government; and he added the reason, "for the love of strife and the thirst for superiority are beyond the power of words to express." In point of fact, Episcopal government has been as little able to secure orthodoxy as to preserve unity. It has not even been able to maintain its own independence. Only in a merely nominal sense which involves something like an abuse of language can the "historic Episcopate" be said to survive within the Roman Church, for Roman Bishops are simply the creatures and echoes of the Universal Ordinary and Infallible Doctor who reigns by Divine appointment from the throne of St. Peter. In the Episcopal Church of the East unity is far to seek. "When," observes a writer in the *Church Quarterly*, "there are seven Patriarchs of

Antioch, and in almost every district are three, four, or five independent jurisdictions, the unity of Christendom is terribly injured."

Why, then, should it pass among Anglicans as almost a self-evident proposition, which can be made the basis of argument, that the "historic Episcopate" would maintain unity even if, by an all but unimaginable miracle, its authority were again recognized universally throughout England and Wales? Who can guarantee the Church against another non-jurors' schism? Why should not Lord Halifax and his friends avail themselves of the rich storehouse of "Catholic" precedents, in order to repudiate openly the authority of every Bishop whom they may regard as unorthodox or uncatholic? There is but a short step between condemning a Bishop's decisions and rejecting his authority. The spirit of the modern "Catholic," indeed, is rather Congregationalist than Episcopalian, save when the exclusive Divine right of an Episcopalian ministry is concerned.

What, moreover, precisely is this "*historic* Episcopate"? Is it represented by the Presbyter-Bishop of the Pastoral Epistles and St. Clement of Rome? or by the monarchical Bishop of St. Ignatius and St. Cyprian? or by the tribal Bishop of the Celtic Church? or by the feudal Bishop of medieval Europe? or by the Erastian Bishop of Tudor England? or by the "tulchan" Bishop of seventeenth-century Scotland? or by the political Bishop of the Hanoverians? or by the "Apostolic" Bishop of the Tractarians? or by the Episcopal presbyter of the Presbyterian "High" Churchmen? or by the Delegate-Bishop of modern Rome? or, finally, by the Superintendent-Bishop of some Protestant Churches? All are equally historic, and so are many other forms of ecclesiastical system. History is never a partisan, and the tradition which it delivers from the past to the present is too vast and various to serve any particular theory. To my thinking this phrase, "historic Episcopate," is unmeaning and unhelpful. It really means no more than the particular form of ecclesiastical government which modern Anglicans possess, and which is repudiated by everybody else.

Dr. Eugene Stock, indeed, tells us that the "historic Episcopate" was "before either the historic Creeds or the historic Canon of Scripture," and we may conclude that it is the Episcopate of the fourth century which he would distinguish as uniquely "historic," and by that title bind on us as the indispensable "basis of reunion." Here, again, he is led astray by a careless use of words. An "historic" document is a document bearing a definite date. The Creed of Pius IV. is as "historic" as the Creed of Nicæa. No doubt Dr. Eugene Stock means by "the historic Creeds" the three Creeds contained in the Prayer-Book, and so far we may allow his usage. But the historicity of a document and that of an institution are different. The one suggests date of origin, the other continuity of life. Magna Carta and the English Monarchy are both "historic," but not in the same way. Magna Carta is "historic" because its origin in the year 1215 is registered; the English Monarchy is "historic" because its existence from the distant antiquity of the national life is known. The Episcopate must be "historic" in the latter sense; and then the difficulty to which we have adverted arises. What phase, of the many phases, of this ancient government is "indispensable"? Before any practical use of the term "historic" can be made, it must be precisely defined. Until that is done we are in the regions of sentiment and rhetoric, the farthest removed in the world from the plane of good sense. Is it suggested that, so long as we retain the name of Episcopacy, it is entirely indifferent what system we thus describe? Even if we shut our eyes to all difficulties, and assume that there is an "historic Episcopate" prior to Creeds and Canon, which we can reproduce and stereotype at the present time, what have we really gained?

What security can we find against the recurrence of the old disasters? Why should the resuscitated system prove more tenacious than before? Why should not Canterbury become the seat of a new Papacy? or a schism between England and America renew the scandal of the older schism of East and West? or, in fine, why should not history repeat itself in every

article of ancient failure and strife? I cannot regard it as a serious proposition that the Church of the twentieth century can only find the solution of its problems by recovering from the past precisely that phase of ecclesiastical government which failed to maintain itself some fifteen centuries ago.

Dr. Eugene Stock sweeps aside as irrelevant the question whether the "historic Episcopate" was or was not Apostolic, or even primitive; whether there have been breaks in the "succession"; whether its conditions have changed. To him Anglican history is a continuous thing for thirteen centuries, and it is sufficient that the Episcopate has been coeval with the Church. This "short and easy" way is not really possible. The Anglican Church as we know it is the creature of a great revolution carried through in the teeth of the "historic Episcopate," and having as one of its conspicuous results such an isolation of the English Bishops as had never been known before in Christian experience. If the Reformers of the English Church had adopted the now fashionable doctrine of Episcopacy, they would have been speedily carried by their logic back to the Papal obedience, which they could not but admit to have been the rule of English Christianity from its start. The only "historic Episcopate" known to them was an Episcopate subject to the spiritual supremacy of the Pope. The Episcopate which came into existence with Matthew Parker's consecration had practical justifications enough, but could it, in the eyes of his contemporaries, be regarded as the perpetuation of the "historic Episcopate"?

If for "Home Reunion" we could substitute such a phrase as the "recognition of Christian unity," we should be on safer ground in these discussions.

The present situation ignores that unity, and, indeed, implicitly contradicts it. We ought not to acquiesce in so manifest a departure from the plainly expressed will of our Divine Lord. How can we set about the task of giving visible expression to our spiritual fraternity? The receiving of the Holy Communion is admittedly the Divinely ordained method of

confessing discipleship, and the fraternity which discipleship creates. Are we right in our present handling of the Lord's Supper? Extreme Episcopalians, of course, cut the Gordian knot by refusing to recognize the validity of all Sacraments ministered by non-Episcopalian ministers. Even those who are prepared on certain conditions (which, however, imply the normal invalidity of non-Episcopal ordinations) to recognize the "orders" of Presbyterians, do so only on the old vicious principle of the Apostolic Succession transmitted through the clergy, conceived of as an order within, rather than the executive of, the Church; and this petty concession would in any case have no effect on the English problem, since Presbyterians are few and far between south of the Tweed.

Evangelicals cannot take this line, and must face the practical question frankly. If we recognize the Holy Communion ministered solemnly and orderly in the Nonconformist churches to be equally with the Anglican "Celebration" a valid fulfilment of the Saviour's commandment, how can we rightly prohibit intercommunion between the Churches? Probably most Evangelicals readily admit devout Nonconformists to Communion in the parish church, while themselves shrinking from the notion of communicating in a Nonconformist chapel. But how is this distinction to be religiously justified? It may fairly be said that in the existing confusion some securities may, and, indeed, must, be reasonably required against the risks of false doctrine, lax living, and sheer ignorance. Here, precisely, I would find the direction in which our efforts could be directed with best hope of success. If, postulating the recognition of organized and orderly Nonconformist Churches, we could secure some understanding as to the conditions under which baptized persons were in these Churches admitted to Communion, we should lay the foundation for federated action over the whole field of religious work. If, for example, it were understood that in the Wesleyan, Methodist, Congregational, and Baptist Churches (which include the majority of Nonconformists) none was admitted to Communion before the age of fifteen, and then

after a careful instruction in the faith as set forth—say, in the Free Church Catechism—and that such admission was a solemn, public act, recognized and registered as such, the whole aspect of Nonconformity in Anglican eyes would change for the better. At present a Nonconformist communicant may be an intelligent and instructed Christian, or a mere enthusiast destitute of the most rudimentary knowledge of Christianity. A similar difficulty arising from the defective education of the Nonconformist ministers has largely vanished, and, at least in the case of the more important charges, their education equals or surpasses that of the Anglican clergy. In one part of the country the educational standard of Nonconformity is said to be markedly superior to that of Anglicanism. “We are,” said Sir Harry Reichel to the Manchester Church Congress, “if things remain as they are in Wales, within measurable distance of a time when theological learning, even in a subject like Church history, will have to be sought not in the Church parsonage, but in the Nonconformist manse.”

Once secure intercommunion in some such way as I have indicated, and the whole religious atmosphere of the country will be altered for good. That interchange of pulpits under due safeguards should be arranged may be taken for granted. It is, indeed, well worthy the consideration of the Evangelical clergy whether they ought not to claim from the Bishops in this matter the same benevolent neutrality which has conceded to the sacerdotalists, as matters lying (to use the Archbishop of York’s phrase) “within the zone of toleration,” the “six points,” and “reservation.” Gradually order might be evolved from the existing chaos; the efforts of the friendly and federated Churches might be intelligently correlated, and the poison of competition eliminated from pastoral work. Common training of candidates for Ordination might be arranged, and, finally, some closer union of organization might be reached. Every advance would be suggested by experience, and nothing would presuppose those sacerdotal pretensions, which have been the bane of Christianity from the start, and the true principle of ecclesiastical division.

In a recently published volume, "Jesus and the Gospel," an eminent Scotch divine, Professor James Denney, has written a concluding chapter which deserves the most careful consideration of all who "seek the peace of Jerusalem." He dwells on the necessity of recognizing "the claims of intellectual liberty," and at the same time of guarding that unique supremacy of Christ which has from the first been the core of Christianity. "Christian people who are consciously at one in their attitude to Christ, and in their sense of obligation to Him, see that they are kept in different communions, and incapacitated from co-operation in work and worship, because they have inherited different theological traditions to which they are assumed to be bound." Most rightly they chafe against a position which prohibits the confession of their deepest conviction. The sentiment of Christian fraternity presses for adequate expression, and allies itself with a new consciousness of the necessity of religious union if in any measure the spiritual task of Christianity is to be fulfilled in the modern world.

"It is certain that before Christians can combine to face with effect the problems presented by society to the spirit of Christ, they must overcome somehow the forces which perpetuate division among themselves." Reason and experience combine to demonstrate that a theological or intellectual agreement is impossible. Even in the New Testament, "though there is one faith, there is not one Christology." It is the one faith which must form the basis of Christian unity. "It is perhaps not too bold to suggest that the symbol of the Church's unity might be expressed thus: I believe in God through Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord and Saviour." Such a brief but sufficient summary of the Scriptural belief would "provide the only reasonable intellectual basis for union." Once settle the point of principle, and all other questions fall into their true order of importance. Men associated on the basis of faith in Christ might debate with moderation and temper the points of discipline: what instruction should precede Communion, what securities for knowledge and loyalty should attach to Ordination,

how best the moral conditions of Christian membership should be asserted and maintained, what guarantees against mere individualism could be provided. Until the ultimate fact of discipleship is acknowledged, no step can be taken ; when that is once acknowledged, all steps are possible.

We are not within sight of unity of organization ; but, with good-will and reasonable self-suppression, we might roll away at once the main reproach of " our unhappy divisions."

Nor can I rate so meanly as Dr. Eugene Stock the religious worth of even occasional interchange of pulpits and intercommunion. At least, the principle of fraternity would be solemnly owned, the roots of proselytizing intolerance would be cut, and the door thrown open to the unimpeded activity of the spirit of fellowship.

No greater calamity to the cause of " Home Reunion " could well be imagined than that Evangelical Churchmen should turn their backs on their own sound spiritual tradition, and allow themselves to be carried away by the reigning " Episcopalianism " into accepting the proposition that " we cannot possibly hope for reunion except on the basis of the historic Episcopate." At least, let them resist the notion that the *basis* of union in a spiritual society must be acceptance of a specific form of ecclesiastical order. Let them ask in all seriousness whether, if that basis must be postulated, they as Evangelicals have any logical or religious *raison d'être* left.

