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OUR UNHAPPY DIVISIONS. A Consideration of Some Obstacles to Reunion.

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A GREAT International Conference on Christian Reunion will be held in Edinburgh next August and in view of the unrest and disunity amongst the nations many will hope and pray that the Christians there assembled will come to such agreement among themselves as will set an example for a similar happy result in the political world. All the way down through the ages religion has been found to be the only solvent for the troubles, trials and difficulties of mankind. It has been defined as man's reaction, as an incipient personality, to the cosmos and during his long history religious experience and the different expressions of it, have undergone a gradual development which ended in Christianity. This we believe to be the final revelation of God in relation to the human race. Christianity is a way of life which gives rise to a certain type of character and it results in a growing experience of God which in main outline reproduces itself, true to type in every country where it is propagated. The Christian in England has a real spiritual affinity with the Christian in China, and in any particular Christian country the unity of thought on fundamental Christian truths transcends all denominational differences. In regard to the three greatest branches of the Apostolic Church, each lays emphasis on some special aspect of Christian Truth, and most theologians admit that each aspect seems to be a necessary part of the whole. A famous Russian theologian of the 19th Century (Vladimir Soloviev) aptly summed it up when he described the Christian East as emphasizing Worship, Roman Catholicism authority, and Anglo-Saxon Christianity, human responsibility and freedom.

These three aspects of Christianity must be kept in a proper relationship in any consideration of the important subject of Reunion—they are complementary to each other, not mutually exclusive.

During the past few years a philosophy of religion has been evolved in which Christians of nearly every denomination have acted on a principle of co-operation with other Christians for the moral and spiritual welfare of humanity. This has produced an atmosphere favourable to a closer alliance with each other in fellowship and prayer and worship and the leaders in every church are now insisting on the necessity to face boldly all the obstacles to complete Reunion.

What are these obstacles? Many answers will be given to this question, but I will give two which can be guaranteed to lead to an animated discussion in any gathering of clergy throughout the country. One is a matter of internal discipline, the other, a question of Catholic order.

1. The idea that no one can be permitted to participate in our Holy Communion Service unless he be confirmed.

This has been challenged recently by an incumbent in the Diocese of Birmingham who sent a letter to an influential newspaper stating that he had arranged "a United Communion Service, at which a Methodist minister will preach and both Methodist and Baptist ministers will administer the Chalice." He further stated that on a complaint being made to the Bishop of Birmingham, Dr. Barnes replied, asking "what there could be that was un-Christian in a gathering of Christians together round the Table of their Lord?" There is no doubt that this challenge will be taken up by many partisans and while the wisdom of the action may rightly be questioned, it is necessary to state that the rule in reference to Confirmation is binding only upon members of the Church of England. This was the constant ruling of Archbishop Tait and it has been followed by his successors Drs. Benson and Temple and Lord Davidson. Confirmation is a good and convenient Rule, but it is not a "Catholic principle." In the Roman Church where there is no "laying on of hands," the outward sign is not observed; and in the Orthodox Church the custom is for Priests to confirm, not Bishops. Our custom is Scriptural and of proved value, but if baptized members of other churches desire on special occasions visibly to proclaim their fellowship with other Christians, is there any better way of doing so than by partaking together of the One Bread? In this connection it is well to remember that Dr. Hort wrote: "The members which make up the one Ecclesia are not communities, but individual men. In other words, I am a member of the Catholic Church, not because I am a member of the Church of England, but because I became a member of Christ in Baptism, and have striven to be faithful to Him." Moreover, the Catholic Church is defined in our Holy Communion Office as "the blessed company of all faithful people," and the Rule, in an exclusive sense, is not so understood in the Episcopal Church of U.S.A. The relations there, and also in Canada, between Episcopalian and other Christian bodies are markedly more friendly than they are in England.

2. The idea that churches without Episcopacy are not to be accounted churches at all.

This contention is much more serious and far-reaching. It prevents spiritual fellowship and it cripples every conference on Reunion. The Bishops in the Lambeth Conference of 1920 decided on the bold policy of recognition of all properly constituted bodies of Christians, but their Resolutions have had little practical effect and they are conveniently forgotten by those who have no wish to remember them. What were the facts which influenced the Bishops in 1920? No doubts were cast on the intrinsic value of Episcopacy as a method of government and as the historic witness to a principle of Apostolic

Succession, but after careful research and enquiry the fact that there were other forms of government in the Primitive Church was established beyond question. Some theologians, however, were not convinced, but it is now clear that their views were due to a mechanical interpretation of the historic fact of Apostolic Succession. They added to the fact a theory, turned the theory into a doctrine, and then proceeded to impose the doctrine upon the whole church. We are still told that this theory is the only legitimate expression of the corporate mind of the church, but Prebendary Grane has shown conclusively that there is a considerable weight of opinion clearly against it. The cause of Unity always and everywhere is the cause of Truth. Many Christians feel that the rivalries, jealousies and estrangements between Churches which are fundamentally at one, must cease. The remarkable response of the Free Church leaders to the Archbishop's Call to Renewal seems to point the way to the evolution of a truly National Church. The compilers of our Prayer Book were wiser than they knew when with admirable comprehensiveness they defined the mystical Body of Christ as "the blessed company of all faithful people." This includes Roman Catholics on the one hand and Free Churchmen on the other. Many will rejoice when the Roman Church becomes truly Catholic, but at present she remains in lonely isolation, tied to the dead hand of the past, and to her all other bodies of Christians are schismatics and heretics. A Reformation from within may come some time, but her terms at present for co-operation are absolute surrender and complete absorption.

There is much more hope for Reunion with the Free Churches in England and the non-Roman Churches of the Continent. We must, however, meet as partners sharing together in the riches of Christ and examining the causes of disunion with a calm mind and in a true perspective. There is good reason for believing that the simple and dignified declaration of the Lambeth Quadrilateral (Holy Scripture, Episcopacy, The Two Sacraments and the Two Ecumenical Creeds) will be the basis upon which Home Reunion will be built. Bishop Lightfoot has given us a guiding principle:—

"Only let the Church that I love keep its unbroken tradition in the one hand and the open Bible in the other; and it will be in the long run a great means in God's hands for reuniting all bodies of Christians in one."

The time which has elapsed since these words were spoken has strengthened their force and the trend of modern opinion is concisely summed up by the Bishop of Gloucester: "The idea of Succession, which results from the Church's rule of ordination, is an historical fact, and not a doctrine. It represents an external connection with the first beginnings of Christianity which is of infinite value for the Church. . . . One part of the work of Christian reunion should be to restore and secure the links of Succession throughout the whole world; but no theory of orders need compel us to deny Divine grace to those separated from us. . . . Ordination depends upon the authority of the Church, and not the Church upon ordination."