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THE GOSPEL CONFRONTS THE WORLD

(B) "THE WEAKENED CHURCH."

"ONE . . . THAT THE WORLD MAY BELIEVE."

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THE words from our Lord's High-priestly prayer which are used to explain the title of this paper leave no room for doubt that its function should be to consider the great subject of Christian Reunion, a subject indeed with which this Conference has been concerned since its inception, in the desire for which it may even be said to have been born.

I shall endeavour to deal shortly with the progress of the Movement for Reunion, especially in the homeland, and its position to-day, and then try to indicate the great hindrances, and wherein consists the call to prayer and action.

I remember an article long ago in the *Review of Reviews* on "Cecil Rhodes' Religion," in which W. T. Stead described it as being a desire to co-operate with God in what he considered to be God's present action in the world : and, as in those far-away days it seemed a possible interpretation of what God was doing in the world that He was engaged in painting its map red, Cecil Rhodes' religion consisted in efforts, not altogether unsuccessful, to assist Him in that particular. (Painting the map of the world "red" has assumed another significance since those days, and it is perhaps some gain that those engaged in it no longer think they are helping the Almighty.)

But, however false the interpretation, the principle of Cecil Rhodes was not at fault. The follower of Him Who said : "My Father worketh until now, and I work," who knows that Christianity is a dynamic religion and that the Spirit of God is ever at work amongst men, must always feel that "he is here to help God," and must, above all things, desire to be in the line of, and to be taking his part in, the fulfilling of God's present Will. If that be so, our subject is of the first importance. For who can doubt that, in these days in which we live, God is "working His purpose out" by the begetting in the hearts of His people a longing for unity such as no other age has witnessed.

It has been, indeed, His age-long purpose. Our Lord's purpose was to found a Society in which His followers would be bound together in the ties of brotherhood, and it is this Society which has come to be called the Christian Church. To quote Lambeth, 1920, "Everything which the New Testament teaches concerning the Church presupposes its essential unity."

Whether or no there are to be found in the New Testament two conceptions of the nature of the Church such as we are accustomed to call the "church visible," and the "church invisible," there is no manner of doubt that the real one-ness of those who are His, the exact numbers and individuals of whom He, and He alone knoweth, was to be manifested in a Society, visible on earth, known to men by its oneness, and showing a world where sin is ever the sunderer the way to a unity where love reigns.

Nor in the minds of His followers has that Divine purpose been wholly lost sight of. Hence, in the scanty records of the early centuries of Christianity which have come down to us, their appearance of being almost wholly occupied with combating the heretic and schismatic who would rend the Church's unity. Hence the conception of the Middle Ages, of One Holy Catholic Church, embracing all nations who would in her fellowship. Hence, too, when such unity of "one faith, one baptism" had become only attainable by the practical denial of "One Lord," those who, at the Reformation, broke that unity, attempted in smaller spheres, whether of the nation, or of identical fundamental belief which cut across national boundaries, to make but one outward Church of Christ. We should not, for instance, forget the greatness of the ideal which in England made Puritan and Anglican refuse to admit each other's right to exist in the Church of Christ in one nation, however much we deplore its actual results. It is, after all, but a mark of the last couple of centuries that the phrase, "The Churches" has been substituted for "The Church."

And God is recalling men to-day to rediscover and to try to fulfil His great purpose of "One Church, one faith, one Lord."

He is leading Communion of His followers, long sundered, and organized in view of their differences from each other, to seek and find organic union in a greater whole. What else do the recent Unions in Presbyterianism, in Methodism, and what else do the South India proposals mean? (I name but the most outstanding examples of a movement which runs through all Christendom.)

He is leading those in all Communion (save one) to search how a real unity may be found in faith and order, helped along by a newly discovered unity in life and work.

A quickened sense of the duty of social service and the development of the Missionary enterprise have brought home the waste and evil of separation, and have revealed in clearer light the need and the possibility of closer co-operation. The rise of militant secularism, and of the totalitarian conception of the State, challenging the existence of the Church, are flaming signals to many Christians that "God wills Reunion."

Amongst members of the Church of England there has been an urge to Reunion in two directions. In the Anglo-Catholic section of its members there has been born a great desire to escape from a position in which they unchurch every other Christian community except one which unchurches them. Years not long past have seen approaches

to the Church of Rome, but the wholly abortive Malines Conversations have made it clear even to those least willing to be convinced that Rome's only terms for Reunion, for any outside her pale, are those of Hitler for Czecho-Slovakia.

But Anglo-Catholic eyes have been directed towards other Communion than that of Rome, the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Old Catholics. And, though it might be thought that any measure of Reunion attainable with Churches whose sphere of action—not to say whose whole intellectual and spiritual development—is far removed from our own, would have few practical results either in deepening appreciation of truth, or in united action against a hostile or sceptical world, they have nevertheless concentrated their attention on those bodies, because they are on the Catholic and not on the Evangelical side of Church tradition. Their zeal, however, in the cause of Reunion (though thus limited), may well be envied and should be imitated. So great has it been that the recognition of the validity of Anglican Orders has been secured by the Church of Constantinople, and by the Conference of Old Catholic Bishops. And thus, at the 1930 Lambeth Conference, while there was little to report with regard to the Free Churches at home except sterile discussions, attention was focused on the Orthodox and Old Catholic Churches. With the former, indeed, no further steps towards intercommunion have been taken. But with the latter, free and full intercommunion was officially authorised by the Conference.

The result of this, whether it were in the minds of those chiefly responsible for it or not, was that the Free Churches felt themselves cold-shouldered, and, to all appearances, the movement for Home-Reunion had suffered a setback.

Since 1930 also, further approaches to the Church of Roumania, and the recognition by that Church of Anglican Orders, after a presentation to them of Anglican doctrine which in part was contrary to its formularies and was entirely unacceptable to Evangelical or Moderate Churchmen, indicated another attempt to direct the course of the movement towards Reunion into a channel which promised no practical usefulness and which could be only successful by compromising or mis-stating the Anglican position.

But it is time to turn to the consideration of the Movement for Home Reunion. It is this which this Conference has had particularly in mind ; not that it does not long for the Reunion of all Christendom, nor that it is wholly pragmatic in its outlook, but because it believes that the differences between us and the Free Churches are differences not of faith, but of order, and that the stress laid on order as if it were of the same, or even (as it would seem) of greater importance than, faith, is fatally wrong.

The movement for Home Reunion has a history which goes far back beyond 1920. But the Lambeth Conference of that year may well be our starting point, for that Conference issued a powerful appeal for unity : and in it, referring to what it described as " the great non-episcopal Communion standing for rich elements of truth, liberty and life, which might otherwise have been obscured and neglected," it

says, "we thankfully acknowledge that their ministries have been manifestly blessed, and used by the Holy Spirit as effective means of grace." In 1923 a statement by the Anglicans on the Joint Conference appointed at Lambeth as a result of appeal asserts that "such ministries are real ministries of Christ's Word and Sacraments in the Universal Church."

Yet that same statement, holding that such ministries may nevertheless be irregular or defective, went on to insist that in any United Church, existing Free Church ministers must be episcopally ordained. The Council of the Free Churches answered this by saying that they were unable to see the consistency of a position which, at one moment acknowledges that Free Church ministers are already ministers of Christ's Word and Sacraments in the Universal Church and, at the next, says that they must be ordained to the ministry of that very Word and those very Sacraments—and unhesitatingly refused to accept Episcopal ordination as a necessary preliminary to Reunion. And, although this was afterwards modified by a suggestion of ordination *sub-conditions*, the Free Church Council in 1925 returned the final answer that "the question of authorization must be answered by some other method than ordination."

That year, and the statement by the Free Church Council ushered in "a pause" in the approaches between Anglicans and Free Churchmen and the Joint Committee appointed by Lambeth did not meet again. Although in the five years much had been gained in the way of mutual knowledge and understanding, yet, as the last statement of that committee expressly said that its discussions had been in no sense negotiations for Reunion, it was not unnatural that in the next five years the movement for Home Reunion languished: and the events of Lambeth, 1930, may well have had the effect of making the rank and file of Free Churchmen (at any rate) feel that the wind of Reunion was blowing in a contrary direction.

But, in spiritual warfare, battles may be lost, but not a campaign. And the movement towards Home Reunion has gathered strength in the years that have followed Lambeth, 1930.

One great reason for this has been the "Faith and Order Movement." Although its first gathering at Lausanne, 1927, evinced little more than the ability to agree to differ with mutual respect and courtesy, at the second, at Edinburgh last year, the measure of agreement, not all of it agreement by formula, at which representatives of Churches as widely sundered as the Orthodox and the Baptists arrived, was remarkable.

A greater reason was the clamant call which came from the mission field. A definite plan for a Union between the Anglican Church of India, the Wesleyan Methodist Church and the South India United Church (mainly Congregationalist in form), in an area of South India was submitted to the Lambeth Conference, and its promoters were encouraged to proceed with it and the Churches of the Anglican Communion were urged to stand by their brethren with generous goodwill. It was on lines suggested by this South India Scheme that, after Lambeth 1930, Conferences between Anglicans and Free Churchmen

were restarted. Their very strenuous labours since 1930 have advanced the whole matter of Home Reunion a stage further.

Apart from important pamphlets, they have produced, in 1935, *A Sketch of a United Church*, and this year have amplified this in an *Outline of a Reunion Scheme for the Church of England and the Evangelical Free Churches in England*. Its authors invite for it wide attention. Its Preface indeed reminds readers that its purpose is but to give a general outline of the kind of Church in which the Churches represented might find themselves united without loss of what is specially valuable in their respective traditions, and that the stage for actual negotiation has not yet been reached.

Nevertheless, Lambeth 1940, might well be a starting point for such actual negotiations : for here is the vision of what might be a Church of England in fact, as well as in name, a Church in which there would be unity in variety, which would not mean the absorption of any present Church in any existing body, nor involve a flat and meagre uniformity, but rather conserve, and make widely available, the spiritual treasures at present cherished in separation. It is based on "the Lambeth Quadrilateral," on the acceptance of Episcopacy as the best instrument for maintaining the unity and continuity of the Church. It does not contemplate the enforcement of one form only of public worship, though it suggests a norm for the administration of the Sacraments. It contemplates an organization in which three organs of government, the General Assembly, the Diocesan Synod, and the Congregational Council would play all-important and absolutely essential parts. It visualizes an Episcopate, the oversight exercised by which would not be only territorial, but, at least at first, sectional, and makes the interesting suggestion that, in the initial stages, each of the uniting Churches might be represented in each Diocese by a College of Bishops. In its provision for inauguration, it outlines an Episcopate composed of existing Anglican Bishops, and of presbyters chosen by the other uniting Churches for immediate consecration, and for such consecration to be done by ministers in those Churches who have hitherto administered ordination in conjunction with at least three Bishops : and it admits all other ministers of the uniting Churches who have been ordained as ministers of the Word and Sacraments to the status of presbyters in the United Church at its inauguration.

This represents a step forward in the history of the Anglican approach to the Evangelical Free Churches.

I think our first reaction to it must be one of thankfulness. That it has been issued by a Lambeth Committee and that it is commonly called the "Lambeth Outline" must mean that, whether it be actually presented to Lambeth, 1940, or no, it cannot be out of that Conference's view : and that there either the Movement will go forward to some practical proposals or receive a severe set-back. And we do not want the almost certain opposition of a party in our Church to mean that its destiny shall be the limbo of forgotten ideals. Our first duty then is to study it thoroughly.

And the next to get it down to our people. For whatever other difficulties there are in the path of Home Reunion, the greatest hindrance of all is the apathy, if not the present hostility, of the rank and file of our congregations. Despite the movements—amongst the leaders on either side—of the last twenty years, despite the amazing drawing together of Churchmen and Nonconformists (so ably set forth in the Tract, 1662 *and To-day*), so that the old antipathy, except perhaps in remote country districts, has been replaced by respect and co-operation, neither the majority of Church lay-folk, nor the majority of Nonconformist laity as yet even desire Reunion: and a vast amount of spade work has to be done ere they will.

The reasons for the apathy are, of course, in the main, the narrow outlook which we know as parochialism, the entire content with the little or the much which one's particular place of worship or denomination has meant to the person. But also, amongst our own people, there is the feeling, bred by pride in a title, and with centuries of political and social ascendancy at its back, that it is the affair of the sun-dared Communion, not of the Church of England, to take steps towards Reunion. Amongst the Free Church Laity there is also the fear of absorption and of loss of identity and importance in a larger communion, and the revolt of a sturdy individualism against what it fears would limit its expression.

A great deal of it is indolence of mind, and more is prejudice. But there it is. Nor is it only the Anglo-Catholic opposition, but opposition from a large number of Congregationalists which is holding up the South India scheme to-day. The first need of to-day is that our respective people shall be awakened to the scandal of the real hindrance to Christian witness of our unhappy divisions, that they shall learn the general lines on which Reunion is likely to be pursued, and can alone be pursued with any hope, and this should, on the one hand, capture imagination and reason, and, on the other, allay the worst of their fears.

Here then, lies the main part of our work in this cause, and not least in the months before Lambeth.

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A second line of action for us appears from the reception which the Lambeth sketch has received from those Free Church bodies which have officially considered it. The Congregational Union, for instance, have appointed a Committee to report upon it, and that Report is definitely favourable; but it ends with these words: "We cannot close without expressing our profound regret that, as the pamphlet *The Practice of Intercommunion and the Doctrine of the Church* shows, the movement is still hindered by the refusal, however conscientious, of the Anglican Church of what the Free Churches practise amongst themselves and desire to be the universal practice—Intercommunion—as the most impressive symbol of the Unity in Christ of all believers and the most effective step to promote Reunion."

In line with this the very influential Committee of the Methodist Church which represented it at Edinburgh, in their Report on that

Conference, have asked the Methodist Conference to adopt this Resolution, "In view of the repeated and recent testimonies to the unifying influence of common worship, the Methodist Conference reaffirms its conviction that nothing would do so much to realize the Unity of the Spirit as fellowship at the Lord's Table between the members of different branches of the Church Universal. The Methodist Conference believes that the failure to overcome our divisions at this point, is not only a grave hindrance to progress in our quest for Unity, but also a scandal with immeasurable results in the life of the whole Church of God."

Statements like these should come to all who hold the Evangelical tradition in the Church of England with compelling force. Most of us are certain, from the accounts of its institution, and from the references in the New Testament, that it is the Divinely appointed means not only of sealing a unity already achieved, but of healing distrust, jealousy, and all the opposites of love and union. We believe that it was intended for the building-up into a fuller unity "all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity," and that "the Lord's Table should be open to the Lord's children." Convinced as we are that (in the words of Lambeth 1920) the ministries of the Free Churches have been manifestly blessed and owned by the Holy Spirit, we have been for long willing to admit members of their Churches to our Sacrament, and have had no scruples at receiving the Sacrament at their hands. Some, like the author of this paper, can testify to blessing so received. We have long believed that "spiritual Unity" and refusal of Intercommunion are a contradiction in terms. We know that the Rubric at the end of the Confirmation Service, which has been brought forward as a reason why we may not, though we would, practise Intercommunion, is proved, by the course of its history, never to have prohibited the admission of (or even, alas, the almost forced attendance of) Nonconformists at Anglican altars, and that the rule of Confirmation before Communion is one of the Church of England for her own children, and for them only.

There is no ground of principle whatever upon which we, as members of the Church of England, should not meet this desire of our Free Church brethren. And it is for us to lose no chance of declaring its rightfulness as well as its urgency in the present situation, and to use all opportunities which lie in our power for such Intercommunion.

Here is the second line of action for the Cause of Reunion now.

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But, in practical action, however, that can only mean that we must not go beyond using such opportunities as are or shall be allowed by lawful authority in our Church. We shall not serve the cause of Reunion by adopting a lawless attitude in our own Communion, and our aim is that our whole Communion may be won over to this view, which is so consonant with its past practice, and which now, if wholeheartedly adopted, would help Home Reunion more than anything else.

But here we come to the crux of the whole question as it confronts us to-day. For the pamphlet on *The Practice of Intercommunion and*

the Doctrine of the Church is probably right when it says that the majority of Anglicans regard Intercommunion as the culmination of union rather than as a method of reaching it. They feel that it is impossible for Christians to receive the Holy Communion together unless they are fellow-worshippers of one worshipping Society with an Apostolic ministry, that such a ministry is necessary to a valid Sacrament, and that they must, therefore, exclude from reception those who accept some other form of ministry.

The pamphlet refers to another class of Anglicans who object to any practice of Intercommunion, not because they do not feel that Sacramental grace is fully offered through non-episcopal ministries to those who seek it in penitence and faith, but because of the present fact of schism, in that denominations are organized in detachment from one another. For them the requisite for full Intercommunion is not the episcopal ministry as such, but the actual unity of the Church. But those who feel thus are few in number, and surely hold in effect that there is no valid Sacrament in the present state of things anywhere.

But the attitude outlined above, which is that of the far larger number of Anglo-Catholics, is one which seems to us to be fatal to the prospects of a Union such as the Lambeth scheme visualizes. In view of it, it is hardly surprising that the Report of the Edinburgh Conference tells us that "No Union has been consummated between a Church of radically 'Catholic' and one of radically 'Evangelical' tradition. The doctrine of 'Apostolical Succession' has prevented it." By that is meant the view of it (all of us, as Edinburgh said, believe in Apostolical Succession in some sense or another), as consisting in a succession of bishops handing down and preserving the Apostolic doctrine, as given only by the laying-on of hands, and, as such, the true and only guarantee of Sacramental grace and right doctrine.

But the Lambeth Outline proposes that those who hold views on this subject which differ *toto caelo* from each other shall be included in the one Church of the future. Indeed, it says that the Church which is to be would neither affirm nor exclude the view that Apostolical Succession determines the validity of ministry or Sacraments.

One is obliged to ask whether there is not a difference so fundamental in such acceptance or rejection that a Church in which, not only both views will be held, but will be rightfully held side by side, would not in practice hold together. It is urged, as against this, that both views are held side by side in the Church of England to-day. But each of those therein who hold these opposing views is convinced that their own is the true and only interpretation of her formularies, and, if it were to be authoritatively pronounced that one or the other were her necessary belief, there would be a secession of Anglo-Catholics or of Evangelicals at once! Is not, in this important particular, the basis of union suggested too broad? Would not a Union, so achieved, be in danger of being a Union by formula?

In view then, of this, the greatest difficulty in the path of Home Reunion, what is necessary? Further ground of agreement must be sought for, and found, as to the nature of the Ministry. But then, as

the Methodist Report on Edinburgh shows, and as the thought-provoking book of Dr. Goudge's states clearly, differences of view as to the Ministry can only be solved by agreement on the prior question of the nature of the Church.

But again, all are agreed (in the words of Edinburgh) that, "Through Jesus Christ, and particularly the fact of His Resurrection and of the Coming of the Holy Spirit, God's Almighty Will constituted the Church on earth," and that "the Presence of the Ascended Lord in the Church His Body, is effected by the Holy Spirit."

Then our great need is to go back this step also, and to search for some more fundamental agreement on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, since it is what we believe about the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity which will determine what we believe about the Ministry and the Church.

If that be so, well may a Conference on spiritual rearmament consider this question of Reunion. For the finding and the formulation of a doctrine of the Holy Spirit will be doubtless beyond human efforts. "The wind bloweth where it listeth and thou hearest the sound thereof, and canst not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth." But any approach at all to such a doctrine will mean the search for the experience of the Living Spirit. The greatest service then, we can do for this cause of Reunion, is just that to which the world's need also calls us, to ask for, to be willing to receive in ever fuller measure, the Spirit of God. For it will be by way of the deepening experience of the One Spirit that "One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism," will be realized.

The Promise of the Father, by R. H. Malden, Dean of Wells (Oxford University Press, 8s. 6d. net) "aims at furnishing material for a re-statement of the doctrine of the Holy Ghost with a view to promoting unity in the Church." The Dean does not try to propose any scheme or policy for ending our present divisions, but desires to suggest a way in which the question should be approached. His first chapter presents the Present Situation with its tension between Christianity and modern thought. He then gives a historical account of the various phases of re-statement and re-interpretation of doctrine down to the modern conditions represented by Modernism and Liberal Catholicism. As an appendix to this section he gives an interesting account of the Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin. A chapter on the Character of the Christian Tradition leads to the consideration of belief in the Holy Ghost with the Old Testament background, the teaching of the Apostolic Church and a general outline of the Gospel tradition. The concluding chapter on the fulfilment of the promise deals with recent statements on the validity of Orders and the various theories of the Ministry. The volume contains much useful information on many historical and doctrinal issues, and points to the Unity of the Spirit as the goal rather than by any methods of diplomatic negotiation to overcome obstacles.