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Reunion : An American Concordat

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AT the present moment our eyes are turned towards America in connection with the "Aid for Britain" Movement. The need for material help in connection with the war effort has driven from the minds of many Christians all other considerations. We are pre-occupied with our own special problems and probably know much less than usual of the problems and opportunities which face other nations. This is one of the special dangers confronting Christians in this country. The urgency and magnitude of the issues which are before us in the present war ; the insecurity of our own personal tenure of property and of life ; the upheaval of society through evacuation ; the destruction of churches and the expectation of invasion all conspire to rob us of leisure and inclination to pursue those very subjects which are most vital to Church reconstruction. This is especially true of the problem of Christian Reunion. We should all agree that the rebuilding of Europe cannot now be accomplished by political faiths alone. As Richard Russell wrote in the *Christian Newsletter* (No. 51) : "A moral and religious foundation is essential to the construction of any order which shall be stable and permanent. Our civilisation is Christian and cannot continue unless animated by a revival of Christian faith. The only hope for Europe appears to lie in those small communities of Christians, both Catholic and Protestant, who live in the world and who are attempting to leaven it as the Christian Church the Roman Empire. They are the only persons whose faith remains untroubled in the bankruptcy of liberalism, the bankruptcy of nationalism and the bankruptcy of dictatorship. . . . The Europe of the future

will be built up upon these little communities or brotherhoods."

The underlying assumption of that statement is probably that these little communities give their witness, keep their patience and hold fast their faith because they are members of the Universal Christian Society which transcends the bounds of nationality. But would not their witness be more powerful and pervasive if instead of being "little" brotherhoods they were more organically linked in the larger brotherhood of the Church of Christ? Can we go on supporting the League of Nations (if we still do) and fail to work for a League of Churches? Can we talk of Federal Union and fail to promote it in connection with "our unhappy divisions?"

The Lambeth Conference (1930, *Report*, p. 110) gives two reasons which should lead all Christians to desire Reunion and seek to promote it: "First and deepest is loyalty to our Lord: for the Church is His Body, and its divisions must needs be contrary to His will and hindrances to the fulfilment of His purpose. Second, and not essentially different, is the perception that only a united church can be the means of bringing to Christ and that unity in Him a world torn by divisions—economic, social, national and racial." These words seem to take on a deeper meaning in view of the broken Brotherhood of the World to-day. The Edinburgh Conference (*Report*, p. 36) stated that: "A principal hindrance to Christian and Church unity is the widely prevailing ignorance, apathy and inertia on the whole subject of unity." In one of his more recent letters (No. 53) Dr. J. H. Oldham tells us of a conversation which he had some years ago with an official of the State Department at Washington. He told Dr. Oldham that the Federal Council of Churches in America was in the habit of sending deputations to the State Department to present resolutions on international questions, claiming to speak on behalf of eighteen million members of Protestant Churches. "Well," he went on, "the curious thing is that we sometimes meet some of those eighteen million Church members ourselves and they somehow do not seem to have the ideas that the Federal Council say they have."

This ignorance is widespread amongst the rank and file of all the Christian Churches. One of the reasons why we

have supported the National Church League is that it does seek to educate the Evangelicals of the Church of England. A recent united week of prayer in Boscombe was very well attended but in comparison with the membership of the affiliated Churches only a small proportion of the local christians evinced any interest in the christians of the other denominations. Too many think of their own Church "as if it were simply a provision for the religious needs of the individual worshipper." (*Unity in the Truth*, A. G. Hebert). The same Anglo-Catholic author, whose book is an examination of the *Outline of a Reunion Scheme for the Church of England and the Evangelical Free Churches of England*, goes on to speak of the way in which people think of the Church service almost as a species of religious entertainment provided by the clergy for the laity to listen to and also complains justly that there is a parochialism which sees nothing at all beyond the life of the local congregation.

We began this paper, however, under a title from which we seem to be digressing. Actually we have been justifying ourselves for attempting the task of contributing something to Evangelical opinion in England regarding the proposed Concordat between the Episcopal and Presbyterian Churches of America.

The theory upon which this proposed Concordat is based is that advanced by an English theologian, Canon Oliver Chase Quick, in *The Christian Sacraments*, p. 141. He points out that from the second century onwards the duly appointed bishops of sees were looked upon as the organs and guardians of the outward unity of the Church. Thus the unity of the Church depended upon the universal recognition of a validly constituted hierarchy. This, it is hardly necessary to point out, is the theory behind Apostolic Succession, the doctrine which has proved to be such a stumbling block to reunion. In the West, however, from the time of Augustine the harshness of this doctrine was modified, "at some cost to logic." The validity of Orders was made to consist in the use of due form and matter by any validly ordained bishop, whether or not he was still in communion with, and still authorised by, the whole Church. This opened the door to schism within the Church itself, "inasmuch as those schismatic bodies which possessed valid sacraments could not be *completely* excluded."

We must pass over any discussion of this position. We might ask: What is the due form in Orders? Is it correct to say, as we believe, that it is not a Sacrament? And what is the matter? The *traditio instrumentorum* is too late to be a vital part of ordination and in the Anglican Communion we do not use this ceremony. However the theory which emerges from Dr. Quick's able discussion may be briefly summarised as follows: In ordination the candidate receives both power from God and authority from the Church. Since the Church is at present in a state of schism all such authorisation is defective; consequently all orders are defective in this respect. This is the basis of the proposed Concordat and there are many in America and England who believe that this theory may well point the way to the ultimate solution of the difficult problem of Orders. The theory, however, is not without its difficulties. It may be understood in such a way as to suggest that the ministry of the Episcopalian and Presbyterian Churches are merely local or denominational ministries. This is denied by both Churches. The Presbyterian Department of Church Cooperation and Union (*Syllabus*, p. 35) declares roundly: "We find these proposals at variance with the doctrinal teachings regarding the nature of the Church as contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith and in other sections of our Constitution. We believe in the 'holy Catholic Church' as set forth in The Apostles' Creed. We believe that the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America is an organic part of the holy Catholic Church. When we ordain men, we ordain them not as Presbyterian ministers, but as ministers of the said holy Catholic Church."

This claim, on the other hand, does puzzle many Episcopalians who have been brought up to believe some form of Apostolical Succession. They cannot see how a ministry which was newly set up in the sixteenth century can be regarded as a ministry of the whole Church. Even if they were to admit Bishop Lightfoot's finding that the original ordaining authority was the presbytery they would feel that between the second and sixteenth centuries the Church was guided to restrict the power to ordain to the bishops.

Free churchmen would point out that the troubles which produced the Presbyterian Churches arose when Episcopacy degenerated into Prelacy, and when the bishops ceased to be

Overseers and Pastors and became "Blind mouths." They would add that the so-called Apostolical Succession could not of itself guarantee rightness of conduct on the part of the presbyter-bishops. Christ appointed St. Peter one of the Twelve, but that did not guarantee either the truth of his teaching or the rightness of his conduct, when Paul withstood him to the face at Antioch! As Dr. C. A. Simpson points out in the *Anglican Theological Review* (October, 1940): "Sacerdotalism of the worst type was rampant so that it was popularly held that a man for his eternal salvation was dependent upon the capricious goodwill of a priesthood more concerned with its own prestige than with the well-being of those committed to its charge." Again he writes: "The abuses and superstitions which had popularly reduced the Mass to a form of magic, and had, in the minds of the people, practically vested the priest with the supposed powers of a magician, had resulted in an idea of the priesthood as a caste standing between God and the laity, and preventing the free access of the individual to his Creator. This conception of the ministry the reformers were concerned to break down. Hence their insistence upon the priesthood of the laity, upon the representative character of the ministry, upon what was common to minister and layman alike. Hence the vital part taken by the laity in the government, both spiritual and temporal, of the Presbyterian Church."

The Concordat, then, presupposes the partial invalidity of all orders. Dr. George Stewart of Stamford, Conn., an able Presbyterian, admits that the basic difference between the two Churches "is not a conflict on major doctrinal matters. We are rather legatees of a historical dispute, centuries old, as to exactly what happened in the first century and a half of the Christian era. This dispute has issued in a drawn battle. Those who assert that there was a complete system of church administration drawn up from the beginning including bishops, priests and deacons cannot be conclusively refuted. In like manner those who assert that in the first century and a half church affairs were largely in a fluid and experimental stage, that the terms deacon, presbyter, and bishop were used interchangeably in a loose manner cannot be conclusively denied their position." He quotes Bishop Lightfoot's well-known words that "the episcopate was formed not out of the Apostolic office by

localization but out of the presbyterial by elevation, and the title, which originally was common to all, came at length to be appropriated to the chief among them." He declares further that neither Presbyterians nor Episcopalians know for certain the early administration of the primitive Church and adds the arresting observation: "In a profound spiritual sense, the successor of the Apostles is the New Testament itself. . . . The ministry is in the Apostolic succession, but it is always the ministry plus the Bible, the ministry of the Word which is the major channel of spiritual grace."

We feel with regard to our own country that the whole future of the Church of England after the war might be altered for the Christian good of England if Anglican Evangelicals and Free Church people would act courageously in the spirit of the straightforward words of the late King George V., quoted by the Bishop of Gloucester in *The Doctrine of the Church and Christian Reunion*. He said: "Wholeheartedly I join in your expression of thankfulness for that spirit of union which has animated us through years of common effort and common sacrifice. I trust that some spirit may remain with us *to strengthen our hands for the work of peace* and to soften the remembrance of old differences. May we see its fruits in the brotherly co-operation of all in the service of the commonwealth and in the closer ties of all religious bodies."

Dr. Headlam's book, from which we have just quoted, was published in 1920 by John Murray. At the end of his second lecture—he is giving the Bampton Lectures—he declares that not one of the rival systems of Church policy which prevail at the present day can find any direct support in the New Testament. There is no Biblical Authority for Episcopacy. The government of the Church is not Presbyterian. Each local church derived its life and authority from the Universal Church, therefore it was not Congregationalism. There is no support for Romanism and there is no evidence that the Apostles ever gave any directions about the future government of the Church. On page 128, writing of one of the crucial differences between ourselves and Anglican Catholics, he remarks: "I have, I think, read everything from the Fathers which is quoted in favour of Apostolical Succession, and I do not know any passage which speaks of succession by ordination in this sense." Again he

writes lower down: "There is no hint of transmission. The spiritual gifts come as a direct gift of God in answer to the prayers of the Church." It is the insistence by Anglican and American Catholics upon Apostolical Succession which is the real crux of the whole situation. The late Bishop Charles Gore in *The Church and the Ministry* did much to promote this view in the Church of England. His position is expounded on page 94 of his book as follows: "The individual life can receive this fellowship with God only through membership in the one body and by dependence upon social sacraments of regeneration, of confirmation, of communion, of absolution—of which ordained ministers are the appointed instruments." With this may be contrasted the Presbyterian point of view as set forth by Dr. Henry Sloane Coffin in an excellent article in *THE CHURCHMAN* (of America), June 1st, 1940, pp. 12f. Writing with special reference to the suggested Concordat he declares: "We insist on ordination by the laying on of hands of at least three presbyter bishops. . . . We have, therefore, a succession through the continuous action of the Church by her accredited leaders; but we think more of God's continuing gifts of ministers, whom He appoints, age after age. His living presence in and provision for His Church is the all-important succession." The stress is here on the charismatic element at the expense of the institutional, on the prophetic rather than the priestly, on God's Grace as directly mediated from above rather than on His Grace mechanically passed on from below. Bishop Gore wrote on p. 65 of his book (*op. cit.*) of "once for all given grace." But where is there the slightest evidence of this? "Once for all given faith" is scriptural, but where is the other idea thus expressed in Christianity? As Dean Lefroy wrote in *The Christian Ministry*: "The finality of revelation is an incentive to fidelity, a preservative against imposture, and an aid to certainty of conviction. The finality of grace is either a declaration that God Almighty has done with His Church, or, the grace being conserved as the revelation has been, that He has entrusted it to the keeping of another "depositorium dives." . . . Must we sue, on bended knee, to those who claim possession of the treasury of Heaven's grace 'once for all given'?" Does the late Bishop Gore state the mind of the Church of England when he writes: "The various Presbyterian and Congregationalist

organizations, however venerable on many and different grounds, have, in dispensing with the episcopal succession, violated a fundamental law of the Church's life" ? The fact is that the Church of England is silent on this doctrine in her official formularies and her creeds and articles. This was noticed long ago by Cardinal Newman. He referred to it in his letter to "My dear Father Coleridge," dated August 5th, 1868. He says: "Apostolical succession, its necessity and its grace is not an Anglican tradition, though it is a tradition found in the Anglican Church. By contrast, our Lord's Divinity is an Anglican tradition, every one, high and low, holds it. It is not only in Prayer Book and Catechism, but it is in the mouths of all professors of Anglicanism. . . . Not such is the apostolical succession, and, considering the Church is the *columna et firmamentum veritatis*, and is ever bound to stir up the gift that is in her, there is surely a strong presumption that the Anglican body has not what it does not profess to have."

On the other hand seventeenth century Presbyterian scholars tried to work out a definite doctrine of Apostolic Succession for presbyters to which Lord Balfour of Burleigh in 1911 attached the term *perpetua successio presbyterorum*. In his able article in the *Anglican Theological Review* (October, 1940) Dr. George Stewart points out that the early Presbyterian Church in Scotland repudiated Apostolic Succession and he finds a more cogent argument for the validity of Presbyterian Orders, and for the assertion that they lie in the direct continual stewardship of the ministry in the words of St. Thomas Aquinas, *Cuius potentia sacramentis visibilibus non alligatur*. God is not bound. "There is a huge company of men and women of every age and clime who were never ordained by any church body, who nevertheless, have been united by what St. Thomas Aquinas called 'an interior act of God,' and who were God's true ministers and channels of His Grace. *Deus non alligatur!*" The Lambeth Conferences of 1920 and 1930 recognize this undoubted fact in Christian history. "We do not call in question the spiritual reality of the ministries now exercised in the non-episcopal communions. . . . These ministries have been manifestly blessed and owned by the Holy Spirit as effective means of grace."

After all, our Master's test is still applicable: "By their

fruits ye shall know them." An American negro, Cal Clay by name, was one day asked by a missionary to what denomination he belonged. The old fellow replied, "Bress ye, sah, dah's fo' roads leadin' from hyah ter town—de long road, de hill road, de sho' road, and de swamp road—but when Ah goes ter town wid er load er grain dey don't say ter me, "Uncle Calhoun which road did yo' come in by?" but "Cal, is yo' wheat good?"

At the present moment, however, this kind of test has little chance of being applied in America, and it seems probable that the Concordat will break down where the discussions held after the 1920 Lambeth Conference collapsed. After the Appeal to all Christian People which acknowledged "all those who believe in our Lord Jesus Christ and have been baptised into the Name of the Holy Trinity, as sharing with us membership in the Universal Church of Christ which is His Body," the Anglicans felt that they must insist on a fresh ordination for Free Church Ministers or possibly a new commission with laying on of hands by a Bishop. The Free Church leaders could not agree to this, because they felt that it would imply that something was lacking in their Orders; that their present ministries are not valid and that the Sacraments administered by them are deficient.

At the last Lambeth Conference in 1930 the Bishops declared: "The vision which rises before us is that of a Church, genuinely Catholic, loyal to all Truth, and gathering into its Fellowship all 'who profess and call themselves Christians,' within whose visible unity all the treasures of faith and order, bequeathed as a heritage by the past to the present shall be preserved in common and made serviceable to the whole Body of Christ. Within this unity Christian communions now separated from one another would retain much that has long been distinctive in their worship and service. It is through a rich diversity of life and devotion that the unity of the whole fellowship will be fulfilled." This seems to pave the way for what might be called: "The United States of the Church." In 1938 the Student Christian Movement published the *Outline of a Reunion Scheme for the Church of England and the Evangelical Free Churches of England*. This has been welcomed by the Evangelical and Moderate men in the Church of England but not by the Anglo-Catholics and the chief difficulty seems to be this: "Is

Episcopacy of the *Esse* or *Bene Esse* of the Church?" This is the crucial difficulty but it is not the only one! Let me prove this by quoting a personal experience. In one of my parishes I was on good terms with the local Wesleyan Church. They invited me to address their men's service. When the day dawned I was ill with influenza, and, at very short notice a substitute was obtained from a neighbouring parish who was a newly ordained Anglican curate. He began by saying: "This is the first time I have been in a Nonconformist place of worship—much against my will!" He then attacked the Salvation Army, spoke of the value and beauty of incense and concluded by denouncing the sin of John Wesley in leaving the Church of England! Father, forgive us, for we know not what we do.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

By C. A. Alington, D.D. (The Centenary Press). 3s. 6d.

This present study, included in "The Christian Challenge Series," deals with an ever-present subject in the Christian Scheme. The Dean of Durham is thought-provoking throughout, and whilst he carries the reader away with him as he deals with the central part of his theme, many will probably lay down the book with a measure of disappointment. The Dean is aware that his emphasis on the present aspect of the Kingdom will lay him open to criticism; but it is not on that account that disappointment will be experienced, for he has made his readers indebted to him for his clear exposition of that point of view. Moreover, his exposition gives a balance to the view of the Kingdom, particularly in these days of war, when the future view might easily gain over-emphasis. Again, the Dean refuses to confuse the Church and the Kingdom, for he is aware that much harm has been done by such confused teaching: "It is the kingdom which the Church exists to proclaim" (p. 112). His emphasis on the Gospel as Good News is timely, for one wonders where is the Good News in much of the contemporary preaching in one section of our Church. The comparison which is made between the attitude of St. Augustine and William Law toward the Kingdom is most helpful, and these chapters will be appreciated by all who read the book with the care which is its due.

The chapter on "The Christian attitude towards sin" is disappointing. The Bible has stronger words for sin than "hamartia," the only word for sin considered in this chapter. God's remedy for sin in the Atonement is not even outlined. Although no one can charge the Dean with holding a light view of sin, one could have expected some exposition of sin in its aspect of transgression or rebellion against God. Apart from this aspect, the book is most admirable, as is to be expected from the pen of one who is able to add to scholarship a wide knowledge of men and affairs.

E. H.