

# 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](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php)

# The Church : Local, Regional, Divided

BY GEORGE MARCHANT

FROM early days, indeed from the time of the apostolic period itself, division has appeared within the outward life of the Church so that it is one of the greatest of historical howlers to think of the Reformation as the "breakdown of the unity of Christendom", even though it is true that in the four hundred years since, the process of sectarian divisiveness has gone on apace, so that (to follow the assessment of Dean Sperry) the United States alone has over three hundred different Christian bodies. We face the fact, therefore, that through almost the entire history of the Church its note of unity has been lacking in outward manifestation—indeed almost in inverse proportion to its catholicity, if we take that term in its extensive meaning and not in the narrow sense that would unchurch the major portion of its members. The urgent entreaties of St. Paul to the Corinthians and his obvious difficulties in vindicating his authority among them, the desperate anxieties on the matter of unity reflected in the letters of Ignatius, the outgrowth of Gnostic and Judaizing sects revealing the significance of hints and references in the New Testament, act as curtain-raisers for the whole variety of heresies and schisms that have attended the onward course of the Church of Jesus Christ. That genial seventeenth-century Anglican, Sir Thomas Browne, confesses in his *Religio Medici* : "There is not any of such a fugitive faith, such an unstable belief as a Christian. . . . It is the promise of Christ to make us all one flock ; but how and when this union shall be is as obscure to me as the last day". Centrifugal forces have been at work among Christians, separating them not merely into different kinds of corporate life, but worse, into mutually repelling, exclusive, and persecuting communities, so that any examination of the course of Christianity must leave any fair-minded reader with the melancholy conclusion that the words of St. Paul to the Galatians—"If ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another"—might never have been uttered.

Centrifugal forces have been at work : what are they ? This question has been examined and discussed for some time and two main types of influence have been described. Obviously, one kind is the theological and ecclesiastical development among Christians ; more recently, emphasis has been rightly given to non-theological factors ever since the Lund Conference 1952 and the pointed reference given to this aspect of the situation by Prof. C. H. Dodd, although Troeltsch had already written a good deal on the matter. Richard Niebuhr has also given us his book *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* ; and the matter is referred to by Professor Greenslade in *Schism in the Early Church*. Let us briefly examine these two types for ourselves. Before doing so, I would emphasize that, in identifying the different elements in these two fields of influence, firstly, I am not necessarily at this stage evaluating them, although some questions may have to be raised later,

and, secondly, it will be obvious that in actual fact there has been a good deal of combination of the different factors and that this isolation of them is somewhat artificial, as with a dissection upon a laboratory bench.

\* \* \* \*

### Theological factors in disunion

I would suggest that there are mainly four such factors: the process of theological definition coupled with liturgical order, the urge for spiritual perfection, the idealization of the New Testament church order, and enthusiasm for spiritual life.

1. The process of theological definition and liturgical order. Theological definition has usually been the outcome of challenge and response to Christian thinking. In 1 Cor. 11: 19 St. Paul seems to accept the necessity of *haereses* (αἵρεσεις) in order that true worth might be made manifest, but it is not thereby evident that he also accepted the necessity of legitimacy of divisions (σχίσματα) between Christians as a result. Αἵρεσεις are strictly speaking "self-chosen opinions", individual viewpoints, that inevitably occur in the continuance of exposition and discussion of the faith. They are the result of the activity of thought in connexion with the faith. Indeed, within the New Testament itself there are different emphases, which, while not mutually contradictory, need the balance of other parts of Scripture. Again, within the New Testament there is the beginning of definition of Christian truth, to deny which inescapably distinguishes the pretended believer from the true. The well known words come to mind from 1 Jn. 4: 6: "Whoever knows God listens to us and he who is not of God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error" (RSV). It is frequently but a short step to take, from the necessary emphasis of one aspect of many-sided truth, to the over-emphasis and isolation of one point to result in positive error, as the christological controversies proved later. Such steps can be taken in a loyal desire, even if mistaken, to uphold the truth against error outside or inside the Church. But the further step from theological definition to actual church division was the outcome of the Church's action towards the heretic once the doctrine had been defined. He was condemned and deposed, but only too often with the result that a party was thus created around him that split off into a schism. It is easy to recognize the sense of importance and even of outrage the Church has felt in the face of many errors, for they were seen as acutely affecting the Gospel. Yet as time has gone on it has been only too easy to think of any point of view as affecting the Gospel in such a tightly inter-connected body of truth as the Christian message: and we have had those who have separated over some variance in belief connected with a particular scheme of dispensationalist interpretation. There is no more searching issue that confronts us than the limits of comprehension here, and it particularly affects us as Anglicans today over our estimate of the significance, both historical and contemporary, of the Thirty-Nine Articles. While the mind of Latin Christendom goes on defining ever more carefully, and is in fact committed to a policy of progressive definition, Eastern Orthodoxy (of whom we are

probably to hear more) sedulously discriminates between credal matters and much that is theologoumena; while amongst our Reformed brethren we hear both the cry, from Kierkegaard and P. T. Forsyth, for a "maximal faith and a minimal creed", echoed by our own Modern Churchmen (at any rate as regards the second half of that slogan); while at the same time we are called upon to digest a growing diet of contemporary theology with which their prolific pens provide us withal. But the modern Church on the whole has tended to draw back from making theological definition divide. Is this a proper lesson to be drawn from our history? Is it a latitudinarian attitude to provide as wide and inclusive a ring as possible for Church fellowship and then within that right to let theological discussion rip? Is this the way to promote the situation in which the Holy Spirit may guide us into truth? The answer to that question may well depend upon how we assess the value of schism in the history of the Church, or St. Paul's words quoted above.

Further complication on this point arises in the close relation made between doctrine and liturgy, both in rites and ceremonies. Doctrinal definition has in the past been closely associated with liturgical uniformity: both have developed in such association and with parallel compulsiveness that they can hardly be dissociated. But the issue is almost always complicated by one or more of the following three factors, and still is so today. Again we must ask, if the element of authoritative compulsion to a rigid uniformity is lacking, and conscientiously adopted variation is permissible, is the real ground for schism removed? The answer to that may lie with the kind of attitude we take toward the next two causes of schism.

2. The urge for spiritual perfection. This is a divisive element in Christendom because it basically refuses to accept the Church as a *corpus mixtum*. It is an important factor in what might be called the sect-mind. It justifies itself by reference to New Testament holiness and to separatedness, but seems so easily betrayed into a rigorism that is harsh and legalistic. There have been intellectual formulations of it in terms of Greek or Oriental dualism in which the material or physical aspects of life have been near enough identified with the unspiritual. It is not necessary to suggest examples of this; indeed the newspapers have been full of one particular example only a few weeks ago. Probably the best way of understanding this may be especially as an example of some form of unbalance, that only makes sense to those who accept the psychologically distorted viewpoint at its foundation. Historically speaking it has produced schism in the wake of persecution—as in the Novatian schism—but it is not by any means tied to such a situation. Rather it can usually be seen allied to one or both of the following factors.

3. The idealization of New Testament church order. It has been the wisdom of the Church of England to find justification for its doctrines but not necessarily for its practices in the text of Scripture, as long as those practices were not clearly opposed to Scripture. Nevertheless the ecclesiastical mind and also the fervent Christian mind is frequently motivated by the earnest desire to reproduce in modern life

the conditions of church order reckoned to be manifested in the New Testament and especially in the Acts of the Apostles. The New Testament nowhere suggests that its practical ordering of the early church life should be taken as a blue-print for the rest of time, and tantalizingly gives a very indefinite and incomplete account of this very subject. This the Church of England has accepted and, within the safeguards of New Testament doctrine and devotion, has believed that the Church has authority to decide its ordering and manner of life. It can indeed speak of a "*corrupt* following of the apostles". But it is on this issue that church relations in England and America have broken down and produced separation. Unfortunately the Church of England, instead of holding to its wise balance, thinking of its ministry as a godly, historic, and useful order, and its formularies as godly and reasonable spiritual guides for worship and practice, has gradually come, through controversy, to accept the basic principle of its Puritan opponents, that its ministry must be defended as somehow derived *in this form* from Christ's institution, and such useful services as confirmation read back into Acts 8. The surprising result today is that we have leading Anglicans furiously researching to justify the threefold ministry from the New Testament and making our use of confirmation an issue between churches ; while the heirs of the Puritans are using forms of prayer and are perfectly ready to take the office of bishop into their ministry if it is accepted more or less in the way Whitgift and the Elizabethan prelates defended it. When order and faith become equated in importance, you have so far enlarged the area in which agreement is to be obtained that the possibilities of union between Christians seems doomed at the outset ; the presuppositions themselves need examination, and this may involve considerable heart-searching, or, if you like, psychoanalysis in depth.

4. Enthusiasm for spiritual life. The understanding of the spiritual life comes under the task of theology, and again the history of the renewal of spiritual life in the Church shows it promoting division. A good deal of discussion of revival needs to involve clearer definitions, for there are those who would include the Reformation, the Moody mission, and the 1859 revival under the term. It depends on whether you make the definition broadly general or whether you have something rather different in mind when you think of the Reformation on the one hand and the 1859 revival on the other. If one thinks of revival as a wide-spread movement within the Church, which brings about an overwhelming sense of the saving power of God through a vivid apprehension of the Gospel in many individuals, it may help us to see what we mean when we recognize that it has had a share in dividing the Church, and even more so the attempt to prolong, further, increase what has begun spontaneously. Usually division arises here either because of controversy about the new movement, or because a leader or leaders promote it in such a way that a breach from the parent church is inevitable. It is of course not difficult to develop a justification for the doctrines and experience of the revival into a justification for existing in separation for their preservation.

\* \* \* \*

These four theological influences along the lines of doctrine, ethics,

ecclesiology, and spirituality have in various ways and combinations brought about division in the Church. But they exist and have been throughout influenced by non-theological factors. These can be listed as geographical, social, and psychological.

1. Geographical. It is easy to sing,

*In Christ there is no East or West*

*In Him no South or North.*

But in fact the four points of the compass have only symbolized the task involved in this aspect of catholicity—that is, geographical universality. In Christianity one of the major problems behind so much of its history has been the effect of variation in nationality and race; the very spread of the Gospel has produced strains in Christian fellowship that have actually led to breakdown. The great schism between East and West has this behind it as much as any other factor. In early days it was Latin versus Greek Christianity: today there is still the deep difference between those living in the Mediterranean climate, or the South American countries near to the equator, especially of Spanish or Portuguese extraction, and those who have a Scandinavian or typically Nordic character. The modern missionary expansion over the last 150 years has of course increased the influence of geography on division. Apart from the important fact that is has exported the divisions of Western Christendom all over the world, there is the further problem that more recently christianized communities are developing their own idiosyncracies. Happily we are able to bridge some gulfs through transport, television, and radio that might otherwise be more disruptive than they are; yet on the other hand proximity at short notice can produce some shocks, as, for example, in the radio programme “Instant Salvation”, which uncomfortably jumbled together very different forms of Christian activity. One wonders how far Western European Christians as a whole will feel at home with others whose natural bent is for a much more exuberant, colourful, uninhibited manifestation of devotion.

2. Social. First of all let us take the case of cultural identification. Bishop Lesslie Newbigin, in his book *The Household of God*, refers to the breakdown of the synthesis between the Gospel and culture of “the western part of the European peninsular of Asia, by which Christianity had become almost the folk religion of Western Europe”. He goes on: “The Gospel was wrought into the very stuff of the social and personal life, so that the whole population could be thought of as the *corpus Christianum*. That conception is the background for all the Reformation theologies . . . in their doctrines of the Church they are defining their position over against one another *within* the context of the *corpus Christianum*. They are not defining the Church as over against a pagan world”.

Now, of course, it can be pointed out that from the first the Christian Church had acclimatized itself to its surrounding society so that some parallels appear between aspects of its outward order and secular institutions. In his 1957 Tyndale lecture, *The Social Pattern of Christian Groups in the First Century*, Mr. E. A. Judge demonstrates the acceptance of involvement in the life of the day and some approximation to social organization in and by the Church, until persecution in

order to produce apostasy aroused a strongly combative attitude. Since then there have been varying kinds of response to the surrounding cultural environment, which Richard Niebuhr has examined in his book *Christ and Culture*. In contrast to the rejecting reaction, which has returned from time to time, there has been its absolute opposite, the attempt to assimilate Christianity to its cultural environment ; typical of this is the medieval synthesis, or again, rather self-consciously, the later social gospel. Between these two extremes he identifies three other responses : first, the kind which seeks a common ground for discussion in order to apply the Christian answer in contemporary cultural terms, such as Aquinas attempted ; secondly, the kind that enters into a dynamic interaction, distinguishing the kingdom of God and the world, to some extent dualistically (Lutheranism is the expression of this) ; thirdly, the kind which affirms that the world and its culture is God's, even though fallen and corrupt, and believes that Christianity is the transforming power, affirming the victory of Christ over and through the cultural situation. Niebuhr instances Calvin and F. D. Maurice as adopting this approach.

It is obvious that at least culture-rejecting and culture-affirming attitudes have played their part in church divisions. But as social forces they have not altogether existed alone. For cultural relation has had its close associate in national identification. The first thousand years of the Church's life saw its growth under the *Pax Romana*, the breakdown of that empire and its separation into a number of different racial and cultural sections, and the securing of Charlemagne's Christian empire under which national development based on primitive racial and geographical divisions began to produce the disruptive element not only in the empire but in the Church which had made a synthesis with it. The breakdown of the medieval *corpus Christianum* brought about the expression of Reformation Christianity in terms of national churches, as Bishop Newbigin has pointed out. The new self-conscious autonomous state, which in many ways Reformed churchmanship helped into existence, became itself an important ingredient in the way Reformed churchmanship interpreted its own self. It did not always do it in the same way. In Luther's Germany the church was a spiritual community under an absolutist rule. With Calvin's Geneva it was a spiritual democracy co-operating with the civil power. In England the two types have wrestled together ever since Henry VIII, under the Lutheran inspiration of Tyndale's book, *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, began a legal transformation of the church and state situation which embodied the Lutheran outlook in every act of parliament that built up Tudor royal supremacy. It was against this that the Puritans reacted under the strong influence toward democratic outlook stemming from Switzerland, and finally produced the disruption that made false Hooker's view of church and state, except as an unrealized ideal.

Besides these forms of national or cultural identification, there have been causes due to social unrest, authoritarianism based on the political and social importance and power of a Christian church, and the rivalries engendered thereby. With what we will think of under the next heading, the mixture of local and personal pride and prestige have

provided potent sources of divisive energies in Christendom.

3. Psychological. It is becoming usual to look for a subconscious influence in action or opinion, and to explain them as rationalizations of this hidden urge. Church history and historical theology should probably take more notice of individual and social psychology in assessing their material. On the other hand great convictions of heart and mind cannot be dismissed as rationalizations of unconscious drives, otherwise we are once more in the behaviourist situation that reduces all our discourse to insignificance. We have our treasure in earthen vessels, and it is part of our task to see how this aspect of earthiness has entered into our problem. The emphasis either upon intellectual or emotional responses to situations has affected the whole way of estimating the relation of nature and grace, reason and scriptural revelation, the created universe and the realm of spiritual experience. The now outmoded psychology of William James has provided the unsatisfactory differentia of the "church-mind" (of the balanced "once-born" outlook) compared with the "sect-mind" (of the guilt-laden "twice-born" Christian). James and those who have followed his view are now recognized to have drawn too arbitrary a scheme, based on badly selected abnormal phenomena, wrongly interpreted according to a presupposed philosophy. Yet while James and his criteria cannot be our guide, we can nevertheless recognize the actual existence of the disruptive effects of two types of Christian, meeting in head-on collision, or otherwise hiving off in mutually rejecting attitudes. The one stresses intellect, knowledge, traditional authority, and even archaism; the other manifests an adventurous, exploratory, empirical outlook aggressively evangelistic, uncommitted to denomination and fervently individualistic in piety. There are in fact statistical studies already available, that can show that if you know one or two views of an individual, then you can almost without fail know what the rest of his outlook will be.

One further comment upon these non-theological factors making for division. In the past, feudalism in secular society had a reflection in the Church's hierarchical structure and theology, and this broke against the rise of yeomen and mercantile classes, developing constitutional and democratic forms of government and society. If hierarchical, institutionalist church structures are closely linked to dominant aristocratic social forms, producing what may crudely be described as "Catholic" types of church order, and if the growth of bourgeois democracy favours the various forms of sober Protestantism, what might be the result of a dominant proletarian society? This is a pressing question because it seems possible that Europe, at least the Western half, is being strongly affected by a rising proletarianism, scorning old established moves, as is clearly visible in its attitude to sex ethics, and full of uninhibited dynamism and explosive emotionalism manifest both in the screaming adulation of its beat-singers and in the teenage rioting it enjoys. Churches at the moment are tinkering with the evangelization of this new social force; what would its real evangelization involve? A church-life of emotional, spontaneous, charismatic vivacity that would ignore or wreck the established channels of Christian life, order, and worship? The growth of

pentecostalism and sporadic parallels in Anglican churches is worth pondering here.

\* \* \* \*

This survey, sketchy as it is, leaves us with a number of important questions which history alone cannot answer. How are we to estimate this progressive fragmentation of the Church? How are we to evaluate the self-contained organization of localized churches. What is the estimation of schism? If these forces are rightly described as "centrifugal", from what centre do they promote flight? Let us try to find some answers to these.

What is our estimate of schism? Can we think of church history in this respect taking us by the scruff of the neck and rubbing our noses in original sin, as the late D. R. Davies would have put it? Are we to take it as in simple terms "sins in the church"? It is true that the churches in their divisions have become more humbly aware that responsibility for division has been as much with the "parent" body as with the splinter group; but this surely needs taking the further step of saying that in a sense both are involved in a bifurcation: the one is not left as it was while the other disengages itself towards change. As Wesley Brady has pointed out, for example, in *England before and after Wesley*, the divisions of the seventeenth century did not leave the Church of England the same; nor did the separation leave the emergent denominations the same either. It may also be said that the problems from non-theological causes ought in fact to have been overcome in the power of Christ; yet at the same time the real problem was that those very problems were not even recognized at the time; they may even have been thought to be values to be conserved. Such a lack of awareness comes more realistically to be seen as declaring the Church to be *simul justus simul peccator*, because the great amphibian lives in time and eternity, and so suffers the limitations and weaknesses of its humanity and world-involvement even when engaged in seeking to be closest to its heavenly calling. The prophetic understanding of Israel's history illuminates us here surely, to be summed up in the phrase—*hominum confusione et Dei providentia historia regitur*. Or, to contribute a quotation from an unknown source mentioned by Charles Williams—*This also is Thou; neither is it Thou*. This perhaps is what gives support to the viewpoint that schism has promoted the better hold on the truth, and the preservation of the Gospel; in fact it makes sense of the paradox that schism is the manifestation of human failure and yet is serving the purposes of the Gospel. But if the prophetic reading of history would say that such division was not without the providential ordering of God and that in devious ways His purpose has been served by the imperfect ways of men, the same reading would also say, that the way taken was not necessarily the only one possible, and that God can and does lead back along the way we came; and (with Ezekiel) that while He can divide Judah and Israel, so He can make two halves of the stick one again. It might even say that He can preserve seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal even while involved in a faithless people practising syncretistic worship.

Here it must be said that one favourite refuge of evangelical thought on this matter must be inspected more closely; I mean the comfort

afforded by the thought of the unity of the Church invisible in the face of visible division. Let us note that in the New Testament the reference to "churches" bears nothing of the sense of different denominations, but refers to local congregations, locally manifesting the one total Church. It agrees here with the words that open the first epistle of Clement: "The church which sojourns in Rome greets the church which sojourns in Corinth". The term *church* in the New Testament can refer to the local group, the aggregate of such groups (1 Cor. 11: 16) or to the total church through space and time. But the local group, or any number of congregations, is never contrasted with the whole Church in terms of visible and invisible. When a Christian by faith, is "in Christ" the phrase has a churchly sense as well as a sense of personal relation to the Saviour; for to be related truly to Christ is also to be related to His people. The relation both to Him and to His Church is manifested in sacramental acts and social activity, and there is no biblical basis for distilling (as it were) a refined spiritual community out of and in distinction from the local empirical communities so as to think rather of the unity of the one and be less concerned with the other. Alan Richardson has rightly pointed out that such an idea of an "invisible church" would have been as repugnant to the biblical outlook as a disembodied soul. Indeed it has been suggested with some reason that this is really a platonizing understanding of the Church. I think this has been overstressed, but it is a warning.

Rather, in the process of Reformed thinking on the matter, the truer concept of the "invisibility of the church" came to be recognized, rather than the idea of an invisible church. The Church in fact is parallel to the individual Christian in this way; only God knows the true spiritual state of a man and nobody is able to pronounce on the spiritual state of another; a man may have inward assurance as to his true trust in Christ, and yet his behaviour may disturb that peace and may concern his Christian friends as well. The individual Christian, like the Church, also thus lives on two levels or in two relations, in inward relation to God, the invisible life, and in outward acts, habits, and manner of life. The inward refers to the eschatological dimension of the Christian situation summed up in the doctrine of justification by grace through faith, in which men dwell in God's new order, have eternal life, belong to His kingdom, have in fact passed from death into life, and are saved for all eternity. The outward refers to the historical dimension summed up in the doctrine of sanctification, where men are being conformed to what they are in Christ, and evidencing that they are in empirical reality what they are by divine calling, through the gifts and working of the Holy Spirit. In this area of Christian life it is not possible to discriminate assuredly the hypocrite from the erring Christian and attempts to do so have proved disastrous; but as we have seen this has been the urge that at the corporate level has produced schism.

Theologically understood thus, there is no support for some supposed invisible community opposed to the corrupt visible, for the very members of the invisible community are themselves still sinful, and the corrupt visible is composed of those whose names are written in heaven. With our Article XIX we unite the visibility of the Church with the

gathering of "faithful men". It is true that in the visible life of the Church there will be those who are not men of true faith; that the participation in its institutional, sacramental life is not identical with a participation in Christ, and that the areas, so to speak, of its inward and outward participation do not correlate completely. But the outward life is the sign, the sacrament if you like, of the inward, hence there is no ground for separation upon the basis of this obverse and reverse distinction in the life of the Church. When we see the Church divided, we must recognize that it is a division between members of Christ's body, who do not share a common church life, and where true Christians live apart. But to say, as some have said, that the proposed Anglican-Methodist unification can be compared to the putting of two dead bodies in one coffin, is, when you look at it from the above standpoint, essentially faithless for it does not acknowledge the Church of God in the churches, and so descends into cynicism. Again, to be satisfied with uplifted feelings after a united Keswick Convention communion service is to fail grievously to note that the very participators go out into divided life, loyalties, and witness in actual empirical fact. We cannot so pull wool over our eyes and try to contract out of the actual realities of our separations. We go out to walk apart.

\* \* \* \*

What is our view of self-contained localized churches? Bishop Newbigin has reminded us that we inherit an outlook in Reformation thought that has adjusted itself to the regionalization of religion from what was once the wider *corpus Christianum* of Western Europe. The slogan was "*cujus regio, ejus religio*", and for the most part behind the *regio* was the *rex* and his religion. Hooker provided the thesis of this outlook for Britain, but he was fighting a losing battle, not only against radical Reformation policies which refused to be halted, but also against social drives creating a new society; and of course since then the darker forces of wide apostasy. If, as we may hope, the drawing together of the churches in different parts of the world comes to pass, it may have the welcome result of a new, unified national church in each place but in full communion with others. Each church will have its own especial ethos, no doubt with variety and difference internally as there will also be difference in churches of different geographical areas. In the present world, both from the missionary and the theological understanding of the Church, as well as the actualities of its worldly situation, the old divisive boundaries cannot be allowed to exercise disruptive force based simply on physical situations. But such national churches are not in sight of renewing the Hookerian thesis. Each is in a missionary situation even if also established. Old Testament theocratic analogies do not apply (unless we are British Israelites) and medieval theories of the godly prince are obsolete now that the country is not the patrimony of the crown.

What the establishment of such unified national churches will involve is obscure, but we cannot, I am convinced, refer the relation of the church to the state in quite the terms we have been used to arguing. Are we going to claim that members of parliament are somehow objectively Christian because they represent a highly dubiously baptized 70 per cent of the population in order to justify our recourse to Parlia-

ment, yet complain of indiscriminate baptism, leading to minimal communicant numbers, and refer to the country as pagan and needing a Billy Graham mission? Would it not be better to say that until the church works out and uses an adequate and fair representative system to find out the will of its members, it requires the highest court in the land to judge whether it is acting according to its historic constitution, gratefully remembering that parliament is still guided by an unwritten national constitution with a certain Christian content, as well as having many members at the moment who are practising Christians. But should the establishment of a united national church involve also the provision of an adequately representative church assembly, we shall have to think again. And the closer relations with unestablished churches overseas will only make this re-thinking all the more necessary. To fight against this will involve our being left with a thesis (like Hooker's) which no longer applies to the situation.

Such a unified national church will either have to be one that learns to contain many tensions and variations in loving unity, or else to be one that has achieved a colourless "central" mediocrity. It will surely involve an experiment in following the reasoning and advice of Gamaliel, and a Christian commitment to the modern political maxim—"the protection not the persecution of the opposition". This may well involve much sifting of motives and of the whole centrifugal fragmentation. Why is it that the truth I stand for, or defend, or the path of obedience I follow makes me wish to separate from a Christian who, so far, looks at things differently. I can use Scripture, like a Plymouth Brother, that really applies to unbelievers, against fellow-Christians; I can call my feeling of difference from another the guidance of the Holy Spirit. I can excite myself with denunciation, or take a quiet line of earnest stubbornness. But deep down, if we dare to probe, we shall come to that pervasive formless anxious fear that is the legacy of our fallen state, which gathers in panic force round any object that seems to threaten our existence, or the meaningfulness of our position. When so aroused, it urges to a defence by flight (secession) or aggression to destroy the threat, perhaps, symbolically, by exclusion, although church history provides examples of more violent methods, which give full rein to this repressed fear. It is this that reacts to all the theological and non-theological factors in division. We would say in terms of spiritual counselling that Christ can heal here in the power of his Holy Spirit. We need still to remember Christ's rebuke to James and John, as they smugly reported how they had stopped one from casting out demons to His name, because "he followeth not with us". This needs much pondering by all kinds of Christians, both those who make much of barriers that are given undue importance, as well as those who have too easy a conscience over the whole Christian situation. Many would say, in support, that reunion will need revival. But the kind of spiritual overhaul for such a united life will involve an experience in depth demanding more understanding and going much further than is recognized by many who easily accept this phraseology. Evangelical spirituality is capable of development for such a task, gigantic as it is. But the physician must first himself be healed. How far are we spiritually making ready for the future?