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DIVERSITIES OF OPERATIONS¹

I

I HAVE always been so conscious of the fortuitous circumstances which called me to moderate in this Historic Synod, as to endeavour to conduct myself with humility. An equal sense of humility influences me now, as I proceed to discharge my last responsible task in preaching the Synod Sermon. I invite your attention to the words of the Great Apostle, which form our text, and in the light of that text, I ask you to consider for a moment certain tendencies of modern ecclesiastical ways, which in my judgment, impair the administration and operation of the Church of Christ. I do not seek your agreement, but I crave your earnest appreciation of the problem.

It is common speech to say that the Church of Christ faces unusual difficulties. Some go so far as to say that it is facing a crisis. In consequence, it is to be expected that earnest men are trying to find a solution which will place the Church in a more enviable position in relation to the world. But the duty still rests with us to examine their proposals on a Scriptural basis and in line with the received testimony of our Historic Faith, that we may be directed by the Spirit to the mind of Christ. There are grave perils awaiting us, if on the one hand we exaggerate the difficulties or fail to define them, and if on the other hand we suffer ourselves to be led astray by panic.

I ask you more particularly now to consider the perils involved in the increasing demand for the "larger unity" of the Christian Church. This aspiration is by no means novel. In fact it has frequently pursued and assailed the Christian Church in all its history, but to-day assumes a misleading aspect.

All over the world ecclesiastics are meeting in Conventions. At Oslo, at Montreal, at Oxford, at Edinburgh, they gather. Let us ask, what do they do?

¹ Sermon delivered at the opening of the Synod of the Maritime Provinces of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, in St. Andrew's Church, New Glasgow, N.S., on Tuesday, 5th October, 1937:—

"And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all." (1 Corinthians, XII. 5, 6.)

They try to define the crisis. A variety of formidable foes threaten Institutional Christianity with paralysis, if not extinction, and the only hope rests in presenting "a common front". Missionary Congresses assure us that the heathen are needlessly bewildered by our denominational differences. The menace to faith is declared sometimes to be Paganism, sometimes Communism, sometimes Anti-Social tendencies, sometimes more vaguely, the "spirit of the modern age" with its insensate and ill-formed clamour for an adjustment of faith.

In their definition of the enemies of Christ they show a strange lack of precision. What is Communism? Is it a Philosophy? Is it an Economic Theory? Is it a Political Expression? Indeed is it of a surety Anti-Religious? They do not explain. It is Communism and therefore terrible. Paganism truly defined represents the flowering of a cultural development properly described as "the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome". Whatever may be the menace in our modern culture to faith, it is at any rate improperly called Paganism or Neo-Paganism. Paganism has no modern equivalent in our fast ebbing tide of culture and restraint.

In any case the Scriptures have no such attractive terminology to define the avowed enemies of Christ. They know of one enemy of Christ and of one only—SIN. The godly fellowship of the Prophets, the glorious company of the Apostles, the noble army of Martyrs were utterly unconcerned with the tendencies of their age, but they were unmistakably clear in their denunciation of sin and in offering salvation. Sin is a basic reality in human life, much more fundamental than the ephemeral trends of modern life and thought. Sin is the only object of the warfare of the Church. Promoters of "larger unity", we fear, are sadly lacking in sin consciousness.

What is to be the scope of greater union? Sometimes there is evidence of a willingness to admit the necessity of limitation. But against that we observe ever a tendency to increase the range in an alarming fashion.

I have before me an Order of Service held under the auspices of the World Fellowship of Faiths. In a Christian Church we have a Moslem call to Prayer, a Sanskrit Peace Hymn, a Brahmin leading in Prayer, Negro Spirituals, a Jewish Response, and finally a Buddhist Benediction. This is a caricature of religion. But even where discussions on greater unity are conducted

within a narrower range of speculation and are governed with more restraint, there is still an atmosphere of unreality present, which reduces them to a travesty of faith.

II

I direct your attention now to the recent Convention on Faith and Order held at Edinburgh under the leadership of Dr. Temple, Archbishop of York. This Convention is typical of all Missionary gatherings, Sabbath School Conferences, Ecclesiastical Conventions, which are held with alarming frequency in our day. With the utmost desire to be fair, we cannot overlook the sanctimonious atmosphere which pervades these associations. The delegates tend to pose as superchurchmen with a wider vision. They rejoice openly in their quasi-emancipation from denominational fetters, and speak in an exalted manner. No *ex cathedra* utterance of the Pope ever affected a greater infallibility than these Oecumenic pronouncements claim for themselves. The plain fact seems to be forgotten that these delegates are under the discipline, worship, and government of the Communion, which they represent, and no Communion to my knowledge ever gave its Commissioners carte blanche to speak patronisingly of itself or to talk at large. When they speak of "all Christians", etc., they use unwarrantable language. They speak for themselves only, when in airy fashion they brush aside the historic claims of the Episcopate, the Presbyterate, etc., and play fast and loose with the Sacraments. It should not be forgotten that no Bishop is present but is bound by his oath of consecration. No Presbyter is there but under the solemn vows of his ordination. Therefore the various Communions may well consider whether their obligation to their Historic Faiths is not sufficient to warrant the application of Church Censures and Discipline upon the delegates, who with such reckless abandon, misrepresent rather than represent the position and principles of their Church.

Let us consider some samples of the indiscreet language which is the conventional jargon of these gatherings. "Deeper than our divisions." "Basis of discussion." "Genuine understanding." "Worshipping at rival shrines." "The Presence which we do not try to define (sic)." "An ordained ministry recognised by all." "Characteristic elements." Here is part of their solemn affirmation, which they invest with Conciliar authority. "We are convinced that our unity of Spirit and aim must be

embodied in a way that will make it manifest to the world, *though we do not yet clearly see, what outward form it should take.*" Fathers and brethen! has common sense fled and reason left her throne. "We humbly acknowledge that our divisions are contrary to the will of Christ." This sounds the depths of fatuity. Where is the Scriptural foundation for so sweeping a statement. Did not Our Lord commission independently the Seventy and the Twelve? The Apostolic Church must have been deceived in the Pentecostal vision, for it separated itself to the Gospel, and along the ways of life left an infinite variety of testimony to the "will of Christ". Unashamedly the vision is for "the seven churches". This suave declaration puts the brand of absurdity upon a thousand years of history.

The evil is also apparent outside the Church. It has long been the conviction and practice of the benevolently disposed that, if you wish a good enterprise to succeed you must strip it of all denominational restraints. Thus every civilised country is plagued with a multitude of undenominational agencies.

The Bible Society, while deserving all praise for its mighty works, is not above suspicion in this matter. It assumes a superiority to the Institutional Church, and is rapidly presuming upon an unrestricted ownership of the Scriptures. It has established an *ipse dixit* of its own in regard to the editing, publishing, and circulation of the Scriptures. Do we forget that Holy Church is the undisputed custodian of the oracles of God? Do we forget that Holy Church defines the Canon, and is the only authorised interpreter of the Word of God? This trust cannot be laid aside in favour of any agency however worthy, to whose custody the Holy Orders have not been directly entrusted. The Bible Society would do well to remember the "rock whence it is hewn", and the piety arising within the Church, which gave it birth.

Again there is the World's Evangelical Alliance with its presumptuous motto—*Unum Corpus Sumus in Christo*—which belongs inalienably to Holy Church. That text is her inspiration and divine commission, and is made use of by a promiscuous body at the risk of possible sacrilege. Here is the slogan of the Alliance. "In all things essential unity: in things non-essential liberty: in all things charity." We will not quarrel with the last, but as to the other two we may well ask if words have lost their meaning. "Essence" is itself "unity." "Essentials" must be

“unities”. There is some prospect of “non-essentials” being systematically grouped into a “unity”, but the characteristic of “essentials” rests in the fact that they differ one essential from another. To make sense we must revise and read “In essentials liberty: in non-essentials unity”. But in any case what a gratuitous estimate of history to suppose that men have died heroically for their faith, aware that their faith was a unity, but blissfully ignorant that there was no difference between them and their opponents.

The plea for “larger unity” of the Christian Church shows a deplorable ignorance of the meaning of words, but it ignores the facts, and places history out of perspective, and forgets the Divine Commission to the Holy Catholic Church. In fact the very name Holy Catholic Church, if its implication is sufficiently understood, conveys by Divine Appointment all that men desire to attain by purely human means. “Larger Unity” is an attempt to form a streamlined Church which will ride easily to the contrary winds of public opinion. It will have no awkward protuberances like the Word, the Sacraments, Apostolic Succession, Ecclesiastical Discipline. The streamlined Church will make of the Word a syncretism, of the Sacraments a spurious fellowship or “get-together”, of Apostolic Succession a piebald ministry devoid of the marks of Divine Commission, and of Discipline—already neglected in the home, in the school, in the community—why burden the Church with it? Let us revel in anarchy. For creeds we shall have slogans easier for the modern jaded intellect to grasp. For Theology—*Scientia Scientiarum*—we shall substitute the less involved pietism of a worldly age. The streamlined Church whose “outward form” “we do not yet clearly see” will neither be Holy, nor Catholic, nor a Church. Having no Commission, it can have no Mission. For the salvation of the souls of men we shall still have to rely on a remnant Church, which continues to witness to its Apostolic origin. The remnant Apostolic Church at least will understand the meaning of words and know if there is a difference between a Bishop and a Presbyter. The remnant Apostolic Church whose “outward form” “we do clearly see” for Pentecost shaped it, will speak still as one having authority. The streamlined Church will be the measure of man’s capacity to enforce obedience.

Now we must face the underlying issue, even though it

hurts. It is evidently conceded, that the Church is failing to-day to bear such a clear and convincing testimony to the Evangel of Jesus Christ as to confound utterly the menacing foes to faith. To an alarming extent our witness is moribund and losing its Pentecostal Power. But a revival of Alexandrian modes with the object of rejuvenating the Church is not calculated to bring regenerating grace. The magnitude of the problems has not taken the heart out of the Church so much as the lack of grace within. We need something more than a tinkering with the machinery. We need a return to the source of inspiration and power.

III

Fathers and brethen, I now commit you at the opening of this Synod to an attitude of reverence and respect for your Presbyterian heritage. As against the prevailing tendency, I uphold denominationalism and I in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Sole Head and Governor of His Church, ask you to reaffirm your loyalty to the trust committed to your charge. You never heard of Masons, Oddfellows, and Rotarians proposing a joint scheme of union to tackle the enemies of fraternity. Though each in line with their received traditions are vigorously opposing the foe. The Church of Christ has less excuse for adopting a utilitarian scheme as a solution of its difficulties. In accordance with our received tradition, I summon you to discharge the responsibilities, which rest upon us as our solemn obligation. And where help is needed, we need only recall "my grace is sufficient for you".

When men show you a picture with an Archimandrite at one end of the platform; a Priest of the Church of Rome at the other; an Anglican Clergyman and a Presbyterian Minister in the middle; do not be allured into talking silly jargon. Tell the truth and avow "What apostasy!" for apostasy it certainly is. One man there at any rate (in all probability all of them) has departed from his most solemn and sacred vows or else he could not comfortably be in such dubious company, and as with Peter of old, his speech continually "betrayeth" him. When you are encouraged from time to time to join in the sentimentality of an interdenominational gathering, if it seems good to you, go knowing what you are about and with some misgivings.

The Week of Prayer is such a gathering which is more and more attracting the interest of Christians. We welcome any

good which may come out of it. But we must not foster the illusion that it can secure for us in so easy a fashion, what the Church seeks to accomplish in more disciplinary ways. Good, faithful people will benefit, as indeed they always do, from any kind of real Christian Fellowship. But there are "drifters" who have come to make that kind of gathering their sole spiritual home. It is deceiving to suppose that that frail type of Christian allegiance can take the place of the more orthodox methods. On the whole, the interdenominational gathering harbours the delusion that men can win a spiritual blessing without incurring a corresponding obligation.

If we would see some real result outside of a mere "mass gathering", then it would be more to the point if those who sincerely and devotedly believe they have been buried with Christ in Baptism and in the efficacy of the Cleansing Rite, would gather—every last one of them—in the Baptist Church, while the Baptist Parson, with no apology, but with unquestioning confidence, exhorts them to an even greater devotion to a faith made illustrious and memorable for its historic evangelical witness.

There would be more evidence of power, if those who gather round the historic symbol of the Cross of Canterbury, were to take with renewed spiritual fervour that venerable Prayer Book into their hands, and seek absolution at the Throne of Grace, in order that the candle lit by Ridley and Latimer should never grow dim.

And if Presbyterians desire a baptism of the Holy Spirit, where could they more reasonably hope to receive it than in their own place of worship? There they are compassed about with a great cloud of witnesses as under the Blue Banner with the zeal of Drumclog they sing—

" In Judah's land God is well known
His name's in Israel great."

This is the kind of testimony of which we might say, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches". The other is like a co-operative society which pays no dividends.

It may be true that spiritually we are dead, and that our witness is as a vision of the Valley of Dry Bones. Revival is undoubtedly needed. But I see no hope in shovelling the bones

into one heap and by spells and incantations seeking to revivify some monstrosity whose "outward form we do not yet clearly see". But I do believe in the sure word of prophecy which revives individually—"Prophecy upon these bones . . . and ye shall live". And as each, true to his identity took on sinews, and flesh, and skin, and the breath of life, so do I see reviving power making more conscientious Baptists, Anglicans and Presbyterians, with a vital faith, so that they live and stand upon their feet, an exceeding great army.

IV

Our Church has a divine origin and an eternal purpose throbs in its history. It acknowledges the prerogatives of Christ and the privileges of His people. I give my testimony, that in my experience of the difficulties which beset the Presbyterian Church in Canada, I have seen none which were exaggerated or rendered intractable, save when men have abrogated the divine right of Presbytery, and permitted self-will to prevail in place of obedience to a Divine Institution, and suffered that which is not divinely appointed to govern the issue. On the contrary, where the Rule of our Church has been accepted with loyalty, and practised with fervour and zeal, there has been abundant blessing, and withal peace.

I bid you come to the deliberations of this Court of the Church of Christ in no shuffling gait, but with clear eyes, heads erect, and a firm tread. Let us not deplore the divisions which rend Christendom, nor yet be ashamed of them. The reproach to Christendom is not our responsibility, nor are we committed to any craven thought of unworthily compromising reconciliation. We are not saved by euphemisms or euphuisms.

The "larger unity" may come under the hand of God with all the power of a Renaissance, when the Churches are so *alive* that they cannot be held back, and so they burst their bands in sunder. In that day of Pentecostal Power there will be no necessity for bewildered ecclesiastics to grope vainly seeking to shape the Church of the future. The vision will be unmistakable, and God himself—as He has done in the past—will emphatically reveal the new name by which He shall be known. When the spiritual vision is blind, is hardly the opportunity to receive and enjoy so splendid a vision.

Away back in the early days of Israel, Saul grew panicky

waiting for Samuel at Gilgal. Like ourselves, he pleaded a crisis. And he construed the emergency as his commission to arrogate the authority of the priest. He offered the sacrifices. Samuel not only rebuked him, but also prophesied the fall of his kingdom.

God does not suffer wilful men to trifle with His eternal decrees even with good intention. Abraham sought to modify the Divine Plan, and in choosing Hagar, fell into the sin of presumption. The Apostles wearied at Jerusalem, and without Divine Authority they elected Matthias to take part in this ministry. The Holy Spirit reserved that place for Paul. Always the lure of "urgency" has been the temptation of Holy Church to destroy the ancient landmarks and forsake the old paths. "For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but in the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry."

The Church is not of the people nor by the people, but of God. God will determine both how long our testimony shall endure, and what "outward form" it shall take, if HE decrees a change. Our task is to maintain and defend the faith. Let there first of all be reviving power of the Holy Spirit to quicken in us greater loyalty and devotion to our historic faith. Be ministers of the Word. Let the elders be ensamples to the flock. As the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church, may we with all abandonment of self be ready to die, if need be, that the Presbyterian witness should persevere inviolate, with the seal unsullied. The totalitarian Church is anathema! Let our missionaries go forth for the sake of the name under the appointment of the Holy Catholic Church of Presbyters, and let the souls they have for their hire be unashamed Presbyterians. Let there be no eclectic spirit.

I confess to an ever-increasing suspicion as to the efficiency of Joint-Committees representing the Churches in various endeavours. If it be a Committee on Joint-Evangelisation for example, I am seriously perturbed. There can be and ought to be no such Committee. The Churches have a common task, but each has a very specific assignment. The evangelisation of the world is our common task, but it is the very task to which the Churches are separately called. The tendency to remit that one supreme individual obligation to others is an evasion of responsibility. It is our duty to evangelise according to the

faith once delivered to the saints. We dare not delegate our own duty.

Our age is notable for the great increase in our intellectual range, but it also reveals the deficiency of our intellectual grasp. In consequence this is the age of Ideology. Ideology has provoked Nazism, Fascism, and many other -isms. Ideology has corrupted education, so much so that it is almost a failure in respect of its aims, and becoming poverty-stricken in the development of character. Ideology now invades the Church with the specious thought that by abandoning our Commission and yielding to the mesmerism of ideas and the hypnotism of words, we can improve upon the Lord Himself. Many are afraid of heresy. We have more reason to suspect and denounce heterodoxy. Ideology is the opiating influence of ideas. We are word addicts. Our age is prolific in ideas, but sterile in sense.

The business of this Synod will demand more than even your wisdom, time and convenience can adequately supply. You will also need the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit in the Divine Government of the Church. That will carry us through. We put no trust in any streamlined Church, weak, ineffective, accommodating, where the fires of Pentecost have died out. We have the "frail bark" launched in faith by Calvin at Geneva, which has weathered centuries. That bark has too many theological and ecclesiastical implications to look streamlined, but she is seaworthy in an ocean of unbelief, apostasy, and fear. Let us set her course whither the Spirit directs. God will be at the helm.

To the Baptist Denomination, to the Church of England, and to others who confess the name of Jesus Christ, Our Only Lord and Saviour, let us say, "We recognise and respect your differences of administrations and your diversities of operations, but we rejoice with you in the same Lord, the same God, which worketh all in all, and on that basis we will rather intensify our historic convictions, in order that with the reviving power of our individual profession we shall be better able to co-operate with you in the business of the Lord of all". There is but one task before the Churches—the salvation of souls: there is but one enemy of the Churches—sin. Let every Church be sure and unwavering in its testimony, even as we are sure and unfaltering in ours. Thus the trumpet shall give no

uncertain sound and we shall all prepare for the battle. "But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness."

Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling
and to present you faultless before the presence
of His Glory with exceeding joy
to the Only Wise God, Our Saviour
be Glory and Majesty
Dominion and Power
both now and ever.

AMEN.

NORMAN D. KENNEDY.

First Presbyterian Church, New Glasgow, Nova Scotia.