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PROPOSED SCHEMES FOR REUNION.

BY THE RIGHT REVEREND THE BISHOP OF FUKIEN.

JUST at the time when I was asked to write this paper I was reading through, not for the first nor yet for the second time, Dickens's wonderful novel *Bleak House*, and I came to a passage which so exactly sums up the situation as I see it that I make no apology for quoting it in full. Little Jo lay dying and the good doctor Woodcourt was attending him and asked him :

" Jo, did you ever know a prayer ? "

" Never know'd nothink, sir."

" Not so much as one short prayer ? "

" No, sir, nothink at all. Mr. Chadbands he was a-prayin' wunst at Mr. Sangsby's and I heerd him, but he sounded as if he was a-speakin' to hisself and not to me. He prayed a lot, but I couldn't make out nothink on it. Different times there was other gen'l'men came down Tom All Alone's a-prayin', but they all mostly said as the t'other ones prayed wrong, and all mostly sounded to be a-prayin' to theirselves or a-passin' blame on the t'others, and not a-talkin' to us. *We* never knowd nothink. *I* never know'd what it was all about."

This really well represents what is happening to-day throughout Christendom. The divisions, controversies and mutual recriminations are so sadly weakening the message of the Gospel which we are attempting to preach to the World, that it fails to reach those to whom it is sent. So serious has the situation become that it is no wonder that now at last some have been aroused to the danger and have determined to get rid of the divisions at any cost. Consequently we hear of Conferences being called together for mutual counsel and discussion, and we even find actual schemes for Union Churches developing in many places.

The subject assigned to me is " Proposed Schemes for Reunion." I accepted the invitation to write this paper on the distinct understanding that I was not likely to commend these schemes in general nor any one of them in particular to the members of this Conference. There have been many such proposed Unions, for example the United Church of Canada, the South India United Church, the United Church of South Africa and the recently inaugurated Church of Christ in China. All such schemes have many points in common, and I am sure that most of the members of the Conference will be familiar with the details of at least one of them and probably more than one. So far as our own communion is concerned, the one which seems to be most hopeful of success is the South India United Church, where representatives of the Anglican Church have actually been negotiating with a view to joining as an integral part of the United Church.

The China scheme known as the Church of Christ in China is practically an amalgamation of the Presbyterian and Congregational Churches alone. This Union is a development of an earlier movement between these two communions which had been in existence

for some years. The great wave of Nationalist feeling which swept over the country from end to end during the last few years, and which did affect, to some extent, even the Church, is partly responsible for bringing the matter to a head just at the present time.

The movement has been ascribed to a growing impatience on the part of Chinese Christians with the divisions in the Church which they call our Western divisions, and which they declare have no meaning for them. I must honestly say that I have met with few such expressions of impatience from Chinese Christian leaders, and I think that the impatience is really to be found exactly where it might be expected, namely, in the hearts of the missionaries, and it is *their* enthusiasm which has infected the minds of some of the Chinese Christians. Such expressions of impatience with our Western divisions as one has heard or seen in print seem to be more the reflection of the opinions of China's foreign Missionary friends, than to be any spontaneous or deep-rooted feeling of their own. The Chinese with whom I have frequently discussed this and kindred matters seem quite ready to grasp the facts: (*a*) that the Church which Western missionaries have been instrumental in founding in China is not the Church of the Apostles' days, nor the Church of the time of St. Augustine, it is the Church of the present day, it is the only Church they had to offer and is therefore the only Church that China could accept; (*b*) that China cannot, as it were, go back and pick it up at some earlier point in its history; (*c*) that it does not really matter where the events happened which produced our present divisions, the divisions now exist in the Church as part of its very fabric and are as universal as the Church, and (*d*) that, as China gradually accepts Christianity, she must make her own contribution to it, and, above all, must do her utmost to co-operate with Christians throughout the world in attempting to heal up the divisions in the Church which she recognizes to be the cause of so much weakness.

The particular Union scheme of which I am now speaking, namely, the Church of Christ in China, was consummated much too rapidly for the Chinese branch of the Anglican Communion—the Chung Hua Sheng Kung Hui—to have any part in it. The Chung Hua Sheng Kung Hui is organized nationally, that is to say, each of the eleven dioceses sends representatives to a General Synod which meets once in three years. Now the Church of Christ in China was organized between two meetings of the General Synod, and thus there was really no opportunity for the Chung Hua Sheng Kung Hui to consider the matter in Synod or officially to join the preliminary negotiations. I do not mean to imply that had the Chung Hua Sheng Kung Hui had the opportunity she would certainly have joined in the negotiations, nor to suggest that she bears any grudge against the originators of this scheme, for we realize, in the first place, that it is a union between Protestant communions already very closely related, and, secondly, that it was but the ratification of an experiment between these particular communions initiated some years previously. At the same time it must be

recognized that if this movement is, as it appears to be, an attempt to form a basis upon which all the Protestant communions in China may unite to form one united Protestant Church of China, then the fact of this smaller union having actually been consummated will complicate any future negotiations with those communions which are as yet excluded from it but which may hereafter wish to cooperate.

But I must express the anxiety I feel, an anxiety albeit which does not seem to be generally felt, that a very serious danger lurks in the proposed organization of Union Churches on national or regional lines and that such a proceeding is likely to lead to divisions in Christendom even more disastrous than those we have at present.

Our divisions into what are called denominations are very much to be deplored, but nevertheless the denominations as we have them now have one strong point, namely, that they do go round the world. However unravelled the strands of the Church's witness have become those strands have preserved that indispensable characteristic of a Christian Church—they have kept their international character, or, better, their supra-national character.

If, in order to secure Unity, it should be found necessary to cut across the unravelled strands, then the result would be that we should, as it were, substitute for our present horizontal division by denominations a vertical division by nations or regions. The hope underlying this process doubtless is that, when the principle has been applied in many different parts of the world, and a number of national or regional churches formed, it will be comparatively easy to draw these national churches together and a World-wide United Church will be the ultimate outcome.

It may well be questioned whether it would ever be possible to achieve a permanent and stable coherence between the units cooperating in any such national or regional united Church. History does not inspire one with much hope; but even if this were found possible, the problem of uniting together a number of such national or regional churches would be infinitely greater, and thus we should be brought no nearer to the goal of a reunited Christendom, but should find ourselves encumbered with denominations at least as numerous as before and far more difficult to unite. For it must not be imagined that the national or regional churches so formed would be identical or even similar in character, in doctrine or in practice. The several regions contain quite different groups of denominations, and it is unthinkable that those different groups when combined should result in identical combinations. Let us use an illustration. Suppose we represent the denominations by the letters of the alphabet; in region No. 1 we have A, B, C, and D denominations, and in region No. 2 we have A, C, E, and G denominations; it is impossible that the combination ABCD should be identical with the combination ACEG. In region No. 3 we may find quite a different group of denominations, say, C, F, I, and L, which have only C in common with the first two. Here again we

must expect a combination having characteristics differing considerably from the former two. The illustration may seem to exaggerate the problem somewhat; nevertheless it serves to show how little we can count on being able to draw together into one great United Church, the national or regional churches after such have been formed. When we add to this the difficulties arising from differences in racial characteristics, national histories and national customs we shall surely begin to realize that to achieve a reunited Christendom through this means is a forlorn hope.

I must go on to mention some of the *dangers* which I see in regional unions.

First there is the obvious danger that the Church will cease to be the link binding together believers in Jesus Christ of different races and colours, the several parts of it will rather become conformed to the regions where they exist and will inevitably fail to bear witness, to as full an extent as previously, to the world-wide fellowship of the disciples of Christ. The Church ought to be, and has surely hitherto been on the whole, a powerful agency for the prevention of war, but if the division of the Church by nations were to become a fact, it is to be feared that, in the event of war, or even during international disputes which tend to lead to war, such churches could hardly fail to fall into the snare of becoming an instrument for the furtherance of national interests or for the denouncing of national enemies. It may well be argued that even with our present divisions we did not wholly escape that snare; well, then, all the less hope if the churches' denominational boundaries were to be made coincident with those of the nations.

Secondly. This process of cutting across the ravelled strands is a process of disintegration, and when a process of disintegration has once begun it is very liable to go on. For example, we already hear rumours of plans for the formation of a Nanking United Church and a Hangchow United Church. Nanking and Hangchow are mere *cities* in China, but if once the process of cutting across the strands begins there can be little doubt that we shall immediately be faced with the problem of *Local Unions*. This is a perfectly natural development. To use again the illustration given above, let us suppose the national united Church of China to consist of a combination of denominations A to Z. Whereas Hangchow finds itself with only A, B, X, and Y, the Christians there will naturally think that they can form a church more congenial to themselves than the National Church, and having no traditions to bind them in loyalty to the National Church they will not hesitate to cut themselves off from it and form a local union, and thus the process of disintegration once begun will tend to continue unchecked until the church is split up into numerous local unions each independent of the rest and all of them failing sadly to bear any witness to the universal fellowship of believers in Christ.

You will very naturally say to me, "What hope is there then of ever securing Unity? Conferences have been held after years of preparation and at immense expense and have yielded but little

result. It is plain that if we are to trust to conferences and conversations alone, unity can only be achieved, if ever, after a lapse of very many years *and the matter is urgent*. The Communion is too large now and the differences too numerous for any satisfactory result to be obtained by conference in the near future, and now you warn us that schemes for national or regional unions are likely to lead us at last into an error that will be worse than the first. Have you any proposal to make which will give us any hope of reaching our goal?" I must say in answer to this challenge that the only hope I see is by way of *Intercommunion*. It does not come within the scope of this paper to speak of Intercommunion, that subject is being dealt with by others, suffice it to say that I believe that the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is our Sacrament of unity, that it was given because our Lord foresaw the danger of disunion (as His High-Priestly prayer plainly shows) and was intended to be a means of preserving unity among His disciples *or of recovering it if lost*, and was never meant to be regarded, as it now so commonly is, as a mere sign of restored fellowship.

Doctor Norman Leys in his book *Kenya* makes the statement, "Protestant missions in Kenya would be happy to unite if the churches at home would allow them." This is a serious indictment of the home churches and one that ought to give them furiously to think. There seems to be a tendency in the home churches nowadays to shift the responsibility for reunion on to the mission-field; perhaps, as a missionary, I may be excused if I do my bit towards shifting it back again. The home Church's constant cry is "We are waiting for a lead from the mission-field," but this cry does not ring true. Barriers have been set up or have grown up which separate us from the other communions, and the home churches say that they wait for a lead from the mission-field to show how these barriers may be surmounted, and all the while the home churches do nothing to remove the barriers, and indeed continue to regard them as indispensable. The churches in the mission-field may surely be excused for feeling anxious lest, in the event of their repudiating any of these barriers, they would be treated as excommunicate by the home churches. Thus we have a vicious circle. The home churches wait for a lead from the mission-field, while the mission-field cannot move until the home churches have at least declared themselves as to their attitude towards these barriers. I fear lest the home churches be at last confounded by their own complacency and that they will one day wake up to find their daughter churches separated from them in a way that they will not scruple to describe as schismatic. Personally I believe that, unless the Anglican Communion is prepared to recognize the sister communions at least up to the point of intercommunion, her very existence in what are now known as mission lands is in danger. To the native churches in those lands, so far as my observation goes, the restrictions which have been placed upon intercommunion are simply meaningless. Intercommunion is practised in many places, but it is with an uncomfortable feeling that it contravenes

some regulation and would render those who practise it liable to the displeasure of the Mother Church.

As an illustration of the kind of barriers to which I have referred, may I make a few quotations from the resolutions of the Lambeth Conference of 1920.

1. The Bishops of the Anglican Communion will not question the action of any Bishop who . . . shall *countenance the irregularity* of admitting to communion the baptized but unconfirmed communicants of the non-episcopal congregations concerned in the scheme.

2. [The conference] cannot approve of general schemes of intercommunion or exchange of pulpits.

3. It should be regarded as the general rule of the Church that Anglican communicants should receive Holy Communion only at the hands of ministers of their own church or of churches in communion therewith.

(The italics are mine.)

These resolutions have not, it is true, the binding force of laws, moreover they are carefully worded so as to avoid the appearance of setting up insurmountable barriers. Nevertheless, in view of the claim that Lambeth Conference makes for loyal obedience to its decisions, these resolutions do seem to many to impose real restrictions. I quote the following from the encyclical letter :

[Lambeth Conference] does not claim to exercise any powers of control or command. It stands for the far more Spiritual, more Christian principle of loyalty to the [Anglican] Fellowship. The churches represented in it are indeed independent, but independent with the Christian freedom which recognizes the restraints of truth and of love. They are not free to deny the truth. They are not free to ignore the fellowship.

Lambeth Conference is not a legislative assembly, it is merely a meeting for discussion, its findings have not the binding force of laws, though they have acquired considerable force throughout the Anglican Communion owing to the widely representative character of its personnel. It is very doubtful whether the Lambeth Conference would ever dare to take action amounting to the recognition of a national or regional united church, however carefully the terms of union had been drawn up. This would seem to it to be dangerously like legislation and any such action on the part of Lambeth Conference would be strongly resented throughout the Anglican Communion. But even if the home church finds it difficult to make changes itself, at least the conference can rescind its own former action, it can withdraw advice it has given in the past or take such other suitable action as shall set the daughter churches free to welcome to their altars recognized communicants of the other great communions and to accept similar hospitality from them.

May we not safely assume that such friendly action on the part of our communion and the greater intimacy which would result from it would lead to that mutual understanding and love which is the only sound and lasting basis of unity.

It is quite possible that each communion thinks that its own service is in some way superior to that of the other communions—more primitive, more catholic, more helpful or perhaps essentially different in some important respect—yet there is one thing of which

we may be sure, namely, that what each communion calls its "Holy Communion" is the service of all others through which God's blessing and help are received; it is here that the Spiritual life is most surely renewed and sustained. These are our best blessings; are they not, then, the very things that we should be most ready to share with others? and should we not also be ready to partake of their deepest and most inspiring Spiritual experiences whom we willingly and rightly acknowledge to be our brethren in Christ?

THE COMING OF THE CHURCH. By J. R. Coates. *Student Christian Movement*, 1929. (Pp. 96.) 3s.

We wish Mr. Coates had written at greater length. As it is, his 96 pages contain more stimulating thoughts and penetrating observations than many more pretentious volumes. Originally given in the form of addresses to missionaries in China in 1926, the volume bears evidence of a combination of scientific method in Biblical Criticism with a love for the Sacred Scriptures. "It takes the whole Bible to present the fact of Christ. . . . Christ means Israel, and Church History includes Moses and the prophets," says Mr. Coates, and he rightly traces the roots of the Church to Judaism. He sees underlying the ideas "Messiah," "Suffering Servant," "Covenant-People," "Light of the World," "Son of Man," an ideal Israel, whose true nature Christ was "to bring into being." This Christ did in founding the Church, a society which, according to the author, "can do what it likes with its traditional institutions." While we do not agree with all that he says on this point, we would underline his opinion that "the Church will achieve effective unity, and become actually Catholic only as it achieves and fulfils its calling to be the agent of world-redemption."

G. H. W.

THE BIRTH OF CONSCIENCE. By Constance L. Maynard. *Religious Tract Society*, 1928. (Pp. 78.) 2s.

The reading of this well-written study gave us much pleasure. The author finds three witnesses to the first dawn of Conscience—the records of primitive man, the mental history of each individual, and the Book of Genesis. A study of the Temptation and Fall of Man leads Miss Maynard to look upon Conscience as a faculty capable of growing, serving us best when it is subject to divine control and inspiration. Not the least pleasing feature of the book is the inclusion of very happily chosen verses (some her own) at the end of each chapter. We feel sure that Miss Maynard could give us a beautiful translation of Victor Hugo's lines on Conscience in his study of Cain in *La Légende des Siècles*.

G. H. W.