

# 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)

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>28</sup> A masterly defence of this phrase is given in the report, *The Catholicity of Protestantism*, pp. 67-90, published since this paper was written.

<sup>29</sup> *Phil.* iii. 9.

<sup>30</sup> J. S. Stewart, *A Man in Christ*, p. 257.

<sup>31</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Beyond Personality*, p. 50.

<sup>32</sup> Vincent Taylor, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, p. 58.

<sup>33</sup> R. Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. II., p. 129.

<sup>34</sup> H. R. Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology*, p. 168.

<sup>35</sup> A. H. Rees, *Justification in the Anglican Reformers* ("Theology" reprint), p. 16.

<sup>36</sup> P. T. Forsyth, *The Work of Christ*, p. 81.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 206-210.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, p. 202.

<sup>40</sup> *Rom.* v. 1.

<sup>41</sup> *John* x. 27, 28.

---

## Contemporary Commentary

A Quarterly Review of Church Affairs and Theological Trends

BY THE REV. F. J. TAYLOR, M.A.

### THIS NATION UNDER GOD

THE phrase which serves as the title of this note is taken from the famous Gettysburg address of Abraham Lincoln and has been adopted as the theme for a convention of more than ordinary importance to be held in Cleveland, Ohio, shortly before the end of this year. The source of the quotation is significant and points to the hope entertained by the sponsors of the convention, that it may mark a notable step forward in the fulfilment by the churches in America of their Christian obedience in this present age. The principal business before the delegates will be the proposed constitution in the United States of a National Council of the Churches of Christ, which in its constitution and functions will be analogous to the British Council of Churches.

To despise such ecclesiastical machinery on the grounds that it is a superfluous luxury, a bureaucratic organisation, or that it obscures the need for a whole-hearted dependence upon the Spirit of God, is to be blind to the necessities of the hour and to suppose that the Spirit cannot use the organisations which men fashion in response to the challenges of contemporary history. There may be in America legitimate fears of the danger of over centralisation in the planning of large scale Christian activity. Yet the pattern of society in our time does demand the conception of a total Christian strategy and adequate means for its implementation. This would suggest the necessity of some council able to survey the whole field of operations and to dispose of what are always likely to be inadequate Christian resources in the best possible way.

The Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, founded in 1908, pioneered a form of co-operation and consultation for common

Christian action in every part of America and in the whole range of Christian concern for the life of man. The structure and methods of the World Council of Churches owe a great deal to this American precedent, for it has been a council in which not individual Christians or mission boards but churches themselves, through official representatives, have joined forces, not merely for particular projects but for effective co-operation in every field of Christian endeavour. In addition to the formation in local areas of parallel councils of churches (about 550 in number) with their own programmes and policies, there have been several important agencies, national and interdenominational in scope, for co-operation in particular functions. Among those agencies, the earliest was the National Sunday School Convention, first held in 1832, and the Foreign Missions Conference of North America, formed in 1893 and probably the best known body of this kind outside America. Despite the inauguration of an Inter-Council Field Department to co-ordinate the activities of these national agencies and local councils, designed to avoid overlapping and to eliminate harmful competition, it became clear a decade ago that the times demanded better machinery for Christian co-operation, both to increase the efficiency of existing work and to give "a dramatic and convincing demonstration of the churches' desire for united action in this time of crisis". Such considerations led to the formulation, within two days of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, of a proposal for the creation of a single corporate agency to succeed all existing interdenominational councils, with a structure similar to that possessed by the Federal Council. Nine years of patient discussion and of consideration in the various denominational assemblies has led to an overwhelming majority in favour of the proposal. The Foreign Missions Conference found greater difficulty than any other council in approving the suggestion and was only able to give its consent in the spring of this year. The serious division in American Protestantism between liberal and fundamentalist groups was more sharply focussed in the prolonged discussions necessary in this Conference, and it may prove to be the most formidable difficulty which the new National Council will have to face in the pursuance of its task.

Three further comments may be allowed. First, the new council, like the British Council of Churches, will be a piece of machinery which will enable the churches to undertake common action and will in no sense be a united church. The preamble to the constitution bases the Council on "oneness in Jesus Christ as Divine Lord and Saviour", but there is no other formal basis of faith for membership. The future relationship of the Council to the World Council of Churches may call for more exact definition. As a united agency, the Council will direct and co-ordinate in four divisions (Education, Life and Work, Foreign Missions, and Home Missions) the work previously organised by the separate interdenominational councils. Secondly, for the first time in America it will bring into one body representatives of the Eastern Orthodox tradition and representatives of the mission boards of Protestant churches. The misunderstandings and conflicts between these two traditions may thus be faced at a deeper level of understanding and corporate activity. Thirdly, there is widespread expecta-

tion among Christian leaders in America that what bears the aspect of a piece of administrative business may yet release such a supply of spiritual energy that the incomplete christianization of American life and national policy may cease to be so grave a hindrance to the missionary activity of the American churches.

#### A TIME TO SPEAK

**W**ITHIN a few days of the opening of hostilities in Korea a statement was issued by the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, then in session at Toronto, expressing its deep concern at the course of events and the serious threat it presented to world order. It was probably inevitable that the statement should have been misunderstood and misrepresented, so that it was made to appear that the full weight of Christian opinion in the World Council of Churches was lining up with the Roman Church in an all-out offensive against Communism. It was likewise inevitable that churchmen on the other side of the Iron Curtain, in their difficult situation, should have interpreted the statement as a sign that the churches of the West were taking sides in the contemporary struggle between the great power blocs in East and West. Bishop Berczky of the Reformed Church in Hungary, in the open letter which he addressed to Dr. Visser t'Hooft, disallowed the sincerity of many of the statements in the Toronto document, adding the significant words, "the message should have told them in Korea that we in the West are ashamed of our colonising effort, the exploitation of human misery and the bitterness of suppressed peoples". The reception of the document in fact has illustrated both the extreme difficulty and the pressing necessity of Christian decision in world affairs.

A responsible Christian body, which includes among its duties the formulation of Christian standards of judgment in international affairs, could not have remained silent when hostilities had begun. It was necessary to show that the church was not indifferent to the existence of world order, nor could it remain neutral in the face of growing disorder. There is a time to be silent and a time to speak. Yet authentic Christian speech can only be uttered in such a way as to cause grave offence or even scandal to many well meaning persons. It cannot be that such speech would be welcome in all quarters, but though desiring through human weakness to keep silence, the church must speak on crucial issues.

The difficulty of its speaking at such a time arises not only from the fact that it will not utter smooth things, but also that it can rarely discover a clear, black and white distinction between the contestants in any dispute. Not all the wrong is on one side, nor all the justice on the other side. But a recognition of the evil in both contending groups cannot be allowed so to paralyse the Christian conscience as to make it impossible to distinguish a relative justice in one side or the other and to take appropriate action. The World Council statement affirmed the reality of aggression, which was indisputable, and went on to point out that the United Nations Commission in Korea was the most objective witness available, and the United Nations itself, though

far from being an ideal instrument, was nevertheless the only possible instrument of world order. Neither the World Council nor any other Christian body is in a position to adopt a pharisaical attitude towards the United Nations but must continue to bear witness to Christ as 'the Lord of all life and Prince of Peace'. The World Council has no intention of accepting the present divided state of the world as inevitable and is struggling to keep open its communications with churches in the East. To this end it is resolved to maintain its liberty of speech and action to witness against evils from whatever source they may appear and to refuse to give to Caesar more than he has a right to ask.

### WARNINGS FROM ROME

**T**HE Church of Rome, like the Soviet authorities, seems unhappily set on a course of action calculated to dissipate most of the goodwill it has accumulated in the last few years. The claim to rally all the forces of Christian civilization and to lead them in an intellectual and spiritual counter-attack on Marxist and other false philosophies has enjoyed a certain degree of success. But recent papal pronouncements have not helped the cause of Christian unity. The Encyclical *Humani Generis*, dated August 12th, 1950, has little that is good to say of the modern world, and sharply rebukes some Catholic thinkers who in the effort to remove barriers between men of goodwill have compromised on matters of doctrine and even dared to wish to reform the whole method of theology. A good deal of the letter is devoted to a rehearsal of the theological errors produced in these Roman writers by the spirit of innovation. Evidently, attempts to grapple with modern thought with the aid of new theological tools are not to receive any official encouragement. Existentialism is curtly dismissed and apparently those French Roman Catholics who have used the language and methods of this spiritual personalism in an effort to make communication with contemporary scientific atheism are rebuked for their pains. The almost extravagant re-affirmation of the divine authority and value of scholasticism sidesteps the question whether scholasticism can be a fruitful intellectual method in the world of modern science. The supreme authority of the church to declare the true interpretation of the Bible is re-asserted and the scientific accuracy of the Bible assumed. The writers of the first eleven chapters of Genesis were by divine inspiration preserved from all error in selecting and presenting the material they used. The Encyclical reveals a curious isolation from the contemporary climate of thought and the persistent refusal of Rome even to contemplate the possibility that to other Christian traditions may have been given things which Rome ought to receive.

### THE POSSIBILITIES OF CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

**O**NE of the great discoveries which Christian people continually make when they encounter each other in conference or in common action is the reality of their mutual membership in Christ even when they belong to different Christian traditions and have been kept apart by high walls of prejudice, conviction and history. The experience of

common worship is an important factor in this discovery, and the scandal of finding that persons who are truly one in Christ cannot meet freely at His table is, in the strict sense of the word, intolerable. It is not likely that this scandal will be removed until the rank and file membership in all the communions feels it as such an intolerable burden that even cherished traditions must be sacrificed to remove it. Meanwhile those who are brought in one way or another into close relationship with Christians of other traditions must decide what their procedure is to be. A small anonymous pamphlet, *Intercommunion : an open letter to young Anglicans*<sup>1</sup>, has recently been published, designed to provide such guidance as Anglicans may require when invited to participate in communion with Christians of other traditions. The author very properly acknowledges that his paper is in no sense an official document but claims to be well acquainted with the circumstances in which the problem of intercommunion arises and to expound the official Anglican view. It is a statement which is carefully drawn and should be widely studied ; but it must be realized that many Anglicans would dispute the claim that a refusal of intercommunion with all other Christians but the Old Catholics is in accord with Anglican standards and traditions.

The statement, if it is to be an objective account of the Anglican position, should be revised or supplemented in at least three ways. First, there is no recognition of the persistent and widespread Anglican practice of communion with foreign protestants, alike in Anglican churches and on the continent. The sober judgment of Professor Norman Sykes<sup>2</sup> has but endorsed the conclusion that this could be described as the classical Anglican attitude. A wide range of writers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, while never concealing their belief that continental protestant churches lacked the perfection of primitive catholicism in not possessing an episcopal ministry, asserted that they were yet truly churches of Christ, with the corollary that intercommunion was possible with these churches. This intercommunion has always been practised and many Anglicans cannot but feel that advice to abstain from such communion amounts to the disallowance of a well established Anglican practice. Secondly, the pamphlet makes no recognition of the fact that Anglicans who engage in such intercommunion have never been censured by Anglican authority for their action, while many Anglican leaders during the last four centuries have encouraged it both by precept and example. Indeed in the recent report of the Joint Committee of the Canterbury and York Convocations there occurs this sentence : " Members of the Church of England, whether clerical or lay, who visit the territory of the Church of South India, may accept the hospitality of that Church for the performance of priestly functions or the receiving of Holy Communion ".<sup>3</sup> Apparently the responsibility for decision whether to participate in communion or to abstain, rests with the individual

<sup>1</sup> S.P.C.K., 6d.

<sup>2</sup> *The Church of England and Non-Episcopal Churches in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, S.P.C.K., 1948.

<sup>3</sup> *The Church of South India*, p. 21.

Anglican and no censure attaches to his action in either direction.

Thirdly, in proposing spiritual communion as alone permissible and adequate in the present divided state of Christendom the writer of the pamphlet does not consider that some measure of intercommunion may promote real union more quickly than anything else. It has yet to be demonstrated convincingly that intercommunion cannot be a means to full union. The assumption that intercommunion is only possible when all other elements of divisiveness have been removed and formal unity inaugurated, seems to be the ecclesiastical version of the common man's attitude in defending his practice of infrequent communion with the plea, 'I am not good enough!' If a "sincere act of spiritual communion brings all the benefits of a communion made in church", may not the extension of this principle from cases of sickness to the field of relations between the denominations have the effect of weakening the desire for full sacramental communion?

#### WITNESS AT THE POINT OF DANGER

**F**EW things can be more important for the churches in Western Europe at the present time than the maintenance of a firm resolve to do all in their power to keep open communication with the churches in the Eastern Zone. It would be fatally easy for the churches on either side of the Iron Curtain to become the catspaws of their respective political authorities, and it may be that the greater resources and independence of the western churches impose a heavier burden upon them to achieve a sympathetic understanding of the problems which face their brethren in the east. Every effort must be made consistent with the service of truth, to show that the church in the west does not merely echo the pronouncements of democratic politicians, nor is it indifferent to the necessary demand for justice for all peoples. A recent publication of the Hungarian Church Press entitled *Five Years of Hungarian Protestantism, 1945-50*, narrates the fortunes of the Hungarian Protestant churches in the post-war period and reveals the grave difficulties through which church leaders have had to try to guide their people. The document deserves the close attention of western readers, for it presents the issues in an autobiographical form and in many places reads like an agonising cry on the part of eastern church leaders to be understood in the west.

The chief object which the rulers of the Hungarian People's Republic have consistently sought to obtain has been an unequivocal admission on the part of responsible church authorities that the new political order has been accepted in a decision from which there can be no subsequent withdrawal. Once that decision is given, as it has been recently even by the Roman Catholics, the state is prepared to guarantee full religious freedom for church activities, including both worship and the right to evangelize. Bishop Bereczky, president of the Reformed church, avows his belief that "the church can remain a true church in a Socialist-Communist state", and argues that the working of the church in the context of a frank recognition of the new order as ordained of God has opened a door for preaching the Gospel freely to working people in the factories and mines. The church "is not concerned with Marxism—Leninism—Stalinism, but with

Marxist people. The Marxist, the Leninist, the Stalinist is also a human being and needs what other men need and what God gives to all men". Some glimpse of the difficulties involved in this situation is given in the further comment that "the way of the church in so radically revolutionary a transition as ours, is necessarily a narrow way. She must walk on a knife-edge. But only so can God enable us to live 'through grace by faith'".

All the writers in this volume speak of the great release which has come to them through the total revolution they have experienced. "God has brought about a spiritual renewal in our church in order that the revived church may serve the entire nation which is also undergoing a renewal." The hardships which the church has had to endure are being used of God to teach it an awareness of its real task. "To our spiritually, materially enfeebled church, which once lived in an unhealthy and disloyal alliance with the social system of the past, God has now given the great opportunity that she can concentrate her energies on her specific task." It would be easy to dismiss these confessions of liberation as little more than enforced submissions to a party line, but this would ignore the fact that the structure of Hungarian society before 1939, in which the churches were so deeply implicated, was feudal and oppressive. A perusal of such books as *Peace and Power* by Harold Butler and *The State of Europe* by Howard K. Smith would enable Christians in the west to understand how it is that Hungarian Christians do not feel called to resist the new order, but in repentance for past failure in this respect to confess that "there will be no future until we willingly condemn that past which was judged by God and accept His righteous judgment with grateful hearts". The note sounded again and again by most of the writers in this Hungarian volume is a call to repentance for grievous failure to implement the Gospel in national life, with an insistence that "failure to work for social justice and real peace would be disloyal to Jesus".

Another fact which disposes Hungarian Christians to look upon the post-war years as an era of liberation is the enforcement of real religious liberty and the restriction of Roman Catholic political influence. The Methodist contribution describes how before 1947 "we were only second class religionists", exposed to humiliating treatment and all kinds of official vexations. "Countless times were our preachers arrested and their homes searched." The writer was himself arrested during the conduct of an open air service. "To-day all villages and towns are open to a preaching of Christ's Gospel and we are not interfered with." This equality and liberty over against another denomination enables the Free Churches of Hungary to enjoy a freedom they have hardly known before. The Baptist writer applauds the action of the state for the same reason and welcomes the separation of church and state in the constitution as a practical embodiment of the ideal of a free church in a free state. It is evident that the church situation in eastern Europe is complex and difficult and that churchmen in that situation are striving to interpret the meaning of Christian obedience in unparalleled conditions. In the west, ill-informed criticism must be replaced by sympathetic understanding.