

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/robbadshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

moreover, is sufficiently attested by the *external* evidence ; the Epistle of Clement of Rome alone would be proof enough (probably 93-96) ; the Epistle (47) cites 1 Cor. by name as a writing of Paul, and transcribes, without giving a name, Rom. i. 29 and even Heb. i. 1. It is surely of interest to note that this same passage from St. Clement of Rome to the Corinthians is cited by Paley, "Horæ Paulinæ," as a proof that our 1 Cor. was not only extant at Corinth, but was known and read at Rome within some forty years of the date which we claim for it.

It is a long way from Paley to Dr. Schmiedel, but the closely similar use of the same passage from St. Clement by both writers may help to remind us that even the most modern attacks are very often old ones in a new guise, and that they may often be defeated by an employment of the same weapons.

R. J. KNOWLING.

(*To be continued.*)

ART. II.—THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT.

A MEDITATION FOR A CHRISTIAN CONGRESS.

"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."—EPHES. iv. 1.

IN these verses St. Paul passes to explain the practical working of the great truths which he had been declaring in previous chapters of the Epistle to the Ephesians. The account of the tumult at Ephesus, in the nineteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, affords a vivid illustration of the strange religious contrasts which were presented by that city in the Apostle's time. The city was known, as the town clerk reminded the people, as specially devoted to the great goddess Diana and to the image which fell down from Jupiter. But it contained a society of Jews, who were the worshippers of the one God of heaven and earth ; while St. Paul had founded in it a Christian Church, which aroused equal opposition from both Jews and Pagans. His preaching at length produced a violent explosion, in which the adherents of those two faiths appear as much in antagonism to one another as to the Christians. The moment a Jew came forward to

preach to the people, "all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out: 'Great is Diana of the Ephesians!'" In the face of these violent antagonisms, St. Paul preached a Gospel which announced that all division between Gentiles and Jews was to be abolished, and that they were to be united in one society—the society of the Church. "Now," he declares, "in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ; for He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in His flesh the enmity . . . for to make in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace." "Now, therefore," he says to the Ephesian Gentiles, "ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, being built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner-stone, in whom each building, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord, in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." Compare this description with the scene of violence and antagonism just recalled to you, and what a marvellous vision it seems! No wonder that St. Paul should speak of it as a mystery, specially revealed to himself, "that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the Gospel." He was proclaiming his message in a world in which the most violent religious and national antagonisms were at work, yet he confidently declared that they were to be merged in one great unity, that Gentiles and Jews and Christians would cease to be in antagonism, and would form one body in the Church.

Accordingly, he proceeds, in the fourth chapter, to depict in the most enthusiastic manner the nature of the great Society in which all were destined to become one. It is a society in which all the members have their various gifts and offices, and are intended to render mutual services to one another. The ultimate object is that we should "all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ," and that, "speaking truth in love, we may grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ; from whom all the body fitly framed and knit together through that which every joint supplieth, according to the working in due measure of each several part, maketh the increase of the body unto the building up of itself in love." This is St. Paul's revelation of the purpose of the Church of God. It is intended to be a society composed of

men of the most different characters and races, and professing, before they join it, the most various faiths, but all united in allegiance to Christ, and in union with Him, each contributing his particular part to the welfare of the whole, and thus forming a well-compacted body, in which every member has its proper office and function.

In his use of the term "body" to describe such a society, St. Paul uses language which the science of our day ought to render more intelligible to us than it could be to those whom he first addressed. To the conception of the men of those days the human body was one continuous physical whole, and it was a strong image to compare with such a physical unity the congregation in a society of a mass of separate individuals. But we know now that our physical bodies, though to the naked eye they appear as one continuous mass of matter, are in reality composed of an infinite number of distinct and separate atoms. It is really by an ocular illusion that they appear united in continuous flesh and blood. Just as the solar system is composed of a number of vast bodies, as they appear to us, held together in mutual relations by one great law, so the physical constitution of each man or woman is composed of a vast number of what, to our eyes, are small cells; and each cell is composed of a vast number of still smaller molecules or atoms, held together by that mysterious and unknown law which we call life. The soul resides in this marvellous house of our tabernacle, and uses its various members, powers, and functions for its own purposes, until the law of life gives place to death, and the building crumbles away into its original atoms. Similarly, St. Paul's conception, or rather revelation, of the ultimate form of human society in the Church is that of multitudes of men and women, whom no man can number, organized into one vast body, under the controlling influence of the Lord of life, each individual being actuated and used by the living spirit of that living Lord.

This is what we are all meant for. Not merely to live our individual lives, and find our individual salvation in heaven hereafter, but to be brought into union with Christ, to be united in Him with all other individuals who, by faith in Him, become parts of his body, and to be moulded, by His Spirit, to serve the great purpose of God, that by Him may be "glory in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages." That is the ultimate goal, and we can only expect to approximate towards it here on earth. St. Paul's vision has, indeed, already received a fulfilment which, considering the circumstances amidst which it was revealed, may well be deemed marvellous. The Church of Christ, and still more the Spirit of

Christ, has, in the course of history, brought together men of the most various races and claims. It has established over a great part of the world a form of civilization distinct from all others, which we rightly call Christian civilization, and has made those various races feel that they have common interests and common duties. Imperfect as that civilization is, there are beyond question Christian laws and a Christian spirit permeating and controlling the various nations which combine to form that great branch of the human family which we call the Christian world. The vision, however dimly, is yet really before the eyes of the Christian nations, and uncontrollable impulses are pressing them onward to its realization.

But there is one practical conclusion to be drawn from this review of St. Paul's revelation, and that is that the promotion of unity ought to be a paramount object among Christian men. A survey of the Christian world—a survey of the religious condition of our own Church and nation—might, indeed, well suggest to us that Christians have but little apprehension of this truth. The Church of Christ—"the body of Christian men dispersed throughout the whole world"—which, in St. Paul's view, was intended to be a society in which this unity should be realized, is broken up into numerous bodies, in some measure directly antagonistic to one another, and in still greater measure separated in sympathy and communion. The spiritual life of one of these communions is to a grievous extent separated from the spiritual life of the others. This division might be illustrated in a striking and painful degree by the manner in which the religious thought and life of these various communions, as expressed in their literature, is practically unknown to the others. By whatever errors each may be marked, there are treasures of Christian experience and Christian devotion in each, which it is lamentable should not be imparted to the rest. But even here in England the various bodies of Nonconformists, and to far too large an extent the various schools of thought in the Church, live their own lives and develop their own tendencies very much by themselves, and are not duly balanced and supplemented by contributions from the thought and life of the others. There is even a temptation, sometimes avowed, to regard this state of division as inevitable, if not desirable, as though it were, on the whole, more advantageous that distinct bodies of Christians should develop, in entire freedom and independence, their own views and tendencies without being checked by organic relations with their fellows.

There are, indeed, it may be hoped, increasing signs that Christian men of all communions are recoiling from such

views. There is a tendency for the various divisions of English religion to combine more and more into larger masses, and at least to form unions, if not to seek a complete unity. But it is to be feared that there is not yet among Christian men an adequate realization of the fact that all divisions of Christian men into separate communities, not united into one organic whole, are contrary to the design of Christ, contrary to the purpose of His Church as revealed emphatically by His Apostles, a grievous violation of His will, and therefore a grievous sin. The very ideal of the Christian Church is "that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care one for another; and whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it, or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now, ye," says St. Paul, "are the body of Christ and members in particular."

What a grievous and disastrous contrast to such an ideal is the spectacle of bodies of Christians forming themselves into organizations which have no mutual communion, or even communication, unable to unite even on such an elementary but vital matter as the Christian education of children, and threatening great political convulsions respecting the position of the establishment of religion in the country! Even looking merely within the communion of the Church of England, what can be more contrary to such an ideal than the formation of party organizations, one of which necessarily calls into action another, until, to our shame and unhappiness, we hear the possibility discussed of the disruption of our own body? Such passages from St. Paul as we have been considering ought to touch our consciences deeply in the presence of such a spectacle, and ought to make us all resolve that we will for the future take more deeply to heart what is described in one of the prayers of our Church as "the great danger we are in from our unhappy divisions," and that we will endeavour better than we have hitherto done to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Let us for this purpose carefully observe the method which the Apostle prescribes for carrying out this endeavour. It is to be observed in the first place that he implies that it needs earnest and active effort. The word translated in our Authorized Version "endeavouring" means more than an ordinary effort; it means giving diligence—constant and earnest diligence—to this great purpose. It is a work which requires at least as great effort as any other part of the Christian life, and we are bound to work with energy for this great ideal of unity. But what sort of energy and effort is required? It is very instructive to observe that the energy to which the

Apostle exhorts us for this purpose is simply a moral and spiritual energy—not an energy of the intellect, not an energy of controversy, not an energy even of statesmanlike or organizing capacity, but an energy of Christian meekness and Christian love. For this great purpose he exhorts the Ephesians to work worthily of the vocation wherewith they are called, “with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love.” If Christian men are to be held together in communion and union, if the parties and the sects which are now unhappily divided are to be again brought together, the one method which St. Paul specifies is that of maintaining all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, and forbearing one another in love. It is unquestionable, and, alas! it is notorious, that the tendency fostered by the divisions and schisms we have been considering is a spirit the very opposite of these gentle graces. It is a spirit of the confident, if not proud, assertion of our own views, a spirit of impatience at their being controverted and contradicted, a disinclination to endure opposition, a lack of mutual love, and consequently of mutual forbearance.

We are apt to forget one truth, which is at the root of the whole matter, namely, that none but the greatest minds and the greatest hearts—and perhaps not even these unless they be assisted, like the Apostles, with Divine inspiration—can possibly grasp all the bearings and aspects of Christian truth and life. It is remarkable that in the fervid passage which immediately precedes, in which the Apostle prays that God will grant the Ephesians, “according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man,” he adds the prayer that they “may be able to comprehend *with all saints* what is the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge.” It is only *with all saints*, in communion with all saints, by the mutual edification of all saints, by the interchange of their various experiences and thoughts, and by the union of their prayers, that the breadth and length and depth and height of the Christian revelation of the love and the will of Christ and of God the Father can be duly apprehended. Christian lowliness would teach us to believe that every true Christian brother can offer some contribution to the unity of the faith and to the perfection of the Christian life; and we should realize that the first necessity for our learning the truth is to listen to others in meekness, and even where we think them in error to forbear them in love. If we are to keep the unity of the Spirit—the unity, that is, of God’s Spirit, the unity which God’s Spirit designs for us, and which God’s Spirit alone can produce in us—we can only do so in

"the bond of peace"—that is to say, by striving to remain bound up together in a mutual peace, refusing to be separated, resolving that, so far as in us lies, we will hear of no separation from our fellows, we will listen to no suggestions for separating ourselves from them; we will meet them in discussion, we will listen with deference and patience to their views, and in meekness and love we will communicate to them our own, and then we may hope that the God of love and peace will be with us, and will Himself by His Spirit bring us more and more into union and harmony with one another.

Such is the purpose of all gatherings of Clergy and Laity for mutual discussion, and the words of the text express the spirit and the purpose with which all who take part in them should be animated. Such discussions should be conducted "with all lowliness and meekness, with long suffering, forbearing one another in love, diligently striving to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." In that Divine Spirit lies our only hope. If it were solely by our own discussions, our own wisdom, our own efforts, that we were aiming at unity we might well despair. But St. Paul reveals to us the Divine Lord and the Divine Spirit who in their own ways—ways far beyond our comprehension—are gradually working towards the creation of that great body which is the Church, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all. The Church may seem almost without form and void, but we have the blessed assurance that the Spirit of God is moving upon the face of the waters, and we are privileged to believe that He will bring order and unity out of the apparent confusion. To Him let us commit ourselves, and so let us join in that noble prayer of our Liturgy that, "as there is but one Body and one Spirit, and one Hope of our calling, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all, so we may henceforth be all of one heart and of one soul, united in one holy bond of Truth and Peace, of Faith and Charity, and may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

HENRY WACE.

