

THE PATHWAY TO REUNION.¹

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“NO justification can be found in the New Testament,” a recent Bampton Lecturer has declared, “for our modern divisions.” The Church appears there neither as congregational nor as infallible, but as the home of the Spirit, of salvation, and of charity. If we seek for rules and regulations in its pages, therefore, we shall be disappointed, but not if we seek for principles. What we need is not antiquarianism, the dead hand of the first upon the life of the twentieth century. We want to learn those principles, and to be inspired by that spirit. We want life and courage.

Now it was the Kingdom, not the Church, that Jesus preached. Is it not probable, therefore, that any formula of agreement which shall put an end to these “unhappy divisions,” if findable anywhere is to be found in the study of the principles underlying the Kingdom rather than the attributes of the Church, and all the more so since the latter have been for centuries the fruitful source of bitter disagreement and contention? Church reunion demands a kindly atmosphere where it can struggle into healthy life. It is not found in fields reeking with the wastage of dead controversies. The seedplots of the Kingdom, of which Jesus spoke, are wholesome soil still.

It was the present and culminating Kingship of their Lord which dominated the whole consciousness of the Early Church. The matchless imagery of the “Revelation” is inspired by it. It is the Church’s sufficient answer to her adversaries, the gauntlet she flings down, with a note of fearless defiance to them to do their worst. Her vision of the present is “the vision of a world-empire once dominated by a usurping power, which has now at

¹ The Lambeth Conference Resolutions, 1920; Dr. Headlam’s Bampton Lectures, 1920, *The Doctrine of the Church and Reunion*; Shakespeare, *The Churches at the Cross-Roads*; *Towards Reunion*, Conferences at Mansfield College and elsewhere; Sanday, *Primitive Church and Reunion*; Bigg, *Unity in Diversity*; Gore, *Steps towards Unity*; Scott Lidgett, *Towards Reunion*; Guy Rogers, *Towards Reunion*; Briggs, *Church Unity*; Hibbert, and other reviews, various articles.

length passed into the hands of its true Owner and Emperor." ¹ The priesthood of Christ is distinctly secondary there to His Royalty. The word "throne" occurs no less than thirty-four times, but the word "priest" only thrice in the whole book (i. 6; v. 10; xx. 6). The fact of His Lordship (see *κύριος* in nine great passages) ² calls forth again and again the reiterated note of exultation, the sense of boundless hope, the assurance of overwhelming and final victory. His kingly omnipotence (*παντοκράτωρ*, nine times, i. 8; iv. 8; xi. 17; xv. 3; xvi. 7, 14; xix. 6, 15; xxi. 22) is realized as carrying with it infinite reserves of power which make the whole future sure.

But the Church of after-ages lost the heavenly vision. Men confounded the means with the end, and strove to find in the Church the realization of the Kingdom of which it was the instrument. They reared an idol to orthodoxy and cried, "This is the only unity." They triumphed over spiritual opponents and declared, "This is the victory of God." They identified the sovereignty with an omnipotent Church and made her proclaim, "I am Cæsar and I am Christ. I am the King and the Kingdom." And the Church became so concerned about her own future that the Kingdom was lost sight of. "Every house divided against itself is brought to desolation." So, whilst theologians were splitting straws over the apostolic credentials or the precise significance of Church authority, or the credal basis of Church unity, proclaiming the supremacy of the Sacerdotium over the Regnum, the common enemy thundered at and broke down the gates unhindered. To-day it is only by the recovery of the true vision of the lost Kingship that the lost unity can be re-won. A discovery of the keynotes of the Kingdom may discover for us again the true bases of unity.

Now the three great notes of Christ's Kingship are the living authority on which it rests, the diversified unity which it expresses, and the worldwide extension at which it aims—loyalty, fellowship, service: these are the three demands which the King makes on all the subjects of His Kingship. The acceptance of these gives the true bond of union between the members of the Kingdom.

I. *Living Authority* is the first mark of the Kingdom. There is the sovereignty, and there is the obedience of faith which gives expression to it. From the first our Lord claimed that sovereignty

¹ Swete, *Apocalypse*, notes *in loco*.

² I. 8; iv. 8, 11; xi. 17; xv. 3; xviii. 8; xxi. 22; xxii. 5.

as a present fact. "All authority hath been given unto Me in Heaven and on earth."¹ This, in fact, is the clearest of all New Testament truths—clearer, at first sight, even than His Divinity or Priesthood. He is "the King that cometh in the name of the Lord," the Messiah-Prince against Whom the nations rage in vain. His kingdom excels all earthly kingdoms because its rule is the rule of perfect freedom, its realm is world-wide, its sovereignty a thing which "stands and grows for ever." The precepts of the Kingdom as such are not ecclesiastical, theological in a specialized sense, conflicting and arbitrary, but social, human and practical. "Go ye, and make disciples of all nations." "As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you." "Ye are the salt of the earth . . . the light of the world." "Ye shall be My witnesses." Who can question the meaning or practical application of words such as these? For ages men have disputed the nature of authority in the Church—its source, prescriptions, and possible limitations. Claims have been made based upon false Decretals, unsupported by historic proofs, and utterly opposed to all life and progress. For centuries interpretations unscientific and dogmatic have claimed a mischievous infallibility, and the Body of Christ has been rent by a needless dissension and strife. And in the emphasis of these conflicting theories of the authority of the Church the authority of Christ Himself has been almost lost sight of. The history of the later Middle Ages teems with such instances, but they are to be found even in the second and third centuries. Although, as Dr. Forrest says in his *Authority of Christ*,² "Spiritual equality in Christ, interdependence, and mutual helpfulness . . . are the essential notes of the New Testament Church," yet "we have in the third century, as the first great contribution of Latin thought to Christian history, the Cyprianic theory of the Ministry and of the Church which forms the greatest break between the Apostolic age and the Reformation," and, "as modified by Augustine, and completed by the Roman bishops, has shaped the history of the Western Church for centuries." Then, in the fifteenth century, a mono-episcopate confronts us, divorced from all association with clergy or laity, hierarchical and absolute. And, in despair, men have found their refuge from such contradictions either in absolutism or scepticism.

¹ St. Matt. xxviii. 18.

² Forrest, *Authority of Christ*, p. 422.

The root-fault, of course, is that authority has been shifted from its fountain-head in the King Himself to the Church whose office it is to be its interpreter only. Ecclesiastical prerogative has invaded and dethroned the supreme prerogative of Christ, "teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." Things which He never hinted at as authoritative have been put forward under threat of penalty or even excommunication as divine precepts; whilst things truly authoritative, such as the authority of the Church herself, and of the Christian ministry, have been placed on a false pedestal of infallibility. A theology logical, self-consistent, scholastic, mediæval has darkened or even subverted the broadly human, divinely simple doctrine of Christ. There has been a perpetual harking back to a "Catholic" tradition which, on scientific examination, proved to have nothing catholic in the true sense about it. As long as Christians persist in affirming, as a precedent to all reunion, the primacy of St. Peter and of Rome, the infallibility of the Church in certain important matters, the Divine origin of episcopacy, the existence of three orders of the ministry in the New Testament, the invalidity of all but episcopal orders, what hopes can there be for reunion among thoughtful and unbiassed men? We are not placing Episcopacy upon its strongest but upon its weakest line of defence when we affirm that "the episcopate with its claim of an apostolic succession is an essential and inviolable element of Christianity." History itself replies in indignant tones to us. Yet on how strong authority it rests when we view it historically the language of Ignatius proves when he sets it forth as the safeguard of unity and apostolic truth; "not an autocratic or absolute government, but . . . of one chosen by the people and clergy of the diocese, and administering his diocese with the synodical authority of the clergy and also of the laity," an authority delegated to him by the priestly people of God.¹

Now when we make the Kingly Authority of Christ the basis of our unity we restore the Church to her true place as ambassador and servant. Our real bond of fellowship will always really lie in obedience to the Lord's supreme commands. For example, how many who are mutually divided and distrustful to-day would find in the following affirmation (part of the Declaration of Common Faith and Practice issued by the Mansfield College Conferences

¹ *Towards Reunion*, pp. 123, 148.

of 1916 and 1917) the basis of closer co-operation, ultimately bearing fruit in actual reunion:—

“ We affirm the sovereign authority of our Lord Jesus Christ over every department of human life, and we hold that individuals and peoples are responsible to Him in their several spheres, and are bound to render Him obedience and to seek always the furtherance of His Kingdom upon earth, not, however, in any way constraining belief, imposing religious disabilities, or denying the rights of conscience.”

The authority in the Kingdom, being a living authority inspired by love and working from within, is capable, as such, of the widest diversity of application. There is nothing stereotyped about it. It is a rule of life, a counsel of perfection, a minister of freedom. No great living earthly kingdom will be fettered in its present freedom by historic precedent, but will have large faith in its widening mission and expanding future. The British Commonwealth is an illustration. The England of the Plantagenets bears but slight resemblance to the world-wide Commonwealth of peoples—differing in religion, race, customs and political institutions—which we still call the British Empire. And in the Kingdom of God the authority to which we surrender ourselves is not an authority of slavish adhesion to apostolic precedent, or ecclesiastical infallibility. It is the living word of a living King. He was exalted that He might fill all things. His Kingship is, therefore, a present and pervasive fact. It rules all thought, all life, all conduct. It governs all relationships. It is constantly creating fresh and living precedents, as we follow the guidance of the Sovereign Spirit. So, in affirming that authority as the first mark of our fellowship in the Kingdom we are replacing dead formulas with a living principle. We are shunning “ the tragedy of the misplaced emphasis.”¹ We are affirming a basis of unity, real, practical, and, in the widest sense, apostolic.

II. A second mark of the Kingdom is its *Diversified Unity*. It is one in its Kingship and authority, and in the loyalty demanded of its subjects; but it is diverse in the life, service and functions which are embraced within the one rule. It is a world-federation of many free communities under one Sovereign, Who is the secret of their cohesion. From the very first it never seems to have been contemplated by New Testament writers, or those who immediately

¹ Shakespeare, *The Churches at the Cross-roads*, p. 52.

followed them, that the Kingship or the Kingdom could be other than one and indivisible, though it was to gather up into that unity a rich diversity of life. That was the constant argument against the heretics—that they were offenders against the visible unity of the Great Society. The very unity of the Empire till the Middle Ages demanded it. Thus Dante, in his *De Monarchiâ*, argues again and again, that “it is only by being under one Princedom, or the rule of a single Prince, that Humanity as a whole is well adapted to the Universe or its Prince, Who is the One God.” The oneness of God’s being, in the image of which man was made, he declares, demands it (*De Mon. c. 8*). The inner nature of things confirms it, as Aristotle in his *Ethics* had shown. “Then,” he says sorrowfully, comparing the age when Christ came with His own, “then the human race was happy in the tranquillity of universal peace. But how the world has fared since that ‘seamless robe’ has suffered rending, by the talons of ambition, we may read in books—would that we might not see it with our eyes!” What Dante perceived as the need of his own day each previous age had already seen. The parables of the Kingdom had always painted it as one and indivisible. The vision of the Apocalypse had been of two empires meeting in deadly conflict—“the Kingdom of God represented by the Church, the World-power represented by Rome. Each was designed to embrace the whole world” (*Lightfoot, Essay, Epistles of St. John, p. 253*). Nor would Augustine have found any comfort, when the world-empire was falling to ruin, in singing of divided kingdoms. It was the one *Civitas Dei* in a world of discord which filled him with comfort and hope. Whether the Kingdom was Millennial Apocalypse, Christian Empire, or Omnipotent Church, it must always be one. The most ultra-individualist has never learnt to pray, “Thy Kingdoms come.”

But the unity was always a *unity in diversity*, a matter of life and freedom subject to the one supreme loyalty. Whenever the thought of the Kingdom became external it ceased, to that extent, to be true to itself. The unity could only be realized in rich and harmonious variety. For it was a unity, not of conformity and compulsion, but of federation, fellowship and freedom.

The unity we are seeking to restore to the Church is a unity whose features have been the marks of the Kingdom all along. Even with earthly Rome it was a unity which embraced under

one Roman toga the widest differences of race and religion ; and among ourselves with our far-flung frontiers, and medley of many races, it is a unity, spontaneous, living, intelligent, internal, the revelation to the whole world, in spite of all its defects, of human brotherhood on the widest scale.

Cannot we learn to-day from the mistakes of former generations ? Nineteen centuries of ecclesiastical strife lie behind us, with the acquired and unreal meaning they have given to some of our greatest words. How can we recover the lost unity of " One Church, one Faith, one Lord " ? We want some new inspiring watchword that may come to present-day men and women without prejudice. Have we not found it in that Fellowship for which the Bishops make their appeal ? ¹ That is certainly the essential feature of the Church's oneness. " We may hope," writes Bishop Robertson in his *Regnum Dei*, " for a fertilization of the conception of the Church and its relation to the problems of human life in the light of the master idea of the kingdom of Christ upon earth." Now the root-error of the old idea of unity was Submission, not Fellowship. Anglican, Presbyterian and Puritan alike showed it when in power. The communities from which they differed must be penalized into obedience. So the sects of English Nonconformity were brought to birth with Acts of Uniformity as their dry nurses. Even National unity was lost by Laud's arbitrary actions in Scotland and by the persecuting madness of the Conventicle and Five Mile Acts of the Restoration, and the folly of the Stamp Acts in America. A better and wiser spirit marks our modern national life. Federation, not servile submission, is the keynote of our imperial unity to-day. The abrogation of British prerogative in South Africa and Ireland are brilliant examples.

Why should not this note of Fellowship be accepted as our principle in achieving the spiritual unity of the Heavenly Kingdom ? Churches Orthodox, Roman, Anglican, Free—all working out their full and characteristic destiny in perfect fellowship and co-operation, " Ephraim not envying Judah " and " Judah not vexing Ephraim " any more ? That would be the Great Church, catholic as never before in a truly Christian sense, as the Visible Society of Christ whose constituent societies are all sub-kingdoms, " Free States " in one vast Commonwealth. The recognition of diversity is essen-

¹ *Lambeth Conference Report*, pp. 26-9.

tial to true spiritual unity. It is only an ignorant Communism or Bolshevism which seeks to reduce Mankind to one International State by compulsion. "Sectional Christianity and Sectional Churches will never do much more than influence sections of the nation and some sides of the national life" (*Towards Reunion, Democracy and Church Unity*, p. 311). What is needed is a unity broadly diverse in its methods, federated in its activities, harmonious in its loyalty and aim, and faithfully applied to all aspects of religious and civic, national and international life, the corporate expression of a common faith and love.

III. But *World-wide Extension* is a third mark of the Kingdom. The discipling was to be to the uttermost parts of the earth, and, like a net, it gathers of every kind.¹ The Kingship must be proclaimed "till every kindred call Him Lord," and "all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of God." These "marching orders" of the Church have been strangely ignored in the preoccupation of our foolish controversies. In nothing have the Free Churches more nobly vindicated their claim to be members of the Church universal than in their missionary service. "It is the property of Christ to be universal." Then it must be one plain mark of His Church that she is Catholic in this modern and yet primitive sense of world-service. The King ascended far above all heavens that He might fill all things, and, therefore, "Christ in His Church" means "His Church in all the world." Catholicity needs redefinition to-day, in the light of experience, as aggressive service to "make Jesus King" in every sphere, social, industrial, international, human. It must become again what it once was in the earliest days—a spiritual patriotism world-wide in its fellowship.

Here, then, in these great, simple watchwords—Loyalty, Fellowship, Service—are three marks of the Kingdom already familiar to us in the earthly sphere but receiving their full and proper interpretation in the Kingdom of God. By accepting them as a temporary basis of unity we shall be shunning "the tragedy of the misplaced emphasis" and pressing forwards to a conception of the Church as "genuinely Catholic," vitally apostolic, and holy—not in faith and sacrament only—but in life and character.

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¹ St. Matt. xiii. 47.