

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

PRACTICAL STEPS TOWARDS REUNION.

BY THE REV. G. F. GRAHAM BROWN, M.A., Principal of
Wycliffe Hall, Oxford.

I

IN this paper the meaning attached to the word "Reunion" is:—the achievement of an organic comprehension of ecclesiastical organizations, considered externally, into one outward, visible and united society. At present this society is not co-extensive with any single institution, nor will it be obtained by a combine into which churches may be stamped by desire to perpetuate a given institutional type. "Unity," on the other hand, consists in an invisible yet unbreakable fellowship of spirit with spirit which already exists among disciples of our Lord and is independent of organic union, but can only be consummated in the realization of that union. Without this organic union complete fellowship in Christ is impossible. The relation of spirit and form is undeniable. What we are reacts on our spirit, and if, in spirit, the Church is one, this inward unity requires some outward form of expression.

Only a world-wide Church can effectively bear witness to the world, and be the agent in the establishment of Christ's Kingdom. To those outside, as well as those inside the Churches, the devastating disasters of disunion have become a scandal. Christians claim to be at one on all fundamental spiritual issues; each in turn mourn their unhappy divisions, and confess that these not only contradict the Gospel, which they proclaim, but militate against its work of redeeming love. Paradoxically enough, Christians on matters other than ecclesiastical come together, and even try to persuade those engaged, for instance, in the industrial struggle known as the General Strike, in 1926, to compose their differences, and live at peace with one another, and in the name of unity, and for the benefit of the nation as a whole, to be willing to sacrifice even economic principles. Those who seek reunion without, should indeed practise unity within.

II

What is the fundamental cause of this lack of union but that surely those who call themselves Christians value more highly

something other than love of God and love of one's neighbour. They prefer the outward maintenance of their familiar institutional life to the practice of the Christian principles they profess. They have substituted orthodoxy for love—which at the outset is very much less expensive. They have attributed sovereignty to a certain interpretation of spiritual facts, and have dethroned the very spiritual facts which they try to interpret. For instance, in the early stages of nearly every approach towards Reunion, the achievement of some kind of institutional uniformity has been required. What this means is, that the unity of the Church is supposed to depend upon, and reside in, uniformity of its institutional life. The hollowness of this is seen if we try to couple the command to love one another with regulations laying down the exact form of words we are to employ in expressing our love. The demand for institutional uniformity is the hall-mark of an impersonal ideal. This is a sub-Christian conception, for the Kingdom of Heaven is based on the perfect recognition of personality in Fellowship, and men have always sought an ordered liberty in which they can fully express their God-given personality. God's gift of grace to man is not a thing which can be transmitted by impersonal and institutional media only, but is a personal loving relationship of God with man and rests on the personal activity of the Godhead, to which man, through faith, actively responds. If the figure of the Church as the Bride of Christ be a true one, the union as implied is a personal union. Therefore, the first practical step towards Reunion is the restoration of the personal relationship revealed by our Lord and the subordination to this of the material and institutional life.

Reunion may be had for the asking. The asking is determined by the uncompromising desire on the part of all Christian people to find their way to that place where our Lord can give the answer to his own prayer, "that they may all be one : even as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us ; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me." This is the prayer not merely of an ordinary intercessor, but it is the royal fiat of a sovereign, whose purpose is being all in all fulfilled, and this purpose is that the unity should be sufficiently apparent to the world, that the world will be convinced that God had sent Him.

From our definition of Reunion, we must obviously have in mind the coming together of the episcopal and the non-episcopal bodies, and exclude none who claim to belong to the Christian society, and so we must consider the Latin, the Orthodox, the Presbyterian, and the Free Churches, in suggesting practical steps towards Reunion.

Every ordained minister in that section of the Church of God known as the Church of England, is irrevocably committed to foster the spirit of Reunion by these words in the Ordering of Priests to which he subscribes : " Will you maintain and set forward as much as lieth in you, quietness, peace and love, among all Christian people,

and especially among them that are or shall be committed to your charge?" Here is indeed a solemn charge to keep. Why does Reunion tarry? It is not because we fail to realize that divisions lead to unholy rivalry, bitterness of soul, waste, loss of direct moral and spiritual influence over the forces of change. On the contrary, we believe that Reunion is desirable, and possible, and is the ideal to which all should work, but there seems to be lacking the right attitude of mind, a feeling that all attempts at Reunion are impracticable.

III

So far as modern theological research is concerned, there is a definite advance towards the solution of the difficulties confronting Reunion. It is no longer held that in the primitive period the belief of the Church was uniformly expressed. To a greater degree than now, there was a unity of spiritual life, but in matters of doctrine there were divergent explanations: for instance, there are at least six interpretations in the writings of the New Testament of the meaning of "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures." Secondly, there was no uniform government of the Church handed down by the Apostles, as far as our records enable us to discover. About the year 100 A.D. there seem to have been localized forms of episcopacy-congregationalism, presbyterianism, and a leadership at Jerusalem through the next of kin. There was intercommunion, and all who confessed the Name and were baptized were in the Body of Christ. "The apostolic ministry was transmitted in divers modes, but these seem to have been recognized everywhere as a valid ministry." No two more practical steps towards Reunion could be taken than the acceptance of these results of historic investigation—the one in the realm of faith, in that the Church never has been one in doctrinal interpretation, but that there is a common life with Christ in God which transcends all creeds but acknowledges their witness to the Faith; the other in the realm of order, that is, that Church Order was one of divine expediency rather than of direct divine tradition. There was a fellowship of disciples out of which there emerged a Church before any of the polities of Order had come into existence. Thirdly, difference in custom and usage have always been acknowledged. Where ritual definitely implies doctrine then it should be allowed the same latitude as the doctrine. Whatever the special form or practice may be—whether it is the sacramental system, the prayer meeting or the fellowship of silence—if it possesses the value attributed to it, then it will survive and will be taken into the life not only of a local Church but of the Church Universal. There is even now a great interchange of material for public worship, and the use of the work by men from any one church by those of every church is an indication of Catholicity of thought which is a prelude to Reunion. Fourthly, the responsibility of the Church to make secular

things sacred shows that the Gospel applies to all life, to collective society as well as the individual. The problems of to-day are world-wide, and if the Church is really to play its part it will need to become not only supra-national but universal, and the economic, industrial, political situations require the help of one undivided Church for their solution. At present, for instance, the Church seems to be incapable of giving instruction to Christians in China which is at all relevant to building up a Christian civilization on the apparent ruins of present Chinese culture. The union of the Churches will come when not only each individual, but each Church, is willing to sacrifice its treasured traditions in doctrine, polity, ritual and social status, the familiar institutional life, to the practice and demands of the Christian principles which are professed.

IV

Throughout the ages, there have been Christian men and women to whom the divisions of Christendom were a scandal, as an injury to the highest interests of mankind, and an offence against the love of Christ Himself. Never before have the unity movements been greater. We have had a world-wide international Missionary Conference at Jerusalem, we have inter-denominational and international co-operation societies, world-wide Church federations, organic unions, unity within bodies having the same general doctrine and polity, the modern rise of national churches, Catholic and Evangelical efforts at rapprochement. But from all these the Latin Church abstains: it has one clear-cut remedy for this lack of reunion. That is submission: there is no negotiation. Any other official means of approach appears to involve "the principle of barter and exchange in doctrinal matters," which "however attractive it may seem in English ears, is positively blasphemous to those who believe that no one has a right to tamper with the deposit of revealed truth."

Whatever may be the official attitude of the Latin Church, yet there are increasing numbers of its thoughtful lay members who are really perturbed at the spirit of devastating isolation which underlies her attitude, and who individually are wondering whether the dogmas are so inexorable as to warrant some of the statements contained in the "Encyclical Letter on fostering true religious Union," issued on January 6, 1928, by Pius XI. This letter was addressed to the Clergy in peace and communion with the Apostolic See. It commands the faithful to have no part or lot in the false efforts after Reunion, and exhorts all to enter the one true Church, i.e., the Latin. This letter was put forth after the Conversations at Malines, and anticipated the published report on these, and seems to be the official Latin pronouncement on them as well as on the Conferences at Stockholm and Lausanne. The stubbornness of

this letter is a sign not of strength but of weakness. Readers of Von Hügel's letters realize that the Vatican maintains this aloofness by enforcing the severest limitations on its thinkers and scholars. It fails to see its incompleteness, and refuses to acknowledge that those who differ have maintained or voiced values which it has not been able so far to express. More than ever it is becoming clear that the theories of authority, of irresistible grace, and infallibility, on which the Latin system is based, are untenable in the light of the facts of to-day. Further, its interpretation of history and of the development of the Church and of dogma are in themselves inadequate, and fail to do justice to the eternal principle of the holiness and the love of God.

That the Latins are willing to hold out their hands despite much evidence to the contrary can be seen in some of their relations to the Eastern Orthodox Church. During the war, for instance, Benedict XV established the Sacred Congregation *Pro Ecclesia Orientali*; he himself became President of the congregation, and no longer are the Orthodox subject, along with unbelievers and heretics, to the Inquisition; they are not spoken of as heretics to be converted but as *fratres dissidentes* to be reconciled. Further, an Oriental Institute has been founded so that Latins and *dissidentes* of every rite and language may attend lectures, and learn of one another. The monastery of Amay-sur-Meuse has been set apart by the Benedictines for the training of the monks of Union. Further, we read in *Rerum Orientalium*, September 8, 1928, that what stands in the way of dioceses, for example in Transjordanian, eager for union (i.e., with the Latins) is the lack of Latin priests who will adopt Oriental rites. "To ask the Eastern Churches to adopt the Latin rite would be inconceivable. That priests of the Latin rite should undertake the introduction of the new elements which union with Rome involves would be impossible." In his Encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam Dei*, November 12, 1923, Pope Pius XI indicated a strong yearning on the part of the Latin Church for the return of the Churches of the East to the fold of the true Church; he asked them to lay aside ancient prejudices, and "not to blame the Church of Rome for the faults of individuals." The general principle which applies to the treatment of the Orthodox, holds also for the other Churches in the East. Actually, each of these Churches has practised excommunication of the other, in fact every communion is under the ban of one or other—either it went out on the threat of excommunication, or was put out. All Christendom must learn to trust one another, and to treat one another's churches as far as possible as they desire to be treated and to have their own church treated.

The mutual rapprochement between the Churches of Eastern Christendom with the Church of England has been fostered by each in turn since the seventeenth century. However true may be the remark of the historian S. R. Green, "the Church of England as we know it to-day is the work of a Greek monk," the situation has been clarified as a result of the formation of the Anglican and

Eastern Orthodox Churches Union, and the appointment by Archbishop Davidson, on the resolution of Lambeth 1908, of a permanent committee to take cognizance of the relations of the Church of England with the Eastern Church. A momentous step was taken when the "Declaration of Faith," prepared and published by the English Church Union in 1922, and signed by 3,715 Anglicans, was presented to "His Holiness the Œcumenical Patriarch and the Holy Synod of the Great Church at Constantinople." In August of the same year, the Patriarch issued an encyclical, stating that English ordinations were regarded as possessing the same validity as that possessed by the Roman, Old Catholic and Armenian Churches, inasmuch as all essentials are found in them which are held indispensable from the orthodox point of view for the recognition of the "charisma" of the priesthood derived from the Apostolic succession. The pan-Orthodox Council has yet to meet, and deliver its opinion regarding the orders of the Church of England. The statement at the Cheltenham Church Congress by the Most Rev. Archbishop Germanos, Metropolitan of Thyateira, has been bitterly criticized by some lay members of the Orthodox faith. "Why should we not think," he said, "that a time is coming when the Catholic nucleus which always existed in the Anglican Church should not prevail over the whole body, so that it should appear in that form which would make reunion with our Orthodox Church possible? Meanwhile, the duty of the Orthodox is not to break the definite bond which binds us to the Anglican Communion, but to help in such an evolution through friendly intercourse and in a spirit of peaceful discussion."

The Committee of Anglicans and Free Churchmen, which was appointed by the Conference held at Lambeth to consider the issues of the Lambeth Appeal, has issued its final report. Dr. Scott Lidgett says: "All the influences which operated in 1920 continue to weigh, and they should constrain us steadfastly to persevere in pursuit of Reunion whatever may be the difficulties that confront us, or the delays that must inevitably take place before these difficulties are overcome. The crux in the conversations, which were in no sense negotiations, was the position of the non-episcopally ordained ministers in the re-united Church, and of their celebrating Holy Communion in Anglican Churches."

V

The practical steps towards Reunion may be considered along the following lines:—

1. The will to union: this involves the hating of those attitudes which create discord; the forsaking of non-essential and secondary positions; and the embracing of the undying passion for the comprehensive outward union of Christendom.

2. The acceptance of the spiritual truths of the Faith—Incarnation, Atonement, Trinity, and to such truths as the Nicene Creed bears witness, and the final authority in matters of faith being the Holy Spirit interpreting the witness of the Bible to Christ and to God whom He revealed.

3. The vision of the Christian Church really establishing the Kingdom of God on earth : this may mean a federal union as a step towards organic union, i.e., of one united corporate body : the main point is the recognition of every regular minister of an accredited Church as a minister of the Word and Sacraments in the Universal Church ; the welcoming of members of the Churches who have a regular ministry to communion at the Lord's Table ; the acceptance of one another's members truly as members of the Church of God ; the acknowledgment of a historical episcopate which will be constitutional and representative.

4. The Church of England should be the Church of the English people, and I would venture to say that the Church of Great Britain and Ireland should be the Church of all its inhabitants. Here arise two matters of importance : the first concerns ourselves ; while Truth must triumph no one section of the Church of England, nor for that matter any of the Churches in England, has a full understanding of Truth, and it seems like sheer insincerity unworthy of the name we bear, to pray at one moment for unity and union with non-episcopal churches and at the next, to regard with equanimity, if not to perpetuate, the unhappy divisions which are still present in our communion ; the second also concerns ourselves and is the question of the Establishment ; it seems clear that the issue of spiritual autonomy must be reopened, for it is a tenet common to Presbyterians, Wesleyan Methodists, Congregationalists and Baptists.

5. As soon as the Presbyterian Churches of Scotland have become united and the plans for the union of Methodists have become effective : the implications are far-reaching and world-wide, and will need the most thorough inquiry.

6. The union movements in South India and Persia especially should be given every consideration ; here these have emerged and have not been forced from outside, and have no ulterior motive such as recognition of orders by the Latins and Greeks. Care must be taken that these movements should not separate themselves from the parent churches. The effect on the home base of the co-operating churches is immeasurable, and we call on Lambeth definitely to support these schemes in such details as are known to us at present.

7. In the meantime there should be a thorough study of the papers at Stockholm and Lausanne. There the problems are clearly stated and a mutual understanding of the difficulties involved would bring members of all churches together, and thus there might emerge a conception of the Church-to-be. The suggestion is fruitful that the Anglican Church is a possible bridge church with the Orthodox, and through the Swedish Lutheran Church with Lutheranism, and

through the Evangelicals with a hoped-for reunion with Wesleyan Methodism and thus with the Free Churches.

8. The demand for Intercommunion is increasing and ought to be encouraged, especially where it is the spontaneous desire of those who have assembled for some special work to express their union with Christ and fellowship one with another. Such laws and instructions in the Church of England which refer to the Rubric at the close of the Confirmation Service do not preclude Christians of other sections of the Church of God from sharing in our service of Holy Communion. On the other hand it was put forward at Lambeth Conference, 1920, that "it should be regarded as a general rule that Anglican communicants should receive the Holy Communion only at the hand of members of their own church or of churches in communion therewith."

In suggesting these practical steps towards Reunion, we become cognizant of other relevant and vital issues, to which answers have yet to be found, and so it is essential that we have not only an open mind, tolerant, not indifferent, but also to have the spirit of Christ. We begin to realize that others have a right to opinions which for us are highly disagreeable. Nevertheless, the great requirement is this right spirit. We need the spirit of courage, and of sound judgment, the preparedness to study, the desire to see the condition of the world as God sees it, the determination to establish the Kingdom of God, the willingness to use every approach to unity as generally consistent with the emerging conception of the Church. We need to co-operate in matters which do not concern differences, to share in the communion of great things, the study of theology, the use of devotional literature, hymns, sermons, books, liturgies, communion in prayer and worship. Out of this will emerge a new Church; it will have the energy, power and liberty of Protestantism, the stability, humility and order of Latin and Eastern Christianity, but it will be neither. The spirit of unity must have a body, and it will be found in the Church that is to come, where Grace is spiritually transmitted and orderly appointed.

The world situation, as was portrayed at the Jerusalem Conference, 1928, only reinforces the demand for Reunion. The trilogy of the world, the flesh and the devil were combined under the head of Secularism. Now there is a facile meaning for this word; but the inner meaning is this, that anything which is disintegrated, which is consciously divorced from the whole of life, which is deprived of its true function, no matter whether it be politics, education, religion, is Secularism, and will fail from inanition; and the demand is for the wholeness of life, which is given through the personality and message of Jesus Christ Himself, and is intrinsically self-authenticating to the human soul and to the collective body of believers. The Spirit of Christ requires an ever-growing body through which to express Himself. No one section can cut itself off without reinforcing the ranks of Secularism, nor can it refuse to co-operate in establishing the all-embracing body of Christ without preparing its own obsequies. We need to return to

the personal principles of our Faith and live and work at peace ; out of this co-operation will emerge a new Church in which there will be orders capable of embracing and expressing every point of view of the mind of Christ in His people. Let us remember St. Paul's view : " Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it ; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word. That He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing ; but that it should be holy and without blemish."

A book of missionary interest which no one should fail to read is Mr. Wilson Cash's *Persia Old and New*. (C.M.S., 1s. net.) Mr. Cash recently paid a visit to Persia and he has given an informing record of his experiences and a brief but fascinating account of Persia and the mission work which has been carried on there for many years. Most of us are familiar with the visit and translation work of Henry Martyn. There have been many vicissitudes since those early days and there are still many difficulties to be faced by the band of workers who are labouring heroically. What Mr. Cash saw, he tells us, filled him with admiration for that splendid band of missionaries, old and young, who to-day are the worthy successors of those who laid the foundation upon which they build. The outlook, he adds, is promising, although there are threats of danger from Bolshevism and Secularism. There is a strong movement for reunion in Persia and negotiations are already far advanced between the Presbyterians and our own people. The Lambeth Conference will have a grave responsibility in making a decision on these reunion movements. Mr. Cash expresses the views of the people thus : " The Persians to whom I spoke were quite definite in their ideals about the Church. They did not want a Church of England in Persia. They were building up a Persian Church on Persian lines to express Persian Christian thought and culture, and while they accepted episcopacy as the right method of church policy they were emphatic in their demands that it should be a constitutional episcopacy and that the government of the Church should be in their own hands."

H. R. Allenson, Ltd., issues a volume of *Twenty-five Talks with Boys and Girls*, by the late Rev. George H. Morrison, D.D., of Wellington Church, Glasgow (3s. 6d.). Dr. Morrison's characteristics as a preacher are too well known to need commendation. These addresses, prepared for publication by his widow, are examples of his gift of dealing with great subjects with simplicity, and yet with beauty of language and illustration.