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HINDRANCES TO CHRISTIAN UNITY.

BY THE VENERABLE W. L. PAIGE COX, B.D., Archdeacon
of Chester.

A RETIRED Indian official of high standing has been referring lately to the Scheme of Church Union in South India. He regards it as a scheme of pressing importance, from the political and not only from the ecclesiastical point of view. He considers that the people of India will not be fitted for self-government till the barriers of race and religion between them have been removed by the common adoption of the one form of faith that can produce unity of spirit amid such great diversity.

Those who framed the Scheme of Reunion would, no doubt, be the last to deprecate a full and free discussion of it. They by no means claim that it is incapable of improvement. What they would desire is that, in any judgment of the scheme, the circumstances in which it has been drawn up should be very carefully considered, and especially the question of the practicability of any other scheme which might seem to some to be ideally better.

A challenge to the propriety of the scheme is coming very strongly and persistently from one school of thought in the Church of England, and the issues involved are so serious that it is a matter of importance to inquire into the credentials of that school for pronouncing a decisive word on questions in which accuracy of statement in doctrine and scholarship is concerned.

In the early days of the Tractarian Movement Dr. Arnold, of Rugby, noticed that its leaders laid great stress on the "ideas of beauty and love," but did not give a similar lead in the direction of "truth and righteousness"—graces of character which the Apostle Paul places in the forefront of all, as necessarily preceding the rest. "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honourable, whatsoever things are just . . . think on these things" (Phil. iv. 8). In the Introduction to the volume entitled *Christian Life*, published the year before his death, Arnold gave an instance of the inveracity which he attributed to "Mr. Newman and his friends." He quoted them as stating that the "security expressly authorized by our Lord for the continuance and due application of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is the apostolic commission of the bishops, and under them the presbyters of the Church." Arnold's comment on this is:

"If they had merely asserted that our Lord had sanctioned the necessity of apostolical succession we might have supposed that, by some interpretation of their own, they implied His sanction of it, from words which, to other men, bore no such meaning. But in saying that He has 'expressly sanctioned' it they have, most unconsciously, I trust, made a statement which is untrue. . . . I am not speaking, it will be observed, of apostolical succession simply; but of the necessity of apostolical succession as a security for the efficacy of the Sacrament" (pp. xxxi-xxxv).

Any student of the New Testament can test for himself the soundness of Arnold's criticism. The point is of importance because it has a crucial bearing on the South India Reunion question.

A book specially written with reference to this question is being circulated under the auspices of the English Church Union. In this book there are items of information and expressions of opinion which contribute usefully to the general discussion; but there are some points in the book which darken rather than elucidate counsel. Almost at the beginning there is a statement somewhat similar to that to which Arnold took such vigorous exception. The writer says :

“ According to the conviction of the majority of Christians (though doubtless not the majority of Christian Englishmen) the vital essence of the service of the Holy Eucharist depends upon the fact that by a valid consecration the bread and wine undergo a spiritual change, in virtue of which we are able to present to God the one true and perfect offering of the Sacrificed Body and Blood of Christ.”

This is mentioned as the “ conviction ” of a large body of Christians, and as a “ conviction,” merely, it might not be a matter of so much concern. But it is made the subject of definite teaching, mainly through popular manuals, and this compels the warning in the same plain terms as those used by Dr. Arnold that such teaching is untrue. It is not true that in the Holy Eucharist “ we present to God the one true and perfect offering of the Sacrificed Body and Blood of Christ.” It is teaching that since Newman's time has been conclusively refuted by some of our most eminent divines.¹ Yet in spite of all this reiterated refutation the teaching is persisted in by way of “ vehement assertion,” as it has been said, “ more particularly to the ignorant and unlearned.” In the book referred to there are various other instances of confident inferences from dubious premises on matters which are really of very serious import in connection with the South India Scheme.

It has been noted elsewhere that irregularities in argument of the same sort occur in another book with which the English Church Union has been specially associated, *A New Commentary on Holy Scripture*. In an American review of that Commentary it is said that one of the editors, in his notes on St. Luke, “ constantly assumes what is quite unproven.”²

That sort of thing savours so much of inveracity that the divine alluded to would not, we may be sure, allow himself to resort to it in everyday life : it is obscured to him in his theological teaching, no doubt, by his prepossessions. Certainly in other branches of study it is scarcely to be met with in these days, when we have learnt the extreme importance of precision of statement—as a matter of expediency as well as of propriety. It is unthinkable in scientific circles, in which there can be no advance of exact and agreed

¹ Particulars are given in *The Heavenly Priesthood of Our Lord*. Second Edition, with an Appendix in answer to some criticisms. By W. L. Paige Cox, Archdeacon of Chester. (Basil Blackwell, 1s.)

² *Homiletic Review*, May, 1929.

knowledge without the most rigid attention to facts on all hands and the most scrupulous and exhaustive sifting of evidence.

Of course, religious teachers of a certain type are not solitary in their tendency to be entrapped into the *indiligentia veri* in matters of controversy. The Head Master of Harrow, Dr. Cyril Norwood, in his book on *The English Tradition of Education*, says :

“ It was but the other day that I heard an eminent man of science relate his experiences in the War, how he was called in to help in a technical question, and found that the politicians and administrators were quite unable to realize the nature of a fact, or the elementary laws of causation. They thought they could get round facts, and that they could always make them out to be something else ” (p. 86).

The moral of this is that all of us, whatever be our calling in life, would be the better for some study of science and for a thorough training in the scientific method, so as to acquire a veneration for facts, and a conscientious accuracy of statement in reference to facts.

One of the commonest forms of inaccuracy of this sort is the use of words in senses alien from their original and proper meaning. Take the word “ Protestant ” for instance. There are many members of the Church of England who not only repudiate the title themselves but apply it in a scornful way to any and all who differ from them in their ecclesiastical views. Yet every student of language and of history knows that the word “ Protestant ” came into use as denoting one who “ protested ” against the errors and encroachments of Rome in her deviations from what is truly Catholic. To quote the well-known saying of Bishop Wordsworth, “ The Church of England became Protestant at the Reformation that she might be truly and more purely Catholic.” Those members of the Church of England therefore who repudiate the name of Protestant practically admit, in doing so, that they are in a false position. They ought, on their own showing, at any rate, to be members of the Church of Rome.

Another ecclesiastical word which is often used with inexcusable and mischievous inaccuracy is “ priest.” It is applied to the clergy in a sense that suggests a distinction of fundamental importance between clergy and laity. The word “ priest ” is, of course, a contraction of “ presbyter,” the “ elder ” of the Bible. It means an elder and no more. The Regius Professor of Hebrew at Cambridge, Dr. Kennett, has lately preached a sermon on the subject, which was published in *THE CHURCHMAN* last April, and it is to be hoped that it will be widely read, for it clears up a point on which there has been much confusion and misconception. It is only the general community of Christians to whom the Hebrew and Greek words are applied in the New Testament.

It is noteworthy that Arnold, in his strictures on Newman’s teaching, emphasized precisely the same point.

“ A priesthood (in the Hebrew sense),” he says, “ belongs to the relations subsisting between God and man. These relations were fixed for the Christian Church from its very foundation, being, in fact, no other than the main truths

of the Christian religion; and they bar for all time the very notion of an earthly priesthood (as applied to a distinct order of Christians)."¹

In the South India Scheme the chief Governing Body, the Synod, is to consist of bishops, presbyters, and laity. The spokesman for the English Church Union, in the book referred to above, accepts this terminology, and adopts the title "presbyter" in speaking of clergy of the second order,² and he has some frank and useful observations on "the fact that the episcopal, presbyteral, and congregationalist systems" each contribute "elements which must all have an appropriate place in the order of life of a reunited Church."³ He has, however, a remarkable *petitio principii* in the following passage: "It must be noticed that presbyterate is not necessarily the same as priesthood in the sacerdotal sense." He then goes on to say:

"In Cyprian's idiom the word 'priest' (*sacerdos*) means a bishop, and it is noticeable that presbyters began to be called priests roughly about the same time as parishes began to be formed and put under the government of members of the second order. Obviously it would then become necessary for them to celebrate the Holy Sacrifice, and so it would also become natural to call them priests."⁴

It is historically true of course that the word *sacerdos* came to be applied to bishop and priest in Cyprian's time, but the writer entirely overlooks the fact that by that time the Church had become impregnated with pagan and pre-Christian notions of sacrifice, the object of which was to propitiate inauspicious deities; and by that time also the popular conception of God the Father had become largely paganized.

We are thus brought face to face with two fundamentally different views of the functions of the Christian Ministry, the one in accordance with New Testament teaching and the other a departure from it in a pre-Christian or non-Christian direction. So fundamental are the differences that they really stand for two opposite and irreconcilable types of religion. The two types have lately been contrasted thus by the Head Master of Harrow, Dr. Cyril Norwood.

"On the one hand, we have as the central object of our faith Jesus born of a Virgin, a Son and a Mother, or it may be, primarily, a Mother and a Son. The figure of God the Father is nebulous, the Holy Spirit is not as a wind that bloweth where it listeth, but it is operative through the Church, through the lives of many saints, through a Divine Society—whose life is entirely mediated by a priesthood possessing all the prerogative and authority of Apostolic Succession, and through the Sacrament which is through the same power and privilege of the priesthood a daily enacted Miracle. The Bible has not much place in this system, for little authority for it can be found in the Bible. It ignores modern science because it claims to be operative in another plane. It does not look back to Galilee and Jerusalem, but to Imperial Rome and the Mystery Religions.

¹ *The Christian Life*, p. 1. On page lix Arnold has a note on the word "priest" corresponding exactly to what is said by Professor Kennett.

² It is rather unfortunate that in the Church Assembly the titles should be bishops, clergy, and laity, as though the bishops were not clergy.

³ *The Case for Episcopacy*, by Kenneth D. Mackenzie, p. 118.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

" On the other hand there is another interpretation of Christianity which frankly accepts the Bible and bases itself on what it finds there, and as frankly accepts all knowledge that proves itself worthy of incorporation into the system of science. With the Bible and through the pages of the Old Testament it traces the progress of the revelation of God. With the New Testament it believes that in Jesus God became Man, the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us. It believes that the Holy Spirit was given and continues from generation to generation to illumine all those who live the life and seek the spiritual values. It believes that God was in Jesus, is in Christ, is in the Holy Spirit, a Trinity in Unity. It holds that he who lives for the good, the true, and the beautiful, begins to live eternally, and will find a place eternally in the Father's House that has many mansions. It relies on the words of Jesus Christ and it finds its highest inspiration in the Fourth Gospel.

" It is clear that these are two systems, a faith once for all delivered, and a faith progressive and widening, as the thoughts of men widen. They cannot exist together inside the same Church without disrupting it, as they are disrupting the Church of England to-day."¹

" They cannot exist together in the same Church without disrupting it." So writes Dr. Norwood. The majority of the bishops of the Church of England—of the present bishops, not of their immediate predecessors—have thought differently. They have made it their endeavour, in revising the Prayer Book, to provide within the Church of England for both systems; and the attempt has gone far already towards producing disruption. The proposed licensing of continuous Reservation, though under specified restrictions, and the alternative Communion Office have not satisfied the adherents of the former of the two systems described by Dr. Norwood; and they have produced the revolt on the part of the adherents of the second system which has brought about the rejection of the New Book on account of the portions representing the new episcopal policy.

One leading cause of the widespread opposition to the New Book as finally shaped by the bishops, is dissatisfaction with the method adopted in the attempt to associate the two opposite types of religion in the one Church. There were many who at once objected to the alternative Prayer of Consecration, not only because of the change of doctrine implied in it, as noticed by our leading scholars,² but chiefly because of the ambiguous language resorted to, language lacking any clear warranty of Scripture. We were told again and again in recommendation or defence of some expressions in the alternative Canon that they were " patient of an Evangelical interpretation." Obviously also they were patient, and intended to be patient, of a quite different interpretation, as some of the bishops admitted. It was this disingenuous method of dealing with the most sacred prayer in the whole Book that was especially condemned as compromising the character of the Church of England as a teaching Church.

It is refreshing, by contrast, to turn to the account given by the

¹ *The English Tradition of Education*, pp. 51-4.

² See a letter by Cambridge Professors and others to *The Times*, dated February 3, 1929. Cardinal Bourne has said that the " suggestion of alternative uses necessarily implies contradictory doctrines."

Bishop of Madras of the negotiations leading up to the South India Scheme. A certain form of declaration, we are told, was proposed to be adopted with reference to the commissioning of ministers ; but it was at once rejected by the leaders of the negotiating Churches because it seemed to be a "subterfuge." It was capable of "a double interpretation," and they would have nothing in the scheme but "what was sincere and unequivocal in intention."¹

We have an echo here of the resolve of the compilers of the Old Prayer Book to admit nothing into the book that was "untrue or uncertain, or not in accordance with the very pure Word of God, the Holy Scriptures."²

Bacon, in his essay "Of Unity in Religion," says :

"There be two false peaces or unities : the one, when the peace is grounded but upon an implicit ignorance ; for all colours will agree in the dark : the other, when it is pieced up upon a direct admission of contraries in fundamental points ; for truth and falsehood in such things are like the iron and clay in the toes of Nebuchadnezzar's image—they may cleave but they will not incorporate."

There can be no real Church unity except on a basis of truth ; and our Church accordingly bids us pray that "all who profess, and call themselves Christians may be led into the way of truth." With unity in view there must be on all hands an open-minded search for truth, and a common determination to reject anything in doctrine and worship which is not plainly consistent with fundamental Christianity as taught in the New Testament.

Within that limit there may be much room for diversity in matters that are non-essential. And there may and should be a readiness in all members of the Church to learn from one another. We may not narrow the Church. We need the contributions which each school of thought may make to the richness of the Church's system of teaching and service. We need the influence in our midst of those who are concerned for Church order and regular devotion, and the association of art with religion : we need the work and example of those who, as a duty to the God of truth, are reverently desirous of distinguishing between the Divine and human elements in the Bible, and the permanent and transitory elements in the theological formularies which have come down to us from days other than our own ; and we need also the witness that some may give more particularly to the paramount importance of personal religion and of individual as well as corporate fellowship with God in Christ.

We may not narrow the Church. We must broaden it. And there is unprecedented hope of that now. There never was a better understanding and a more friendly feeling between Church people and Nonconformists than there is to-day. We are co-operating with them in study. Their scholars are in full concord with ours. There is agreement between the mass of enlightened Churchpeople and the mass of enlightened Nonconformists on the main matters of religion, and there is every prospect of our coming closer to one

¹ *Church Union in South India*, pp. 69, 70.

² Preface "Concerning the Service of the Church."

another on the things that still divide us. The spur to the desire of this on both sides should be the need of union in view of the home and foreign missionary work that lies before us. We are looking on together this year at the experiment that is in contemplation in South India. If that experiment succeeds, a consequence of it must surely be that we shall begin to envisage a Scheme of Home Reunion on carefully devised lines.

“ My heart leaps up when I behold
A Rainbow in the sky.”

There is a rainbow in the ecclesiastical firmament now, though set, like all rainbows, on a dark surface of cloud. That cloud—of division within the Church and of unsettlement without—may be, after all, the precursor of a sunlit day when the Church of England will become again in actuality the Church of the whole nation.

In view of that possibility there should be no further talk of a separation between the Church and the State. Christian reunion in England would strengthen and consolidate both; and the “ powers that be ” in Church and State would go forward in harmonious collaboration in their respective spheres of influence, with untold promise of good to the country and the world.

The Rev. W. Wilson Cash has shown in several interesting books a brilliant capacity for writing a fascinating narrative. His latest contribution to missionary literature shows the same qualities. It is an account of *The Changing Sudan* (C.M.S., 1s. net). The subject lends itself to graphic description and to moving incident, and Mr. Cash from his long and intimate acquaintance with the country does full justice to the opportunity. The history of the Sudan during the past half-century has been marked by many vicissitudes. From the death of Gordon in 1885 till the re-conquest by Lord Kitchener in 1898, the country was under the domination of the Moslem power. Mr. Cash's picture of its pitiable condition must convince every reader of the incapacity of Islam to raise any people and of the necessity of Christian missions to bring light into dark regions. Recent developments have opened up the land in a wonderful way, and there is a strong appeal for men and means to make full use of the many openings for evangelistic, educational and medical work. Mr. Cash's moving story will, we hope, meet with a ready response. Opportunities now open may pass and never come again.

Pressing Forward is the C.M.S. Story for the Year 1930 (1s. net). It should be read by all churchpeople so that they may gain from it something of the enthusiasm which will inspire renewed efforts to enable the Church to cope adequately with the needs of the workers overseas.