

EVANGELICALS AND
HOME REUNION

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Evangelicals and Home Reunion.¹

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THE question of Home Reunion is a very large one, and being large it has a great number of aspects, and while those aspects to which our attention has just been called are quite central and vital, there are others which approach the same centre along other radii.

May I say at the very outset that I have no sympathy at all with those people, or those bodies of people, who say, "Let us alone. We are perfectly contented to go on as we are doing, making the best of the house in which we find ourselves, the house where we were born, and we are not too much concerned about our relations with our Christian neighbours." These are the people who say, "Do not bother us about union. We shall do very well if we go on the lines of general sympathy and fraternization, and of general co-operation in those things which are outside the Gospel, and especially worship." I detach myself entirely from that type of feeling. I am very much concerned indeed that the various branches of the Christian Church should publicly and openly make at least an object-lesson of the unity of the spirit in the bond of its peace.

May I also say that I will venture to speak from the point of view of an Evangelicalism which is liberal and generous in its views and intent—a liberal Evangelicalism, an Evangelicalism with what I believe the Devonshire people call an "oncoming disposition." I have heard charges made to the effect that Evangelicalism has too often presented a somewhat grim and inhospitable aspect to certain other directions both of thought and of religious life. I am not undertaking to decide here and now whether that is true or not true, but if it has been true, and if it is not amended, then there is no future for Evangelical Christianity. I venture also respectfully to agree with the Bishop when he alluded to the unfortunate influence of patristics upon our religious and theological belief. The belief of the Church lies to a large extent under the ban of patristic study and patristic authority. Nothing could be more beautiful and profound than the religious insight of the Fathers. Nothing could be more

¹ An address delivered at a meeting of the London Clerical and Lay Evangelical Union, on June 28, and specially reported for the CHURCHMAN.

unfortunate, on the other hand, than to stereotype their distant and detailed views either of theology or of Church institutions. I wish—and I have often expressed the wish in quarters where I thought perhaps it might meet with response—that we had an anthology from the Fathers, giving us examples of their most beautiful insight into certain ideas, but leaving out a great deal of their writings that concerns the polity of the Church. The Fathers are more precious for their spiritual insight than for their institutional conclusions.

This matter of unity is no light matter. I know people who are disposed to dismiss it, wondering at the amount of fuss and trouble raised over what seems to them such an obvious thing. It is not obvious. The issues involved in the great controversies of history are not obvious issues, and they are not to be settled offhand, and if we are disposed to settle them offhand we should turn round upon ourselves and ask whether we have taken the measure of the problem. Real union must be planted very deep. As it is one of the consummate flowers of Christian church-life, so its foundation must be at the roots of the holy mountains, if I may so put it. Real union must be planted very deep. The real unity of the Church must be planted as deep as the foundation of the unity between God and man. When we are dealing with the gulf which separates us from the great Roman Church, for example, that is a very profound and serious matter, and it is so profound and serious, not because the question has played a large part in history simply, but because the points of issue go to the very roots of the relation between the human soul and the Divine Soul. Therefore I am not disposed to dismiss any of these questions lightly, neither do I hope for a speedy solution. I distrust speedy solutions of great matters. I am saying this because a number of people are quite satisfied to cast themselves hastily upon the fact of general Christian sympathies in dealing with this question of union. But that is not the whole; it plays a great part in the question, but it is not the whole. Again we are told that we must rally the churches together to defend the Gospel against the assaults of the world, of rationalism, and so on. That is all profoundly true; the more we are drawn together the greater our influence will be in resisting that which ought to be resisted, always being very careful as to the selection we make of the things that ought to be treated so. But we must go deeper than our sympathies, and deeper than Church defence. We must go to the roots of the matter. And here we are brought

up “all standing,” as the sailors say, by the charge, “Now you are going to victimize the Church by theology.” That remark reveals a most unhappy frame of mind. There is no foundation for so great and ultimate a matter as the unity of the Church unless it be a foundation that would be described by many people as a theological foundation. We shall not treat this question with adequacy or respect or solemnity unless, we found it as deep as we can go in the relation between God and man in Jesus Christ.

I venture, therefore, to say this, that the churches must be united, not simply by sympathy, but by authority. Now you, my brethren, possibly have had quite as much authority as you feel you want. But you will understand my particular point of view in saying that there are certain cases and situations where we at least—speaking for the Church to which I belong—could do with a little more. The Bishop has been candid, and I venture to meet his candour from my side. He has not expressed himself in any bigoted way about the incorruptible excellence of the Church of which he is such an ornament, and I am not going to say that the Church which I represent is in any danger of perishing from its own excellences. We have to help each other out in these matters. The churches must be united by a real and common authority more even than by sympathy, for my point would be that you do not get the Christian sympathy created except by Him who is our grand religious and theological authority. The right sympathy is created by the right authority, and the right freedom also is created by the right authority. When I am addressing gatherings of my own people I tell them that the prime necessity for the right freedom is the right authority, and you cannot get the freedom right without the authority. When talking about the freedom of Christians, that is an obvious truth. The foundations, therefore, I venture to suggest, must be laid in heaven rather than upon earth. It is a phrase of Wordsworth’s that

Foundations must be laid
In Heaven . . .

That is an epigram, and epigrams are reckoned by many people as extraordinarily dangerous settings of truth. But I always contend that you cannot tell the truth about Christianity except by epigrams, by paradox. We live upon a paradox. The Cross itself is a paradox. “Die to live” is a contradiction in terms. You cannot tell the

truth on these matters without getting an antinomy of that kind which irritates the plain man extremely.

What, then, is the authority? It is the *historic* Redeemer in our *personal* experience. That is paradoxical and miraculous enough, if you think of it. I want to be a little more positive and particular than to say simply that our centre is Christ. Do you mean Christ as teacher? I am very much surprised at the number of clergy who say that our ultimate authority is the teaching of Christ. It is not the teaching of Christ, nor the character of Christ. All that is too placid, too inert, not sufficiently dynamic. What did Christ do? What did He set out to do? He redeemed. We feel the historic Redeemer as our Redeemer. I do not mean the Redeemer legislating about redemption, or legislating about the Church and theology. It was no system He left us. He did not legislate at all. It was not His genius to legislate; it was His genius to redeem. His vocation, His mission, was to redeem. He left a world redeemed, and we have to yield ourselves to that redemption. That is the fundamental thing. Certainly for the Church it is. And that kind of authority will draw us together in a sympathy that nothing else can produce. On the other hand, our link is not simply our experience. It is not the experience of being redeemed.

It is our experience of the Redeemer, when we are not thinking about how we are feeling at all. Are there not moments, beautiful and rare, when we have felt that we have touched at once both heaven and earth? We know that our Redeemer liveth and ruleth, and we do not think at all of our feelings and our experience. It is not our experience at all; it is the Redeemer in the midst of our experience.

I want to put the same thing from another point of view. The only thing that can unite the Church is the tiling that reconciles the world. It is the world in the Church that divides us so much. It is the unreconciled world in the midst of our Christianity that causes us so much trouble. And the reconciling power is the atoning Christ; not just Christ without more ado, but the atoning and redeeming Christ. And that is why I venture to say that the only foundation of Church unity is the evangelical one. This is not a piece of theology, if you please. It is a piece of the last and profoundest morality in the whole world. We English do believe in morals. Sometimes we do not believe in anything else. But we

do believe in morality, and we are willing to listen to and to go a long way with a man who starts from that foundation. One reason why people are dissatisfied with theology is that it has abandoned that foundation, and we have got into all the intricacies of an old and metaphysical theology. But if one has much to say about the theology of this matter one says it because it is a moral theology. That is, it has to do with the adjustment of man's conscience and God's conscience. And that is really the only source of theology that one need care very much for in the long run. But that has immense roads radiating from it in every direction. We must rally then upon the gospel of moral redemption. If we are going to define, that is one of the best definitions I know of Christianity. That is what we rally upon. We do not even rally upon the Bible. There is a certain way of treating the Bible which makes difficulty for the Gospel. There has been a way of treating the Bible, with a certain amount of spurious respect, which has seriously hampered, not to say endangered, the service which the Bible and the Bible alone is able to render the Gospel. What is it that gives the Bible spiritual value? It is to us the great sacrament of the Gospel of the Christ of God. I am in the way of saying that the real successor of the Apostles is the Bible. And yet there is a way of treating the Bible about which we shall have to deal very faithfully with ourselves. It is possible so to treat the Bible as to idolize it, and to put a barrier between ourselves and the Gospel by its means. We must escape from that. If it were told us by an angel from heaven that it were really necessary that, as of old, the pitchers should be broken at the blowing of the critical trumpets in order that the lamps in the pitchers might shine forth, then the Bible might be well lost if only we could be made divinely sure by the Holy Spirit that it was for the triumph and glory of the Gospel. If the alternative is sharply put we must say that our foundation is the very nature of the Gospel—the one Gospel of the one Lord and the one Saviour. It is not a theory of the Bible.

Moreover, may I put the same thing from this other point of view? The unity of the Church is a supernatural unity. It is not to be got through the devices and engineerings of man. It is a supernatural matter. It rests upon the permanent and eternal element in Christianity. What is the permanent thing in Christianity? What is going to survive the changes that Christian belief

and life must undergo in the years that are to come? There must be some central thing that does not change? What is the permanent and eternal element in Christianity? It is Christ's redeeming work. Our churches' unity must rest upon that if it is to have a permanent foundation. We are really in possession of a greater trust than we have realized when we call ourselves Evangelical. There is a gold-mine upon our estate that we have not yet worked as it should be. If there be a unity coming for the Church, in my judgment it can only be by the concentration upon this evangelical element and its development according to the riches of the spirit and the needs of the world with which we have to do. Church unity rests upon an evangelical succession, not upon a canonical succession. The life of the Church is a matter of evangelical solidarity. This sounds ponderous, but it is very true. The life of the Church depends on its evangelical solidarity, that is to say, its solidarity in the Gospel. It does not rest—this life of the Church—on a canonical continuity. To say that is legalism; it is a relapse into Judaism; it is something which ties up the Church rather than unites it. I would even live dangerously for one moment, and I would say this, that if we could take out of the Mass such doctrines as transubstantiation, the central place which the Mass as the worship of the sacrifice of Christ takes in the Roman Church is one of the strongest things about that Church. It is still, by the place it gives to the Mass, putting in the very centre the Cross and the evangelical element. We do not grumble that they put the Cross in the centre. We only wish their ways of construing the Cross accorded with the principle and authority of the New Testament. It is not baptismal regeneration we have got to rally on; it is conversion. That is to say, our foundation is not a mystic one, it is a moral one. And the reason why the Church is not doing for the world what it should be doing is that it has not got a sufficient moral grasp of the world and the world's case. The New Testament has that grasp, the present Church does not have it in the measure or proportion of the New Testament; we do not duly grapple with the last moral fact of sin.

I would like to point out also that unless we bethink ourselves well about this matter of union, the public will have something to say. But has the public the right to criticize the Church? Well, the secret of the Church is not with the public, it is with the Church itself. The secret of the Church is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit makes

the life of the Church. If men yielded as they should to the movement of the Holy Spirit they would be within the Church, and not outside it; and then their judgment upon Church matters would be of more value than it can possibly be from people who have never realized the Holy Spirit sufficiently to place themselves in living communion and membership with the Church. The central principles and policies of the Church are to be prescribed by its own inward light and life, with all due regard, of course, to criticism from outside. But criticism is one thing, and prescription is another thing. And there are symptoms at the present day that the world outside claims the right to prescribe to the Church, and not only to criticize. In that respect we ought to make our own opinion and our own practice felt. But yet no Church can afford to be independent of public opinion, and I venture to think that if we do not do a great deal more than we have been doing in the way of mutual approximation we shall lose any such hold upon the world even as we have got. And especially would it greatly endanger our hold if our separation were to retard the educational improvement for which our country is so anxiously pining.

I agree with his Lordship's reference to the nation. I am not going to say anything about Free Churchism, but I will venture to say this, that it is impossible for the Church to be out of relation to the nation in which it is. The existing form of the relation is for the moment neither here nor there. But it is impossible for any branch of the Church to become entirely neutral to the State. It could not be, because there is a sanctity that belongs to the State, and which comes from the same Lord as the sanctity that belongs to the Church.

In the Interim Report of the Archbishops' Committee I welcome the fact that two great changes showed themselves in the attitude of the Established Church to the churches outside it. The first of these was the change from what might be called prerogative prelacy to a constitutional episcopacy. That is a valuable approximation. The office should rise from the body of the Christian people, and it should not descend upon it with a formal prerogative from above. That is a very important point, and it is due very largely to our new scientific knowledge both of the New Testament and of Church history. We are owing more to the scientific scholars and students in this matter than most of us have any idea of. There was a time when these

were polemical influences; now they are rapidly becoming irenic. The other happy change showing itself in the Report was the recognition on the part of Anglicanism of at least the prophetic ministry of the Free Churches. But the insistence in that document is upon episcopacy. Episcopacy is presented as a condition of unity. Now that creates a deadlock. We cannot go any further for the time being. But the door will not be long shut. There are influences—I will not say burglarious, for they are too open for that—which are gradually unpicking that lock and pushing open that door. That document says that the Free Churches are not asked to accept any theories of episcopacy, but just the fact of episcopacy, the historic fact. That really will not do. I know how admirably it is meant, but I am quite sure of this, no fact as a mere fact could be held to justify such a monopolist claim except for the theory that was in it or under it. I am not sorry about the deadlock. Deadlocks give you time to consider where you are. They give time for many things to simmer and improve. But we have got to insist, so far as the Free Churches are concerned, upon—what I have found the Evangelical side of Anglicanism willing to admit—the recognition of our ministerial orders. That comes before everything else. We may go further than you think about episcopacy, being driven by practical considerations, but there is no possibility of fertile action in this direction so long as our orders are unrecognized.

I have no business further to monopolize your time. I want to say in conclusion that the several forms of church polity are not rivals to each other. They are complementary to each other. The three great branches—Episcopacy, Presbyterianism (including Methodism), and Congregationalism—should not be at each other's throats. Episcopacy represents the liberty that is secured by authority, Presbyterianism the liberty that is secured by order, Congregationalism the liberty that is secured by local autonomy and local initiative, and the initiative especially of the laity. "If you want to make a thing living make it local," it has been said. The New Jerusalem is described as a cubical city. It was a great cube descending out of heaven, very like, if one may put it so, a huge block of flats. But even then, cannot we have at our disposal a common chapel, and a kitchen, and a drawing-room in common? The matter of inter-communion here arises. It is a much greater difficulty to many than it is to myself. Any person who has confessed

the earnestness of his faith in the Redeemer enough to become a Church member should be welcome to communion with any other Church. That is—if I may use a Scotch expression—the doctrine of mutual eligibility. (Oh, we can talk Latin in Scotland!) Less than that does not really mean more for Christ, but it tends rather in the Judaist direction; and it is the Judaism in the Church that is one of our great dangers. There is one thing that society needs more than anything else, and that is a new heart, and there is one institution in the world that has got the secret and monopoly of that; it is the Church of Christ in its manifold branches and powers. The more we unite, the more power we bring to the national confession of the righteousness of God in His historic and everlasting Kingdom.