

# THE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE YOUNGER AND OLDER CHURCHES

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## THE HISTORIC CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

THE BISHOP OF MANCHESTER  
(ARCHBISHOP DESIGNATE OF YORK)<sup>1</sup>

**A**LL our thoughts here are concerned with the missionary work of the Church and with the extension of the Church throughout the world, and our minds necessarily go back to the Church's marching orders. I want to begin again from that point. 'All authority is given unto me in heaven and in earth.' There is the fact. 'Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.' The threefold name of God was the name by which He was known to those to whom He was revealed as love. So the command was to make the nations into disciples, bathing them in that love which is for Christians the open secret of the universe. There was the command.

All Christianity stands upon the acceptance of that fact, that all authority in heaven and earth belongs to Jesus Christ. It is of small importance whether you begin with the historical Figure who became the revelation of the Eternal Spirit, or begin with the Eternal Spirit who became an historical figure. It is the greatest paradox in the world that we should believe in the love of God, because experience does not suggest it. There are indeed many converging lines of inquiry which give us hope that what is going

<sup>1</sup> Address delivered at the Jerusalem meeting.

on in other departments of thought and activity is going to lead us back to a belief in God ; but at first sight experience is dead against it ; and if we isolate Jesus of Nazareth from the work that was carried on by His disciples it is impossible for us to assert the basic fact of the Christian faith. If the human life of Jesus was a mere episode, it would be wanton to say that the world we know is in the hands of Him whom we know in the Gospels. It only begins to be credible if we set alongside Christ that body which we call the Church. I do not see how anybody in his senses could believe in the deity of Christ who did not also believe in that society which we call the Church. It was only through the Church that He could make human experience conform to the principles which He had lived among men. In the first verse of the Acts of the Apostles we find the significant words, 'The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus *began* both to do and teach.' St Luke was now going on to tell of what He went on to do and teach. It was the activity of the same Jesus, no longer through a bodily organism of flesh and bone, but through His Body, the Church. And so the historical fellowship started on its way.

We are told that Christianity is a system of doctrines, and, on the other hand, that it is a 'way of life.' Historically it always comes before us as a movement among mankind. The first impression it made was not as an ideal, or as a body of truth, but as a movement, of which the normal channel was the organized society of Christ's disciples. When the Lord withdrew His physical presence He left, not a book, not even a society with constitution, officers and so forth, but a group of people united because

they had shared the company of Jesus, some, moreover, who had been especially called by Him; that was the beginning of the Church.

There are many people who are anxious to know whether the Church or the apostles came first; the fact is that neither came first; the Church was there from the outset with the apostles in its midst as its normal focus of authority and leadership. As it began to spread St Paul discovered as a fact, no doubt hidden in many ways, yet discernible in spite of all that concealed it, that this society united people, in spite of all that tended to divide them. There was neither Jew nor Gentile—the deepest of all divisions based on religious tradition was unimportant; there was neither Greek nor Scythian—the deepest of all divisions based on culture was unimportant; there was neither bond nor free—the deepest of all divisions based on economic status was unimportant; there was neither male nor female—even the distinction of the sexes was unimportant; but they were all one man in Christ Jesus, that is to say, there was only one personality there, and it was the personality of Christ. All those who had come into His obedience were members of the body of one person. Nowadays we speak about being ‘members’ of all kinds of associations. When St Paul said that Christians were members of Christ, he was using an expression that had never been used before and one of astonishing strength. The whole point about the parable of the one body was that the limbs were all different, and each had its own place. It was vital that each should be in its own place and do its own work and not somebody else’s; but all these were different means of giving effect to one life. If a limb began to move of its own accord

one would not say how splendid that is, but how desperately paralysed it is. That which constitutes the unity of any personality is its purpose. If there was only one purpose in the Christian society, then in a real sense there was only one person there. St Paul heard with horror of divisions in the Church at Corinth. It would be a good thing if we could recover some of that sense of horror. There was one passage in the Epistle to the Ephesians in which he spoke of how divisions arose. 'I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beseech you to walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye are called.' But how is that worthiness shown? There is a sharp contrast between the temper outlined above and that of the classical teachers or the traditions of religious cultures other than Christian. The tendency in connexion with human traditions is that men should live up to them, should be proud of them; but St Paul enjoined them to be worthy of their calling—the loftiest in the world—by their lowliness and meekness (for this great inheritance was not something they had achieved, but something Christ had done)—forbearing one another in love—giving diligence to keep their eyes fixed on the oneness of the Spirit.

The gifts of Christ to the Church are men of different capacities—some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors, some teachers. Many divisions arise because the prophet, charged to proclaim God's will to his generation, or the evangelist, charged to bring home the Gospel with power to the individual, become impatient with the statesmanship of the apostle, or the slow laborious methods of the pastor or the teacher, while these in turn are irritated by what often seems to be the blatancy of the prophet and the evangelist. The

very gifts of God which make up the richness of the Church may become the cause of the Church's divisions ; what was meant to deepen its unity may divide it.

The most intractable divisions of the Church are not doctrinal but geographical. The first great mutilation of the Church was the failure of Israel to take its place within it. We hear a great deal about the excessive emphasis on doctrine as compared with ethics, and it is broadly true that we have emphasized doctrine too exclusively as compared with ethics ; but think for a moment what it would have meant if in the formative ages of theology all the intellectualist tendencies of the Greek had been balanced by the prophetic element of the Hebraic tradition ; think what it would have meant for the presentation of the Gospel to the East if the Jews had remained in the Church, and Christianity had not become European. The next great mutilation was the division between the East and the West. If they had kept together they would have given to Christianity incomparably more than they were able to give in their isolation. The next was the division between North and South, because the Reformation was really a great division of the North against the South. The tendency of the Teutonic North was towards love of freedom, especially freedom of association, as against the Roman inclination towards authority and discipline. And whenever you get division in the Church, you get loss to both sides. Some of the errors that we detect in the Roman communion arose from lack of those elements which had gone to make Protestantism, whereas the errors in Protestantism arose because of the absence of just that element which could be supplied from Southern

Europe, not in its isolation, but as one element in the whole.

There are times when division may become necessary because of the claims of the Spirit, because men must act according to conscience. The main point I want to stress is that what we want is a unity not only across the centuries but across the oceans. I will give an example from the communion which I know best. The reason why some of us feel so deeply about the principle of ministerial succession is because it keeps alive in a special way a sense that in the service of Holy Communion the celebrant acts by commission of the Universal Church, and the worship into which we enter is the worship of the Universal Church. We are worshipping not only with those who are present but with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven. Those who do not have that institution may have that same experience, but the institution preserves it and helps to keep it vivid.

We agree that the unity of the Church is a unity of faith, but it is not necessary that the one faith should always be formulated in the same way. Nevertheless, there is obviously an incalculable advantage if there is one single formulation which is accepted, not necessarily as final, but as that to which all may point as a standard by which their own faith is to be judged. That is the position which is held by many of us with respect to the historic creeds. At the Lausanne Conference it was laid down that for the unity of the Church there must be one ministry and the faith to which the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds bear witness. It is often asked: How can we be expected to formulate our beliefs to-day in terms of Greek philosophy? but



there is only one word in those creeds which could possibly be regarded as having any connexion with Greek philosophy, and it was not used there in its philosophical sense. The creeds are almost entirely records of fact and of experience.

So we come to a question which is of very great importance in some parts of the world. It has been asked if it would not be well to unite the Christian bodies in China or India and so set up a Chinese or an Indian Church which would be Churches of Christ free from the trammels of Europe. Any opinions I may hold are purely personal, but I would ask you if one of the functions of the Church is not an attempt to bridge over those things which separate men. Certainly the ideal is a united Church of India or of China which is in full communion with the Church elsewhere. About that, I imagine we are all agreed. But if—I say, *if*—we should have to choose between interdenominational and international unity, would it be better to have a united Church of India, or of China, which was not international, or a number of denominations in India or in China every one of them international? I think that if the choice ever had to be made it would be far better that there should be many denominations all international than one local Church that was not international. I trust that choice may not have to be made. I trust that unity both interdenominational and international may be attainable. I only urge that, if such a choice has to be made, the international fellowships are the most important. I illustrate again from the communion that I know best. The Anglican communion has spread throughout the world. Every ten years the Bishops of the Anglican communion meet at the Lambeth Conference. They come together from all

parts of the world to their immense mutual enrichment. Suppose that instead they had only united with other people in their own regions overseas, would the result not have been great loss? We must seek unity on the mission field, but one that shall not break the international unity of the Church, because international relationships are supremely important. Divisions of the Church along national lines are the hardest of all to heal. What is wanted is something that will produce human intercourse, and just because there is much difference between the national outlook of the European churches and the national Indian outlook, it is most important that the Europeans and the Indians should be members of one Church, and the same is true of the other parts of the world. They really have need of one another.

But the question is asked by the younger churches whether, if all the old denominational divisions are imposed upon them, they are not thus being made to suffer for the sins of the older churches. Yes, it is true; but is it not a Christian principle that we have to suffer for the sins of others; is it not a Christlike thing to do? We have all to suffer for others' sins, we have to fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ for His Body's sake, which is the Church. I trust you will not become indignant with me for putting it that way. I do not wish for any compulsion, but I do want to see unity that will be international, and I hope soon to see a unity both interdenominational and international; but above all I want to see the international unity strong, for it alone can save the world from some of the worst evils which threaten it. I believe that the Church overseas needs us. The deeply spiritual life of India

needs some of the alloy of the grosser mentality of the West to become effective, and we of the West no less need the East; we need to learn from them the laws of spiritual life and habits of meditation. And our Lord needs us both. We were to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into that love which is for us the open secret of the universe; but the chance to develop that love must be given through actual intercourse. The main plea for the unity of the Church is that we may the more effectively proclaim the one Christ, crucified, risen, ascended, regnant.