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THE CHELTENHAM CONFERENCE

HELD AT

ST. PETER'S HOUSE, OXFORD,**APRIL 10, 11, 12, 1929.***Subject:* **LAMBETH AND REUNION****INAUGURAL ADDRESS BY THE REV. C. M. CHAVASSE, M.C., M.A.,
Principal of St. Peter's House.**

MY dear brethren, to welcome you here at St. Peter's is like seeing a dream beginning to come true; and I hope with all my heart that this gathering is an earnest of that Evangelical influence which this place shall exert increasingly throughout the whole Church.

Of course I welcome this Conference as an opportunity of propaganda on behalf of St. Peter's itself, about which I am kindly allowed to say one word. I hope that you who have come will see, and be conquered—and will return to your various spheres of influence resolved to back up one of the greatest ventures to which Evangelicals have ever put their hands. To this end you will find some literature at the back of the Hall, and I feel confident that many of you will be ready to distribute appeals or to give me names to whom they may be sent. There must also be many Churches who for the next few years would give St. Peter's a collection—perhaps on St. Peter's Day—and there may be some of you who would invite me to your Parish or neighbourhood to address meetings on behalf of the Hall.

But a greater reason for satisfaction is the one I have already mentioned. It has always been the intention that St. Peter's should provide, not simply an academy for undergraduates, but a great rallying ground for the Evangelical School. And by your presence to-day in a Hall from which the workmen have hardly been banished, you will know that we are eager to fulfil such obligations expected of us.

And then, more than all, I have always prayed that St. Peter's might prove to be a great practical scheme which should re-unite the scattered forces of the Evangelical party. We are here to discuss Reunion. We need Reunion in our own ranks. And the project of St. Peter's should be a great means thereto.

REUNION.

This brings me to the subject of our Conference, and I rejoice that the matter which first gathered us in this Hall should be that of Reunion. It is certainly a controversial question; yet it presents us with a living, positive, and burning cause we are bound to advance.

We are tired of being thrust on the defensive, and of being forced

to play the dangerous rôle of "Protestant" in a negative sense only.

The great successes of the Anglo-Catholic School have been very largely due to the fact that they have possessed a cause to forward, not only to defend. And it was because the Evangelical School arose with a positive message and doctrine and policy that its advance was so amazing in its first happy and persecuted years.

Please God! we may recapture something of that early fervour by rallying now to this definite objective of Reunion.

How refreshing it is to turn from the barren arena of Prayer Book controversy to this inspiring challenge of Reunion! And do we realize that Reunion with the sister Churches of the Reformation must precede any satisfactory revision of our liturgy or formularies? For only so can the Protestant convictions of the Nation make themselves effective in a National Church; which is otherwise in danger of becoming an Ecclesiastical sect, out of touch with the true sentiment of the country.

With regard to Reunion—two introductory questions arise which, perhaps, a Chairman's address is called upon to outline. They are (1) Is Reunion the Will of God? (2) If so, what is the main road towards Reunion?

(1) IS REUNION THE WILL OF GOD?

There is no doubt that Our Lord intended for the world a Church which should be an Organic Unity.

There are His words in the xth of St. John: "There shall be one Flock, One Shepherd." Again in His great High Priestly Prayer in the xviith of St. John He prays that the Church may be as One as the Holy Trinity itself. And St. Paul, interpreting His mind, constantly refers to the Church as One Body composed of many members. Such language entirely disposes of that weak and sentimental blindness which would ignore practical dis-union because of a supposed invisible unity behind, and which see in a friendly federation of different Churches the goal at which God would have us make. But do we only believe in a "Holy Federation" when we speak of the unity of the Sacred Trinity? And should not we describe a human body of federated members as suffering from the paralysis of locomotorataxia? The Unity of the Church must be of the same nature as that of the Godhead or of the human body. And if this is the Will of God—then Reunion must be our aim, if we would not be guilty of the sin of schism.

What then is the Unity which is here depicted for us? It is not uniformity, but rather the Oneness of harmony from variety.

I am increasingly struck by the few principles which govern the whole range of life, and I would almost say that the "Almightiness" of God lies in His supreme "Simplicity."

Thus we are told that the Universe at large or the atom in detail are the same in structure; that the Universe with its revolving constellations is only an atom magnified to infinity; and that each atom with its whirling electrons is a microscopic Universe. But

more than this (as our Lord's Parables would show) not only does the same law run through all nature, but nature itself is sacramental; the outward sign of identical laws which govern the spiritual life.

And if this be true, then nothing is more certain than that what I might call the "Family Principle" is the Divinely appointed Unity both for heaven and earth. In nature, as we have seen, the unit is not the solitary atom, but the atom which is a "family" of electrons revolving round one centre; a principle which is carried throughout the whole Universe. Or again the unit of the body is not any one member, but a variety of organs all making up one whole. But the unity of the Body is a parable of the structure of Society. Therefore in Society the unity is not the man or woman or child, considered separately, but the union of all three in one family—which we might term the social atom. And then, even as human Fatherhood (according to Our Lord) is God's divinely appointed picture of Himself, so the Family is the symbol of the Unity of the Godhead—Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Three Persons and One God—from Whom every family in heaven and earth derives its origin.

The family principle then is the very nature of the Godhead. It is His divinely appointed structure for every form of life; and I believe that it is what Our Lord meant when He came preaching the Kingdom of Heaven; namely that in proportion as the family principle obtains in industry, in Society, and in our International relationships—so does this world become conformed to the Kingdom of God. Therefore was the Church appointed by Christ to be at once the example to the world of this family principle, and the means of attaining thereto; only we have frustrated God's plan by reason of our unhappy Divisions.

(2) THE MAIN ROAD TOWARDS REUNION.

So in the second place we are constrained to ask along what line must we work for Reunion and so seek to fulfil the will of God?

Now the family principle, as we have seen, is a unity that is composed of variety, and indeed consequent upon variety. Just as the different members of a family bring each one their unique contribution, and so make up one whole—so unity in the Church can only be obtained by safeguarding those varied truths for which the divided Churches stand.

Our divisions in the past have been occasioned by authority seeking to impose one outlook upon all, and of seeking to effect a universal uniformity of order and belief for all temperaments, ages and races. If therefore Reunion is to come, it can only be secured by each communion being very jealous to conserve the truths emphasized by the rest. The denominations of Christendom owe their existence to the determination of safeguarding some particular truth which at the time of their schism was in danger of being lost. If therefore the Church is to be one, it must possess the various contributions thus preserved; and so, for example, the rule of

Episcopacy, Presbyterianism, and Congregationalism must all find their place in any scheme of Reunion ; thus giving to Bishops, to Clergy and to the Laity, their rightful share in the government of the One Church.

This family principle of respect for variety is now generally recognized (if not wholly acted upon) owing to the rise of democracy, and the establishment of the rights of national consciousness which the Great War sealed in blood. Caesarism and Papalism have gone as a means to world-wide unity, with their policy of the dragooning of all by superimposed power. Instead, the movement is upwards from below. Individual character and temperament and tradition must first assert themselves, or they have nothing to contribute to the whole. And then they must voluntarily lose themselves by merging themselves in the larger whole, or they withhold their offering. Our Lord, I believe, laid down this principle in the xth of St. John when He declared that He had power over His own life, and that possessing this power He laid down His life of Himself. Both in civics and in religion we have for long centuries been contending for this, the right of individual character, and to this end have perforce smashed gorgeous dreams of World Empire and a Catholic Church. The time has now come when from the rich contributions of nations and Churches we must build up one family, and the Church must show the way to a world that is already united economically and geographically. From this principle of safeguarding variety, and from the history of the schisms of the past, we may, I believe, trace out a practical road for Reunion. The path is to retrace our steps, and one by one to join up the schisms in the reverse order in which they arose historically ; that is, the schisms last made will be the first healed. In this way the smallest ruptures, and thus the easiest reknit, will be the first objective of reunion. The practical result will be the creation of great National Churches, which thus become the expressions of national character, and are therefore in a strong and proper position to negotiate one with another. Nothing is more enthralling at the present moment than to watch the erection of such National Churches in India and China, and it would be a flagrant denial of the purposes of God, to ignore national temperament as the building medium of that rich and wide City of God into which all the glory of the nations flow.

At the present time Reunion has already begun most auspiciously, not only in India and China, but in our own land with Presbyterian Reunion in Scotland, and the union of the Wesleyan and Methodist Communions.

It will thus become the first duty of the Church of England to retrace her steps 200 years and to join up with this Wesleyan-Methodist Church ; for there is nothing in the world which divides us from them save the wicked fact of our separate existence. Such a step would undoubtedly pave the way for the formation of a great Anglo-Saxon Church, which would discover deep and strong affinities with Churches on the Continent, and would also link up with Missionary Churches all over the world.

Then, and not till then, we should be in a position to approach the Orthodox and Roman Communions. The Greek Church would undoubtedly, in such an event, be willing to give us their venerable traditions in return for our spiritual life. But all overtures at present to the Greek Church are really a red herring to divert attention from Reunion at home, and reminds me of that cheap and snobbish socialism one sometimes meets which prates impractically about the masses while behaving offensively to members of its own household. But what about the Roman Catholic Church? One thing only is clear, namely, that Rome must come to terms, not with the individual Churches of the Reformation, but with the Reformation itself. Rome, no doubt, cherishes the hope of swallowing the Reformation Churches one by one, but on the family principle she must alter her whole conception of what constitutes the Church, and this she will only do if confronted with a Protestant Church greater than herself. It may be objected that such a policy of an Anglo-Saxon Church would mean schism in our own Church. It may be so, and the possibility must be faced. But better far to lose some devout and honoured members of the Church of England whose affinities are really Roman, than to miss the opportunity of joining hands with the multitudes of our non-conforming brethren, whose characteristics are essentially Protestant and English.

This is really the issue at Lambeth next year. Meanwhile, the Holy Spirit is driving us on, and by Missionary claims abroad and by spontaneous acts of fellowship and inter-communion at home, a passion for Reunion is being engendered, to deny which would be to resist the Holy Ghost.

Lambeth in 1930 will have to make decisions comparable in their gravity and their nature to those of the First Council of Jerusalem, when the middle wall of partition was broken down between Jew and Gentile. May God guide and empower His Church once more to do the right without fear of consequence!

The Purpose of God in the Life of the World (Student Christian Movement, 2s. 6d. net) contains some of the addresses delivered at a Conference on International and Missionary Questions held in Liverpool in January of the present year. The volume has special value as a survey of the World's need and the present condition of religious life. The writers are all men of wide experience whose words have special weight. They include the Rev. E. Shillito, the Rev. R. T. Hall, the Rev. F. R. Barry, Canon Raven, Dr. Kor, the Archbishop of York, the Master of Balliol, Mr. J. H. Oldham and the Bishop of Liverpool. These addresses should serve their purpose of leading to a fuller understanding of God's purpose for mankind and to a large increase of zeal and devotion to the carrying out of all that is devout. Over 2,000 students were present at the Conference representing many parts of the world. The inspiration and possibilities of such a gathering of younger people open a vision of Christian advance which we hope will be realized.