

The Christian Year

The Culture of Conscience

(FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY)

EPIPHANY is the revelation of Christ in His Divine life, not only to Gentiles, but also to Jews. If the Magi were brought to Him by the leading of a star, and were prompted to offer adoring gifts from the great world beyond, as a symbol of the universal destiny of the Gospel; His own fellow countrymen were also, not long afterwards, astounded by the understanding and answers of One, who, according to accepted standards had never learned.

The supernatural character of Christ's life, thus early revealed, was the earnest of His authority to direct the conscience of mankind which no human being, however gifted or inspired, could do. Before Him and beside Him all religions directed life upon the principle of rule and precept. Jesus uncovered the culture of conscience by which life should be directed as from a consecrated centre issuing in consecrated service. He came as the infallible guide, because His knowledge was of the heavenly order, and was a perfect revelation of the mind and will of God. When we pray "that we may perceive and know what things we ought to do," we really pray that we may not only know the teaching of Him, who is "the Way, the Truth and the Life," but also that we may have Him within our life and conscience. This is only possible of One whose manifestation revealed a superhuman personality.

We sometimes hear people debating as to whether or not the doing of certain things is sin; as if there were place for doubt as to the bearing of Christian ethics upon life. We must always remember that Jesus knew human life, to assure us of which He became incarnate, and that He made full allowance for all its necessary development in temperate pleasures and restrained enjoyments, as well as prayer and labour. We will always be safely directed as to what is sinful if we make the words of the Collect our own prayer. By them we are reminded that we are best directed in the spirit of Christ if we pray positively to be shown what things we ought to do, rather than negatively what things we ought not to do.

Conscience is not always an unerring guide. Unless its rebukes and sanctions are constantly observed, it fails to react in the terms of Christ. Our conscience will bear witness if we sincerely pray for heavenly direction. It is a prayer which is certain to be answered. "Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

But knowledge is not sufficient. The failure of men to witness for God is not so much due to a want of knowledge as it is to the absence of desire to interpret knowledge in terms of conduct. Christian life fails where knowledge is not put into action. This again is because we do not know Christ in the right way. There is a sufficient provision of "grace and power faithfully to fulfil the same," if we have the right knowledge. The manifestation of Christ in His supernatural character is the warrant and earnest of power and grace. The answer He gave to His parents on the great day of His first public appearance as a boy, should ever be kept in the background of our mind: "Wist ye not that I must be in my Father's house?"

A PRAYER BEFORE BIBLE STUDY.

O gracious Lord and most merciful Father, who hast vouchsafed unto us the rich and precious jewel of Thy Holy Word, assist us by Thy Spirit that it may be written in our hearts to our everlasting comfort, to reprove us, to renew us according to Thine Own Image, to build us up and edify us unto the perfect building of Thy Church, to sanctify us and endue us with all heavenly virtues, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Some people so blind their eyes with tears for yesterday's faults, that they stumble all through to-day.—Ex.

TOWARDS CHRISTIAN UNITY

Archbishops of Canterbury and York's Sub-committee
with Free Church Representatives.

Interim Report of a Sub-Committee Appointed by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York's Committee and by Representatives of the English Free Church's Commissions, in Connection with the Proposed World Conference on Faith and Order.

1. In all our discussions we were guided by two convictions from which we could not escape, and would not, even if we could.

It is the purpose of our Lord that believers in Him should be one visible society, and this unity is essential to the purpose of Christ for His Church and for its effective witness and work in the world. The conflict among Christian nations has brought home to us with a greater poignancy the disastrous results of the divisions which prevail among Christians, inasmuch as they have hindered that growth of mutual understanding which it should be the function of the Church to foster, and because a Church which is itself divided cannot speak effectively to a divided world.

The visible unity of believers which answers to our Lord's purpose must have its source and sanction, not in any human arrangements, but in the will of the One Father, manifested in the Son, and effected through the operation of the Spirit; and it must express and maintain the fellowship of His people with one another in Him. Thus the visible unity of the Body of Christ is not adequately expressed in the co-operation of the Christian Churches for moral influence and social service, though such co-operation might with great advantage be carried much further than it is at present; it could only be fully realized through community of worship, faith and order, including common participation in the Lord's Supper. This would be quite compatible with a rich diversity in life and worship.

2. In suggesting the conditions under which this visible unity might be realized, we desire to set aside for the present the abstract discussion of the origin of the episcopate historically, or its authority doctrinally; and to secure for that discussion when it comes, as it must come, at the Conference, an atmosphere congenial not to controversy, but to agreement. This can be done only by facing the actual situation in order to discover if any practical proposals could be made that would bring the episcopal and non-episcopal communions nearer to one another. Further, the proposals are offered not as a basis for immediate action, but for the sympathetic and generous consideration of all the Churches.

The first fact which we agree to acknowledge is that the position of episcopacy in the greater part of Christendom as the recognized organ of the unity and continuity of the Church is such that the members of the Episcopal Churches ought not to be expected to abandon it in assenting to any basis of reunion.

The second fact which we agree to acknowledge is that there are a number of Christian Churches not accepting the episcopal order which have been used by the Holy Spirit in His work of enlightening the world, converting sinners, and perfecting saints. They came into being through reaction from grave abuses in the Church at the time of their origin, and were led in response to fresh apprehensions of divine truth to give expression to certain types of Christian experience, aspiration and fellowship, and to secure rights of the Christian people which had been neglected or denied. In view of these two facts, if the visible unity so much desired within the Church, and so necessary for the testimony and influence of the Church in the world is ever to be realized, it is imperative that the episcopal and non-episcopal communions shall approach one another not by the method of human compromise, but in correspondence with God's own way of reconciling differences in Christ Jesus. What we desire to see is not grudging concession, but a willing acceptance for the common enrichment of the united Church of the wealth distinctive of each.

Looking as frankly and as widely as possible at the whole situation, we desire with a due sense of responsibility to submit for the serious consideration of all the parts of a divided Christendom what seem to us the necessary conditions of any possibility of reunion:—

1. That continuity with the historic episcopate should be effectively preserved.

2. That in order that the rights and responsibilities of the whole Christian community in the government of the Church may be adequately recognized, the episcopate should reassume a constitutional form, both as regards the method of the election of the Bishop as by clergy and people, and the method of government after election. It is perhaps necessary that we should call to mind that such was the primitive ideal and practice of episcopacy and it so remains in many episcopal communions to-day.

3. That acceptance of the fact of episcopacy and not any theory as to its character should be all that is asked for. We think that this may be the more easily taken for granted as the acceptance of any such theory is not now required of ministers of the Church of England. It would no doubt be necessary before any arrangement for corporate reunion could be made to discuss the exact functions which it may be agreed to recognize as belonging to the Episcopate, but we think this can be left to the future.

The acceptance of episcopacy on these terms should not involve any Christian community in the necessity of disowning its past, but should enable all to maintain the continuity of their witness and influence as heirs and trustees of types of Christian thought, life and order, not only of value to themselves but of value to the Church as a whole. Accordingly we hope and desire that each of these communions would bring its own distinctive contribution, not only to the common life of the Church, but also to its methods of organization, and that all that is true in the experience and testimony of the uniting Communions would be conserved to the Church. Within such a recovered unity we should agree in claiming that the legitimate freedom of prophetic ministry should be carefully preserved; and in anticipating that many customs and institutions which have been developed in separate communities may be preserved within the larger unity of which they have come to form a part.

We have carefully avoided any discussion of the merits of any polity, or any advocacy of one form in preference to another. All we have attempted is to show how reunion might be brought about, the conditions of the existing Churches and the convictions held regarding these questions by their members being what they are. As we are persuaded that it is on these lines and these alone that the subject can be approached with any prospect of any measure of agreement, we do earnestly ask the members of the Churches to which we belong to examine carefully our conclusions and the facts on which they are based, and to give them all the weight that they deserve.

In putting forward these proposals we do so because it must be felt by all good-hearted Christians as an intolerable burden to find themselves permanently separated in respect of religious worship and communion from those in whose characters and lives they recognize the surest evidences of the indwelling Spirit; and because, as becomes increasingly evident, it is only as a body, praying, taking counsel, and acting together, that the Church can hope to appeal to men as the Body of Christ, that is Christ's visible organ and instrument in the world, in which the spirit of brotherhood and of love as wide as humanity finds effective expression.

(Signed) G. W. Bath and Well: (chairman), E. Winton: (Dr. Talbot), C. Oxon: (Dr. Gore), W. T. Davidson, A. E. Garvie, H. L. Goudge, J. Scott Lidgett, W. B. Selbie, J. H. Shakespeare, Eugene Stock, William Temple, Tissington Tatlow (hon. sec.), H. G. Wood. March, 1918.

NOTHING is more to-day has committed years she stands the civilized

In German we saw an civilized, high ed a privilege science or ph perous citizen mans. In Pa colonies was mans. Yet, problems of we must, as our to find a these people ed even our

Three year heard a good Belgium and been accounted was that the many of the the wine fou in the fall of to see for my, carried on by unfortunate in the third many, and sa ed out to me which could n I saw that I count for all and fatherho

Such a sta sible but 'prol influence of l tions are gov whole outloo very charact When in 187 tory, the Hol his people a might becom nation. The people who/ even what v fact, I know than that of they would a certain st trench warfa in the sumr had its origin been taken f brought to s many that a been able to succeeded in trenches we sianism as v to me nothin theory propi great scienti for existenc a system of ually develop here it is ir ual growth out the softie tianity.

It was out world domin same time G upon the O and saw in l rule and dor the Hohenz domination,