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The talisman of unity

William Reed
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A SERMON IN BEHALF OF CHURCH CONSOLIDATION PREACHED IN THE CRYPT OF THE CATHEDRAL OF ST. JOHN THE DIVINE SUNDAY JAN-UARY THE TWENTY-SECOND 1899

WILLIAM REED HUNTINGTON D.D
RECTOR OF GRACE CHURCH NEW YORK

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR ON THE SAME SUBJECT.

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He that scattered Israel will gather bim, and keep him as a shepherd doth bis flock.—Jeremiah xxxi. 10.

How is this? Christ says that it is "the wolf" that "scattereth the sheep"; Paul says that "God is not the author of confusion but of peace"; and yet here is an Old Testament prophet affirming, in the plainest possible terms, that one and the same power, to wit, the power divine, both scatters and gathers, breaks and joins, crumbles and reunites. I know not how we are to reconcile these apparently discordant voices unless we assume that God has deliberately chosen to educate man through the instrumentality of man's own mistakes. It was from under the boughs of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, where disobedience had had its way, that the race started out on its long pilgrimage towards the postponed tree of life. The Babel builders are dispersed of God only that they may be reunited, ages hence, in that better city whose foundations are upon the holy hills, and where a single mother-tongue prevails. To pass from stately parables to homely ones: the burnt child dreads the fire, and the bitten lamb fears the wolf; but all the while it remains true that fire and wolf are the creatures of

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God, and that of what they do He is, in some deep sense, the author and the cause.

And so with "schism," as it is called, and the healing of it, in the world ecclesiastical.

We are asked, to-day, to believe that Protestantism is a failure and that the Reformation was a mistake, because, forsooth, Protestantism and the Reformation have proved themselves prolific of divisions, because, in other words, they have resulted in the scattering of the sheep. That is good reasoning as against those who are determined to make of Protestantism and the Reformation a finality; who hold that wisdom died with Martin Luther, and that the outer edge of the sixteenth century delimits the horizon of truth; but it weighs for little with such as are persuaded that Almighty God broke up the Latin union in order to help us form a better one; destroyed the imperial framework that He might put in place of it a polity large enough to cover the round world.

With these, who trust the future, the cry is "Onward!" Nothing can damp their faith in the resources of the Almighty. "He that scattered Israel," they insist, "will gather him, and keep him as a shepherd doth his flock." Such is the churchmanship of hope.

But I am not concerned, at present, to speak about Church Unity in the large. My proper subject is Church Unity in these United States. If, for a moment, at the start, I have suffered myself to stray off into the wider field, it has simply been that I might set myself right with those who hold (and properly hold)

that any one who expects to solve the national problem without having taken into account the ecumenical one, convicts himself of folly. A Catholic Church which is to envelope the world must make provision for the needs and allowance for the characteristics of more than one nation, yes, of more than one race.

But while all this is true, equally true is it that America, lying as it does between Europe and Asia, reaching out hands in both directions, and speaking across two oceans, is singularly well placed for exercising a world-wide ministry of reconciliation. Whatever may be accomplished here in the direction of unifying the people of God, will tell tremendously elsewhere. The very fact of our having absorbed into our circulation so many and such various strains of oldworld blood, when once we shall have come to a substantial agreement in this matter of religion, will prove greatly to our advantage as peace-makers in Christendom. "America can understand us," men will say, "for in her we all have lot and part."

So, then, our study of Church Unity, as the question presents itself on our own soil, need not, after all, be such a very provincial and imperfect affair as at first appeared. It is even possible that in the course of our enquiry we may happen upon thoughts that have a more than national reach, and concern the whole body of the faithful everywhere.

But be this as it may, let us go at our task believingly rather than despairfully. We are not alone in our endeavor. Of the two disciples who set out to walk those three-score furlongs which separated Jeru-

salem from Emmaus, it is written that "while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus Himself drew near and went with them." If our communing and reasoning over this greatest of all present-day topics are what they ought to be, a like access of power and increment of light may come to us.

What, then, do we mean by Church Unity in the United States? What would be the practical advantages of such unity were it to be brought to pass? What are the most formidable obstacles that block the way? What justification, if any, has the Protestant Episcopal Church for supposing itself called of God to special activity in the premises?

It will be my endeavor swiftly to touch, and, please God, honestly to answer these four questions. They are questions which must be met and squarely met by the friends of unity, or the case is lost; we shall stand convicted of the "bubble" and the "iridescent dream," broken-hearted by reason of a just reproach.

No place could possibly be more appropriate for such an enquiry than this place. The symbolism of a Cathedral is two-fold; as the Church of the Chair, for that is what the word Cathedral means, it stands for the principle of authority; as the Church of the whole city, it stands for the principle of comprehensiveness. It is the Bishop's Church and it is the People's Church. When this great building shall have been completed according to the design, there will radiate from the apse, in the crypt of which we are now gathered, certain chapels to be known as the Chapels of the Tongues because of their representing and, in a way, commemo-

rating the various nationalities which have contributed to make New York the cosmopolitan city it is. So then, first of all:

(1) What is meant by Church Unity in the United States? Such unity, I answer, as unites the States themselves, namely, a unity so real that it can show indisputable tokens like the flag; vocal symbols such as the oath of office and the declaration of allegiance; personal agents of administration, such as governors and magistrates; a simple platform of belief upon which all stand; and a general scheme of conduct to which those who are of the Commonwealth are expected to conform themselves. Such is unity as civilians understand it; why should Churchmanship take up with any less thorough conception of what it means for a people to be one?

Observe I am careful to avoid the expression "visible unity," for, strictly speaking, there is no such thing. Like "colored missions," the phrase is an outrage upon good English. Missions have no color, neither can unity which is a spiritual fact be seen of man. But Almighty God, nevertheless, has so ordered his duplex universe, that facts which cannot be seen are made vivid to us by and through the things which do appear; and although unity, in and of itself, must forever elude bodily vision, it has a way, whenever it is real and genuine, of making itself observed.

This is the answer to those who, hard pressed by the exigencies of the situation, are all the time disparaging Church unity as if it were something materialistic, and of the earth earthy, one of those "beggarly

elements" which the spiritually-minded should hold in contempt. How often we have heard it from the platforms of union meetings, inter-denominational love-feasts, evangelical alliances, and such like, the cry that God never meant his people to be one in any sense that would make their unity noticeable to the carnal eye; and that absolute unity of spirit ought to be accounted entirely compatible with infinite divisibility of body. But, if that contention be correct, what are we to make of those significant words of Christ in his great intercession for the Church, "that they all may be one . . . that the world may believe that Thou hast sent me." "The world," we must remember, looks on with carnal eyes. How is "the world," then, to discern a unity which has no tokens?

Understand me; the most sanguine of us do not expect, though we are charged with expecting it, that the time will ever come when a national Church will embrace all that is religious in America. Even the civil structure, which has force to back it, does not succeed in achieving an absolutely perfect comprehension. What is an "outlaw"? He is a man who has contrived to put himself on the other and outer side of that pale or picket-fence on the hither side of which the "inlaws," as we may call them, live. But the United States does not forfeit unity because of the fact that there are outlaws who reject its authority and defy its power. Even so must it necessarily prove with a national Church. Based as it must be on voluntary consent, it can never become so comprehensive as to comprehend those who make a merit of not being com-

prehended; who hold up their right hands and swear to a solemn league and covenant that nothing shall ever induce them to come into communion and fellowship with those who do not think with them as respects all subjects upon which the religious mind can exercise itself. For the practical purposes of a national Church it will suffice if the great bulk of those who accept the Bible as, in a special sense, God's book, who confess the faith of a Christian in the simple terms of the Apostles' Creed, who stand by the sacraments of Christ's appointment and believe in having a ministry which shall be worth its mint-mark everywhere, it will be enough, I say, if these can be persuaded to come under one roof. Do you cry "Impossible! now that compulsion has been ruled out of the whole area of things ecclesiastical and religious "?

Well, perhaps so, but I should be sorry to see that word "Impossible" affixed, in the Church's own handwriting, to an enterprise which secular societies are accomplishing every day. Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon, that a unity to which the order of Free Masons and the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers have succeeded in attaining by voluntary effort, and under no other constraining force than that of sympathy and a sense of common need, has been declared by the Church of Jesus Christ in the United States of America a thing impossible!

(2) We pass to the next question: What would be the practical advantages of Church unity if the thing were to be brought to pass? I scorn to dwell upon the utilitarian answer which might be made to this ques-

tion were one willing to make it; I spare you a statement of the savings that would accrue to Vestries, Music Committees, Sextons and Sunday-school Superintendents, were one strong Church to be substituted for half a dozen puny and ineffective ones in every village of the land. To dwell on that phase of the subject would mean lowering and vulgarizing the whole movement.

But let me instance two points in which Church unity would prove itself of the greatest possible value.

Everybody has been praising lately Gen. Kitchener's reconquest of the Soudan. And which was the particular feature of the campaign that called forth from competent critics the warmest commendation? It was the marvellous preparedness which characterized the whole process from first to last. So carefully were the different branches of the service co-ordinated, so thoroughly did each arm serve and support every other arm, that the invasion went forward with all the irresistible steadiness of a tidal wave.

Christendom is to-day moving upon heathendom with a zeal never before surpassed. But what of the methods and the strategy? Would you get the true answer to that question? Go not in search of it to the publications of the various missionary boards, go not to the missionary boards themselves; go not to the several legislative bodies, General Conventions, General Assemblies, and General Conferences which stand back of the Boards; but go to the actual forces in the field, go to the men and women at the front; they will tell you what the trouble is. They will tell you, and tell

you with much warmth, that one of the chief hindrances to missionary progress is denominational rivalry;—not rivalry there, but rivalry here, not a spirit of competition and eagerness for the pre-eminence among the missionaries themselves, but a spirit of competition and eagerness for the pre-eminence among Secretaries, Boards, Conventions and Committees in these United States. Once let American Christianity begin marching upon the heathen stronghold with that unity of method which the Sirdar showed in marching on Khartoum, and we shall see results worth scoring.

But marvellous as would be the consequences abroad, the practical effect of Church Unity here at home would be more signal still. It has lately been stated on high authority that less than one-half of the people of this country acknowledge allegiance to-day to any form of organized Christianity. Only a month ago, I heard the Superintendent of Schools of one of our largest cities quoted as having said that in the municipality which he represented, there were more than a hundred thousand children of school age who did not know of the existence of such a book as the Bible.

To the mind of one who loves his country, who believes that democracy as a form of government depends for perpetuity upon character in the citizens, that no Republic save a theocratic republic can possibly survive; in a word, that righteousness, as Christians understand it, is the only salt that can keep "popular institutions" from falling away to rottenness, such figures are startling indeed.

But why is it that our young men and our young

women can afford to take up this attitude of indifference toward organized religion? How do they justify themselves to themselves? Largely in this way, I fancy: They look at the "religious world" as they have heard the journalists call it; and they consider it. what it is. They see it made up of a number of groups or circles, ranging all the way from Roman Catholics at one end of the line to Christian Scientists at the other. "These are so many religious clubs," they say to themselves. "Each seems to have its own clubhouse and its own set of officers. Even were I disposed to join one of them, I should be puzzled to make a selection; and, perhaps, I could not afford the fees. On the whole, I think I will let my membership in my Trade-union, and my Order, and my Friendly Society suffice." My friends, is this the feeling which a look at the Church of God, as pictured, let us say, in the Te Deum, would be likely to engender in a young man's mind? I trow not.

And then as to this question of public education, Why is it that the children in our schools cannot be authoritatively taught the elements of right conduct? Why are Christian morals tabooed as part of the pabulum upon which the youth of the Republic should be nourished? Why are such simple questions, as, What is thy duty toward God? and What is thy duty toward thy neighbor? elbowed out of our children's minds by questions as to the specific gravity of platinum and the latitude and longitude of Zanzibar? I charge it upon our "unhappy divisions." Let the defendant meet the accusation if he can.

(3) Take next our third question. What are the most formidable of the obstacles that block the way? They are these, putting the least important first and the most important last: vested rights of property, deeds of gift, inherited trusts, and the like; then, on another level, traditional rivalries, the transmitted animosities and antagonisms of other generations, and scores of burning questions which would have been acknowledged burnt out, years ago, had not a mistaken sense of duty to ancestors forbidden.

Upon neither of these two classes of difficulties shall I dwell. They explain themselves and call for no commentary. The really formidable gulf is that which sunders those who, by natural bent, or bias caused by education, incline to interpret religion from the viewpoint of the individual and in a mainly subjective, interior way from those who interpret religion from the view-point rather of the collectivist and incline to lay enormous emphasis upon the sacramental side of it. This is a difficulty which is serious indeed, since it is rooted, not in the happenings of this or that century of the Church's life, but in the nature of the human mind itself: it is none other than the ancient contrast of Catholic and Puritan—a contrast as old as Christianity. Let the Catholic first state his case: We are born into the Church, he says, by sacramental, as we are born into the State by natural, birth. We have not chosen Christ He has chosen us, and graciously called us into the fellowship of his flock. In doing so, He has made provision for our safe custody and proper nourishment. The saving of the soul is too precious

a matter to be entrusted to the risks of private judgment. Suffer yourself to be wisely and graciously cared for by the Church, this household into which you have been born. See, here are teachers to instruct you; teachers who have come down in a direct line from the beginning, and who are, therefore, more likely than any others to possess the true tradition of the Christ. Here also are sacraments — two if you insist, seven if you will; but, all the same, a system, a provided scheme of spiritual help and comfort; a course, a treatment, a blessed ministry of grace.

And as for worship, here it is in form definite and precise. Why go wandering aimlessly about in search of Christ? Why soar up into the heavens of speculation to bring Christ down from above, or delve laboriously in the depths of research to bring up Christ from beneath? Enter the nearest church where you can be sure of finding Him on the altar. See you not the smoke of incense curling about his throne? Hear you not the sharp note of the bell annunciatory of his coming? What remains, save to fall low on your knees before his footstool, and to acknowledge the objectively present God?

So far the Catholic, whether Roman or Anglican. But listen now to the Puritan. What has he to say for himself? A great deal if we will let him. He does not believe at all in this materializing of religion as he considers it. All this perfection of Church discipline is to his eye rank tyranny, an unwarrantable invasion of Gospel freedom. He demands to be let alone. What is the ecclesiastic that he should attempt to lord it over

another man's conscience? To his own master he standeth or falleth, priest or no priest.

The Church is a spiritual, that is to say, an inward and invisible thing, through and through. The conditions of human life make a certain amount of outward organization necessary, but that is only an incident of the present distress; in heaven it will not be so; and the less we allow it to be so here on earth, the better. Nothing is so sacred as the individual conscience. And as for worship, the less of body we give to it, the more of spirit it will have. Attenuation is the measure of ghostly purity. God is a Spirit, and to suppose that such things as architecture and ritual can help us in getting nearer to Him, is a dangerous deceit.

This language of the Puritan may strike us as vehement; it certainly is that, for the Puritan is nothing if not dead in earnest; and yet we cannot help acknowledging that there is a great deal of truth in what he says. Assuredly, the individual conscience does have its rights as against all the world. It was no modern Protestant, it was Athanasius, a Father of the Church, who said that. Assuredly, the inner is of more importance than the outer, the substance than the form, the kernel than the husk, the thing signified than the sign.

And yet we must confess that inasmuch as these two ways of looking at things, these two estimates of what Christ meant his religion to be, have co-existed in the Church, taken as a whole, ever since the days when He called Peter to baptize and Paul to preach, it must be that any scheme of unity which makes room

and allowance for the one tendency to the exclusion of the other will necessarily be a one-sided, partial and imperfect thing. Men and women will be High Church and Low Church to the end of time, and in no place could this truth be more appropriately emphasized than just here.

(4) This brings us to our final question: What justification, if any, has the Protestant Episcopal Church for supposing itself called of God to special activity in the promotion of unity in America?

This justification, mainly, I think: that it is the only communion on the continent that makes an honest and measurably successful endeavor to keep these two sorts of Christians, to whom I have referred, within speaking distance of each other. Rome will give you Sacramentalism pure and simple, such as they have been having in Porto Rico for the last three hundred years, with the results which Father Sherman, infinitely to his credit, so plainly and so fearlessly points out.* Rome, I say, will give you Sacramentalism pure and simple, and any one of a hundred sects will give you a religion washed as clean as snow of any slightest suggestion of Sacramentalism. But certainly it is a most noteworthy fact, account for it as you will, that the historic Church of that race to which God seems to be assigning leadership on earth (I say "seems," for it is rashness to insist positively upon any one interpretation of the divine purpose), is the only

*See Report made to General Brooke, at San Juan, on the condition of Religion in Porto Rico, by the Rev. Thomas E. Sherman, S.J., December, 1898.

Church anywhere which so much as attempts to do equal justice both to the Sacramentalists and to the anti-Sacramentalists.

Recent events have given and current events are giving a peculiar emphasis to this point. I suppose we have all of us watched, with more or less closeness of attention, the controversy now going on in England over the so-called "ritualistic excesses." It has been and is the protest and, in the main, the just protest, of the Puritan element in the Anglican Church against the encroachments of the Catholic element. And what is the conclusion to which the mind of English Churchmen is settling down? Why, this: that sacramental doctrine ought henceforth to be considered neutral ground, and that so long as people show themselves willing to observe the sacraments "in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same," they are to be allowed a large liberty of thought and of opinion in philosophizing about their nature. Such is the purport of the counsel which has lately come to us from the wise Primate who sits in St. Augustine's seat at Canterbury.

What more? Why this, and it is full of significance: It has at last been recognized by English Churchmen that the Book of Common Prayer, admirable as it is, wonderful as it is, precious as it is, does not necessarily cover and meet the spiritual needs of all sorts of men under all sorts of conditions; and by general consent the conclusion has been reached that the Bishops ought to have and ought to exercise the right of sanctioning forms of worship for which the

once all-powerful Act of Uniformity makes no provision. That we American Episcopalians had reached this same conclusion a few weeks earlier need cause us no mortification, but, on the contrary, may well serve to strengthen our rather too feeble confidence in our own judgment as a national Church.

The London Guardian, the organ of the more sedate school of Anglican thought, has lately taken its contemporary, The Spectator, gently to task for having declared "comprehensiveness" (in the sense in which we have defined it here to-day) the special note or characteristic of the Church of England. No, says The Guardian, Comprehensiveness is not so much a note of the English Church as it is something incidental to the connection between the Church of England and the realm of England. Cut the bond that knits Church and State together, and the comprehensiveness would disappear. The Church, left to herself, would refuse to be comprehensive. So Dean Stanley also used to argue from his very different point of view. But the experience of the American Episcopal Church completely vindicates The Spectator. There is here no bond of Church and State, nor has there been for more than a hundred years, but the American Episcopal Church stands, to-day, the most comprehensive Church in Christendom, loyal to the Scriptures of both Testaments, loyal to the early Creeds, loyal to the Sacraments of Christ, loyal to Holy Order - a spiritual house large enough for a nation.

And yet I seem to hear a voice which says, "Though thou hast great possessions, one thing thou

lackest," and it is true. No ecclesiastical advantage, no historical prestige, no well-fortified "quadrilateral" will ever make this Church in which you and I believe the reconciling power we long to see her become, until the spirit of sacrifice and of sympathy shall possess her as it has never possessed her yet. In order to fulfil the priest's office to one's fellow-man, one must have learned how to suffer, and until Almighty God shall have disciplined us as a Church out of every slightest remnant of self-sufficiency, we need never hope to win the beatitude of them that make peace. I heard a returned missionary tell, not long ago, of a sermon which he had listened to in the East from the lips of a native preacher. The topic was the wounded side of Christ. "I believe," said the preacher, "in the wounded side of Christ, for I have seen it, seen it as really as the Apostle Thomas saw it after the resurrection. I saw it the other day as my eyes rested on the countenance of that aged Australian mother who, when told that her two daughters, missionaries in China, had both of them been murdered by a heathen mob, said, 'This decides me; I will go to China now, myself, and try to teach those poor creatures what the love of Jesus means." *

^{*} In the Sermon as preached, and in the first edition of it as printed, the honors of this narrative were, in good faith, credited to the Methodists. My accuracy having been questioned, I wrote to the Rev. Dr. Baldwin, from whose lips I had heard the story at a public meeting. The substance of his reply is subjoined. In the interest of truth, though at the cost

The old mystics, you remember, used to trace a connection between

> "the water and the blood From that riven side which flowed,"

and the two sacraments which minister to the common life of the Church, and make it organically one; but whether we get at it by inner vision, as the Hindoo preacher did, or sacramentally, with the mystics, let us get at it, for in that wounded side of Christ lies hid the talisman of unity.

of rhetoric, I have cancelled, in this edition, the impugned paragraph. W. R. H.

150 Fifth Avenue, March 4, 1899.

MY DEAR DR. HUNTINGTON:

Yours of the 2d inst. is duly at hand. I hasten to say that Mrs. Saunders and her daughters were indeed worthy members of the Church of England. The incident was told, as you state, by a Methodist preacher; and the place where he saw Mrs. Saunders was at the great Jubilee Service of the Methodist Mission at Foochow; but the ladies themselves were all Episcopalians.

On the Sunday of the Jubilee Service, at my suggestion, the immense congregation prepared themselves with flowers, and we went from the church to the graves of the martyrs, and strewed the flowers upon them. Mrs. Saunders stood near me. . . . I am sorry that particular point of your story is spoiled, but I could give you enough of Methodist experiences to justify it.

Yours in the unity of the Spirit, STEPHEN L. BALDWIN.

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