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OF
RELIGIONS

*AN ILLUSTRATED AND POPULAR STORY OF THE WORLD'S FIRST
PARLIAMENT OF RELIGIONS, HELD IN CHICAGO*

IN CONNECTION WITH

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THE REUNION OF CHRISTENDOM.

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The reunion of Christendom presupposes an original union which has been marred and obstructed, but never entirely destroyed. The Church of Christ has been one from the beginning, and he has pledged to her his unbroken presence "all the days to the end of the world." The one invisible church is the soul which animates the divided visible churches.

Let us briefly mention the prominent points of unity which underlie all divisions. Christians differ in dogmas and theology, but agree in the fundamental articles of faith which are necessary to salvation. They are divided in church government and discipline, but all acknowledge and obey Christ as the Head of the Church and chief Shepherd of our souls. They differ widely in modes of worship, rites and ceremonies, but they worship the same God manifested in Christ, they surround the same throne of grace, they offer from day to day the same petitions which the Lord has taught them, and can sing the same classical hymns. There is a unity of Christian scholarship of all creeds, which aims at the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. The English Version, in its new as well as its old form, will continue to be the strongest bond of union among the different sections of English-speaking Christendom—a fact of incalculable importance for private devotion and public worship. Formerly, exegetical and historical studies were too much controlled by, and made subservient to, apologetic and polemical ends; but now they are more and more carried on without prejudice, and with the sole object of ascertaining the meaning of the text and the facts of history upon which creeds must be built.

Finally, we must not overlook the ethical unity of Christendom, which is much stronger than its dogmatic unity and has never been seriously shaken.

The unity and harmony of the Christian Church were threatened and disturbed from the beginning partly by legitimate controversy, which is inseparable from progress, partly by ecclesiastical domination and intolerance, partly by the spirit of pride, selfishness and narrowness which tends to create heresy and schism. The church had hardly existed twenty years when it was brought to the brink of disruption by the question of circumcision as a condition of church membership and salvation. The party spirit which characterized the philosophical schools of Greece manifested itself in the congregation at Corinth, and created four divisions, calling themselves respectively after Paul, Apollos, Cephas, and Christ (in a sectarian sense).

1. Many schisms arose in the early ages before and after the Council of Nicaea. Almost every great controversy resulted in the excommunication of the defeated party, who organized a separate sect, if they were not exterminated by the civil power.

2. In the ninth century, the great Catholic Church itself was split in two on the doctrinal question of the procession of the Holy Spirit, and the ecclesiastical question of the primacy of the Bishop of Rome. The Greek schism lasts to this day and seems as far from being healed as ever.

In view of this greatest, and yet least justifiable, of all schisms, neither the Greek nor the Latin Church should cast a stone upon the divisions of Protestantism. They all share in the sin and guilt of schism, and should also share in a common repentance.

3. In the sixteenth century, the Latin or Western Church was rent into two hostile camps, the Roman and the Protestant, in consequence of the evangelical reformation and the papal reaction.

4. In England, a new era of division dates from the Toleration Act of 1688, which secured to the orthodox dissenters—Presbyterians, Independents, Baptists and Quakers—a limited toleration, while the Episcopal Church remained the established or national religion in England, and the Reformed or Presbyterian Church remained the national religion in Scotland.

The principle of toleration gradually developed into that of religious freedom, and was extended to the Methodists, Unitarians, and Roman Catholics.

We find, therefore, the largest number of denominations in England and America where religious freedom is most fully enjoyed; while on the continent of Europe, especially in Roman Catholic countries, freedom of public worship is denied or abridged, although of late it is making irresistible progress.

5. In the United States, all the creeds and sects of Europe meet on a basis of liberty and equality before the law, and are multiplied by native ingenuity and enterprise.

The number is much too large, and a reproach to the Christian name. For these divisions promote jealousies, antagonisms, and interferences at home and on missionary fields abroad, at the expense of our common Christianity. The evil is beginning to be felt more and more. The cure must begin where the disease has reached its crisis, and where the church is most free to act. For the reunion of Christendom, like religion itself, cannot be forced, but must be free and voluntary. Christian union and Christian freedom are one and inseparable.

Before we discuss reunion, we should acknowledge the hand of Providence in the present divisions of Christendom. There is a great difference between denominationalism and sectarianism. Denominationalism is a blessing; sectarianism is a curse. We must remember that denominations are most numerous in the most advanced and active nations of the world.

The historic denominations are permanent forces, and represent various aspects of the Christian religion which supplement each other. The Greek Church is especially adapted to the East, to the Greek and Slavonic peoples; the Roman, to the Latin races of Southern Europe and America; the Protestant, to the Teutonic races of the North and West. Among the Protestant Churches, again, some have a special gift for the cultivation of Christian science and literature; others for the practical development of the Christian life; some are most successful among the higher, others among the middle, and still others among the lower classes. All divisions of Christendom will, in the providence of God, be made subservient to a greater harmony. Where the sin of schism has abounded, the grace of future reunion will much more abound.

Taking this view of the divisions of the church, we must reject the idea of a negative reunion, which would destroy all denominational distinctions, and thus undo the work of the past. Variety in unity and unity in variety is the law of God in nature, in history, and in his kingdom. We must, therefore, expect the greatest variety in the church of the future. There are good Christians who believe in the ultimate triumph of their own creed, or form of government and worship, but they are all mistaken, and indulge in a vain dream. The world will never become wholly Greek, nor wholly Roman, nor wholly Protestant, but it will become wholly Christian, and will include every type and every aspect, every virtue and every grace of Christianity—an endless variety in harmonious unity, Christ being all in all.

Every denomination which holds to Christ the Head will retain its distinctive peculiarity, and lay it on the altar of reunion, but it will cheerfully recognize the excellences and merits of the other branches of God's kingdom. No sect has the monopoly of truth. The part is not the whole; the body consists of many members, and all are necessary to each other.

Doctrinal differences will be the most difficult to adjust. When two dogmas flatly contradict each other, the one denying what the other asserts, one or the other, or both, must be wrong. Truth excludes error and admits of no compromise.

But truth is many-sided and all-sided, and is reflected in different colors. The creeds of Christendom, as already remarked, agree in the essential articles of faith and their differences refer either to minor points, or represent only various aspects of truth and supplement one another.

Different movements within the church have already made themselves felt in the line of bringing together the scattered members of the one fold. There have been voluntary associations of individual Christians. History records the Confederate Union of Churches, as realized in the Pan-Methodist and Presbyterian Councils, the International Congress of Congregationalists and the meetings of the Anglican Council. The third meeting of the latter Council adopted a program for the union of Christendom, consisting of four articles, looking toward a confederation of all English-speaking Evan-

gelical Churches, and possibly even to an organic union. As it comes from the largest, most conservative, and most churchly of all the Protestant communions, it is entitled to the highest respect and to serious consideration. It commends itself by a remarkable degree of liberality. The only serious difficulty is the "historic episcopate." This is the stumbling-block to all non-Episcopalians, and will never be conceded by them as a condition of church unity, if it is understood to mean the necessity of three orders of the ministry and of Episcopal ordination in unbroken historic succession. But it is to be hoped that the Episcopal Church will give the historic episcopate as "locally adapted," such a liberal construction as to include "the historic presbyterate," which dates from the apostolic age and was never interrupted, or will drop it altogether, as a term of reunion. In any case, we hail the proposal as an important step in the right direction, and as a hopeful sign of the future.

We pass to the instances of organic union.

1. An organic union between the Lutheran and German Reformed Churches, into which German Protestantism has been divided since the sixteenth century, was effected in 1817 in connection with the third centennial of the Reformation, under the lead of Frederick William III., king of Prussia and father of the first emperor of united Germany.

2. In our country, the recent history of the Presbyterian Church furnishes an example of organic union. The Old School and the New School, which were divided in 1837 on doctrinal questions, were reunited by a free and simultaneous impulse in the year 1869 on the basis of orthodoxy and liberty, and have prospered all the more since their reunion, although the differences between conservative and progressive tendencies still remain, and have, within the last few years, come into collision on the questions of a revision of the Westminster Standards, and the historical criticism of the Bible.

3. The four divisions of Presbyterians in Canada have forgotten their old family quarrels, and have been united in one organization in 1875.

4. The Methodists in Canada, who, till 1874, were divided into five independent bodies, have recently united in one organization.

If all the Protestant Churches were united by federal or organic union, the greater, the most difficult, and the most important part of the work would still remain to be accomplished; for union must include the Greek and the Roman Churches. They are the oldest, the largest, and claim to be the most orthodox; the former numbering about 84,000,000 members, the latter 215,000,000, while all the Protestant denominations together number only 130,000,000.

If any one church is to be the center of unification, that honor must be conceded to the Greek or the Roman communion. The Protestant denominations are all descended, directly or indirectly, from the Latin Church of the middle ages; while the Greek and Latin Churches trace their origin

back to the apostolic age, the Greek to the congregation of Jerusalem, the Latin to the congregation at Rome.

First of all, the two great divisions of Catholicism should come to an agreement among themselves on the disputed questions about the eternal procession of the Holy Spirit, and the authority of the Bishop of Rome. On both points, the Greek Church is supported by the testimony of antiquity, and could not yield without stultifying her whole history. Will Rome ever make concessions to history? We hope that she will.

The difficulty of union with the Roman Church is apparently increased by the modern dogmas of papal absolutism and papal infallibility declared by the Vatican Council in 1870. These decrees are the logical completion of the papal monarchy, the apex of the pyramid of the hierarchy. But they can refer only to the Roman Church. The official decisions of the pope, as the legitimate head of the Roman Church, are final and binding upon all Roman Catholics, but they have no force whatever for any other Christians.

What if the pope, in the spirit of the first Gregory and under the inspiration of a higher authority, should infallibly declare his own fallibility in all matters lying outside of his own communion, and invite Greeks and Protestants to a fraternal pan-Christian council in Jerusalem, where the mother-church of Christendom held the first council of reconciliation and peace?

The reunion of the entire Catholic Church, Greek and Roman, with the Protestant Churches, will require such a restatement of all the controverted points by both parties as shall remove misrepresentations, neutralize the anathemas pronounced upon imaginary heresies, and show the way to harmony in a broader, higher and deeper consciousness of God's truth and God's love.

The whole system of traditional orthodoxy, Greek, Latin and Protestant, must progress, or it will be left behind the age and lose its hold on thinking men. The church must keep pace with civilization, adjust herself to the modern conditions of religious and political freedom, and accept the established results of biblical and historical criticism, and natural science. God speaks in history and science as well as in the Bible and the church, and he cannot contradict himself. Truth is sovereign, and must and will prevail over all ignorance, error and prejudice.

The history of the Bible is to a large extent a history of abuse as well as use, of imposition as well as exposition. No book has been more perverted. The mechanical inspiration theory of the seventeenth century, which confounded inspiration with dictation and reduced the biblical authors to mere clerks, is given up by scholars for a spiritual and dynamic theory. Textual criticism has purified the traditional text of the Greek Testament, correcting many passages and omitting later interpolations. The criticism of the Hebrew Bible text and the Septuagint has begun the same fundamental process. Historical criticism is putting the literature of both Testa-



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"THE IDEA OF THIS PARLIAMENT WILL SURVIVE ALL CRITICISM. THE CRITICS WILL DIE BUT THE CAUSE WILL REMAIN. I THINK THE LORD WILL GIVE ME STRENGTH TO SURVIVE THIS PARLIAMENT OF RELIGIONS. I WAS DETERMINED TO BEAR MY LAST DYING TESTIMONY TO THE CAUSE OF CHRISTIAN UNION IN WHICH I HAVE BEEN INTERESTED ALL MY LIFE.

ments in a new light, and makes it more real and intelligible by explaining its environments and organic growth until the completion of the canon. The wild allegorical exegesis, which turns the Bible into a nose of wax and makes it to teach anything that is pious or orthodox, has been gradually superseded by an honest, grammatical and historical exegesis, which takes out the real meaning of the writer instead of putting in the fancies of the reader. Many proof texts of Protestants against popery, and of Romanists against Protestantism, and of both for orthodoxy or against heresy, can no longer be used for partisan purposes.

Church history has undergone of late a great change, partly in consequence of the discovery of lost documents and deeper research, partly on account of a new spirit and standpoint of the historian. The study of history—"with malice toward none, but with charity for all"—will bring the denominations closer together in an humble recognition of their defects and a grateful praise for the good which the same Spirit has wrought in them and through them.

With regard to the relation of the church to natural and physical science, concessions will be made to modern geology and biology, when they have passed the stage of conjecture and reached an agreement as to facts. The Bible does not determine the age of the earth or man, and leaves a large margin for differences of opinion even on purely exegetical grounds. The theory of the evolution of animal life, far from contradicting the fact of creation, presupposes it; for every evolution must have a beginning, and this can only be accounted for by an infinite intelligence and creative will. God's power and wisdom are even more wonderful in this gradual process. The theory of historical development, which corresponds to the theory of natural evolution and preceded it, is now adopted by every historian, and is indorsed by Christ himself in the twin parables of the mustard-seed and the leaven. But there is another law of development no less important, which may be called the law of creative headships. Every important intellectual and religious movement begins with a towering personality which cannot be explained from antecedents, but marks a new epoch. The Bible, we must all acknowledge, is not, and never claimed to be, a guide of chronology, astronomy, geology, or any other science, but solely a book of religion, a rule of faith and practice, a guide to holy living and dying. There is, therefore, no room for a conflict between the Bible and science, faith and reason, authority and freedom, the church and civilization.

Before the reunion of Christendom can be accomplished, we must expect providential events, new Pentecosts, new reformations—as great as any that have gone before. The twentieth century has marvelous surprises in store for the church and the world. Let us consider some of the moral means by which a similar affiliation and consolidation of the different churches may be hastened.

1. The cultivation of an irenic and evangelical-catholic spirit in the personal intercourse with our fellow Christians of other denominations.

2. Cooperation in Christian and philanthropic work draws men together and promotes their mutual confidence and regard.

3. Missionary societies should at once come to a definite agreement, prohibiting all mutual interference in their efforts to spread the Gospel at home and abroad.

4. The study of church history has already been mentioned as an important means of correcting sectarian prejudices and increasing mutual appreciation. The study of symbolic or comparative theology is one of the most important branches of history in this respect, especially in our country, where all the creeds of Christendom come into daily contact, and should become thoroughly acquainted with one another.

5. One word suffices as regards the duty and privilege of prayer for Christian union, in the spirit of our Lord's sacerdotal prayer, that his disciples may all be one in him, as he is one with the Father.

We welcome to the reunion of Christendom all denominations which have followed the divine Master and have done his work. Let us forget and forgive their many sins and errors, and remember only their virtues and merits. The Greek Church is a glorious church; for in her language have come down to us the oracles of God, the Septuagint, the Gospels and Epistles; hers are the early confessors and martyrs, the Christian fathers, bishops, patriarchs and emperors; hers the immortal writings of Origen, Eusebius, Athanasius and Chrysostom; hers the Œcumenical Councils and the Nicene Creed, which can never die.

The Latin Church is a glorious church; she was the *Alma Mater* of the barbarians of Europe; she stimulated and patronized the Renaissance, the printing press and the discovery of a new world; she still stands, like an immovable rock, bearing witness to the fundamental truths and facts of our holy religion, and to the catholicity, unity, unbroken continuity, and independence of the church; and she is as zealous as ever in missionary enterprise and self-denying works of Christian charity.

We hail the Reformation which redeemed us from the yoke of spiritual despotism, and secured us religious liberty—the most precious of all liberties—and made the Bible in every language a book for all classes and conditions of men. The Evangelical Lutheran Church, the first-born daughter of the reformation, is a glorious church; for she set the word of God above the traditions of men, and bore witness to the comforting truth of justification by faith; she struck the keynote to thousands of sweet hymns in praise of the Redeemer; she is boldly and reverently investigating the problems of faith and philosophy, and is constantly making valuable additions to theological lore. The Evangelical Reformed Church is a glorious church; for she carried the reformation from the Alps and lakes of Switzerland “to the end of the West;” she is rich in learning and good works of faith; she keeps pace with all true progress; she grapples with the problems and evils of modern society; and she sends the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

The Episcopal Church of England, the most churchly of the reformed family, is a glorious church: for she gave to the English-speaking world the best version of the Holy Scriptures and the best prayer-book; she preserved the order and dignity of the ministry and public worship; she nursed the knowledge and love of antiquity, and enriched the treasury of Christian literature. The Presbyterian Church of Scotland is a glorious church: for she turned a barren country into a garden, and raised a poor and semi-barbarous people to a level with the richest and most intelligent nations; she diffused the knowledge of the Bible and a love of the kirk in the huts of the peasant as well as the palaces of the nobleman; she has always stood up for church order and discipline, for the rights of the laity, and first and last for the crown-rights of King Jesus, which are above all earthly crowns, even that of the proudest monarch in whose dominion the sun never sets. The Congregational Church is a glorious church: for she has taught the principle, and proved the capacity, of congregational independence and self-government based upon a living faith in Christ, without diminishing the effect of voluntary cooperation in the Master's service, and has laid the foundation of New England, with its literary and theological institutions and high social culture. The Baptist Church is a glorious church: for she bore, and still bears, testimony to the primitive mode of baptism, to the purity of the congregation, to the separation of church and state, and the liberty of conscience. The Methodist Church is a glorious church: for she produced the greatest religious revival since the day of Pentecost; she preaches a free and full salvation to all; she is never afraid to fight the devil, and she is hopefully and cheerfully marching on, in both hemispheres, as an army of conquest. The Society of Friends, though one of the smallest tribes in Israel, is a glorious society: for it has borne witness to the inner light which "lighteth every man that cometh into the world"; it has proved the superiority of the Spirit over all forms; it has done noble service in promoting tolerance and liberty, in prison reform, the emancipation of slaves, and other works of Christian philanthropy. The Brotherhood of the Moravians, founded by Count Zinzendorf—a true nobleman of nature and of grace—is a glorious brotherhood: for it is the pioneer of heathen missions and of Christian union among Protestant Churches; it was like an oasis in the desert of German rationalism at home, while its missionaries went forth to the lowest savages in distant lands to bring them to Christ.

Nor should we forget the services of many who are accounted heretics. The Waldenses were witnesses of a pure and simple faith in times of superstition, and have outlived many bloody persecutions to be missionaries among the descendants of their persecutors. The Anabaptists and Socinians, who were so cruelly treated in the sixteenth century by Protestants and Romanists alike, were the first to raise their voice for religious liberty and the voluntary principle in religion. Unitarianism is a serious departure

from the trinitarian faith of orthodox Christendom, but it was justified as a protest against tritheism, and against a stiff, narrow and uncharitable orthodoxy. It has brought into prominence the human perfection of Christ's character and illustrated the effect of his example in the noble lives and devotional writings of such men as Channing and Martineau. Universalism may be condemned as a doctrine; but it has a right to protest against a gross materialistic theory of hell with all its Dantesque horrors, and against the once widely spread popular belief that the overwhelming majority of the human race, including countless millions of innocent infants, will forever perish. And, coming down to the latest organization of Christian work, which does not claim to be a church, but which is a help to all churches—the Salvation Army: we hail it, in spite of its strange and abnormal methods, as the most effective revival agency since the days of Wesley and Whitefield; for it descends to the lowest depths of degradation and misery, and brings the light and comfort of the Gospel to the slums of our large cities.

There is room for all these and many other churches and societies in the Kingdom of God, whose height and depth and length and breadth, variety and beauty, surpass human comprehension.

THE RELIGIOUS REUNION OF CHRISTENDOM.

BY THE HON. W. H. FREMANTLE, CANON OF CANTERBURY.

This is a great subject; it might be thought superfluous to write upon it; for is not the Parliament itself a witness that we are united? If we can calmly, and with no sense of mutual enmity, discuss with all religionists, Christian and non-Christian, our various beliefs, it must be an easy thing for those who are Christians to be at one amongst themselves. Alas, it is a very different thing, to meet in a brotherly way in a conference, and to act as Christian brothers in practical life. But it is by the practical life that we are to be tested here and judged hereafter. The Parliament will, I doubt not, do much good, and may shame many into a sense of the evil of disunion. It may suggest thoughts which will fructify in honest hearts. I feel sure, also (I speak from unvarying experience), that when men meet, as they must here, to try to understand each other sympathetically, the points of union will loom out larger, and those of disunion grow less. But we should deceive ourselves and show great ignorance of human nature, if we fancied that the disintegrating tendencies could be stayed by a few brave words. It is up-hill work to endeavor to roll back the enmities of the past, and the reunionist must be prepared for sacrifice and for effort. Indeed, there is a danger in the assertion of unity in great enthusiastic gatherings apart from