

Theological Studies



CHURCH UNITY AND PROTESTANT MISSIONS

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EFFORTS towards unity among certain Protestant groups have been considered newsworthy of late by the secular press. One has in mind the projected unity among Presbyterians and the Protestant Episcopal Church of America and the apparently accomplished unity among the divisions of Methodists last year. Many reasons may be assigned for these attempts and successes, but it would be impossible to understand adequately this movement among the denominations without some idea of the missionary development of these groups. The rapid geographical extension of denominationalism, almost exclusively the work of a century and a quarter, with its consequent enormous expenditures of money and personnel has had two effects upon denominationalism. In the first place, it has impressed upon the groups the necessity for unity in view of the weakness of division, and secondly it has at the same time complicated the attainment of the unity.

Confronted with the millions of pagans in a country such as China or India, the denomination eventually realized the futility and practical impossibility of cutting into such a large mass of error and ignorance by its own individual efforts. The

denomination necessarily looked about for kinship with other forms of Christianity for the sake not merely of numerical advance but even of survival in the face of such overwhelming odds. It soon became painfully obvious, after the first rush of zeal, that such a mass could not be Christianized by the Lutherans alone, nor the Baptists alone, especially when the denomination had to face the opposition both of paganism and of divergent groups of Christianity. In this realization the self-sufficiency of the denomination suffered its first weakening blow. If he reflected at all, the missionary of a denomination soon saw that his own sect would never be capable of converting these millions and the aim would have to change from making converts to his own particular expression of Christianity to the making of converts to Christianity which would then place him in a sort of communion with other groups working in the field. In this idea the sect was already forced into subordination to a higher and more extensive idea than itself. Thus dawned the idea of an all-embracing Christianity which is essentially undenominational. Yet the attainment of that universality would be made more difficult by the existence of the denominations and by their growth in pagan lands.

The situation has not changed much from these first realizations. It is a discouraging situation. Protestantism, if it is to advance, must still be denominational, yet the extension of these historical divisions renders the realization of a united Christianity more difficult. These facts were appreciated more keenly and universally among missionaries of the last century than they had ever been appreciated in the three hundred preceding years of Protestant history. In the home countries the sect was strong enough to be unconcerned about other sects. But in mission countries the group was seen to be a pathetically weak thing in comparison with the task it had set out to accomplish. Missionary endeavor more than any other single factor has tended to destroy those barriers of denominationalism which must be razed if there is to be a united Protestantism.

As long as the denomination was able to continue in comparative security at home, the very idea of unity was repugnant; it smacked of Romanism. But when the insufficiency of denominational Christianity had been proven by the missionary experience, the idea of unification was inevitable. Denominationalism might be defended after a fashion in the countries where it had been born and had matured, but there was no justification for it in the mission countries. It was the missionary who first caught the vision of something greater than his own little expression of Christianity, not the preacher or the divine in the home lands, and as the missionaries and missions multiplied, the question became more acute and complex.

As a result of the work of the last century and a quarter, one might safely approximate the number of Protestant Christians in mission countries as well over ten million. This growth in numbers and occupation of territory by such a large number of denominations and societies, over three hundred and fifty, indicates the vastness of the task of unifying Protestant Christianity. Knowing this, one understands the insistence upon unity by missionaries who were experiencing the folly of competition, rivalry, overlapping, and the harm which these things were doing to the Christian cause. The returning missionary planted the seed of unity in the home churches and fostered it by missionary conventions. The home churches caught the vision of the missionary because in some instances they were seriously threatened for the first time in their history with forces superior to themselves. Therefore, what they once believed was desirable, perhaps, for mission countries, they soon saw to be imperative everywhere if Protestant Christianity was to survive with any strength.

The last half-century of Protestantism has witnessed a series of conferences which would have been impossible in other centuries, because these meetings sought to break through the walls of nationalism and denominationalism, which were, and still are, in some places such sacred notes of the Reform. With the

multiplication of these gatherings leaders have been increasingly more successful in bringing together a rather complete representation of nations and denominations. The word "Catholic," which at one time was the signal for a flood of abuse and misrepresentation, has been appropriated by Protestant leaders, many of whom do not hesitate now to speak of the existing One, Holy, Catholic Church of which all believers in Christ are members.

There are other no less noteworthy changes in Protestant thought as expressed in these conferences. The bitter abuse of Rome and particularly of the Jesuits as the incarnation of ecclesiastical despotism has changed to an expression of regret that the Church of Rome does not see its way clear to participate in these conventions. The almost universal fear of unity has changed into a desperate cry for unity. The unquestioned glorification of the Reform in all its phases has given place to doubt and in some quarters to certainty that there must have been something wrong with or defective in the principles of a Reform which could be responsible for such confusion and division. The once complete contentment of some with denominationalism has changed to a feeling of its insufficiency and unchristianity. The elements of individualism and personality which once reigned supreme in Protestant theology are yielding under pressure of world events to an insistence on the corporative and social concept of Christianity. The sacredness of private interpretation has admittedly broken down as a norm of Christian truth. More people are seeking a stable and secure authority outside of themselves on which they may safely rely, though officially autonomy is asseverated. The cold drabness of Protestant worship is changing in some places and there is a recognition of the necessity of what we Catholics call liturgy. In a word, some of the denominations are slowly losing some of their distinctly Protestant features and are seeking to gather up the lost fragments of the Pre-reformation heritage of Christianity. The denominations are becoming more and more Catholic in their desire for unity,

corporate life, liturgy, and authority which are some of the elements in Christ's Church which they either neglected or deliberately excluded at one time.

We maintain again that the greatest single cause for these changes, at least for the inauguration of them both in theory and practice, has been the missionary activity of the past century in the interests of which the first great conferences were called. There have been contributing causes, political, social, intellectual, but no one of them has been as insistent and as extensive as the causality arising from work on foreign missions which has driven the sects together for cooperative effort. Before any such movement could have taken on such a general force, it was necessary that the groups be lifted out of the security and insulation of their local surroundings. This was done by the fervor of evangelization which opened up to the groups further frontiers and was responsible for a general broadening of their horizons. The growth from a localness and provincialism, that was stifling, to a universality of outlook is nowhere more apparent than in the reports of these various missionary conferences. Consequently a brief survey of them is indispensable for the better understanding of the changes in the denominations and the hopeful emphases of our day. It will further show the utter impossibility of attaining genuine unity, if Protestant principles are persevered in by leaders. Finally, it will seek to estimate how far toward the true concept of Catholic and Apostolic Unity the above-named changes have brought the sects.

Prior to 1888 several meetings of missionaries and interested parties had been held in the home countries but their membership was almost exclusively local or national.¹ From the volume published after the Liverpool Conference of 1860 a few items are taken for the sake of history. The purpose of the convention was to "illustrate the practical unity of the Church," so

¹New York, 1854; London, 1854; Liverpool, 1860; Mildmay, 1878. Cf. *Report of Missionary Conference*, London, 1888, Vol. I, p. 3; also *World Missionary Conference*, Edinburgh, 1910—Vol. IX, pp. 3-4.

that even at this early date it was assumed that there was a unity and it is interesting to notice that the convention speaks of *the Church* in the singular number. Yet the delegates definitely repudiated all idea of merging the sects into one great whole, because each sect was to retain its individuality.² The difficulty in mission countries caused by the propagation of the religious differences of the West was noted. It was suggested that simple forms of worship should be introduced which would prescind from the conscientious differences existing in the Churches.³ The difficulty was baldly stated by asking what form should be introduced, Episcopal, Presbyterian, or Congregational. Church form and polity were considered important but they were not as vital as the right of the local church to choose its own form of institutional Christianity. A definition of the church was derived as "a congregation of believers in Jesus Christ, meeting in one place for worship of the Almighty and observance of Christ's institutions, having appointed officials." It was deemed incompatible with such a definition that any of the existing forms of the Christian Churches should be imposed absolutely.⁴ It was thought that the controversies of former centuries were nearly dead and therefore the missionary message should not look to denominational views but to the essentials which would, perhaps, eventually lead to a nobler exhibition of the oneness of the Church. All professed that they should know no Church but the one great Catholic Church of which Christ is the Head and Foundation and for the completion of which they must wait.

In this Conference there was recognition of the obstacle of division and an attempt to formulate a definition of the Church which resulted in confirming the general opinion that the sects should continue as they were, though an effort should be made

²Cf. *Conference on the Missions*, Liverpool, 1860, pp. 16, 278.

³Ibid. p. 279 sq. The watchword or slogan of Protestant missions has been the development of a "self-supporting, self-governing, self-propagating" Church, a phrase used by Secretary Anderson of the American Board Deputation to India in 1854-55 which has been echoed ever since. Henry Venn, a secretary of the Church Missionary Society, had the same idea at about the same time.

⁴Cf. *Conference on the Missions*, Liverpool, 1860, p. 279.

to prescind from the denominational differences in the interests of cooperation and unity wherever it was possible. It was not determined what form of church should be propagated and at this early date church form was considered to be a thing of secondary importance, emphasis being placed on the preaching of the essentials of Christianity, though no indication was given of just what those essentials should be.

At London in 1888 was held the first of the great Protestant World Missionary Conferences. It was considered to be "in the highest sense ecumenical," "the grandest ecumenical council ever assembled since the first council in Jerusalem."⁵ Certainly it was unprecedented in Protestant annals. There was a predominance, obviously, of British delegates and the narrowness and self-complacency of Anglo-Saxon superiority⁶ are amusing today in view of the absurdities and disagreements on the race myths; such a tone will disappear in later Conferences as more members from mission Churches are given representation.

"The object of the Conference is to stimulate and encourage all evangelization agencies, in pressing forward, in obedience to the last command of the Risen Saviour, 'Go ye, therefore, and make disciples of all nations'.⁷" The passing of rules and regulations was considered not in conformity with the character of the Conference.⁸ The problem of a united church was presented in the discussion on the "Organization and Government of the Native Church,"⁹ in which the main divisions treated the preparation of western organizational forms, the process of devolution or indigenization, and the training of native workers. There seems to have been a certain fear of anything like organic unity and the proof incontrovertible used against

⁵Cf. *Report of the Missionary Conference*, London, 1888, Vol. I, pp. xii, xxiii. One thinks of the Vatican Council two decades before.

⁶*Ibid.*, pp. xv, 154: "It (the conference) brought out the great extent to which the work of evangelization is taken up by or thrown upon the Saxon race." "It is to the race which is sending the blessings of Christianity to the heathen to which God is giving success as the colonizers and conquerors of the world."

⁷*Ibid.* Vol. I, p. viii.

⁸*Ibid.* Vol. I, pp. xi, xxiv; it was not in conformity with the Anglo-Saxon genius, an interesting point: "rules and laws, without an executive authority to carry them out, are a mere form or farce." p. xxv.

⁹*Ibid.* Vol. II, pp. 341-428.

the idea was the Church of Rome. Consequently, there was an indefiniteness and a loose denomination of unity and spirit. The desire of the mission countries for their own expression of Christianity was noted, but opinion was divided between uniting organizations of the same ecclesiastical form, establishing national churches or continuing in the present status. Dr. Warneck, the great German Missiologist, was certain that Christ intended a oneness "far deeper, far more spiritual and more free than the Roman Church understands by hierarchical unity." However, he did see the necessity for some outward unity, though his concept was very nebulous.¹⁰ Because there was no supreme authority, the problem of division from which "Evangelical missions suffer horribly" must be solved by brotherly union. The assumption underlying comity was twofold: (1) "We all possess in common such measure of doctrinal truth as is sufficient to show a sinner the way of salvation; (2) Salvation is not by any Church but only by faith in the Lord."¹¹ Bishop Suter of the Church of England suggested a line of action which would find expression at a later date in the attempts of the South India Scheme for uniting episcopally constituted churches and those of the Presbyterian or Congregational type.¹² Opposition was clear against anything resembling real unity,¹³ since the mind of the Conference may be expressed as being hostile to anything resembling fusion into "unreal unification instead of unity." One delegate said, "Three words we rejoice in—Catholic, Protestant, and Evangelical—and we shall hold them to the end," but all should realize the evident unity of spirit existing among the groups.¹⁴ There was to be no compromise with any truth conscientiously

¹⁰Ibid. Vol. II, pp. 431-437, p. 431: "We should degrade this oneness to a mere pious expression if we were to consider it merely as something spiritual and not intended to be outwardly recognizable. . . . The Romish Church has lost freedom to gain unity and the Evangelical its unity to gain freedom . . . at all events such a union (of spirit) formed on freedom has a far higher value than that of the Papal Church."

¹¹Ibid. Vol. II, p. 436.

¹²Ibid. Vol. II, p. 458.

¹³Ibid. Vol. II, p. 436: "Unity is not to be found in our insisting upon an outward conformity. We must not hope for an absolute uniformity in worship."

¹⁴Ibid. Vol. I, pp. 420 ff. q. by the Bishop of Exeter.

held; differences were due to misplacement of emphasis on forms of expression and devotion and to historical events which had passed; hence the love of God and of one's neighbor should be first considerations.¹⁵

We may say in summary of this London Conference that the idea of unity was planted, though it was not clearly defined; it was an amorphous thing of the spirit which withdrew from anything resembling the unity enjoyed by Rome. Unity amid diversity was the motto. There was no indication of any precise idea of the nature of the Church. Division was raised to a position of glory by some who considered it a direct disposition of Divine Providence for the more rapid evangelization of the world. Doctrinal differences were not discussed and church form or organization was generally conceded to be a thing of relative importance which would readjust itself in time. The only real fruit of the Conference was the actual assembling of so many different groups and the commonly expressed desire for unity and cooperation which grew from mission needs.

The next International Conference was held in New York, May, 1900,¹⁶ and was called the "Ecumenical Missionary Conference." As a matter of fact, it was more of a religious demonstration than a council for establishing important results for the missions.¹⁷ One notes a more restrained attitude toward Catholicism in this Conference. The great call of inspiration for Protestant missions, "the evangelization of the world in this generation," was conceived as definitely possible by Dr. Speer, the Secretary of the Conference.¹⁸ In the discussions on "Comity and Cooperation" there seemed to be a shying away from the question of complete unity, though some did realize the necessity of a visible form while others recalled that comity was only a *modus vivendi* until that still distant day should arrive when the churches would be ready for true unity.¹⁹ There was no unanimity on the nature of unity, some urging organic unity, others interested only in federation, others still

¹⁵Ibid. Vol. II, p. 484.

¹⁶Cf. Ecumenical Missionary Conference, New York, 1900; Vol. I, for history.

¹⁷Ibid. pp. 30, 32, 34, 59.

¹⁸Ibid. p. 77.

¹⁹Ibid. Vol. I, Chapter X.

insisting on the great evangelical principle of freedom, no matter what type of union might be effected. Division was thought by some to be a manifestation of the life that was in the sects. The motives for comity or unity were said to be the poverty and sin of the unredeemed masses, their darkness and superstition, the numbers in the home churches who remained outside the institutions of the Churches because they were displeased with the insistence on denominational differences, and finally because it would rejoice the heart of Christ. The papers on the organization and administration of the native Churches did not show any definite objective.²⁰ In general, one may say that the Conference was a success as a religious demonstration and that it contributed to the spirit moving within Protestantism to bring the Churches closer together for the elimination of antipathy and isolation.²¹

The third and greatest of the missionary conferences was held at Edinburgh in 1910 and was called the "World Missionary Conference."²² It was different from former gatherings because it brought to its delegates a program that had been deeply studied by various Committees previous to the convening of the Conference. The leaders had determined beforehand that "no expression of opinion should be sought from the Conference on any matter involving ecclesiastical or doctrinal questions on which those taking part in the Conference differed among themselves."²³ The time had not yet come for the discussion about differences in doctrine because it was felt that the consciousness of the possibility of union had to grow and the Conference demonstrated beyond all doubt the possibility and fact of cooperation, though it also showed that while some cooperation was possible, still the differences must eventually be straightened out.

²⁰Vol. II, pp. 285, 273.

²¹Vol. II, p. 349, for a statement of union in essentials and spirit.

²²The reports of this Conference appeared in nine volumes entitled *World Missionary Conference*, 1910. Cf. Vol. IX, pp. 5-17, for history of the preparatory work.

²³Vol. IX, p. 8; cf. also p. 143, "We are drawing together now as perhaps never before. . . . If we are to be successful, a great amount of unity must be attained." Cf. also p. 145.

There is nothing more elusive in Protestant literature than the concept of the Church, for it is always escaping definition.²⁴ The Commission on the "Church in the Mission Field" had to discuss not *a* Church but Churches. Corporate unity was recognized as a difficult problem, "whenever for the first time the Church becomes aware of the great barriers to organic unity." Consequently, two courses were open to the native churches: (1) To strike out for themselves above and beyond all denominational differences, or (2) to heed the advice and learn by the experience of the older Churches: the Commission favored naturally the latter course, describing it as wiser and more Christian.²⁵ The Bishop of Birmingham stated the necessity for a clear appreciation and definition of the essentials and the Catholic features of the Church.²⁶

The Eighth Commission reported on "Cooperation and the Promotion of Unity." It admitted that it was easier to unite missionaries than to unite missions and that underlying the whole problem was the doctrinal disagreement. The chapter on "Federation and Unity" directly set itself the task of discussing the situation and prospects of the mission in this regard. Two ways were outlined as leading to unity: Either to combine in close organic unity churches of a similar polity, or to combine in free federation the different communities in a particular area.²⁷ The Bishop of Bombay summed up the Anglican attitude by saying, "The method should not be compromise for the sake of peace but comprehension for the sake of truth."²⁸ The Commission refused to decide which method would be preferable but did say that organic unity "presents the united front which Christian missions so universally desire."²⁹

The Chairman in introducing the subject to the Conference recorded the desire existing in the missions for unity and its necessity, the failure of sympathy in the home Churches, the new vision of unity granted to the Commission.³⁰ Some dele-

²⁴Vol. II, pp. 11-12. *Christendom* (Spring, 1939, 164-174) has an accessible summary of the many discussions of the Protestant concept of the Church. ²⁵*Ibid.* p. 34.

²⁶*Ibid.* p. 355; cf. Vol. IX, p. 189, on necessity of dogmatic statement.

²⁷Vol. VIII, p. 87. ²⁸*Ibid.* p. 114. ²⁹*Ibid.* p. 118. ³⁰Vol. VIII, pp. 189-190.

gates preferred federation; many looked toward unity. Protestantism asserted itself in rejecting everything that resembled too close a union; therefore, denominationalism, variety, liberty, and elasticity were defended as indispensable to future unity. There did not seem to be any clear concept of unity except the attempt by the Bishop of Southwark to define it or describe it.³¹ The discussion did bring to light the fact that differences could not be submerged. It was even admitted that Rome and the Orthodox Churches would have to be embraced in Christian Unity.³²

The Conference based the necessity of a united church on reasons declared to be of supreme importance,—the more effective occupation of unevangelized sections of the world; the scandal of a divided Church in the eyes of a critical world; the demand for a united front in mission countries; the growing desire for unity among the races evangelized, which desire contained, if not a threat, at least impatience with foreign evangelizing agencies; the disastrous effect of division on the spiritual life of the Church at home and abroad; the opportunity of accomplishing unity on the mission quickly, which might react favorably on the home Churches; and for a few, the ideal of the Christian Church as conceived and founded and prayed for by Christ.

The difficulties in this conference were enormous and unanimity was found only in the desire that something be done. There were differences on the varying emphasis of doctrines; differences on actual doctrinal content of the faith; differences in discipline and practice; differences in church polity; differences in method and ideal; differences on what form of unity was desirable. There was no clear idea of the significance of the Church. The Protestant insistence on liberty, local right,

³¹Ibid. p. 232, "Unity is synonymous for the life of the Body of Christ. True unity would express itself mentally in the unity of conviction; morally in unity of heart and feeling and of conduct and purpose; and structurally in unity of order; unities all of them containing within them room for rich varieties."

³²Ibid. p. 233, "If we are to reach unity . . . the unity must comprehend the great communion of Rome as well as the great Church of the East"; p. 199, ". . . we must take into our reckoning the Roman Catholic Church."

independence was very manifest. The chimerical notion of unity amid diversities which leaves the sect unchanged will be cherished for a long time. The love of sect was very strong naturally, but a new idea was grasped, the idea of a Church Universal which in some of the delegates had already transcended the barriers of denominationalism. The results of Edinburgh were a new vision, a firm, deep hope and a deep concern. The vision grew out of a fuller perception of Christian truth and the actual cooperation experienced in the Conference. The hope was founded on that vision which had been brought down from the plane of mere possibility to that of action. The concern was caused by the hopeful vision of a world-wide Church, the vision of world-wide Christianity, and this hope was placed in the mission countries. The success of the Conference was almost entirely on the side of desire and sentiment and hope, but it was necessary to stir these desires and sentiments. Most important from our point of view was the admission that Rome and the Orthodox Churches must be embraced in Christian unity; this indicates definite progress in Protestant views upon unity.

The next general meeting was held in Jerusalem in 1928. It was not a World Missionary Conference in the sense of Edinburgh, because a new instrument had been created as a result of Edinburgh, the International Missionary Council. It was, however, the first genuinely international meeting of the denominations.³³ There was a tendency towards impatience with theology in this Conference and Christianity was reduced by some to its simplest expression. This was a stroke against denominational differences which were keeping people out of Christianity, or the organizations of Christianity,—people who were held by a simple Christ.³⁴ One cannot but be saddened by a reading of the reports on the Christian Message, because of the uncertainty of conviction and the confusion of doctrine shown.³⁵ The question of unity could not be specifically

³³*Jerusalem Meeting Report*; Vol. 8, pp. 205-216.

³⁴Vol. 1, pp. 13, 15, 57, 298, 301, 309, 331, 380, 484; Vol. 3, p. 190.

³⁵Vol. 1, pp. 346-347, 355.

treated by the Council since it would involve a discussion of doctrine and church polity which were excluded from Council deliberations by its Constitutions. In the volume on the "Younger and the Older Churches" much pertinent material is supplied.³⁶ The objective of Protestant missions was said to have been for a long time the establishment of autonomous native Churches, wherein the native Churches should be left a good deal to themselves to establish their own ultimate church form.³⁷ No one had ever answered authoritatively just what kind of a Church was to be planted in mission lands. This Conference showed clearly that Protestantism did not know where it was going. But, trusting in the Spirit, it was hoped that He would lead to something truly marvelous. A discussion was held on International Missionary Cooperation which had a few things to say on the necessity of unity.³⁸

It seems that the Jerusalem Conference was overshadowed by the Lausanne Conference held in the preceding year, because Lausanne left in the minds of many a sense of futility and discouragement in view of the tremendous doctrinal differences. The Jerusalem Conference, the character of which is mainly cooperative, does seem to have carried the emphasis away from unity towards mere cooperation. Possibly at Jerusalem the dictum of Söderblom, "Service unites, dogma divides," was influential. But since that time the true ecumenical wishes to join Life and Work to Faith and Order. The differences at Jerusalem were so great and so deep that at one time there was fear that the meeting would have to dissolve. In this Conference the West was looking to the East for a way out of the chaos of division which had been created for East and West by denominationalism.

A rather unique document appeared in 1932,³⁹ an appraisal not by missionaries and ministers but by a group of laymen, representing various denominations in America. These men

³⁶Vol. 3.

³⁷Vol. 3, pp. 5-40.

³⁸Vol. 8.

³⁹*Rethinking Missions*, New York, 1932. This volume contains the summary of conclusions. The group was called the Laymen's Foreign Mission Inquiry. There are seven volumes of "Fact Finders' Report."

considered the problems and needs of the missions by studying conditions in the actual fields of China, India and Japan. Much of the liberal Christianity in the book was rejected by the denominations but the facts gathered were irrefutable and its most important conclusion was that a profound transformation of the Church in mission fields was necessary, a change from sectarianism to unity and cooperation, which would eliminate the chaos of competition and the rivalry of sectarianism.

Great hope was placed by some in the negotiations carried on in South India between the Anglican Church of India and the Presbyterians, called the South India Scheme. The discussions were begun in 1919 and have been saved from ruin on several occasions by postponing action. It might be called a test-case of the possibility of unity between the episcopally constituted churches and the non-episcopal groups. The theology of Orders, referred to in a preceding number of this magazine, is pathetically uncertain and neither side is willing to make too many concessions. The latest development is an impasse which must wait on the part of the Anglicans for the pronouncement of the Lambeth Conference of 1940. This move towards unity is reflected in the recent attempt here in America of the Protestant Episcopal Church of America to unite with the Presbyterians and the issues are the same.⁴⁰

It may be said that the greatest fruit of these missionary discussions has been the conferences on Faith and Order, one held at Lausanne in 1927, the other at Edinburgh in 1937. These conferences are the direct result of the enthusiasm engendered at Edinburgh in 1910 and are the efforts of the theologians of the denominations to discuss their differences and to find some basis for the establishment of unity. Another group which owes its origin similarly to the inspiration of the missionaries is that responsible for the Conferences on Life and

⁴⁰Source material for this scheme, *Documents on Christian Unity, 1920-1924*; Second Series, 1930; compiled by G. K. A. Bell.

Work held at Stockholm in 1925 and at Oxford in 1937.⁴¹ This latter group has confined itself to clarifying the attitudes of the Churches with regard to world problems. A consequence of the last Conference on Faith and Order was the establishment of a World Council of Churches with headquarters at The Hague to act as a kind of general representative for Protestant Christianity, but like all such interdenominational councils in Protestantism it is without any authority to impose doctrine or conduct upon individual sects.

Though the movement towards unity has grown considerably within the last quarter century, the actual results are negligible and one does not intend to say that in a derogatory manner. The obstacles are immense, and the theological view on unity on which the movement is based is indefensible. The nature of the desired union has undergone change in the minds of leaders. Early in the movement the idea of real unity was considered undesirable by the majority, no doubt, because of the fear that the denominations would have to sacrifice their individuality. Lately, the consciousness of the utter impossibility of advancing without sacrifice on the part of all has begun to take root. Some, especially the very Protestant groups, hold out for federation, but an increasing number insist that anything short of organic unity is contrary to the will of God.⁴² The denominational barriers are less forbidding than formerly as the many union services testify, but the status of theological thought in Protestantism does not show any greater clarity on doctrine. There is a slow dismemberment of Protestantism which makes the attainment of union all the more imperative, because more and more are less interested in denominationalism. This dis-

⁴¹Sources for these Conferences; *Lausanne Conference on Faith and Order*, Lausanne, 1927; *Second World Conference on Faith and Order*, Oxford, 1937; Stockholm—*The Stockholm Conference on Life and Work*, Stockholm, 1925; *Second World Conference on Life and Work*, Oxford, 1937.

The best Catholic appraisal of the Conferences of the last decade is to be found in *Um Kirchliche Einheit*, Max Pribilla, S.J., Freiburg im Breisgau, 1929. A general survey of the whole field, Protestant and Orthodox, is given in *Cbrétiens Désunis*, M. J. Congar, O. P., Paris, 1937.

⁴²Cf. *Church Unity Movements in the United States*, H. Paul Douglas, New York, 1934.

memberment has been caused, it seems, by the destruction of that social, political, and intellectual isolation by which organized Protestantism kept itself in the ascendancy in England, America, and Germany. Liberalism and Modernism have weakened not only the denominationalism, but the very Christianity of the sects and they have no barrier to throw against the influence of these attitudes which are so adverse to the isolation which once preserved their lives. This phenomenon of the gradual dissolution of the insulation which embraced every phase of life has been a strong factor in the weakening of denominationalism. The tone of the appeal has shifted from the narrow Protestant cry to the fuller, but unfortunately, indefinite cry of a world Christian fellowship, which, it is claimed, will be the contribution of Protestantism for the solution of the ills of the world. But who is going to cry, "Halt" to the continual loss of doctrine and conviction?

The idea of a supremely authoritative Church is still a stumbling-block to many of the denominations, though an increasing number are seeking for some authority outside of themselves which will justify their existence in the minds of the questioning. It seems obvious that any unifying element must come from outside the sects, because there is no unifying element within them. They differ on creed, organization, jurisdiction and modes of worship and if these are excluded, there is nothing left which could serve as a basis for uniting people who call themselves Christian. None of the existing elements in the denominations can supply a basis for unity because no one of them has any right to universal acceptance over another. Since all are equally insufficient and at the same time subjectively self-sufficient, something outside the groups must be sought which can command the enthusiasm and submission of all by reason of its proved and authoritative sufficiency. The more one views this conflict of personal freedom and authority which is so strong in Protestantism, the more the conviction grows that it is not a question of doctrine nowadays so much as of an escape, a protection against any body claiming

supreme authority in Christendom. Fellowship, federation, the branch theory, the unity of spirit are all meandering roads seeking to skirt the mountain that lies in the path of complete union, the mountain that confronts them at every turning of the road which must be crossed and not evaded, a visible, living authority and the submission that faith requires.

Out of the mass of ideas on this problem current in Protestantism three general trends may be safely stated, the cooperative, the ecumenical, and the unitive, though these are not clear-cut divisions. The method of cooperation is popular in America and embraces the federative idea, which some wish to call unity. Reduced to its simplest form it means that on a minimum basis of Christian doctrine churches contribute to a central committee and agree to recognize the status of any sect holding this minimum; but each sect maintains its doctrinal and jurisdictional individuality. This idea is most popular with the thoroughly evangelical groups. The ecumenical idea is less easy to summarize and may be called a unity in a loose sense. It begins on the supposition that no single church is *the* Church of Christ, but all churches have conserved certain true and inalienable values. All these values distinctive of the groups must be brought together in a unity which will then express *the* Church. The result will be that no church will be absorbed in another, but all will contribute to the Christian possession of the others and the resultant church will enjoy the plenitude of truth which is its heritage from Christ. The defenders of the ecumenical view fear that mere federation will be a goal; they regard it as a half-way house.⁴³ The idea of real unity in doctrine and jurisdiction is very limited and does not meet with much encouragement; it looks too much like Rome's idea of unity, and Protestantism is still far from the spirit of the "Mortalium Animos."

While the inspiration and urgency of unity arose in the mission fields, the burden has now been assumed by the home

⁴³Cf. *Christendom* (Winter, 1939, p. 207); *Journ. of Religion*, 18 (July, 1938), 273.

Churches. It was once hoped that the mission Churches, free from the historical oppositions of the West, might discover some way by which the home Churches could unite, but now it appears that the mission Churches are destined not to lead but to follow the home Churches; the dependence of the missions on Mission Boards is too great to allow them to attempt anything that would sever them from such abundant sources. It would be folly to predict anything for the mission Churches or for the home Churches. What has been called by Protestants themselves "perhaps the greatest problem of the missions," a united Church, is still unsolved and from all appearances gives no promise of solution in the immediate future. In the present status of Protestant thought the problem is insoluble for the simple reason that the goal is uncertain and confused. The nature and functions of the One Church must be much more clearly defined in their theology before they can attempt a reorganization.

The study of the growth of this movement supplies an apologetic for the Catholic Church by contrast. The missionary effort of Protestantism was an attempt at Catholicity but results have proven that the characteristics of the Church can not be dissociated. The attempt towards universality soon impressed the denominations with the necessity of unity and in the minds of those the appreciation of the need of unity has forced them to cast about for the preservative of unity which is the authority to be found in apostolicity. And our hope is that as the attempt to be Catholic in the sense of universal has led them to desire unity, so the desire of unity may lead them to the realization that unity is unthinkable without that living authority which comes down from the Apostles unbroken. When that day dawns they have discovered the Church which has always been among them.