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COMMENCING TO-DAY AT THE BARGAIN CORNER

ON CHURCH UNION

Notable Ministers Give Their Views.

In Response to the Question Submitted by the Christian Guardian, Asking What Would Have to be Changed That a Union of the Bodies Might be Consummated.

PRINCIPAL GRANT.

QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY, KINGSTON.

I do not think that anything should be changed or removed, as a condition of union between the churches named. In faith, order, administration and discipline, they are silently approaching each other now. This is due to general causes, and it is a sign of the times, and a sign of the will of God, which wise men should discern. So far has the approximation gone in the last ten or twenty years, that it is impossible for an outsider now to distinguish between them. There are, of course, differences, but these do not touch the objects for which a church exists. There are wide differences between Presbyterians, Congregationalists, ministers and congregations in the same church. No two men are alike. The richer the life of any society, the more pronounced the differences between the members. The greatest political and social organism in the world is the British Empire, just because it includes the greatest variety, and its fundamental law is, that each exists for all, and all for each. We ought to find that law exemplified in the Christian church more truly than in a political organism. In a union each would share in the peculiar excellencies of the others, and the whole would have a fuller life, to the glory of the Head and the enrichment of the life of every member of the body. At present, all are weakened because of the obstacles we have raised to the inflow of common life.

The union might, at first, take the form of a federation, in which each church would preserve anything which now distinguishes it, and which it considers a source of strength. To draw the line between such matters and those with which the Supreme Court would deal, presents no insuperable obstacle. It would require calm deliberation.

The main point to be assured of is this: Are these churches persuaded, as I think they should be, that their present divided condition is not warranted, that it is therefore a state of wilful and sinful sinfulness, which should "take end" as soon as possible. We have no assurance of this; neither General Assembly nor Quadrennial Conference has said anything of the kind, and I am not aware that congregations have given expression to any such conviction. How can it, then, be supposed that they are ready for union? Yet our present condition means weakness of spiritual life, poorly disguised by fervent appeals and feverish spasmodic efforts in different directions.

PRINCIPAL SHAW, LL.D.

WESLEYAN COLLEGE, MONTREAL.

I am invited to indicate what changes are necessary to secure a union of the Methodist Church with Congregationalists and Presbyterians. It is almost as pleasant to delineate a basis of ecclesiastical union, even if not needed for fifty or a hundred years to come, as in fancy to distribute a million dollars among charitable and religious objects. Who knows, however, but what in the Christian Era, in a good deal shorter time, this matter may loom up on the horizon of practical politics?

But first, as to the Congregationalists the problem must be ruled out, as union in the sense intended is impossible. There is no such thing as the Congregational Church. There are in Canada some hundreds of Congregational churches, devout in spirit, intelligent in Christian life, liberal in educational enterprise, and, for the most part,

conservative in theology, and because they are congregational each church is independent, and refuses to be controlled by any central authority, such as Synod, Assembly or Conference. Its pastor and deacons may meet, if they wish in convention or union with kindred spirits, but the union has no legislative and controlling power over the churches, except such as the churches may themselves voluntarily accept. A congregation may utterly ignore what is done by the Union; it may withdraw altogether from the Union; and yet continue to be a Congregational church. This is the outcome of the principle of independence which so gloriously triumphed at Preston Pans, in 1648, over "Papists, Prelatists and Presbyterians," and the grand service the Independents then rendered against the evils of ecclesiasticism, the church and the world can never forget. Union with the Congregational Church is an impossibility, because there is no such body, and because there is no such church-court with which to conduct negotiations. Congregational churches, separately may surrender their independence and become Methodists or anything else they wish, each congregation choosing for itself, and Methodists may go on in their present tendency, more and more repudiating connexion with authority, until all Methodist churches become congregational. In each case you have, of necessity, absorption of one polity by another, and not organic union. As the Baptists are congregational in church polity, the same remarks apply to them, only that the difficulties are increased here by the fact that every Baptist congregation is uncompromisingly committed to certain views of baptism, which all other churches in Christendom reject.

The Presbyterian Church is the only great denomination with which the Methodist Church can possibly have organic union, they two occupying in common the same place between the independence of Congregational churches on the one hand, and the extreme ecclesiasticism and uncompromising demands of prelatical churches, Anglican, Roman Catholic, etc., on the other. Much could be said on the question, Is such a union probable? I am simply asked, What changes would be needed on either side to bring it about? I think this question is covered by considering three points, doctrinal standards, itinerancy and name. No difficulty whatever arises as to church government. We are both Presbyterians in deposing that episcopacy is essential to a true church, the M. E. Church being one with us here, and in holding that the New Testament teaches us only one clerical order, that of Presby-

ter or Elder, and that this name and that of Bishop, are used interchangeably in the New Testament, and in early patristics, for the same office. We have, moreover, courts very similar in organization and jurisdiction.

1. As to doctrinal standards, I affirm my conviction that there is no insuperable difficulty. Each candidate for the ministry may be received by subscription, either to the Westminster Confession, or the three standards of the Methodist Church. Of course, some on both sides would object to this, but if the two churches have a mind for union, an immense majority of both ministers and laity, would approve of this simple compromise, especially as the points held in common so far outnumber those on which we differ. If there be any obstacle as to doctrines, it will likely disappear, for the unfortunate reason that people are becoming entirely indifferent as to creeds.

2. As to the itinerancy, many Presbyterians wish for it, in some modified form, to bring together a hundred vacant pulpits and a hundred uncalled ministers, and many Methodists are desirous of a permanent pastorate. As to a permanent pastorate, why not let as many churches have it as desire it, and as to the rest, let Stationing Committees intervene with all the absolute power they are now supposed to have with us, and secure a place for every man, and a man for every place, and so leave no church unfilled, and no man idle. Personally, I would regret the surrender of the itinerancy, for it is the most effective piece of ecclesiastical machinery ever devised. The itinerancy means self-sacrifice, and self-sacrifice means success.

3. As to the name, I give up. Unfortunately, this would be the supreme difficulty, creeds and politics being very secondary to it. What would the united organization be called? Presbyterian-Methodists, or Methodist-Presbyterians, or neither? The name Presbyterian stands for a great principle, enshrined in the New Testament, and in the best pages of church history, and brought out conspicuously at the Reformation, and, moreover, to begin with, Methodists are ready to be Presbyterians in church government. On the other hand, the word Methodist, perhaps like the word Christian, a nickname at first, stands for the mightiest evangelical force in Protestantism. All the history of this unparalleled movement bringing it in the short space of one hundred and fifty years to a foremost place in Protestantism, second in numerical strength only to the Lutheran Church, would make it difficult to surrender the name. Each side would be very jealous, naturally, for its inspiring and significant designation. I would be willing to settle the difficulty by casting lots for either name, Methodist-Presbyterians, or Presbyterian-Methodists.

But, Mr. Editor, a preliminary consideration or two may be appropriate before you commit yourself to the union. Unions and wars are the result of long-cherished loves and hatreds. If we were at war now with France, Ashoda would only be an incident, an occasion, not the cause of such war. If you commit yourself to the advocacy of union with the Presbyterian Church, you must count upon facing prejudices quite outside of theological and constitutional differences. May I illustrate them? That Methodists are lacking in moral tone, that they are rash in ecclesiastical administration, that they are sadly wanting in intelligent sympathy with higher education, that Presbyterians, with all their improvement, are still cold and formal in religious life, and that many of them hate Methodism and love whisky. These will serve for samples. They are plainly served, because I know them to exist, and I know occasions for them to exist. When the spiritual and moral tone on both sides is improved, these prejudices and the cause of them will gradually disappear. There is no question such improvement is taking place, and the assimilation of the two churches is rapidly being effected, and the best people of both churches, in large numbers, are free from such prejudices.

In the meanwhile, until the theme of your symposium appears above the horizon of practical questions, we will keep the Saviour's prayer in mind, "That they all may be one." Not wishing to make any lofty profession of grace, I believe this prayer has already been answered in my heart, and I am certain in the case of thousands of others, Anglican, Congregational, Baptist and Presbyterian. We are one in the sense in which the Saviour offered this pray-

er. Denominationalism with me is no the bete noire it is with some, and yet I follow after gladly and gratefully, if it be true, as circumstances sometimes indicate, that by the union of the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches of our Dominion, nearly two millions out of her six millions of people would thus form a type of Protestantism, liberal in catholicity, intelligent in conviction, robust in morals, conservative, yet not narrow, in theory, and pre-eminently evangelical in spirit— a body as large as the Church of Rome, and three times as large as the Church of England in Canada, and which should have a most potent and favorable influence in shaping the destiny of our Dominion.

DR. CARMAN.

Your question, "What will have to be changed or removed in the Congregational, Presbyterian and Methodist Churches ere union between these bodies may be consummated?" admits, I think, of easy answer. The first thing to be removed is the lack of demand or occasion for union. When that shall have been removed, the second quickly follows, viz.: the lack of earnest desire for union. These churches, as they are, are likely doing as much for the cause of God as they would for a while do, if brought together in one body. Only on mission fields, and in sparsely-settled districts, perhaps in some cases in the villages and smaller towns, would advantages arise out of union; and even in these, so widespread is the field, no great pressure has been felt. When it is felt it will be heeded. When God, in his providence, would bring these peoples, now closely joined in spirit, into one visible organization, he will so indicate his purpose to them, and so fill them with his Spirit, that in the growing similarities in the great doctrine of the common salvation, the minor differences of polity and government will soon disappear. Meantime, we strive together, in the hope of the Gospel, and labor and pray for the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace.

REV. THOMAS B. HYDE, NORTHERN CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, TORONTO.

Before I could answer your queries intelligently, I would need to know your thoughts as to the extent of such a relationship. Assuming, however, that you mean "union" in a large and comprehensive sense, and without discussing the obstacles which at present exist, I would suggest that they might be a federation of our forces under the following conditions:

- 1st. A broad doctrinal basis, such as the one adopted by the Evangelical Alliance.
- 2nd. Recognition of the autonomy of the individual church, as far as possible.
- 3rd. A joint committee or executive to be composed of the secretaries of the various activities, such as home and foreign missions, publication, education, church extension, etc., and such others as might seem desirable, to be presided over by a chairman, elected for a year or more, who would be free to devote his whole time to the interests of the entire work.

REV. W. H. WARRER, ZION CONGREGATION CHURCH, MONTREAL.

As to your request, my first thought was, that I had no time at present to properly write of the matter. But, possibly, the fewer words the better, and so here goes; as my settled conviction:

1. The Methodist and Presbyterian Churches must abolish subscription to a written doctrinal standard as a necessity of ministerial standing, and be content to accept a general agreement on fundamentals, and to allow the candidate to express his behalf in his own words.
2. Congregationalists must yet fur-

ther develop their organization before they can act effectively and as a unit in the matter of church union.

3. All parties must become more convinced that organic union is a matter to be desired.

4. All parties must also consent that within the circumference of the uniting bond church government shall be so variable and elastic as to suit the varying conditions of time and place, and be always and everywhere the fit instrument of the life of the Spirit.

REV. F. C. HEATHCOTE, SECRETARY CANADIAN SOCIETY OF CHRISTIAN UNITY.

In response to your invitation to me, as secretary of the Society of Christian Unity, to write a letter upon the subject of Christian Union, I must explain that I do not, in any sense, claim to represent the Society, neither can I vote in its opinion.

I may however, state that the Society is made up of clergy and laymen of various communions, having in common a desire to bring about a greater manifestation of unity. We consider that the time has come when some effort may be put forth to help in clearing away misunderstanding, and bringing to light the real differences which keep Christians apart.

The object of the society is to promote the cause of unity by means of common prayer and mutual discussion of the many grave questions that surround so great a subject.

It is hoped that within our Society discussion may take place, safeguarded by sincerity and charity in our search for the truth.

[The views of chancellor Burwash of Victoria University and Principal Caven of Knox College Toronto, will appear on Monday.]

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