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WHOLE MAN FOR WHOLE GOD

SERMON by BISHOP BRENT at ST. PAUL'S*)

“He which testifieth these things saith, Yea, I come quickly. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.”—Rev. XXII. 20.

A common impulse gathers us to-day in this place. We come in order to feel the touch of God upon our lives, to be confirmed in our belief that His power has not shrunk with the ages, but that He is still a tower of defence to those who trust in Him, to be challenged by some unrealised ideal, born not of man, but of God. We perceive the brave proportions of human capacity only when we are charged with the performance of a difficult task by the vision of things to be, such as that which shall be my theme this morning—the realisation of the Unity of the Church of Christ.

THE APPROACH OF GOD TO MAN.

Consider God's impatience in behalf of man. His eagerness finds expression in the cry, “Yea, I come quickly.” He means

*) Wir veröffentlichen nach dem «Guardian» vom 16. Dezember 1910 den vollen Text des warmen und bedeutungsvollen Appells für Kirchengemeinschaft, den der hochwürdige *C. H. Brent*, D. D., Bischof der amerikanischen Kirche auf den Philippinen, von der Kanzel der St. Pauls-Kathedrale zu London im letzten Dezember, gestützt auf das Einverständnis der von mehr als hundert Bischöfen und dreihundert Priestern und Laien beschickten Generalkonvention seiner kirchlichen Gemeinschaft, an seine Hörer, und wir dürfen sagen, an die Christenheit gerichtet hat. Viele unserer Leser kennen den ernstesten und tief religiösen Mann von unserem Oltener Kongress des Jahres 1904 her, an dem er als Freund und Gast tätigen Anteil nahm. Sein Wort wird selbst in diesen Tagen, wo auch dem Friedfertigesten der Streit förmlich aufgedrängt wird, nicht ungehört verhallen; für alle Zukunft wird es seine Früchte tragen.

Red.

it. His delight is among men. His rush manward is more direct than the arrow seeking its mark, more eager than the flight of the mother-bird on homeward wing. This approach of God to man is matchless in its generosity. It is not the response of God's abundance to man's need, but rather God's abundance leaping unbidden in the direction of man's capacity. From the Protevangel, "It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel," to this the last chord in the symphony of the written Word, Divine announcement has ever anticipated human appeal. The invitation is accepted by God before it is issued by man. Can there be any surer witness to the dignity of human life than this? The effect of God's eager interest in man's affairs because they are human is to assure us that our dearest hopes and highest ideals are to reach their perfect consummation. No height is too high to scale if God is on our side, no task too impossible to undertake. We are stung into life.

GOD'S PATIENCE WITH MAN.

Side by side with God's impatience on behalf of man is His patience with man. He has never once forced His way into human life. If we are reluctant to receive Him, He waits:—

"O Jesu, Thou art standing
Outside the fast-closed door,
In lowly patience waiting
To pass the threshold o'er."

The latch is on the inside of the door, and only the human hand can lift it from within. God respects too much the liberty of will with which He has endowed manhood to interfere with its operation. He is patient in His impatience. He comes quickly, according to announcement—as quickly as we permit. Every prophecy in history is the sound of His approaching feet; every outburst of virtue is a gleam from the radiance of His face; every word of wisdom is the whispering of His counsel; every triumph over opposing forces is an echo of His might. As often as man refuses full entrance He accepts partial entrance. If the palace is closed, He waits in the park without. Be the door opened, never so little, His life enters and illumines. Does man refuse Him the symmetry of a unified Church, He seizes upon the broken order and works marvels with it. The history of time is filled with His approaches, manifestations, dartings in, caresses.

THE ASSAULT OF LOVE.

But so great, potentially, is the stature of human life that partial incarnations are inadequate. Only God, in the richness of His completeness, is sufficient for man in the richness of His possibilities—whole God for whole man. In the ripeness of time He found full entrance into human life. A body was prepared for Him. He entered humanity as every manchild enters the family—from within. The door may be bolted and barred, but no lock can keep the babe out. “The Word was made Flesh, and dwelt among us”—though only for a moment. He was thrust forth as soon as He was discovered. His foothold from the first was precarious—like that of the crag climber who clings to the face of the cliff where only birds can rest secure. In the prime of His manhood He was dislodged by cruel enemies and fell with pierced hands and bleeding feet outside the door of time. This, however, was not the end. Again, with force renewed and sympathy quickened by His human experience, He returned to the assault of love. For evermore the Spirit of God, by virtue of the Incarnation, is the Spirit of man. He seizes upon all that a sluggish, reluctant race will yield, leaving areas of luxuriance and brilliance wherever His eager cry “Yea, I come quickly” meets with the response “Amen, come, Lord Jesus.” Yes, that may not be forgotten—an urgent announcement calls for an urgent reply. In the far-off days, when Isaiah spoke and wrote, it may have been sufficient for men to wait for God; now, instead of being passive, we must hasten toward Him as the shepherds hastened to the Bethlehem Babe. Our best must be His as well as our most. We must give Him room to dwell—whole man for whole God. Nothing short is a worthy recognition of the approach of Him Who proclaims, “Yea, I come quickly.”

UNITY IN CHRISTENDOM.

Whole man for whole God—this means a corporate offering. Mere individualism is a thing of yesterday. The written record of revelation begins with a garden and ends with a city; it begins with a man and ends with man; it begins with an individual and ends with a society; it begins with a unit and ends with a unity. These days in which we live are not the beginning—they are the end. We must therefore offer God

for His foothold a unified Church and an evangelised race. Unity in Christendom is the prayer and purpose of Jesus Christ. Its desirability is beyond dispute. The need of it those who, like myself, belong to a Christian Communion none too numerous or strong, and who, like myself, wear the proud title of missionary, alone can fully appreciate. Fragments can do only fragmentary work. Do not be deceived; without unity the conversion of great nations is well-nigh hopeless. The success of Missions is inextricably bound up with unity. It has been said by some one that we need not more but better Christians. Such antitheses are unfortunate. You cannot have better Christians without having more. The effort to expand is a requisite of health, but the expansion must be of a unified Church, not of sectarian fragments.

OBSTACLES TO UNITY.

There are four main obstacles in the way of promoting unity. First, acquiescence in the broken order. Satisfaction with the moderate success of things as they are, the acceptance of mediocrity as a necessity, is fatal in the Christian life. We have fleeting glimpses of Christ, when we ought to have a glowing vision. A mutilated Christendom can never have anything better than a mutilated conception of our Lord and an impoverished influx of His power. Our broken Christendom is wholly inadequate to meet the needs of society. We have rather settled down in the conviction that unity is not a possibility, and that we must therefore make the best of the situation as we find it. Unity is possible only so far as we believe it to be so, and there can be no realisation of it or any other ideal until we crown our desire for it with our conviction that it must be. Secondly, the sense of security among great dominating Churches like the Church of England, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Orthodox Churches of the East. It is their misfortune rather than their fault if they fail to recognise the imperative need of unity. They are apt to be prejudiced in their own favour by their prestige and position. They rejoice in their strength and mistake their local for universal influence. Endowed as each is with a body of systematic theology all its own, they are in danger of worshipping their idea of God instead of God, and invoking the presence of their idea of Christ rather than Christ.

Ideas are noble, but at best they contain only a cupful of nourishment and are soon wrung dry.

“CHURCH” OR COMMUNION.

Thirdly, the misuse of the word “Church.” So far as I am aware, there is no warrant except perverted use for the application of the word Church to any existing Christian Communion in the sense it is commonly intended. The word is so majestic in what it connotes that it cannot bear the restraint of adjectival qualification beyond what has been attached to it in the language of the Creeds. A distinguishing word linked to it—like Protestant or Episcopal, for instance—is apt to contradict the essential meaning of the word. The utmost it can bear is a territorial or a national characterisation, and only then if it is applied with understanding. Its careless use obscures the catholicity of its sweep, caging men in sectarianism and removing the stinging rebuke which it for ever carries to a city that is not at unity with itself. My preference would be to term the various organic groups of Christians indiscriminately as Communions. Not one is to-day worthy of a better title. Then we could reserve “Church” for the Bride of Christ, that glorious Church, holy, without blemish, not having spot, or wrinkle or any such thing.

SUBSTITUTES FOR UNITY.

Fourthly, substitutes for unity, of which there are two principal ones, called respectively Undenominationalism and Uniformity. Undenominationalism at best can only hope to bring about a federative patchwork, “a glueing of the Churches together at the edges.” At worst it will lead us into the slough of unreality by slurring over those distinctions of conviction which call for a treatment, not of obliteration, but of preservation and synthesis. The other substitute—Uniformity—is equally disastrous. At best it is capable only of creating structural dignity and formal completeness. At worst it would rob us of our royal liberties by an imperialistic tyranny. It is organic unity that we are reaching for, not reunion. The former is from within; the latter from without. The one is fundamental, the other artificial. It is a mistake to suppose that it is desirable to reproduce the imperialistic unity of ancient times, good as it was for the moment. It is no more desirable or possible than

it would be to regain the civilisation that is past. That which is to be can be built only on that which is. There is a simple unity and a synthetic unity. The former precedes, the latter succeeds analysis. It is synthetic unity which is our goal. Our next formal or organised effort is to discover by personal conference just where we stand, and to clear the issues befogged by controversy.

THE RESOLUTIONS OF THE GENERAL CONVENTION.

The Communion which I represent, less than two months ago in its Representative Council, composed of upwards of three hundred picked presbyters and laymen and more than a hundred Bishops, adopted, without a dissenting voice, the following resolution:—

“We believe that the time has now arrived when representatives of the whole family of Christ, led by the Holy Spirit, may be willing to come together for the consideration of questions of Faith and Order. We believe, further, that all Christian Communions are in accord with us in our desire to lay aside selfwill, and to put on the mind which is in Jesus Christ our Lord. We would heed this call of the Spirit of God in all lowliness and with singleness of purpose. We would place ourselves by the side of our fellow-Christians, looking not only on our own things, but also on the things of others, convinced that our one hope of mutual understanding is in taking personal counsel together in the spirit of love and forbearance. It is our conviction that such a conference for the purpose of study and discussion, without power to legislate or to adopt resolutions, is the next step towards unity. With grief for our aloofness in the past and for other faults of pride and self-sufficiency which make for schism, with loyalty to the truth as we see it, and with respect for the convictions of those who differ from us, holding the belief that the beginnings of unity are to be found in the clear statement and full consideration of those things in which we differ, as well as of those things in which we are at one, we respectfully submit the following resolution:—Whereas, there is to-day among all Christian people a growing desire for the fulfilment of our Lord’s prayer that all His disciples may be one, that the world may believe that God has sent Him, Resolved—That a Joint Commission be appointed to bring

about a Conference for the consideration of questions touching faith and order, and that all Christian Communion throughout the world which confess our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour be asked to unite with us in arranging for and conducting such a conference."

A GLORIOUS RISK.

"What a risk!" I hear some one say. Yes, I reply, a glorious risk. It were better far for a Christian Communion to risk the loss of its distinctive character in a brave effort toward unity than to sit in idle contemplation of a shattered Christendom. At worst it would lose its eccentricities and prejudices; at best it would lose itself entirely in the splendour of unity according to the mind of Christ. But let there be what peril there may, peril for God's sake is the only safe condition for Church or Churchmen. It is more reasonable to be in peril than in security if the best things lie a hairs-breadth beyond the peril. Everything worth having is found only on the yonder side of a risk. We must have unity, not at all costs, but at all risks. A unified Church is the only offering we dare present to the coming Christ, for in it alone will He find room to dwell. Whole man for whole God is our watchword. Let us expect unity, let us think unity, let us pray for unity, let us work for unity. If we fail, it will be better to fail because we have dared great things than because we have not dared at all, so that men can say that we aimed at—

"The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth too hard,
The passion that left the ground to lose itself in the sky."
