



JOINT COMMISSION  
APPOINTED TO ARRANGE FOR A  
WORLD CONFERENCE  
ON  
FAITH AND ORDER

Ἴνα πάντες ἐν ᾧσι, καθὼς σύ, πάτερ, ἐν ἐμοὶ καὶ γὼ ἐν σοί,  
ἵνα καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐν ἡμῖν ἐν ᾧσιν, ἵνα ὁ κόσμος πιστεύσῃ ὅτι  
σύ με ἀπέστειλας.

Ut omnes unum sint, sicut tu Pater in me, et ego in te, ut  
et ipsi in nobis unum sint, ut credat mundus, quia tu me  
misisti.

*That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I  
in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may  
believe that thou hast sent me.*



UNITY OR UNION: WHICH?  
BY THE RT. REV. P. M. RHINELANDER, D.D.  
BISHOP OF PENNSYLVANIA

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## UNITY OR UNION: WHICH? \*

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*[This paper is deemed worthy of publication by the Commission of the Protestant Episcopal Church on a World Conference on Faith and Order, which, however, does not hold itself responsible for any statement or opinion herein expressed.]*

**W**HAT do we really want in our relations with our fellow Christians, Unity, or Union? Are we to work that we may be united, or to be united that we may work? Are we to be "at one" because life is in unity, or simply because strength is in union?

Here is a true distinction; a distinction, I mean, between things which really are distinct. "Life in unity" and "strength in union" are two different principles. Both no doubt are true, but they are different truths. They are true on different levels and in different sections of experience. *Two men together*

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*can cut a tree down faster than one man can cut it down alone.* That is one truth. *Branches broken from a tree will die.* That is another truth. These two truths illustrate, not one and the same law, but two very different laws. One tells us that two living beings working together can do more than one working by himself. The other tells us that a living being cannot remain alive alone; that life cannot be at all in isolation. One shows that in union there is strength; the other, that in unity is life. Here, then, is a true distinction for us, if we will think it out.

But it still remains true for us, even if we will not think it out. It is as true in concrete living as it is in abstract thinking. It is true in thought because it is first true in life. It is literally a "practical" distinction, for it controls and explains our "practice."

Union for the strength that is in it; unity for the life it gives; these are two

very common and perfectly familiar "social motives." And they are different motives. We know them both and we know them to be different. Friendship is a different thing from partnership. Friends are naturally partners and often partners are friends. But still the two words stand for two distinct relationships.

Friendship means sharing all chief things in life for the sole joy of sharing. The sharing of life and its possessions is not a side issue, but the very heart of friendship. Unity is its end and aim. Unity really exhausts its meaning. Friendship exists because love seeks an object that it may live. "He who loves not lives not." "To love is the perfect of the verb to live." These are the words of friendship. Its great first principle is simply that in unity is life.

Partnership, on the other hand, means not corporate life but common

work. It means coöperation with other people for the sake of getting something done in a speedy, gainful, or effective way. Partners need share nothing beyond their labor and their profit. Sometimes they share even these unwillingly. Their community of life is not an end but a means only. It is not really a community of life at all. "A corporation has no soul," and, speaking generally, it would be excessively embarrassed if by accident or miracle it acquired one. Partnership exists, and is sustained, sometimes in spite of friction, because each partner has a personal stake in the firm's business. That is its whole point and purpose. Partnership exists because there is strength in union.

This distinction, therefore, is a real one. It holds for thought because it holds in life.

Moreover, it is not only true but also radical. It reaches to the root. Here

we seem to have a pair of genuine roots which have borne, and still are bearing, a prolific harvest in our social life. To change the metaphor, our whole social fabric from top to bottom seems to rest upon these two foundation stones: upon contract, offensive and defensive, and upon loving fellowship, in weal or woe. As we run our finger down the long catalogue of social institutions, from the greatest to the least, from the most familiar to the most remote, we shall find, I think, a more or less complete dichotomy. On one side are all the unities of our life. On the other are all the unions of our labor.

I am concerned now with this distinction as it affects and is found operative in religion.

In religion human life is at its fullest. In religion human motives find their deepest root and freest play. In religion, therefore, we should expect to see these

parallel desires for unity and union finding their clearest and most interesting expression. Such actually is the case.

It is precisely in religious work that union is felt to be most necessary and productive. It is precisely in religious life that the individual finds his loneliness entirely intolerable.

Let us see, then, how this distinction works out in religion. First take it on its more obvious side. Take it practically or as operative in our motives. Our religious associations, however we describe them, are really formed and maintained under the stress of one or other of these two determining desires. In our religious life we are seeking either for union or for unity, all our various or varying Christian social institutions being witness.

Christians, on the one hand, combine for the strength that comes from union. There are services to be main-



tained ; there are obligations to be met ; there are good works to be done ; there are programmes or creeds to be upheld. None of these things can be done adequately unless an adequate number of people unite to do them. So “congregations” or “societies” or “churches” are formed, that these desirable results may be achieved by the strength that comes through union. Loyalty to what the union “stands for” is expected ; proved devotion to its “objects” is the test of membership. Now it is undoubtedly a great thing for Christians to be strong, if they use their strength for noble ends. And obviously strength does come by union. In recent years we have learned much in both directions. Multitudes of Christians are seeking strength for nothing else or less than that they may evangelize the world, and for the sake of so great an aim are smothering their differences that by union they may find

strength to get it done. But it must be noted that so far it is union, and not unity, which is desired. Oneness is sought as an instrument, not as an end.

On the other hand, Christians are drawn or grow together simply as Christians. Whether in the family, or in the congregation, or in the mission field, their religion means a corporate life rather than a coöperative work. Worship is "common," not because many individuals combine to offer it, but because the offerers are precisely not mere individuals but members of each other. Good works are to be done in common, not because there is a commandment binding alike on all, but because the Spirit of God is good and they are joint partakers of that Spirit. Creeds are to be upheld, not because they contain illuminating or inspiring ideas, but because there is one faith common to all, to be expressed by all. Such Christians may in their turn "co-

operate in Missions," and spend all their united strength to "evangelize the world," but always and in everything it is fellowship, or unity, they seek; more fellowship and more unity because what they have already is not enough; because they are bound to be dissatisfied till all the race is one.

So much is obvious. But there is more than this. The difference in motive points to a corresponding difference in theology. The actually operative motive that shapes our social Christianity is but the index of our working faith in God's own will and nature, in the significance of Christ and of His Gospel. The practical is also the theoretical. This is the reason why it is idle to speak of religion without dogma. As well speak of digestion without gastric juice. So to speak is to show ignorance, not of religion or dietetics, but of the primary processes of psychology on the one

hand and physiology upon the other. Fortunately it is not true to call a creed merely a reflex. But it is true that a man's creed is the reflection of, or, better, his reflection on, his motives.

Now to apply this. If practically, as Christians we are seeking union with other Christians rather than unity, it means that we regard the socialism of the Christian Gospel mainly as a programme or a task. God in Christ has suggested, sanctioned, made imperative certain readjustments and reformations by which human life and its conditions can alone become satisfying and satisfactory. A follower of Christ, that is, any one who finds himself in sympathy with the programme either in part or whole—naturally offers himself as a recruit to do the work. Such recruits, in order to get the work accomplished, combine under common leadership and use a common method. So the practice reflects the theology of Christian union.

On the other hand, if actually or practically our chief social motive as Christians is to seek to realize our unity, to fill out to its full spiritual meaning "The Fellowship of the Name," as it was called in ancient days, then theoretically our social interpretation of the Gospel corresponds. Fellowship is not a wise method but a final word. Everything is to be judged as it expresses and increases fellowship. Works or activities become mere functions of life; indeed, works cease to be works at all and become fruits—the fruits of that spiritual fellowship which alone can make life fruitful. What God has given us in and through Christ is not a moral code, still less a programme of social reformation, but, first, the revelation of the fact that Divine life itself is social; and second, along with this knowledge, grace by which men may have this life and realize it, one with the other, each with all. Here

again the practical motive that dominates Christians in their social life reveals the working theory which such Christians have as to the mind of Christ and the purpose and meaning of His life. The practical is also the theoretical. The practice reveals the theology of Christian Unity.

My point will perhaps be plainer if I take to illustrate it our familiar differences as to this thing called "Churchmanship." These differences have much deeper spiritual significance than I think we commonly appreciate. If they have seemed in the past chiefly flaming banners of noisy party strife, none the less are their roots struck deep into the soil of strong convictions—the convictions by which we really live. For our differences as to the office and function of the Church really stand for and express our differences in our social interpretation of the Gospel, and these in their turn underlie and reflect

the differences in the actual motives that draw us into our religious fellowships. The word "Church" means in its deepest sense and most deliberate use, simply the social life of Christians. The word is merely a Greek adjective meaning "belonging to the Lord." The noun to be supplied is "Ekklesia," that is, "Assembly" or "Congregation." Therefore, leaving out all borrowed uses of the term, whenever we use the word "Church," deliberately and carefully, we mean "the Lord's Society." So the view which Christians take of the Church, or, in a word, their Churchmanship, is simply and necessarily their way of making clear to themselves and others the social motive which animates their Christianity.

To go over our ground once more; if the social meaning of the Gospel is exhausted for us by the idea of coöperation; if, that is, the Gospel is simply a work, initiated and announced

by Christ, and then handed on by Him to individual Christians to be accomplished, then the society of these same Christians, or the Church, becomes merely a coöperative union; and its importance as related to the Gospel is purely derived and secondary. It is simply a partnership, and a partnership of distinctly limited liability. It is simply an instrument which at any time and at all times is to be judged as a success or failure as it is practically useful. Does it help Christians to get Christian work accomplished? Is it proving an effective instrument for the housing of the poor, for the education of the ignorant, for the stamping out of vice and crime, for the evangelization of the world? Then it can justify its existence, for means are to be judged simply as they achieve the end. A Christian Church is a union, or rather the Christian Churches are so many unions, of Christians, organized and sustained



that it or they may make Christians "strong to labor, that there be no decay, no leading into captivity, and no complaining in our streets."

But it is equally clear on the other hand that if the social motive which dominates our Christianity is a deeper thing than this, if we are entirely unwilling to regard the isolated individual either as the ultimate object of God's love or the effective agent of God's will, if the Gospel is exhaustively described in the one word "fellowship," then the Church, that is the Lord's Society, becomes synonymous with the Lord's Gospel. Religion is in terms of life and not of work. Work is a mere function, a mere sign of life. The Gospel is life. And because life is social, therefore the Gospel is a Church. For life is never complete alone. Life is in unity. In order to get an individual at all, you have to postulate the entire race of men from the beginning to the

end. The life, that life which God gives men in Christ, is social, it is fellowship. The Gospel of Christ is the Fellowship of Christ, and all we do and think and pray is for the Church's sake.

And so once more our distinction turns out to be not only a true one in and for our religious life, but radical as well. We are deep down among the roots of things. Here is no mere superficial disagreement, but a radical divergence. And I think it fairly carries us within sight of the fundamental difference that divides us. I say "the fundamental difference," not "the fundamental differences." There is really only one. A root bears many branches, but the branches are all products of the root. There are many sects in Christendom. But the root of sectarianism or schism is always and everywhere the same. All divisions come from one cause of difference. We are finding this to be strangely true, experimentally,

as we have fuller intercourse with Christians of other names than ours. We realize that the divisions between Christians no longer run vertically, but are rather horizontal. Denominational lines are growing blurred. They are difficult to explain. They are still more difficult to justify. Certainly they are not to be perpetuated. We have intimate fellowship in faith among men and women of every name, sometimes of no name at all. And yet there is a line of cleavage. We are conscious of it everywhere. It runs across all differences of name. It comes into our homes, into our pews, into our Conventions. It is very radical. It reaches to the root. If we think it out, I believe we shall find ourselves following the line I have been tracing. There is one great diversity. It is ultimate because it is a diversity as to the ultimate meaning and purpose of the Gospel. You may denote that line of cleavage

by many different pairs of contrasted terms. "Catholic or Protestant" is fairly good, but perhaps rather obtrusive and polemic. "Mystical or moral" is rather better, though still both terms are more or less involved in the jargon of the Schools. I have preferred "Seekers for Union" or "Lovers of Unity."

If we really are on the track of a fundamental difference, it surely will be a great thing for us to recognize it, to face the facts of our actual faith and of our inmost loyalty. Then at least we shall be saved the draining loss and bitter weakness of a blind struggle in which "ignorant armies clash by night." We shall have a real issue to try and test us. We shall come together noting our real and not our verbal differences. We shall be ready, by what has been called "a gracious interview of friends," to discover the real reason of our erstwhile separa-

tions, to try to overcome them, and to solve all difficulties by a common reference of what we hold to Him who holds us all. So we may hope for light on the great problem. It is often said that Christian unity is in the air. That is not altogether a word of promise. For Christian Unity is not only in the air, but it has an unfortunate way of staying there. And we who want it, want it upon earth, even though we look for it from Heaven. It seems an obvious first step, that, like the hunter or the lover, we should know at least the look and the nature of our quarry and something of its habits, before we start off in hot pursuit. Such knowledge may discourage some of us. It will on the other hand weld together with the fire of a common love and passion all those who have together caught the vision of the Bride of Christ as Christ is meaning it, and Christ's Spirit moulding it. I think the

whole of Christendom will have taken a decisive step towards the attainment of those things which belong unto her peace when all Christians of all names shall have thought out the answer to the question: "Unity or Union: Which?"

PRAYERS FOR THE PEACE AND UNITY OF  
THE CHURCH

**O** LORD Jesus Christ, Who saidst unto Thine Apostles, Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you; Regard not our sins, but the faith of Thy Church, and grant her that peace and unity which is agreeable to Thy will, Who livest and reignest God for ever and ever. Amen.

**O** GOD of Peace, Who through Thy Son Jesus Christ didst set forth One Faith for the salvation of mankind; Send Thy grace and heavenly blessing upon all Christian people who are striving to draw nearer to Thee, and to each other, in the unity of the Spirit and in the bond of peace. Give us penitence for our divisions, wisdom to know Thy truth, courage to do Thy will, love which shall break down the barriers of pride and prejudice, and an unswerving loyalty to Thy Holy Name. Suffer us not to shrink from

any endeavor, which is in accordance with Thy will, for the peace and unity of Thy Church. Give us boldness to seek only Thy glory and the advancement of Thy Kingdom. Unite us all in Thee as Thou, O Father, with Thy Son and the Holy Spirit, art One God, world without end. Amen.

**O** LORD Jesus Christ, look with pity, we beseech Thee, upon Thy Church weakened and hindered by differences and divisions; bless the effort to bring together in conference all who confess the faith of Thy Holy Name, Who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, God, for ever and ever. Amen.