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BY

H. BURN-MURDOCH
LL.D. CANTAB.



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PREFACE

In this century a sense of the need for Christian unity has steadily strengthened. A happy outcome of discussion and conference in recent years has been the discovery of closer doctrinal agreement than had been expected: but agreement does not extend to the doctrine of the Church, or connected questions of Order.

A platitude needs to be reiterated, because so many have not grasped it, that unity is not uniformity. As Dr G. W. Broomfield has lately written (*Revelation and Reunion*, p. 214), 'the order and practice of the united Church must be such as to preserve everything of real and permanent value in the organization and customs of the bodies which are now separated from one another. . . unity is to be sought not by readiness to minimize—much less to abandon—the things which distinguish us from our brethren, but rather by an eagerness to discover whatever is true and valuable in the things which distinguish them from us'. The *Appeal to All Christian People* from the Lambeth Conference of 1920 said:

The vision which rises before us is that of a Church, genuinely Catholic, loyal to all Truth, and gathering into its fellowship all 'who profess and call themselves Christians', within whose visible unity all the treasures of faith and order, bequeathed as a heritage by the past to the present, shall be possessed in common, and made serviceable to the whole Body of Christ. Within this unity Christian Communion now separated from one another would retain much that has long been distinctive in their methods of worship and service. It is through a rich diversity of life and devotion that the unity of the whole fellowship will be fulfilled.

If then unity admits of great elasticity and variety in *organization*, what is the visible and practical one-ness, the unity needed to fulfil our Lord's prayer that we may all be one that the world may believe? It has come to be increasingly recognized on all sides that the answer to this depends upon the further question, what is the true nature of the Church in the world?

This is an attempt to find an answer to that question in the teaching of the New Testament. Organism is wholly distinct in principle from organization. The Church, or new Ekklesia, was left by our Lord with no organization whatever, but He left it a living society with an organism of His provision which is still its distinguishing endowment.

The New Testament also teaches clearly that the Church is sacramental, that is to say, it has both an outward, visible, identifiable materiality, and an inward, spiritual reality; for this visible body of most imperfect saints is at the same time the invisible and mystical Body of Christ.

A paramount catholic doctrine of all sacraments is that God is not tied to them (although we are); that is conspicuously true of the sacramental Church. Grace abounding overflows all limits of sacrament and sacramental Church, but this does not make them unnecessary to us and, moreover, without them there cannot be that unity which we know to be the divine purpose for the winning of the world's belief.

An important step towards a recognition of the 'outward part' of the sacramental Church was made at the Second World Conference on Faith and Order, at Edinburgh in 1937. Agreement was arrived at 'that every sacrament should be so ordered that all may recognize in it an act performed on behalf of the universal Church', and that 'To this end there is need of an ordained ministry recognized by all to act on behalf of the universal Church in the administration of the sacraments'.

I have tried in this book to show, what seems to me plain, that the one-ness of the Church must be a humanly perceptible one-ness, not only in the time present, but also in its continuous and unbroken life in the world: we must be perceptibly one with the Church of Pentecost in order that we may also be one with our scattered brethren throughout the world to-day; unity must, as it were, be vertical in order that it may be lateral.

Through half a lifetime I have longed for unity. The thought and study of many years impel this attempt to express their outcome. Lacking many qualifications for it, I can claim one, a real understanding of, and high respect for, the wholly different outlook and opinions of others, with some of whom I have close ties of friendship, kinship, and affection.

As the table of contents shows, there are three divisions in this book:

1. The Church in the light of Scripture: a living organism, the sacramental outward of an inner and spiritual reality.
2. Continuity in the organic life of the Church through the centuries.
3. Continuity an essential of the Church and its unity.

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The second of these divisions includes a survey of what is known of the hundred years following the time of St Paul's death. The history of that rather obscure period has been the subject of much speculation and controversy. It only need be remarked here that the main theme of the book does not depend upon acceptance of an exact historical theory of that period.

On some points additional matter may be found, if desired, in notes placed at the ends of chapters; these are indicated by an asterisk in the text.

I wish to express my thanks to the Very Rev. W. Perry, D.D., who read the typescript (in 1942), and has given me wise and kindly counsel.

H. B.-M.

August 1943

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SOME ABBREVIATIONS USED FOR REFERENCE
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- Ainslie=J. L. Ainslie, B.D., Ph.D., *The Doctrines of Ministerial Order in the Reformed Churches of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*. Edinburgh, 1940.
- Anglo-Russ. Sym.*=*The Church of God: an Anglo-Russian Symposium*, by members of the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius, ed. E. L. Mascall, pref. by W. H. Frere, D.D., bishop of Truro. London, 1934.
- Bright=W. Bright, D.D., *Notes on the Canons of the First Four General Councils*. Oxford, 1882.
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- Essays on Early Hist.*=*Essays on the Early History of the Church and the Ministry*, by various writers, ed. H. B. Swete, D.D. London, 1918.
- Flew=R. Newton Flew, D.D. (Principal of Wesley House, Cambridge), *Jesus and His Church: a Study of the Idea of the Ecclesia in the New Testament*. London, 1938.
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