

The Judgment, not Reunion, of Christendom

W. Kelly.

It need not surprise anyone that, in a letter to the Archbishop of York (in 1896), an experienced and able politician of the day has expressed the hopes of such as look for a reunion of Christendom. Some were unprepared for this, and are pained at a tone throughout very deferential to the Pope, to say the least. In fact, however, Mr. Gladstone is more consistent with himself than on most of the burning questions he has ever approached. Christendom has always been a cherished idol. In this he is unchanged still.

Now, if we believe the scriptures, Christendom spiritually judged is a ruin; and this by the confession of almost every conscience when probed. The Pope, to begin with, acknowledges it in his manifold anathemas; so in effect do Mr. G. and all that yearn after reunion. Were things according to God, there would be room for neither. Much more deeply do those feel the ruin who habitually in sackcloth and ashes confess the sins which caused it. By divine constitution all the saints since Pentecost had originally but one communion. There might be thousands or myriads that believed (Acts 21: 20); but they were "the church of God in Jerusalem," in Antioch, in Corinth, in Ephesus. So it was everywhere in apostolic days. Churches in distinct provinces or countries of course there were. But the gospel even then was preached everywhere, the Lord working with those who preached (Mark 16: 20; Col. 1: 6, 23); and the believers throughout the earth were builded together as God's house, a living God's assembly, pillar and base of the truth.

On a rough reckoning of Christian profession, there are said to be 216 millions of Romanists; but there are 137 millions of Anglicans, Lutherans, Reformed and other Protestants, and 97 millions of Greeks, orthodox or others, with Nestorians, Copts, Abyssinians, etc. There are at least as many that bear the Christian name outside as within Romanism, though itself containing far more than any other single denomination. But unity there is none. Can any claim be weaker in presence of the facts? It is equally certain, that holy unity in the truth ought to have ever been, and that it has for ages ceased to be. The claim therefore is now demonstrably false, its absence a sure proof of ruin. Catholicity of the visible church is a self-complacent dream. And if apostolicity in the historic sense count, it is plain that Rome cannot vie with Eastern churches, which, planted by one or other apostle, were ruled by St. John, the last. Rome never had apostles save as prisoners or to die; the assembly therein was planted or ruled by none of them. As to this scripture is decisive.

Much is argued in a human way for succession. But what faces the believer first to last in scripture is the vanity and breakdown of man, no matter when, where, or how tested by God, no matter what the privileges conferred on man. So it was with Adam, with Noah, with Abram, etc.! with Moses, Aaron, and Israel; with Saul, David, and Solomon; with Nebuchadnezzar or any other of the Gentiles. In nothing did God fail, but sustained faith, notwithstanding failure in His own; yet man failed under each and every trial. Meanwhile God pointed to the Second Man Who not only stood perfectly, but will in the end gloriously display all the titles which crumbled away in the first man and his sons: the Last Adam, First-born of all creation, Governor of the earth, Seed of the woman and of promise, Priest on His throne, King in Zion, Son of man Whom all the peoples, nations, and languages shall serve in the age and habitable earth to come.

But is not the church an exception to the law of human failure and misery? By no means. Hence the momentous caution (and to the saints in Rome notably in Rom. 11 by the great apostle of

uncircumcision), that they should not be wise in their own conceits. If the professing Gentile did not continue in God's goodness, "thou also shalt be cut off," as the Jew had been. Are any so blind, hard, or high, as to say that Christendom has continued in His goodness? Will the Pope affirm it of half the baptised? Will the Protestant of the Romanist majority? Will the pious Anglican say it of his own community? Will a God-fearing Nonconformist plead, Not guilty, for his society or for any other? But if it be so, scripture (without a single qualifying word in any other passage, with many and even more solemn menaces elsewhere) lays down inflexibly, "thou also shalt be cut off."

Christendom, mother and daughters (Rev. 17: 5), falls under the universal sentence. God's ways with the faithful fail now no more than ever; God's purpose of grace will be established in Christ and the church on high beyond all the power of the enemy. But there is no difference from the Jew in the Gentile as to responsible profession on earth. The one exception is the Lord Jesus, Who will give effect to this as to every other design of God in the coming day. He, not the Pope, is the head of the body, the church; He Who is the beginning, first-born from the dead (for it is in this condition, not as incarnate merely, that church relationship begins), that in all things He might have the pre-eminence.

Let none deceive in any way. The day will not be, as the apostle assures, except the falling away, the apostasy, first have come (not reunion but apostasy, unless indeed the two coalesce) and the man of sin have been revealed, the son of perdition (2 Thess. 2). Those who believe with Luther and Calvin and Knox, with Cranmer and Jewel and Parker, with Baxter and Howe and Owen, that Romanism is the apostasy and the Papacy the man of sin, must profoundly regret the aged statesman bowing before Pope Leo XIII., and deprecating that which the power behind the Vatican will demand in their never-failing pride and the unslumbering thirst after universal domination for their chief. But while it is sheer unbelief to doubt that Rome is the harlot of the Apocalypse, a more audacious portent will be the issue of the baptised, including Popery and Protestantism and Jews too, in a more complete apostasy, and in the exaltation of the lawless one whom the Lord will destroy by His shining forth, and thus introduce the days of heaven on earth, as He alone is competent and worthy and fore-appointed.

With this agree all the oracles of the New Testament as of the Old. The darnel (Matt. 13) ruined the crop; but there is no remedy sanctioned till the Son of man judges in the consummation of the age (13: 27-43). As in the days of Noah and of Lot, so it will be when the Son of man is revealed (Luke 17), not reunion but judgment of the quick. 1 Tim. 4 and yet more strongly 2 Tim 3 prove non-continuance in God's goodness, and therefore the necessity for excision (as in Rom. 11). And what mean 2 Peter 2, Jude, 1 John, and the Revelation? Even 1 Peter 4: 17 declared the time come for judgment to begin at the house of God.

Individuals may be through grace delivered. But evil as a whole once insinuated abides worsening till divine judgment; which assuredly is nigh, as the Lord is ready to judge living and dead. The hope of reunion for Christendom is not only unwarranted by one word, but opposed to the uniform testimony, of the Lord and His apostles. It springs from fallen self; which first departs from God's will, and then neglects or defies His word, never abandoning vain trust in man. The prophets declare that God will in sovereign grace restore Israel. The New Testament is equally explicit that He will destroy, not restore, Babylon.

How can sober man expect her who says in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall in no wise see mourning, to quit her spurious throne, and to betake herself to the dust in repentance? Now especially, that they have set up an impeccable woman and an infallible man as their new calves of gold? Does her forehead yet blush for worship in one form or another to the virgin and the angels, to

dead men's bones and clothes, to the crucifix and the wafer? Is she ashamed of a celibate priesthood with its auricular confession and other horrors direct and indirect? Does she repudiate her pretended transubstantiation, and her real enmity to scripture reading? Has Rome delivered herself from that lie in her right hand, the Mass? On her own showing it is a propitiatory sacrifice for the living and the dead. This would be, according to scripture, a sacrament, not of the remission of sins (as the Lord's supper announces), but of their non-remission. Is it not a sacrifice avowedly going on day by day, with just the same proof of inefficiency as in Jewish sacrifices, which the Epistle to the Hebrews contrasts with the offering of Christ's body once for all (Heb. 9, 10), and its result now to the believer? For where remission of sins is, "there is no more offering for sin." This the gospel proclaims, and the Mass contradicts: a different gospel, which is not another.

What then can one think of Anglicans listening to Rome, when their own Articles of Religion (xxxii.) pronounce that the sacrifices of Masses are "blasphemous fables and dangerous deceits?" and (xix.) that Rome "hath erred not only in their living and manner of ceremonies, but also in matters of faith?" Has not the profound and progressive alteration of the last half-century in the Anglican body been a return not to "that which was from the beginning," but to the rites and doctrines of unreformed Christendom in East and West? Has it not led to this retrograde letter by Mr. G.?

If you value scripture, if you cleave to the gospel, if you have redemption in Christ, if you honour the Son as the Father, if you know that corporately you are God's temple and your body a temple of the Holy Spirit, beware of reunion with the city of confusion, doomed to destruction as God is true. Beware even of looking back, lest you become a pillar of salt. For God is not mocked, and the Lord may be provoked to jealousy.

W.K.

Since this warning was written in 1896, the outcry for the Reunion of Christendom has been continued in ever-widening circles and in ever-increasing volume and intensity by religious and political leaders alike. Scripture foretells that this coalition will be formed, and that it will flourish externally for a while, but that it is doomed to a spectacular destruction by the judgment of the Lord. Mr. Kelly's solemn warning is re-issued with an earnest desire that its readers may avoid all contact with this unhallowed scheme.

The upsurge of the so-called ecumenical movement, nurtured by the liberal and modernistic World Council of Churches, together with the call of Pope John for greater tolerance and prayers for a moving together of the Protestant and Roman Catholic bodies, make this challenging article even more relevant to our day.

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