

Lord Halifax and the reunion of Christendom

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LORD HALIFAX

AND

THE REUNION OF CHRISTENDOM¹⁾.

One of the characteristic features of our times is the tendency of small political bodies to unite, to agglomerate. The same tendency is felt in religious spheres, in various Christian Churches and communities, and it is a good, a happy symptom. Unity in Christian life would of course vastly improve and enlarge its activity. It would not only save a great amount of strength, spent, now, in warfare and division, but would give the Church the opportunity of devoting her christianising power wholly in a right direction, for the benefit of mankind, and to laying the foundation-stone of the Kingdom of God on earth. Reunion questions, then, are being ventilated everywhere, in every Church; and of course nobody can utter a word against that grand and holy idea. The difficulty begins with its *application*. It is not an easy task, to find out one's way between Scylla and Charybdis, between the sand-banks and reefs of ignorance, pride, and egotism, and to select the best of the propounded *criteria* and *modi procedendi*, which unhappily are very different and sometimes contradictory.

One of the foremost men among those who have taken up schemes of reunion is Lord Halifax, a man of high standing and culture, who has lately had an interview with Pope Leo XIII. and could judge the state of things by personal experience. What are the conclusions the noble Lord arrives at? He seems

¹⁾ Extract from the *Anglican Church Magazine*, Aug. 1896, p. 283-290.

hopeful;—such, at least, is the general impression the reader gets from the article in the *Nineteenth Century* ¹⁾ upon which I wish to base a few remarks, an article full of good, Christian ideas and feeling. Let us see if the hopes correspond with the *data*.

What is Reunion of Christendom? What does 'union of Churches' mean? It is not, as Lord Halifax justly remarks (*Nineteenth Century*, p. 869), a mere alliance, or a federation of independent Churches professing divergent creeds, but a union founded upon the profession of *one* faith, with only such differences with regard to matters of discipline and practice as might rightly be acquiesced in. Quite true. The 'united' Churches, while preserving their autocephality, must form a close and complete *unit*, with *one faith* and *one head*—Christ. Though accepting the same common basis, the faith of the undivided Church, they must preserve their distinct life, their freedom *ad intra*. Unless that autonomy, that complete autocephality be kept in its fulness, the very character of the union changes, is destroyed and lost. All these statements are, I believe, truisms, and nobody will object to them. Of course, the Church, by the organ of its legal representation, can give to one of her members (and in point of fact gave it to the Bishop of Rome) certain privileges of precedence; but these rights, being *de jure* not *divino sed ecclesiastico*, can be abrogated by the Church, as legally as they have been given. But whatever may be the nature and extent of these privileges, they must not alter the nature of the union, which is a free one, or exceed the rights of 'primacy among peers' (*primus inter pares*).

Now, can we expect, as Lord Halifax does, to see these ideas shared by a Pope—not only by an Innocent III., or a Gregory VII., or (the likeness though ludicrous is defensible) Pius IX., but even by a good-natured Clement XIV. or a skilful diplomatist like the present Pope? Of course Leo XIII. will do his utmost. He will twist, as much as possible, the wording of the syllabus and the *constitutio dogmatica* of 1870; he will avoid (as he usually does) speaking about dogmas. Yet finally he will be obliged to avow that *union with Rome* is *submission to Rome*. According to the papal theory he cannot, since 1870, be only *primus inter pares*. His primacy is no longer the

¹⁾ The *Nineteenth Century* for May, 1896: 'The Reunion of Christendom,' By the Rt. Hon. Lord Halifax.

primacy which was current in the old life of the undivided Church; it is now the most despotic power possible, extended to the very limits of the material and immaterial worlds; it is the fullest Almightyness, from which there can be no escape, neither on earth, nor in purgatory, neither in this life, nor in the life to come. The difference between the power belonging to each of the members of the projected union and the power of a man personally infallible, having the right to decide questions of morals and dogmas according to his own opinion, *non autem ex consensu Ecclesie*, is not only enormous in degree, in quantity, but also in nature, in quality. A *limited* power, however great it may be, is out of comparison with an unlimited one, authorized to explain, to modify and (theoretically as well as practically) to reduce the rights of others to a mere shadow, to zero. Union with an element of this sort would be a sham, a tyranny of the worst kind, and I strongly doubt whether the Anglican Church would accept such a position. Anglicanism is the result of a protest against Roman encroachments; and although the political power of Rome is crushed and destroyed for ever, and England has no reason whatever to fear in that direction, still the great reason of the protest exists—the tendency of Rome to crush the autonomy of the Western Churches, transforming them into mere bishoprics, without freedom or power; while it seems to me that the theological difficulties are now even greater than in Henry VIII.'s time. As for the East—any union with modern Rome is absolutely out of question.

I will not dwell upon the question of Infallibility, as defined by the Vatican Council. It has been so thoroughly studied, in all directions, from all points of view, that there remains no possibility whatever of doubting the true meaning, the range, the *portée* of the definition of the new papal prerogative of July 18, 1870. Hardly any Roman theologian, indeed, will hold the Vatican ground to its full, logical extension. Nearly all of them try, as Germans say, to break off its point (*ihm die Spitze abzubrechen*), to lessen its importance, by cutting from the official wording its most characteristic part, the end, "*Non autem ex consensu Ecclesie*," or by adding the important and wholly arbitrary gloss, that these last words are an academical expression, conferring upon the Pope a mere

theoretical right of which His Holiness will never make any use.

Does Lord Halifax realize all the difficulties inherent in any measure of union with the *actual* papacy? Does he realize that the possessor of infallibility will hold quite a different position from all the other members or heads of the “united Churches”; that a primacy endowed with such powers will be at once raised to an absolute dominion; that with such a Primus the ‘parity’ of all other representatives of reunited Christendom would perish? Roman theologians say that the Pope will never carry his rights into practice, or that, the Pope being infallible, unerring, will only decree what is just, he will only declare what is true. But are such arguments worth discussing? Are they not an evident *petitio principii*? And where is there any pledge of forbearance?

Some friends of reconciliation and union with Rome, aware of the insuperable difficulty created by the new dogma, affirm that, after all, the Vatican Council has been prorogued, is not definitively closed, that we cannot yet judge of its final decisions, that, after resuming its sittings, the Œcumenical Council may put forth explanations, limitations, modifications, making the new dogma more acceptable, palatable. How can we believe in the possibility of such a metamorphosis? The necessary prorogation of the Œcumenical Council was a safety-valve, and is now used as a loophole. True, the late Pius IX. was the opposite of Leo XIII. He was a narrow-minded fanatic, adverse to all compromise, and deeply convinced of his infallibility: “*La chiesa son Io,*” he declared. The real promoters of the dogma, however, were cautious and skilful men. They foresaw the impossibility of carrying their monstrous child without strong opposition from the learned bishops of the Council; and they were right. The overwhelming majority of these prelates spoke strongly and voted against the new dogma, some of them even fleeing from the Council to avoid the voting. All this the promoters foresaw. They even foresaw the possibility of secessions from Rome under the immediate pressure of the struggle. The necessity for a safety-valve was obvious, and so the ‘prorogation’ of the Council was determined upon¹).

¹) The *official* reason alleged was the struggle with the Italian Government.

The want of character—not to say of honesty—prevented the anti-infallibilist bishops from secession, from protesting in a really Christian and manly way. Presently they *laudabiliter* submitted, and so the ‘prorogation’ of the Council, now useless as a safety-valve, became a loophole, which is used sometimes with a certain success by the supporters of the new dogma. When pressed too hard—too logically—by their opponents, they say: “Well, you may be right in your logical development of the new dogma, but the Council is not yet closed. Subsequent explanations may put everything into order.” Is it worth while to discuss such arguments?

But let us return to the central point of the question. Lord Halifax believes that, after all, “the dogma of infallibility (p. 861) is not what infallibilists and anti-infallibilists thought at first.” Strange indeed! Is it possible to admit, as Lord Halifax does, that a definition made by more than 600 bishops, headed by the Pope and led by the Jesuits (who are certainly not wanting in intellect!), could have been couched in such doubtful terms that both parties were deceived, and could not “at first” find their way through its clouds and fogs?

The wording of the celebrated ‘Constitution’ is not at all uncertain. It runs thus: “*Romanum Pontificem cum ex cathedra loquitur, ... doctrinam de fide vel moribus ... definit, ... ea infallibilitate pollere qua divinus Redemptor Ecclesiam Suam in definienda doctrina de fide vel moribus instructam esse voluit, ideoque ejusmodi Romani Pontificis definitiones ex sese, non autem ex consensu Ecclesie irreformabiles esse.*” The Jesuits knew well what they wanted. They certainly did not want a fresh edition of the lame and timid Gallican attempt of 1683—an infallible Pope *united* and *acting* with the Church represented by the infallible Council. Has Lord Halifax forgotten the hatred, the contempt of men like Count J. de Maistre and Veillot for the Gallican theories? No; the Infallibilist party wanted a good, clear, unflinching Infallibility, *and they have got it!* If, instead of reading Cardinal Manning’s comment (p. 861), Lord Halifax had read the *Constitutio dogmatica*, he would have seen that the Pope, speaking *ex cathedra*, is not at all bound to take “all necessary means to ascertain the truth,” or to be “in union with the episcopate.” He would have seen that he

is bound *by* nothing, though he is said to be bound *to* the Church, to be united *with her*. But how? As her head. The head certainly does not walk separately from the body; but who decides upon the road, its length, its direction? Does the head consult the legs or arms? It decides *ex sese*, not *ex consensu corporis*; and Pope Pius IX. had, after 1870, the fullest right to say, "*La chiesa sono Io.*" Lord Halifax (p. 861) justly remarks: "How the truth is arrived at is a detail." Of course it is, *provided it be the truth*; but that is exactly the question at issue. We, Easterns, Old Catholics, Protestants, and Anglicans, believe that in consulting the Church (*viâ* Œcumenical Councils), we are sure to "arrive at the truth," whereas in consulting the Pope we are not.

And where, I repeat, is the guarantee that the infallible Primate of reunited Christendom not only will never err—as did, for instance, his predecessor, Honorius—but that he will never make use of his authority for proclaiming new dogmas without consulting the Church; that he will never trespass the conditions of the reunion act?

All this, however, does not discourage Lord Halifax. "In regard of reunion with Rome," he says (p. 858), "I cannot believe that it is so difficult as is thought by some... Much can be obtained by the determination *on both sides*, not to claim over and above what is *strictly de fide*." But where is to be found the unmistakable standard of truth? Solely in the dogmatic teaching of the undivided Church. But will Rome accept such a view? Will she consent to reconsider all new dogmas, avowing that they are only pious opinions? Lord Halifax gives an illustration of how both sides could arrive at an understanding: "To suppose," he says, "that it pleased God, in view of the merits of her Son, to extend to His blessed Mother in a greater degree the same grace which, we know from Scripture, it pleased Him to confer on St. John the Baptist, is surely not a proposition which of itself need alarm anyone." ... "*If it would please God*" ... the blessed Virgin "*may* have been filled with the Holy Ghost from the moment of her conception." Most certainly, *if God would*; but the question is whether *it did please*, and if the holy Virgin *was*, etc. All these are suppositions, opinions, which can be safely rejected. Lord Halifax acutely sees the difficulty, and tries to escape it in a skilful, if

not very successful, way. "No doubt," he says, "the difficulty of the authority to *impose* such a belief remains." That is exactly the point, the insuperable difficulty. What answers Lord Halifax? He says that the Anglican Church, too, has imposed XXXIX. Articles, containing a variety of propositions *outside of the Creeds*, upon her clergy, *statements not to be contradicted*, so she need not scruple to acquiesce in a doctrine which can claim the support of so large a portion of the Western Church. Of course it is a strong retort, a *Tu quoque* to Anglicanism. But what is the use of it? Instead of one difficulty, Lord Halifax shows two. The Immaculate conception is, according to Rome, a thing "not to be contradicted." Such are, also, according to Anglicanism, the XXXIX. Articles. Both are to be swallowed, the latter by Anglicans, the former by Romans. But do these difficulties become more palatable by such a *Do ut des* argument? I doubt it.

A desire to come to an understanding often leads parties to put aside fundamental difficulties, and, beginning with secondary ones, to minimize them. But what is the use here of discussing secondary points, when these difficulties, which are the stumbling block in all endeavours after union with Rome, remain? The fundamental questions to be discussed first, are: Is the Pope infallible *without* the Church? Has he the right to proclaim a dogma *without consulting the Church*? Will Rome unite with other Churches *upon equal terms*?¹⁾ We must begin by that. Of course, the criterion of the discussion is the teaching of the undivided Church, the "*quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus creditum est*" of St. Vincent.

¹⁾ The question of the validity of Anglican Orders, which has been studied by a commission of Roman and Anglo-Roman experts, is of no importance in the question of the reunion of the Churches if the parties cannot come to an agreement in dogma. By a remarkable coincidence, the same question has been thoroughly studied by one of our foremost theologians, Prof. Sokolof (Moscow Academy). I believe the final result of his study will be favourable to the validity of Anglican Orders. It is difficult to say what will be the result of the Anglo-Roman conferences; but the position of the Pope is a strong one. If he find it in accordance with his plans, he may, without troubling himself about any result the Commission could arrive at, proclaim the Orders valid. If he can *ex sese* proclaim whatever he likes, or that he finds useful, he can give with the greatest ease the fullest validity to Anglican Orders, and he will surely do so, upon the condition that Anglicans accept his supremacy, without looking too closely into what supremacy may mean in papal language.

If I speak about these difficulties it is by no means to aggravate, to magnify them, or to create new ones, but to show a surer way to get rid of them all. I believe that every attempt in a wrong direction, every failure, becomes a check to future efforts, a discouragement for times to come. In making these few remarks on Lord Halifax's Christian-minded, but I fear too sanguine, article, I only have the intention of pointing out a safer way to arrive at the desired end. I believe we must begin by the study and the comparison of the *fundamental truths* of the Churches to be united, and to compare these truths with those of the undivided Church. Lord Halifax proposes what may be termed the analytic mode of action, reasoning from the consequences, the smaller facts, the actual position of things to their principles. I would propose the synthetical mode, as being surer, if longer. I hasten to add, that, though I do not share the hopes of Lord Halifax, I deeply sympathize with his noble and Christian activity.

A. KIRÉEFF.

Pavlovsk, July 1896.
