

## XV. - Spiritual Unity.

It shall be one flock and one shepherd. JOHNNES 10:16.

The Mission has grasped the high idea that it is about the world, about humanity, about all people and nation in the Christian dispensation, from the beginning and has never lost sight of it.

It never lost sight of it. It has gone to the most remote regions, and has sought out countries where there was nothing to be gained and only the Gospel to be brought. It did not do so only in the 19th and 20th centuries, but from the very beginning, and the further one penetrates into the interior of Asia, the more one encounters historical data that bear witness to the mission previously carried out. In the middle ages, that great work did not stand still at all. After the discovery of America, they threw themselves into the new world. At the end of the 18th century, love for the natural peoples came to the fore alongside the Mission, especially in England, and for a short time it rivalled it in the Aboriginal Societies, but without being able to match it, and soon it was completely overshadowed by it. It was especially in the 19th century that the Mission of all churches reached its zenith, and at least as much as better communication and more frequent trade, it is the Mission that has broadened our understanding of the world and revived the sense of unity of the whole human race among us. The whole of this missionary activity is the result of Jesus' command to teach all nations and of his ordinance that his Gospel should be preached to the ends of the earth, but even more so from the powerful action that flowed from that word, how the inclusion of the whole world and of our entire family in our human endeavors, far from standing in opposition to the basic idea of Christianity, arose from it and was powerfully confirmed by it. What is now being done out of material interest, as a result of the ever-expanding commercial movement to open up the entire world through traffic, amounts to nothing more than the continuation of what Christianity had begun for centuries with the spiritual intention of hearing psalms, ascending from the ends of the earth, giving praise and worship to the One who called this entire earth into existence from nothing, and who created mankind as a unity on its soil. Yet more than once the Missionary movement and the trade movement have led to conscious or unconscious cooperation. Sometimes the Mission led the way and trade followed, other times the trade movement led the way and it was she who promoted the preaching of the Gospel. English missionaries in particular have more than once entered unknown regions, especially Africa, to open the way for England's political influence. At home the trade may have looked down on the Mission for a time, but now this has

changed, and here as well as almost everywhere else the Mission is now highly esteemed by the trade and even by the government, not of course for its results in the spiritual field, but because it opens up access to the lives of tribes still alien to us, makes contact with these tribes easier for commerce and for the government, and isolates in the converts a group of natives on whom the government can rely in moments of tension. Our East India Company has from time immemorial seriously promoted not only the preaching of the Gospel but also the Christianization of the natives in our Archipelago. Now the population of Amboina is, as a result of that old preaching, almost entirely Christian, and even for the army our government takes sides with these Christian natives, because they are men one can count on. Had this preaching been carried on more forcefully, and also in the 19th century maintained with more solidity especially on the Outer Islands, Islam would probably never have penetrated there, and our government would now be much more firmly rooted. On New Guinea, Sumba and other islands the mission is still the pioneer who establishes the influence of the Netherlands, and even in the political field all parties here at home agree more and more on the high value of the mission. Not least through the translation of the Scriptures into the languages of these peoples, access to these nations has been made easier and the unity of our human race has also been better expressed in the genealogy of languages.

Just as the Christian religion joyfully welcomes our increased power over Nature as a fulfillment of a divine ordinance, and the extension of our knowledge in all spheres of life is desired by Christianity and Christianity is flattered, so too, and even more strongly, may it be said of the incorporation of the whole world into our human action, It is no other than the working out of a lofty idea, which first came to the fore through the Christian religion, and which, in connection with trade and colonization, is still continuing to elucidate the true insight into the unity of our human race and into the regiment of the Lord of our God on all this earth.

On the other hand, it was different with the Church of Christ itself. In her a unity was announced that would rise high above the division and splitting of humanity into races, nations and peoples. Babel's confusion of tongues had brought about that division and splitting, as if by God's will. Gods would be the unity of the regiment over all the earth, and never could the unity of that regiment rest with a human ruler. Babel's confusion of tongues was an intervention of God to prevent the political unity of the world empire. Nevertheless, the ruler of the world has always sought to restore the unity of the world regiment under one human ruler. Time and again mighty rulers have risen up, who with fire and sword drove out the

surrounding nations, rendered them powerless and incorporated them into their empire, in order to establish one mighty world empire. This idea had already been put forward by the kings of Persia; under Alexander the Great the Greeks adopted it from the Asiatic; and finally, the emperors of Rome succeeded in temporarily establishing it over the more familiar part of the world. Imperial Rome lived in the conviction that the whole world was subject to Rome. From Imperial Rome this idea was taken up again by Charles the Great, and after him the old German emperors tried again to realize this comprehensive idea. Napoleon, too, was pregnant with the same idea. In three parts of the world, this unique general had fought with his troops. Even today, the idea of a world empire is not foreign to British imperialist politicians. And to add to this, at present the same idea is revived in an entirely different form, now that many people cosmopolitically dream of uniting all peoples and nations in one large world republic. All these attempts to oppose the divine decree that humanity should live on dividedly in nations and peoples with the proud idea that we humans are eminently capable of bringing the entire human race to its highest power under one rule and one right.

On the other hand, the unity of mankind, already willed by God, is a spiritual unity, the one holy, universal Church of Christ, which, acting in all nations and among all peoples, would express a limited, a different, a spiritual, but precisely because of that, a higher unity. And if one imagines for a moment that this ideal had been realized, and that all those who profess Christ as King could act as one, under one Council, over all the earth and among all peoples, one can hardly imagine the influence and power in the spiritual sphere that would emanate from this one Church of Christ. To think only of the Mission, it is clear as day how nothing breaks down the influence of the Mission as much as the appearance in the heathen country of the Mission of three or four Churches, which deny each other the light in their eyes, and precisely because of that make a very unappetizing impression on the indigenous population. At the unhappy hour, however, the realization of this high and beautiful ideal was broken by the fact that the first Christian emperor declared the Christian religion to be a state religion, made the Church a state church, and thus bound the freedom of Christ's Church in state bonds. It is Byzantineism that by this means broke the unity of the Church once for all, and in an almost irreparable way. The Church was destined, as a spiritual unity, to stand high above the divisions of our gender into nations and peoples, but it had to remain free from the narrow confines which the state system maintained among these different peoples. The Church had to remain universal, and precisely because

of this it had to bind the national diversities together in higher unity. By locking up the Churches themselves in the State and making them a national asset, which was entirely contrary to this, Byzantineism deprived the Church of Christ of its high ideal in its position independent of the national community. This broke its power, and however much one may avenge in Rome the desire, as a spiritual power, to make national life and government in the various States dependent on itself, it is to be commended that the Bishops of Rome have always endeavoured to prevent the nationalization of the Church and to maintain the inspiration of a Church which, as a world Church, would guarantee spiritual unity to all nations. This did not succeed, because only the smaller part of Christendom remained in Rome's unity. First the Greek Church fell away, then in the 16th century the Churches of the Reformation left Rome's unity; entirely apart from the small groups that lead a zealous existence in Abyssinia, Egypt, Syria and Asia Minor. Whether this could have been prevented cannot be examined in this paper. Perhaps the unity would have been maintained if the Bishops of Rome had taken a purer spiritual view of it, but in any case, it must be acknowledged without question that it was above all the Byzantine idea of Caesaropapy which, reviving among the Eastern and Slavic peoples, gave new strength to the idea of Emperor Constantine, contrary to the basic principle of the Gospel, and once again brought it to power. It was certainly like that in Russia, in Turkey and in Greece, but also the Churches of the Reformation are far from free in this respect.

In the 16th century it was not least the princes of Germany who promoted the Reformation in their countries and Luther, grateful for that support, did not see clearly enough the danger for the purified Churches. It was the Byzantine idea of Emperor Constantine which had become powerful again due to the influence of the jurists in Germany, especially in the courts. The German princes, brought up in these ideas, felt impeded by the influence of the Bishop of Rome on their subjects. They wished to free themselves from this influence and knew no better than to take the place of the Chief Bishop in the manner of Emperor Constantine. The title of Chief Bishop was even adopted, and to this day the German princes are still *summus episcopus* in their national church. This naturally led to the Church becoming a separate church in each country, to its being nationalized again and to its being confined within the narrow confines of national life. Any attempt to have the Churches of the various States regain their unity and regiment in one common Council was soon abandoned. Thus, the regiment of the Church became a branch of state service, its own spiritual character was ignored, its independence was lost.

The rule of *cuius regio eius religio* was adopted, which means that whoever gave orders in the country actually had to decide to which religion the people should belong. Every subject had to practice the religion of the Sovereign. The idea of the Church merged into the idea of the people. And finally, not even the faintest trace remained of the powerful idea in Scripture to embody, in the midst of the division of the peoples, the unity of our gender in the one, universal, Christian Church of Christ. And it is true that one has felt the error of this school and that later, under the power of the so-called Irenicism, numerous attempts have been made to restore the unity of the Churches, but, without distinction, all these attempts failed. The Churches were incorporated into the State, nationalized in the Byzantine sense, and the princes did not let go of the spoils they had taken. The Caesarian therapy retained the upper hand.

At home the Remonstrant group tried the same thing, but the Calvinist spirit resisted. Not enough, it is so. The coincidence of our liberation war against Spain and the Reformation movement has also resulted in our resigning ourselves to too narrow a national band, has perpetuated the State Church and has made the spiritual character of the Churches non-existent. But even though we also suffered damage, the worldly character that the Synod of Dordrecht bore shows how the spiritual worldly unity of Christ's Church at home was not abandoned. It was deeply felt that the truth was all-embracing, and that therefore the churches in the Netherlands had neither alone nor in their own power to decide about the truth. All the foreign Churches of the Reformed confession therefore appeared at the Synod of Dordrecht together with the Dutch Churches, and although here too not everything was golden, the idea of the unity of the Church in the midst of the diversity of nations was nevertheless maintained; and had it been possible to give expression to this lofty idea in the future, the course of our history would have been very different. Soon, however, the States regained supremacy, no general Synod was allowed to convene, and thus our Churches also crumbled from the world Church and became increasingly nationalized. Not in the good sense, that our national life was more and more permeated by the spirit of Christ's Church, but, quite differently, in the harmful sense that even the connection with the foreign Reformed Churches was more and more loosened, that we formed a Church group on our own, and that we no longer felt that we were a link in the great chain of Churches, with which Christ surrounded the whole of Europe. From this it must also be explained, that king William I, with the best intentions, as Sovereign, arrogated to himself the authority to lay down the law to the Reformed

Churches, and created the state creativity of the synodal system, under which so many Churches still suffer.

All this now hangs together. According to God's will and ordinance, the division of mankind into nations and peoples must continue to exist and is intended to enable the peoples to lead their own national existence, and to have them develop in that own national existence those qualities and gifts for the benefit of the whole human race which God has especially entrusted to each of those nations and to each of those peoples who have become historical. But precisely in this sharing the need remained to give a higher expression to the unity of mankind. This was then tried in a counter-productive way in the various empires, which were founded by world conquerors, but which disappeared just as quickly. And then the Christ appeared, in order to give visible expression to that much-needed spiritual unity for our human race, in the midst of national divisions, through the foundation of His one Church. Under the Apostolate, and as long as the persecutions continued, this spiritual unity also prevailed in three parts of the world, but at an unhappy hour the Emperor Constantine destroyed Jesus' high and holy idea by confining religion to the State again, and binding it to the authority of the sovereign of the country. The nationalization of the various Churches pushed back the high idea of Christ, and even now we sometimes hear cries that the title of "Father Church" could ever be a title of honor for the Body of Christ. It is this which has led the world, without the Church of Christ, to try again to seize the lost unity of our lineage, and it is the faster communication and the network of trade movements through which one now, eager for internationalism, tries to realize this unity in the material field. It is a disgrace to the Church of Christ that what it was called to accomplish, but only on the spiritual plane, is now being tried without her, and this on the material plane. But even this humiliation can bring healing, on the condition that the Church humbles herself, does not oppose what is happening outside of her, and pursues the unity of the Church of Christ throughout the world as a holy ideal. And pursuing it, not by pulling Christ down to the lower rank of religious genius or moral leader, but by standing up again with united strength for the spiritual Kingship of Christ.