

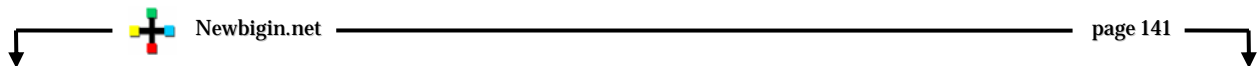


Twenty-Five Years of C.S.I.

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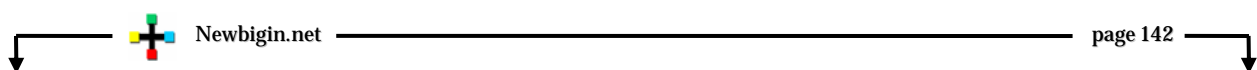
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An atomic bomb works by fission the breaking up of a unity; a nuclear bomb works by fusion. Both fission and fusion can produce heat. When I was a theological student I read about the famous Disruption of 1843, when more than half of the ministers and members of the Church of Scotland left the establishment, surrendered 100 per cent of the money and property, and formed the Free Church of Scotland. People talked about 'the glow of the Disruption'. During the months that followed the Union of Churches in 1947 I often found myself thinking of 'the glow of the Union'. There was a wonderful sense of warmth and joy - born of newly discovered riches in the experience of other Churches; of the excitement of thinking things out afresh in the light of a new unity.

I used to feel it especially as a. new bishop going round the villages of Madura and Ramnad districts visiting congregations which had been quite separate from each other and knitting them into the new unity of the Diocese.

Inevitably that particular glow wears off. We take unity for granted and go on to think about other things. This is natural but it is good to remember that in 1947 this was something completely new in Christian history, object of exaggerated fears and hopes all over the world. It is good also to remember the way in which union has been extended by the addition of the North Tamil Church Council in 1954, the Christian Reformed Church in 1958, the Kannada Pastorates of the Bombay Diocese in 1963, and just recently the Bombay Karnatak and South Kanara Councils of the United Basel Mission Church. It is true that there have been two much regretted (and much advertised) secessions - of some members in Madhya Kerala in 1966 and in Trichy-Tanjore

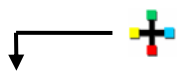


in 1969 - but both of these have proved to be ineffective movements which show no sign of giving rise to living churches. In general we can say that the process of union has gone on. Those prophets who foretold twenty-five years ago that the CSI would fall to pieces like a 'Pantomime horse' have been proved wrong.

On the other hand, those who feared that union would mean the creation of a vast bureaucratic monolith have also proved wrong. Until 1964 the Synod had no full time officer except one clerk! Even now, the Synod office is an extremely modest establishment. The power lies with the Dioceses and they have been unanimous in resisting all attempts at centralisation. Our friends in the mission boards overseas would often find it easier to deal with one office instead of 17, and there are no doubt things which could be done better by a single central office. But it is probably wise that the CST remains extremely loosely-knit, provided that in each diocese the work of the Church is tackled as a single task. I think it can be said that this is happening.

This administrative decentralisation has not, I think, weakened in any way the values of unity - except perhaps in those dioceses such as Tirunelveli and Madhya Kerala where only one tradition is represented. All of us have been changed by the experience of unity. At ecumenical conferences the delegates from CSI have had something unique to contribute during these past years, and it has been recognised. And at inter-church discussions, such as those with the Lutherans, it has been obvious that there was a profound theological unity among the CSI representatives who came from very different backgrounds but spoke with deep unanimity on the great issues of faith.

Next to the growth in unity, I would refer to the way in which unity has helped us to become a truly Indian Church. Twenty-five years ago the life of the Church was still largely controlled by the thinking and action of missionaries and mission boards Indian leaders had to fit into a pattern that was shaped by foreign missionaries. A very great deal in the ordinary life of the Churches still depended upon decisions made in mission boards in London or New York. In spite of our still heavy dependence on foreign funds this is no longer the case. The decisions are made here and are made mainly by Indians, not by foreigners.

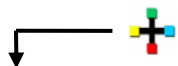


One of our weaknesses is that there are still many who are not ready to accept this, and want to retain an element of missionary control. This is shown by the tendency to nominate missionaries to key positions.

Of all the achievements of these twenty-five years, that which has been most widely praised is that which is embodied in our Book of Common Worship. We can indeed be very thankful for it. It has provided models which are being followed all over Christendom. Yet we must admit that this has been a work of leaders and scholars, and that there has not been any real renewal of liturgical life at the local level during these years. To a distressing extent our congregations - whether they follow the CSI liturgy or not, seem to be governed more by joy in just the celebration of the Church's worship. When one looks at the renewal of liturgical life which is going on in the Roman Catholic Church it is very sad to see the CSI congregations so terribly afraid of anything new. Probably it was necessary and right that our first efforts in the field, of liturgy should have been the bringing together of all that was best in our differing traditions. This meant that the work of the Liturgical Committee had a very conservative character. Now the time has come for a change of direction. We must encourage simplification, the pruning away of meaningless repetitions, and the discovery of ways of worship which will communicate to all the joy and freshness of the Resurrection.

It is often said that we are weak in evangelism, and that the hopes expressed in 1947 have not been realised. There is some truth in this. But it has to be remembered that - quite apart from union - the situation has changed radically. The kind of mass conversion which took place in

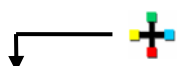
earlier times is not possible now. There is steady growth, and this is encouraging, but it must be said that there is not the evangelistic concern that there ought to be. On the other hand I do think that we have advanced greatly in the sense of responsibility for our neighbours. I think that the churches as I remember them twenty-five years ago were very content to be isolated, self-concerned societies caring for their own advancement but not caring much about the welfare of the whole community. I think the Church today has more sense of



responsibility for the community, and that is partly the result of union. Small warring sects do not have this kind of concern: they are only concerned to increase their own strength.

People rightly deplore the quarrels which frequently spoil our life as a Church. This is indeed something about which we have to be ashamed. But I must say that I think things are better in this respect than they were before the union. People seem to forget about those old quarrels, and, perhaps that is part of the mercy of God. But if we look at the records, and if I consult my own memories, there is no ground for thinking that we are worse in this respect than the previous generations. On the contrary, while our sinful passions are no doubt as bad as they were, I think that the broader fellowship which we have in the CSI has made it easier to find ways of reconciliation than it was for example in the old days of the S.L.U.C..

Looking back over these twenty-five years, one realises how radically the situation has changed. Leadership in the life of the nation is passing out of the hands of those whose basic training was in the liberal Christian tradition imparted through Christian schools and colleges, and is now in the hands of a younger, more secular and more radical generation which looks for its inspiration else-where. At the same time, within the Christian movement, there is a mushroom growth of sectarian groups which are perhaps a witness to the fact that secularism and rationalism do not provide a soil in which the human spirit can long survive. And in the western Christian world, to which we have long looked for spiritual support as well as financial, there is a widespread breakdown of faith. The CSI is now far more orthodox in a traditional sense than any of its parent churches. But we have not yet found the way to embody the Christian style of life in a form that is both relevant and challenging to the new radical secular leadership of our country. We are in danger of becoming an enclosed society concerned chiefly with our preservation - appealing more and more often to our 'minority rights'. To me the most hopeful signs are that we are beginning (in places like Arasaradi) to become seriously involved with the new movements that are shaping the future; and that the youth movements in the dioceses are growing in vigour.



Twenty-five years ago the separated churches were very much in a colonial situation, modelling themselves on what was done 'at home' which meant England or Scotland or America. There are still some among us who are chiefly interested in following trends in the churches overseas. The future lies with those who are taking seriously what is happening in our own country, what is being expressed through the novels and films and political programmes in the languages of South India, and the new ways in which people here in our own land are meeting the problems of life. If we can now see many more signs of this than we could see twenty-five years ago. This is in large measure because we have been brought together into one Church.

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