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Our Lord Jesus Christ

IT is especially significant therefore that the recent Church Assembly passed by a large majority the Archbishop of York's motion that the Church of England should officially appoint delegates to "The World Council of Churches." This project of a World Council of Churches has arisen out of the natural development of the two Movements known as "Life and Work" and "Faith and Order."

The debate in the Assembly was of a very high standard, so that we in the gallery, who lacked background, were swayed for or against the motion as speaker followed speaker.

The Archbishop of York expounded the history and hopes of the Council, while the Bishop of Gloucester sat beside him like an old lion shaking his mane and longing for the moment when he might rend the Archbishop's arguments in pieces. But he had to wait while the motion was most persuasively seconded by the Bishop of Chichester, whose face shone with heavenly light as he spoke. Yes, we were persuaded, quite persuaded, the motion must pass. Then came the Lion, and after him the equally devastating Tiger in Canon J. A. Douglas. Their contention was that it would be a grave error to attempt to form a "World Council of Churches" in the midst of a world at war; when nations were ranged against each other; and when two of the three great blocs, namely the Roman and the Orthodox, would abstain from participation. The argument naturally swayed a strong element in the Assembly. Had not the Council had the audacity to include even one or two Churches who did not practise water baptism? Impossible! The Church of England could not any more than Peter align herself with anything so "unclean!"

And so the battle raged, though in gracious Christian spirit, backwards and forwards, as in Acts xv.—on the same fundamental issue, "Is the Church an Institution founded on loyalty to rules and regulations, or is it the Mystical Body of Christ, called out and indwelt by the Spirit of God?" Can its membership, its life, its power, be summed up in statistics, or is it only "the Lord knoweth them that are His?"

In commenting on the success of the debate His Grace the Archbishop of York has written, "I value it especially as a witness to the world of the fellowship in Christ of all those who believe in Him. You are probably familiar with the 'Affirmation of Unity in allegiance to our Lord Jesus Christ' which was an act of the World Conference at Edinburgh in 1937. It is, of course, contained in the official report. That was an affirmation in words only—very striking, but words; this is an act. And it is valued especially by the younger Churches—China, Japan, India, and various parts of Africa—as a means whereby they can enter into fellowship, through their delegations, with the longer-established Churches. This is a strength to them in their stand against Paganism."

The affirmation is obviously taken from Paul, "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." That is the basis of Apostolic Unity in Diversity, the parable of which is the Body with its members and Christ the Head. Strangely enough, the "Catholic" conception of the Church is a Union with Uniformity. This inevitably leads to Paul's astonished question, "If they were all one member where were the Body?"

If the diversity of nearly sixty Churches of many nations has reached a unity of "allegiance to our Lord Jesus Christ" surely the hour has come for Evangelicals to "Close the Ranks," as Bishop Ryle exhorted. There is something lacking in us if, at such a time as this, we cannot Close the Ranks and bear a united witness to "our Lord Jesus Christ." If those four words are given their full Scriptural significance then there is no doubt that the whole revelation of God is in them. Therefore to keep faithful to the apostolic conception we need the addition of those other four apostolic words "according to the Scriptures." Christendom was first divided by personalities—Peter, Paul and Apollos; next into Churches; now into Societies. These are necessary members, but they are not the Body. The members belong to the Body, but the Body to the Head. The members minister to the Body, the Body serves the Head. (1 Cor. iii. 21-23).

So let us Close our Ranks, and find a way to bear together the Apostolic Witness to "Our Lord Jesus Christ, according to the Scriptures."