

**PATHWAYS TO
CHRISTIAN UNITY: A
FREE CHURCH VIEW**

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Pathways to Christian unity: a Free Church view by Various

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CHRISTIAN UNITY: A
FREE CHURCH VIEW**

PATHWAYS TO CHRISTIAN UNITY

A Free Church View

BY

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PREFACE

THIS book is written at the request of the Swanwick Free Church Fellowship. Though it is not the result of any general conference, and the writers alone are responsible for what is written, it is probable that it is in many ways a representative book. It is the result of much consultation outside the small circle of writers and it adopts a line of approach which is characteristic of the younger generation of Christians. Repudiating the dogmatic and often doctrinaire attitude of older controversies, it takes its stand upon experience and judges theory from that standpoint.

Seen in this light the Churches appear to be led by their ecclesiastical theories to pass judgments on each other which experience does not justify. Theory blinds them to their own defects, to the excellences of others and to their

common possession of a spiritual life which undoubtedly originates in Christ, and which is strong enough to be reproductive. Theory stands in the way of their mutual co-operation and fellowship, still more of their unity. Under such circumstances Charity and Truth point one way. They point to the ending of a state of isolation based upon theories in which evidently there is some flaw and to the re-examination of ancient disputes in the light of the further experience and opportunity for reflection which the centuries have afforded.

Turning back then to the New Testament (chap. 1) we find a conception of Christian unity that fits our need. It gives us every encouragement to advance from our present state of lamentable division (chap. 2) towards an ultimate visible union ; attempting in spiritual association to understand and express a fuller thought of the Church than has ever been embodied yet (chap. 3). We find the witness of Christian life and practice in contrasted types of Churches to be not really opposed but supplementary (chaps. 4 and 5), and we find a solvent for misunderstanding and estrangement in an ever-expanding fellowship of service and enquiry, registering its

progress from time to time in fresh constitutional forms of union or federation (chap. 6).

We conclude therefore with a confident and urgent appeal for the wide extension of local Christian fellowship and co-operation and for a studied attempt (chap. 7) to bring the separated denominations into formal union where that is already possible, and, for the rest, to make their thought and practice increasingly comprehensive till what is at present impossible shall itself come within their reach. For such a programme we believe the Church is ready in the providence of God.

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