

CATHOLICS AND THE ŒCUMENICAL MOVEMENT

THE Lambeth Conference and the World Council of the Churches at Amsterdam, held this summer, have brought the question of Christian Unity once again into the forefront of consciousness, even for Catholics. Now that they are over and their results made public it seems worth while to consider from the Catholic standpoint what value their efforts are likely to have in fostering a Christian Unity which is founded upon Truth. For us in England this will mean primarily a consideration of Anglicanism, for it is very evident, even from a superficial observation of the growing desire for unity among non-Catholic Christians, that the Church of England plays a dominant part in its development and will determine to a great extent the forms it will take in the future. What is happening in the Church of England therefore is a matter of capital importance if we wish to assess the value, in terms of truth, of the work being done by the œcumenical movement.

This brings us to a fundamental question not always squarely faced by Catholics. Does it matter what happens in the Church of England or in any of the Christian bodies which owe their origin to the Reformation? What is our attitude to these bodies as organisations? Is it of the slightest importance, as far as truth and true unity are concerned, which direction they take, or what arrangements they make among themselves for furthering their own coherence?

The view of the majority of Catholics would probably be that it matters not at all. By their separation from the divine authority of the Church these bodies have forfeited all claim to speak in the name of Christ; the inevitable result of their original schism is that they are becoming more and more subject to the corruption and diminution of such truth as they still possess. Their separation from divinely constituted authority leads, by a kind of inherent determinism to the disintegration of their capacity for truth—a doctrine of inevitable regress comparable, but in reverse, to the ideas of 19th century optimism. In consequence what happens to the Church of England or any other non-Catholic religious body can be of no interest to the Catholic, who can do nothing but stand by and watch the break up, with regret it is true, but with a regret not untinged with the satisfaction which comes from what one has always said proving true. I do not think this is an unfair sum-

mary of the views of the majority of Catholics especially in this country. It is of course often intuitively felt rather than coherently thought out; but by many it is held as a considered view of the attitude of Catholics to the non-Catholic religious bodies sprung from the Reformation upheaval.

Is it however a true view? In other words is such a view consonant with God's providential dealing with the affairs of men as they actually exist and not as they ought to be? Does it take account as fully as it should of the varied modes in which divine grace acts through the Mystical Body upon the souls of men? I do not think that it does, and if these things are fully considered I believe that they will show that the œcumenical movement may be of very great moment for the ultimate reunion of Christendom, and that in the future the influence that Catholics bring to bear on it can fundamentally condition its direction and results. This view does not conflict with the present policy of the Holy See, laid down by Pius XI in *Mortalium Animos* and confirmed and reinforced by his successor; the policy which will allow no official part to be taken by Catholic representatives in public gatherings where the 'Churches' meet on an equal footing and where dogmas of Faith are discussed. The authorities of the Church, the hierarchy, with the Pope as their Head and Spokesman, are divinely guided, and Rome has a universal care for the souls of men to guard them from false teaching, and a special instinct for detecting where danger to the uniqueness of her authority may occur. We can safely conclude both that this discipline is wise in present circumstances and that altered circumstances would bring about a change in it.

It is a truism to say that man's sin is the cause of the divisions of Christendom and that the sin was and is by no means always on the side of the schismatics. This consideration in no way alters the fact that divine authority is only to be found within the true Church whose centre of unity is in Rome. But that is not to say that God in his ordinary providence does not use separated Christians through their organised bodies as instruments for teaching his truth. The truths themselves have their own inherent authority and they are presented also with the human authority of the organisation which teaches them and at least to some extent preserves them. It may be moreover that it is the will of God that the measure of truth so preserved should be increased by the power of his grace and the co-operation of the human wills of those who are members of these bodies. None of this, if its truth be granted, would in any way infringe on the unique prerogatives and authority with which our Lord has endowed his visible Church on earth.

It may well be argued further that almighty God in thus increasing the depth and extent of truth held as divinely revealed within the non-Catholic organisations is preparing in ways the outcome of which he alone can fully see, for the return to Catholic unity of those who formerly broke away from it, and is preparing for it not in the hearts of individuals alone but also by means of the religious bodies to which by historical accident they belong. These are human institutions lacking the guarantee of divine authority, but they are not for that reason excluded from the care and guidance of God's providence.

Post-Reformation controversy has undoubtedly led to great emphasis being placed on the nature of the Church as a hierarchical, governmental society, instituted by our Lord for the preservation and interpretation of the truths of Faith committed by him to its care. In itself this emphasis has not been excessive for truths can never be emphasised too much, but it has led, as one-sided emphasis must, to under-emphasis on certain important elements in the corporate life which the hierarchical structure of the Church exists to preserve. This one-sided emphasis is observable in our insistence upon the fact that schism has caused the non-Catholic bodies to lose their share in the divine authority of Christ's mystical body, and in our forgetfulness that, in some degree at least, they have retained their share in its supernatural life. Many of their members are incorporated sacramentally in that life by baptism, many receive truths of Faith through the Scriptures presented to them as God's Word, which by its own inherent power and often by a corporate tradition of interpretation within their communities, gives them, imperfectly indeed, but still in its degree effectively, the gospel of salvation. In all this the religious body to which they belong, itself only acting by human authority, is an instrument under the guiding hand of God's providence by which they are brought to some degree of membership in Christ's mystical body which is the visible Church on earth, though still, owing to their separated allegiances, outside the scope of its authority and its full sacramental life.

If the foregoing principles are true it follows that what is happening in the non-Catholic religious bodies is of the utmost importance, and Catholics should realise that the growth of truth within them is a matter of vital moment. This is particularly true of the Church of England. Broadly speaking Catholicism means the teaching of Christ and his Apostles embodied in the Scriptures and drawn out thence by the authority of tradition through the Church. Protestantism means the teaching of Christ and his Apostles em-

bodied in the Scriptures and drawn out thence by the mind of the individual reader under the illumination of the Holy Ghost. This does not exclude a commonly received body of interpretation accepted by likeminded people, but it does ultimately exclude any authority but that of the Scriptures themselves. In this sense the Eastern Orthodox Church is Catholic and the Churches founded by Luther, Calvin and their followers are Protestant. The Church of England since the days of the Elizabethan settlement contains and always has contained two mutually inconsistent streams; the one Catholic in tendency, the other Protestant. The Tractarian movement greatly emphasised the Catholic tendency and Liberalism in the form of modernism in its technical sense and radical biblical criticism cut across both streams during the 19th and early 20th centuries, so that today both the Catholic element and the Protestant have their liberal counterparts. Liberalism however has long passed its peak period, and though still alive among the middle-aged seems hardly likely in a Christian context to survive more than another generation. The contest of the future within Christendom is likely to be between the Catholic idea and the Protestant.

In this contest an important element in the Church of England is on our side, an element inheriting the Tractarian mind, which is Catholic in the sense that it pays great deference to the authority of the Church though it is mistaken as to where the true seat of authority lies. How far that element is growing in influence it is hard to say. It undoubtedly prevented a greater measure of approval and support being given by the Lambeth Conference to the Church of S. India and secured that, as a practical measure, that newly formed body should pursue its experiment in relative isolation from the Anglican Communion, so that orthodox Anglo-Catholics though unhappy at what has been done do not yet feel themselves entirely compromised. The air of Lambeth, however, was full of similar schemes, all of which are really attempts to combine Catholicism (in the sense noted above) with Protestantism under formulas which conceal their radical differences, in the hope that in course of time they will grow into closer dogmatic agreement. To the orthodox Anglo-Catholic this is a betrayal of principle and as such can only lead either to their separation again or to the disaster of a general diminution of truth within the uniting bodies.

It would seem then that Catholics should welcome and pray for the penetration of Catholic truth and Catholic principles within the Church of England. The Anglican Communion claims to be world wide and it undoubtedly exercises a profound influence upon other Christian bodies. The more it preserves within itself and

increases its own elements of Catholicism the less will be the general diminution of truth which they suffer in their search for unity. Every betrayal of principle in the interests of unity is a diminution of truth and every such diminution makes the true unity of Christendom more difficult of realisation.

It is sometimes urged that any increase of Catholicism or the Catholic mentality within non-Catholic bodies makes individual conversion to the Church less likely. But faith, the light by which a non-Catholic at last sees the true nature and authority of Christ's Church, is a gift of God. Untruth is the only thing that can obscure that light when God offers it to a human soul and Catholics in their work for unity must labour to increase the knowledge of truth and to remove every element of misunderstanding and falsehood, in their own presentation of the Faith as well as in its apprehension by those outside the fold. How and when and to whom God offers the light of Faith we cannot know; our work is to prepare the way for its entrance when he offers it, whether that offer is made by slow degrees, with an ultimate full realisation far in the future or more swiftly to those whom he chooses for an immediate gift.

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ANGLICANISM AND CATHOLICITY

IMPRESSIONS OF A CONTINENTAL OBSERVER

ONCE he has crossed the Channel the continental very quickly discovers that the Church of England is quite unlike the protestant communities he knows in France or Belgium. Instead of bare conventicles he finds churches—very often fine ones, with altar, cross, statues, even red lamps in the sanctuary and confessionals. The liturgical vestments are similar to our own. Some of the services offer the same general characteristics. There are religious communities which are curiously like our monasteries both in their rule and in the piety, earnestness and influence for good of their members. If he is lucky the enquiring visitor may come into contact with members of the Anglican church quite close to his faith or come across theological works in which the vocabulary, the terms of reference and the subjects treated are familiar to him.

The hurried traveller will even be able to go back with the conviction that the things which separate us from the Anglicans are few. There is papal infallibility but this has doubtless been badly explained to them and since its definition the Popes have exercised it so little that Catholic theologians are not even all agreed