ANGLICANISM AND THE CHURCH OF SOUTH INDIA

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CATHOLICS have been hearing, during recent months, of the prospect of something like a crisis in the Church of England, and even of the possibility of a schism. The trouble has arisen from the anxiety, mainly of Anglo-Catholics, caused by the growing desire amongst Anglicans in general for the acceptance in full communion, as soon as may be, of the newly constituted Church of South India. Most Anglicans, and even many Anglo-Catholics among them, would be ready to extend to this venture the completest possible recognition compatible with maintaining the unity of Anglicanism as a whole. The anxiety of Anglo-Catholics arises from doubts as to how far this may itself be compatible with the integrity of their own particular principles of Faith and Order, which they hold to be an essential element in the Anglican contribution to work for unity.

Any understanding of what all this means, in the context of ecumenical ideas, and that of course is its main interest for Catholics, depends first of all upon a knowledge of what the so-called South India scheme involves, and secondly, less easily attained, upon the understanding of what Anglo-Catholics mean by the maintenance of Catholic Faith and Order in the Church of England, and of the fears they entertain of its infringement by too hasty a recognition of the Church of South India, as it now is in its formative stage.

The Church of South India is an experiment in Christian unity typical, in its method, of the spirit and outlook of the Ecumenical Movement. It came into existence in 1947, after prolonged negotiations, lasting nearly thirty years. As a result of these negotiations four dioceses of the Anglican Church in India, Madras, Dornakal, Tinnivelly, and Travancore, entered into union with the members of the Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregationalist bodies in that area. The basis of the union, embodied in the official Constitution of the Church of South India, is, broadly speaking, consonant with Anglican principles,

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but there are points in it which are a source of acute anxiety to many members of the Church of England. The Apostles' and Nicene creeds are accepted as witnessing to and safeguarding the Faith, but a note is appended to this clause in the Constitution stating that the Church in South India does not demand the assent of individuals to every word and phrase in the creeds. Similarly the Church in South India accepts the historic episcopate, in constitutional form, but with a rider to the effect that the united Church is committed to no particular interpretation of its meaning.

Meanwhile for an interim period of thirty years, episcopally and non-episcopally ordained ministers are working side by side in the Church of South India under bishops consecrated by the Anglican rite, or by the new rite which has been drawn up. These require the consecrators to be at least three bishops. All bishops and presbyters, consecrated or ordained after the inception of the union, are to be consecrated or ordained by bishops. The intention and expectation of the united Churches, set forth in the Constitution, is that eventually every minister permanently attached to the new Church will be episcopally ordained. After thirty years, that is in 1977, the united Church will determine for itself whether it will continue to make any exception to this rule.

The establishment of the Church of South India in 1947 put its ex-Anglican members out of communion with the Church of England, and its bishops were unable to attend the Lambeth Conference in the following year. Though inclined to look with benevolent eyes upon the Church in South India as an experiment in unity of considerable promise, the bishops assembled at the Conference were divided in opinion concerning it, and especially concerning the validity of its orders. The majority were in favour of regarding them as fully valid, a minority reserved their judgment. In consequence of this, the Convocations of Canterbury and York appointed in 1950 Joint Committees to enquire into the whole question, and to report upon this main point and certain other matters relating to the question of recognition by the Anglican Communion. These committees unanimously recommended a postponement of five years to give time for consideration by the whole Church of England, before a final and definitive judgment on the theological issue

should be arrived at. Last year a second Joint Committee was appointed to conclude such a judgment. The recent acceptance by the Convocations of the Report of the Archbishops' Convocation Committee on the Church of South India, embodying the conclusions arrived at, has caused the present stir and anxiety in Anglo-Catholic circles.

Before dealing with the decisions of this Committee, now accepted by the Convocations, it is necessary, in order to get a true view of the situation, to understand what Anglicans, and in particular Anglo-Catholics, mean by the Catholic Faith and Order that they wish to see realized in the Church of South India, before they can approve of full communion being established by the Church of England with it. Catholics believe that episcopacy and papacy are vital to the life of the Church because the Church teaches that this is so, and we believe the present teaching of the Church to be that of Christ himself. Our theologians and historians study Christian origins with all the apparatus of modern historical research and conclude from the evidence it yields that, in this matter, as in others, reason, by the application of criticism to the documents, does much to confirm the truth of what revelation tells us and faith accepts. Anglicans, of course, are not in the same position. For them the Church is split up into divided portions and is not a single, visible structural organism, but has something of the character of an abstraction. Holding this, they must appeal for ultimate confirmation of their beliefs, not to the Church at present, but to a time when the Church, as they say, was undivided; that is to the first centuries of the Christian era.

One of the difficulties of this position is that in very early times the Church took itself almost wholly for granted, and left no systematic record, in the form of authoritative definitions, about its own constitution; it was occupied with more fundamental doctrinal decisions. In consequence it is far from easy to *prove* simply from documentary evidence that episcopacy is essential to the life of the Church. History can give no completely decisive verdict about it. The New Testament itself is far from clear, and neither are the ecclesiastical writers of the sub-apostolic age. After that bishops, priests and deacons are clearly in evidence everywhere, but how they came to be so is not equally evident. Whether they were ordained by apostolic authority, as necessary to the life of the Church, or whether they were a merely natural

and useful development of purely human origin, is a matter of intense controversy amongst Christian scholars and Christian denominations. Anglo-Catholics hold that the evidence of history shows, and tradition testifies, that episcopacy was held to be of the *esse* of the Church's life; other Anglicans, arguing from different premises, believe it to be not absolutely necessary but of its *bene esse*; others again have introduced a third distinction and speak of it as being of the *plene esse*. Nearly all Anglicans wish to retain it, and pass it on, in some way, to other Christian bodies, as a condition of reunion.

The difficulties that face Anglicans, in their form of the appeal to antiquity in the matter of Church order, face them also in the determination of what is of faith and what is only a matter of opinion. Some Anglicans consider that scientific criticism of the New Testament documents has made the doctrines of the Virgin Birth and the physical Resurrection of our Lord contained in the creeds, if not untenable at least problematical. Anglo-Catholics, taking a stricter view of the binding force of the tradition of the primitive Church, hold them to be *de fide*. They are greatly opposed therefore to the introduction of the clause in the official Constitution of the Church of South India which exempts words and phrases in the creeds from binding force. It is true that not a few members of the Church of England are prepared to deny, or treat as optional, doctrines contained in the creeds, but this is in plain defiance of its official formularies.

We turn next to consider the decisions themselves, made by the Convocations through their acceptance of the Report of the Archbishops' Committee. In the first place it must not be thought that there is as yet anything like full communion between the Church of South India and the rest of the Anglican Church. That problem still lies ahead and will have to be faced in 1977. A big step towards fuller communion has however been taken by the decision to give recognition, as fully valid, to the ordinations and consecrations of the Church of South India. The committee which recommended this step had several leading Anglo-Catholic theologians among its members, and included the heads of two religious orders. In an article in the *Church Times* of April 15 Dr E. L. Mascall writes that this question was exhaustively dealt with, not long ago, by a group of Catholic-minded Anglican theologians, of whom he himself was one, and that

their conclusion was that the Church of South India consecrations and ordinations are formally valid. He claims that this conclusion was arrived at according to the general teaching of the Western Church upon the question of form and intention. If the words of the Church of South India Constitution concerning episcopacy are as they are reported to be, no Catholic theologian would admit this claim. On St Thomas' principles, which are of course the classical source of the general teaching of the Western Church, the invalidity of these orders is more easily demonstrated than is that of the orders of the Church of England itself.

The other decisions accepted by the Convocations involve some extension, under limiting and safeguarding conditions, of the admission of episcopally ordained ministers of the Church in South India to the celebration of the Eucharist in Anglican Churches, and of baptized members to the reception of Holy Communion. This, in the eyes of most Anglo-Catholics, is no sign of the establishment of full communion, and in their view it can be justified by an extension of the principle of 'economy' practised by the Orthodox Church; especially since the occasion may still be looked upon as an important and perhaps fruitful experiment in Christian unity, not yet in sight of its final realization.

The Papalists, a small group on the extreme right wing of Anglo-Catholicism, tend to hold the same beliefs about the Church and its authority as Catholics do. They accept the Vatican decrees, and claim to obey the Church wherever possible in their abnormal circumstances. Hitherto they have retained belief in the validity of Anglican Orders, and have justified remaining 'in schism' as a duty, in order to promote corporate reunion. Owing to the decisions that have caused the present crisis they appear to be more inclined to revise their views on these two points. Apart from the Papalists, however, Anglo-Catholics in general, though anxious about the future, will not consider, except perhaps in isolated cases, that officially the Church of England is fatally compromised in regard to 'Catholic Faith or Order'. The real crisis lies in the future, in the year 1977. It seems unlikely that the Church of South India as a body, however much it may absorb the Anglican spirit and ethos, will be prepared to break off communion with the parent Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational Churches, which are

all of course non-episcopal. In consequence the Church of England will then, for the first time in its history, be faced with the choice of accepting full communion with a Church in full communion with non-episcopal Churches, or of rejecting communion with the Church of South India. Will that dilemma produce the often prophesied split? The pressure of opinion against the strictness of the Anglo-Catholic position will be great, and it should not be forgotten that other schemes of a similar nature to that of the Church of South India are in process of negotiation. There is a North India scheme, and one in Ceylon, to mention only two which are approaching maturity, and only recently the Archbishop of Canterbury has taken the initial step in a movement for unity at home between the Church of England and the Methodist body.

Catholics of course stand completely outside the domestic controversies of Anglicanism, for they are no more able to believe that Catholic order, in the true and proper sense, exists in the Church of England than in the newly fledged Church of South India. Indirectly, however, what happens in the Church of England is, or should be, important to us because of its impact on the rest of the non-Catholic world. The Church of England has traditionally from the Reformation period, in contrast with other religious bodies sprung from the same source, a markedly churchly and sacramental character. This character during the past hundred years has been greatly emphasized by the influence of Tractarianism and the Anglo-Catholic movement, which has worked almost revolutionary changes in it. Today, through the Ecumenical Movement, it is beginning to work similar changes in World Protestantism.

Behind the deep sense of the Church and its sacramental life which marks, as it constantly has marked, the outlook of devout Anglicans, whatever the particular colour of their convictions, lies the institution of episcopacy, which Newman and the Tractarians did so much to raise in men's estimation by their teaching on Apostolic Succession. Catholics hold, as Newman came to hold, that though the institution remains, its inner Catholic reality was lost at the Reformation. But none the less, even the institution as it is, and the teaching that accompanies it, bear witness to a part of Catholic truth, emphasis upon which is of vital importance in ecumenical work if it is to move in a

Catholic direction. The defence of episcopacy within the Church of England, as being of the *esse* of the Church, lies in the hands of Anglo-Catholics, and is an indirect witness to those elements of Catholic truth with which the Church of England, through the Ecumenical Movement, is penetrating World Protestantism. It is therefore an indirect and remote means of leading men towards the fullness of truth, which the Catholic Church alone possesses. That is why Catholics, watching from a distance, may well be anxious lest, in the years ahead, the Church of England, by its official action, should do anything to diminish or nullify the force of that witness, and give rise maybe to yet another schism among the followers of Christ.

THE GREENE BAIZE DOOR

IAN GREGOR

'EVERY creative writer worth our consideration, every writer who can be called, in the wide eighteenth-century use of the term, a poet, is a victim: a man given over to an obsession. . . . The obsession is perhaps most easily detected in the symbols a writer uses.' These words written by Graham Greene in a review of Walter De la Mare's short stories are illuminating in a study of Mr Greene's own work, and in this brief paper I want to use them as a central point of reference, in attempting to show what is meant by calling Mr Greene's work 'poetic'. In a sense, my purpose is pre-critical since its emphasis falls on description rather than appraisal. Obviously, these are simply terms of convenience, and can never be exclusive of each other, but they serve to indicate an emphasis. Where Mr Greene's work has been concerned, critical arrows have so easily felt the gravitational pull of moral and theological forces that the intended target has remained strangely untouched. This paper, flighted with a literary observation, tries to maintain direction by continually keeping in sight the idea that Graham

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