

COMMENTARY

THE USE OF CONTROVERSY. Some years ago it was proposed that the law of libel should be amended to include the collective defamation of those who could not legally seek individual redress. At the time it was supposed that this might protect, in particular, the Jews who have suffered so much from general accusations by their enemies. It would be exaggerated to look to such a remedy for recent attacks on the integrity of English Catholics. Yet the peevish and wholly unsubstantiated charges, under official Anglican auspices, contained in *Infallible Fallacies*, must be called by their proper name. For libels they must be judged to be when, without the pretence of proof, they accuse Catholic priests of illicit proselytising and duplicity. Such accusations, it may be argued, are *obiter dicta*, of little consequence compared with the arguments from theology and history which are intended to demolish the claims of the Catholic Church. They are indeed unlikely to be regarded with much seriousness by those with any knowledge of the facts, and there has been a considerable anxiety expressed by many non-Catholics to dissociate themselves from them. Yet the pamphlet commended by the Archbishop of Canterbury, and published by a Society whose purpose is the 'Promotion of Christian Knowledge', is intended as a serious (and popular) answer to Catholic claims.

It is, for this journal in particular, a matter of intense regret that the Anglican authorities have chosen the way of knockabout debate as their contribution to Christian understanding. In this issue Fr Henry St John, whose writings in *BLACKFRIARS* over the last twenty-five years have done so much to foster a truly eirenical spirit in religious controversy in this country, deals with the dogmatic and historical arguments raised by the recent pamphlet. As he suggests, the issues involved are far deeper than those of a partisan advantage, and the whole mood of *Infallible Fallacies* unhappily suggests that quick returns are preferred to the hard and humbling work of mutual understanding.

Dr Nathaniel Micklem's *The Pope's Men* is also a critical examination of the faith and practice of the Catholic Church. His sympathetic reference to the Dominicans of Oxford

must not be supposed to account for our greater liking for the Congregational attack. His pamphlet is at least written with a sense of penitence. He admits, which the Anglican authors seem slow to do, that 'it is always easier to see the sins of others than our own', and yet he is so often misled by the appearance of things, the human fallibility that inevitably cloaks the Church's mission in the world, that one longs to say, 'That is true. Of course the Church *seems* politically interested in securing her rights. But why? Is it only to secure a denominational advantage, or is it to preserve the radical rights of men—those of Doctors Fisher and Micklem as well as those of the deplorable priests in Colombia and Spain?'

For it is precisely at this moment in the Church's history, when she is withstanding the most sustained and powerful of attacks on her life and on liberty itself, that her English critics choose to attack her. Do the 'priests of the Anglican Communion' suppose that the hundreds of imprisoned and tortured priests in Eastern Europe are concerned, now, to defend the Nag's Head Fable or the idiosyncrasies of certain Spanish bishops? There is something singularly sad, if not distasteful, about the hurt pride and parochial recrimination of these insular insults when one looks beyond England, which is the only territory the critics know. And they have known nothing of the tragedy of persecution: not yet, at least. It will be time enough then, in the evil day, to see if a proprietary interest in justifying the division of Christianity contributes to the work of Christ.

But it must not be supposed that these controversial forays will in any sense lessen our hope for Christian unity or our intention to continue the tradition of this journal in fostering a religious debate which is rooted in the desire for truth and motivated by nothing less than the love of God and our brethren. For, separated though they are, they are so often one with us in the honest desire that God's will be done, that a temporary loss of temper (and we have often lost our tempers, too) must not bar the way to friendship. It may be that attacking an 'enemy' is a sign that all is far from well at home. That sort of aggressiveness, and the motive of it, is understandable enough, and the increasing

strains within the Church of England, as well as its role within the World Council of Churches (so dear to Dr Fisher), make an anti-Catholic attack intelligible, though scarcely justifiable.

'Attacks do call for occasional answers', Dr Fisher has remarked. Our complaint is not that there should be answers, but that here they relate to fictitious questions. There are indeed many questions that demand to be answered by Catholics and non-Catholics alike, but if the motive of the asking is the search for Christian truth, then the mode of it must be Christian charity and nothing less. Here all, Catholics included, have the duty of examining their consciences, and if that be the result of the recent pamphleteering it is a matter for gratitude.

FALLIBLE INFELICITIES

HENRY ST JOHN, O.P.

IT would be interesting to know in what sense the Archbishop of Canterbury used the word 'propaganda' in introducing to the public, in his speech to Convocation, the pamphlet *Infallible Fallacies*¹ as a useful antidote to the 'intensified propaganda' of the Catholic Church. This word has almost lost its primary and original sense, and has acquired a loaded and sinister meaning. What it usually signifies today is spreading or bolstering up an idea by suppressing half the truth about it, using false emphasis, suggestion and even direct mis-statement, and especially by employing a technique of making isolated and probably hypothetical instances appear as widely applicable generalisations. Inevitably, when the word is used, it raises in the mind an imaginative picture embodying these associations. It is strange then that His Grace should have used it, without explanation, when speaking officially on the delicate topic of the greatest Church in Christendom and the methods it uses in proclaiming its teaching, and it is still stranger that he should have selected for commendation, as a defence against

¹ *Infallible Fallacies*—An Anglican reply to Roman Catholic arguments; by some Priests of the Anglican Communion (S.P.C.K.).