

## UNITY AND AUTHORITY<sup>1</sup>

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ALL Christendom, Catholic and Protestant, believes that God has spoken to men, and that his Word thus spoken is the Word of Life, the good news of salvation. All Christendom too, though not without reservations, believes that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament contain that Word written. Beyond this Christians begin to part company along a hundred different roads. The cause of their divergence is the variety of different answers given to the question how God's Word written is to be understood. Is it self-authenticating; does it yield its meaning to each man's conscience by the inner light of the Spirit, or are we to approach it by the aid of sound learning, relying only, for the conviction of faith, on the ordinary means of knowledge with which reason has endowed us? What part does the concept of the Church play in mediating God's message to men's minds, in terms which they can depend upon with certainty? Does God, in his written Word, stand in judgment over and reform the verdicts of the Church, or does Christ our Lord, living in it by the power of the Holy Spirit, guide its understanding of the written word and himself speak with its voice? If the Church is integrally necessary to the proclamation of the gospel, what is its nature and how can its voice be recognised and its verdicts guaranteed? The fundamental disunities of Christendom lie in the answers given to these questions. To the finding of a way which will lead from such diversity into a unity willed by God the world-wide ecumenical movement has addressed itself for over thirty years with a sincerity and depth of desire which must surely be the work of the Holy Spirit.

In that movement the Church of England has taken from

<sup>1</sup> *Documents illustrating Papal authority A.D. 96-454* edited and introduced by E. Giles. (S.P.C.K.; 17s. 6d.)

*Spiritual Authority in the Church of England—an Enquiry* by Edward Charles Rich. (Longmans; 21s.)

*Schism in the Early Church.* The Edward Cadbury Lectures, 1949-50, by S. L. Greenslade, D.D. (S.C.M. Press; 21s.)

the first a leading part. It is itself a microcosm of the diversities of Christendom and this has enabled it to ponder, as no other religious body has been able to do, the nature and origin of the beliefs that divide Christendom, and to take the lead in the exploration, with sympathetic insight, of the positions of others; a notable characteristic of the ecumenical approach.<sup>2</sup> This alone has power to break down the psychological barriers which hinder contacts of understanding, and breed distorted ideas of the beliefs of those who are separated from us. Much work of Anglican scholarship, notable for its exacting standards, has in recent years been directed towards the eirenic elucidation of problems encountered in the study of life, liturgy and government in the first centuries of the Church's existence. Considerable progress has been made, in this way, in bringing Catholic conceptions within the purview of world Protestantism, and there is evidence of a deepening insight into and appreciation, by Anglicans and others, of the nature and scope of the authority to which the Catholic Church lays claim. The appearance during the present year of the three books reviewed in this article is therefore very welcome. All three are written from a definite Anglican standpoint, yet their differences illustrate clearly the cleavages which divide Anglicans themselves. They exhibit the best characteristics of Anglican scholarship, integrity and sobriety of judgment, and all have the same eirenic temper.

In *Documents Illustrating Papal Authority* Mr Giles sets out to put at the disposal of the English reader the raw material necessary for an impartial study of the papal claims. His method is to place the extracts from the fathers, commonly used in controversy, in their documentary context. Seen in this way they so often give a different picture from that which they give when quoted briefly by controversial writers. He labels these writers 'axe grinders', though with kindly humour and no implication of dishonesty. Many of us who are converts can recall our rather feverish reading of Father Puller's *Primitive Saints* and Bishop Gore's *Roman*

<sup>2</sup> For a full development of this idea in relation to the Church of England see *The Christian Dilemma: Catholic Church: Reformation*, by W. H. van De Pol, D.D. (Dent) pp. 187-211.

*Catholic Claims*, followed by an equally feverish perusal of Luke Rivington and Chapman's answer to Gore. We can recall too the maze that this reading left us in. Mr Giles quotes Dr Adrian Fortescue<sup>3</sup> as pouring scorn on the appeal to ancient documents. No reader of Leo XIII's *Satis Cognitum* could doubt that the Church appeals to history in confirmation of her doctrine. What Dr Fortescue is concerned to point out, in his usual vigorous fashion, is what Mr Giles himself admits, that the documentary appeal cannot of itself provide a definitive solution, since the historical facts of this particular problem are patient of different interpretations, according to the presuppositions with which they are approached. Mr Giles gives large extracts from the fathers and ecclesiastical writers commonly cited, setting the relevant points fairly in their context, his choice of evidence is extensive and impartial, and his translations appears to be scholarly and accurate. Moreover he provides a useful commentary on them by outlining the historical background of his documents and, in many cases, he notes how the 'axe grinders' have used their material. It is almost amusing to realise the unanimity with which the facts are interpreted, and doubtful questions decided, by the presuppositions of the contestants on either side.

One of the chief difficulties in rightly interpreting these documents is the natural tendency of the student, whatever his presuppositions, to read back the developed conceptions of a later age into the less articulated thought of an earlier one. It is a pity then that Mr Giles, in his introduction, should appear to call in question the legitimacy, for Catholics, of invoking the principle of development of doctrine as integral to their theology. He cites some words of Cardinal Hergenrother, written at the time of the Vatican Council, 'that the primacy was never as a ready-made system traced out for the constitution of the ancient Church, but was deposited in it like a fructifying germ, which developed with the life of the Church'.<sup>4</sup> On this Mr Giles comments: 'Opinions differ as to whether this approach to the subject can be reconciled with the official statement of Pope Leo

<sup>3</sup> *The Early Papacy*, page 3.

<sup>4</sup> Hergenrother: *Anti Janus* (E.T. Dublin, 1870), page 118.

XIII, in the Encyclical *Satis Cognitum*, that present beliefs about papal authority are not new but are the venerable and constant belief of every age'.<sup>5</sup> There is no contradiction between Cardinal Hergenrother's words and those of Leo XIII. *Satis Cognitum* is only asserting the familiar theological position that nothing defined as of faith is new doctrine, even though it may hitherto have been implicit only in the *depositum fidei*. A passage from the *Mortalium animos* of Pius XI makes this very clear: 'In the use of this extraordinary teaching authority no fresh invention is introduced, nothing new is ever added to the number of those truths which are at least implicitly contained within the deposit of Revelation divinely committed to the Church.'<sup>6</sup> The fact of development of doctrine then is not merely a doubtfully valid opinion. It is accepted by the Church as necessary to the true understanding of her dogma and teaching authority.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Wherefore, in the decree of the Vatican Council (Session IV cap. 3) as to the nature and authority of the primacy of the Roman Pontiff, no newly conceived opinion is set forth, but the venerable and constant belief of every age. *Satis Cognitum* §15 E.T. in *Rome and Reunion*, ed. Messenger, page 71.

<sup>6</sup> *Mortalium animos* §3 E.T. in *Rome and Reunion*, ed. Messenger, page 84.

<sup>7</sup> Newman's *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* is of course the classical exposition in English of the fact of development. Its orthodoxy has been questioned in the past but was finally and definitively vindicated by the Spanish Dominican Father Marin-Sola in his *L'évolution homogène du dogme Catholique* (Fribourg, 1924, 2 vols.). In a paper read during the fourth Conversation at Malines Bishop Gore, quoting Lord Acton, stated that Newman apparently withdrew from the extreme position of the *Essay on Development (Recollections of Malines)*, by Walter Frere, page 115). He gives as Newman's latest statement and the expression of his final mind the words: 'First of all, and in as few words as possible, and *ex abundanti cautela*, every Catholic knows that the Christian dogmas were in the Church from the time of the Apostles; that they were ever in their substance what they are now; that they existed before the formulas were publicly adopted, in which, as time went on, they were defined and recorded.' These words were written in 1858 in an article in the *Atlantis*. This article was reprinted in pamphlet form and incorporated in 1874 in *Tracts Theological and Ecclesiastical* where it will be found at page 333 of the 1908 edition. The third and last edition of the *Essay on Development* was issued in 1878. In the preface Newman says that alterations of arrangement and

It will illuminate many obscure points encountered in the study of Mr Giles' book.

Canon Rich's *Spiritual Authority in the Church of England*<sup>8</sup> is a comprehensive enquiry into every aspect of authority as it is understood in varying forms in the Church of England. He himself, by upbringing and environment, stands in the tradition of an Anglo-Catholicism of which Bishop Gore is type and perhaps progenitor; a combination of critical learning with respectful homage to the past, not always consistently determined whether sound learning is faith's confirmation or its very basis. It is necessarily axiomatic in the Anglo-Catholic position that the hierarchical unity of the Church can be, and has been, broken by schism. Anglo-Catholics are compelled in consequence to confine the essence of Catholic unity to a communal life of faith and sacramental grace, dependent on an apostolic hierarchy, everywhere showing similar recognisable characteristics, yet by equal Catholic right transcending the boundaries of any single allegiance. They deny therefore that God's ordinance for the due preservation and propagation of that life necessitates its being uniquely and properly the life of one, single, visible, hierarchical unity only.

Canon Rich is constant in his emphasis that the deposit of faith, given to the Church by our Lord, is no mere external imposition of authority but the possession of the whole faithful, whose minds share in it and thereby constitute the mind of the Church. Nor is he unaware of the implications of

wording have been made in it, but none in its matter. Gore's belief was without foundation. He, and presumably Acton, had misunderstood the scholastic use by Newman of the word 'substance' in this context, and had made it mean almost the opposite of what its author intended. What Newman did mean is illustrated by a distinction used by Father Marin-Sola in dealing with the objection that the Vatican definition of Papal infallibility claimed to contain nothing that was new. 'Rien de nouveau quant à la substance; mais du nouveau quant à l'explication. Car précisément l'évolution du dogme consiste en cette explication nouvelle de tout l'implicite, notamment de l'implicite-virtuel.' (*L'Évolution homogène du dogme Catholique*, Vol. II, page 289.)

<sup>8</sup> The substance of a review appearing in the *Eastern Churches Quarterly* is incorporated in the following paragraphs. I am indebted to the Editor for his kind permission for this.

this belief. The mind of the Church by its prayer and worship, by its living experience of revealed truth and by speculative theological thinking concerning that experience, penetrates with ever deepening insight into the faith, perceiving its implications more clearly and drawing them out more explicitly from age to age. In this way, though the deposit of faith is constant and can never be added to, the mind of the Church is progressively enlarged concerning it. That which was once implicit becomes explicit to it by its own action under divine guidance. Catholic theologians are accustomed to introduce a distinction here. A truth may be implicit in another truth, already explicitly held, in two ways; *formally*, as they say, when it follows from the very nature of the terms: Christ our Lord was true man, therefore he had a human soul; or *virtually*, when it is seen by intuitive inference, under the influence of the indwelling Spirit, to be actually bound up with other truths already firmly held: as when our Lady is believed to have been conceived without original sin because this comes to be seen by inference from her whole position as second Eve and co-Redemptrix.

Professor S. L. Greenslade's Edward Cadbury Lectures deal with the causes and consequences of schism in the early Church. He is a member of the Evangelical group, and in discussing this vital question of schism within the Church or schism from it, is at pains to widen the Church's visible boundaries to the utmost possible extent. Yet in the course of his book the question is constantly forced upon one how, if the visible boundaries of the Church are to be extended so as to include warring and dissonant minds, can its own mind be in any sense the source from which it draws the content of its authoritative teaching?

In dealing with the controversy between Pope Stephen and St Cyprian (254-256) concerning heretical baptism he points out that St Cyprian's position in denying its validity was the logical one, and his main ground for putting it forward not tradition, but reason and common sense. Pope Stephen alleged apostolic tradition as the ground for his practice of accepting the baptism of heretics and not rebaptising. In an age when many local customs were justified by

this claim it is scarcely likely that this one was founded on fact. What did decide the question, and ultimately, under Catholic authority, made the acceptance of heretical baptism the rule was the mind of the Church perceiving by the guidance of the Holy Spirit that this was the right inference from the nature of the sacramental rite. The matter cannot be dismissed as one of discipline. The validity or otherwise of a sacrament necessary to salvation is a doctrinal question of supremely vital importance. At a later date the same inference was drawn, in the same way, first that holy orders, given and received apart from the authority of the Church, could be valid, and later that they could be efficacious. At a still later date the full implications of the truth *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* began to be worked out, as these others had been, under pressure of circumstances, and the notion that those cut off from visible unity may still be in some sense members of the mystical body of Christ, and so of the Church, emerged. The process still continues.

In the paper already alluded to, read at the Malines Conversations, Bishop Gore contended that it was not legitimate to yield the faith that we give to the fact of the Virginal conception of our Lord, or his Resurrection or his Ascension to the Immaculate Conception of our Lady (and he would today have added her Assumption). He argued that 'the former group of accepted facts rests upon original witness and good evidence: the latter on nothing that can be called evidence at all'.<sup>9</sup> Setting aside the question whether faith in the factual content of a revealed truth rests upon its historical evidence or is only corroborated by it, it may be replied that many truths are taught by the Church as having been implicit in the deposit of faith which have no historical evidence of the character desired by the Bishop to support them. The validity of heretical baptism has been mentioned. In the creed we acknowledge the perpetual virginity of our Lady. This however has no scriptural support in the gospels or elsewhere; at first sight rather the reverse, nor does evidence point to the existence of any tradition in the sense of knowledge of fact continuously handed down

<sup>9</sup> *Recollections of Malines*, by W. H. Frere, page 117.



from apostolic times.<sup>10</sup> The inspiration of the books of the New Testament, and their inclusion at different stages in the Canon is similarly devoid of either of these evidential supports. The list could of course be added to. We owe our belief in these truths, as having been implicit in the deposit from the first, solely to an inference drawn from it by the mind of the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. But the mind of the Church as it penetrates more deeply into the Faith does not of itself attain truth infallibly. Mixed with the growing truth in the minds of the faithful can be sheer error, lack of balance leading to distortion and superstition. It is by the divinely guided and guaranteed magisterium with which our Lord has endowed the successors of the Apostles, under the leadership and authority of the Bishop of Rome, that truth is separated from error, error and false emphasis finally rejected and the mind of the Church enlarged by a clearer perception of the content of the Faith. Here lies the necessity for infallible authority.

Canon Rich has done good work in his book by his trenchant criticism of the oddly persistent error which confuses infallibility with a kind of inspiration and equates its utterances with a new revelation of truth. In this and many other ways he is preparing the ground for belief that infallibility rightly understood must necessarily be an endowment of the Church, bestowed upon it by our Lord. In a moving passage he acknowledges the progress of his own mind in the course of his enquiry from disbelief to belief on this point.

The Constitution *Pastor Aeternus* of the Vatican Council though it leaves much undefined concerning the nature and exercise of the Pope's personal infallibility emphatically identifies it with the infallibility of the Church, which owing to an unfortunate, though perhaps necessary, change of

<sup>10</sup> In St Jerome's controversy with Helvidius, who held that after the virgin birth our Lady had other children by St Joseph, the Saint's arguments are almost exclusively exegetical and from what is fitting. Only towards the end does he touch upon tradition in any sense, and then only to point out that the truth he is defending was held by great men in previous generations, whose names he cites. He makes no claim to be guided by apostolic tradition.



procedure was left undiscussed by the Council. It excludes absolutely the idea that infallibility conveys new knowledge by any kind of inspiration, and confines the scope of the teaching office of the Roman Bishops to the careful guardianship and faithful exposition of the revelation of the deposit of Faith delivered by the Apostles. It seems clear then that when the Pope, as Supreme Shepherd and Teacher of the faithful, defines a doctrine as divinely revealed he is dependent for his knowledge of the nature of the doctrine defined, and of the fact that it belongs to the *depositum fidei*, upon the mind of the Church. It is through the insight of the mind of the Church, as we have seen, that truth hitherto implicit in the deposit becomes explicit. It would appear then that no doctrine could be defined as of faith till it had at least begun to be explicit in the mind of the Church. Its promulgation by the teaching magisterium is normally effected through the episcopate in union with their head; in the decrees of a General Council, or by previous consultation of the universal episcopate dispersed throughout the world. The Constitution *Pastor Aeternus* confirms that this procedure has always in fact been followed.

The insistence of Catholic doctrine upon the necessity of visible organic and hierarchical unity is bound up with this ultimate dependence of the magisterium, in the exercise of its supreme teaching authority, upon the clear expression of the mind of the Church. It is only within that unity that this clear expression can exist in its fullness. The three books under review do not endorse this doctrine of the Catholic Church, but their thought even where it is in disagreement almost always helps to clarify Catholic teaching by setting it in its true proportions. By their objectivity, and by the eirenic temper with which they approach their different tasks, they supply valuable material for the promotion of understanding and sympathy between those whom the divisions of Christendom separate. This is the necessary presupposition of the ecumenical spirit and of progress towards Christian unity.