

MOVEMENT IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

To ensure a full understanding of the situation to which the publication of the Report of the Archbishops' Commission on Christian Doctrine has given rise, it must be viewed against the background of Anglican history. The upheaval of the Reformation tore the Church of England violently out of the living tradition of Latin Catholicism, but it did not place it completely in either of the main streams of continental Protestantism. From the moment of its final separation, it stood in isolation—with a heritage from the Catholic past, and a considerable infiltration of contemporary Protestantism. It appealed, not as did Catholicism, to a living voice, nor to a great interpreter of God's revelation, as did Calvinism and Lutheranism, but to the primitive Church of the early centuries. Thus, while Catholicism invoked a living continuous tradition as final witness to the faith, and Protestantism, tending to ignore the interval between the Apostles and its own second founders, presented a new interpretation, Anglicanism, rejecting both, based itself upon an appeal to the earliest ages of Christianity, and created a tradition orthodox, sacramental, sober and learned, biblical, patristic and historical in approach, but dogmatic only where the primitive Church seemed plainly to have given its decision. Scholasticism, with its tradition of close theological thinking, was set aside, and so in the main were the systems of the continental reformers, and thus grew into being the characteristics of the Anglican ethos.¹

¹ It is true of course that side by side with the main tradition of Anglicanism a Puritan tradition has always existed in the Church of England. Many who inherit this tradition approach the truths of religion through the medium of the Anglican ethos, without losing the distinctive marks of their origin. But there is also a Puritan tradition which is isolated from and out of sympathy with the main current of Anglican life.

In doctrinal authority, according to the traditions both of the Latin West and the Orthodox East, two equally important elements may be discerned: the objective or transcendent law, externally formulated, and proposed by the authority directing the community; and the same law, subjective and immanent in the consciousness of the community, and spontaneously lived by it. The former corresponds to the *Ecclesia Docens*; the latter to the *Ecclesia Discens*. The transcendent law has its origin in the teaching of Christ by act and word during His earthly life. In so far as that teaching is accepted and lived by the community which is His Mystical Body, it becomes immanent therein, and the living of this law, both by prayer and worship, and by the intellectual probing of the philosopher and theologian, continually draws out from it new implications. Moreover, from time to time the scholar seeks to adjust new knowledge, historical and scientific, to its eternal and unchanging truths. The resulting growth in the immanent law, which is lived, demands a corresponding elaboration in the transcendent law which is proposed. At every point, the growth must be controlled by the *Ecclesia Docens*, the guardian of the faith, whose office and function it is to judge whether such growth is a true development, and such adjustment a true interpretation, of the original teaching of Christ. Both these elements are essential to the constitution of a true and balanced religious authority; an excess of emphasis on the function of external proposition will produce legalism; a lack of it will lead to anti-nomianism.²

² At this point the vital and delicate question of Infallibility would make its appearance. An adequate discussion of this would carry us beyond our present purpose. But the Liberal Manifesto recently published in the *Church Times* (Jan. 20th) is the latest of many evidences that the fullest theological discussion is necessary if the truth concerning it is not to remain obscured. The point of view put forward by the *Manifesto* in the sections on infallibility and historical criticism is one which

For four hundred years the Church of England has stood apart from the continuous tradition of Western Catholicism, and until recent years it has been still more out of contact with the tradition of Eastern Orthodoxy. During the whole of that period it has had an immanent law, which has produced its effects largely uncontrolled by a living and contemporary transcendent law. Where such authority has been exercised, as in the case of Laud and the Puritans, it has generally come more from its powerful partner the State than from the Church itself as an independent organism. The force which has shaped this immanent law has been an eclectic tradition of its own creation, expressed in the written formularies of Prayer-book and Articles. This tradition has always allowed of a wide variety of interpretation, particularly as regards such questions as the nature of the visible Church and of its authority, the nature of revelation, and of the faith by which it is apprehended. The Bishops of the Church of England have never, as a teaching body, essayed to decide these questions, still less to make their decisions a regulative norm for the life of the Church of England as a whole. The result has been that the Church of England has lived throughout its history, now more and now less vigorously, by an immanent law which embodies a presentation of Christianity more Catholic than Protestant in its emphasis. This presentation has been arrived at without the intervention of any transcendent authority speaking in the name of a living tradition wider than its own boundaries. And for this reason, many questions as to the nature of authority itself have been left unsettled.

The Oxford Movement, and the liberalising movements, the most important of which was that initiated by the Lux Mundi school, have had a decisive effect in determining

demands the respectful attention of Catholic theologians; but much that is said in it appears to us to be based on misapprehension, and to stand in need of far more exact theological thinking than it seems to have received.

the character of the Church of England as it exists to-day. These movements were made possible in the form they actually took, by the nature of the Church of England, and its peculiar tradition and ethos. Anglo-Catholicism began as a spontaneous revival of sacramental doctrine and practice, which based itself on the pronounced sacramental element already present in traditional Anglicanism; this it developed and carried far beyond anything that the Church of England had hitherto known, borrowing its devotional language and its theological expression as well as its ceremonial practice mainly from Latin sources. Many of its ideas have now permeated the whole Church of England, and the influence of the movement extends far beyond its own explicit adherents. More and more, it has come to look beyond the traditional Anglican standard, the primitive Church, towards the living expression of historic Catholicism to be found in the traditions of the Latin West and the Orthodox East.

The liberalising movement of which Bishop Gore was protagonist cut across the Anglo-Catholic movement in the latter part of the last century. This movement was not peculiar to the Church of England, but was widespread throughout Christendom, though the Anglican ethos gave it, in the case of Bishop Gore and his followers, a specific Anglican colour. The growth of the modern scientific spirit during the nineteenth century forced upon Christians the necessity of viewing revealed truth in a setting of new scientific and historical knowledge, and of new conjecture and hypothesis provoked by that knowledge. The chief sources of this new thought have been the literary and historical criticism of the Bible, and of Christian origins in general, and the bearing of scientific and philosophical evolutionary theories upon traditional Christian doctrine. The sound learning of the Anglican tradition has often been of very great value in meeting the attacks which have been made upon religion in the name of science and historical criticism,

The brunt of the battle in biblical studies has been borne by non-Catholic scholars, amongst whom Anglicans have held and still hold a high place. A casual glance through the pages of Lagrange or Grandmaison is sufficient to prove this. But there have been notable weaknesses in the general defence of traditional Christian doctrine within the Church of England, and the chief of these is the fact that its episcopate does not constitute an active teaching authority voicing a living and continuous tradition of revealed truth wider than its own boundaries. In consequence, there has been no regulation or control of the immanent law by the transcendent. The immanent law has allowed positions and ideas, especially concerning the nature of authority and of the revelation it proclaims, and of the act of faith by which that revelation is apprehended, which are in fact destructive of the truth, though they may not always be immediately seen to be so. The modernist heresy within the Catholic Church was condemned primarily not because of its advanced critical conclusions, but because underlying those conclusions was an immanentism the logical result of which was the denial of objective revelation. Where such denial exists, in more or less explicit form, in the Church of England, it is not representative of any considerable section of it, though it seems certain that premisses concerning the complex nature of all that is implied in the word *credo* are prevalent which would logically lead to such denial, and there is no living authority to act as warning and guide, and if necessary, when crisis arises, to exact the ultimate obedience of faith. The Church of England as it is to-day possesses a distinctive tradition and ethos, containing many elements that are Catholic combined with others that are inconsistent with the faith. It is alive and full of spiritual vitality, but this is partially paralysed by the fact that it comprehends elements that are in reality mutually exclusive. There is widespread feeling that it needs above all an active teaching authority resting on a tradition wider than its own

boundaries which can eliminate the false and incompatible elements within it, and make it consistent with itself.

It would seem that some measure of realisation of this need led to the appointment of the Doctrinal Commission in 1922. 'In the first proposal made to Archbishop Davidson in 1921, out of which the appointment of the Commission arose, the hope was expressed that a fundamental agreement might be revealed which should give a clear and convincing answer to the question "For what does the Church of England stand?" and that there might be found a norm of Anglican teaching with a general episcopal approval; because it was becoming increasingly clear that the only adequate safeguard against far more serious disruption lay, not in the fact of Establishment, but in securing a genuine unity of belief' (*Memorandum*, p. 13).

Two factors in the situation to-day are bringing home to members of the Church of England the urgent need for this unity of belief. One is the deep and serious perplexity 'caused by the wide diversity of teaching given from different pulpits, not merely on the familiar controversial questions relating to sacramental practice and ceremonial, but about the very grounds of belief, and the fundamental articles of the Christian faith. The very fact that the Report, when it was published, became a best-seller seems to show that the ordinary person to-day is earnestly seeking to be enlightened on these matters, and is asking what the teaching of the Church of England really is' (*Memorandum*, p. 12).

The other factor is the important official part that the Church of England has come to play in recent years in the oecumenical movement. Here, face to face with the representatives of the Orthodox Churches and of the great Protestant Confessions in a genuine attempt to penetrate, and reach agreement concerning, the fundamentals of the Christian revelation, it is becoming increasingly evident that the Church of England as a corporate organism has not yet chosen, and must soon choose, on which side of a

vertical line it stands. This vertical line cuts through most of the horizontal confessional divisions of Christendom, and marks a fundamental, and ultimately irreconcilable, divergence between groups within the same confessional allegiance. On one side of the line are those who view God's action upon the world and His revelation of Himself as exclusively evolutionary, and within the order of created nature, and who deny in consequence the existence of the supernatural and miraculous. On the other side of it are those who insist that in addition to God's action in and through the powers of created nature He has acted and continues to act upon that nature in a manner which wholly transcends its native scope and powers. This cleavage between those who deny and those who maintain the reality of the supernatural, though it is still largely implicit in premisses held rather than explicit in conclusions drawn, is even now beginning to make the confessional divisions of Christendom seem less insuperable by throwing together in mutual sympathy and increasing understanding all those, whatever their confessional allegiance, who hold the supernatural action of the transcendent God to be integral to His revelation of Himself and to His dealings with men. The great hope for the ultimate reunion of Christendom lies in a clearer realization of all the implications of this truth, and of the dangers into which its denial must lead. For such realisation will throw men back upon historic Christianity and upon the historic tradition which has been continuously preserved both by the Latin West and by the Orthodox East.

That certain elements in this historic tradition have permeated the Church of England as a whole is clear from the pages of the *Report* of the Commission. It is a remarkable thing that a Commission, roughly at least representing the main groupings of the contemporary Church of England, should have reached so high a degree of unanimity on such controversial questions as the nature of the Church, the ministry and the sacraments. Thirty years ago this would

have been impossible. The first and most important (because primary) part of the treatise on the Church (pp. 99-104) is an admirable statement, starting from a scriptural basis, of the nature of the Church as a divinely created fellowship, indwelt by the Holy Ghost, designed by God to be the instrument for the redemption of mankind through Christ.

' Salvation is offered to men through the redemptive activity of God. It can be received by the individual only through the free response of his will. But the salvation offered is, according to the teaching of the New Testament, not merely individual; it is, indeed, in one and the same act, the reconciliation of the individual with God, and his enfranchisement in the Communion of Saints, which is the fellowship of the redeemed, united to one another in the Communion of the Holy Spirit. It is as a member of the Body, as a " fellow heir " and a " joint partaker " in the common inheritance of the saints, that the individual through faith in Christ, hopes for salvation—a salvation which is essentially social and corporate.' (p. 103).

Here a Catholic feels that he is reading the words of people with whom he is fundamentally at one, whatever differences may subsequently occur. Similarly, there is a fundamental unity of principle between what Catholics hold and what is laid down in the *Report* on the relation between the Church and the Christian ministry. The priesthood of the Church derives from the priesthood of Christ:

' the Church on the day of Pentecost is set before us in the book of the Acts of the Apostles as a body of believers having within it as its recognized focus of unity and organ of authority, the Apostolate, which owed its origin to the action of the Lord Himself. There was not first an Apostolate, which gathered a body of believers about itself; nor was there a completely structureless collection of believers which gave authority to the Apostles to speak and act on its behalf. To suppose that the organization of the Church must have begun in one or other of these ways is to misconceive the situation. From the first, there was the fellowship of believers finding its unity in the Twelve.' (p. 114).

Finally, in the section entitled *The General Doctrine*

of *the Sacraments*, the function of the sacraments in the corporate life of the Church is explained on wholly Catholic lines:

'It is of the essence of the Christian doctrine of the sacraments that in each sacrament God Himself is active, bestowing grace by means of external signs.

All sacramental rites are grounded in this principle, and derive their virtue from the activity in them of Christ, Who, through the Holy Spirit, thus continues the work begun in the days of His Flesh.

That work is always redemptive, and the sacraments are means whereby the benefits of Christ's Passion are applied to the needs of a sinful world.

Christ now acts in the world through His Body, the Church. The sacraments belong to the Church, being part of its corporate life, and having their meaning within that corporate life.' (p. 127).

For the first time in its history, therefore, it can be said that the Church of England as a whole, in so far as the Commission is representative of it, has put forward a doctrine on the Church, the ministry and the sacraments which is fundamentally Catholic in type. It is true, of course, that much particular doctrine based on these foundation principles is not in accordance with Catholic standards. This is true especially of the doctrine of the Church, where its unity and catholicity must be explained in terms which will justify the traditional Anglican position. But, none the less, the general fact is of great significance for the future. The Church of England as a whole is moving, and in one direction at least it is moving towards Catholic truth.

As the *Memorandum* of the Council of the Church Union points out, this doctrine is, so far as it goes, a sound superstructure built upon rotten foundations, for the *Report* leaves two radically different views of revelation side by side unreconciled. It has failed, therefore, in its task of investigating how far it is possible to remove or diminish existing differences, because it has not set itself to go to

the root of those differences. Yet a strong desire for unity of doctrine remains, and will continue to make its influence felt. In every Christian communion, and not least in the Church of England, efforts are being made to go to the very root of the matter in order to find out why the impact of the Christian Gospel on the world at large is so slight and ineffective, and this widespread searching of heart is bringing about far-reaching changes in ideas and outlook. 'We have been learning again,' writes the Archbishop of York in his introduction to the *Report*, 'how impotent man is to save himself, how deep and pervasive is that corruption which theologians call Original Sin. Man needs above all else to be saved from himself. This must be the work of Divine Grace.' A deepening realisation of this need must lead to a wider acceptance of the correlative truth of the supernatural impact of the transcendent God upon the world of nature, for naturalistic theology is essentially and necessarily pelagian. In the Church of England at least, with its own historic heritage, this would be likely to mean a growing approximation to the historic traditions of East and West, which have consistently embodied and witnessed to this truth, and such a movement might well lead the way, in the providence of God, to the healing of the wounds of Christendom.

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