

MODERNIST PROTESTANTISM*

IT is an arguable thesis that the Protestantism which broke off from catholic unity in the sixteenth century is now most authentically represented by the group calling itself 'The Modern Churchmen's Union for the advancement of Liberal Religious Thought.' Not that these modern ecclesiastical Liberals have fewer inconsistencies in doctrine and practice than have the other insurgents against the *de facto* and *de jure* Catholic Church. Thus even the authentic 'aims of the Modern Churchmen's Union' as authentically stated in the Report (p. xvii) contain the following :

1. *To affirm the continuance and progressive character of the revelation given by the Holy Spirit in the sphere of knowledge and conduct.'*

(a) For the moment we are at a loss to know how the President of the Union, Dean Inge, has allowed the category of Progress to find a place in the aims. His broadside attack on the modern idea of Progress is remembered by us as one of the most refreshing draughts in modern English letters.

(b) The chief grievance felt by the insurgents against the Church in the sixteenth century was that there had been growth (Newman called it Development) of Christian Doctrine !

2. *To maintain the right and duty of the Church of England to restate her doctrines from time to time in accordance with this revelation.'*

(a) (Miss) Marie Stopes, Ph.D., stated in Court that she had received a Revelation with regard to contraceptives. Perhaps this throws light on the activities and aims of the Modern Churchmen's Conference

*PROBLEMS OF PERSONAL LIFE. The 17th Annual Conference of Modern Churchmen. (Basil Blackwell; pp. 184; 3/6 net.)

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which was largely occupied with proving that Contraception was Christianity.

(b) But a Church which takes its doctrinal revelation from secular sources is hardly a safe place for Modernists like Bishop Barnes, who recently—and in a thoroughly Catholic spirit—refused to submit the question of his ecclesiastical powers to a secular court.

3. To uphold the historic comprehensiveness of the Church of England.

We are not a little bewildered by this aim, when we reflect that the first exercise of this historic comprehensiveness was an ACT OF UNIFORMITY AND A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER which created Nonconformity, sent thousands to exile or the gallows, and, even by force of arms, never succeeded in capturing a majority of the people of England.

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But there is a 'Comprehensiveness' which is the latent, dynamic Protestantism within the Church of England. As life-long members of the Catholic Church we do not pretend to understand the fact—yet it is a fact—that within the liberties of the Church of England an official minister of that Church can explicitly deny fundamental doctrines of the historic Church of Christ. The insurgents of the sixteenth century, while explicitly arguing on the (intellectual) authority of the primitive Christians, were implicitly acting on the principle of the subjective authority of their own reason and conscience. Modern thinkers like Dr. Horton have realised how inconsistent were the early Protestant pioneers who on the one hand denied the infallibility of the Church and, on the other hand, proclaimed, as a fundamental doctrine, the infallibility of the Bible. Consistent Protestantism could

only hold, as Modern Churchmen hold, and as the young modernistic School of Anglo-Catholics hold! that there was no such endowment as Infallibility. It is this whole-hearted and honest rejection of objective infallibility that makes the Modern Churchmen the true heirs of sixteenth century Protestantism.

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A study of the addresses given at this recent conference will show how much latent satisfaction is in the Editor's words: 'It may be of importance to point out that all the Modern Churchmen's Conference papers were written before the Lambeth Conference Resolutions and Reports were published Whilst the Oxford Conference was in session, the Lambeth reports appeared, and the general feeling appeared to be one of gratitude that even if the Lambeth Fathers had not perhaps moved very far, yet they had moved, and that their movement had been forward—not perhaps always in a straight line, but after the manner of chess-board bishops—obliquely.' (p. 256).

Here we may unburden a difficulty we have always felt against the position covered by the words 'modern' and 'forward.'

We often hear it said that even such a fundamental institution as Marriage, and such a fundamental virtue as conjugal chastity, must adapt themselves to the new element in *modern* conditions. But we ask, and we have always asked in vain, what is this new element which was not present in the days of Onan, or Sodom and Gomorrhah or Herod?

Again, we ask in despair how a Church can 'go forward' by going back, as the Church which came out of paganism is invited by the Modern Churchmen to go back to the easy divorce and race-suicide of the pagans.

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If there is any consolation in all this welter of inconsistency it is that the Anglo-Catholics will recognise in the Modern Churchmen's satisfaction at the Lambeth decisions, the ominous fact that since the rise of Anglo-Catholicism the Church of England has moved. Yet in its most solemn pronouncements that movement has been, not in a Catholic, but in a Modernist Protestant direction.

The 'going forward' from modern times to the pagan era is seen in the frank paganism of the Dean of St. Paul's. 'The modern spirit is in vigorous revolt against all this. In parts of the Continent, especially in Germany and Sweden, young people of both sexes take exercise almost naked, and are proud of displaying the physical development which is the reward of their healthy mode of life. It is the revival of the "Greek spirit." (Is this 'going forward'?) 'Here surely Liberal Christians should sympathise entirely.'

Here surely we have the authentic Church of England Protestantism which would have delighted the heart, if not of a Colet, at least of a Henry VIII and Queen Elizabeth.

Those of us who have hitherto appreciated the dramatic fitness of St. Paul's address to the soul of Greece before the Areopagus at Athens, will feel not a little grateful that the descendants of Aristotle and Plato did not hear their first tidings of Christianity from the Dean of St. Paul's.

These perfervid clerical Modernists are so anxious to learn from the 'progressive revelations' of such accredited seers as Marie Stopes (of the gold-pin revelation!) that they seem not to have had time to see their inconsistencies. In this headlongness they are not a little quickened by their fear of the Catholic Church. Dean Inge's Presidential Address on *The Modern Outlook in Ethics* provides us with an exam-

ple of their inconsistency. He said: 'Ultramontane catholicism is too thoroughly medieval, both in its conception of a universal spiritual empire, and in its whole outlook to capture the progressive (sic!) nations of the world. . . . In the ethical field it represents a complete abandonment of Christian morality, since they are simply out to win, *recte si possunt, si non, quocumque modo*' (p. 259). Yet on the fundamental matter of birth-prevention the Catholic Church is so little out to win and so far from abandoning Christian morality that the Dean gloomily admits: 'As Liberal Churchmen our duty is to try and break down the steady opposition of traditionalists, and especially of Catholics, to any impartial consideration of this vital question' (p. 271).

The high-water mark of the Conference of Modern Churchmen was probably reached by the well-known Eugenist surgeon, C. J. Bond, C.M.G., in his paper on *The Medical Aspect of Birth-Control*.

'I wish to add a word about sterilisation as a method of preventing procreation in the case of persons who suffer from serious defects which, although not necessarily transmissible to offspring, yet render such individuals incapable of rearing offspring under normal conditions. Blindness in the case of both parents *in poor circumstances* (italics mine) constitutes such a defect.

'My advice has recently been sought by a Statutory Committee charged with the supervision of the blind in their area. The committee rightly wishing to discountenance the marriage of blind workers under their care, has passed a rule which provides that persons so marrying, without the consent of the committee, shall cease to receive benefit and employment by the committee unless one or both parties to the marriage can produce a medical certificate that such a marriage shall be childless.

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'Two young couples under the care (sic) of this committee have expressed in writing their willingness to undergo sterilisation and so comply with the committee's rule.

'Through the help of a sympathetic (sic!) surgeon, and at their own express wish the male partner has undergone vasectomy in the case of one couple, and the female (a blind girl of unsound stock) the operation of salpingectomy in the other.

'In my opinion sterilisation is the right method of conception-control in such cases. It provides a certain and life-long security against procreation; and such married couples do not lose their employment, they do not depend on support from the rates, and the State is safeguarded against the risk of the birth of children by parents who are not able to rear them under normal condition' (pp. 376-377).

The present writer feels his whole soul so nauseated by this proposition of a modern surgeon that he can hardly trust himself to a minimum of commentary. He only thanks God that he is not so blind as to overlook the inhuman callousness of this proposal. He can only see two fellow beings already mutilated in the most precious sense of sight. He sees them stretching out their hands to their fellow-men for an alms. He sees with horror that his fellow-men offer them bread and shelter only on condition of further mutilation; so that though they could never have the joy of seeing a human smile, they shall never even hear the laughter or the prattle of their own children. And this in the Name above all Names!

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Poor Dr. Bond! Poor Modern Churchmen! Ye too are blind; yet know not your own blindness. The fair garden of human and divine love you are treading down because in your blindness you have lost your

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way. Are we, who are within the liberties of the truth, to look on your blindness as so hopeless that in defending ourselves against you, we must mutilate you still further? Or are we to see in the opening words of your President, Dean Inge, a glimmer of sight, when he says to you: 'The present revolt against traditional ethics which it is our chief aim in this Conference to understand and criticise is not based on any philosophy consciously held, but rather on a collapse of all authority which has left the present generation without any universally accepted standards' (p. 257).

Have you eyes to see the Dean's writing on the wall? Have you ears to hear this warning cry? Or are you deaf as well as blind when he warns you that there is an ethical movement of profound importance; and that it is based not on any philosophy, that is, on thought; but on the collapse of all authority?

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