

The Panther and the Hind

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While reading Aidan Nichols' book, *The Panther and the Hind: A Theological History of Anglicanism* (T & T Clark, 1993) I remembered the story of the country which decided that their young people should be taught to play football and that a national side should be fielded to compete with other countries. So they wrote to the Football Association in England for copies of the laws of football and sent them to their schools with instructions that the young people should learn the rules by heart, be tested in their knowledge and then be sent out to play. There was, apparently, some consternation in high places when chaos ensued and questions were asked as to why people who had learned the rules still could not play the game.

Aidan Nichols has certainly learned the rules of Anglicanism but still appears—at least to this Anglican reviewer who was taught the rules by one of those whom Nichols recognises as a “separated doctor” of the Roman Catholic Church, Eric Mascall—to be unable to play the game. For there is no doubt at all about Fr. Nichols' scholarship and the acuity of his perspective on the history and development of Anglicanism since the Reformation. But none of his perception enables him to see how or why such a perverse—in his view—beast can continue to survive as it does with such vigour and obvious self-enjoyment, or why all right thinking Anglicans do not immediately see the error of their ways and at least join a Uniate Anglican Church and so regularise their position.

There will, of course, be a number of people, like the previous Bishop of London, Dr. Graham Leonard (who contributes a Foreword to this work), who will find what is said music to their ears. A number of them will stop playing the game and retire to read the rule books which they now feel they neglected for so long while they were on the field and playing so well. Perhaps they began to be surprised that the game was such a good one and that their team was coming together and could even score a few goals. They could not work out why this should be and so have feverishly begun to read the rule book to find out why the Church they have always belonged to is as bad as they always said it was!

What Aidan Nichols says about the Anglican Church is hardly any surprise to anybody, particularly not to Anglicans, who have been playing with a three (or more!) party team for some time. Nor is it any

surprise to scholars, many of whom, Anglicans included, agree with much of his analysis. We have known for some time that there are broadly speaking three strands within Anglicanism—Low Church Evangelicalism, High Church Tractarianism and Broad Church Latitudinarianism—and that these strands stem from different historical situations and theological perspectives, many of them the legacy of the Reformation. We have known for some time that the existence of all of these views within Anglicanism makes it very difficult for Roman Catholics to take us seriously but we have lived with that for a long time and will go on doing so quite happily for as long as it takes.

The great merit of Nichols' exposition of Anglicanism is its clarity. He has distilled so much of what has occurred in our history and enabled us to see afresh what happened and to see it gathered all into one place. He says that he hopes that his exposition will enable Roman Catholics to understand the Anglican Church more thoroughly and certainly this book will go some way towards that. It will help anybody who reads it to see links and connexions between the theological giants in each communion where they did not see them before. In particular I enjoyed Nichols' account of the influence of St. Thomas Aquinas on Richard Hooker and the picking up of links between liberal Anglo-Catholics like Charles Gore and Catholics like Hans Urs von Balthasar. Similar parallels are drawn between Anglican modernists and their Catholic counterparts, Tyrrell and von Hugel.

The trouble is, however, that the Anglicans are never allowed to get it right. Parallels there are but the poor little Anglicans, because of some beastly touch of the tar brush that they cannot get rid of, have never been able to come up to snuff. What Nichols confronts us with is a sort of theological classism: because we started out from the wrong place, "up north" or "down the mine" or "in the Reformation", then we are doomed for the rest of our days to be unable to get alphas on our essays. Anglican theologians are always shown either to have followed their masters with insufficient loyalty—Hooker, for instance, allows 'occasionalism' to traduce him away from a properly Thomistic view of the sacraments—or not to have mentioned something crucial that they ought to have known about—Anglican modernists, for example, read Tyrrell and von Hugel but "lacked interest in ecclesiology". It begins to sound like a school report. Even when we are privileged to be linked with von Balthasar we get panned because Balthasar is "careful" (which of course we were not) to link his version with the traditional doctrine. After a while this all becomes very predictable and very boring. I am no more a fan of Don Cupitt than Nichols but at least I think we should try and see *why* Cupitt says the things he does rather than simply assume that we have dealt with

him by saying that he is the last gasp of a tradition which should never really have existed in the first place. Nobody is faced on their own ground.

Nichols makes an interesting point when he says that Henry Scott Holland “anticipated the definitely controversial fundamental theology of the German Jesuit philosopher and dogmatician Karl Rahner”. Happily we find out a few lines later that both of these naughty theologians “provide correctives in the course of their writing, which mitigate . . . their offences”, but the cat is already out of the bag. For this form of criticism and this sort of language (“correctives”, “mitigate offences” etc) reveal that Nichols is working on both Anglican and, it appears, Roman Catholic theologians through coloured spectacles—and the shade of these spectacles is, quite simply, ‘intégrisme’. He wants to integrate everybody within one system and finds those who lead unintegrated lives or who produce unintegrated theology dangerous and ‘corrosive’. This implies that somewhere there is a view and that we all have to belong and hold that view. Breaking ranks with the party line is not allowed because unity is more important than the quest for truth. This makes me ask whether Fr. Nichols has not really stood where we stand in order to try to understand and interpret who we are.

The second difficulty I have is over the spectre of Erastianism. This ghost never really leaves the stage throughout the whole book and hovers continually over the interpretations offered, however well researched. The Reformation was a State Act. Hooker cannot correct himself because he has a theocratic view of the monarchy. We are even suddenly reminded that Thomas Arnold concluded “that officers of a Christian State should regard themselves as Christian Ministers and in the absence of ordained ministers be authorised to preach and administer the sacraments”. Dean Armitage Robinson is quoted as saying, “The ideal function of the Anglican Communion is to express and guide the spiritual aspirations of the Anglo-Saxon race” as if this was a standard view among Anglicans. In the end this recital of erastian sin also becomes boring and repetitive. ‘Erastian’ is certainly the standard criticism of Anglicanism among Roman Catholics. But as an understanding of what Anglicans really think of themselves it is outrageously untrue. It is evidentially not true that the Church of England behaves as if it were the servant of the State. Moreover, is it true that Catholic theology requires a total disjunction at all points between the life of the State and that of the Church? If so then we would have to dissociate ourselves from large parts of Roman Catholic history as well as from much of the history of the Orthodox Church at any time. The presence of this spectre throughout Aidan Nichols’ book only reveals the density of the colour in the

spectacles he is wearing. It might help his cause to think that that is what Anglicans think—and he may convince weak minded people that this is what the Anglican Church is like—but the large majority of Anglicans consider themselves to belong to a reformed and pastoral catholicism. Anglicanism is a way of being Catholic and not the way for a particular race of people.

It is Fr Nichols' conclusion which I found most difficult. Nichols concludes that no satisfactory ecumenical negotiations can be carried on with a Church which is "so very much three churches in one". So he envisages an Anglican Church united with but not absorbed by Rome based upon the selection of different strands from among those already mentioned viz. a metaphysic of theocentric humanism drawn from the Cambridge platonists, a doctrinal and sacramental ethos from the Restoration divines where incarnation, liturgy and church are linked, and a missionary spirit borrowed from the evangelicals. The difficulty is that we already have all of these things. In describing a possible Uniate Anglican Church Nichols describes the Church which I already inhabit quite well. We already have these elements, we have linked them together both in faith and in practice. They are already held together in a pastoral unity focussed in our Bishops. None of us—except some weakminded people—feel the need for this faith to be held within any other greater framework or think that it needs more validation and confirmation than it has already. And any peeps we may have taken over the garden wall into the Roman Catholic Communion do not reassure us that we need the sort of confirmation that is being talked about. We have seen what that sort of authority can do to people. And if these different strands have arisen and exist within an ecclesiology which is, according to Fr. Nichols' lights, defective, then it seems to us that the defectiveness is quite satisfactory.

When I talk to my Roman Catholic friends what I see is a group of people who are very much like me but who have fought to be like me against the very framework which Fr. Nichols says I need. Doubtless they think that I need what they have, but that is all the more reason for us simply to accept the integrity of the other and allow our two communions to grow together in patience, common service of the poor and mutual friendship. Different and apparently mutually defective ecclesiologies have—at least as far as my experience is concerned—produced very similar results. Nothing is served by the sort of exercise Fr. Nichols has completed except more of the corrosiveness which he claims is an Anglican disease. As I said earlier we have been playing a very satisfactory game already.

One of the crucial sentences in the book occurs when Fr. Nichols

admits that “the problems caused by theological pluralism throughout Anglican history have begun to be felt more keenly in other confessions, not least the Catholic...” He continues, “the inhibition of the emergence of church parties, and the resolute affirmation of what is common to Catholic faith and practice, is the main pastoral desideratum of the contemporary Church of Rome—and it is one for which the development of varieties of Anglican Churchmanship offers an instructive warning...”. For someone like me who lives and works in very close proximity to the Roman Catholic world this is really a very strange set of statements. It is blazingly apparent to me that there are and always have been church parties within the Roman Catholic Church. There are a number of internal contradictions within that Church, some of which have been there for a very long time. Moreover, the contemporary Roman Catholic Church is having increasing difficulty in doing just what Fr. Nichols says should be done. Could I not respectfully suggest that it might be better to take the Anglican Church as a pioneering example within Catholicism rather than as a warning? I agree with Fr. Nichols that the concept of the Anglican Church as a bridge Church between Catholics and Protestants has been overplayed. We are not so much the bridge Church as that section of the Catholic Church which has learned how to handle differences pastorally rather than doctrinally. That is the nub of the matter. Fr. Nichols would prefer us to hold our differences together in a different, and to him more intellectually coherent, way. We would like, respectfully, to point out that his Church also has its differences and is trying to hold them together in a way which—in our view—will only succeed at the expense of the links between a Church and its particular setting in a land or nation and at the expense of the freedom of groups and individuals to explore the truth for themselves and to bring that truth into the service of others, including those at the centre. Admittedly our way of “pastoral unity” puts a greater strain on the pastoral capacities of the episcopate. Anglican bishops are very much in the firing line on almost every issue; but my own experience is that ours is a more human, rational, local, reformed and accountable Church, more fitted for the changes that the Church has to face and live with in the modern world and no less true to the givenness of the Gospel and the essentials of Catholic theology. If that is our experience—that the game is being well played—and it is certainly mine—then why listen to people who think they have the rule book?

Earlier in this review I commended Fr. Nichols’ clarity of exposition. Behind that clarity, which is admirable, there is a desire for another sort of clarity, a religious clarity which, I feel, some of Fr.

Nichols' co-religionists would not find so congenial. May I refer him to von Hugel when he said,

“Never get things too clear. Religion can't be clear. In this mixed up life there is always an element of unclarity... Religion can't be clear if it is worth having. To me, if I can see things through, I get uneasy—I feel its a fake. I know I have left something out, I've made some mistake.

Aidan Nichols OP, *The Panther and the Hind: A Theological History of Anglicanism* Foreword by the Rt. Revd Graham Leonard T & T Clark, London, 1992 pp 186 .

Reviews

CREDO: THE APOSTLES' CREED EXPLAINED FOR TODAY. By Hans Küng, *SCM*, 1993, Pp.xv + 196. £9.95,
BELIEVING THREE WAYS IN ONE GOD: A READING OF THE APOSTLES' CREED. By Nicholas Lash, *SCM*, 1992, Pp.viii + 136. £7.95.

These two books on the Apostles' Creed, both by radical Catholic theologians, come from the same publishing house in rapid succession—but what a world of difference between them! Neither will bring great surprises to readers already familiar with their earlier, and in Küng's case, much longer writings,—though Lash's fertile mind seems often to be in process of surprising itself. But it is good to have such major theologians risking this apparently simpler but actually much more difficult role.

There is a sharp contrast of style between the two. Küng's book is based on popular lectures to vast audiences in Tübingen. It keeps the racy, colloquial style of such a setting, using the device of hypothetical questions from a variety of standpoints—traditional catholic, more radical forms of belief, atheistic, adherents of other religions—, which are then taken up and dealt with in a direct and straightforward manner. Lash writes in an elegant and elusive prose, full of memorable aphorisms that by their puzzling nature tease the mind into thought.

Their first major difference in terms of content is in their