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REFORMATION PRINCIPLES—ARE THEY WORTH PRESERVING ?

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THERE is surely no more foolish or ignorant cry than that which is heard to-day in some quarters, "Away with the Reformation." The Reformation marks one of the greatest movements in the history of the human spirit. We are concerned with it here mainly as a religious movement, but it was something far wider than that. It was a movement affecting the whole range of thought, culture, civilization. It was one of those creative moments in the world's history when new forces are released, which powerfully mould the future development of mankind. The principles underlying the Reformation as a religious movement are of a piece with that whole travail of the spirit of humanity, out of which our modern world began to be. I make, therefore, no apology for standing up to defend the Reformation.

Before examining the principles which underlay this great religious movement in England let us remind ourselves that the Reformers kept prominently in mind the continuity of the Church. The charge is sometimes brought that they broke away from the old, historic Church, and made a new one. They themselves, at any rate, were not aware that they were doing so; they certainly had no intention to do so. Their object was the very reverse; they wished to proclaim their continuity with the Church of Apostolic and Primitive times. Reform, not secession, was their aim. They took the Church of the first five centuries as their standard, and merely wanted to remove the errors and abuses of mediævalism. Thus Bishop Lancelot Andrewes writes: "Our religion you miscall modern sectarian opinions. I tell you, if they are modern, they are not ours; our appeal is to antiquity—yea, even to the most extreme antiquity. We do not innovate; it may be we renovate what was customary with those same ancients, but with you has disappeared in novelties." Richard Hooker says: "We hope, therefore, that to reform ourselves, if at any time we have done amiss, is not to sever ourselves from the Church we were of before. In the Church we were, and so are still." Archbishop Laud is even more emphatic: "There is no greater absurdity stirring this day in Christendom than that the reformation of an old, corrupted Church, will we, nill we, must be taken for the building of a new . . . One and the same Church still, no doubt of that; one in substance, but not one in condition of state and purity; their part of the same Church remaining in corruption, and our part of the same Church under reformation." Cranmer would have been horrified if you had told him that he was making a new Church. In drawing up his English Book of Common Prayer he tried to follow closely

the old, familiar Latin Service Books, except where they needed to be purified or simplified. The Roman teaching he rejected was rejected on the ground that it was not the teaching given by the Primitive Church, and had no warrant in Scripture.

Let me, in passing, say at this point a word about the meaning of the two terms "Protestant" and "Catholic." The opponents of the Reformers tried to claim for themselves the title "Catholic," and dubbed the Reformers "Protestants." But the latter always called themselves "Catholics." "We never departed," says Foxe, "from the faith of the true and Catholic Church of Christ. . . . We are the true Catholic Church and maintain the sanity thereof." The true opposite of "Catholic" is "heretic," and "Papist" is the true opposite of "Protestant." The word "Protestant" to-day has a militant sound; it suggests protest against something. But it must be remembered that the Reformers were not simply protesting against mediæval errors; they were contending for the true Catholic faith as it was in the early centuries. "The Church of England became Protestant at the Reformation that she might be truly and more purely Catholic"—so wrote Bishop Wordsworth. "Protestant" is the opposite of "Catholic" only when the latter word is used in a sense different from its true historical sense.

Let us now see what were some of the main principles of the Reformation.

I. THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE NATIONAL CHURCH.

While there was no breach of continuity with the historical, Catholic Church, there was, of course, a breach with Rome. It was a double breach: (a) There was the repudiation of Papal authority and supremacy. (b) There was the rejection of certain doctrines and practices current in the Roman Church. The breach with Rome in the matter of Papal authority, brought about at the instigation of that vigorous personality, Henry VIII, was not a bolt from the blue. Henry only gave the last impetus to a movement which had been gathering force for centuries. Bishop Creighton wrote as follows: "There never was a time in England when the Papal authority was not resented, and really the final act of the repudiation of that authority followed quite naturally as the result of a long series of similar acts which had taken place from the earliest times." The nation, like the King himself, might have been ready to accept the purely spiritual authority of Rome, but was not prepared to tolerate Rome's interference in non-spiritual matters and her claim to temporal power. What did this assertion of national independence mean in the religious sphere? The Church of England claims that it is a fount of authority in religious matters. It accepts the common beliefs of the Christian Church. If it did not, it could not claim to be a part of the Catholic Church. But it claims the right to draw up its own Prayer Book, and to settle what rites and ceremonies shall be used. Article XX says: "The

Church has power to decree Rites or Ceremonies, and authority in controversies of Faith. And yet it is not lawful for the Church to ordain anything that is contrary to God's word written." It accepts the decisions of the first four General Councils, but states that General Councils may err and have erred. In other words, the Church of England claims entire freedom of self-management, so long as it does not overthrow what is Catholic and Primitive.

It is important at this juncture to insist on this free power of our national Church, because a different view is being pressed upon us. We are told that the Reformation was a great mistake, and that we ought to submit either to the authority of Rome (the precise amount of that submission causes some difficulty to those who try to define it); or to the authority of what is called Catholicism. That is to say, there is some other authority to which we owe allegiance.

Now I leave on one side the question of submission to Rome. I cannot conceive that Englishmen will ever tolerate it; or that Rome can so far deny her own past as to make possible any form of reunion, which does not involve submission to her authority. At the same time it is well to bear in mind that seeds grow. What seems impossible to one generation may be possible to the next. But I have not any real fears in this matter. Let us pass on to consider the authority of Catholicism. What is Catholicism? We must know what it is, before we can estimate its authority. Here I confess to being in a fog. I have been unable to obtain any clear definition from Anglo-Catholics. In fact, the admission has been made by some of them that it is a weakness of their position that they can find no adequate definition. The usual definition given is, that by Catholicism is meant the beliefs and practices of the undivided Church up to 1054, when the split between East and West occurred. Note, that was not the Reformers' definition. By Catholicism they meant the beliefs and practices of the Church of the first five centuries, before changes had set in which were a departure from primitive purity. Let us take, however, 1054 A.D. as the limiting date. At once two criticisms come to mind: (1) Within that period are we to take over everything? It was a superstitious period. As the Bishop of Durham asks, who is to decide what is to be taken over? The only authorities seem to be, either Rome, or the antiquarian experts, who do not agree among themselves. (2) If 1054 A.D. provides the limit, why are Anglo-Catholics pressing for the adoption of beliefs and ceremonies which came into being later than that date? Benediction and Exposition, for instance, are not found in that period, nor is the observance of Corpus Christi. Catholicism is something vague and nebulous. It lacks a decisive standard. It may mean, and does mean for many, a whole congeries of practices which are simply Roman in origin and colour. Till Anglo-Catholics will define Catholicism, and tell us what it includes in the way of belief and practice, we must continue to resist its authority.

Now we are told that the day of national Churches is over ;

that the conception of a national Church is a narrow one, that Catholicism is a wider and finer thing. Men have said to me that they would like to see our national Church destroyed and a "Catholic" Church put in its place. But we *are* a Catholic Church, a true branch of the Church Catholic. And is the day of national Churches over? Is nationality a thing of the past? Can we not continue to have a Church which is the expression in religion of the national life and character? Such a Church need not be insular or narrow. It may possess international characteristics, and preserve an international outlook. Let us remember how the Church of England has moulded our national character, and what an intimate connexion there has been between Church and State in the past. That connexion has, if we take a broad view of the matter, been of real advantage to both parties. The connexion to-day is looser than it was, and no one wishes to make it tighter. But the Church can still do splendid service to the nation in the future. When it has composed its internal quarrels it will grow in influence. Let us cherish this conception of a free, independent, national Church as part of the Catholic system, and not be led away by the vision of some wider authority, nebulous in kind, to which we owe obedience.

2. THE SUPREMACY OF SCRIPTURE.

At the Reformation Scripture was made the test of doctrine. This appeal to Scripture is the most characteristic feature of the Church of England regarded as a teaching body. Article VI says: "Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation; so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation." We recall the great part played by the Bible in the Reformation. The Reformation began with the efforts to give the Bible in their own tongue to the people of England. Erasmus, Colet, Tyndale are honoured names in this connexion. In 1538 Henry ordered the Bible in English to be placed in every church. This return to the Bible was dictated by a double motive. First, there was the desire to make the Bible a common possession of the people. Secondly, there was the desire to pass behind theology as created by the Schoolmen to the fountain-head of the New Testament, and to study doctrine as it was in the apostolic writings. It was the beginning of that historical method, which has become to-day such a potent instrument of research. The Reformers, then, made Scripture the test of doctrine. They accepted Conciliar decisions, not simply because a General Council had made them, but because what the Council had decided was judged to be in accord with Scripture.

To-day we are faced with a movement which (a) tends to put tradition on an equal basis with Scripture; (b) tends to substitute for "what is true" the pragmatic test of "what helps." Brought

to the test of Scripture many doctrines and practices in vogue at the present time stand obviously condemned. The most notable example is the cultus of the Reserved Sacrament. The plea is put forward that many of these things, which have no warrant in Scripture, are natural developments from the primitive Gospel. Clearly there has been development, and development will continue. Christianity came into the world as a germ which was to unfold and ripen through the centuries. There has been development both in doctrine and organization. But the question we have constantly to ask ourselves is: Are all developments true? Have all the developments of Christianity been true to type? We have to distinguish between historical developments and what may be called natural developments. An acorn must grow into an oak; it cannot become an elm. Why? Because the growth of the seed is regulated and controlled by some inner principle or life-force, which ensures that it shall develop true to type, or at any rate with only slight deviations from the norm. But the chief agent in a historical development is man; and man can and does make mistakes. You must, therefore, have some standard for testing a historical development. We remember the difficulties in which Newman found himself when he tried to harmonize the teaching of Rome with the teaching of the Primitive Church. To solve his difficulties he made use of this idea of development. He drew up various tests, by which a true development could be distinguished from a false one. It was a brilliant piece of writing; but his theory of development was vitiated by the fact that the whole process had taken place under the control of a Papal authority, which regulated the development. There was no free, historical development at all. It was a logical development, and it was assumed that what emerged had been implicit all the time. The whole theory was a glaring example of the fallacy of begging the question.

Now, if we are to have some standard for testing theological and ecclesiastical developments, where can we find that standard except in the New Testament? There is no other standard available. To say that the mind of a particular century is to be our standard, or to canonize the whole period up to 1054 A.D. and offer that as the norm for doctrine and practice, is to refuse to treat the New Testament as the abiding touchstone. Tradition has its place, but it is always subordinate to the standards of Scripture. To substitute "what helps" for "what is true" is to open the door to every kind of emotionalism and superstition. If the present generation were a Bible-reading generation, if it had the knowledge of the Bible which the older Evangelicals possessed, I am sure that we should be free of many of our difficulties. We cannot do a more important thing at this juncture than to insist on the supremacy of Scripture. Since the war there has been a recrudescence of superstition in many directions. Perhaps that has always been the effect of a great upheaval. All the more important, therefore, is it to preserve a sane, critical judgment, and to test all new developments in the light of Scripture.

3. THE PRIESTHOOD OF THE LAITY.

This was another cardinal principle of the Reformers. The Church of England has always maintained the right of each individual soul to have access to God without any intermediary. This of course does not mean that there is not need or room for a duly ordered and constituted ministry, or that it is not part of the duty of the minister to help in the direction of the spiritual life of his flock. But this is a very different thing from the claim that this ministry has some special authority of a unique kind over the life of the individual. "The Church of England," says Bishop Lightfoot, "has no sacerdotal system; it imposes no sacrificial tribe or class between men and God." "Priest" in the English Church means "presbyter." At the Savoy Conference in 1661 the Presbyterians wished to substitute "presbyter" for "priest" in the Prayer Book. But the Bishops refused to make the change, saying that "priest" was only a shorter form of "presbyter" and meant the same thing. In the Latin translation of the Prayer Book, made in 1670, and made with official sanction, "priest" is rendered "presbyterus" and not "sacerdos." The Epistle to the Hebrews never alludes to any human priest acting as an intermediary between God and man, but bids each "come boldly to the throne of grace."

Can it be denied that we are faced to-day with an attempt to restore that very system of the Mass and the Confessional, which involves the sacerdotal idea, against which the Reformers fought? When we think of the tremendous stress which is being laid upon confession, we are driven to see behind it a claim to spiritual direction and authority, for which surely there is no warrant in the New Testament. The Englishman has a wholesome dread of priestcraft; he will not be won over in any large numbers to an acceptance of any such system of spiritual control of his religious life. The danger lies in another direction, in the possibility of the machinery of the Church being captured by a section, whose views do not represent the views of the mass of the English people. Let us remember (I say it reverently) that Jesus was a layman, and that the very heart of the Gospel is that each human child can move with perfect freedom in his Father's house.

4. THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND AND THE FREE CHURCHES.

The Reformers not only showed great sympathy with the non-episcopal Protestant Churches of the Continent, but remained in communion with them. They accepted episcopacy for themselves. They felt it had New Testament sanction, and had proved in actual working to be the best system of ecclesiastical government. But they did not regard it as of the essence of the Church; nor has the Church of England ever done so. There is nothing either in the Ordinal or the Articles to show that the Church of England refuses to allow that non-episcopal Churches are part of the Catholic Church of Christ. The description "branch of Christ's Holy Catholic Church" is given in one of the canons of 1603 to the Re-

formed Presbyterian Church of Scotland. Bishop Cosin deliberately communicated when abroad in Protestant Churches. Bramhall would not allow that these Churches were unchurched by the Church of England. He re-ordained Presbyterian ministers who desired it, but always said that in so doing he did not doubt the validity of their orders. Tillotson was prepared not to require re-ordination of those who had been ordained abroad in non-episcopal Churches. Since the Oxford Movement a school of thought has arisen, which lays stress upon episcopacy as of the *esse* of a Church, and emphasizes the doctrine of Apostolic Succession in a way in which, as Professor Turner has shown in his essay in *The Early History of the Church and Ministry*, it was never emphasized in earlier days. We are hearing much to-day about reunion. All Christian people must be anxious to heal as far as is possible our divisions. The question is, with whom is reunion first to come about ? Are we to seek reunion first with Rome, or with our own Free Church brethren at home ? Surely with these last lie our true sympathies, born of our sharing in the common life and development of our nation. What is keeping back this reunion (whatever form it may ultimately take) is the fact of the presence in the Church of England of a school of thought, which is not content with applying the New Testament principle "by their fruits ye shall know them," but insists that without episcopacy there can be no true Church. At this moment a race is going on between those who would press for reunion with Rome, and those who would begin by seeking reunion with our English Free Churchmen. I am not wishing to defend our divisions, with all the strife and overlapping which they cause, but in my judgment the very genius of Christianity is such that it lends itself naturally to differing expressions. I should be sorry to see only one type of ecclesiastical organization. Deeper than organization lies spirit, and spirit creates for itself differing embodiments.

Attempts are being made to alter radically the historical character of our Church. It is incumbent on us all to make strenuous defence of the heritage left us by our fathers. The more the work of the Reformers is studied, the more does their wisdom and sanity appear. They had seen the mediæval system in operation before their eyes. They deliberately rejected it. Do we wish to see it restored ?