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THE MENACE TO PROTESTANTISM FROM THE WEST AND FROM THE EAST.¹

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IN order to enter upon the subject of the menace to Protestantism from Rome in the west and from the Greek churches in the east, the enquiry should be made: What is this threatened Protestantism? Does the supposed menace affect anything material to the basis or practice of our spiritual life?

The recent Islington Clerical Meeting has made it clear, by recalling much that ought not to have been forgotten, that Protestantism is not merely an imperfect or partial historical reaction, only negative to the corruptions of the Medieval Church that have now been reformed away, but a self-interpretative message and gospel, and is as such effective where its consequent negative aspect to error is not brought into view.

A more complete and thorough Protestantism than is current in the Church of England at the present day is greatly to be desired, for an incomplete or partisan grasp of truths that are fundamental and essential is a menace from within that should be first realised and then strengthened.

Perhaps the most suggestive and complete definition of the reformation of the Church of England would be to describe it as the revival of Apostolic Protestantism. This is not question-begging or running away from historic controversy with Rome, but taking up the higher ground of its Scriptural basis.

The protestations of S. Paul, which are not confined to the Galatians, and of the Epistle to the Hebrews, include the setting forth of the liberty of the gospel delivering us from the guilt and power of sin, the free acceptance by grace of the assurance of eternal life and the realised presence of the Saviour in the heart effected by the Holy Spirit. As this gospel is protestant and negative to the bondage of the law, the reactions of the heart towards beggarly elements or carnal ordinances constitute internal menaces to the status of the sinner saved by the Grace of Christ alone.

The inspired Scriptures are effective remedies for the recurring sicknesses and epidemics that afflict the soul. The medicine of the Galatian Church wrought the cure of Luther sixteen centuries later, and can be prescribed for our present maladies; the leaves of this tree are for the healing of the nations. In short, the sensitive heart of Protestantism is the faith which hears the voice of God in the Scriptures and has felt it working salvation in the soul.

The double menace of to-day has opposite characteristics: the Church of Rome pursues its consistent campaign against the Protestant Church of England, while that Church on her part assumes a

¹ Address at London Meeting of Lay Churchmen, January 23, 1932.

retreat from its Protestant peculiarity towards intercommunion with the unreformed Eastern Church.

On the one hand the admirable missionary zeal of Rome is based upon a unique claim and supported by energetic propaganda, while on the other hand, our own leaders, with enthusiasm for an ideal of reunion which has woven itself into the outlook of the Church at home, enter into negotiations with the Greek Church which involve recognition and fellowship with many practices and traditional doctrines that are not in harmony with the Scriptural Protestantism of our reformers. In either case the menace exists in an imminent form. Protestants can obtain unity with the Church of Rome only by repentance and reconciliation, or by sacrificing the distinctiveness of a sole appeal to the supremacy of the word of God, effect intercommunion with the Greek Church.

It will be observed that the menace of Rome in the main affects the spiritual liberty of the individual, it appeals to him to eschew Protestantism as error. The Greek *rapprochement* menaces the status of the Church of England as a representative Protestant communion. Thus different methods of defence are implied, but in both cases the necessity will be apparent of a fundamental realisation of what is essential Protestantism.

A revival of Pauline Protestantism will, in the first case, reintegrate the soul in its liberty and in the second will secure the Scriptural foundations of the Church of England against disintegration. For this revival of Evangelical doctrine we must confidently pray and courageously work.

The self-sufficient completeness of the system of the Church of Rome offers a primary menace to current Protestantism with its proverbial want of unity. The force of this contrast it is not possible to deny and it would be futile to emulate Rome's apparently harmonious and logical position. Its effect must be admitted while its spiritual validity is repudiated.

The confident authority of an infallible Church on earth furnishes a bed-rock principle for the repose of faith. On this foundation a discipline of the intellect can be established demanding obedience which is absolute, and, by the sacrifice of the Protestant idol of the right of private judgment, it actually produces a genuine humility. It proceeds to exercise a control of the conscience which affords a substantial relief from the canker of indecision and provides a satisfying answer to the unavoidable question, "What must I do to be saved?"

The promised relief is attained by resigning all the anxieties of the soul to the proffered arms of the Church, a relief which is sufficient in most cases to hide from view the weakness of that Church's foundation. The superficial healing which may be continually renewed by penance brings the soul into a bondage which is welcomed rather than refused.

To this menacing claim of Rome—pressed to-day as ever upon the burdened conscience—the only answer which is effectually satisfying is that the real authority for the justification of the

sinner by grace remains only with God, who Himself will speak directly to the heart through His vivified word.

Further, the liberty which the Spirit of God imparts produces in the heart not only peace, but the fruits of holiness in a measure that compares (dangerous and misleading though such comparisons are) with that of modern saints or mystics, whether Baron von Hügel or S. Therese of Lisieux. The life consecrated to Christ spreads its blessedness over the whole sphere of proper activities and is richer and more blessed in its sacred joys and service than the alternatives of the specialised devotions of the contemplative Orders of the Roman system.

Among the fruits of the Spirit will be a sincere affection, derived from the Saviour, for sinners; for personal evangelism is the true Protestant answer to the menacing zeal of Rome for the conversion of England, and the need of this aggressive service is urgent. Zeal must be countered by zeal in love, and error be answered by the experience and testimony to realised truth.

A secondary but pressing menace is the attractiveness to very many minds of the tradition of a sacred splendour in the Roman practice of public worship; but this is secondary only if the underlying doctrinal intention is overlooked; for the utilisation of the arts in the worship of the Church is directed mainly to the emphasis of the Mass. The truth or falsehood of the object of the employment of the arts cannot be overlooked. It may be confidently stated that both cumulative effect and detail have meaning and reference, and that tradition governs religious art.

The values of all pure art are gifts of God's grace and as testimonies to His reality they cannot be despised, but like all other wonders are secondary in nature to the primary revelation of the truth by His Spirit. The service of music with the other arts to an untrue faith, as it would be to a sinful purpose, illustrates the maxim *corruptio optimi pessima*. The purpose of art is to stimulate emotion, and psychology teaches that emotions which do not result in right action have harmful reactions. The problem of religious art may therefore be stated by reference to the resultant actions it produces, e.g. to the influence upon the life of the beholder of a crucifix, or that of solemnizing music on the hearer. Art must have a purpose, and its danger lies in the mere enjoyment of the emotion while avoiding or suppressing its purpose. If therefore in the artistic acme of Roman worship the purpose is involved with the doctrine of the Mass, it becomes clear that the service of art is misapplied and its attractiveness menaces spiritual reality.

To offer a counter attractiveness of the same quality would seem to be impossible in Protestant worship; it suggests the evolution of a Christian counterpart of the superseded glory of the Temple ritual of Judaism. The secondary, or visible and temporary, would be invoked to the diminishing of the primary and lasting values of the spirit—we shall find ourselves facing again the protests of the New Testament, as well as of the prophets, against unreality in worship. It can be no answer to the menace to cite the most

beautiful Anglican Cathedral ritual against its Roman prototype or the feebler imitations of the parish church. The primary must precede the secondary ; the Protestant glorious liberty of the truth possessed and expressed finds for itself the proper sphere of the secondary values of order, beauty and joyous utterance, to which no limits need be put, subordinate to consistency with essentially spiritual purpose.

While the menace of Rome should incite Protestants not to avoid personal contact, but to promote the evangelisation of their brethren, the character of the menace which arises with the Eastern Churches removes it from personal to the sphere of corporate action : and to almost its full extent, for us at home, into the hands of theologians. The "mysterion" of ordination which is to be taken for granted without exact definition by Anglican and Orthodox is patient of a doctrine of apostolical succession that is not patient either of Protestantism or the history of the reformed Church of England : and the acceptance of the statement by the delegation to the Lambeth Conference, that the explanation of the Anglican doctrine of the Eucharistic sacrifice was agreeable to the Orthodox doctrine "if an explanation were to be set out with all clearness" fills the Protestant with fear as to the nature of such explanations.

The contacts with orthodox Christianity in the mission fields of the East, however, are practical matters in which the fundamental issues of gospel liberty and simplicity cannot be evaded or contention for the truth avoided.

It must be earnestly pressed that the tolerating light of Protestant truth is not dimmed in dealing with these two phases of what we certainly hold to be error ; that the gift of the grace of God for the ministry is not a "mysterion" attaching to a physical contact, or that the Eucharistic sacrifice involves any assimilation to the false doctrine of transubstantiation.

In both regards how much we desire for our leaders in any negotiations the clarity and faithfulness to Scripture and primitive practice of the fathers of the Reformation, so that a Church which has been so long remote and without missionary aggressiveness, may in its present era of persecution and depression be revived by the Protestantism which has been and is, thank God, still the glory of the Church of England, and that a harmony of doctrine which is not fictitious or evasive may become the basis of fellowship in the Gospel, and dissipate the menace of a lowered standard of Protestant faith and practice.

The Pigs and Other Curly Tales for Young and Old, by McEwan Lawson (Student Christian Movement, 2s. 6d. net), is a series of light sketches on a variety of subjects which will amuse and instruct many of various ages.