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Contemporary Commentary

A Quarterly Review of Church Affairs and Theological Trends

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ANGLICAN ISOLATIONISM

THE recent action of delegates representing the Church of England at the Oslo conference of Christian Youth, in abstaining from participation in the Eucharist celebrated in the Lutheran tradition for members of the conference, has caused bewilderment in the churches of the Reformation on the continent and profound distress to many Anglicans. The counsel conveyed to the delegates from the Archbishop was evidently delivered as a command which it would have been hard for any representative to disobey. Yet one significant issue is immediately presented to the instructed churchman. The various provinces of the Anglican Communion, while recognising a primacy of honour in the See of Canterbury, do nevertheless claim and exercise an autonomy which is comparable to the position of the Dominions within the British Commonwealth. It seems clear that however much the delegates from England may have felt themselves bound by the archiepiscopal direction, no such binding power ought to have controlled the actions of Anglicans from other parts of the world.

If the question is confined to the actions of English churchmen alone, it is clear that the direction to abstain from communion in a Lutheran Church is a most serious innovation in classical Anglican practice. Without exception, in earlier centuries Anglicans regarded the Reformation as a mighty spiritual movement, bringing back into the full light of day the purity of the Gospel and of primitive practice. They were not unaware of differences in theology and in order between themselves and the Protestants of the continent. They were prepared to assert, as the University of Cambridge did in 1681, that the Church of England was " the beauty and crown of the Reformation " and to believe that reformation principles would everywhere be strengthened if the moderation and good order of the Church of England could be more widely reproduced. But a tenacious hold on sound tradition and practice did not forbid a ready acknowledgment that the Church of England was at one with Lutherans and Calvinists on the fundamentals of the faith and in that respect stood with them over against the Church of Rome. Nor did representative Anglicans shrink from the logical consequences of this acknowledgment in the practice of intercommunion. Foreign Protestants visiting England were readily admitted to communion (note the thousands of Hugenots absorbed at the end of the 17th century) and English churchmen on the continent joined in communion with Lutherans, Dutch Calvinists and French Hugenots with the open approval and encouragement of ecclesiastical authority. The historian Clarendon comments on the novelty of Lord Scudamore's action when, as English ambassador in Paris, he withdrew from intercourse with the French Protestants.

The Tractarian and post-Tractarian pre-occupation with the Roman controversy has thrust ecclesiastical issues into the foreground which are far removed from the common concern of reformed Christianity and seriously distorted the perspectives of Anglicanism. The spokesmen of the Church of England to-day are far from being in full accord with the historic position of the Church as it is disclosed in its standards and traditions. The novelty and audacity of this ' catholic ' claim to represent the Church of England should be widely recognised and as widely disallowed, for it is producing an isolationism in the Church of England which is not only foreign to its traditional position but also repugnant in an age when the utmost possible unity is an urgent necessity.

PARTNERS IN OBEDIENCE

THE enlarged meeting of the International Missionary Council was held at Whitby, Ontario, last July and as the first gathering of this kind since Madras 1938 was bound to be an important event. For nearly ten years Christians have been kept apart by the iron curtains which war inevitably sets up. Even the hardships and difficulties of total war have not been able to shatter the growing unity of the Church in this generation, and the meeting at Whitby set the seal on the great new fact of our era proclaimed by Archbishop Temple in the Spring of 1942. The delegates took courage from the fact that in spite of the chaos of recent years the Church has not disappeared from any country. But it was a sober courage, because none could fail to recognize how precarious is the existence of the Church in many areas and how meagre are the resources with which to face unparalleled demands.

The conference was emphatic in its endorsement of the Madras emphasis on the necessity of indigenous leadership, but it also showed itself aware of the limits of this emphasis. " The evangelistic task of the Church," says the report, " is much too large and varied to be the prerogative of one order or one privileged class in the Church." If this means that the evangelistic task requires the full participation of the ordinary member as well as of the ordained specialist, it also affirms that no particular church is adequate to the task which confronts it. " The older churches have still much to contribute to the life of the younger, but it is also true that the older churches need for the fulfilment of their task, the help of the rich spiritual resources which are being developed in the younger churches." If partnership in the work committed to the family of God is to be anything more than a pious aspiration, then it involves receiving as well as giving in the life of every partner. Can the reconversion of England be undertaken with any prospect of success by English Christianity alone? Its original conversion to Christ was the result of foreign missionary aid, and it is at least very likely that its reconversion will require similar outside aid. At the present moment the churches in Britain do not appear to be able to carry out the tasks committed to them.

Another feature of the deliberations was the emphasis placed upon training leaders in the younger churches to equip them to bear the heaviest burdens. There can be few to dispute the need for genuine Christian leadership in every part of the world, but there does not yet

seem to be a close enough examination of the true pattern of leadership in the Church of the twentieth century. It is obvious that men of strong personality, of outstanding gifts or who have received special training, will exercise considerable influence ; but is this all that can be said of Christian leadership ? Is it the duplication in an ecclesiastical framework of the necessary leadership and initiative in secular affairs ? Or is it a unique quality which is the gift of the Holy Ghost, and manifested in a way hardly recognised by the world ? Church history is full of illustrations of the disastrous consequences of ' Christian ' leadership exercised in a way that the world understands, even if it dislikes or repudiates it ; but are we not called to understand afresh the whole meaning of Christian leadership in a revolutionary world and then to see how far men can be trained for such a function ?

A particularly welcome note heard in the conference was the emphasis upon the task of evangelism as central to the whole world task of the Church. All work must be judged by the extent to which it is winning or failing to win men and women to personal allegiance to Jesus Christ. It is all too easy for Christian institutions (schools and hospitals) to become obsessed with academic standards and to obscure the real purpose of their existence. A representative group of Chinese leaders has recently asked for more of the old fashioned missionaries who will go out into the country and evangelise. The Church itself in every land has to be reconverted in every generation, and unless it is content to be unfaithful to its Lord it must treat the work of witness and of preaching to those " who are without " as a priority in its list of duties. Partnership in obedience requires that this must first be understood and then acted upon as vigorously in the older churches as in the younger.

ECCLESIASTICAL ESCAPISM

OUR present discontents are compelling increasing numbers of churchmen to apply themselves to the problems of the life of the church in a post-Christian society. Inevitably men vary in their diagnosis of the trouble, and widely different if not contradictory proposals are canvassed as the way out of the spiritual deadlock of the hour. A group of clergy from Hull has put out a broadsheet entitled *The Church and Evangelism in England To-day*, and the younger clergy of the diocese of Chelmsford have been conferring on the subject of " Fulfilling our Ministry." Both these groups in common with many others are conscious of the great gulf fixed between the people of England and the Church of England. It is apparent, as Bishop Henson with relentless logic was accustomed to insist, that the Church of England has, since the early years of this century, declined into a sect. What is disturbing in the Hull broadsheet and in many other quarters is the uncritical acceptance of this lamentable result. Indeed, the outlook which is given expression in these documents seems to anticipate and to make plans for a more strongly marked divergence between Englishmen and English churchmen than at any previous epoch of our history. It appears as if the determination to be realistic and to face the seriousness of the present situation has led these groups into a sectarian outlook which is inadequate to the

hour. No good can come out of any attempt to divert attention from immediate difficulties by the bland assurance that revival is nigh at hand. But the realist Christian will count his assets as well as his liabilities and will know that the kind of generalisation which sees the churchman on one side and the average Englishman on the other with a deep gulf fixed between is probably even more misleading than such generalisations commonly are.

It is not true to say that the minority position of the church is an unrecognized fact, although more than one deduction may legitimately be drawn from it. Many voices (including episcopal voices) have been insisting on this very point for some years. What we look for in vain is any proper recognition on the part of these groups of the tension which ought to be a mark of church life. If it is right to oppose any facile identification of the church with the nation, it is certainly wrong to speak without qualification of the church becoming " more truly the church by living in opposition to the world." There has to be an identification of the Body of Christ with the world as well as an essential apartness, and this can only be manifested in tension. The views of these groups suggest as much of an escape from that tension in one direction, as the views which they are opposing avoid tension in another way. What is also surprising in a professedly realist document is the amount of space devoted to easy platitudes and sweeping generalisations. " There is no inherent difficulty in making the Church an aggressive outspoken society obtruding her principles and practice on the world—except the lack of will to do it " ! " If by the grace of God something like a miracle happened and the Church through her leaders began to throb with a new spirit and as a consequence began to adopt a new policy and method, then a new force would be introduced into the situation which would falsify all the predictions." It is one thing to point to the need for a prophetic voice and for wholly new policies and methods : it is quite another thing to say this without giving any satisfactory indication of what is in mind or even of what is desired.

It is hard to accept this document as what it claims to be, ' a practical proposal.' The only concrete suggestion is the need to establish a generally agreed minimum basis of adult membership defined in terms of duties, and that the administration of the occasional offices should be confined within those limits. It is open to question whether general action along what must appear as purely legal requirements is the most likely way of winning the people of England into definite Christian allegiance. There is need for greater pastoral care in the administration of these rites by preparation and teaching, but this will almost certainly provide all the needful discipline. It is idle to assert that the parish priest is " powerless to take any direct action to bring about reform in his own parish," for some are already doing it.

It is evident that there is a good deal of confused thinking in such a document which is hardly calculated to be of much assistance at the present moment. What is most deplorable is the failure to show a deep sense of penitence, and the most frank accusation we have yet seen from church sources of the blindness and impotence of church

leaders. It is strange that this bitter complaint should come from a diocese like York, which for twenty years has enjoyed the leadership first of Dr. Temple and then of Dr. Garbett. It looks as though such groups have been smitten by the prevailing disease of the age—the refusal to admit responsibility for failure and the readiness to seek for a scapegoat. It is possible to rationalize the frustration of pastoral failure by blaming the bishops, but it does little to assist our present desperate plight. In another and even more startling direction it is to be noted the outlook here described is deeply influenced by an assumption of the age, that " the system " is the source of nearly all our ills. Change the system and its leadership and the Church will be what she ought to be. On the contrary, the clamant need is genuine repentance (in particular the repentance of rank and file members for persistent failure to follow a lead frequently given) and spiritual revival.

TAKING SIDES IN HISTORY

THERE still survive some writers who possess sufficient hardihood to permit themselves the use of the high sounding phrase ' history teaches us ' and forthwith proceed to an exposition of some favourite opinion fortified with the claim to indisputable historical justification. The discriminating reader, when confronted with such an assertion, is in the habit of preparing himself for a whacking lie, since nearly everything will depend on the selection of facts made by the writer and the perspective from which he views them. The impact of scientific methods and ideals upon modern historical writing has tended to discount the attempt to find moral lessons in history and to urge that the business of the historian is to narrate as faithfully and impartially as he can the actual course of events. No doubt earlier writers had frequently shown themselves too censorious in their treatment of historical characters and sometimes reduced history to a source book for the illustration of moral principles which they desired to advocate. By contrast the modern historian, enmeshed in the relativities of modern thought, is frequently in doubt about moral standards and his moral scepticism is apt to be reflected in his historical judgments.

The late Dr. C. J. Cadoux, well known for his devotion to freedom and opposition to tyranny, whether secular or ecclesiastical, has addressed himself to this problem of moral judgments in history in an important book entitled *Philip of Spain and the Netherlands* (Lutterworth, 18/-).

In a carefully documented chapter he has accused the *Times Literary Supplement* of showing over a period of years an unscholarly favour to books which put the record of Roman Catholicism in the most favourable light possible. It is a serious indictment, sufficiently of a piece with well known Roman methods, and demands a serious reply.

Dr. Cadoux then turns his attention to a limited field of enquiry—the struggle of the Netherlands for political and religious liberty against Philip II of Spain in the sixteenth century. The facts are easily accessible and Dr. Cadoux has not attempted to make an original contribution to history but has subjected two modern revisers of Motley's classical narrative, the one a Romanist and the other an

Anglican, to a close and searching examination. He has no great difficulty in demonstrating the shifts to which they are reduced in their determination to prove that Philip, the Duke of Alva and the officials of the Inquisition were not really cruel and oppressive. What makes his judgments more impressive is the scrupulous determination to make every possible allowance for Philip and to recognise the shortcomings of William of Orange. In the light of this discussion it is plain that in the end the conflict was between religious freedom and toleration, between at least a measure of humaneness and cruelty, between irresponsible monarchical despotism and the rights and wishes of subjects. Nor are those issues located merely in past history but are burning questions of the hour. We have to take sides at the present time and there is no convincing reason against the same procedure in studying the past, provided we are scrupulously honest in handling the material. This present study illuminates the extent to which " my cause right or wrong " can affect the judgment of Christian men and distort their moral sensibility.