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Contemporary Commentary

A Quarterly Review of Church Affairs and Theological Trends

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WITNESS ON THE CHRISTIAN FRONTIER

THE days are not far past when it was fashionable for ecclesiastical writers to refer to the fissiparous tendencies of Protestantism as though this was so obvious a feature of non-Roman Christianity of the West as to require no further elaboration or definition. It is undoubtedly true that in days of decline Protestant communities were deeply infected by the secular individualism of early industrial society. But that persistent and honest searching of the Scriptures which has always been the glory of the main Protestant traditions had already led to a rediscovery of the central significance of the beloved community, before the pressure of recent events compelled Protestant communities to become what they already were, the Church. One of the most impressive demonstrations of this awakening in evangelical Christendom was offered in Berlin last summer, when there was assembled in the hot days of July a mammoth convention of Protestant Christians. One of the most forward-looking of German Evangelical leaders—Reinold von Thadden—has described this *Kirchentag* as a “landmark of the very greatest consequence in the history of our church”. It was a bold decision on the part of the promoters of the convention to summon it in a city which is divided between the occupying powers and where the division between East and West, between two opposing ideologies, has its visible manifestation in barriers and controls. It was deliberately intended to express the fact that Christians are called to be frontiersmen, to live and witness on the frontiers of the church and the world, of peace and war, of prosperity and poverty, of unity and division.

The *Kirchentag* demonstrated that communities which are held apart politically and physically by insurmountable walls of distrust and antagonism can experience brotherhood, not by way of a political slogan or a social theory, but in the common life of the people of God. “One Lord, one faith, one baptism” is not the despairing cry of ecclesiastical perfectionists but a reality, when Christian people of diverse backgrounds and interests meet together in the name of Jesus Christ. When this happens it is as though none of the things that divide exist any longer. The oneness of the people of God was apparent in another dimension besides that of political or geographical disunity, for the division between rich and poor, town and country, managers and workers, refugees and native inhabitants, disappeared as by a miracle. Delegates representing coloured peoples of the younger churches from overseas were present and “addressed a white nation, so widely represented, in order to teach them the Gospel”. Though great crowds were gathered in the shattered, divided city “the masses dissolved into human beings who emerged as responsible individuals, eager and willing to take upon themselves the task of solving their problems in the light of our common faith”.

The effect of this great rally, summoned in no spirit of ecclesiastical drum-beating or desire to beat politicians at their own game, had a profound effect upon the discharge of the Christian mission. Many workers and intellectuals, who had for years been alienated from the preaching and piety of the church, "overnight became receptive to the Christian message," while others who had been little better than passengers, were turned into "courageous confessors in the community of brotherhood," no longer ashamed of the Gospel of Christ. The *Kirchentag* addressed itself particularly to the function of the ordinary church member and brought many to realize that in emerging from pious seclusion, the church can live on the frontier between the Kingdom of God and the hard realities of life in a world of intolerable social and economic tensions, a world divided between the two opposing world powers of East and West. It is the layman alone who can represent the church in the world, in the context of industry or politics. There can be no doubt that this remarkable Christian assembly, which so successfully ignored the Iron Curtain, made a deep impression on the Communist officials in Eastern Germany. It will appear both as a beacon of hope, and a searching reminder to Christians in all other parts of Europe that it is not necessary to submit passively to things as they are.

HUMAN RELATIONS IN INDUSTRY

THERE is little need to emphasize the fundamental importance of good human relations in industry or to argue that the Gospel ought to have an illuminating word to speak on this very important sphere of human activity. It is a sign of the times that increasing numbers of Christians are becoming aware of grievous failure in Christian witness in the earlier stages of the Industrial Revolution and of the extent to which the whole industrial order is bedevilled with suspicions based on past memories. The recent Beckly Social Service lecture delivered before the Methodist conference by Sir George Schuster,¹ who has had long and wide experience of industry, has again directed attention to this important subject. He lays great emphasis upon the need for management to break out of the closed circle of distrust and suspicion by a disinterested concern for the well-being of the workers and so to prove that it is not mere force of circumstances which is compelling management to consider welfare, industrial health, working conditions and joint consultation, but a genuine and lasting change of heart. This may often require a willingness to persist in well doing in the face of sneers, apathy and misrepresentation.

The lecture is important because it lays stress upon the need both for hard work and thought and for experimentation in the industrial field if relations are to be improved, and industry yield up its true value to the community. "No amount of kind-heartedness will compensate for functional inefficiency." To proclaim principles, often without the necessary check of direct experience in the life of industry, is futile without a resolute attempt to carry them through to practical ways and means. Mere goodwill is insufficient to give effect to justice in

¹ *Christianity and Human Relations in Industry* (Epworth Press, pp. 128, 6/6).

the conditions of modern industry. Secondly, Sir George Schuster views the developments of modern industry with a measure of optimism and does not consider that they bring inevitable loss to human personality or are certain to produce evil results. Craftsmanship should more often be considered as a group skill rather than as an individual quality. Thirdly, while there is need for positive satisfactions to be found in work, so that the employee is not driven to regard his working hours as an inescapable preliminary to the hours of freedom when he can really begin to live, it is also clear that industrial employment must be so handled to fit in "with a satisfactory social setting for people's lives outside their working hours". A perusal of this book would save many Christians from making facile pronouncements on industrial problems, and would also demonstrate the amount of sheer hard work to which they are called if they wish to practise Christian obedience in industry.

ANGLICAN THEOLOGICAL TRADITIONS

THE recently published survey of trends in British theology by the late Dr. J. K. Mozley¹ has some shrewd and penetrating comments to offer on many aspects of theological thinking in Britain between 1889 and 1939, a half century of great importance in Anglican history. It is evident that the contribution made by Evangelicals of the Church of England to the thought of this epoch was of the slightest. In the early part of the nineteenth century those who were prepared, often at the price of grievous misunderstanding and unpopularity, to be known as evangelicals were distinguished in the Church of England for their initiative in three directions. Although the fashionable term 'biblical theology' had not been invented in their day, it was nevertheless true that evangelicals were concerned to expound the message of the Bible in such a way as to make it a living, converting force in the country. It was an age in which the authority and accuracy of the Bible was commonly accepted by churchmen and dissenters alike, so that the great pastoral need was not to demonstrate its authority but its relevance as the Word of God for the life of men. Secondly, Anglican Evangelicals made great pastoral use of the Prayer Book. Their evangelistic activity was stimulated by the liturgical forms which they used, and it seemed to them evident that men needed to be awakened to a realization of the truths embodied in the liturgy of the church. The shape of the Prayer Book involved a certain pattern of Christian life. It was possible to use it as an adequate instrument for the worship of converted, revived congregations, and the evangelical fathers never had any doubt that it was possible to teach even the spiritually illiterate to worship in this way. So they frequently gave courses of parochial lectures on the Prayer Book, its history and meaning. Thirdly, these early nineteenth century evangelicals were noted for their social concern, a concern which found expression in such nation-wide efforts as the anti-slavery campaign and the Factory legislation of Lord Shaftesbury, or in parochial, industrial and welfare societies. They were pioneers in an age in which the indifference of church leaders to the new industrial order

¹ *Some Tendencies in British Theology* (S.P.C.K., pp. 166, 10/6).

and the needs of the proletariat was all too commonly accepted as the natural thing.

When the period which Dr. Mozley has brought under scrutiny is reached, evangelicals had lost the initiative which in these three fields had been theirs in the earlier part of the century. It is true, as Mozley recognizes, that the evangelical contribution to theology has been more distinguished than is usually admitted. Men like Moule, Wace, Dimock, Drury and Girdlestone achieved a fairly large measure of unity in their writing and expounded a theological tradition with learning and dignity. But the general position which they adopted was uncongenial to the interest and temper of the age. It was not that their thought was discredited by their critics, but that their position was by-passed and the theology of Gore, Scott Holland and Moberley increasingly gained the allegiance of a younger generation of Anglicans.

The theological influence of Anglican Evangelicals, as distinct from their work in the parishes and on the mission field overseas, suffered—among other causes—by reason of three weaknesses from which those who stand in the evangelical tradition in the Church of England to-day have by no means yet been delivered. In the first place, evangelicals, because of their proper emphasis upon the Bible both as a means of grace and as the rule and ultimate standard of faith, have found it very much more difficult than other churchmen to come to terms with the changed attitude to the Bible which now prevails in most theological discussions. They have been right to resist any facile acceptance of critical conclusions, when those have been presented not as provisional statements but as assured results. But they have frustrated their own theological effectiveness by a blindness to the acute difficulties involved in a doctrine of biblical inerrancy, a doctrine of much less respectable ancestry than they have sometimes realized. The confusions and uncertainty about biblical authority which have been so apparent amongst Anglican Evangelicals have weakened evangelical witness in the church and prevented the appearance of any biblical work of major importance from the pen of an evangelical scholar.

Another evangelical weakness has been a characteristic want of attention to the problems which the philosophy of religion attempts to treat. No endeavour has been made to construct a philosophy of religion which might make an appeal to minds conversant with modern movements in science and metaphysics. No volume comparable in importance with *Lux Mundi*, *Foundations*, or *Essays Catholic and Critical* has been published by a group of evangelical scholars, so as to grapple with the intellectual trends of the age by presenting a coherent, and consistent theological position. Nor has any individual scholar made a contribution to the understanding of any of the great Christian doctrines which could rank with the writings of Hastings Rashdall, Lionel Thornton, Clement Webb, W. R. Matthews, or Oliver Quick. A lack of interest in the problems of philosophy, science and art has been accompanied by a lack of interest in literature and drama. The Christian writers in these fields whose works are being read with increasing attention are not evangelicals—a fact which

tends to strengthen the impression that evangelicals care little for the things of the mind.

A third weakness has been a too rigid adherence to the doctrines of the sixteenth century reformers and a narrow interpretation of Anglican formularies, as though all truth had been vouchsafed to the men of the sixteenth century. To recognize the limitations of sixteenth century theologians is not to be blind to the inestimable service which they have rendered to the Church of God. But the world of the twentieth century is very different from the period of the Reformation and loyalty to the evangelical fathers of the sixteenth or of the nineteenth century does not impose upon their successors the necessity of an undeviating adherence to all the theological emphases or language of the earlier periods. The sixteenth century reformation embodied the principle that reformation must be a constant feature of the life of the church and not an occasional upheaval. Its leaders never supposed that the work they had done could not be bettered and would stand for all time in the form in which they had left it. It is as subject to the need of continuous reformation as any other element in the church. The men of the sixteenth century had to make plain their testimony in a particular situation which no longer exists. The modern evangelical needs to make himself free of the whole Christian heritage and to enlarge his understanding of Christian truth. This is perhaps most apparent in the development of liturgical studies. The day is past when men could speak without qualification of 'our incomparable liturgy'. Far more is known about the early and medieval history of Christian worship than the evangelicals of the early nineteenth century could have realized, and the Prayer Book must be assessed in the light of this fuller understanding. Men are now more conscious of its defects than they were of its excellences. Yet evangelicals, despite their devotion to the Prayer Book, have done little to meet the new situation or to explore the full content of Christian worship. This neglect has resulted in the title 'Prayer Book Anglican' coming into general currency to signify churchmen who do not accept the name of evangelical.

Dr. Mozley notes¹ that one of the striking facts of the religious situation after the first world war was the association of theologians, whose work in biblical and doctrinal fields was of the first importance, with a new phase of the Anglo-Catholic movement. If there are insights of permanent validity for the whole of Christendom in the evangelical tradition, then it is evident that the present generation of evangelicals—and the one to come—must take the responsibility of theology in the intellectual atmosphere of the contemporary world with much more seriousness than their predecessors did in the first four decades of this century. There are not wanting signs of some improvement in this respect, but much hard work and thought yet remain to be undertaken.

FENCING THE TABLE

THE Church historian of the future who undertakes the task of describing the Christian history of the first half of the twentieth century will certainly include the origin and growth of the Ecumenical

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 72.

Movement among the two or three most significant features of the period. The denominations into which Christendom has been for so long divided have now, in the middle of the twentieth century, a far more extensive knowledge and sympathetic understanding of one another's traditions and problems than they had at the close of the nineteenth century. The area of effective Christian fellowship has been considerably enlarged during these years. But this movement has been responsible in a paradoxical way both for a recovered apprehension of the meaning of confessional or denominational loyalties and for a profound sense of the tragedy and sinfulness of the disunity within Christendom. The ecumenical gatherings which have taken place during the last three decades have given to the participants a deep and rich experience of Christian fellowship in faith and worship, study and discussion; but the fellowship has been "rudely broken at the point where it ought to be deepest, in the sacrament of Holy Communion", where the rules and customs of many Churches do not yet allow their members to share in it across the existing denominational barriers. "Thus at the very same time there has emerged a new desire for intercommunion and a new realization of its difficulties."

The Faith and Order commission on Intercommunion under the chairmanship of Professor D. M. Baillie has recently published its report ¹(the first part of a more substantial volume on the subject which is to appear before the 1952 Conference) in preparation for the proposed conference at Lund in 1952 when the subject will be debated more fully. The present document expounds the difficulties which confront churchmen of different traditions in their attempts to find a way to deal with the scandal occasioned by this sacramental disunity. It is to be noted that the urgency of the problem is most acutely felt in the younger churches of Africa and the East, where restrictions upon inter-communion are regarded as "imported shackles, needing to be cast off", if the native churches are to find fellowship with one another and to express in their own idiom the distinctive character of Christian fellowship.

It is difficult to find a terminology which accurately defines the problem, as it is variously understood in different ecclesiastical traditions, but the whole issue of intercommunion arises from the fact that there exist Christian groups which differ, sometimes very sharply, from one another in faith and order and yet all claim to be churches, that is true parts of the one Church of Christ. There is fairly general agreement that the idea of churches as separately organized denominations is a conception utterly foreign to the biblical doctrine of the Church. Yet agreement at this point does not go very far to help, for the New Testament belongs to a period of church history in which the issues had not arisen which made the existence of denominations almost inevitable.

The Commission in its report defines three places at which there are profound differences of conviction, differences which cut right across the normal denominational distinctions and are clearly displayed in the tensions which exist within the Anglican Communion. The first

¹ *Intercommunion*. The Report of the Theological Commission of Faith and Order (S.C.M. Press, pp. 33, 2/-).

difference arises from the question whether intercommunion may rightly precede reunion or can only be the result of such a measure of agreement in faith and order as to involve a partial realization of organic union. To allow intercommunion in any general way without that previous agreement would seem to many Anglicans and most Orthodox to imply such a disrespect for truth and for the sacrament itself as to betray the ultimate hope of reunion; whereas many other Anglicans and most of the churches of the Reformation would hold that intercommunion now is a step towards ultimate reunion. Christians who begin to share in holy things at the Lord's Table could not for long be content to remain apart in communities organized into denominations at variance with each other. Another difference turns on the importance of a sufficient unity of belief in sacramental doctrine and in what is done at the Eucharist. There are deep differences of doctrine and practice in eucharistic worship in the several Christian traditions which must not be minimized. But there is also the danger of exaggeration in the presentation of these difficulties and often an implied demand (openly resisted in the Concordat between the Old Catholics and the Church of England in 1931¹) that other traditions should express their devotion and doctrine in the same way as oneself, before common participation in the eucharist is possible. It is clear that there must be a distinction between what is so essential, that without it there can be no communion, and what is strictly secondary, however important and valuable it may be for devotional and pastoral purposes.

A third obstacle to intercommunion arises from differences of order. To many churchmen of the Reformation tradition, order is a secondary question beside agreement in the Gospel. But it has to be recognized that the Orthodox, the Old Catholics and many Anglicans regard order as a matter of doctrine; though it would not be merely on the isolated issue of valid orders in apostolic succession, but on the essential pattern of the Church's life as a whole (in which ministry is one element) that they would require agreement.

These are formidable problems and there is little prospect of any substantial agreement on them in the near future. Indeed, the report itself acknowledges that there is as yet no agreement on the requisite basis of intercommunion. Nevertheless the observance of the principle of comity in missionary work has been a tacit acknowledgment that the denomination evangelizing a particular area has there represented in some measure, the one Catholic Church of Christ. Membership in the World Council of Churches also commits a church to the acknowledgment of something of the true reality of the Church of Christ in its fellow members. Intercommunion is a subject which demands a heightened awareness of the critical issues at stake and a greater mutual sensitiveness about differing convictions. A full measure of faith, hope, charity, penitence and prayer must be forthcoming if the ecumenical movement itself is not to run out into an unprofitable stalemate. The churches cannot hope to stay together unless they share with one another in holy things.

¹ *Documents on Christian Unity*, edited by G. K. A. Bell. Third Series (Oxford, 1948), p. 61.