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Editorial

THE question is being asked today whether the Roman Catholic Church, despite its significant motto *Semper Eadem*, is not in fact undergoing changes of a more or less radical nature. This question should be of particular moment for all seriously thinking Protestants. We can only welcome and thank God for signs that in some parts the Holy Scriptures are being permitted to circulate with greater freedom among the ordinary people (see, for example, the Bishop of Leicester's observation in his article in this issue), and that there is an upsurge of interest in biblical theology and exegesis in scholarly circles; for the knowledge of the Word of God gives light and freedom and is, indeed, the fundamental principle of the genuine reformation of the Church in every generation. It is through a turning and returning to the Word of God and the acceptance of the Gospel of God's free grace which it proclaims that hopes for the transforming of the Church of Rome alone can have any prospect of fulfilment. In this respect, Evangelical Christians have every right to be prayerfully optimistic, realizing that the Word of God is still living and powerful, and that the great liberation experienced in the Reformation of four hundred years ago was due to the rediscovery, under God, of that Word.

There have certainly been some quite unusual developments within the Roman Catholic Church, particularly in cisalpine countries, during recent times. The so-called "New Theology", for instance, manifest in the main in France, represents a reaction against the barrenness of the official medieval Thomistic-Aristotelian synthesis in favour of a more contemporary and, in so far as it is related to biblical reality, more fruitful approach to the theological task which confronts the Church. There can be little doubt that this movement has received an impulse from the renewed vigour of Protestant studies in biblical theology.

Another significant phenomenon has been the growth of the *Una Sancta* movement, chiefly on German soil, where the menace of a common danger, namely, the fierce anti-Christian tyranny of Nazism, had the effect of throwing Roman Catholics and Protestants together. They found that they were able to talk to each other and to co-operate in ways which had hitherto seemed impossible, and even at times to worship together. There has been a new spirit of willingness on the part of many Roman Catholics to give sympathetic consideration to the principles of Protestantism. Indeed, the *Una Sancta* movement has been indicative of a desire for religion that is evangelical and that allows scope for the exercise of private judgment. With it may be coupled the appearance in certain quarters of a liturgical movement directed towards making the worship of the Roman Church both more intelligible and more congregational. It is surely something worth remarking when the liturgy of the Mass is conducted in the vernacular instead of in Latin, when the celebrant adopts the westward position, facing the people, when a table is substituted for the altar, and when the sacrament is celebrated in the evening.

Another symptom of dissatisfaction with things as they are has been

the organization of the priest-worker movement in France, the object of which has been to reach the industrial masses whose outlook has become circumscribed by the unspiritual this-worldly values of secularism and materialism. Priests, specially trained, have endeavoured to establish contact with the working classes by living in their midst as they live and by working at their side in the factories as fellow-artisans.

These and other developments are undeniably significant. They have stimulated hopes regarding the future of the Roman Catholic Church. They have presented opportunities for productive contacts and discussions. They have indicated that there are individuals and groups who are anxious to open a door for communication with those who do not acknowledge the supremacy of the Pope. It is right that we should take these things into account and, as we may have opportunity, seek to improve them to the glory of God. But we must, none the less, beware lest we fall facily into the error of thinking that the Roman Catholic Church as such has in any way officially altered its position and relaxed its claims to exclusiveness. That Church is still a monstrous authoritarian machine, relentless in its purpose, intolerant of change, insensitive to the claims of individuals and minorities.

The dogma of papal infallibility, promulgated at the momentous Vatican Council of 1870, has had the effect of entrenching its inherent dictatorship more firmly and inexorably than ever. Absolute and unquestioning submission to the papal voice, whether uttered directly from the Vatican or mediately through the ecclesiastical hierarchy, is if anything more binding than hitherto. The authoritarian inerrability of its "teaching office", which is fundamental to its system, means that the Roman Catholic Church as such cannot entertain second thoughts about itself or be open to radical (or even moderate) reformation without ceasing to be itself.

Accordingly, it must not surprise us to learn that the priest-worker movement has by official edict been brought to a standstill, or that the "New Theology", the *Una Sancta*, and the liturgical movements have been confined by orders from above within the most unaccommodating of ecclesiastical straitjackets. Again, we must not be deceived by the gentler tones in which the Reformation of the sixteenth century has in recent years been described, as though it were due to a regrettable misunderstanding of the true nature and benevolence of papal Christianity, and as though the latter were no less concerned with the need for reform. In point of fact, these wooing tones are more subtle, and calculated to be more successful, than the intemperate vilification and invective which it was for so long customary to hurl against the Reformation and its leaders. Far more eloquent of the true character of Romanism is the inescapable fact, never to be overlooked, that the anathemas pronounced four hundred years ago by the Council of Trent against the evangelical doctrines of the Reformation have never been withdrawn, but continue in full force. Any genuine change of heart in the Church of Rome must be heralded by the retraction of these anathemas—otherwise the gulf between us remains unbridged.

Meanwhile, Rome's terms for the reunion of Christendom continue

unaltered : they are summed up in the word absorption. The only move that it will contemplate is a move made by Protestants back into the papal fold. But so long as Protestants remain Protestants they are heretics, religious untouchables, excluded from salvation, and not to be tolerated. The politics of the Roman Catholic Church must be understood against this background. When it holds the whip hand, as in Spain, its intolerance is ruthless. When it is in a minority, as in England, its intolerance is veiled under a cloak of benevolence, while its agents labour by means of propaganda to win our adults and by means of attractive schools to capture our children, always with the ultimate objective of being our whole nation once again into submission to the papal overlordship.

One of the most noticeable features of contemporary Romanism has been the quite extraordinary growth in modern times of the cult of the Virgin Mary. Evidence of this is afforded not only by the immense popularity of pilgrimages to places like Lourdes in France and Fatima in Portugal, but also, and even more significantly, by papal pronouncements which have decreed *ex cathedra*, that is, as absolutely binding on all the faithful, the dogmas of Mary's immaculate conception (1854) and bodily assumption (1950), and which have even gone so far as blasphemously to assign to her the dignity of hypostatic union with the Holy Trinity. The tenor of recent pronouncements coupled with the excesses of veneration that are encouraged provide, in fact, every reason for anticipating that in the foreseeable future the dogma of Mary's co-redeemership with Christ will be promulgated from the infallible papal throne. This startling trend—which, incidentally, is an extreme outworking of the characteristic synergism of Romish anthropology—is quite definitely incompatible with the central doctrines of the New Testament, and is therefore a movement which is *away from Christianity*. It is also beyond doubt a cause of misgiving to numbers of thoughtful men and women within the Roman Catholic Church (cf. the review of Berthold Altaner's *Patrology* in this issue).

Those who wish for a reliable and intelligent exposition of the contemporary situation in the Roman Catholic Church, based upon a thorough knowledge of the subject, are confidently advised to study Walther von Loewenich's book *Modern Catholicism* which has recently been published by Macmillan's (379 pp., 50s.). In Dr. von Loewenich, who is a member of the German Lutheran Church and Professor of Protestant Church History at Erlangen University, they will find a stimulating guide. His book contains a wealth of information, presented and discussed with admirable clarity. It is written in a spirit of charity throughout ; yet in sum it builds up a massive indictment of the totalitarian ecclesiastical régime of present-day Roman Catholicism. The one weakness of this notable contribution to the controversy is the liberal relativism of Professor von Loewenich's own theological outlook. Fortunately, however, this weakness is not obtrusive but only occasional and incidental in what is essentially a historical-critical study. An excellent critique of contemporary Romanism from the point of view of Reformed theology will be found in the book *The Conflict with Rome* by G. C. Berkouwer (Philadelphia, 1958), who is Professor of Theology at the Free University of Amsterdam, and who also writes

with charity and understanding towards those with whom he disagrees.

Despite the apparent intractability of the Roman Catholic system, our attitude towards it should not be one of despair. Its adherents are our fellow human beings; their basic spiritual need is identical with our own. And let us not forget that our Reformers were all the Pope's men to begin with—most of them very obstinately so. The Word that prevailed so powerfully at the Reformation is no less able to prevail in lives and churches today. Protestants have drifted into a policy of non-interference where Roman Catholics are concerned. This is unevangelical. We should seek by personal contact and friendship to gain their attention and without harshness or pharisaical superciliousness—not as proselytizers, but as witnesses—to introduce them to the liberating truths of the Gospel, as "Little" Bilney once did on a famous occasion with Hugh Latimer.

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In this issue, Donald Robinson's vigorous critique of the proposed new baptismal services will, we hope, receive the serious attention it deserves. The article on Confirmation, which takes some account of the proposed new Confirmation services, is intended as an addendum to his article with a view to rounding out the picture relating to the Report of the Liturgical Commission. The Bishop of Leicester's article has the laudable purpose of inciting us to give effect to the call of the last Lambeth Conference for a deepening of the quality and an extension of the scope of both personal and corporate Bible study; and in this connection we should like to draw attention to his recently published booklet *Reading Through Hebrews*, a series of six readings with expository comments given by him in Leicester Cathedral during Lent of last year. James Packer's contribution represents the substance of the paper he read at this year's Islington Conference. The articles by Owen Brandon and Maurice Wood are concerned with a subject which is of maximum and perennial importance for the Church of Christ, and certainly not least for Evangelicals. If the former asks the questions, the latter may be felt to provide some of the answers—though the two articles were in fact prepared quite independently. This is a theme to which we shall hope to give more space in the future.

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We regret that, owing to a printing error, the date given on the spine of our last issue was March, 1959, instead of **March, 1960**. Our readers are requested kindly to make the necessary correction on their copies.

P.E.H.