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Anglicans Catholic and Evangelical*

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THE OXFORD MOVEMENT, which produced Anglo-Catholicism, was a crusade to establish a particular view of the nature and authority of the Church (of England) as the basis for personal religion as well as for a national ecclesiastical policy. The movement was opposed by many sincere churchmen, including Evangelicals, on the ground that it was an attempt to fasten a false tradition on the Church of England.

The Tractarians were nothing if not exclusive in their claims: they contended for the character of the whole Church as they believed it to be. This exclusive claim passed into Anglo-Catholicism, and the co-existence of Anglo-Catholics and Evangelicals within the Church of England has had a diplomatic, but not a theoretical, basis, despite various attempts to provide a rationale of comprehensiveness.

The present collection of essays by eleven 'Catholic Anglicans' is a cross between an *apologia* and a *confessio*. It marks a distinct shift in position. It might almost be taken as an admission that the Oxford cause has finally been lost. A hint of the old exclusiveness appears in the preface: 'it is true that the Church as a whole has absorbed many of the lessons which Hurrell Froude had set out to teach, but it cannot yet be relied upon to give them expression in its official pronouncements'. But there is resignation in the modest statement of purpose: 'all of us are convinced that the Catholic tradition in Anglicanism provides us with an authentic way of being Christians'. Has it come down to this? This is not merely a disclaiming of the triumphalist phase of Anglo-Catholicism (well drawn by John Gunstone's essay on *Catholics in the Church of England*), but is practically a denial of the very genius of the Oxford Movement—the uncompromising assertion before all men of the true Catholic glory of the Church—and a return to the parochial piety of John Keble in the days before Froude and Newman compounded his individual convictions into a mission to the nation.

The new Tractarians are for dialogue, not mission. Like others of their generation, they are taking soundings rather than running colours

* A Review of *Catholic Anglicans Today*, Edited by John Wilkinson. Darton, Longman and Todd, 254 pp. 25s.

to the mast. The temper of their self-exposure is admirable, and we must be grateful that the confession they make is public, in the church, and not merely auricular and private. Their reasons for thinking as they do about their 'way of being Christians' will be welcome (they express the hope) both to those who, like themselves, have their roots in the 'Catholic tradition' but are dissatisfied with the older pattern of that tradition, but also to 'the growing number of conservative evangelicals who ask serious questions of us, and deserve serious answers'.

In acknowledging this courtesy, the best response is probably to say, with equal candour, how far the 'reasons' put forward are in fact welcome to a conservative evangelical reviewer.

The findings can be expressed in brief thus:

1. The most *welcome* collection of essays is that on 'Catholic Worship', which brings to light large and hopeful areas of common ground with evangelical thinking;
2. The most *unwelcome* section is that on 'The Catholic Church', which reveals little sign of any real advance towards a more biblical doctrine of the church than that held by the earlier Tractarians;
3. The most *disappointing* essays are those which concern biblical authority and the Gospel. Here there is a wider gap, in theory at least, between 'Catholics' and 'Evangelicals' than was once the case. It would have been of deep interest to Evangelicals to know what Catholic Anglicans Today (whom for convenience I shall call CATs) consider the Gospel to be, but this scarcely emerges, even in the essay on *The Christian Gospel*. There is some wrestling with problems of biblical interpretation and of the philosophy of religion, but it is not apparent what the essayists consider either the content or the power of 'the Gospel of the Living God' to be. ('The Sacraments, not preaching, are the sources of divine grace' stated the 'advertisement' to the first volume of Tracts in 1834: have CATs got this dogma out of their system yet?)

The three essays on worship deal with the sacraments (Theodore Simpson), tradition (John Wilkinson) and spirituality (Christopher Bryant). Little is said about symbolism in worship, or about the particular ethos of 'catholic' worship. This is a pity, since this is still the area of greatest practical difficulty in relations between Anglo-Catholics and others. What do vestments, lights, incense, bowings, 'east worship and dropping worship', processions, mean to CATs? Have they a rationale still? Simpson says, apologetically, that such ritualism was the inevitable result of some early Tractarian teaching about the Church as 'a mysterious supernatural institution'. But what is the status of ritualism now? If it could be abandoned, a large *skandalon* would be removed from Anglican relationships. But we would like to hear the case of CATs.

Bryant writes helpfully on the place of law and discipline in the

Christian life, which he regards as a life of 'openness to God and man'. The exact benefit of 'dialogue' with the heathen and pagan world in this connection needs more explication before it can be endorsed, and an evangelical is unlikely to trust 'the liturgy', as against personal Bible reading, to correct 'false ideas of God'. There are Anglican liturgies which evangelicals cannot use simply because of the unbiblical ideas of God which they contain. Indeed, the concept of 'the liturgy' is due for a critical re-examination.

John Wilkinson's clear principles regarding the place of tradition in worship will command wide approval, not least in regard to the relation of scripture and tradition. He also discusses, with uncommon frankness and objectivity, two current problems: the oblation of bread and cup in the communion service, and prayers for the dead. He defends the formula 'we offer this bread and this cup' on historical grounds, but decides against it on practical grounds. 'For every Anglican who knows that "we offer this bread and this cup" need mean no more than "we give thanks over", there are fifty who see the word "offer" in the context of later controversies' (p. 154). Evangelicals should be genuinely grateful that so many CATs have taken the pressure off in this particular matter, and should respond by exploring the full and proper limits of a theology of thanksgiving, and the best way of expressing it.

In his analysis of prayers for the dead, Mr. Wilkinson is equally constructive. At one point only does he overstate his case. 'If I pray directly [for the dead] I am only doing what every Christian felt free to do until the Reformation' (p. 160). This begs the vital question of what those Christians whose witness comprises the New Testament felt free to do. We would also question Mr. Wilkinson's statement that 'the point at which Catholic and Evangelical traditions part company is in the mention of individual names in the prayer'. The mention of names is not an issue in itself. The issue is whether any kind of petition for the departed (including requests for 'refreshment, light and peace') is compatible with the doctrine of justification by faith and the biblical teaching concerning the critical nature of death in relation to judgment. It is inadequate to say that 'the Evangelical will concede that names can be mentioned so long as they are linked with some mention of the living'. For we may only pray 'grant us with them a share in thy eternal kingdom' on the understanding that *their* sharing in the kingdom has already passed beyond any contingency. 'We with them' is the 1552 formula, and indicates a distinctly different theology from the 'we and they' theology of 1549. It is not the linking of the two, but the assurance about the departed, which determines the matter.

Theodore Simpson's interpretation of sacramental theology in dynamic rather than static terms will appeal to evangelical students of Cranmer. 'Every sacramental act is an ordinary human act,' whose

context enables us to discern the act of Christ towards us (p. 118). Evangelicals would do well to explore the view that the history of sacraments in the church reveals the ritualisation of essentially non-cultic acts. Simpson suggests that 'we should look for the "matter" of the sacrament in the sacramental action itself (not in the material element used in the action), and that we should extend the notion of "form" to include the whole context within which the action is set. . . . There is no reason to deny that whenever such an act is performed with the intention of doing what Christ did, then Christ will be at work' (p. 121). Mr. Simpson's attempt to explain baptism as primarily 'adoption' is less fruitful. The very idea is at odds with the author's own insight into the basis of a sacrament as 'an ordinary human act'. Baptism in the New Testament is basically a washing, a gesture of repentance, and its object is 'remission of sins', not adoption. The appeal to Galatians 3: 24 is too weak to sustain the view that baptism is an 'act of adoption' (p. 122f).

While the discussion of worship opens many hopeful lines of approach, there is little prospect in connection with the Bible and the church.

As with so much discussion about 'the church', there is no adequate identification of the object under discussion. 'That the Church is a divinely created and divinely commissioned body with authority is not in question,' says Alan Wilkinson. But this proposition is in fact the first thing the reviewer would want to question in Wilkinson's discussion. What 'church' is he referring to? In the New Testament sense of the word, the 'church' is not a 'commissioned body', and is given no authority; it is *under* the authority of apostles, prophets and teachers, whose authority is that of the word of God, not of the church. However, Mr. Wilkinson does not in fact allow much in the way of authority to 'the church', and he rightly urges humility, openness and sensitivity in the dealings of Christians with 'those outside'.

Nevertheless it is unfortunate that the attempt of CATs to articulate a doctrine of authority is so inadequate. Nor is it hard to see where criticism should be directed. The essayists have no doctrine of scripture; they appear to have succumbed to two propositions: William Temple's dictum that there is no such thing as revealed truth, and the old maxim that the church created the New Testament (and that therefore the New Testament has a subordinate role anyhow). Until these ideas are critically examined (and abandoned!) we can hardly expect any real rapport between evangelicals and CATs.

For Leslie Houlden (who writes on 'The Bible and the Faith') the New Testament is not authoritative scripture. It is merely the primitive church's 'response' to God's acts in the first century, 'edifying', but 'in principle simply a response, like our own'. Its only advantage over our own is its freedom from later accumulation on 'the Church's theological tradition'. In the end, the modern Catholic is free *from*

the New Testament and free *for* 'tradition', which is 'what we more generally call the work of the Holy Spirit' (p. 24).

Evangelicals can have no sympathy with this attitude to scripture. The New Testament, as second century Christians already recognised, consisted in principle of 'the gospel' and 'the apostle'. The church created neither 'the gospel' nor 'the apostle'. Evangelists and apostles were not officers of the church. They were Christ's gifts to men, and their ministry both created and governed the church. Of course the needs and activities of churches are reflected in gospels and epistles, but it is wrong to think of these documents as products of the church's faith. Those who value early tradition should know that these documents have always been attributed to individuals (not communities) whose role, whether of evangelist or apostle, was to witness *to* the church of what they had seen and heard or had received of the Lord.

This espousal by CATs of one of the baneful axioms of Form Criticism—it is certainly not a *conclusion* of NT study—is the more incongruous in that Anglo-Catholics have always had a high view of the role of the apostle in God's economy. Their emaciated doctrine of scripture now confines the apostle to the role of initiating a succession of bishops (who have to be good pastors, but whose teaching is their own response to things, not that of the apostles any more). Frank Hawkins' article on 'Ministry in the Church' illustrates the confusion of thought from another angle. He is right to see the apostle as the vital figure in connection with ministry in the New Testament church, but his concentration on a search for 'successors' to the apostles is misguided. For in the role of witnesses to the life and ministry of Jesus, there were no successors—only the New Testament scriptures which embody their testimony. In the role of 'missionaries', founders of new churches through the preaching of the Gospel, there have been apostles in every generation, successors of the first apostles if you like, but certainly having no instrumental connection with them. Their pastoral role (which is Mr. Hawkins' special concern) the apostles shared *at once* with other pastors and teachers in their churches. Mr. Hawkins reads this as involving succession, but there is no question of *succession* in the New Testament (as distinct from *extension*). If arrangements for succession in pastoral care were eventually made, they were made by the churches themselves, as the Didache indicates: 'appoint for yourselves therefore bishops and deacons . . . they also perform for you the ministry of prophets and teachers'. Mr. Hawkins reads into the New Testament what he is looking for, as, for instance, when he says that 'the apostle naturally presided' in the liturgy, and that St. Paul's jurisdiction over the Gentile churches 'had to be confirmed by the apostolic council' (p. 71, 79).

With their modernistic view of Scripture CATs combine Temple's equally modernistic view of revelation. Propositions, words and sentences—those of scripture being not essentially different from our

own—only express human reflection on revelation. Revelation itself takes place in experience. Both Alan Wilkinson in 'The Authority of the Church' and Neville Tidwell in 'The Church's Teaching' expound this view. But the view is contrary to scripture itself, which does not make this distinction between knowing God and knowing truth about God. If a man believes in his heart 'that God raised Jesus from the dead', he will be saved (Rom. 10: 9). Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God (1 John 5: 1). Knowing *about* God with the heart is the same thing as knowing God as a person, for God is the living God, and to apprehend the reality concerning him is not other than to know him. In biblical thinking, to know God is the same as to know that which we have heard from the beginning concerning him.

The weakness of Mr. Tidwell's argument is seen in his examples. 'When we say Christ was sinless what we are really talking about is our "experience" of his unique moral and spiritual integrity' (p. 104). Who can agree with this? If we say Christ was sinless, this is surely because the New Testament says so. Tidwell's view enables him to discard the New Testament's 'words and sentences' in favour of his own subjective judgment. He is worried by the bogey that if a statement is a 'historical' statement, we have to wait for the approval of a professional historian before we can rely on it. The New Testament says that Jesus was born of a virgin. This can only be historically true if a historian says so. Therefore being a statement of this category, it does not have to be believed as Christian doctrine though the words can be used as a symbol of 'the Church's experience of Christ'. 'If the virgin birth is a biological fact, it has in itself no saving significance.' Belief in it 'is not something which the Church has the power, right or need to make necessary to salvation' (p. 105). The author applies the same reasoning to the resurrection. If the argument is sound, it should be applied equally to the death of Jesus, which was also a biological fact. According to Tidwell's argument, it has in itself no saving significance. A Christian is free to believe that Jesus historically died on the cross, but this is not necessary to salvation. All that matters is that, 'whether taken literally or as a symbol', the death of Jesus expresses a particular insight into our experience of Christ.

If CATs are looking for closer understanding with evangelicals, they must return to the Church's own doctrine of holy scripture, and cease flirting with Bultmannism. The rift here is deep and wide, and brings little comfort to those who were beginning to think that old things had passed away and that a rapprochement was near. The old Tractarian doctrine of authority and the church was never squared with scripture. With all gratitude for a new openness and friendliness and desire for unity (on both sides), and for much real agreement, evangelicals must continue to regard the doctrine of revelation and scripture as the central issue between themselves and Catholic Anglicans Today.