Contemporary Commentary

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HIDDEN ROCKS IN YOUR LOVE FEASTS

ANY attempt to delineate the principal features of the past half century of Christian history would have to take serious account of the growth of the ecumenical movement, from its earliest beginnings in missionary and student co-operation for practical and definable ends, to its latest development in the constitution of the World Council of Churches as a means whereby not only effective Christian co-operation on the widest scale could be carried on, but also Christians of widely different traditions could explore the meaning of their differences. The course of history since the sixteenth century has until recently kept Christians apart from each other in their regional or national allegiances so that the debate between them on the meaning of the Gospel for contemporary life has been carried on by long range theological artillery. As in the conflicts of nations, protagonists in the grand theological controversy have often embarked upon a new struggle with weapons of a previous age, already outmoded by subsequent historical developments and irrelevant to the actual issues of a new age. Yet timidity and conservatism have all too frequently combined to drive the churches into a policy of defending ecclesiastical and theological bastions erected in earlier conflicts, as though this were the whole duty of a church in relation to other churches.

The emergence of the ecumenical movement has now made it possible for representative theologians of every non-Roman tradition to grapple in personal confrontation with the meaning of their denominational separation from each other. The importance of this development can hardly be exaggerated, for in an age when the mechanical means of transport make it possible for Christians from every part of the world to meet each other, as in no previous era, the denominations, by the deliberate assent of their responsible organs, have agreed to encourage to the utmost the renewal in this personal way of that fundamental theological struggle inherent in the very existence of the Church. The ecumenical Christian, while unswervingly loyal to the truth as it is in Jesus, has become aware that this truth has often reached him through a medium which has obscured or distorted some of its essential features. The Christian who is of the authentic ecumenical breed will be humble and teachable, acutely conscious both of his need to learn from others if he is to grow up to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ and also of the defects of his own tradition in mediating that fulness.

Nevertheless, despite the progress which has been achieved towards reunion through innumerable conferences and commissions, there are disappointing delays and hindrances in its realisation. Indeed, one of the features that has become prominent in these discussions has been an uncompromising emphasis by all traditions on their distinctive witness, which it is implied must not be compromised or blurred in

the interests of the "coming great church". The unwillingness to admit that an historic witness has been mistaken or defective has been the subject of an open letter[1] addressed by Dr. C. H. Dodd to the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches. It is a most important and searching document and ought to be given long and careful consideration by anyone who is concerned with the growing together of Christians who have hitherto been separated. "There are some of us," says Dr. Dodd, "who take fright at the danger that our 'distinctive witness' may prove less distinctive than we thought, and we want to change the subject and say, 'Ah, but here is something very important which we are sure you don't believe!'" Is the delay in agreement leading on to unity really due to the presence of unavowed motives, "to intense (and it may be quite legitimate) pride in the tradition to which I belong?" Again, theological convictions may be only in part theological and to a considerable extent formed out of social, political or national ideas, habits, convictions and prejudices, so that we defend certain positions for reasons "other than pure doctrinal logic." This is not necessarily to be condemned, but it must be brought into the open and acknowledged. Dr. Dodd suggests that the pressure exerted by Christians from the far side of the Iron Curtain will make this "one of the really outstanding questions we have to face." It is clear that in the relationships of churches as in those between Christian individuals, a prerequisite for success is honesty of motive and readiness to confess the sins of corporate pride and exclusiveness.

THE CHURCH AND THE WORKERS

A MARKED feature of modern Christian history is the alienation of the industrial masses from the life and worship of the church, alike in Protestant and in Roman Catholic countries. No church can claim to be exempt from the judgment implied in this inescapable fact of contemporary life throughout the world, but there are not wanting signs that in every communion groups are awakening to a realisation of the seriousness of the situation and the futility of much of our traditional Christian endeavour. It is not that the church once possessed the confidence of the great majority of industrial workers and has subsequently lost it, but that it has never enjoyed it. In an earlier age the church largely stood apart from the dynamic forces of the Industrial Revolution which shattered the accustomed pattern of national and ecclesiastical life, thus creating an ever-widening gulf between its life and message and the vast new proletariat through whose labour the operations of the industrial machine were made possible. There have been in every communion during the last century notable pioneers of social justice, but it cannot be said they succeeded in their own day in convincing their fellow Christians of the supreme importance of the work they were striving to do. Church leaders at the decisive stages of the Industrial Revolution showed themselves as bewildered or hostile to its developments as any of their contemporaries, thus implicitly repudiating their responsibility as watchmen of the Lord for the souls of the people. Repentance for

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past negligence and failure must lead all communions to-day to a renewed concern with the evangelization of the industrial masses and to a determination to find new ways of communicating the eternal gospel, so that whether they hear or whether they forbear, its relevance to their condition and their destiny becomes apparent.

It is unlikely that any progress will be made with this task until the church as a whole becomes aware of the vast untouched mission field at its very doors and learns to adopt appropriate missionary methods to meet the challenge. The industrial world is a mission field where traditionalists can make little impact and may often do much harm. In the Church of Scotland, the Iona Community under the leadership of Dr. George Macleod has striven by disciplined experimentation to help the whole church to face the challenge which the modern sprawling industrial town presents to the effectiveness of the Gospel. In England several attempts have been made, not without some success, by the Christendom group, the Industrial Christian Fellowship and the Christian Frontier, to bridge the gulf between the people and the Church. Perhaps the most striking experiments to deal with this problem are to be observed in French Roman Catholic circles. For some years before the war in France and in the Low countries, the *Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne* struggled to win the young worker and to show him the true relationship between work, life and worship. The connection between the liturgical revival in the Roman church and its social consciousness was evident in this organization. The pressures of the war and the post-war years have led to a development of this unique missionary work which demands the most careful study on the part of all non-Roman Christians.

A number of books recently published in this country give an account of the principles and methods which have been adopted. *The Priest and the Proletariat* by the Abbé Kothen reviews the experiments tried out in France and the considerable literature they have produced. *Priest Workman* is the diary of a Roman priest, Henri Perrin, who accompanied deported French workers to Germany in 1943 and was imprisoned for his religious activities which had aroused the suspicions of the military authorities. *France Pagan* edited by Maisie Ward gives a picture of the Abbé Godin, a remarkable French priest who died in 1944 at the age of 38, but who during the difficult years of the German occupation carried on his missionary activity in industrial areas. The book also contains an important statement by Godin himself of the policy he proposes for the Church, embodied in the Mission de Paris. Another volume, *Revolution in a City Parish,* describes a comparable effort in a down-town parish in America.

Nothing could be more futile than an attempt on the part of reformed churches to reproduce, in their very different circumstances, methods which have emerged out of the soil of Roman church life, but the pioneer efforts described in these books set a question mark against much of our evangelical church life. We do not always realise how wide and deep the gulf is between the Church and the masses but Godin refuses to allow his readers to nurse any illusions, for he speaks of " the impossibility of the pagan worker entering the Church and the im-

possibility of the Church penetrating the pagan world ". The problem of effective evangelism is a good deal more complex than we commonly allow and demands some hard thinking and real sacrifice if it is to be adequately solved. The French bishops have been active in guiding and supporting this pioneer work and quick to notice its missionary significance, combining encouragement to individual effort and experiment with some measure of official direction. " Pioneers," observed the late Cardinal Suhard, " must not be blamed for making mistakes ".

Since the sixteenth century Protestants have laid great emphasis upon the priesthood of all believers, yet it is open to question whether in the modern world they have succeeded in embodying this insight in the total life and work of the church. The missionary method proposed in these books seeks to minimise the apartness of the priest from the workers by encouraging him to become a priest-workman ; but it also endeavours to foster a lay apostolate whose members will deliberately enter into and share the life of the proletariat, cutting themselves off from any other mode of life which may originally have been theirs, as effectively as if they had gone out to labour in a distant mission field. Such an attempt to embody the principle of the Incarnate life of Christ " who took upon Himself the form of a slave ", must lead on to the creation of a genuine Christian community which will find the inspiration for active service in its common life and worship. It follows that the missionary task is seen, not as the snatching of individuals out of the world as brands from the burning, but as the creation of a Christian community which shall stand as a place of light and warmth in a cold, dark world. " We need to take hold of the life of the place." " Every human community should be a Christian community, existent or in the making." Here then is a searching challenge to Christians in every place to take up the task of reconstituting society in the name of Christ. What must be avoided is any tendency to look upon these experiments as short cuts to success. Such a romantic, unrealistic approach would be doomed to failure and disappointment.

BAPTISM TO-DAY

FIVE years ago the publication by the Convocation Committees of an interim report, *Confirmation To-day*, focussed attention on the pastoral problems arising from the widespread and continued use of Christian initiation rites in a society which was rapidly becoming post-Christian in its assumptions and practice. The theological section of this report was sketchy and confused, and in the subsequent discussion it aroused it was apparent that any revision of existing procedure in the administration of Confirmation could only be contemplated after a careful examination of the whole theology of Christian initiation should have been undertaken. To plead for such a discussion is often a way of avoiding necessary decisions on ecclesiastical procedure and postponing indefinitely action which may be unpopular. But several considerations made it evident that it was a matter of some urgency to devote close and anxious attention to the theology and practice both of baptism and of confirmation.

In the first place the facts disclosed in the report showed that it was still customary for a large majority of English people to bring their children to the font, but that only a small minority of those baptized were given such a Christian upbringing that they became regular worshippers and communicants. If it was too facile a conclusion to suggest that for many thousands of people baptism was no more than the survival of a social custom from a dead past, it was clear that there was a widespread and scandalous misuse of the sacrament. Secondly, there were many clergy who were so gravely disturbed by this scandal that they were trying in their parishes to fashion a discipline in its administration which would uphold the true dignity of a gospel sacrament and promote the Christian good of the people. The scandal of indiscriminate baptism was not indeed a new feature of English church life in the middle of the twentieth century, for as far back as 1896 Bishop Hensley Henson preached a notable sermon before the University of Oxford in which he asserted " that the modern practice of unconditional, indiscriminate baptism is indecent in itself, discreditable to the church and highly injurious to religion ", and added the further observation that " our church life draws a taint of hypocrisy from the laxity with which the sacrament of the new birth is administered ". He pleaded then for the enforcement of the 29th of the Canons of 1603 which required every one " admitted godfather or godmother to any child at Christening or Confirmation, to have received the Holy Communion ". The " immediate and thorough, though cautious and gradual reform " which he urged has not yet been taken in hand by authority with the general consent of the church, so that individual parish clergymen have attempted, not always wisely, to supply the deficiency. Thirdly, the public lecture delivered at Oxford in January, 1946, by Dom Gregory Dix under the title of *The Theology of Confirmation in Relation to Baptism* directed attention to the theological relation of the two rites and suggested with an impressive display of patristic learning that since the time of Augustine the church had mistakenly attributed to water baptism, much of the significance which properly belonged to confirmation. If this thesis were to be accepted, it would no longer be possible for the clergy to go on using the existing Prayer Book rite of baptism with a good conscience.

For these reasons among others it was necessary that further study of the questions which had been raised should be undertaken with official sanction, and the Theological Commission appointed by the Archbishops at the end of 1946 issued a document, *The Theology of Christian Initiation* early in 1948 in preparation for the work of the Lambeth Committee on the same subject. In this document and in the Lambeth Report, the essential unity of Christian initiation from preparation and examination through baptism and confirmation to first communion is frankly recognised. The baptism of infants is regarded as justifiable, but with the admission that the rite cannot bear the whole weight of meaning which the New Testament ascribes to the Christian initiation of adults. The Joint Committee of Convocation have now carried their work a stage further in a second interim report with its schedule *Baptism To-day*. This document deserves and should receive the very careful attention of clergy and

laity throughout the Church of England. It sets forth with admirable brevity and clarity the problems, pastoral and theological, by which the administration of baptism is surrounded in the conditions of modern church life and propounds some important questions to be discussed by parochial clergy in the coming year. It is much to be desired that this request will be met and that ruri-decanal chapters will give to it the serious and sustained attention that the subject demands. One conclusion presents itself with irresistible force to the careful reader—there is no easy and simple solution to our problems. Any attempt to deal with the theology in isolation from the actual circumstances of administration in the parishes would be more confusing than helpful. Further, it is important that misleading analogies should be avoided. It is no doubt correct to speak of England as a mission field but the meaning to be attached to the phrase in that context must be carefully distinguished, alike from the primitive ages of the church and from the overseas provinces of missionary activity in the modern era. The post-Christian condition of modern England presents us with a new situation where there are not as yet well trodden paths to follow. An appendix in the pamphlet sets out the extent to which the church may be invited to rid itself of its Augustinian burden. The argument is clear and plausible but needs very careful scrutiny before it is allowed to pass. The pamphlet testifies to the deep and widespread pastoral concern about the circumstances surrounding the use of baptism in the church to-day and its publication should be a cause for sober thankfulness on the part of all considering churchmen. There cannot be the same measure of confidence that the questions it raises will receive generally agreed solutions at no very distant future.

MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

THERE is no subject of debate in Christian circles at the present time which generates more heat than the question of the right discipline the church should adopt in the face of the moral and pastoral problems which arise from a divorce rate of 50,000 a year. Those who have hitherto been most vocal, have emphasised the need for the strict maintenance of the Christian standard of marriage as a life-long indissoluble union between one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others. They have added the logical corollary that a divorce procured through the civil courts implies the refusal of this standard and must necessarily deprive the parties concerned of any right to re-marriage during the life time of the former partner. If such a second marriage takes place, it cannot be solemnized in church with the use of the Prayer Book service, nor can the parties be admitted to that full participation in the life of the church mediated by the sacrament of Holy Communion. If the church believes that divorce and re-marriage are contrary to the mind of Christ, it is obliged to bear witness to its Lord by a refusal of Christian privileges to those who ignore or defy Christian standards.

Nevertheless there are many Christians who doubt whether a policy which has the merit of intelligibility and logical simplicity but is deeply resented by many persons as unchristian (most of them it must be admitted, ill instructed in Christian fundamentals and confused

about the true nature of Christian love), can be justified as according to the mind of Christ. The publication by the Provost of Sheffield and the Rector of Birmingham of a pamphlet bearing the title *Marriage, Divorce and Repentance in the Church of England* is to be welcomed as a careful statement of another point of view which is probably as widely held in the Church of England as the so-called rigorist view expounded by Bishops Kirk and Mortimer. The nation has a right to know that responsible Christian men may, on conscientious grounds, be deeply divided from each other over the concrete meaning of Christian duty in certain important spheres of life. The historic Anglican disavowal of any claim to infallibility in the interpretation of Holy Scripture should impose greater caution on many of the sons of the Church of England than is sometimes displayed in publishing to the world their conclusions on the clear duty of the church and its individual members.

The authors of this pamphlet have very little difficulty in showing that many of the arguments commonly employed in controversy over divorce and its consequences are based upon inadequate and unsatisfactory definitions of the significance of marriage. They contrast unfavourably the treatment of the subject by Bishops Kirk and Mortimer, Canon Lacey and Mr. Macmillan with the discussion of its meaning in terms of personal commitment in the writings of Brunner and Berdyaev. It is curious to notice no reference to Otto Piper but the pamphlet seems to lay as one sided an emphasis on the distress and suffering of those whose marriages have been broken, as the so-called rigorists over emphasise the disastrous consequences of glaring, public infringements of the Christian standard. It would indeed be disastrous if remarriage after divorce were equated with the sin against the Holy Ghost and automatically involved life-long exclusion from the sacraments. But it is worth reminding the authors that such a discipline is sometimes exercised in the mission field. Sympathy with those who may be regarded as the victims of the sexual irresponsibility of our society does not exclude a concern for the well-being of society as a whole. Most thoughtful people would agree that the church has a pastoral duty and responsibility to those whose marriages have broken down : whether it would be right to call it a ' special ' duty is another matter. It is clear that the Church of England has not a uniform outlook on this problem and the rigorists cannot claim to represent it to the exclusion of all other views. But there is not sufficient weight given in this pamphlet to the need for an uncompromising public witness to the Christian standard of marriage, nor is it clear that repentance must be judged by some objective standard. Whatever service of prayer and blessing is permitted to those who have married again, it surely must contain some public expression of penitence for past failure. The suggested order of service included in the pamphlet does merit the stricture of a ' sham marriage ' passed by the Bishop of Oxford on many of these services, for it is closely modelled upon the Prayer Book order. The truth is that in face of the grave crisis in family and personal relationships which is characteristic of our time, churchmen need to give a great deal more careful and prolonged thought to these problems than they have yet done.