

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

Editorial

FEW great men have suffered more from misunderstanding and misrepresentation than have the Reformers of the sixteenth century. They have been variously portrayed as immoral monsters, charlatans, fanatics, innovators, and schismatics. In more recent years, however, the malicious caricatures that have for so long been in circulation have been largely withdrawn. Dirt befouls those who throw it, and in any case historical falsehood cannot be sustained indefinitely. Consequently, a quite different portrait has been devised and put into currency depicting the Reformers, not as ogres, but as essentially good men animated by admirable intentions. Their features are no longer grotesque, but tragic—their tragedy being that they failed to perceive the sympathy and benevolence of the church in which they had been nurtured and which would fain have retained them in her bosom and encouraged them in their task of reformation. This portrait paints out, of course, circumstantial details which would fit in ill with the “benevolent” ensemble, such as the fierce persecutions with which the Reformers were pursued, the hostility of papal bulls and burnings, and the anathemas (still in force) of the Council of Trent. It is, in fact, but a further distortion of history, but more subtly so.

There is, moreover, a particular portrait of the *English* Reformers, widely accepted, the authenticity of which has now been critically questioned by a Jesuit theologian. (Evangelical scholars have never regarded it as anything but a fake.) In the perspective of this picture these worthies are portrayed as having repudiated, not the central corpus of “Catholic” doctrine, but only certain late medieval extravagances of a peripheral nature that had become popular in the period preceding the Reformation. In other words, it is a picture which seeks to persuade us that, so far as the English Reformers were concerned, no radical cleavage was involved, but rather that the shape of the doctrine and worship of the Church in England continued fundamentally unchanged. If this is indeed the case, it must be said that it is a situation which does not seem to have been grasped either by the papists who put the Reformers to death or by the Reformers themselves who chose to endure martyrdom rather than renounce the teachings which were characteristic of their position.

This picture has, understandably, found special favour in Anglo-Catholic circles, where the need has been apparent of some mode of interpretation which would legitimize the giving of an unprotestant sense to the formularies of the Church of England. Ever since the rise of Tractarianism in the last century the interpretation in question has been part of the stock-in-trade of Anglo-Catholicism. But, while it was undoubtedly the spread of the “Catholic” revival that caused it to prosper, it was not the invention of the Oxford Movement. It had, in fact, been propounded as much as two hundred years prior to the Oxford Movement by Christopher Davenport, a Franciscan priest (also known as Franciscus a Sancta Clara), who in 1634 published a commentary on the Thirty-Nine Articles the aim of which was to demonstrate that these Articles were susceptible of a meaning consonant with the teaching of “Catholic” orthodoxy. In the next, that is, the eighteenth, century the notion was given clearer definition by the French writer Le Courayer, and in turn it was eagerly appropriated by

the Tractarians of the nineteenth century when it came to their notice. Pusey, for example, quoted from the work of Le Courayer in Tract 81. But it was in Tract 90, of which Newman was the author, that it reached its fullest development. Anglo-Catholics who have been responsible for keeping it alive since then should at least have been warned by the subsequent history of Newman, who in the end was so little convinced by his own argumentation that he seceded from the Church of England to the Church of Rome—prior to this decisive step, as he himself confessed, “it was (his) portion for whole years to remain without any satisfactory basis for (his) religious profession, in a state of moral sickness, neither able to acquiesce in Anglicanism, nor able to go to Rome” (*Apologia pro Vita Sua*).

The crux of the matter was the interpretation of Article 31 which condemns “the sacrifices of Masses” as “blasphemous fables and dangerous deceits”. The day came when Newman frankly declared (in his *Via Media*) that his explanation to the effect that the Article was directed, not against the official doctrine of the Roman Church, but only against popular errors, was “a mere hypothesis of the author of the Tract to serve as an escape from a difficulty”, and acknowledged that “what the 31st Article repudiates is undoubtedly the central and most sacred doctrine of the Catholic Religion”. In recent years, too, Dom Gregory Dix has spoken ironically (in *The Question of Anglican Orders*) of the temptation of Anglo-catholics “to represent Archbishop Cranmer and his colleagues as premature Tractarians”.

The hypothesis, however, has persisted as a foundation-stone of Anglo-Catholic apologetics, heedless both of the cautionary example of a Newman and of the damaging criticism of Evangelical scholarship. But now, at last, it may well have been delivered its death-blow by the publication this year of a book by the Jesuit scholar Francis Clark, of Heythrop College, entitled *Eucharistic Sacrifice and the Reformation* (Darton, Longman & Todd, 582 pp., 50s.)—a work of impressive erudition, carefully and clearly argued, and comprehensively presented. In surveying the history of the hypothesis, Dr. Clark draws attention to the “surprising influence” which B. J. Kidd’s small book *The Later Medieval Doctrine of the Eucharistic Sacrifice* (which first appeared in 1898) has had upon “eminent Anglican scholars, notably Gore, Darwell Stone, Bicknell, Srawley, Hicks, Mascall, and Dugmore, all of whom acknowledge their debt to it”. As he points out, “Kidd’s direct aim was to establish the Catholic orthodoxy of the 31st Article”; and this he endeavoured to achieve by contending that the use of the plural in the phrase “the sacrifices of Masses” showed that the Article was not intended to condemn “the sacrifice of the Mass” (“The distinction between ‘*sacrificia missarum*’ and ‘*sacrificium missae*’ is a real one; and thus Article XXXI denies, not the Eucharistic sacrifice, but certain errors and erroneous practices developed out of it”).

Dr. Clark has little difficulty in demonstrating that “the interpretation of the Reformers’ attitude to the Mass does not depend upon one phrase in one document”, that both the singular and the plural phrase were used interchangeably not only in Reformed but also in Roman writings, and that in fact “the English Reformers frequently referred to ‘the sacrifice of the Mass’, in the singular, in terms no less disparag-

ing than those applied in Article XXXI to ' the sacrifices of Masses ' ". And he builds up a massive case in proof of the fact that " it was not only defects in clerical conduct, in popular devotion, and in pastoral discipline that they were resolved to reform, but above all the very theology of the Mass, as hitherto authorized and taught in the pre-Reformation Church "; that " it was to the tree they applied their axe, and not merely to the parasitical growths upon it ". The study of their writings exhibits that " the Reformation hostility to the sacrifice of the altar is connected, in a coherent pattern, with the basic Reformation doctrines of grace, of justification, of the Church and the sacraments, and ultimately of Christology ". This can hardly be emphasized too much or too often ; and we wish that all Anglican scholars might have a comprehension of the issues involved as clear as that of this Roman Catholic scholar.

Dr. Clark, indeed, adduces an array of evidence to prove, *inter alia*, that the Edwardine Reformers declared their conscientious opposition to the sacrifice of the Mass in unmistakable terms ; that they had accurate knowledge of the authorized Catholic teaching on the Eucharistic sacrifice, and of how it was presented by their contemporary opponents ; that they could not but repudiate this teaching, since it was in implicit contradiction with their basic theology of grace and justification ; and that they denied any real objective presence of Christ in or with the Eucharistic elements, a denial which removes the foundation of the Catholic concept of the sacrifice, for if Christ is not objectively present in the sacrament He cannot be offered there.

Dr. Clark's attempt to exonerate the medieval Church of the various " monstrous doctrines " which have been alleged against it is not uniformly successful, but he amply establishes his contention that " a long succession of Anglo-Catholic authors have been misled into accepting a theory about the Reformation and the Mass that is historically unfounded ". We concur with his judgment that, " despite the new spirit of conciliation and careful choice of terms, it does not appear that the essentials of the problem have been changed, and that the new comprehensive language about Eucharistic sacrifice now recommended to Anglicans may cover, but does not resolve, the basic doctrinal tensions ". And he is to be applauded for his recognition that " the clear-sighted candour of writers like Bishop Neill, who are able to recognize the incompatibility of two doctrinal positions and to point out the reason, is more useful than the well-meant but undiscerning eirenism of writers who treat contradictory doctrines as complementary insights, as different emphases of the same truth, as different colours in one spectrum of Christian witness ".

The desire to discover a *via media* between Rome and the Reformation has led to the invention of hypotheses designed, like Newman's, " to serve as an escape from a difficulty," which on analysis may be, and have been, shown to be incompatible with the realities of the case, but which unfortunately have for many years now been treated as factual and set up as a standard of interpretation. What is now needed is a fresh consideration of the crucial subject of eucharistic doctrine in the light of the plain facts of history and especially in the light of the infallible teaching of our Lord and His Apostles.

P.E.H.