

principle a necessary and very praiseworthy institution. The unity, the simplicity, the inviolability of truth must be upheld and the faith of the Catholic Church preserved.

There are of course innumerable points of sympathy between Catholic and non-Catholic, some of which will be recognised in one or two of the articles published in this issue of BLACKFRIARS. But the fundamental paradox will always remain and there will be no hope of an understanding between the two so long as the Protestant refuses to understand why the Catholic cannot compromise and why he seems to expect every other religion to surrender everything it holds dear. Sympathy on this point should help to clear the air and make intelligible Rome's refusal to accept any modification of any doctrine as taught in its purity by herself. The movement towards reunion will actually increase if this position is put frankly before the non-Catholic. For the Church does in fact ask for 'unconditional surrender'; and that claim is part and parcel of its catholicism.

THE EDITOR.

NOTE: BLACKFRIARS has the honour to present the first impressions of two expert Catholic Canonists on the recent proposal for an Anglican Canon Law.

OUR SEPARATED BRETHREN¹

For in one Spirit were we all baptised into one body—1 Cor. 12, 13

BY the very fact of baptism men are incorporated into the one Church of Christ. A large number of Christians, it is true, do not consider themselves members of the Mother Church. Yet all those who were baptised in the name of the triune God outside the pale of the Catholic Church belong to her. Everyone wishing to baptise and doing so in the prescribed way, baptises validly, and anyone may do so in case of emergency. The Council of Trent has laid down that whoever denies that baptism, even if administered by heretics, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, with the intention of doing what the Church does, is true baptism, shall be anathema. Anyone who has been validly baptised is and remains a member of the Apostolic Church. A son does not cease to be the child of his parents though he grows up far from his home. In like manner the character of regeneration and of membership

¹ Translated from *Die Eine Kirche* of B. Momme Nissen, O.P. (Herder, Switzerland) by Irene Marinoff. The reader is also referred to the precise statement on this subject by Victor White, O.P., in BLACKFRIARS, September, 1943.

in Christ, bestowed by baptism, is not obliterated, though a man be brought up in ignorance of Mother Church, without her instruction, and without receiving her other sacraments.

It has been said that baptism gives grace to live according to the precepts of the Gospel. Our separated brethren bear witness to this fact, inasmuch as they faithfully adhere to the Apostolic Creed, believe in the divinity of Christ, and keep the ten commandments; devoutly pray the Our Father, and in simplicity of heart make the teaching of Scripture the foundation of their lives.

[N.B., *in simplicity*, for our modern critical intelligentsia has interpreted the holy Bible in so many diverse ways that the reading of it has lost its power to give grace.]

The seed of the divine word only bears good fruit in the hearts of those who fix their eyes upon God alone and simply and reverently believe in the Bible, content to leave those things unexplained which the lonely Bible student from the serious dangers of presumptuous interpretation, to illumine his mind, and to foster his spiritual growth. The daily reading of holy Scripture will prove a source of grace to those who follow this rule, and the beginning of a real imitation of Christ. Though mixed with vague and erroneous opinions, the integrity of Bible Christians deserves respect.

The grace of baptism, safeguarded by the spirit of holy Scripture, urges them to perform acts of pure love. For about a hundred years, chiefly in the North West of Europe, our Protestant brethren have vied with Catholics in works of charity. Wherever the pathetic cry of human suffering is heard, their forces appear in the name and spirit of Christ; they come to the aid of waifs and strays, idiots, cripples, the blind, the deaf and dumb, convicts, the starving, the sick, and sufferers of all kinds. In humility and devotion heroic works of charity are performed, especially by women pioneers, drawn from all classes in society, united in charitable associations or religious communities.

Certainly the Protestant bodies are in error with regard to questions of faith, but their unstinted zeal and indefatigable efforts in the service of the homeless, the drunkard, the prostitute, and all who are on the verge of despair, may well put to shame many a churchgoing Christian. This active spirit of charity, which does not shrink from the greatest sacrifice, proves beyond doubt that men who are inspired by Christ outside the pale of the Catholic Church, in spite of erroneous tenets, can yet show great Christian mercy and charity.

Bad Catholics are a disgrace to the Church, while she is honoured by the charitable deeds of good Christians outside the pale. This is

what Pope Pius X meant when he said during a private audience in 1910: 'I prefer a good Protestant to a bad Catholic'. We should deny the divine power of Christ if we were to deny the good that our separated brethren, who follow the spirit of the Redeemer, show in their lives and prove by their works. For this is their heritage from the much misjudged Catholic Church, which gave to the world its whole Christian patrimony.

Why do not those who share the life of the Mother Church through baptism, the study of the Scriptures, and christian works of charity joyfully acknowledge their membership? We all know the reason: that fatal schism which divided Christendom 400 years ago. . . . In the sixteenth century the Teutonic peoples north of the Alps were faced by a Roman hierarchy, some of whose members were very evil and appeared to be even more so. The Church, on the other hand, could only see priests, who had been consecrated to her service, breaking away from her in passionate revolt, autocratically altering her teaching and attracting vast crowds in the Northern countries. It stands to reason that the Church had to fight them and their claims.

Today the tide has turned: the Church is setting the world a magnificent example in all things that pertain to her. Though the members of the priesthood are not all perfect, yet most of them prove themselves worthy of their exalted office. As regards our goodwilled separated brethren, their opposition to Rome has considerably decreased, or even totally disappeared, giving place to a frank recognition of our common christian principles. In our day many Protestants, and those not the least devout either, hardly know in detail what the Reformers taught, and how they justified their separation from Rome. . . .

We can best appreciate the present situation *sub specie aeternitatis* by resolutely turning our eyes from the past to the present, from the accounts of historians to the vital lessons of our modern age itself. . . . May God give humility and charity to our judgments. By considering these things in the spirit of the Church of Christ, we shall easily reach far more peaceful and hopeful conclusions than those of former centuries.

Any personal view of a revolutionary change will necessarily be a limited one. Yet I feel justified in offering this one, as it is based on the experience of a lifetime, and is only meant to serve mutual understanding and concord. As I grew up in a purely Protestant district, and lived as an artist mainly among Protestants, I have kept many of my old friends. Not one of these resented my reception into the Catholic Church. The fact even brought me into closer touch with some. Thus I am familiar with the religious problems and activities

of our separated brethren since 1870. Here I am referring almost exclusively to those who are Bible Christians and ardent followers of our Lord. In ministers and laymen alike I can see a form of 'Confessional' Christianity growing, built on the Apostolic Creed and a simple faith in holy Scripture. These Christians hardly ever think of distant Rome, of Luther, Melancthon, or Calvin. Their only concern is to try to come nearer to God and to do his will, through prayer, a righteous life, and obedience to the law of charity.

In my early days I met this 'evangelical' way of life among the peasants of my Frisian home; later on among the devout Hamburg patricians, among the squirearchy of the northern estates, and in many a middle-class home. It seems to me that this religious attitude as it is everywhere practised by pious lay people, living in simplicity by their baptismal grace, has lately had a growing influence on the Protestant clergy. Most of these have shown a more solid faith in these last decades, and have recently dissociated themselves from both modernist and anti-Romanist views.

With glad surprise I noticed how staunchly the Northerners, from Norwegians to Low Germans, proved their loyalty during many frontal attacks upon Christianity. Storm and stress have strengthened the Christian faith, which had been wavering in many places. The distress caused by wars and famine have inspired new zeal in works of charity. The common danger threatening all Christians, the necessity of defending the Faith against irreligion, the realisation that today the whole is at stake, have united believers of every denomination. Great historic events, experienced in common, tend to overcome differences arising from past history. The lessons of the present day have taught many separated members to recognise the Pope and his Bishops in the North as comrades in arms and even as leaders in the struggle for Christ. Christ is preached and confessed anew. It is again realised that God does not only require penitence and resignation, but also voluntary mortification on the part of Christians.

Whether I met them on the shores of the German ocean or in Switzerland, in the truly devout among our separated brethren I was struck by their *anima naturaliter Christiana*. By their moral lives I am reminded of the early christian communities, of the very dawn of primitive Christianity. It hardly occurs to me that these are men whose ancestors broke away from Rome. On the contrary, I see a form of imperfect Christianity, imperfect through no fault of its own, originating in a sincere goodwill. It is imperfect because, without realising it, these christians lack the fulness of the Faith and the gifts of grace bestowed by sacramental communion with Christ. 'We Catholics believe more than they do'.

If, as a former Lutheran, I look into the catholic catechism, I realise that the protestant catechism agrees with a considerable number of our religious and moral dogmas. But what protestants lack is our lucid doctrine of the visible Church with her teachers, priests and pastors; the doctrine of the means of grace, especially of the seven sacraments, is also wanting. Whoever turns without prejudice from the orthodox protestant position to the doctrine of the Catholic Church need only complete his christian knowledge, though advancing, it is true, considerably beyond his present tenets.

Some sincere protestants seem to resemble the disciples in their relation to Jesus when he was walking in Palestine. They followed him devotedly, though they only recognised the Redeemer imperfectly. Still a prey to the tumult of personal thoughts and emotions, they only dimly realised his Godhead. What a change came over these same Apostles after the descent of the Holy Ghost! Then the seeking and wavering followers of an itinerant preacher, as we still see them in the disciples of Emmaus, became a firmly united band of fighters for God, acting as one man under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. They could only do so because of their adherence to the Faith taught by Christ and their complete submission to St Peter and to Rome. This was the foundation they built on. I visualise a similar development in store for our separated brethren.

Our Father in heaven, with the words of thy beloved Son we beseech thee 'That they all may be one, as thou, Father in me, and I in thee; that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me'. (St John 17, 21.)

Though sincere protestants may loyally adhere to their faith in God and in Christ, yet I have often noticed that they feel something is lacking in their relation to God. Of late they have repeatedly revealed the insufficiency of their religion by making salutary efforts to spiritualise their faith and unite with other christians. In the past new groups and sects were continually forming, especially across the ocean; recently a hopeful, sometimes even passionate striving for union has been apparent. Desirous of choosing the path which leads from isolation to union, from imminent anarchy to an all-embracing ecclesiastical order, the Oecumenical conferences prove to us how deeply they realise the tasks common to all who call themselves Christians.

When considering this tremendous undertaking, I see two dangers threatening protestants. The first is that of stopping halfway; the other of pursuing a wrong aim. Those who believe they can attain the desired unity merely by agreement of the Church leaders and their

followers, from the christian East to the American West, stop half-way. For they cannot give themselves what they do not possess, i.e., unity of Faith. . . . This can only be obtained from the source, which has guarded it in its integrity. It is only by re-establishing the lost connection with the Apostolic Succession that all christians can be gathered into one fold. Protestants can only find real unity by joining the flock that has remained faithful. If anyone has been led astray (through no fault of his own) as our separated brethren were through the fundamental errors of the founders of their religion, he must first of all come back to the point at which the wrong turning was taken.

A mistaken aim is pursued by those who believe that the 'United Church' of their desire will only be realised in the future. They wrongly consider the form and essence of the Church as a matter of individual judgment, of mutual agreement between the faithful. As though the Church were an institution which is developed gradually through the union of different creeds, and could be determined by a settlement between the parties concerned. They entirely misunderstand the fact that the Church has been established in unequivocal terms once and for all by the mission of Christ. This one Church comprises the beginning, middle and end of Christianity upon earth.

Many of our separated brethren have discovered the real remedy against the temptation of evading the true Church by relegating it to the future—a mere castle in the air. This remedy consists in the honest, reverent and thorough examination of the essence of the Church, as it has been confronting the world for nearly two thousand years. I have been frequently struck by the appreciation of the Catholic Church which results from the study enjoined on the protestant by his own tenets. I have met with scholars whose serious studies led them to realise the greatness of the Papacy who, when they were grossly misrepresented, confirmed the reliability of Catholic historians, both of early Christianity, of St Peter's stay in Rome, and of many other details of catholic history.

Some were engrossed in the study of the unparalleled riches of medieval culture, its mysticism, its treasures of architecture and sculpture, and in recent times even of Catholic philosophy, above all, of St Thomas Aquinas. I have been told that protestant theologians study the Breviary of the catholic priest and take a special interest in Catholic liturgy; that they visit convents in large parties where the Day Hours of the Church are celebrated. Many protestants are impressed by the ceremonies of Holy Week or of Easter at St Peter's, or in other cathedrals. Thousands will enter our catholic churches, when they are travelling abroad, to taste of the peace of God. Thousands go for holidays to the Catholic countryside and meet its devout

inhabitants, thus learning to appreciate the Catholic mind, everywhere partaking of the riches of the Church.

A teacher from Heligoland remembered as the most beautiful incident of her journey along the Rhine the choral singing of the monks at Maria Laach. At Fribourg in Switzerland, a lady from Northern Europe was deeply impressed by the daily Mass and communion. Others who had travelled in Franconia came home transformed in spirit. Those who have found access to the spiritual treasury of the Church by way of art and Church music are too many to be numbered. These are only a few examples to illustrate in how many different ways protestants have recently been inspired by the crown jewels of Mother Church. It is a criterion of truth that in its essential fertility it should radiate in manifold directions. As God is known by the fullness of nature, so is the true Church by the abundant treasures of her culture. Yet it is true there is still a long way to go till the essence of the Church, which is spiritual, is realised. Where there is a question of those values of the Church which are unfamiliar or even opposed to the protestant's way of thinking and confront his conscience with a decision, I have often noticed that many will shrink back with marked reserve, while others are impelled to deeper thought, and again others feel an unmistakable attraction. Not a few are struck by the sight of the confessional in every Catholic Church, which opens a healing spring for impurity and sin; others are impressed by the fact of the constant personal guidance of souls performed by the priests. Men who suffer from the manifold divisions of protestantism are stirred by the undisturbed unity of Faith in the Church; it warms their hearts to think that in this way the 'Communion of Saints' is realised on earth, and anticipated in spirit beyond Purgatory, even in Paradise.

Those who continue to ponder these things in their hearts will perceive that all attractive paraphernalia of the Church are only a dim reflection of the divine virtues fostered within her. Then it may occur to some: our protestant faith is divided and stunted, our hope lacks both roots and wings, our love, the supreme fervour! . . . This is inevitable. The separated members cannot draw the firm lines, beginning from God and ending with God.

(To be continued)

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