

## COMMENT

## I. EXTRA ECCLESIAM NULLA SALUS

SOME seven years ago there was an extended correspondence in *The Times* under the title *Catholicism Today*. The leading article which summed up the correspondence after six weeks contained this passage: 'Roman Catholics are not in fact committed as is widely believed to the doctrine that all non-Roman Catholics are damned.' It remains true, however, that the doctrine that apart from the Church no one can be saved is in fact held by Roman Catholics as an integral part of their faith. Readers of St Augustine's sermon on the unity of the Church in this number will have noticed that he holds that those who are outside the Catholic Church cannot have the Holy Spirit. He had in mind of course the leaders of the Donatist schism and considered them as being in formal rebellion against divinely constituted authority. Upon these premises Catholics would say today what St Augustine said then. The Church does not change its doctrines to suit the temper and views of different ages. But new knowledge and changed circumstances do sometimes enable the Church to see more deeply into and understand more clearly things that are implicit in the unchanging truth of which it is the depository. This clearer insight is exemplified in the interpretations which have been put by the theologians, in relatively recent times, upon the problem of the salvation of non-Catholics. In a number of *THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT* devoted to Christian unity it is not unfitting that there should be some discussion of these developments.

It is a truth of faith that Christ our Lord operates his work of redemption and salvation solely through the one Church, which he founded and which is his Mystical Body. This truth is of course summed up in the maxim *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. That the Mystical Body of Christ on earth and the Church Catholic and Roman are one and the same entity is a doctrine based upon this truth so clearly that it possesses an authority only less than that of a solemnly defined dogma. It has been clearly laid down in the encyclical *Mystici Corporis* and reiterated in *Humani Genesio*. Those who are saved, therefore, whoever they be; the non-

Catholic believers, the atheists and agnostics, among whom we live; the pagans and savages in remote regions, if they attain to salvation attain it through Christ *in his Church*.

The classical explanation of this truth is given by St Thomas in his *Summa Theologica*.<sup>1</sup> St Thomas's thought here is all the more profound because he treats the question in terms of the whole Church, Christ's Mystical Body, triumphant, suffering and militant. His starting point is in the very heart of Christology and in the purpose of the Incarnation and the universality of our Lord's atoning work. Having shown in the teaching of St Paul that Christ is the head of the Church, he asks if this means that he is the head of the whole human race, in such wise that all men are members of his Mystical Body. He recalls the passages of Scripture which teach the universality of the Atonement; e.g. 1 Tim. 4, 10: 'We hope in the living God who is the Saviour of all men, especially of the faithful.' And 1 John 2, 2: 'And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.'

He then explains. There is this difference between the physical body of man and the mystical body of the Church, that whereas the members of the physical body all exist together at the same time, the members of the Mystical Body do not; neither with respect to their natural existence—for the body of the Church consists of men who from the beginning of the world have existed, and of those who until the end of the world will exist. Nor with respect to their supernatural existence, for even among those men who exist (naturally) at the same time, some do not yet possess grace, though later they will possess it, while others already possess it. Therefore among members of the Mystical Body are to be counted not only those who are *actually* such, but also those who are *potentially* such.

Now, of these, some are potentially such but with a potency which will never be actualized, while the potency of others will at some time be so; and this in three degrees. One degree is by *faith*, another by *charity* and the third by the fulfilment of *glory* in the next life. Thus looking at the matter generally and with regard to the whole duration of the world, Christ is the Head of

<sup>1</sup> III, 8, 3. For much of what follows I am indebted to the Essay on 'Membership of the Church', Part 3, Essay 2, in *God the Unknown*, by Victor White, O.P. (Harvill Press, 1956.)

all men, but according to different degrees.

*Firstly*, and principally he is the Head of all those who are *actually* one with him in *glory*.

*Secondly*, of those who are actually one with him by *charity* (i.e. possessing sanctifying grace in this life).

*Thirdly*, of those who are actually one with him by *faith* only, and not *charity*.

*Fourthly*, of those who are one with him only potentially, but whose potentiality is divinely destined to be actualized in the future.

*Fifthly*, of those who are one with him potentially and whose potentiality will never be actualized; such are men living in this world, who are not destined to grace and glory. But such of these as have died cease entirely to be members of Christ, for they are no longer capable even in potency of being united with him.

Hence even unbelievers, although they are not *actually* of the Church, are nevertheless *potentially* of it. This potentiality is grounded on two things: firstly and principally in the power of Christ which is sufficient for the salvation of the whole human race; and secondly in the freedom of the will to accept this salvation and the means necessary to obtain it.

It will be noticed that St Thomas deals here with membership of the Body of Christ entirely in terms of its inner life of grace, and not at all with its hierarchical and juridical structure. This was, of course, not because he was unconscious of it, still less because he thought it unimportant, but simply because he took it for granted. He was not confronted by a Christendom split up into a multiplicity of separate and competing Churches. Even the Eastern schism was for him and his contemporaries remote and wholly exceptional, and may well have seemed much more temporary than it does to us today.

Our attention is very much more concentrated on the relation of a Christian to the external structure of the Church as a criterion of membership. When therefore we turn to the authoritative teaching of the contemporary Church, as it is set out in the *Encyclical Mystici Corporis*, we find that its ultimate basis is still the sacrament of baptism; that every baptized person *ipso facto* becomes a member of the Church Catholic and Roman, Christ's Mystical Body on earth, wherever and in whatever religious

body this sacrament may have been administered. By it is received sanctifying grace, the theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity and the gifts of the Holy Ghost, the very groundwork of the sacramental life of the Church. Nothing can destroy this, once it is received, but deliberate and grievous sin.

The adherence in good faith to the Christian body which administered the baptism, whether it be the Church of England or one of the Free Churches, provided the baptism was validly performed, can in no way damage its inner effect of sacramental grace and character. What does happen as a result of this personal act of adherence (and we may apply St Thomas's distinction here) is that there is an increase in potentiality and a lessening in actuality in the relationship of the person concerned to the Catholic Church. The actuality that remains is the sacramental grace and the character of baptism. But the actuality that is diminished and becomes potentiality only is the title to a share in the fullness of the common life of the Mystical Body. This can only be found within the visible hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church, which guards and teaches the Faith in its fullness and provides the whole range of sacramental life instituted in his Church by Christ our Lord. Where valid orders have been retained, as in the Eastern Orthodox Church, the actuality of sacramental life is very much greater. Yet even here there is separation from the divine society, due to schism, the loss of the fullness of authority and the completeness of unity in the Faith.

All this is implicit only in the teaching of *Mystici Corporis*, which says in fact very little about those who are outside the visible structure of the Church. It does, however, indicate that all those who are thus separated from visible unity can be held as members of the Church *in voto* (by desire), if their separation is in good faith; if, that is, they are faithful to conscience and do what in them lies to follow God's will and obey it. This would apply of course not only to the baptized, whose actual relationship to the Church is made closer by the character of the sacrament and its grace, but also, in a more potential way, to the unbaptized. The good will and implicit desire of these procure them the inner grace of sanctification, of which baptism is the ordained means, without receiving the outward and visible sign of the sacrament and its accompanying character. Whether the agnostic and unbeliever, assuming their good faith, can receive this super-

natural gift of God by a kind of implicit faith is a matter about which theologians argue. We cannot know the answer to this question with certainty. It is therefore one to be left in the hands of God whose justice and mercy we know to be infinite.

In the final paragraphs of *Mystici Corporis* the Pope, addressing those who do not belong to the visible structure of the Catholic Church, refers to words which he spoke at the beginning of his pontificate when he committed them to God's care and keeping. He now begs them to yield their free consent to the inner stirrings of God's grace, and strive to extricate themselves from a state in which they cannot be secure of their own eternal salvation. This security, of which the Pope speaks, is not the subjective security which depends upon the personal movement of the will in acceptance of God's grace, whenever and however bestowed, but the objective security provided by the divine guarantee of the Church, which mediates to us certainty concerning its authority and the faith and sacramental life of which it is the sole appointed guardian.

The Pope goes on to give as the reason for this that while those who are not within the visible structure of the Church may be related to the Mystical Body of the Redeemer by a certain longing and even desire, unconscious though these may be, yet they lack those many great heavenly gifts and aids the use of which can be legitimately enjoyed only in the Catholic Church. The heavenly gifts and aids of which the Pope speaks are the fullness of divine authority within the divine society which ensures fellowship in the true faith and the secure guarantee of the whole range of sacramental life. These the encyclical emphasizes are the means by which God's gift of salvation is mediated to men, and only within the visible structure and common life of the Mystical Body can they be found in their entirety and with the security afforded by its authority.

To sum up. All men everywhere, the human race as a whole in fact, are in *some sense* members of the Church, Christ's Mystical Body, either potentially or actually; either in fact or in desire. Indeed (and here I am quoting in substance the words of Fr Victor White in his essay, already cited, on membership of the Church), that membership is a very rich and complex concept, capable of realization or non-realization in manifold different ways. A man may satisfy one element contained in the concept

without satisfying others. He may be externally and visibly a member of the Church, yet without grace and entirely cut off from its inner life; while another may be externally and visibly cut off from membership in it and yet be sharing to a high degree, by implicit desire, its inner life of union with Christ.

In other words a good Protestant, and perhaps even a good agnostic or atheist, may be far more in Christ by grace than a bad Catholic. Some theologians distinguish between those who are perfectly and completely members of the Church, that is who hold perfect internal as well as external unity with it; those who are completely but imperfectly members, namely those in external communion but who share only imperfectly, or not at all, the inner life of grace; those who are perfectly but incompletely, namely those in a state of grace, but outside the visible structure of the Church; and so on. These divisions are necessarily somewhat arbitrary and unsatisfactory, but they serve to emphasize the point that membership of the Church, by which alone Christ mediates his redeeming power to men, is a complex and not a simple and easy concept; it cannot be applied or denied in all cases without qualification.

## II. ECUMENICAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

THE INSTRUCTION of the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office to Local Ordinaries on the Ecumenical Movement, issued in December 1949, emphasized, among other things necessary to the promotion of 'reunion' work by Catholics, the desirability of instruction for the laity in all that concerns it and its methods. There is now a considerable Catholic literature in English on this subject, though much of it may still be almost unknown to the majority of Catholics. It will be useful therefore, for readers of THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT, to set out here a short bibliography of the most important works in that literature, with brief comments on their scope and suitability for various types of reader.

Perhaps the most important book yet published, as well as the first of its kind in this country, is *Divided Christendom—A Catholic Study of the Problem of Reunion* by Yves M. J. Congar, O.P. (Geoffrey Bles, 1939); a translation from the French. Père Congar, the well-known Dominican theologian, has a wide experience of ecumenical work in France. His book is theological and displays a lively and critical sympathy with the non-Catholic mind and

its outlook, in conjunction with a penetrating application to its positions of soundly based Catholic principles. The chapter on Anglicanism is of particular value in this connection. Readers who decide to tackle this book should be prepared for some intensive reading.

Another book of almost equal value, though not so explicitly theological, except at one or two special points, is *The Christian Dilemma: Catholic Church and Reformation*, by W. H. van de Pol, D.D. (J. M. Dent, 1952); a translation from the Dutch. Dr van de Pol was a Dutch Calvinist, then an Anglican and at last a Catholic and a priest. He has been deeply concerned in the past in the ecumenical movement itself and is so now from the point of view of Catholic ecumenism. He has therefore an unrivalled experience, at first hand, of ecumenical method and outlook. Particularly enlightening is his analysis of the nature of Anglicanism and of its principles, and of the influence of the Church of England as an institution in English life. This book can be recommended, as second only to Père Congar's, to interested readers who are prepared for reasonably close study.

A smaller and rather more elementary book is *The Catholic approach to Protestantism*, by George Tavard (Harper and Brothers, New York, 1955); a translation from the French by the author himself. This is also an excellent introduction to Catholic Ecumenism and its spirit, and to the history and progress of the Ecumenical Movement, and the Conferences which gave rise to the organization of the World Council of Churches. Of particular value is the part dealing with the attitude of the Holy See to Ecumenism and the special chapter on its official pronouncements on this subject.

*Catholicism and the Ecumenical Movement*, by J. M. Todd, with an Introduction by the Abbot of Downside (Longmans, 1956). This is perhaps the best book, for those who have no previous knowledge, on which to make a start. It is small in compass but written with wide knowledge, and it is exceptionally comprehensive. It outlines the history of the Ecumenical Movement itself, and sets out in forthright terms what, in the author's view, should be the relationship of Catholics to it if unity of non-Catholics with the true Church is ever to be achieved. With Mr Todd's book may also be mentioned *Essays in Christian Unity*, by Fr Henry St John, O.P. (Blackfriars Publications, 1955). This

is a more occasional and less consecutive work, but it will be found to contain much information and to throw light on the nature of the ecumenical approach to our separated brethren.

Two books of a rather different kind will also be found useful. The first is *The Sheepfold and the Shepherd*, by Columba Cary Elwes, o.s.b. (Longmans, 1956). Dom Columba sets out, without polemical aims, to describe the Catholic religious way of life to non-Catholics. This he does with a gentleness and deep insight which are both moving and attractive. The chapters on Prayer and on Meditating on the Church deserve special mention. But Dom Columba's insight into the working of the non-Catholic mind and the ethos it has created for itself is not always equally penetrating. Some of his judgments on its positions are too superficial and lacking in understanding, and this will tend to neutralize a little the excellence of his positive expositions. The second book that many will find useful, provided they are prepared for a theological approach, is *Christ, Our Lady and the Church—a Study in Eirenic Theology*, by Yves M. J. Congar, o.p. (Longmans, 1957). Eirenic theology seeks to trace doctrinal differences to their roots in history with a view to their possible reconciliation in a truer view of their real nature. Père Congar holds that the differences which divide Catholics and Protestants go deeper than their disagreement about the nature of the Church. They are rooted in divergent views of the nature of the Incarnation itself, these being in their turn attributable to a distorted idea of the relation of Christ's humanity to fallen human nature, and the resultant methods of God's power in saving us.

Père Congar shows in this book that there is a fundamental difference of philosophical interpretation between Catholics and Protestants in the respective concepts of person and nature. This difference begins at the point where Protestantism and the historic Catholic tradition part company. The Protestant emphasis in this divergence is monophysite in tendency, because its effect is to minimize and distort the place and function of the sacred Humanity of Christ in the work of redemption, and in consequence the part played by our Lady and the Church in its economy.

To have a sympathetic appreciation of the aspirations of the Church of South India scheme, in the context of the Anglican principles that gave it birth and support it; to realize the force



of the tensions within Anglicanism the launching of it has focussed, is to understand what the ecumenical spirit means to many of our separated brethren. The last book on our list is a pamphlet, *The Church of South India and the Church*, by Donald Rea, published for the Confraternity of Unity (Baxter's Press, Oxford, 1956). The author is an Anglican Papalist who accepts all Catholic doctrine including the Vatican decrees. Yet he possesses a distinctly Anglican mind and outlook. He holds that the Church of England, itself an 'imperfect' Church, can and must accept the South India compromise with all its anomalies, and that ultimately its development will further the cause of Christian unity in the direction of the true unity of Rome.

Canon Rea is well-read both in St Thomas and the latest work of Catholic theologians on ecclesiology. His ably-written pamphlet will enable Catholics to watch what is taking place among our separated brethren as a result of this manifestation of the ecumenical spirit, with suspended judgment as to whither it may be leading, but with sympathy bred of knowledge and understanding of the real situation with all its cross-currents and complexities.



### EXTRACTS

THE Autumn number of PAX, the Quarterly Review of the Benedictines of Prinknash, contains an article of particular interest in relation to the manifold problems of Christian unity. It is by Dom Bede Griffiths, O.S.B., and is on Kerala. This is the name given, in the reorganization of the states of the Republic of India, to what was before composed of Travancore, Cochin and Malabar in the extreme south-west.

It has the distinction of being the most literate and best-educated state in the Indian Union. It is said there are more graduates per square mile around Tiruvalla, the town in which I am now living, than in any other part of the world.

Kerala, however, has a Communist government owing to the fact that in it there is found a combination of wealth and poverty, a high level of education and much unemployment.

On the other hand it has the distinction of being the most Christian State in India. Christians are said to number about one-third of the population, and their influence is even more considerable as they are one of the wealthiest of the communities.