

ANGLICANISM AND THE PAPACY¹

HENRY ST JOHN, O.P.

WORK for Christian unity must, of course, envisage the removal of what are called the non-theological factors, obstacles of divergence of ethos, outlook and idiom of thought, which separate Christians and Christian allegiances. These seem to bulk larger in the minds of many ecumenists than the primary and basic obstacles which are purely theological. Dr Mascall's book wisely sets out to make theology the foundation of his approach to the problem of unity, and Christians of every allegiance, Catholics not least among them, have cause to be grateful for almost all of this ably written contribution to the solving of that problem. His work has been done with the learning and charity we should expect of him, and apart from one important section of it, the two chapters on the Papacy which we shall comment on later in this article, will prove of undiluted value in promoting the ecumenical dialogue.

The distinctive mark of Dr Mascall's approach is a typically Anglican one; it is characteristic, as he points out, of the central theme of the Report *Catholicity*,² namely the necessity of getting back behind the Reformation and the middle ages if the wholeness of the Catholic tradition is to be recovered. Much of what he says on this subject, in his chapters on Clearing the Ground, Reculer Pour Mieux Sauter, The Rediscovery of Liturgy, and The Church and the Ministry, will gain the cordial assent, *exceptis excipiendis*, of the majority of Catholic theologians, whether their particular interest is ecumenical or not. Catholics, if they speak of the recovery of the wholeness of tradition, do not mean that the Church, as they understand it, has ever lost that wholeness; it remains always in possession, though aspects of it have, for one reason and another, either inevitably or by abuse, receded into the background, or even been packed away in a drawer, where they lie almost unnoticed, ready to be brought out again one day when occasion arises. This we recognize is part of the human side of the Church, which through sin, weakness and indifference to

¹ *The Recovery of Unity. A Theological Approach.* By E. L. Mascall. (Longmans; 25s.)

² *Catholicity. A study of the Conflict of Christian Traditions in the West, being a Report presented to His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury by a group of Anglo-Catholic theologians.* Dacre Press. 1947.

high ideals, and even also, inevitably and in the nature of things, renders it liable, for good or ill, to the impact of its temporal environment in the world in which it lives.

This truth is being brought out in our day by the work of the liturgists and the liturgical movement, which is not merely the liturgists, in the recovery of a fuller realization of the implications of the doctrine of the Mystical Body and its practical applications both in worship and in society. The common presentation of doctrine does in fact vary in emphasis and content from age to age. It is influenced by the changing views of the theological schools on matters of deep import lying outside the scope of *de fide* teaching, and by contemporary habit and practice among the faithful; both theologians and non-theologians being affected by the time-spirit of the age in which they live. Recent developments in the doctrine of the Mass and in biblical theology are evidence of this, and Dr Mascall quotes extensively from the critical work of the contemporary liturgists to the same effect, especially from Pater Jungmann and Père Bouyer.

The main principle of eirenic theology employed by Dr Mascall in urging the necessity of getting behind the Reformation and the late middle ages, for the recovery of the wholeness of the Catholic tradition, is that Catholicism and Protestantism at the Reformation both suffered in common from erroneous assumptions which were a heritage of the immediate past, and remained implicit and unexamined in the controversies that arose between them. Of these the most damaging were the current nominalism into which late medieval Catholicism had fallen, and a clericalism, which had separated ministers and people in liturgical worship and had led to distortion in the current conception of the Mass. These notions were underlying assumptions in Reformation doctrine and religious practice, as they were also in contemporary Catholicism.

While we must acknowledge considerable truth in both these positions, many will think it possible that Dr Mascall is overrating their effect. It is true that nominalism was widespread in Germany and to a lesser extent in northern Europe in general, but the age was the age of the greatest of St Thomas's commentators, Cardinal Cajetan, and Thomism was alive and flourishing in other parts of Europe. Was intellectual contact so restricted that it had no influence whatever on the theological

thought of northern Europe? It would seem that more research will be needed before this question can be answered with certainty.

And can we be so sure of the extent to which the clericalization of liturgy had separated the Mass from Calvary in the eyes of the faithful, and tended to make the former something effective in its own right, done by the priest for the people, as Gregory Dix argued in his customarily fascinating way in *The Shape of the Liturgy*? In England today the Mass has remained as clericalized (in Dr Mascall's sense) as it was at the Reformation, especially in the north, where there is a strong indigenous Catholic tradition, tracing its ancestry to that time. Large congregations continue to participate silently in Masses whispered at the far distant altar. Yet every child learns that 'the Mass is one and the same sacrifice as Calvary', and one knows by experience how very simple and uneducated Catholics have a way of by-passing theories, liturgical and theological, and getting to the heart of the matter without them. Even silent participation can be deep, real and consciously corporate.

When he reaches his last two chapters entitled Church and Papacy, which are naturally of deep interest to Catholics, Dr Mascall becomes markedly less eirenic in his approach. It is not that we grudge him his strongly Anglican standpoint, but that he fails to carry out his own eirenic principle to go back behind the Reformation and the middle ages to the primitive Church. It is curious that nowhere in the book does he undertake any explicit discussion of the nature of the Church's unity, save by his argument for the necessity of episcopacy as part of its sacramental life. Yet if there is one point more than another at which the Reformation and its heirs have notably departed from the norms of the primitive Church it is in their belief that the Church can be, and is, divided in respect of its external and visible unity of faith and government. For the early Church, schism was schism from the Church and never within it, whatever the complications of being in Communion or out of Communion with one another might sometimes lead to. To Catholics it seems as obvious that God, by the leading of his Holy Spirit, should for all time preserve in existence against schism the visible unity of his Church, as it does that, through its agency, he should have preserved intact from heresy the truths of the Incarnation and Redemption.

For us then the Church Christ founded is and always must be,

by his promise, a single visible organic society, undivided and indivisible. This is part of divine revelation and therefore regarded as essential both in the primitive tradition, as set forth for instance by St Cyprian, and also in the present historic tradition of Christendom East and West, the Churches of the Reformation excepted. In any truly eirenic discussion the Papacy must be seen as an institution growing up within a Church conceived, in this way, as a society visible, organic and undivided. As soon as it is thought of as an institution now at work in a divided Church it is bound to be seen as an alien element, imposing itself from without like a malignant growth. In other words the unity of the Church is the necessary key to the meaning and growth of the Papacy, and it cannot be fruitfully discussed save in relation to this primitive concept of unity.

It is noticeable that the whole of Dr Mascall's argument is based upon an attempt to isolate the present-day Papacy from the Church, and to show that it is, in all that he disagrees with about it, such an alien growth.³ He adopts the tests laid down by Dr Ramsey, the Archbishop of York, for assessing the legitimacy of the development of the Papal prerogatives viz.: 'A Papacy, which expresses the general mind of the Church in doctrine, and which focuses the organic unity of all the Bishops and of the whole Church, might well claim to be a legitimate development in and through the gospels'.⁴ Dr Ramsey then goes on to say that 'a Papacy which claims to be a source of truth over and above the general mind of the Church, which wields an authority such as depresses the due working of the other functions of the one Body, fails to fulfil the main tests'. These two points are Dr Mascall's gravamen against the modern Papacy as the Vatican Council has

3 This is evidenced by the onesidedness of his comment upon a quotation from Dom Columba Cary-Elwes that the doctrine of infallibility was 'of immensely slow and gradual growth and its realization occurred chiefly in the Western Church' (*The Sheepfold and the Shepherd*, page 222). He says 'This is a significant admission, and might lead to the suspicion that human ambition had as much to do with it as divine inspiration' (page 206). No doubt a legitimate expression of opinion for one who does not recognize that the Papal supremacy is of divine origin. But, historically speaking, should it have been set down without reference to the long story of human ambition which characterizes the See of Constantinople and many of its occupants, from the days of Eusebius of Nicomedia? The erection of 'an ecclesiastical system, leaving out of view the primacy of the See of Rome, and finding the key-stone of its vault, in the last resort, in the political authority of the Emperor of Constantinople' (*The Church and Infallibility*, B. C. Butler, page 207) undoubtedly played a very large part in impeding the recognition in the East of all that the Roman primacy involves, and confining it to the West.

4 *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, by A. M. Ramsey (Longmans), page 65.

defined it, and nearly all the many individual objections he brings in his second chapter are rooted in one or other of these points.

The Papacy claims to be 'a source of truth over and above the general mind of the Church'. This is an erroneous statement; if it were true the Papacy would be an institution set over against the Church instead of being integral to its working structure. Infallibility is not inspiration, still less is it revelation. In exercising it the Pope has at his disposal only the knowledge of the content of the deposit of faith to which any theologian or indeed any of the faithful has access. That knowledge resides in the mind of the Church and is interpreted by its authority, which has power to determine by divine guidance whether any particular doctrine is or is not a genuine component of the deposit and therefore revealed truth.

The authority which thus interprets the mind of the Church is the *ecclesia docens*, the episcopate throughout the world in communion with the See of Rome. Apart from that See there can be no teaching authority in the Church at all. Its verdict is *ex sese* decisive and does not derive its finality, in defining the faith, from antecedent or subsequent consent of the rest of the episcopate or of the Church at large.⁵ Thus the Church's infallibility finds its final focus and determination in the personal infallibility exercised by the Pope in virtue of his office as successor of St Peter and Vicar of Christ. Yet the Pope himself and his fellow bishops, equally with the rest of the faithful, are bound by the obedience of faith in allegiance to the authoritative teaching of the Church; though constituting in one capacity the *ecclesia docens* they belong in another to the *ecclesia discens*. Nor should it be forgotten that the *ecclesia discens* plays its part in liturgical worship and by study, thought and prayer, in the gradual formulation of the doctrines upon which the teaching authority of Church, at a later stage, pronounces its defining verdict. The deposit of faith is the possession of the whole Church, and the clearer insight into it, which comes from deeper penetration into Scripture and its traditional interpretation, is a common undertaking to which not the theologians only but the faithful at large make their contribution. This has been so from the first and still is so.

Dr Mascall is almost indignant at the idea that truths such as the

⁵ *ideoque ejusmodi Romani Pontificis definitiones ex sese, non autem ex consensu Ecclesiae irreformabiles esse.* Vatican Council, *Constitutio Pastor Aeternus*, cap. iv.

Immaculate Conception and the Assumption should be held to be definable as dogmas, on the ground that they are part of the deposit of faith, having been at one time *purely implicit* in it; implicit, that is, in such a way that without the definition we could not know that they were in it at all. He calls this a kind of dodge, into which Roman theologians are driven, in order to maintain their theoretical principle that there can be no additions, in the course of history, to the deposit of faith. In other words he is maintaining that these doctrines can be defined only as new and additional revelations, and not as part of the original deposit. Were this so it would mean that the Church is contradicting its own doctrine, confirmed by the Vatican Council, that nothing essentially new can be added to what was from the first revealed to the Apostles.

The Roman theologians however have worked out, as Newman did, from historical data, how doctrinal development has actually happened in the course of the Church's life. If what they have done involves us in a dodge to avoid an awkward dilemma, it would appear that the Apostles themselves first started the necessity for such a dodge. We can trace the process in the New Testament itself. The first heresy was that of the Judaizers, who taught that circumcision, as well as baptism, was necessary to salvation.⁶ Quite evidently the Apostles had had no definite command from our Lord in the matter. It is true that St Peter was instructed by a vision to admit uncircumcised Gentiles to the Church, but the vision contained no direction on this point. It might be thought obvious, as the Judaizers evidently held, that circumcision should be obligatory on all Gentile converts. St Peter acted in the matter of Cornelius and his family not by any logical inference from what had been revealed to him and his fellow Apostles by Christ, but by a spirit-guided insight into the whole meaning of baptism, as the gateway into the Church, its sealing of the reception of faith and its power to impart the life which flows from Christ's redemptive work.

If there was a special revelation made to him in the matter St Peter gave no hint of it in the proceedings at the Council of Jerusalem. 'It hath seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us' implies divine guidance in seeing God's meaning in the dispensation of salvation in Christ, and the relation of baptism to it, but

⁶ Acts, 15, 1.

not new revelation. I have sometimes wondered whether there was an infant in the household of Cornelius and if there was whether St Peter baptized it. For the same problem underlies the Church's knowledge of the efficacy of infant and heretical baptism; again a matter where common sense and logical inference would perhaps have judged that an infant was *incapax* of receiving and a heretic of administering the Sacrament. It can scarcely be said either that the reception of a sacrament necessary to salvation comes only within the scope of discipline and not of revealed truth. We might make a considerable list of similar cases in the course of history, where a revealed truth, purely implicit, was made explicit by the Church's authority: the inspiration of the individual books of Scripture, the necessity of episcopacy, the direct invocation of saints, and the whole range of doctrines concerning our Lady, from her perpetual virginity to her Assumption; though no doubt Dr Mascall would not recognize some of these as *de fide*.

Revelation is not a series of carefully compiled propositions, it is something much more complex and deeper; its formulation in *de fide* propositional definitions represents indeed without error the truth of the *res revelata*, but it does not exhaust the richness and depth that it contains. The deposit of faith is revelation and is contained wholly in the Scriptures interpreted by Tradition, or perhaps not quite wholly in the Scriptures but partly also *in* Tradition, though all of it, at all times, interpreted by the living voice of Tradition (the theologians differ on this point). Revelation is God's Word spoken, and in the deposit of faith the whole of God's message to mankind is contained. It is his Word spoken to faith, the faith of the Church, in Christ Jesus. But though the whole of God's Word thus spoken is possessed by the faith of his Church and has been so possessed from the first, the whole is not at once explicitly apprehended in such a way that it can be articulated in human ideas and words.

Even in ordinary life we possess a natural knowledge of things in this way, we know things in the depths of our being, but are not consciously and explicitly aware of their nature and multiple implications. A young man in love knows and is intensely aware of his love, as deeply aware of it as he ever will be, but concerning its nature now and its many implications he is almost wholly inarticulate both in ideas and words. Such expressions of

it as he can achieve, either to himself or his loved one, seem too inadequate to be worth the saying. But in time, while his love remains as deep and complex as it was from the first, he will achieve a more adequate expression and coherent understanding, but never one that can exhaust its reality.

The deposit of faith entrusted to the Church may be compared to a great picture studied by those whose minds are enlightened by grace. The central theme of the picture, the great redemptive act of God in Christ, is vividly depicted and its meaning strikes the imagination and mind of the beholder immediately it is seen, though not in all its detail. But round this central theme, and closely connected with it in significance, are very many subsidiary themes; they point to the central theme, and make clear its place and power in the history of mankind, showing how men's minds were prepared for it. They show too the divinely ordained means by which that power is made available by divine ordinance to mankind. These subsidiary themes are often highly symbolical in character; they do not always carry a plain meaning, or one which fits in at once with other themes. Moreover they are so depicted as to be in relative darkness compared with the brilliant colouring of the central theme; the further removed they are towards the outer edge of the picture, the more obscure and unconnected they appear at first to be.

Those who live with this picture, the faithful all the world over, study it at times with close attention, always under the light of faith. The central theme never loses its intense and absorbing interest or the brilliance of its impact. But after months and years of loving study, gradually the surrounding themes come to be seen more clearly, their significance is realized more deeply, and their connection with the central theme, and with each other, more and more clearly recognized. After many years of scrutiny and absorbed attention the whole message of the picture, in all its many significant details, will be clearly seen, yet even so its total meaning will never be fully exhausted. The message the picture gives has always been there, it has never changed or been added to, but its full import, summed up in the central theme, and grasped implicitly in grasping it, has become progressively more explicit and articulate in the minds of those who live with it under the light of faith. The bishops, who constitute the teaching authority of the Church, by a special gift of grace have the power,

in concert, to guard against false interpretation of the great picture or any of its details. To carry out this duty they must themselves constantly examine it with deep attention under the special guidance of the Holy Ghost. But there is one among them who, by God's appointment, holds the final and decisive authority in this work of interpretation. All know that the Holy Spirit will guide them to a common agreement concerning it, and when that is reached their teaching will be divinely guaranteed as true. But there are times when opinions differ among them and among the faithful, on one or another point of detail. On these occasions they look to the one of their number, whose authority is final, for guidance and direction in their discussions, and this they receive with glad obedience; for by this road they reach their own decision. At times too the need arises for a definitive and final judgment as to where the truth of faith lies. Then when, as their chief Bishop and leader, he addresses his verdict to the whole Church as its teacher, they know that he is safeguarded by divine power from error. By their acceptance of this verdict they share, as a body, in the divinely given safeguard, and in this manner the whole episcopate securely declares to the world the truth that is in Christ.

In commenting on the Augustinian words *securus judicat orbis terrarum*, which were decisive in Newman's conversion, Dr Mascall asserts that it is of the essence of the Roman position that it is the judgment of the Roman Pontiff and not the consent of the *orbis terrarum* that is definitive in matters of faith and morals: in a case of *Petrus contra mundum* Peter would be right and the world wrong. Such a situation is conceivable; even Athanasius was once *contra mundum*, and Robert Hugh Benson in his novel *Lord of the World* pictured it, the Church being reduced to the Pope and a handful of faithful. But Dr Mascall omits to notice that, although the verdict of Peter is solely decisive in completing the consent, the teaching authority of the bishops and the testimony of the faithful play a big part in the process by which it is reached.

Only the Pope can give the decisive judgment which sets the seal of immunity from error upon the expression of the Church's final mind and makes it irreformable. That mind, however, is formed in all its stages up to the last through the study of the great picture by every member of the Church, each in his own particular capacity and at his own particular level. The Pope, the Bishops,

the theologians, the faithful; by teaching, by studies and research, by formulation, by prayer and worship. So that in the final result the whole Body of Christ on earth (in concert with the faithful who have left it) has had its share in expressing the mind of Christ.

'A Papacy', says Archbishop Ramsey, 'which wields an authority such as depresses the due working of the other functions of the one Body, fails to fulfil'⁷ the test of a legitimate development. By showing that the Papacy, as it now is, does in fact play its decisive part in expressing the general mind of the Church in doctrine, and cannot and does not claim to be a source of truth over and above the general mind of the Church, we have gone far to vindicate it from wielding an authority such as depresses that of the diocesan bishops. The Papacy does in fact conform to Dr Ramsey's test of legitimate development, by expressing the general mind of the Church in doctrine and focussing the organic unity of all the Bishops and of the whole Church. But as we have already noticed a great deal depends, in the application of this test, on what is meant by the organic unity of the whole Church. As many Anglicans do, Dr Ramsey and Dr Mascall accept a Papal primacy but reject absolute supremacy in teaching and government. They acknowledge a Papacy which in their view ceased to exist, but not the Papacy as it has actually developed within the life of a visible organic society; it is we Catholics who do that. The fundamental difference which lies between ourselves and all the Reformation Churches is the nature of the Church's unity.

Most of Dr Mascall's difficulties and those of his fellow Anglicans are due to his profound distrust of what he calls absolute authority and its correlative absolute obedience. It is his suspicion of this that leads him to regard the Papal authority as something imposed from outside upon the Church, not as an integral part of its life. This limitation of view is a difficult one for Catholics to understand. We are in daily contact, mediate or immediate, with the religious orders which are an impressive and vital element in Catholic life. A religious lives under a vow of obedience, and that obedience is absolute, limited only by conscience and the rule of his order. Such a life is only possible to those who have a profound belief and trust in God's providence. An Abbot or other Superior may issue a command by his supreme authority,

⁷ *Ibid.*, page 65.

and in actuality occasionally does so, about some matter great or small concerned with the life of the monastery, which in the eyes of his subjects or some of them is unwise, wrong-headed and even foolish; but he must be obeyed within the limits of conscience. Moreover his subjects must believe, and are rightly trained to believe that obedience in all such circumstances is still good, because however wrong-headed and foolish the command, however impervious the Superior to reasonable representations, God by his guiding Providence will in the end bring good out of the evil. But if he has such criticisms of his Superior's action, the religious is also trained, and rightly so, to suspend his judgment concerning them to the extent he is able, and to keep his criticisms to himself except in so far as discreet and prudent canvassing of them in the right quarters may bring about a change.

In its wider context, and apart from the special obligations of a vow, this is the kind of obedience that Catholics willingly give to the teaching and ruling authority of the Church in things that are not *de fide*. There are of course at times personal tensions when the wisdom of certain directives is questioned or even questionable. This is universally recognized within the household of the Church as it is in the religious family, and the way of dealing with them is the same, willing obedience and complete trust in God and his power to bring good out of evil.

Dr Mascall has criticized in particular the handling by the Holy See of two scientific problems in particular, biblical criticism and the theory of evolution, in their bearing on the Church's teaching. We are not of course bound to hold that the Holy See always deals with such problems in the most perfect manner possible, but in its requirements for the safeguarding of the faith we are bound to obedience and its correlative of prudence in judgment or suspension of judgment. Even today, if it is not easy to make judgments upon the necessity of all that St Pius X did in dealing with the modernist crisis, it is safe to say that drastic action of the kind he took was entirely necessary. Of course at that time a brake was put upon the progress of real scholarship and there was inevitably a spirit of heresy-hunting abroad. But Anglicans who have no discipline of this sort should remember that their kind of freedom had a heavy price to pay in the opposite direction in the widespread dissemination of every recent theory and hypothesis among many who were quite incapable of dealing with them and

fell by the way in consequence. They will also do well to recall the opinion of a great and much-loved Cambridge scholar, Sir Edwyn Hoskyns; his appraisal of the integrity of Catholic biblical scholars and in particular of Lagrange, much of whose work was done in the modernist period and its aftermath; and his judgment that the findings of the Biblical Commission do not constitute an intrusion of ecclesiastical administration into the field of technical scholarship or impede the independent critical judgment of Catholic scholars.⁸ English Catholics too can console themselves with a certain pride that two English theologians, Newman and Bishop Hedley, in very early days, wrote in defence of the possibility of the evolutionary hypothesis.

To sum up: we believe that Dr Mascall's fundamental misconception of the Catholic Church, like that of many other Anglicans of learning and integrity, is that he persistently looks at the Papacy in isolation from and set over against the Church, instead of as an integral part of the episcopate, binding, like the keystone, the arch of its authority into a unity and keeping it so. The Pope lives under the solemn obligation of obedience to Christ ruling in his Church, and the obedience he himself receives from his fellow bishops as a result of his universal jurisdiction, far from being an interference with their inherent and divinely conferred authority, completes it and keeps it true to the authority of Christ. Dr Mascall's fellow Anglican Dr T. G. Jalland, whom he quotes with more than a tinge of disapproval, is on truer lines when he writes: 'The value of the papal office as the primary centre of unity, as the highest court of appeal, as a custodian of order and a corrector of aberrations from the original *depositum fidei*—all this and much more emerges, as we hope to have shown, only when the Church becomes aware of itself in a fuller sense as a world-wide organization, and when a local and 'parochial' consciousness gives place to an ecumenical outlook'.⁹

8 *The Fourth Gospel*, edited by F. N. Davey (Faber and Faber, 1947), page 25 ff.

9 *The Church and the Papacy*. Bampton Lectures. (S.P.C.K.), page 542.