

OLD PRIEST AND NEW PRESBYTER¹

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THE book of this name by Professor Norman Sykes is a learned exposition, as impartial in the circumstances as it could well be, of the mind of the Church of England upon the problem of the Church's ministry. It examines the way the originating formularies of Anglicanism concerning the nature and necessity of episcopal rule have been understood and acted upon during the course of Anglican history. Professor Sykes's conclusion, after reviewing the relevant evidence, may be summed up in his own words:

'The Church of England has never set forth any theological or doctrinal theory of episcopacy, but in its Articles, the Preface to the Ordinal and the writings of its representative divines has contented itself with a historical statement of its intention to continue the three-fold ministry on the ground of its tradition in the Church since the Apostolic age' (page 244).

The way in which this historical statement has been understood and acted upon by the Church of England from the first, traced out by Professor Sykes, can also be summed up in a passage which he quotes from the conclusion of Bishop Lightfoot's essay, 'The Christian Ministry':

'If the preceding investigation be substantially correct the threefold ministry can be traced to Apostolic direction; and short of an express statement we can possess no better assurance of a Divine appointment or at least of a Divine Sanction. If the facts do not allow us to unchurch other Christian communities differently organized, they may at least justify our jealous adhesion to a polity derived from this source.'²

This may be not unfairly described as the essential Anglican position, and it was almost exclusively such at least up to the beginning of the Tractarian movement, which based itself upon a view of Apostolic succession that certainly did unchurch non-

¹ *Old Priest and New Presbyter*. By Norman Sykes, F.B.A. (Cambridge University Press; 27s. 6d.)

Anglican Orders. By Anthony A. Stephenson, S.J. (Burns and Oates; 7s. 6d.)

Anglican Orders and Defect of Intention. By Francis Clark, S.J. (Longmans; 25s.)

² *Commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians*, page 187.

episcopal communities in a way more decisive than any section of Anglicanism had hitherto done. The reason for this was that the Tractarians exalted tradition to a higher, more definitive function in the interpretation of the biblical revelation than had previously been accorded to it. Divinely revealed truth, rather than scientifically attained evidence of historical fact, was for them the basis upon which episcopacy was accepted.

Professor Sykes writes with evident disapprobation of what he stigmatizes as the anti-historical temper of the dominant tendency in some contemporary schools of Anglican theology. This temper he characterizes as offended by the intrinsic limitations attaching to historical evidence where 'probability is the very guide of life', and as seeking to dispel historical incertitude by dogmatic presupposition. He refers to the unproven premise of the primitive wholeness of Catholicism assumed by the authors of *Catholicity*,³ and speaks of it as the maxim put forward at the outset by which to fill the gaps in the historical evidence, and to read back into the apostolic and sub-apostolic ages the settled rules of later epochs.⁴

To Catholics this is as if one were to talk of the unproven premise of faith in Christ's resurrection being put forward to fill in the gaps in the historical evidence supplied by the New Testament. For us the 'primitive wholeness' of Catholicism is another name for the Church, Catholic and Roman; what the former was in the apostolic and sub-apostolic age the latter is today; between them there is a visible, substantial continuity and identity. Whatever was embraced by and emerged from that primitive wholeness, and has come by a Spirit-guided conviction to be realized as Christ's ordinance, is an object of faith, as is the Church which embraces and has proclaimed it as such. Scientific history and criticism may well confirm this faith and corroborate it; but the faith itself, though dependent upon fact, in the sense that both fact and its meaning are contained in what is revealed, is not dependent upon the establishment of fact by evidence. The scholar may and should pursue his research therefore without anxiety, since he believes that no truly established verdict of history can ever *contradict* what the Church presents to us as

³ 'The Anglo-Catholic Report to the Archbishop of Canterbury on the Conflict of Christian Traditions in the West.' (Dacre Press, 1947, pages 11-17.)

⁴ Page 243.

divinely revealed. Both are true, each in its own order, and since all truth is from God both are his truth. But revelation is the fullness of truth, the truths of history are partial and fragmentary, full of gaps and ambiguities as yet unbridged and unsolved. Even Manning's not entirely discreet axiom concerning the infallibility definition, 'the dogma must conquer history', misleading when quoted in isolation, was in fact no more than an expression of the relationship of these two orders of truth.

It was faith in this sense that prompted the Tractarian appeal to antiquity. Yet, as Newman came to see, that appeal was inadequate of itself as a basis for such faith. Unless the unity of the Church is—and it must be—analogue to that of a living organism, unless its inner life is maintained, consistent with itself at every stage, by a visible organic structure, undivided and indivisible, it can possess no ultimate and absolute criterion of truth. Apart from this organic unity the Church can have no single mind and voice to judge and proclaim as genuine its developing insights into the revelation committed to its care. The alternative to this position, as Anglo-Catholics today are coming to see with increasing clearness, is a belief in revelation based, not on God's Word infallibly interpreted by his Church, but upon God's Word written in Scripture, and in the last resort decisively judged by reasoning and scientific criticism. Granted the necessity, in the understanding of revealed truth, of critical research and theological thought upon it, by the ordinary modes of human reasoning and judgment, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit; granted too the complementary function of the *lex orandi* under the same guidance, constantly at work in the minds of the faithful, deepening there the insight of the Church into the meaning and bearing upon human life of the Faith once for all delivered to the Saints, a choice of alternatives is inevitably encountered. Where does the final judgment lie in assessing genuine and authentic development? In a divinely guaranteed authority or in the ordinary working of human reason? There is no *via media*.

This was the decisive question, as he came within sight of his goal after almost a lifetime of pondering this issue, of one who recently followed in the steps of Cardinal Newman:

'The evidence for episcopacy has as much or as little support in Scripture and tradition as has the Papacy. Looked at from a

strictly objective standpoint both the doctrine of the Apostolic succession and the doctrinal claims of the Apostolic see are in the same category; they can only be justified and insisted upon in accordance with presuppositions concerning the nature of the Church and her ministry. And this is not a historical judgment so much as a theological and philosophical one. The weighing up of evidence, the careful scrutinizing of documents and all such like methods of research cannot in the nature of the case determine the issue.⁵

Readers of *Old Priest and New Presbyter* will find in it much that is relevant to an understanding of the question of Anglican Orders dealt with in the two books by Father Anthony Stephenson and Father Francis Clark. If the merits of this question are to be properly assessed the most important thing to decide is what the Catholic Church and the Church of England mean respectively by 'bishop' and 'priest', and what is the specific purpose of each when they set about the task of making them. The answer lies in the difference between the instruments (rites) that the two Churches make use of for this purpose. That a priest is ordained for several different purposes stands out clearly in the Roman Pontifical, but it is made equally clear that the primary and in a sense the over-riding purpose is that he may offer sacrifice. The Anglican Ordinal, however, which was substituted for the Pontifical at the Reformation (1552), while it kept most of the subsidiary purposes, excluded this idea altogether. Moreover, not only was the idea of sacrifice eliminated from the new Ordinal, but it was excluded also, in any sense unequivocally that of the Catholic Church, from the new 'Lord's Supper' which was ordered to replace the Mass. Thus the purpose of the Pontifical, as an instrument for ordaining, was above all to make sacrificing priests; the purpose of the Ordinal, as the instrument substituted for it, was to confer a priesthood from which this idea of sacrifice had been excluded.

It is sometimes said by Anglican theologians that the nature of sacrifice was widely misunderstood in the later middle ages and that erroneous and perverted teaching, which fostered the notion that the Mass was in some way independent of Calvary, was widely current too; the Reformers, it is claimed, were justified

5 *Spiritual Authority in the Church of England*. By E. C. Rich. (Longmans 1953.) Chapter X, page 194.

therefore in their exclusions, the motive of which was not to deny the sacrifice of the Mass but to push the idea of it into the background of men's minds in order to give greater prominence to other aspects of the sacred ministry. There is probably an element of truth in these contentions; the motive alleged may too have been in the minds of some of the more moderate Reformers who joined in the Reformation and worked with it. But the reforming movement, even in England, went very much further than this and attacked the Mass at its very roots in the theology of the Church, as it is set forth in St Thomas, and was later defined at the Council of Trent.

Cranmer can hardly be denied the title of leader and architect, in England, of the new doctrines which replaced the classical theology of the Church, and had substantial repercussions in new conceptions of the ministry and the sacraments. The result of these doctrines has been that, to put it at its highest, the Church of England, as Professor Sykes testifies, has never set forth any theological or doctrinal theory of episcopacy and, in consequence, of priesthood. It has adopted the threefold ministry as an institution, in some sense apostolic in origin, without attaching any one particular significance to it, least of all a sacrificial significance. The purpose embodied in the sacramental forms in the Ordinal therefore is necessarily a least common denominator purpose, which can effectively include only what is the unequivocal mind of the Church of England as a whole, and must exclude everything that is sectional only in it or absent altogether. The element of sacrifice, integral to the Catholic notion of priesthood, can find no place therefore in this purpose and is excluded from the signification of the sacramental forms. The personal ministerial intention of an Anglican bishop *might*, and nowadays no doubt often does, include this essential element but its effectiveness is nullified by the exclusion implicit in the form he uses.

Ultimately this is, of course, a question of the nature and authority of the Church. Looked at from within the Catholic Church the status of Anglican Orders appears very different from their status as viewed from within the Church of England. For Anglicans, unless indeed they are Papalists, the Church of England is a national, autonomous Church, with power, subject in England to Parliament, legitimately to alter its own rites and ceremonies, and to decide upon its own doctrines in conformity

with Scripture and the primitive Church. For them Cranmer, his associates and successors were and are bishops and priests invested with the full authority of the Catholic Church, as they conceive it. For us, the Church of England is in schism, having revolted from the true Church and its authority. It has set up its rites, ceremonies and specific doctrines in rebellion against that authority. Its intentions and purposes, embodied in its formularies, are by definition its own, and in certain important respects therefore opposed to and in defiance of those of the true Church.

This is the crucial point in the Bull *Apostolicae Curae*. It is what the Reformers did by their changes that is decisive; what, as individuals, they intended to do is important only in relation to what they actually accomplished. Father Anthony Stephenson's book brings out this crucial point with force and clarity in the five essays which appeared in *The Month* in 1955 and 1956 and are here republished, together with a courteous reply from Dr Mascall, and two interesting Appendices: a letter and an article to the Catholic Press contributed by Mr Walton Hannah and Mr Hugh Ross Williamson before their submission.

While Father Stephenson keeps almost exclusively to the central argument of *Apostolicae Curae*, that from the insufficiency of the forms, Father Francis Clark, as the title of his book indicates, is mainly occupied with the elucidation of the second and subsidiary argument of the Bull, that from defect of intention. He has however one chapter, the ninth, which is a most clear and comprehensive explanation of the central argument. The rest of the book is a well written and ably argued treatise, extremely well documented, on the subsidiary question of the meaning in this context of defect of intention. Only those who have some acquaintance with the scholastic analysis of sacramental intention are likely to follow and appreciate its intricacies.

What and whose intention is under discussion in this small section near the end of *Apostolicae Curae* is a question about which there has been and is considerable difference of opinion among Catholic and Anglican theologians. Father Clark states and examines no less than seven theories, some of them mutually exclusive, disentangles these with skill and disposes of all but one by a clear analysis of their weaknesses. He adopts, in an exclusive sense, the theory that the intention spoken of in the Bull is to be identified with the internal intention of the minister in the strict

theological sense. This theory is based upon the principle of positive exclusion, namely that by choosing to use the new Ordinal in preference to the Pontifical the early Reformers, and in particular Archbishop Parker's consecrators, manifested a personal ministerial intention to exclude or not confer an element in the sacrament which in fact belongs to its very substance. In so doing they cancelled, as it were, their presumed more general intention of doing what (to their minds) Christ instituted and his Church teaches.

Father Clark certainly makes a very strong case indeed for his view that this is the 'intention' with which *Apostolicae Curae* is concerned. He shows that Cardinal Gasparri held the principle of positive exclusion in ministerial intention to be decisive in invalidating not only the Sacrament of matrimony but any sacrament, and that he applied this principle specifically to the case of Anglican Orders. Owing chiefly to his authority as a canonist this view was before the eyes of the theologians in Rome at the time when the discussions, which preceded the publication of the Bull, were at their height. Moreover it best fits the actual wording of the Bull, and has behind it a great weight of theological and canonical authority.

There seem to me however to be two weaknesses in Father Clark's presentation of this case. As the Abbot of Downside suggested, in his *Tablet* review, it is very difficult to establish with historical *certainty* that Barlow's intention and that of his assistants at the consecration of Parker was one of positive exclusion. It might, for instance, have been one of sheer obedience to Royal authority, without further reference, *in intention*, to the purpose with which they were acting. The Queen's authority was for them the supreme authority in religion under Christ. Their own personal opinion may well have been that consecrating was simply one way of confirming an act of that supreme authority, and that in consequence the beliefs they held about episcopacy and priesthood may have been no more than concomitant error, while their sole intention was to carry out under Christ the royal appointment of the godly Prince; to do, that is, what the law of Christ commands.

The other weakness of Father Clark's exposition, as I see it, is that he takes too much for granted his reader's understanding of the principle of positive exclusion. An obvious *prima facie*

objection to it is the argument that it is impossible for an act of the will, such as intention is, to exclude or will not to confer a non-existent. For Barlow and the Reformers in general the sacrifice of the Mass and the sacrificial element in the Christian priesthood had no existence as a reality but were in fact blasphemous notions. How therefore could they will positively to exclude them? Surely any such notion must remain concomitant error in the mind, incapable of affecting the action of the will. The answer to this objection lies in the distinction between the *idea* of the sacrificial element in the priesthood and its *reality*. The first they could, and presumably did, exclude by an act of the will, the second they could not. Moreover, they manifested the intention of excluding the idea of sacrifice by choosing to use the Ordinal from which it had in fact been excluded. It would have added to the clarity of Father Clark's elucidation if this somewhat intricate, but to me, at least, clarifying distinction, had been included in his explanation. These however are small blemishes in a very able and thorough examination of the principles of *Apostolicae Curae* which, if it is not quite the last word upon the subject, would seem to come very near to being so.

It is both difficult and distasteful to deal with a question so very personal to Anglicans as the validity of their sacraments and orders. Both Father Stephenson and Father Clark have done a necessary work with charity and discrimination. If unity in faith were one day to be attained by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and all Christians were ever to find themselves prepared to accept the divine authority which the Catholic Church alone mediates to the world, then the substitution of validity for invalidity in orders and sacraments would present no difficulty; till that basic unity is arrived at no such lesser agreement is possible. It is as well to remind ourselves, in the meanwhile, that validity is a guarantee of the bestowal of grace through appointed channels or means, and though it is closely associated with authority in the hands of men, its loss or destruction does not limit God's power freely to bestow his saving grace upon those who through no fault of their own are without this gracious guarantee.