

## ONE AND CATHOLIC

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THE Russian Orthodox lay theologian Komiakov once said that the Pope of Rome was the first Protestant in the world, and this saying is generally taken to mean that, like the Protestants, the Pope proclaims doctrine as truth *ex sese, non autem ex consensu Ecclesiae*.<sup>1</sup>

Without going so far as this, Dr E. L. Mascall in *The Recovery of Unity*<sup>2</sup> makes it the thesis of his two final chapters on the Papacy that its claim to universal jurisdiction has resulted in its becoming, in part at least, an excrescence on the life of the Church, impoverishing the function of the episcopate and setting itself, as a preponderantly juridical entity, above and apart from the inner life of grace and truth that it should exist to foster.

Such criticisms as these and others closely connected with them appear fairly constantly in ecumenical writing, and much patient elucidation is needed to meet them and set them in their true perspective.<sup>3</sup> The purpose of this article is to point to certain considerations concerning the phrase *ex sese, non autem ex consensu Ecclesiae* in the Vatican Definition which tend to show that it does not separate the Pope from the Church and set him above and apart from its true inner life, but on the contrary, integrates him into the Church's teaching authority as the final and decisive step in its exercise.

Faith is a gift of God, the beginning in us of eternal life. It is given in baptism and comes to us as an encounter with Christ in his Church. The content of our faith is the saving truth of God, himself supreme Truth, given to us in the Person of Christ the Redeemer in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit indwells the divine society, the Church, and makes it Christ's Mystical Body and us his members, so that we live in him and he in us. God's unchanging Word to men in Christ is communicated in human terms, of their nature inadequate to the depth of the

<sup>1</sup> Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *de Ecclesia Christi*, Cap. iv. Denzinger 1839.

<sup>2</sup> *The Recovery of Unity—A Theological Approach* by E. L. Mascall. Longmans 1958.

<sup>3</sup> Some of the points raised by Dr Mascall have already been commented on in two articles of mine in *BLACKFRIARS: Bible and Tradition*, Aug. 1958, and *Anglicanism and the Papacy*, Nov. 1958.

mysteries revealed, yet divinely safeguarded to convey their truth humanly to human beings. What the Church teaches, therefore, concerning itself and its message, is the fullness of truth as God wills us to know it in this life, until faith gives place to the knowledge of life eternal. The truth thus revealed is abiding; it is not dependent upon the acquired knowledge of human reasoning and research, though this, if genuine knowledge, can never contradict it. All new knowledge is relevant to revealed truth and its place must constantly be elucidated by the theologians and set in its proper context in the Church's teaching.

There are of course very many men and women of good will, who are living outside the boundaries of the Church militant and not subject to its authority. Many again of these can and do have a deep faith in Christ's redeeming power.<sup>4</sup> Such faith is drawn from the inspired Scriptures; its source is divine, but it is limited in its extension and cannot attain the totality of the truth committed by Christ to his Church and embodied in its tradition. Non-Catholics who possess this real but restricted faith do not receive it directly from the divine Society but from a partial source, the Scriptures as interpreted by their own tradition, their own conception of the Church and its nature. This conception and its accompanying tradition involves, in practice, belief in a Church that is externally divided,<sup>5</sup> and a Church so divided cannot of its very nature present a complete account of itself to the faith of the believer in the way that an organic visible and united society is able to do. Non-Catholic Christians therefore are compelled by necessity of circumstances to resort to the enquiries of critical scholarship as the ultimate source and groundwork of their beliefs.

The New Testament evidence for the Petrine claims, and the long history of their development up to the beginnings of the Great Schism between East and West, leave many gaps and are at no point wholly conclusive. The question therefore, from the evidential standpoint, is apt, like that of the Virgin Birth of Christ, or his bodily Resurrection, to be judged, for or against, according to the fundamental presuppositions of the judge. This of course is as true of the Catholic as it is of any non-Catholic position, and it is a fact that brings us constantly back to the realization that

<sup>4</sup> For a clear and illuminating discussion of this see *Faith and Dissident Christians* by Fr Charles Davis, *The Clergy Review*, April 1959.

<sup>5</sup> The Eastern Orthodox Church, alone among the dissident Churches, though often divided by schisms, still adheres to the traditional doctrine of a visible Church organically one and essentially indivisible. See *Evanston Report* 1954, pp. 92-95.

faith and its content is a gift of God, for which men can dispose themselves under grace, but which is in the end purely gratuitous. The ultimate solution to the problem of disunity is therefore something that God alone can give and that we can only prepare the ground for. Unity work consists in fostering on all sides, the Catholic side included, the conditions which dispose to faith and its deepening and extension by seeking truth with charity wherever it is to be found.

An indispensable preliminary to this is sympathetic understanding of the presuppositions upon which those who differ from us base their judgments. There has been in recent years a considerable revision of attitude among non-Catholic scholars in regard to the interpretation of the New Testament evidence concerning St Peter's position among the Apostles. The well-known Protestant scholar Dr Oscar Cullman in his book on St Peter in history and theology<sup>6</sup> acknowledges, against the more usual Protestant exegesis, that a primacy was conferred by our Lord on St Peter and that Peter himself and not his faith is the Rock. But Dr Cullman holds that the function of the apostolic college as a whole, and St Peter's primacy in it, were not transmissible, but temporary and personal, coming to an end with the firm establishment of the Church. This opinion is of course conjectural; there is no decisive evidence of the nature of the ministry in the period immediately succeeding the apostolic government of the Church, though when the Church emerges from the darkness of this 'tunnel' period it is certain that the monarchical episcopate has established itself. But Dr Cullman belongs to a tradition in which the theory holds sway that the ministry which replaced apostolic government was the creation of the Church as a whole and not of directly divine or even apostolic ordinance. These are his presuppositions and he interprets the Scriptures in accordance with them.

The evidence itself however admits, at the very least, of the belief that both the apostolate and St Peter's primacy in it were continued in the Church and transmitted to successors down the ages owing to Christ's express commission. An Anglican, Dr John Lowe, formerly Dean of Christ Church,<sup>7</sup> agrees with Cullman's view of the Petrine primacy but disagrees with him in regarding the general apostolate as not transmissible. His particular Anglican attitude to this question seems to be determined by the pre-

<sup>6</sup> *Peter, Disciple—Apostle—Martyr, A Historical and Theological Study*, translated by Floyd V. Filson, London 1953.

<sup>7</sup> In *St Peter*, O.U.P. 1954.

suppositions of his Anglican regard for episcopacy. Dr Mascall goes further (*op. cit.* chapter 9). He admits that our Lord conferred upon St Peter a primacy over the Church and over his fellow Apostles, that this authority was transmissible to his successors and that his successors are the Bishops of Rome. He denies, however, that the Petrine primacy involves absolute supremacy in governing and teaching, such as is envisaged by the Vatican definition. In this case again it appears to be the presupposition of Dr Mascall's Anglican position that determines him in his conclusion. He sees evidence of a papacy developing in the history of the 'undivided' Church, but he cannot allow that it could rightly develop to a point which would negative the legitimacy of the Anglican conception of a Church that has become in actual fact divided.

The reasons with which Dr Mascall supports his conviction are mainly such as are rooted in a denial of the legitimacy of a doctrine of development capable of supporting the Catholic position, as it has been worked out by the theologians on the basis of Newman's famous classic *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*. In criticizing Dom Columba Cary-Elwes's book<sup>8</sup> he warns him that his admissions in regard to absence of knowledge of the powers of the Papacy in primitive times are in danger of countenancing the belief that development from such a situation to the modern belief of the Roman Church would involve new revelation<sup>9</sup> and thereby run counter to the teaching of the Vatican Council itself. But what Dom Columba says is entirely compatible with the view that the doctrine of the Primacy as now defined was implicit in the original gift of our Lord to St Peter in such a way that it was not explicitly realized or resorted to till later. Dr Mascall calls this a theologian's dodge to get out of an awkward dilemma, but he fails to face the problem that historically this is a characteristic of a great deal of development of doctrine in the life of the Church through the ages. We see it first within the New Testament itself in the realization that baptism alone (and not circumcision and the keeping of the Law) is necessary to salvation, and later in the emergence of belief in the validity of infant and heretical baptism: in the growth of episcopacy; in the slowly developing cultus of our Lady, beginning with the truth of her perpetual virginity; in the veneration for the saints and the

<sup>8</sup> *The Sheepfold and the Shepherd*. Longmans 1956, pp. 207ff.

<sup>9</sup> On this point see: *Is Newman's Theory of Development Catholic?* by H. Francis Davis, BLACKFRIARS, July-August 1958, and *The Starting Point of Marian Doctrine* by Cornelius Ernst, O.P., BLACKFRIARS, November 1959.

realization that they have knowledge of our prayers to them; in the doctrine of purgatory and of the sacrifice of the Mass. It can hardly be that Dr Mascall holds none of these developments to be part of God's revelation, but only pious opinions liable to error. If that were so, the Church could hardly have based devotion upon them in the way it did.

A corollary of Dr Mascall's conviction that the absolute supremacy of the Papacy is a false development is that the consequent relation of the Pope to the Church is qualitatively different from that of every other member of it and makes him virtually an external authority to which the Church is subjected. 'The Papal theory divides the members of the Church into two entirely distinct classes: one which is continually bound by a duty of unquestioning obedience, and one which is subject to no earthly control'. (*op. cit.*, p. 209.)

Would Dr Mascall hold, for instance, that the Abbot, in St Benedict's Rule, who is owed obedience by his whole community in virtue of their vow but who himself owes obedience to no personal authority within the monastery, is in a qualitatively different relation to the Benedictine Order from the rest of his brethren? He is the father of the family, the foundation of its life and the centre of its unity, and he is so because he is bound by the law of Christ, through his vow of obedience, both to the Rule and the laws he himself makes for the community. His obedience is obedience to Christ whom he sees in each one of his brethren.<sup>10</sup>

So it is with the Pope. He is bound in obedience to Christ whose servant he is, and of whose rule he is the visible embodiment. He is bound to Christ whom he sees in all Christ's members. His title is *Servus servorum Dei*. He is bound in submission to the structure of the faith of which he is supreme guardian. He is himself a member of the *ecclesia discens*, and must submit to the Church of which he is the Head on earth under Christ. And this not only in the things of faith. He is bound in personal obedience to the laws which govern the day-to-day life of the Church. He says Mass and in doing so obeys the rubrics, he goes to Confession and does the penance enjoined on him, he recites his office, he keeps fasting days and days of abstinence, and he does these things in the spirit

<sup>10</sup> The Rule pictures him as the representative of Christ in the monastery, and as responsible to the dread judgment of God for the way he rules his subjects and for the teaching he gives (Cap. 2). He must do all things in the fear of God and observance of the Rule, knowing that he will certainly have to render an account of all his judgments to God—the most Just Judge (Cap. 3). *The Rule of St Benedict*, translated and edited by Abbot Justin McCann, Burns Oates 1952.

of obedience to the Church with which all faithful Catholics do them. To say that his relationship to the Church is qualitatively different from that of all its other members is to exalt the juridical and hierarchal element, in which his authority is unique, because supreme, at the expense of the inner life of truth and love which is shared by all the baptized, himself included.

Dr Mascall maintains that, whereas the episcopate is a sacramental function of the Church, the Papacy is a juridical and administrative one only. But in fact the Pope becomes Pope solely in virtue of his election to the See of Rome. He succeeds to the Apostolic authority bequeathed to the Church in that city by St Peter. Immediately on his election he becomes chief Pastor of the diocese of Rome, and only because of that chief Pastor of the whole Church and Vicar of Christ. Every bishop becomes head of his diocese as soon as he is chosen and confirmed. He assumes immediately the power of jurisdiction even though not yet consecrated. The reason for this is that jurisdiction is guardianship of the sacramental life of the Mystical Body. It is necessary for, though derived from and subordinate to, that life. For the same reason the Pope's supreme jurisdiction is *episcopal* because he is shepherd of the whole flock and guides and supports his brethren of the Apostolic College in their pastoral work of teaching and feeding all over the world.

'If it was accepted', says Dr Mascall, 'that the Pope, as inheriting the primacy of Peter, was simply the divinely appointed head of the episcopal college, the divinely constituted organ and mouthpiece of the universal apostolic episcopate, we could I think admit that there was genuine continuity with the position of the Papacy in the primitive and the undivided Church' (*op. cit.*, p. 208.)

But that is precisely what the Papacy is, provided that the organ is recognized as the finally decisive element in the Church's ruling and teaching office, and that the mouthpiece is held to speak with an authority that focuses and makes absolute the authority of the episcopate as a whole. It should not be forgotten that the ordinary *magisterium* is the normal day-to-day expression of the Church's teaching authority and it consists in the teaching of all the episcopate as a unity dispersed throughout the world, each bishop representing his own diocese. In this unity dispersed the Bishop of Rome, as supreme Pastor, has his place; without his concurring voice there would be no unity and no incontestable teaching. The supreme *magisterium* in the person of the Pope, confirming a General Council or speaking by his sole authority as supreme teacher, expresses the Faith of the Church, not

simply as registering the consent of the rest of the episcopate but as confirming its verdict and putting it beyond question. That is the meaning of the *ex sese* clause in the Vatican definition. (See above, para. 1.) It is not the consent of the Church that ratifies the papal verdict, it is the papal verdict, given under the conditions laid down, that ratifies and makes absolute the consent of the Church.

Nor does that mean that the Pope in exercising his supreme authority is independent of the mind of the Church.<sup>11</sup> Every bishop is a witness on behalf of his own diocese to what is of faith in the mind of the Church. The whole apostolic college of bishops acting together in this witness is, as such, immune from error in proclaiming the truth of God's revelation. Their infallibility derives from the Church, and is secured by the supreme authority of Peter's successor who is the centre and keystone of unity in faith, and whose word is decisive of that unity. The authority of the Catholic hierarchy is like an arch. An arch remains in being in virtue of its keystone. Apart from the keystone it will cease to exist. Yet it remains an arch, not solely in virtue of the keystone, but as long as the separate stones it is composed of are in contact with each other and with the keystone that unites them.

<sup>11</sup> The mind of the Church in this context (the expression is often used in a wider and looser sense) means the possession by all the faithful of the *deposit of faith*, the revelation given by Christ to his Church in the beginning of its life. In this mind of the Church at different periods of its history there have always been truths defined and taught by its supreme *magisterium*, truths explicitly taught by its ordinary *magisterium*, and yet other implicitly held truths, the subject perhaps of theological differences and disputes, only to be recognized and promulgated as truths of faith at some future date. It is his sole source of knowledge of the faith and he is as dependent upon it for this as any member of his flock. His defining power, which all bishops share when using it in common, he alone has it personally, is a God-given assistance to recognize, in the mind of the Church, truths so conformable to the Scriptures and Apostolic tradition that they can be declared to be contained in the *deposit of faith* and therefore divinely revealed.