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A QUERY AT LAMBETH

CATHOLICS should consider well the nature of the Lambeth Conference's Encyclical Letter and Resolutions.¹ The Encyclical opens with phrases with which they could not quarrel. It declares that the Church is divinely instituted, that the gates of hell cannot prevail against it, and later, that men cannot attain peace until they acknowledge the authority of God—'our allegiance' always is to Christ the King'. Reading further and more deeply into this document, with its reports from special committees to elucidate the general resolutions, the Catholic will be struck by the difference which at first sight seems to be less one of dogmatic utterance than of an absence of specification or of clarity. While the Conference records movements of reunion with almost every kind of Christian Church—Old Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Scandinavian, Spanish reformed, various churches in India—it can show no definite approach from Rome. And yet it nowhere rebukes or even criticises the Catholic Church for its apparently intransigent attitude; it does not make 'an example' of Rome by pointing out that she alone has consistently refused to be a partner to any co-operation in building up 'a Church genuinely Catholic, loyal to all truth and gathering into its fellowship "all who profess and call themselves Christian",'

¹ Lambeth Conference 1948. S.P.C.K. 5s.

which was the ideal set up by the 1930 Conference and taken up again in this year's deliberations. The committee for the subject of reunion merely states that no headway has been made with Rome on any essential matter, and that even the present Holy Father's appeal to non-Catholics has been seemingly contradicted by 'Roman Catholics in particular countries'. Far from adopting a bitter attitude, the bishops merely express their puzzlement and show themselves genuinely anxious to begin some form of co-operation with Rome. 'We would therefore greatly value further elucidation from the Roman Catholic side on the manner of such co-operation, and would be thankful if the way could be found to make it fully effective.'

Even the South India Scheme, which may be expected to lead to definition and so to division, is regarded with the benign and interested gaze of scientists watching a fellow scientist making experiments in a test-tube. No one is condemned. No *anathema* is pronounced. The strange query about feminine ordination, which from any Roman Congregation would have received at best the laconic and final *Resp. Negative*, is met with evident reluctance by the bishops' feeling 'obliged to give the answer "no" to the question asked'. 'We regret that our answer, if accepted by the Conference, will necessarily cause disappointment to those in the Chinese Church who wish to make the experiment'; for this is one of the few experiments which are not, at least as yet, viewed with benignity.

The idea of the unity of the Church is so 'loose' and experimental that the Roman Catholic system and conduct are bound to appear superficially as intolerant and proud. Why, she will not even send a representative to the world conference of Christians held at Amsterdam. This 'tight' and 'self-contained' unity naturally makes the other seem 'warm' and charitable and Christian. Little wonder then that in the course of their discussions evidence was offered 'from various quarters that the ideal of the Church for which Anglicanism stands appeals to a much wider circle than those belonging to the Anglican Communion', for it 'embodies a harmony of Catholic and Protestant factors which is found in no other Communion'. These others whoever they may be are naturally inclined to regard the Roman system as intolerant and overbearing.

Our own experience in BLACKFRIARS has shown how easy it is for people to misunderstand the language which is intended to explain the Catholic idea of unity. An endeavour of our own at the beginning of the year to explain this 'intolerance' only called forth many letters of protest and misunderstanding. One correspondent even went so far as to imagine that the analogy which we drew between the spiritual 'totalitarianism' of the Church with the national 'totalitarianism'

of fascism was in fact a denial of the previous policy of BLACKFRIARS throughout the rise of Fascism and particularly during the Spanish war. We gave fascism that most damning of all titles, that of a 'substitute' or *ersatz* truth, and it was regarded as a veiled compliment to Franco!

The Editor has here to admit with apologies that he used terms and analogies without taking into account their past and present associations which so easily wound disturbed sensibilities and make it impossible to regard such words or phrases as 'inquisition, unconditional surrender, totalitarian, intolerance' with severe objectivity. Such words are too heavily laden with a burden of unhappy memories to be used in any but a pejorative sense, even though the things for which they stand may be true and good. The Editor should have chosen his words with greater care, and we wonder whether the bishops had some such inappropriate use of language in their minds when they spoke at Lambeth of the 'difficulties over the meaning and application of religious freedom' which prevent an understanding with Rome.

Even though the Inquisition and the Index still exist to exercise their purifying influence within the Church, they cannot be mentioned without conjuring up hideous practices of the middle ages. 'Unconditional surrender' not only means what Lambeth expresses as 'that the only the method of reunion which Rome will accept is that of submission to the Papacy', but also all the undesirable evils of the final episode of a total war—all existing tradition and manners of life being utterly swept away. And so although truth is intolerant of errors, the word cannot be here employed because it suggests, to use the terms that one correspondent took it to mean, 'force and compulsion . . . to compel, to enforce conformity . . . to suppress errors'.

It therefore becomes more and more difficult to find words to convey the reality. If we abandon the word 'intolerant' in relation to truth, we are still left with the fact that the Church *cannot* compromise in any doctrine. In matters of dogma she cannot meet people half-way and agree to only a partial acceptance of her teaching. The faith is unique and all of a piece; and so it is impossible for it to exist with a denial of any single point in the body of doctrines. To take a pertinent example: it is frequently reiterated that the fundamental principles of the Anglican Church contain the right and the duty of private judgment and the ultimate appeal to Scripture as the Word of God. The present Archbishop of Canterbury re-emphasised both these points in his widely publicised article on *The Beliefs of the Church of England* (S.P.C.K., 2d.). Bishop Carey, celebrating the

memory of Dean Church, gives four essential principles as the foundation of the Church of England (a) *The Bible* the final reference, (b) *Creeds* as summaries of the Word, (c) *The Apostolic Succession* in the Ministry, (d) *The Sacraments*.² Now these teachings are indeed characteristic of Protestantism, and they are no doubt the Protestant tenets which Lambeth hoped to unite with Catholic beliefs in the broad unity of the Church of England. But in fact the Catholic teaching cannot co-exist with the principles of private judgment and the supremacy of the Bible. The Church says it is one *or* the other. as indeed Karl Barth has asserted on behalf of his own point of view. There is no suggestion of compulsion or forcible suppression of error, but the power of truth is itself compelling. Surely an occasional impatient gesture on the part of a Catholic is understandable when he is asked to plunge again and again into elaborate arguments from history, when he is asked to re-consider the question of Anglican Orders and so on. All this is so irrelevant, when the question is one of error which must be rejected. The Catholic may seem intolerant in an evil sense; but this may be simply natural impatience derived from original sin. And the same applies to the toleration claimed for the propagation of untruth. It is only a drunken Catholic who will break up a Salvation Army meeting; it is, nevertheless, an indifferent Catholic who will pass the meeting by with the thought that it is simply 'good religion'. Men are still upset by an untruth even when it is not a deliberate untruth. A father who 'tolerates' fibs among his children is not regarded as a good parent. And similarly a good and zealous Catholic cannot 'tolerate' what is inimical to the truth which he holds from God.

But the means of curbing error are very varied and in this sphere a great variety of methods is of course possible. In the middle ages they adopted the plan of handing the heretic over to the State in so far as he was an anti-social agitator. We may safely assume that such a method has proved itself to be so full of possible evils and abuses that it will never be adopted again. It constantly ran the danger of infringing natural human rights, such as the right of parents to educate their children; it ran the danger of co-operating in an attempt to tamper with a man's conscience and even with his rights to life and freedom.

In reaction to the evils implied in that earlier system men have been inclined to think that Truth herself alone and unaided should be allowed to exercise her power and 'intolerance'. In other words, men have relied simply on the stating of the true teaching, waiting upon the Lord in the power of the Word to triumph over error—the

² The Church of England vindicated. By Walter Carey. Mowbray. 6d.

sword is the Sword of the Spirit alone. But this itself contains the seeds of error in that it overlooks the need for human co-operation, and even social co-operation, in the fulfilment of the designs of God. The mere prophetic proclamation of the Word is not sufficient. It needs to be taught in the spirit of Christ, as 'one having authority'. And it is just at this point that the Catholic differs from the Protestant, and just at this point, too, that the Catholic Church appears to become intransigent and intolerant. The Church in order to preserve the purity of truth and the unity of faith insists with all her moral and doctrinal authority that those who have the faith should not endanger it by mixing easily with those who have not the faith. For this reason she prohibits 'mixed' marriages, she forbids Catholics to join in religious worship other than her own, she will not even send a representative to the meetings for reunion among non-Catholic Christians. As Pope Pius XI wrote: 'It is clear that the Apostolic See can by no means take part in these assemblies nor is it in any way lawful for Catholics to give to such enterprises their encouragement or support. If they did so, they would be giving countenance to a false Christianity. . . .' (*Mortalium Animos*). To those born and bred in the spirit of private judgment and the supremacy of the Bible all this savours of an evil sort of intolerance; but it is well-nigh inseparable from the Catholic faith. That is why the attractive unity of the Church of England, embracing the best elements of Protestantism and Catholicism, cannot be appreciated by those who accept the authority of the teaching Church.

But, of course, this still remains only one side of the picture. As we have insisted before, the word of Truth is the Word which breathes forth love. There is no single member of the human race whom the Catholic is excused from loving and from desiring to see embraced in the full unity of the love of the Word. The Catholic creed may sound intolerant, but if it has hold of a man that man should be the gentlest and most understanding towards others. 'Outside the Church there is no salvation' sounds bitterly intransigent; but it is in fact redolent of true charity when explained, for example, by Cardinal Bourne: 'As it is equally true that without the deliberate act of the will there can be neither fault nor sin, so evidently this axiom applies only to those who are outside the Church knowingly, deliberately and wilfully'.³ The world is full of sinners, but there are few formal heretics. It is not the selfish man nor the lustful who is condemned by the truth as such. Heresy, towards which divine truth is in-

³ Cardinal Bourne's introduction to the English translation of *Mortalium Animos*. 'True Religious Unity'. C.T.S. pp. 4-5.

tolerant, is usually started by one who sees a single facet of truth and forgets about the *source* of all truth, one who is horrified by an abuse and forgets the unity of faith. This has been made so abundantly clear in the teaching of the Church that it is no longer easy for a man to be a minor, still less a major, heresiarch. Having once accepted the fulness of the faith he cannot easily begin a new religion; and the vast majority of those already born and bred in other religions are only material heretics, believing the 'good faith' in which they live to be the True Faith.

So, to return to the Anglican Church, it is certain that however intransigent and intolerant Catholics may seem to be in their refusal to accept the advances made to them with such generosity (even by the Lambeth Conference itself), the Church of Rome is deeply interested in its members and their way to salvation. It is noteworthy that in all the Catholic literature devoted to the re-union of Christendom a predominance of interest is always given to the Anglican Churches. Presumably this interest arises from a sense of great hope in the generosity and good faith of these admirable Christians. Thus for instance in the review *Unitas* published in Rome for the Society of the same name, formally encouraged by the Pope, the general articles dealing with the problem of reunion refer constantly to the Church of England and to the teaching of Anglican theologians. We might sum up the true attitude of Rome to the Anglican Churches as being one not of intolerance but of an almost impetuous desire to reveal the inconsistencies of trying to combine Protestant judgment with Catholic dogma, and so to knock down one of the greatest modern barriers to reunion in faith. Individual Catholics, both cleric and lay, often take it upon themselves to condemn and even sneer at the members of the Anglican Churches. But this is not characteristic of the true Catholic who should seek always to share the riches of Christ in the unity of the faith.

THE EDITOR.

NOTE.—The Secretary of THE CATHOLIC COMMITTEE FOR RELIEF ABROAD writes: 'The demand for BLACKFRIARS is always much greater than we are able to satisfy and at the moment few are coming in to us. . . . The C.C.R.A are always grateful for any copies and can promise that they will be sent to people who will greatly appreciate them'.

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