

FAITH AND ORDER<sup>1</sup>

WHATEVER opinion Catholics may hold about the utility of the World Conference on Faith and Order recently held at Edinburgh we must at least recognize the witness it bears to a deep and growing determination on the part of Christians of widely differing allegiances to bring to an end the disastrous divisions of Christendom. This determination has given rise to a new way of approach to the problem of re-union, a new technique in dealing with the differences which divide Christians.<sup>2</sup> Controversy of the old type between antagonists, who laboured without any attempt at mutual understanding or sympathy to prove themselves entirely right and their opponents entirely wrong, is of comparatively little use in attaining truth. Its place has been taken by the way of affirmation which first explores and emphasizes every possible point of agreement and by so doing clearly marks off the points at which divergence begins and how far it extends. Experience shows that such divergence is often due more to the partial or faulty presentation of truth than to perversity of mind or will in accepting it. The careful probing of historical causes can do much to prepare the way for reconciliation, by a frank acknowledgment of shortcomings where they exist and a sympathetic understanding of the false emphasis and consequent error to which such shortcomings have often given rise. This is the human and preparatory element in the work of the Reunion of Christendom; the necessary spade-work which must be done before the soil is ready for the Holy Spirit to produce the fruits of reconciliation—a perfect union of heart and mind in Christ Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Reformation, the Mass and the Priesthood*, by E. C. Messenger, Ph.D. Vol. II. Rome and the Revolted Church. (Longmans; pp. xx + 772, 30s.)

<sup>2</sup> This new way of approach and technique is now commonly described as "ecumenicism," a new and tongue-twisting word derived from the ecumenical movement which issued in the Stockholm and Lausanne Conferences in 1925 and 1927 and in the Oxford and Edinburgh Conferences this year.

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Can Catholics adopt this way of approach, even though a large and heterogeneous gathering such as that assembled at Edinburgh may seem to them a dangerous way of putting it into practice? We know that a distinction can be drawn between the Faith as formally defined and taught by the supreme authority of the Church and the spirit of the age as it affects the Faith in the lives of individual Catholics during a particular period or over a particular geographical area. We believe that the Faith itself cannot be distorted by false emphasis or partial presentation because it is guarded and interpreted by a teaching authority that cannot fail, but we have to acknowledge that the spirit of the age which surrounds the Faith can sometimes obscure it or cause its faulty or partial application in the thoughts and lives of contemporary Catholics. This faulty and partial application may extend even to the preaching and teaching of the Faith; there have been periods when the pastors of the Church were almost dumb and the hungry sheep looked up and were not fed; periods too when important aspects of the Church's teaching were allowed to fall into the background, or were not sufficiently insisted on.

The Reformation began as a protest against deep-seated evils and corruptions in the Church. It was a protest that went woefully wrong and proved itself a remedy worse than the disease; though it was exploited by the greed of the worldly for their own ends, it is hard to deny the sincerity and good intentions of many of the Reformers, and it is not for us to judge which incurs the greater guilt—the zeal of heresy or the apathy of a lifeless and formal orthodoxy. The Church of England which the Reformation produced as a self-sufficient entity, cut off from the rest of Christendom, has a Christian character and genius and a still powerful influence which extends beyond the bounds of its practising membership. In a society which is in grave danger of disintegration under the advancing tide of neo-paganism it is imperative that Christianity should speak with a united witness and an authority unimpaired by divided allegiance. We Catholics know what will be the Faith of a re-united Christendom, but we do not know what particular form that

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re-united Christendom will take, what traditional elements now existing outside the Church are capable of being incorporated into its unity. But it is clearly our duty to work for the healing of the wounds of Christendom, not by advocating ready made schemes of corporate reunion; these are purely speculative and therefore dangerous, but by patiently working to make contacts of understanding with our separated brethren in order that we may prepare the ground for the fruit that God will bring forth.

In this work we must have two aims in view, and these are complementary; isolation from the other is likely to render either of them almost entirely fruitless. The first aim must be to explain and elucidate the Faith; the second, a wide and difficult one, demanding not only deep knowledge but abounding sympathy, to probe into the historical causes of the breach with Rome and thus to enter into the minds of our separated brethren, to see ourselves as it were from their point of view and to understand the origin and growth of their particular doctrinal tradition and ethos. Only by a synthesis of these two aims can the ground be prepared for that unity of Faith which the Holy Ghost alone can bring into being.

Judged by the first of these aims, in isolation from the second, Dr. Messenger's work, completed by the second volume now under review, is an achievement of thorough and painstaking research. Again and again in studying his seven hundred odd pages we are impressed by the width of his reading, both in respect of Catholic and Anglican authorities, by his clear grasp of principle, by his mastery of intricate detail and his lucid summarizing of the complex facts of an historical situation. An Anglican reviewer of his first volume remarked "that it might seem strange that Roman theologians should still find it necessary to take pains to substantiate the statements of the Bull *Apostolicae Curiae* forty years after its promulgation" [Theology, Sept. 1936, p. 138.] The number of misconceptions and incorrect assertions still current in both Anglican and Catholic literature on the subject has, however, made this further and exhaustive survey necessary. It is still asserted, for instance,

that Edwardine ordinations were accepted as valid by the authorities during the Marian restoration, and the theological application of the doctrine of intention in the Bull *Apostolicae Curae* is still widely misconceived.

Dr. Messenger has succeeded in showing that there is no ground for the assertion concerning the Edwardine ordinations and that in all the alleged cases these orders were treated as invalid and re-ordination was absolute. The supposed rehabilitation of John Scory, Bishop of Chichester, by Bonner is particularly interesting as showing how long an error, due to the exercise of a little imagination on the part of its first perpetrator, may persist and be repeated and to what shifts our own controversialists have been driven in their efforts to evade what appeared to be an awkward case, but which in reality was non-existent. As to the question of intention an exhaustive enquiry reveals that up to the last revision of the Prayer Book in 1662 no Anglican divine held the doctrine of the Eucharistic Sacrifice in any form which was consonant with the Catholic doctrine as it had gradually developed in the course of centuries and as it had come to be formulated in the tradition of the Church. Moreover the compilers of the Anglican Ordinals and Communion services excluded in every case the many explicit references to sacrifice which occurred in the old Pontifical and Missal. Only in one prayer in the new Communion-service of 1552 did the word sacrifice occur, and then in so ambiguous a form that it could not be taken as certainly implying the Catholic doctrine. Thus in the newly-compiled sacramental forms of the Edwardine Ordinals the sacrificial office, as understood by the Church was not included in the Anglican conception of the episcopate and priesthood; in consequence a new intention was embodied in the ancient words, which was not the intention of Christ or of the Catholic Church.

A valuable part of Dr. Messenger's second volume is the essay in which he summarizes the conclusions of Western theology concerning the necessary form and intention of the Sacrament of Order. He points out the bearing of the whole rite (as embodying the intention of the Church) upon the

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meaning of the words used in the form, and shows how the Bull *Apostolicae Curae* admits by implication that a formula of ordination, not sufficiently explicit in itself might have its meaning determined by the surrounding prayers of the rite. He goes on to show that it is precisely at this point that the deficiency of the Anglican Ordinals lies, since in the surrounding prayers of the rite the omissions and alterations, which constitute their difference from those of the ancient Pontifical on which they are based, introduce into them an ambiguity (at the very least) concerning the essential nature of the office they were intended to confer; so that no remedy for the *in se* insufficiency of the formulas themselves can be sought for in any determination the surrounding prayers could give them. This is a point of the first importance often overlooked by both sides in the controversy.

Judged then as a discussion of the intricacies of a theologico-historical problem which has been isolated from its wider context Dr. Messenger's two volumes are of great value and as an exhaustive statement of our position are likely to be final. Judged, however, by the second aim which we have postulated as necessary their value is open to some questioning. The old method of controversy which was content to state a case without attempting to enter into the mind and outlook of the other side is not an effective means to-day of promoting the claims of the Catholic Church, however ably the case may be stated. A new spirit and a new technique of approach is in possession. This demands a careful probing into the historical roots of our differences and a sympathetic understanding of the whole doctrinal tradition of those who differ from us, how and why it arose and what truths it lays emphasis upon and in emphasising perhaps distorts into error. Viewed in the light of this new method of approach to the problems of divided Christendom a discussion of Anglican Orders apart from the wider problem of the nature and claims of ecclesiastical authority is likely to be a putting of the cart before the horse unless an understanding of the background against which an Anglican looks at the question is at least implied in it.

It is here, so it seems to us, that Dr. Messenger is least

successful. Many Anglicans contend that the Reformation owed its origin to a movement away, not from the true doctrine of the Church, but from a distortion of it in popular idea and practice, due to the spirit of the age, which obscured the true nature of the Church as the community of grace-filled members of Christ's Body. Subsequent heresies concerning grace and the Sacraments had their roots in this distorted conception. The movement, through lack of guidance, became a revolt and the revolt ended, as revolts so often do, by marring what it had set out to amend. This contention is of sufficient weight to merit close consideration on the part of Catholics, and an attempt to discuss Reformation history without taking it into account is unlikely to carry conviction with Anglicans.

Throughout his book Dr. Messenger appears to imply that the Reformation in England followed exactly the lines of its Lutheran or Calvinistic counterparts on the continent, and that the tradition of the Church of England was in all essentials identical with that of Continental Protestantism. To support this implication he considers it sufficient to prove that the sacrificial doctrine of the Eucharist and the priesthood was rejected by the Anglican reformers and the "evangelical" doctrine of Continental Protestantism adopted. Even apart from the fact of the wide divergence between the Lutheran and Calvinistic traditions this view of the situation appears to us to be an unhistorical simplification. It is true that the leading Reformers were strongly influenced by their brethren on the Continent, that under this influence the Catholic doctrine of the Mass and the Priesthood was reduced to heresy, and that this found considerable expression in the new service books, but it is also true that among the rank and file a deep reverence for historic Christianity, and in particular for patristic theology, became part of the tradition of the Church of England from the beginning. This tradition is first visibly embodied in Richard Hooker, and it was carried on and developed by the Caroline divines. It issued, in opposition to Lutheranism and Calvinism, in a doctrine of grace which was substantially orthodox and as a corollary of this in a doctrine of the Church, which though

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imperfect did lay emphasis on the sacramental idea and on that of incorporation into Christ's mystical body. Thus the main body of the Church of England,<sup>3</sup> though it rejected the sacrificial conception of the Mass and the priesthood, retained, in a way that Continental Protestantism did not, a doctrine of grace and of the Church which is potentially Catholic. The flower was cut off, but the roots were left; it is hardly surprising therefore that to-day the flower is blossoming again and Catholic sacramental doctrine is establishing itself within the Church of England.

What the future holds in store no one can predict; yet it can hardly be doubted that the anxious desire for a re-united Christendom of which Oxford and Edinburgh are witnesses is the work of the Holy Ghost. If it is Catholics must have some part to play in it and must not disdain to learn from those who do not share their communion. The chief lesson the ecumenical movement can teach us is that to-day it is useless to hammer away at our differences *in vacuo*; they must be fully related to all the historical circumstances from which they arose. In an atmosphere of controversy this is impossible; save in exceptional circumstances truth will only emerge as truth in a psychological atmosphere generated by friendly contact and understanding. This atmosphere can only be attained by a determination on both sides to explore our differences to their roots. Since he has planned his work to deal with one of the surface problems of the situation and has dealt with it so ably, it may seem unfair perhaps to criticize Dr. Messenger for not going deeper. But it is seldom worth while treating symptoms unless you have first thoroughly probed their cause.

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<sup>3</sup> The Puritan and Calvinistic tradition has always existed side by side with the main body in the Church of England. The Evangelicals of to-day, though they have lost much of their distinctive Calvinism are still marked by their Puritan antecedents.