

Why Is Anglican - Roman Catholic Dialogue Possible Today?

A paper read to the first meeting of the Anglican-Roman Catholic Joint Preparatory Commission at Gazzada, January 10th, 1967

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When this meeting was planned in Rome last October it was agreed that the opening reports, of which this is one, should not be historical discourses in the ordinary sense. They should answer the question "Why is Anglican-Catholic dialogue possible today?". While recognizing that we do not start from zero, they should follow the spirit of that passage of Philippians quoted in common by Pope and Archbishop at St. Pauls^{*)}; they should concentrate on the present situation, on the opportunity and favourable conditions for dialogue which it offers.

My own suggestion, welcomed then, was that suitable limits for my paper might be set by contrasting the Anglican-Roman situation at the time of "Mortalium Animos" (1928) with that of today. There is no lack of scope for this. But any historical point of departure is arbitrary. The Encyclical "Mortalium Animos" as a papal utterance reflects an historical attitude, and relies on previous utterances. I must briefly mention three:

On September 16th 1864 the Holy Office addressed a letter Ad Omnes Episcopos Angliae forbidding Catholic participation in that Association for the Promotion of Christian Unity founded by F. G. Lee and in the periodical The Union Review which the Holy Office wrongly assumed to be merely expressing the association's opinions. The H

The Holy Office assumed that this movement

*) "Forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are before, I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (cf. Phil. III, 13-14).

rested on the so-called Branch Theory; but what I am chiefly interested in here is the language of the Holy Office letter. It reflected the ~~extreme~~ ultramontaniam of Manning and ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ Talbot. It reflected the fact that ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ ^{Rome} did not enjoy then, ^{complete} ~~not for long afterwards~~ ~~XXXXXX~~ information or broadly-based advice on English affairs. In 1919, less than a decade before Mortaliu Animos, they raised the question at the Holy Office whether the 1864 decree ought to remain in force, and its provisions be extended to all unity meetings organized by non-Catholics. The answer ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ was "affirmative". Fifty-five years it seemed ^{not yet} had changed the conviction once established. ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ To say that this was so in fact would be unfair to Leo XIII, who may be remembered for other things besides Apostolicae Curae. Nevertheless, the same sort of language appears e. g. in his letter Ad Anglos.

Again in 1927, July 8th, the Holy Office, in anticipation of the Lausanne Faith and Order meeting, August 1927, decided it must stand by its decree of 1919.

Mortaliu Animos certainly seemed to put a crown on this attitude. ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ Yet we must remember that it was more a criticism of the Ecumenical Movement as it then existed than an expression of Pius's attitude to separated Christians. This is better expressed in an address given earlier in the same year to the University Catholic Federation:

"For reunion it is above all necessary to know one another and to love one another. It is necessary to know one another because it may be said that if the work of reunion has so often failed, these failures have been due in large part to the fact that neither side has known the other. If there have been mutual prejudices, these prejudices must be resolved. The errors and equivocations that exist and are repeated among the separated brethren against the Catholic Church seem incredible. But on the other hand, Catholics too have sometimes been lacking in a just evaluation of their duty or, because of lack of acquaintance, in friendly devotion. Do we know all the precious, good and Christian things that these segments of ancient Catholic truth possess? The separated particles of gold-bearing rock themselves contain gold"(Cf. Speech of June 8, 1927, quoted in D. Bertetto, Discorsi di Pio XI., Torino 1959, I, p. 671).

Twenty years separated Mortalium Animos from the Monitum of the Holy Office of ^{5th} June 1948. This is an eloquent if indirect testimony to the stirrings in Catholic hearts. I quote the first part of it:

"Since it appears that in some places, contrary to Canon Law and without permission of the Holy See, joint meetings of Catholics and non-Catholics have been held to discuss matters of faith, all are reminded that Canon 1325 Sec. 3 forbids these meetings without permission to laity, clerics and religious. Much less is it lawful for Catholics to summon or establish such conferences" (Act. Ap. Sed., 40 (1948) 257).

The Holy Office drew attention to the state of the law. But the state of reality was changing and asked for a new vision. Anyway, the following year the Instruction on Ecumenism, if not a revolutionary document, at least paid the Ecumenical Movement the compliment of a great deal more space and a rather more sympathetic preamble (cf. Instructio ad locorum Ordinarios: "De motione oecumenica", AAS 42 (1950), 142-147). We may allow further that it represents an advance on anything that had gone before in the way of concrete concessions. Catholic relations with our separated brethren result from complex historical forces in each country, and there may be some recognition of this when the Instructio gives bishops some scope in dealing with these relations. If we look forward towards the Second Vatican Council it is even more interesting to see that some initiative is urged on episcopal conferences, but the prevailing impression left by the tone and content of this Instructio is that ecumenism is not ~~which was intended~~ yet understood as a state of mind, governing without compromising religious thinking and practice. The contrast between the Instructio and the Council's decree "Unitatis Redintegratio" is sufficiently obvious. We may now consider what influences converged in the interval to promote ecumenical thinking among Catholics at large.

Biblical Renewal.

Forces of renewal were at work. First we must put biblical renewal. As late as 1946 Ronald Knox, a loyal yet candid Catholic, speaking of the Catholic attitude to the Scriptures could say that "we have a score of good fighting texts at our fingertips, landmarks in the history of controversy. And for the rest the whole treasure house of the gospels is there at our elbow and somehow we never seem to have more than a nodding acquaintance with it".

Happily, there were already movements afoot to make this criticism, if not out of date, certainly more limited in relevance. The mood and the methods prompted by the Modernist alarm hampered the proper participation of Catholic scholars in the remarkable advance of biblical scholarship between the wars. These were particularly impressive of course in the field of archeology and related sciences which revolutionized the approach to the Bible. It was not well appreciated in Rome that these advances affected non-Catholic Christian scholars beneficially, making them less influenced by nineteenth century prejudices. There were contacts between Catholic and Protestant or Jewish biblical scholars: we can remember gratefully that our own Cardinal Bea, when lecturing at the Biblical Institute in Pius' XI time, was invited to take part in an international Biblical Conference, went somewhat diffidently to Pius to ask whether he should go and was told he certainly must. But such examples were still too rare.

In 1943, when the war distracted attention from such a landmark, Pius XII issued his encyclical Divino Afflante Spiritu. (Cf. AAS 35 (1943) 297-325). It celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of Leo XIII's Providentissimus Deus but was mainly concerned to emphasize that "the position of Biblical studies had greatly changed during the past half century". Excavation (hardly begun in Palestine when Leo wrote), the discovering of ^{Oriental literature,} ~~papyri and codices~~ more exact study of the Early Fathers, have given new dimensions and stimulus to

biblical study; so have the remarkable advances in ancient languages and philosophy. These aids should support the contemporary scholar in his search for the author's meaning and for theological content. "The faithful want to know what God has told us in Holy Scripture". (1. c. p. 312). Modern scholarship had deepened our insights into the meaning of inspiration and hermeneutics. The interpreter must "go back in spirit to those remote times" (1. c. 315) with the help of history, archaeology, ethnology and so on - searching out the ancient writers' proper mode of expression. If today many problems persist, the general effect of this more scholarly approach, says the Pope, has been to restore rather than diminish confidence in the ~~XXXXXX~~ way in which the Bible renders history (1. c.).

The encyclical grew out of a reaction to conservative extravagance in Italy, but that was not its most important aspect. A renewal of scholarly concern with the Bible, of scholarly cooperation with other Christians and with men of all beliefs was in this document finally forcing its way out at the top, so to speak. You all know that it was not the end of obstructionism against biblical scholarship, but it was perhaps the end of a world in which obstructionism could hope to succeed permanently.

Some of you will remember the stirring history of the Constitution on Divine Revelation during the days of Vatican II. I shall refer to it again. Here I think of it mainly because of the way it brought about one of the most striking of the many conciliar activities outside the Council aula.

Most of the bishops had studied Scripture at a period when the light shed by Providentissimus Deus had been blacked out by the Modernist crisis and not yet restored by Divino Afflante Spiritu. To equip themselves for their conciliar function of witnessing to the truth they turned energetically and in great numbers to the experts. It was thus that a majority was created in favour of rejecting the first Schema on Revelation which would have made real debate impossible and which was candidly described in the Council as "theologically immature", "unsympathetic to scientific research", "incomprehensible to non-Catholics". At this decisive moment in the Second Vatican Council the Episcopal College recaptured the ancient Catholic tradition of

holding sound learning and hard thinking in high honour.

Liturgical Renewal.

If Divino Afflante Spiritu and the Council utterances in the biblical field seem like revolutionary documents tenaciously resisted in some quarters, Liturgical renewal has had a more serene history; Catholic and other Christian studies have for longer followed parallel ways. Liturgical learning has been enriched by Catholic and non-Catholic scholars alike. In England it was even given permanent form in such societies as the Camden, The Bradshaw, and the Surtees. We should not forget here the recall to the fundamentals of religion prompted by the war. Diekman has written "it was in army and war prison camps when reduced to the bare essentials of worship, in a personal encounter of priest and lay soldiers stripped of all external props, that the reality of the Liturgy and the meaning of the Church were discovered anew by thousands. To this discovery the pastoral liturgical renewal of the post-war years largely owes its dynamism". Here too a famous Papal Encyclical, Mediator Dei,^{(cf. A. A. S. 39 (1947), 521-595)} canalised a strong movement within the Church as a whole, and not least in the mission field. It was a movement, moreover, which was felt throughout the Christian world, and not least in the Anglican Communion.

The vital factor, it has been said, is not the practical details of ritual technique but the spiritual consciousness of our people. The enrichment we are seeking to give them is the reawakened sense of the assembly of Christians as a basic reality of Christian life.

With the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Liturgy the liturgical movement in a few weeks ceased to have all the provisional, struggling, minority character associated with the term "movement", and became firmly incorporated in the church's life. Regulation of it too became much more broadly based. The conception of the people of God grouped liturgically round its bishop is already prominent in the constitution and points to the Constitutio De Ecclesia. The Liturgical Constitution as a

conciliar act is an act of collegiality, making provision for acts of collegiality in daily liturgical life. The flexibility of the dispositions for liturgical reform, the responsibilities given to episcopal conferences, also point clearly to the social changes which had so much prompted liturgical reforms, as the reforms themselves constantly reflect the Scriptural renewal already briefly discussed.

Social Movement.

Speaking in the Liturgy debate, Bishop Ancel of Lyons urged those Bishops who had no pastoral charge to try to understand the plight of pastors who were faced with situations in which the church was considered moribund and appreciate their longing for a liturgical renewal. Bishops who still enjoyed the security of large docile congregations were asked not to close their eyes and hearts to the needs of those living in de-Christianized areas where the mere pouring in of money would be of little use.

These are the words of a bishop whose repute derives chiefly from his intimate association, maintained through many ups and downs, with the vital social movement in the French Church. Nowhere has the need to recapture the modern masses for Christ been more radically faced. As one of your English university historians has put it, speaking of the period following the denouncing of the concordat by the Republic in the early years of this century "a new missionary spirit was awakened among the clergy and the old bureaucratic attitude became less common. In varied ways the Church tackled the problem of keeping a hold on the people".

Cardinal Verdier and many following in his wake have had the courage to speak of a "dechristianized France" and to draw the conclusion that pastoral methods that created this situation are obsolete.

I do not need to stress that there have been similar stirrings in the Anglican Church. It is enough to mention movements and writings associated with the name of William Temple.

Is there a thread that runs through these three kinds of change? It might well be seen as the thread of pure scholarship; the scientific spirit not in the sense of an assumption that material knowledge is the end of all inquiry, or that no method but that of the natural sciences can lead man to truth; but rather in the sense of a meticulous regard for fact, a wholly disinterested effort to understand both past history as it was and present reality as it is. Research as the servant of understanding, not the servant of propaganda or the bolster of received opinions.

Such a candid attention to fact in the world of today could not fail to provoke a radical re-examination of accepted ideas. Could the gulf which had been opened between the Church and the world be seriously thought of as unconnected with the way the ~~official~~ ^{officially} Church presented itself to the world? You will remember that when the original schema De Ecclesia was presented to the Council it was vigorously attacked on just this ground. It conceived the Body of Christ not as a divine mystery but ^{so much} rather ~~merely~~ as a legal institution. The Church, said the critics, was not a pyramid of people, priests and pope, so much as the whole people of God, the organic, mystical body. The Hierarchy's primary function was to serve, ~~not to be a mere instrument of the people~~

We must remember that it was the bishops themselves, acting collegially, who sealed the fate of this document, which they saw as travestying the nature of the Church of which they were pastors. A year later a radical-ly revised ~~text~~ ^{scheme} was voted by the bishops: they had those months in which to consider the vital question of what the Church is, of how she shall present herself to a world which is not interested in her past triumphs, her complex historic organization, the splendours of her ceremonial or the intricacies of her legal system. They adopted the text by a majority of 2231 votes to 43.

Whatever might be the theological significance of the debate on the collegial status of bishops, the debate itself was the clearest exercise of that status. It was collegial action too that fashioned and voted the final

constitution, presenting the Church afresh as "a sign and instrument of the intimate union of the whole human race with God"^(Nr. 11), making her known in all the richness of her life and attributes, as she reveals herself in the words of Our Lord in the Gospel and in the preaching of the apostles, especially, St. Paul. It was within this picture that the constituent elements of the church - episcopate, priesthood, religious, laity and their relations to each other were examined.

In the same context of the People of God the constitution lays the foundation for the Decree on Ecumenism, by briefly examining the Church's relations with those Christians who do not have full visible union with the Catholic Church. Earlier controversies about "degrees of membership" are avoided. Emphasis is on positive links - baptism, scripture and so on (De Ecclesia, 15).

Let us enlarge a little upon one of these positive links. In Chapter VI of the Constitution on Divine Revelation which treats of "Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church" the Council not only vindicates the rightful place of Scripture "together with sacred Tradition^{as} the Supreme Rule of Faith"^(Nr. 21): it urges what no official document has done for many centuries, that easy access to sacred Scripture should be provided for all the faithful especially in translations from the original texts.^(Nr. 22) I should like to quote the succeeding sentence of the Constitution in full:

"and if given the opportunity and the approval of Church authority these translations are produced in cooperation with the separated brethren, all Christians will be able to use them".

This sentence has provided the warrant for a most eventful series of negotiations which have reached a critical stage in Rome during the past week: negotiations by which the Catholic Church may hope to profit by the collaboration "freely offered" of that very remarkable world wide organization, the United Bible Societies^{*)}. This chapter of the Constitution goes on to give

*) Since these words were written at the end of 1966, the collaboration referred to has advanced and spread with remarkable rapidity.

unstinted encouragement to biblical scholars; to assert that "the Sacred Page is as it were the Soul of Sacred Theology"^(Nr. 24) and to demand that all the people of God, clergy and laity, shall have the will and the facility to attain a knowledge of Scripture adequate to their state(Nr. 25).

Second Vatican

In the Constitution on The Church in the World of Today, the Council ~~XXXXXX~~ insist that they proceed from more deep examination of the mystery of the Church to speak "not only to the Church's sons and to those who call on the name of Christ but to all men, anxious to explain to all how it understands the presence and function of the church in the world of today"^(Nr. 2). A horizontal consideration, so to speak, follows a consideration in depth. "Men must be saved, human society restored"^(Nr. 3) says the Constitution. The two tasks are inseparable. Christian history gives venerable witness to their conjunction. This "horizontal" consideration is essentially that found in the ~~XXXXXX Chapter of XXXXX on the People of God~~: Proemium of the Constitution:

"The Church believes that Christ who died and rose from the dead for all of us, gives man through His spirit light and strength enough to live up to his high vocation; nor is there any other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. She believes that the key, the centre and purpose of all human history is to be found in her Lord and Master. The Church claims that beneath all change there are many things unchanging which have their ultimate foundation in Christ who is the same yesterday and today and forever".(Nr. 10).

Here surely in a time of uncertainty like ours, a time of rapid change when standards are too easily seen as relative, is a powerful inspiration Christians must have in common. The dignity of the human person, the worth of the human community, the determining of the rightful autonomy of earthly things, the relevance of the Gospel to man's education, to his social economic life, to his political life, to the problems of living that beset him; the urgency of these problems can hardly fail to bring us together to confront them in common.

The Council's Pastoral Constitution exhorts all the Catholic faithful to recognize the signs of the times - ^(Nr. 4) ~~XXXXXX~~ While the Decree on Ecumenism ~~XXXXXX~~ fully recognizes the value and

opportuneness of a common concern and a "more intensive cooperation carrying out any duties for the common good of humanity which are demanded by Christian conscience"^(Nr. 4), it does not put this first. Let me quote again:

"In ecumenical work Catholics must assuredly be concerned for their separated brethren praying for them, keeping them informed about the Church, making the first approaches to them; but their primary duty is to make a careful and honest appraisal of whatever needs to be renewed and done in the Catholic household itself in order that its life may bear witness more clearly and faithfully to the teachings and institutions which have been handed down from Christ through the apostles"(l. c.).

In going on to speak of the practice of ecumenism which, "involves the whole Church, faithful and clergy alike"^(Nr. 5), the Decree quickly reverts to this point:

"every renewal of the Church essentially consists in an increase of fidelity to her own calling. Undoubtedly this explains the dynamism of the movement towards Unity"(l. c.).

The humility generated by this spiritual ecumenism will provide a proper frame of mind for dialogue and for the study which is the absolute pre-requisite of dialogue. The Decree reminds us too that not only is dialogue not exhausted in such conversations as our own but also that these conversations cannot be sustained indefinitely except against a background of wide ecumenical education(cf. Nr. 7).

I need not remind you of the famous sentence in Chapter 3 which assigns a special place to the Anglican Communion^(Nr. 13) - surely because it manifests to such a degree those criteria already adumbrated in De Ecclesia 15 and more fully developed here. The culminating reason why we are present here today is that this "special place" was thrown into such sharp relief by the meeting last March of Pope Paul VI and the Archbishop of Canterbury. It was not the first time that the present Pontiff had shown his special regard for the Anglican Communion, but it was unique in its

impact. You will remember that he praised the spontaneity and wise courage of the Archbishop as well as his pietas. Let us remember all the ancient overtones of that word "pietas". The Archbishop's confidence was indeed well judged for, as the Pope said, his steps did not echo in a strange house.

Our own meeting is a product of that more famous meeting. Let us not forget the extent to which the programme we are setting out to draw up has already been determined in its essential character at this earlier meeting. Our task is to formulate grave and complex problems in such a way that we may study and meditate upon them together, without resentment born of pride, without thought of earthly advantage, in obedience to the words of Christ and ^{with} the help of the Holy Spirit.