

Editorial

HISTORY is not static : it is compounded of *movements*, of actions and reactions ; it is a stage on which the actors are living persons, not a tableau of motionless figures. No less than any other historical entity, Roman Catholicism, despite its appearance of an immovable object, has to adjust itself to changing times and circumstances ; it cannot hold itself aloof from and remain unaffected by the movements and developments of successive centuries. The Roman Church, after all, is not a sculptured sphinx but an aggregate of human beings. The Reformation of the sixteenth century is itself a proof that the supposed imperturbability of Rome is a fiction, for it was something that happened to the body of Roman Catholicism and it was precisely Roman Catholics who were reformed. Inevitably a new situation was created which placed the Papal Church in the valley of decision, for here, first and foremost, was the opportunity for the reform of the Church as a whole rather than a movement of separation—as is shown by the course of events in England, where the Church was both thoroughly reformed and also preserved its integrity.

Rome, however, thrust the Reformers from her and persecuted them as heretics. None the less, the new situation drove the Pope to convene the Council of Trent for the purpose of defining his Church's position as over against the teaching of the Reformation. The Tridentine anathemas, condemning as they did the distinctive doctrines of the Reformation, served to give permanence to the rift between the Roman and the Reformed Churches. Yet the vitality of Protestantism has been such that the Roman Church can neither ignore it nor remain uninfluenced by it. However closed the situation may be in theory and by definition, the possibility of circumstances arising which bring the two sides together in an unwonted attitude of openness cannot be excluded : this was demonstrated, for example, by the spontaneous rise of the *Una Sancta* movement in Germany under the common pressure of the Nazi tyranny—a spontaneity which papal authoritarianism has since sought to curb.

Now again in our day a new situation has developed through the appearance of the ecumenical movement. Exclusive though her own claims to catholicity are, this once more is something which Rome cannot ignore, for not only are ecumenical fingers probing into Roman territory, but there are also movements within Roman Catholicism itself which are feeling out towards the Protestant world, and are indeed in some measure a positive reaction to the latter. In this respect it is sufficient to mention the growing interest in Bible study, both at the academic level and in the sphere of every-day life, the demands for services in the vernacular instead of in Latin, and the desire for worship that is genuinely congregational in character. It remains to be seen to what degree such trends and longings will be encouraged or

confined by the dictatorial hand of officialdom. But the Reformed Christian must not be content with the passively critical attitude of the spectator: it is his duty to stimulate as far as he may be able all tentative feelings-out towards reform amongst Roman Catholics. He will remember that the Reformers of the sixteenth century were originally (to use Bishop Latimer's autobiographical expression) "obstinate papists". He will know, too, that Rome is far from being as unified as she appears to be, since no amount of papal dogmatism can silence every doubt and close every mind. Has the dogma of papal infallibility, decreed in 1870, effected the burial of counciliarism? Was the centuries-old Thomist-Scotist conflict over the question of Mary's immaculate conception in fact resolved for ever by the definition of that dogma in 1854? Is it really imagined that the promulgation of the dogma of the assumption of Mary in 1950 has satisfied the intelligence of all those Roman Catholic scholars whose voices were previously raised in reasoned protest against such a definition?

This year we have the interesting prospect of a new Vatican Council being convoked for the purpose of considering, in response to the contemporary situation, the question of ecumenicity and reunion. Protestant churches will be invited to send delegates, but only in the capacity of observers—which is a pity, for it would at least give an air of greater realism were they allowed, especially on such a theme, to contribute to the discussions that will take place. German Reformers were, in point of fact, invited to attend the Council of Trent, and, although they candidly called in question the validity of its constitution, men like Melancthon and Bucer were prepared to accept the invitation on the understanding that they would be given an opportunity of presenting the Protestant case. They also required that the Pope should be willing to submit himself to the decisions of the Council. Prevented for various reasons from being present at the Council's opening sessions, it was only after the conclusion of the first period that Melancthon and others set out for Trent, and this in turn was an embarrassment to the dignitaries there assembled; for now, as Professor Hubert Jedin of Bonn, the distinguished historian of the Council of Trent, points out, "the question arose whether the decisions on Scripture and tradition, original sin, justification, and the sacraments, which had been agreed during the first period, would have to be admitted as binding by the Protestants, or whether there would have to be joint revisions" ("The Council of Trent and Reunion: Historical Notes", in *The Heythrop Journal*, Vol. III, No. 1, Jan., 1962). It was on this question as well as on the demand that the Council, in accordance with the decrees of Constance and Basle, should declare itself superior to the Pope that the negotiations came to nothing.

The English and Swiss Reformers, however, were decidedly opposed to participation in the Council of Trent. Indeed, there was unanimity among the Reformers as a whole, including Bucer and Melancthon, that of far more importance was the convening of a general Protestant synod—an objective for which Cranmer planned over the years, but which he never brought to fruition because of the interruption of the Reformation in England under Mary, when he and his colleagues

suffered martyrdom. In 1552 Bullinger wrote to Cranmer urging him to advise the king not to send any delegate to the Council of Trent ; to which Cranmer replied : " There was no need of any advice of mine to dissuade him from a measure which never came into his mind ; but I considered it better, forasmuch as our adversaries are now holding their councils at Trent to confirm their errors, to recommend His Majesty to grant his assistance that in England, or elsewhere, there might be convoked a synod of the most learned and excellent persons, in which provision might be made for the purity of ecclesiastical doctrine, and especially for an agreement upon the sacramentarian controversy ". In a letter to Cranmer that same year Calvin declared that he would not shrink from crossing ten seas if he could be of service at such a synod.

As today we approach the event of another papal council the significance of the Council of Trent, for all that it took place four hundred years ago, must not be overlooked or minimized. That council, too, in its day, had to address itself to a new ecumenical situation. Its definitions, moreover, as Professor Jedin says, are " the official Catholic answer to Protestantism ", with the consequence that " after the Council of Trent Catholics knew exactly what to believe and teach on Scripture and tradition, original sin and justification, the sacraments and the veneration of saints. The Council eliminated existing uncertainties and produced clarity and security on the Catholic side. It fixed the borderline between Catholic and Protestant religious thought and thus confirmed the separation ".

At the same time Professor Jedin sees it as " a fact of extraordinary importance " that the Council of Trent " has in none of its three periods condemned the persons of the Reformers ; its condemnations referred only to their doctrines ". Wycliffe and Hus, he points out, had been condemned *by name* at the Council of Constance in the preceding century (Hus, in fact, was burnt there, despite the safe-conduct that had been guaranteed him, and if Wycliffe had still been living he would doubtless have been burnt also). But it is astonishingly naïve, if it is not disingenuous, to pass over in silence the appalling persecutions, tortures, burnings, and massacres of Protestants both before and after Trent. These, it may gently be suggested, affected in a radical manner persons as well as doctrines ! Attitudes have changed, it may be, since the sixteenth century, but it is surely unhelpful to disregard so integral though unhappy an element of history.

The same must be said, too, of the damnatory anathemas of the Council of Trent which, Trent being accepted by Rome as one of the General Councils, are no less in force today than they were in the sixteenth century. Is there, in our contemporary situation, any prospect of these anathemas (which relate to the central doctrines of the Reformation) being withdrawn or even modified ? The answer would appear to be a definite negative. Professor Jedin speaks of " an unbridgeable gulf " between Roman Catholics and Protestants " in their views on Council and Church " and refuses to entertain " revision of Trent " as a " possible way towards *rapprochement* and reunion ".

Cardinal Bea, the head of the newly formed Vatican Secretariat for

Unity, in an article on "The Council and the Protestants: Possible Contributions to Church Unity" published in *The Month* (Jan., 1962), significantly observes that "the most authoritative modern historian of the Council of Trent [that is, Professor Jedin] notes very well that its teaching requires not reformation but completion". As for the forthcoming Council, he expects that it will be able "to carry out a useful work of explanation and so remove many misunderstandings" in the field of doctrine. But he stresses that there are "laws given by God Himself, which cannot therefore be changed: for example, the existence of the Episcopacy and Primacy in the Church". It is his hope, however, that "the Council may do much to help the ecumenical movement" and "will greatly increase the enthusiasm of all for the work of unity".

Another voice which commands respect is that of Professor Küng of the University of Tübingen. The genuine benevolence which shines through his book *The Council and Reunion* (Sheed & Ward, 307 pp., 11s. 6d.) is, of course, most welcome; but the beguiling tones with which he speaks must not be allowed to lull Protestants into an undiscerning coma. Dr. Küng affirms that as the result of the Pope's announcement of an Ecumenical Council "hopes for reunion have risen by leaps and bounds", and emphasizes that the reunion of separated Christians is "bound up with a renewal within the Catholic Church" which will pave the way for the restoration of unity. It is his contention that his Church, although it rejected the Reformation, did not reject reform, and that "the Council of Trent became an epoch-making, universal expression of the Church's reform of herself from within". Such an assertion would at least seem to indicate (however differently it may be intended) that Protestant and Papal concepts of reform differ radically from each. Yet Professor Küng calls his Church to self-criticism, to the extent of acknowledging that in whatever measure the protest of the Reformation may have been justified in that same measure she should put her house in order so that the protest may be rendered pointless.

If only this self-criticism and renewal were commensurate with the central doctrinal core of the self-criticism and renewal that took place in the Reformation, there would indeed be the brightest hopes for true Christian reunion. As Dr. Küng says: "If Catholics carry out Catholic reform and Protestants carry out Protestant reform, both according to that Gospel image, then, because the Gospel of Christ is but one, reunion need not mean a utopian dream". But the problem is precisely this: unless the two-way reform for which he pleads results in a genuine coincidence of faith and doctrine at the centre (at the circumference there will always be room for differences)—unless, to put it more concretely, either the Tridentine anathemas are rescinded by Roman Catholicism or the protest of the Reformation is repudiated by Protestantism—there will be no real coming together; the gulf will remain unbridgeable. This is a case of either/or. It cannot be both/and. If the doctrine of the Reformers was right in the sixteenth century it is right today. If Rome was seriously in error in the sixteenth century she is still seriously in error today—indeed, even more so, since by the fixing of the Marian dogmas of the Immaculate Con-

ception and the Assumption and the dogma of Papal Infallibility she has *added* to her errors in Protestant eyes.

Modern Protestantism (let us be frank) is badly in need of reform. It scarcely presents an appearance that is calculated to elicit the respect of the Roman Catholic Church. Not only is it scandalously divided, but it is doctrinally nebulous and nondescript, including in its ranks many who are enemies of the strong theological Protestantism of the sixteenth century, many who deny cardinal articles of the primitive Christian creed, and even some who reject the Godhead of our blessed Lord and Saviour. Having very largely cut itself adrift from the anchor of the Reformed confession, it is as likely to grab the rope thrown to it from Rome as to heed the call to return to its scriptural moorings. All the more necessity, then, for the reaffirmation of that Protestantism which is genuine and biblical, wholly committed to Creed and Gospel, and therefore able to speak coherently to Rome.

It is particularly in the realm of dogma that the unbridgeability of the gulf between Rome and the Reformation is apparent. For all his irenical acknowledgment of the need of his Church for renewal, Professor Küng insists that Roman Catholics "cannot speak of any 'deformation' in the Church's dogma", since "dogmatic definitions express the truth with infallible accuracy and are in this sense unalterable." This being so, the assurance that they are not exhaustive of the truth is no palliative. If she is to be true to herself, Rome will not and cannot budge from her anathemas, her papalism, her sacerdotalism, her mariology. She therefore conceives of reunion as a one-way traffic and speaks to Protestants in terms of a "homecoming". It is with the best of goodwill, no doubt, that "Holy Father" invites his "separated brethren" to return to "Holy Mother". But we, longing no less for the unity of Christ's body, must demand that our controversy be submitted to the judgment of God's Word, in charity and openness, realizing that unless we are united in the Truth we are not united at all, and that loyalty to the Truth must involve *separation* from error.

Certain reforms which Professor Küng wishes to see authorized in the Roman Catholic Church, such as systematic Bible reading, more prominence given to preaching, services in the vernacular, worship that is congregational, communion in both kinds, relaxation of the requirement of clerical celibacy, and the abolition of the Index, would, of course, be cordially welcomed by Protestants, who have long rejoiced in these benefits. But there is no evidence to suggest any fundamental change in the attitude of official Roman Catholicism, or that reunion as envisaged in the Vatican will mean anything other than the "return" of Protestants from "heresy" to the Roman fold, acquiescence in the supremacy of the Pope as Peter's successor and Christ's vicar, and association with those doctrines and practices which were shown at the Reformation to be contrary to Scripture and incompatible with the Christian Gospel. Friendship and openness we must encourage, praying earnestly for a great reviving movement of God the Holy Spirit over the troubled waters of the contemporary ecclesiastical scene. The candle lit by Bishops Latimer and Ridley still has its light and warmth to impart to the dark places of our generation.

It must, further, be frankly recognized that the issue between the Reformation and Rome involves the question of the character and validity of orders. As Professor Lampe demonstrated in our last issue, the Reformed and the Roman concepts of the ministry are in essential points irreconcilably opposed to each other. Nowadays we hear a lot—too much—about the papal rejection of Anglican and other non-Roman orders as null and void. A reminder that from the Reformed point of view the validity of the orders of the Roman Church is at least questionable—sacerdotalism being incompatible with the New Testament concept of the ministry—may help to restore a sense of proportion. How widely is it known that on the Continent it has been, and still is, the general practice of the Reformed Churches of France, Holland, Germany, and elsewhere to reordain former priests of the Roman Catholic Church who have come over to their ranks and wish to serve in the ministry, and, indeed, that reordination is generally desired by such men themselves because of their awareness of the inadequacy of the scope of their previous orders? The significance of the fact that there are many more converts from the Roman priesthood who choose to take their place among the laity might also be pondered. The situation is discussed in an interesting article on *La réordination des prêtres catholiques-romains qui deviennent pasteurs réformés* by Pierre Petit in *La Revue Réformée* (1961, No. 4).

How regrettable it is that our own Church today is indulging in a pallid imitation of Rome by speaking disparagingly of the orders of other Reformed churches simply because they do not possess the historic episcopate! This was a matter of concern to Bishop Hensley Henson half a century ago. In the Robert Lee Lecture for 1911 on *The Relation of the Church of England to other Reformed Churches* delivered in St. Giles Cathedral, Edinburgh, he adduced ample proof to show that “the intolerant attitude to the other Reformed Churches, which too often finds expression at the present time, is not justified by the precedents, the formularies, and the law of the English Church”, and that “there is nothing in the constitution or in the law of the Established Church of England which compels or permits that rigid ecclesiastical isolation, which now generally obtains, and which unquestionably is a consequence of the adoption of Tractarian principles by a large section of the English clergy”. His expectation that the day was “not far distant when the two National Churches of Great Britain will be restored fully to that fellowship which marked their first days of independence” has unfortunately not yet been realized. Stressing the “solidarity of the Reformation”, in accordance with which the English Reformers “regarded themselves as linked with the Reformers in other countries in a common cause”, he deplored “the emphasis on the Succession of the Bishops” as “a new factor in the religious diplomacy of Reformed Christendom” and affirmed that “it is the right and . . . also the duty of every member of the Church of England who values the heritage of spiritual liberty implicit in his membership of a Reformed Church to communicate with the other Reformed Churches, wherever and whenever the opportunity to do so may be given to him. So doing, he will assuredly be true to the principles and best traditions of his own Reformed Church”.

So doing, we would add, he will also help to put the question of Rome and Reunion in its proper perspective.

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It is a pleasure to give as the first three articles of this issue papers which were read at this year's Islington Clerical Conference, the theme of which was "The Glory of our Liturgy". To the new Vicar of Islington, the Rev. R. P. Johnston, we offer our prayerful good wishes in the important office which he has now assumed, and take this opportunity of echoing the words with which he concluded a noteworthy presidential address: "Humbly but firmly, lovingly but faithfully, may we ever stand for those biblical doctrines, recovered at the Reformation, which are the chief glory of our Liturgy." P.E.H.
