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n Appeal for a New Policy :

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A Paper read at the Anglo-Catholic Congress at Birmingham on the 22nd of June, 1922, and now addressed as an Open Letter to all Members of the Church of England, and particularly to those who profess and call themselves Catholics

BY

The REV. A. E. J. RAWLINSON, B.D.,

Student and Tutor of Christ Church, Oxford ;

Examining Chaplain to the Bishop of Lichfield.

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BOMBAY, CALCUTTA, AND MADRAS
1922

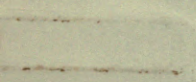
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AUTHOR'S NOTE

THE writer of this pamphlet has never found himself led to join either the *English Church Union*, the *Churchmen's Union*, or the *Church Association*. He was invited this year to address the members of the Birmingham and Midland Anglo-Catholic Congress at Birmingham, and by the kindness of Messrs. Longmans, Green & Co. is now enabled to submit to the consideration of a wider public the suggestion (in itself no new one) that the true policy for the Church of England might be to develop the contribution of the Anglo-Catholic movement along such lines as make for spiritual reality, but in conjunction with a less reactionary theology than that which is still more common than it ought to be in Anglo-Catholic circles, and with due regard to the positive values of Evangelicalism and Liberalism.

Catholicism with Freedom.

It would be an affectation to pretend to be unaware that to large numbers of persons the idea of a combination of Catholicism with Freedom is likely to present all the piquancy of paradox. Catholicism is widely regarded as being the precise antithesis of what is meant by freedom in religion : the term is associated rather in men's minds with such repellent ideas as those of enforced conformity, of priestly tyranny, and of intellectual reaction. A Catholic is supposed to be free neither in respect of belief nor in respect of practice : he is supposed to have submitted his reason to the dogmatic decisions of infallibility, and to be under obligation to conform his religious life in practical ways to the spiritual precepts of an ecclesiastical guide. If the claim to infallibility were true, and the ecclesiastical guide invariably wise, the state of affairs would be bad enough, inasmuch as the system would seem to involve the tutelage in perpetuity of human souls who ought rather, as free personalities, to have reached independence along with maturity of character and mind. It is doubly objectionable in view of the age-long conflict between authority and truth, and of the abuses which have made the power of the priest a byword, and sacerdotalist a term of odium and of reproach.

I do not think the statement will be seriously disputed that that, or something like it, is the ordinary Englishman's view of Catholicism in general : what, beyond this, is his view of the Anglo-Catholic movement in particular ? Well, no doubt he is a little puzzled by it, and no doubt opinions are divided. There are those still who would endorse Disraeli's sneer about " the mass in masquerade," and who would simply dismiss the subject with the remark that, for those who like it, Catholicism can be obtained, and is best supplied, from

Rome. But I want to submit that there exists a considerable number of people in the country who are impressed, and in some ways attracted, by the *religion* of Anglo-Catholics, but who are repelled by their theology, at least as commonly presented, and by what they cannot help regarding as a certain inelasticity and narrowness of mind. The impression has somehow been most unfortunately created that Anglo-Catholics are afraid of modernism; and that not merely in the sense that they regard this or that particular attempt to think out Christianity in relation to the problems of contemporary thought, and by the methods now current in the learned world, as having failed, but in the sense that they fundamentally distrust the attempt to do so at all, and that they fail to see the necessity for such attempts. And I am sure that this impression has been created in part by a certain disposition on the part of Anglo-Catholic organisations to hunt heretics, and to call upon the Bishops for repeated declarations of allegiance to the Creeds. The result has undoubtedly been to arouse in the minds of many who might otherwise have been warm friends of the Catholic Movement a disturbing fear; it is widely believed that if the Movement became predominant—if Anglo-Catholics, for example, were ever in a position to control the policy of the Church of England as a whole—the result might be an intellectual reign of terror. It is important that it should be made unmistakably clear that this fear is groundless.

It is easy to be impatient with intellectuals, but intellectuals too have souls: and moreover large numbers of people who are not precisely intellectuals are nevertheless not unaffected by contemporary thought—they read newspapers, for example, and they read novels, in which they hear echoes of what is being said and being written by learned investigators—by critics, philosophers and scientists—in universities both in these islands and abroad. The result of their reading is that they become conversant, after a fashion, with intellectual problems, and with ways of regarding things,

of which it sometimes appears to them that Anglo-Catholic clergy and orthodox laity are apt to fail to take adequate account. Now it is perfectly true that the busy parish priest has but little time, and in some cases but little competence, for work of an intellectual kind along learned lines. What is important is that, if this is so, he should at least believe in learning, and neither despise nor fear it : that he should abstain from calling for the condemnation of learned men ; and that he should abstain also (and this is an even harder thing) from the habit of dogmatising about learned themes.

For the plain fact is that in theology, as in other branches of learning, the critical spirit and method has come to stay : and that means that the Catholic movement on its theological side must either make terms with the critical spirit, or be content to renounce all hope of retaining or of securing the allegiance of the educated, or even of the semi-educated class. I was asked the other day by the newly-appointed vicar of a certain parish whether I thought that the future of religion in this country lay with the Anglo-Catholics. I replied at once, " Yes, if they can learn not to be obscurantist ; but not otherwise." I am glad to be able to quote from Canon Underhill's admirable introduction to the Official Handbook and Programme of this Congress. " It is not enough, nowadays," he writes, " simply to state a dogmatic Catholicism, even in the pulpits of parish churches ; we have to convince men and women that it is *true*. Many, even among our best and most faithful, are troubled by a haunting suspicion that modern science and modern scholarship have seriously undermined the foundations, not of Catholicism, but of Christianity itself. In the factories and the offices, as well as in intellectual circles, opponents every day tell our people with triumphant conviction that the day of Christianity is done. We ourselves know its truth and power ; but our first responsibility to-day is to state our beliefs in such a sane and reasoned manner as may re-assure our troubled friends, and make our enemies think again. We have a good hope of

being able to do this." I wish entirely to endorse Canon Underhill's words. I think that he has rightly diagnosed the situation and that he has indicated a most necessary task : and I agree with him in thinking that it can be done. But it can be done only in an atmosphere of freedom, and by methods which are largely new : the doing of it must involve a final severance from the state of mind typified by the remark of a certain layman who once said to me, after complaining of the prevalence of heresy in modern times, " The worst of it is that even in cases in which the clergy believe the right things, you have no guarantee that they are not believing them merely because they happen personally to think them true, instead of accepting them simply and solely upon the authority of Holy Church." The fact is that an acceptance of critical methods involves in the long run a modification in the traditional way of putting things, not only as regards the authority of Holy Scripture, but also as regards the authority of Holy Church ; it involves a re-thinking of the whole problem of the nature and basis of Catholic authority, along lines less mechanical, less rigid and narrow, and it may be more spiritual than those of the past. In a word, it means some form of " modernism," a term which, as the result of having been used in a variety of senses, and to denote, in some cases, quite opposite ways of thinking, has by now become very nearly as ambiguous as " bolshevism," and is apt to arouse in men's minds very much the same passions.

The term " modernist " was coined by Pope Pius X in the year 1907, and the original " modernists " were Catholics, who both practised as such, and affirmed Catholic dogma as spiritually true and important. At the same time, as critics, they rejected its basis in history ; and it is possible to approve of the Pope's condemnation of " modernism," though not equally to approve of the campaign of disciplinary terrorism which in the Roman Church followed the encyclical *Pascendi*, and which has resulted in a tendency to condemn or distrust all such teaching as is not quite

mediæval and traditionalist in outlook. The name "modernist" has, however, been appropriated more recently, either as a term of abuse or as a label in which men take pride, to describe various forms of theological liberalism of a more or less Protestant type, some of which are more negative and more palpably inadequate than others. It is possible to hold that no really satisfactory or adequate "modernism" has yet been produced. If so, what is the moral?

I want to suggest that the moral is not that the aims of the modernists are wrong, but that the goal has not yet been attained: that the problem of modernism remains, and is still to be solved. It is folly to take up an attitude of simple hostility to all forms of modernism, merely as such, and to attempt to fall back on tradition and authority alone; that is not what we need. What we need is a real presentation of historical Christianity in modern terms for modern men; a presentation which will set it in relation to the living thought of the times in which we live; a presentation which will be the work of men who are genuine free-thinkers, in the sense that they freely think, that they believe utterly in reason, in knowledge, and in truth, that they are prepared to take full account of critical scholarship and to be honest in mind; and at the same time a presentation which shall do adequate justice both to the eternal truth of the Gospel of Christ and to the spiritual experience of Christendom generally and of Catholic Christianity in particular. And I say that there *might* be an Anglo-Catholicism which should produce such a modernism, and that from this point of view the opportunity of Anglo-Catholicism is unique, for the reason that it represents a movement which has potentially available the entire devotional riches and spiritual tradition of historical Christianity upon which to draw, the whole field of traditional experience and of traditional theology available to study, the authority or *auctoritas* at once of the Church and of the Scriptures to inspire and to guide and to orientate its attempts at restatement, while at the same time it is not and

need not be hampered by the intellectual strait-waistcoat of Rome.

It is, I think, obvious to any observer that the Anglo-Catholic movement stands, with regard to these matters, at the parting of the ways. Exactly as in the case of the Evangelical party, there is an old guard of conservative Die-hards and a young guard of progressives and liberals. If Evangelicalism as an organised movement and a distinctive school within the Church of England dies out in the comparatively near future, it will be because of the victory of the old guard of Die-hards over the younger forces of liberalism within the Evangelical camp. What is going to be the outcome of the struggle which is visibly in progress in the ranks of Evangelicalism to-day? And what is going to be the outcome of the essentially similar struggle for the leadership of future policy, which is less obviously, but none the less actually, in progress below the surface within the ranks of the Anglo-Catholic party to-day? The transition from a stubbornly conservative to a modern and critical attitude in relation to tradition and to the conception of authority is intrinsically much less difficult and much less disturbing for Catholic than for Protestant theology, for the reason that Catholicism sets the Bible and the Church in their proper historical as well as logical relationship to one another, whereas Protestantism has attempted to base its theology upon the Bible alone. A transition and a change both of outlook and of method there is, nevertheless, bound to be: it will bring with it great gains, and also some losses; and though in reality nothing of permanent value will be lost, and the losses will be overbalanced by the gains, it will nevertheless be inevitably the case that many of those who, throughout the course of a life's experience, have been accustomed to drink of the old wine, will find themselves looking dubiously upon the new. The new wine, nevertheless, is the wine of freedom, and it is the vintage which the coming generations will assuredly demand. The movement in the world of learning, of Biblical scholarship, religious philosophy,

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historical and psychological research, is not by any means all in the direction of heresy, or of "rationalism" in the eighteenth century sense, but it is all in the direction of freedom and critical method, and nothing can check it. It is a world-wide movement inspired by the love of truth, and by the Spirit of Truth, which is the Holy Spirit of God. It needs, and needs badly, the contribution of Catholic devotion and of Catholic faith: but it cannot receive this contribution at the hands of devout intellectual backwoodsmen, who regard the whole movement of criticism with fear and suspicion and dislike. Now here is the question: Are you prepared, and is the Anglo-Catholic movement in general prepared, to trust the Holy Spirit, and to abandon once and for all the demand and desire for a policy of intellectual repression? Have you the genuine faith in God and in truth which will rise superior to the temper of fear for an apparently menaced orthodoxy, and be content to leave the issue to Him who is the ultimate Source of all that is true, and before whom error cannot permanently stand? Are you prepared to put confidence, not, indeed, in any pretended infallibility of scholars, but in the Holy Spirit's guidance of the minds and of the work of your younger intellectuals, upon whom must rest the responsibility of mediating, in the sphere of theology, the transition and the necessary change? Are you willing to be committed, not indeed to this or that particular brand of modernism, but to a recognition of the need for a "modernism" *of some kind or other*? If so, then will you pray more for the men who are trying to do the work, and distrust them less? I want to suggest that it is essentially unchristian to criticise anyone for whom one does not pray; and that criticisms of "modernism" are sometimes heard, or appear in print, which are really of such a kind as to suggest that their authors are not only ignorant or ill-informed, or else lacking in sympathy of mind, but that their criticism of those with whom they are at variance does not genuinely proceed from the spirit of prayer. There is such a thing as a

“modernism” that is substantially orthodox; and even heresy is usually only a somewhat distorted emphasis upon something which, in one form or another, really needed to be said. The gain which results from the discussion of a theological issue is always permanent; the mistakes incidentally made are essentially temporary. “I beseech you, gentlemen, by the mercies of Christ”—so Cromwell is reported once to have addressed the House of Commons—“think it possible that *you* may be mistaken!” It is a possibility which it is good for us all to remember when we are tempted to pass judgment upon others. In intellectual matters it is not invariably the narrow way that leadeth unto life.

Of course, in saying all this to the Anglo-Catholics of Birmingham I am, for the most part, preaching, as your programme makes plain, to those who already are converted. You will understand that I am in effect venturing to do what is sometimes done by politicians; I am appealing beyond my immediate audience to those who may read what I have to say if it appears in print. I have said already that I think the Anglo-Catholic movement stands, as regards this matter, at the parting of the ways. It has stood for Catholicism, but not invariably for intellectual freedom, in the past. Much depends upon whether it is really prepared to stand for Catholicism *with* Freedom in the future. If so, it may sooner or later sweep the country, so far as religion is concerned. A Catholicism genuinely free and genuinely liberal, if once it can succeed in getting itself effectively presented in terms of a theology which is modern and intellectually fearless, and at the same time definite, evangelical, and in line with what is true and valid and permanently precious in the religious life and tradition of the past, a Catholicism which really presents the eternal Gospel in modern terms, and brings it home with power to the hearts and consciences of modern men, will find, I suspect, that its message is precisely that for which the world is waiting, as well as that which the world most needs.

But it means a new policy, and before embarking

upon new policies it is just as well to count the cost. If you are to have, or to aim at having, a really live theology, a theology which will eventually do for the twentieth century what was done by S. Thomas Aquinas and others for the Church of mediæval days, when at a time of intellectual crisis the Christian faith was by them restated in terms of a thought which was at that time new, then a price must be paid for the article you wish to obtain : and the price will be paid in the form of a crop of immediate heresies, partial errors, inadequate statements, false starts, unsuccessful experiments. You will inevitably have negative as well as positive movements in modern theology. Disturbing books will be written. The minds of the simple will be perplexed. The truth will prevail in the end, and prevail on its merits : and over all will be the over-ruling Spirit of God. But some men will for the time being make shipwreck as touching the faith : and others in despair and perplexity will go over to Rome : and the dream of a right little, tight little Anglican Church, with its clergy all orthodox and its laity all docile, will go to the winds. You will have to make good in the midst of the welter of modern discussion, and not in some carefully guarded seclusion from all that disturbs. Claiming freedom yourselves, you will have to grant freedom to others : and that must mean living on terms of religious communion and fellowship in Christ with men and with women who in doctrine are definitely unsound. It will mean the toleration, for the sake of an ultimate good, of immediate anomalies. It will mean putting up with the fact that included in the ranks of the clergy will be men who, though occupying the position of accredited teachers, and speaking as such in the name of the Church, will not adequately express in their teaching the Church's true mind. All these things are familiar enough : and they happen already. They have happened, to a certain extent, at all periods of history ; they are not essentially new ; and in the Church of England you certainly cannot prevent them from happening if you would. What I suggest is that you

should cease even to try to prevent them, and should cease to be nervous about them. They are simply the inevitable growing-pains of an age of re-statement. Let us cease to attempt to prevent them, and trust God to look after His Church. Even from a purely human point of view there is quite enough traditional orthodoxy in the Church of England, taken as a whole, to obviate utterly any danger of a substantial departure from orthodoxy, or corporate betrayal of the faith. Let us trust less in the alarmed resolutions of Ruri-decanal Conferences and Federations of Catholic Priests, and let us trust more in the guidance of the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of Freedom as well as of Truth. Let those, in the meantime, who are not learned amongst us, those who are outside the movement of modern theology, and relatively untouched by its problems, who are simply content in humility and faith to pursue the old paths, to think along old lines, and to walk as their fathers walked in the house of their father's God, be content so to do, without criticising others, bearing their witness to the things which in life and experience they have proved to be spiritually true. There is no fear that the Gospel will fail: to-day, as in times past and eternally, it is, and remains and will always remain, the great message of God, quick and powerful, meeting man's need: the great liberating Word of Christ crucified that maketh not ashamed, inasmuch as it is in very truth "the power of God unto salvation." Re-statements and modernisms which depart from the Gospel instead of re-stating it will die of themselves: we need not accelerate their end, still less, by the valuable though unsolicited advertisement of a heresy-hunt, need we give them a new lease of life. They disturb for the moment, no doubt: but in themselves they are just débris left behind by the advancing movement of modern theological thought, which by new methods and in a new spirit of freedom and of unshackled research is destined surely to issue in a constructive re-statement, at once liberal and evangelical and essentially Catholic, in which no element of truth or of value

in the many-sided heritage of the Christian and Catholic past can possibly fail to secure due recognition and place.

I am tempted to add a few words on the conception of authority, and I venture to take them, virtually unaltered, from an already-published sermon of my own.¹ Christianity is essentially an authoritative religion, and its Gospel is an authoritative message. It speaks with the accents not of human discovery or speculation, but of revelation from on high. It claims to embody the supreme and final and sufficient truth about God and about man. It refuses to be classed as one system among many, as one more religion among the others. It is the final word of God to us men here upon earth, or it is nothing, and in the last resort it must be either taken or left. But of what nature is this authority of the Gospel? What is its type and character? Of what nature is the authority of the Church? Of what type and character is the authority of Christ Himself, the human Christ, as He lived upon earth in the flesh?

If we are to approach the matter from the human side—and it has been the assertion of orthodox Christianity that the Divine Revelation of the Incarnate Word was given in terms of genuine manhood, and of a life and an experience genuinely human—then we must discover, as I think, the secret of that authority with which Christ spoke as man in that which the New Testament describes as His “anointing” by the Spirit. That is the essential meaning of the experience which the Gospels describe as having accompanied His Baptism: from henceforward He is the Anointed of the Lord, anointed not with oil, but with the Holy Ghost: the spiritual Son of David, who aspires to no earthly throne, but whose mission is spiritual and religious. The political associations of the title “Son of David” He discards: the conception of secular royalty is transfigured and transformed by that of service. “The kings of the Gentiles have lordship over them, and their great ones exercise

¹ A Sermon on *Authority*, contributed to *The Coming Catholicism*: by *Six Anglican Priests*. (Robert Scott, London. 1920).

authority upon them. But ye shall not be so; he that is greater among you, let him become as the younger, and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. . . . *I am in the midst of you as he that serveth.*" These words surely determine the type of all internal authority—executive, administrative, pastoral—*within* the Christian Church. They rule out, as inadmissible in principle, any exercise of authority which in form and spirit is legal or despotic. They mean that whoever is set to bear office or rule in the Church of God must seek to persuade rather than to command, to guide rather than to control, to attract rather than to compel, and that the analogies of secular rule and governance are in this sphere wholly misleading.

And, secondly, if the authority of Jesus as Messiah was determined by the conception, and derived from the fact, of His anointing by the Holy Ghost, it is implied that His authority as a teacher of spiritual and religious truth is akin not to that of the lawgiver, but to that of the prophet. He is indeed One greater than the prophets, greater than John the Baptist: but as regards its general type and nature His authority is akin to theirs. Regarded humanly He is the supreme example of a Prophet, the Anointed of the Spirit *par excellence*: and *therefore* His words are the words of God, His message the message of God, the words of eternal life. He speaks in the name of the Lord. He acts in the power of the Spirit. He is, from this limited point of view, and considered upon His human side, the supreme instance of prophetic inspiration.

Now here, again, it is the characteristic of prophetic inspiration that it makes its appeal to the heart and conscience of the listener. The prophet's message may assume the form of a challenge, a rebuke, an inspiration or an appeal. It may assume the form of a proclamation of divine truths clothed in the form of symbolism and imaginative vision. It is, moreover, authoritative. It claims to be true. The prophet speaks with the assurance of spiritual insight, in accordance with the degree of his inspiration. But his appeal is to an

answering insight : to the spiritual insight of the spiritual man. His claim is not to override men's reason, or to hold in tutelage their minds. He seeks to challenge, not to stifle, thought : to provoke and not to check inquiry. His promise is ever to the effect that " if any man willeth to do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." He calls upon men to use their judgment : " I speak as to wise men : judge ye what I say." He holds out a prospect not of bondage, but of liberty : " Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." And therefore the forms in which the prophetic word is clothed are not primarily speculative, but religious. The prophet claims not intellectual infallibility for his message, but spiritual truth.

" As the Father hath sent Me, even so send I you " : that is the charter of the Christian Church. The Church too has a prophetic office. The Church, as a spiritual Society, is a teaching Body, teaching with the authority of her Lord, and commissioned in His Name to proclaim an authoritative message to all the world. But the authority of the Church as teacher is identical in type and kind with His. It is prophetic rather than legal, spiritually true, not intellectually infallible. The authority of the Church is primarily an authority to preach the Gospel. Systematised theologies, dogmatic formulations of the content and intellectual implications of that Gospel, these there must necessarily be : but the Church, if she is wise, will not claim for *them* infallibility in the strictly intellectual sense. What she may rightly claim in this regard is a certain sureness of spiritual insight whereby she is enabled to say, " This formulation or that, as propounded by A or B or C, is inadequate as an intellectual interpretation of the content of the faith, because there are certain essential spiritual values which it ignores or fails to conserve " : or, again, she may stamp a particular formulation (for example, the Definition of Chalcedon) with the seal of her approval as being a statement, adequate as far as it goes, of certain aspects of her message : at least a statement (in the case of the particular example I have cited) of

the problem of the Incarnation and of the lines within which any adequate solution of it must fall. The Church may canonise statements of doctrine as theological classics : she may not stereotype theology. She may and must test, but may not preclude, re-statements of the substance of her faith. She may not so utilise the thinking of the past as to forbid, or to regard as needless, the thinking of the present. It is hers to bear witness to the truth : the truth as she has received it and verified it in life. It is not hers to keep the minds of men in tutelage, or to coerce or to dragoon assent. The truth of Christ, whom the Church proclaims, like Christ Himself, who is the truth, is "the food of the full-grown." "In malice be ye babes, but in mind be men." The Church, like her Lord, delivers her witness, and in doing so she speaks with authority of that which she has seen and heard and known. But having delivered her message and borne her witness she must needs say with S. Paul : "I speak as to wise men : judge ye yourselves : judge ye what I say."

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