

*CATHOLICITY: ANGLICANISM, HISTORY AND THE  
UNIVERSAL CHURCH IN 1947<sup>1</sup>*

*Andrew Chandler*

In July 1947, a man barely known to church history named Bill Allen was putting down concrete floors in an address in Central London when he suddenly found himself confronted by a tall figure in gaiters, knee breeches, clerical hat and guy ropes fixing him with a curious stare. This almost exotic figure asked: ‘Who are you?’ Bill Allen replied: ‘I am the foreman for Concrete Limited. I am fixing Bison floors.’ ‘Oh good’, said the figure. ‘And are you going to get results?’ ‘Yes, sir.’ ‘That is more than I can get. Results is what I cannot get.’ To which Bill Allen replied: ‘Well, sir, Concrete Limited gets them.’<sup>2</sup>

In the same year in which Archbishop Fisher encountered Bill Allen in a cottage in the grounds of Lambeth Palace there was published a slender pamphlet bearing the bold title, *Catholicity*. This created a stir in the church and provoked at least two rejoinders which were published in the following years. What had produced such a pamphlet, what did it say, and why did it matter?

*Archbishop Fisher*

*Catholicity* appeared in a distinctive context. To a large extent that context was defined by the primacy of Fisher himself.<sup>3</sup> Fisher remains a figure often almost discredibly taken for granted by his own church, trivialised as nothing very much better than a headmaster who materialized at Lambeth Palace as an archbishop and proceeded to treat the church altogether like a public school which needed a serious dose of reorganization. There is something in this, of course. Certainly, Fisher could relax into an amiable authoritarianism which was not always admired or enjoyed. But his achievements as Archbishop of Canterbury between 1944, when he appeared, and 1961, when he departed, were very formidable indeed. He set himself the task of making the Church of England, from top to bottom, a viable basis for public Christianity in the new, modern age of reconstruction, welfare, nationalization and domestic mass migration. He knew that he had inherited an office which had become heavily involved in ecumenical initiatives and he was determined to maintain, and even extend, them. He bore at least some comparison with the figure of Pope John XXIII, who by the end of Fisher’s archiepiscopacy would be launching his own sustained venture in church reform, and in a spirit not so very different from that which characterised the ambitions of Archbishop Fisher. Indeed, in certain respects they were not dissimilar. Bernard Pawley, Geoffrey Fisher’s representative at the Vatican in those early years of the Vatican Council, and a man very much in Fisher’s image, met John XXIII soon after he became Pope. He noted their conversation down for subsequent recollection thus: John: ‘Are you married?’ Pawley: ‘Yes.’

---

<sup>1</sup> This article is based upon a paper given at an anniversary conference held at Southwark cathedral under the auspices of the Society of Faith on 4 November 2017. It was the last thing that I discussed with Geoffrey Rowell and I still owe much to him for the provision of materials. I am also particularly grateful to Stephen Tucker and Robert Gage.

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Chandler, *The Church of England in the Twentieth Century: The Church Commissioners and the Politics of Reform* (Woodbridge, 2008), p. 137.

<sup>3</sup> For three biographical studies see William Purcell, *Fisher of Lambeth* (London, 1969), Edward Carpenter, *Archbishop Fisher: His Life and Times* (Norwich, 1991) and Andrew Chandler and David Hein, *Archbishop Fisher 1945-1961: Church, State and World* (Farnham, 2012).

‘Well, that need not divide us. So, after all, was St Paul. Are your parents still alive?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘Are they very old?’ ‘No. Only in their seventies.’ ‘Are you a theologian? Nor am I. It is theologians who have got us into the mess, and we have to get ourselves out of it. It is practical men like you and me who will deliver us from it.’<sup>4</sup>

Such an exchange raises a question as to what place may be claimed for an intellectual idea, or vision, of the Church at all. Can such a thing be anything better than a hollow, if fascinating, theory? Must it always invest dogmatic, even obscure, obstacles when a greater investment might be made in the kindly, pragmatic understandings of sensible people who find that they can enjoy each other and collaborate fruitfully? Indeed, will the union of the Christian Church become more likely when the intellectuals have fallen silent? Church history, in almost any form and at any time, has tended expose a quality of abrasion between these realities. Fisher knew this perfectly well. But he was more interested in the question which arose from this: such abrasion could all too clearly prove destructive. Could it become creative?

### *The Catholic movement within the Church of England*

Beside the archiepiscopacy of Geoffrey Fisher a second context in which to place *Catholicity* is, of course, the history of that Catholic tradition within the life of the Church of England. Many views are available about how that narrative works from the earlier days, where the *joie de vivre* of a certain quality of insurgency was almost jubilantly alive in the grime of benighted urban parishes and chapels of ease built and financed by idealistic local patrons. In these years six candles on an altar no longer announced an insurrection and incense no longer provoked riots. Public Anti-Catholicism had its last hurrah in the House of Commons during the Prayer Book crisis of 1927-8. Anglo-Catholicism now presented something far more settled; it was to be found comfortably at home in Oxbridge colleges, in deaneries and cathedral closes, even bishop’s palaces. Popularity had brought complexity: the movement was not at all coherent. Terminology was difficult. Between the two world wars it was widely acknowledged that there were liberal Catholics but not conservative ones.<sup>5</sup> Places mattered too: Spens was not alone in seeing a distinction between the Anglo Catholicism of Oxford and Cambridge. The movement (most still saw it as a movement) had respectable organizations like the Society of the Faith, the creation of the Douglas brothers, and respectable adherents like Will Spens, the Master of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. In 1933 Spens himself could argue that Anglo Catholicism was never more popular and never before so widely accepted, inside the church and outside: ‘The relations of the movement with the Episcopate and with liberal minded members of other parties have never been so good.’<sup>6</sup> The weekly *Church Times*, edited by Sidney Dark, was no longer the trumpet of a campaigning party but had come to represent a comprehensive view of the church at large. Subsequent scholarship has emphasized that the middle years of the twentieth century even

---

<sup>4</sup> See Frederick Bliss, *Anglicans in Rome* (Norwich, 2006), p. 44. See too Andrew Chandler and Charlotte Hansen (eds.), *Observing Vatican II: The Confidential Reports of the Archbishop of Canterbury’s Representative, Bernard Pawley, 1961-1964* (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 1-19.

<sup>5</sup> For a significant study see Alan Piggot, ‘An Educated Sense of Fitness: Liberal Anglo-Catholicism 1900-1940’, D. Phil thesis, University of Oxford, 2004, particularly pp. 3-28.

<sup>6</sup> Will Spens, *The Present Position of the Catholic Movement in the Church of England: An Address delivered at the Conference of the Diocese of New York at Lake Mahopac on October 18, 1933* (1933), p. 8.

brought the ‘triumph’ of Anglo Catholicism.<sup>7</sup> In his popular *History of English Christianity*, Adrian Hastings wrote of a ‘high summer of Anglo-Catholic theology’.<sup>8</sup> The intellectual credentials of the movement had long been growing richer and more productive. *Essays Catholic and Critical*, published in 1926, had earned sober respect without provoking indignation and been republished many times.<sup>9</sup> The journal *Theology* was edited in these years by two liberal Catholics, E.G. Selwyn and then Alec Vidler. Liberal Catholicism, much like other forms of liberalism, was arguably beginning to wane. But the richness of Anglo-Catholic thought was still unfolding fruitfully. By 1945 a new book showed the movement still at a height of provocative achievement: this was *The Shape of the Liturgy*, a work which Hastings nicely described as ‘a formidable and extremely influential piece of imaginative scholarship’.<sup>10</sup> Dix occupied a striking place in the Catholic movement within the Church of England. An Anglican Papalist, he was a benedictine monk at Nashdom Abbey, a neo-georgian immensity just outside Slough, designed by Lutyens for a Russian prince and princess exiled by the Bolshevik revolution and subsequently acquired by the Order in 1924.<sup>11</sup>

This flourishing represents a moment of English church history. *Catholicity* occurred within that moment. It is arguable that by 1945 this was already beginning to wane. The more Christian adherence altogether declined in post-war Britain the fewer felt bothered about what might go on inside its churches anyway. Decline would deal more cruelly with Anglo Catholicism than with any other party or tradition of the Church of England.

### *Reviving the Ecumenical Age*

The origins of the *Catholicity* report lay in a conversation which took place in the middle of 1945 and in the context of a controversy. This was about church union and the specific case was that of the Church of South India.<sup>12</sup> The work of many missionaries and many years, the creation of a united church in the southern dioceses of India had suffered frustration because Anglo Catholics feared that the principle of episcopacy must be compromised by such a union of ministers ordained in different ways, within one body. Fisher wanted this union to succeed and in the theology of episcopacy he was no Anglo Catholic. In 1945, there were many who felt this hung in the balance and there were many, too, who regarded it as an abrasion between pragmatic, constructional idealists, who sought to capture a future for a universal church that was viable, and others who were insistent on the maintenance of a system even if it appeared to be inoperable or counterproductive in a particular part of the

---

<sup>7</sup> See Mark Chapman, ‘The evolution of Anglican Theology, 1910-2000’, in Jeremy Morris (ed.), *The Oxford History of Anglicanism, Volume IV: Global Western Anglicanism, c. 1910-Present* (Oxford, 2017), pp. 40-1.

<sup>8</sup> Adrian Hastings, *A History of English Christianity 1920-1985* (London, 1986), p. 298

<sup>9</sup> For a broader picture of the context which produced the book, and other such statements, see Geoffrey Rowell, *The Vision Glorious: Themes and Personalities of the Catholic revival in Anglicanism* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 220-47.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 446.

<sup>11</sup> For an attractive, succinct overview of Dix see Kenneth Stevenson, *Dom Gregory Dix* (London, 1983).

<sup>12</sup> For an overview see Bengt Sundkler, *The Church of South India: The Movement towards Union, 1900-1947* (London, 1954); for the debate which broke out in the Church of England see Eric Waldram Kemp, *The Life and Letters of Kenneth Escott Kirk, Bishop of Oxford 1937-1954* (London, 1959), pp. 150-186.

world. Fisher was inclined to view it as an example of the destructive capabilities of Anglo-Catholicism within the Church of England at large. Caught up in this anxious debate was the figure of Dom Gregory Dix. In that year Dix was working on his contribution to a new collection of essays edited by his friend the Bishop of Oxford, Kenneth Kirk. This was *The Apostolic Ministry*. Also at work on this particular enterprise were Lionel Thornton of the Community of the Resurrection at Mirfield and Austin Farrer of Trinity College, Oxford.

Anglo Catholics of all kinds were sure that they looked eagerly to the union of the Church. But they had proven ambivalent to the campaigns of the ecumenical movements which had given international Protestantism so much character if force in the twentieth-century world. Quite simply, to move closer to Lutherans and Calvinists must be to move further from the Church of Rome. For Protestantism, at large, they had very little feeling indeed. This was widely shared across the Church of England. Even Bernard Pawley found that he preferred continental Catholics to continental Protestants. Thus far the problem of union had provoked all kinds of stray initiatives in Britain itself. There had been meetings of different kinds of minds, consultations and conferences, publications of all sorts. But they had achieved very little indeed, if anything at all. Fisher could see that much of the momentum achieved between the wars, and in the great international conferences of what was now a World Council of Churches in Process of Formation, had already been dissipated at home. It was time to try another method. At some indistinct point in the summer of 1945, when Dom Gregory Dix and Archbishop Fisher were at loggerheads over the Church of South India, the two men met. Dix suggested that ‘a group of Anglo-Catholics’ might set to work on the problem of church union, not as a part of some unsatisfactory ‘round table’ meeting of thinkers drawn from across the church, but on their own.<sup>13</sup> Fisher saw something in this. Possibly he thought that it was about time the Anglo-Catholics stopped getting in the way of everybody else and instead did something useful together. At all events on 13 November 1945 Dix wrote to Lambeth Palace to report that he had been busy with this. They should need to have some terms of reference: ‘As to what could happen next, who shall say?’<sup>14</sup> The Lambeth Conference lay before them all and this could be a useful preparation for it. Fisher was content and duly provided these terms of reference. He was attracted by the idea that other parts of the Church of England might also do something comparable, and was quick to think of the Free Churches and the Church of Scotland too. On 27 November 1945 he wrote to F.J. Western of the Friends of Reunion, ‘The Anglo-Catholics are quite clear that the round-table method got nowhere and I am satisfied the best thing they can do is to work on their own and see whether they can hammer out a constructive line. It doesn’t follow that that method is best for other people. The question really is whether it is worth trying or not.’<sup>15</sup> Western was non-committal. Fisher persevered, writing to Robert Newton Flew, the principal of Wesley House in Cambridge. Newton Flew was both non-committal and busy. The Anglo-Catholics were to set to work alone.

Archbishop Fisher now inaugurated the meetings with a document stating its terms of reference.

- (i) What is the underlying cause – philosophical and theological – of the contrast or conflict between the Catholic and Protestant traditions?

<sup>13</sup> As recounted in Dix to Fisher, 13 November 1945, Fisher Papers, Vol. 76, fol. 283.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., fols. 283-6.

<sup>15</sup> Fisher to Western, 27 November 1945, Ibid., fol. 289.

- (ii) What are the fundamental points of doctrine at which the contrast or conflict crystallizes?
- (iii) Is a synthesis at these points possible?
- (iv) If a synthesis is not possible, can they co-exist within one ecclesiastical body, and under what conditions?

This certainly gave Dix and his confrères much to work on.

### *Catholicity and its authors*

Whilst Fisher thought of the new enterprise as one expressive of the mind of ‘a group of Anglo-Catholics’, the authorship of *Catholicity* was nothing quite so simple. It was much more a meeting of individual minds alive and at work within a broad tradition. The purpose was not to produce a narrow, purposefully party document. Dix himself certainly used the phrase ‘a school of thought’, but he also knew that it represented a genuine diversity. He frankly admitted to Fisher that his task was to carry such a group with him. Dix himself modestly took the role of secretary. The chairing of the sessions fell to the emerging figure of Arthur Michael Ramsey, at this time Van Mildert professor at the University of Durham.<sup>16</sup> These days we tend to look back on the figure of Ramsey very much as an archbishop, but if we had encountered him in the period of *Catholicity* the impression might have been at least a little different. One who encountered him in January 1949 was a theologian, Karl Barth. Barth wrote to Ramsey shortly after their meeting to say that he had been pointing him out to his relatives and friends in photographs that he had taken of the ecumenical meeting which they had both attended. To Ramsey he wrote he would explain with the words:

And here you see my very good neighbour Canon Ramsay [sic] from Durham, an authentic Anglo-Catholic, with strange views concerning tradition, succession, ontology, and so on, but also with a very convincing twinkle in his eyes, broadminded but nevertheless always prepared to find out some particular point to fight some unexpected little battle, a man with whom I more than not agreed notwithstanding ... the outstanding symbolic figure in the picture of my first ecumenical experience!<sup>17</sup>

In time it would come to include his co-authors in *The Apostolic Ministry*, Lionel Thornton and Austin Farrer, V.E. Demant at St Paul’s Cathedral, the Warden of Keble College, Oxford, H.J. Carpenter, the Dean of King’s College London, Eric Abbott, F.W. Green of Norwich Cathedral, A.G. Hebert of the Society of the Sacred Mission at Kelham, the bishop of Southampton, Edmund Morgan, R.C. Mortimer, Regius Professor of pastoral Theology at Oxford, the Rector of Liverpool, Ambrose Reeves, Charles Smyth at Westminster Abbey, and, in prose but not in person, T.S. Eliot. Dix the recruiter had every reason to be proud of such an ensemble. Adrian Hastings admired it as ‘a remarkably brilliant group of men’.<sup>18</sup> All of them were either at the height of their powers in 1947 or well on the way to attaining it.

The group first met on 15 January 1946. It was a success. Dix ensured that Ramsey was the guiding authority and in this he evidently performed well. Dix himself reported to Fisher:

<sup>16</sup> See Owen Chadwick, *Michael Ramsey, A Life* (Oxford, 1990).

<sup>17</sup> Barth to Ramsey, 3 January 1949, Ramsey Papers, Vol. 2, fol. 154.

<sup>18</sup> Hastings, *A History of English Christianity*, p. 446

It was obvious that the Group had a ‘common mind’ from the beginning (though by no means an ‘Anglo-Catholic’ minds altogether, as the term is commonly understood). The label of the group in Your Grace’s letter to me is something of a misnomer ... There was a real sense of constructiveness about the whole discussion, and an obvious intention to try to put the whole question on a new footing now that we have at last the opportunity to leave a purely ‘defensive’ attitude. For this chance I think we owe Your Grace a great deal of gratitude.<sup>19</sup>

On this first occasion it was Demant who appeared the decisive intellectual ingredient. Demant, Dix wrote enthusiastically, had drawn attention to argument that the Western Church was not simply divided in two, but that

...there are really three elements, not two, in the matter - Catholicism, Protestantism and Liberalism - and the two latter are only accidentally united. Insofar as there exists a true synthesis of Protestantism and Liberalism it is Catholicism. Liberalism historically is, broadly speaking, a secularised version of those elements of Catholicism which Protestantism rejected and it can only cause confusion in the analysis of the problem to ignore this...<sup>20</sup>

If nothing else, this certainly shows how Dix and his peers were beginning to relish the opportunities presented by their subject. The great intellectual enterprise was underway.

*The shifting context: Fisher’s Cambridge Sermon of 1946*

On 3 November 1946 Archbishop Fisher preached a sermon before the University of Cambridge which at once became known as ‘A Step Forward in Church Relations’. In it he observed that the era in which the different traditions had come to achieve a measure of understanding and to explore together what might be possible in schemes of unity had been abruptly ended by the war. ‘How’, he asked ‘shall we begin again? I sense a certain reluctance to begin at all.’ A ‘distinguished theologian’ had even told him that all such activity should cease until ‘further study, theological thinking and prayer in all Christians communions have led them to a recovered apprehension of the integrity and balance of Christian truth’. But Fisher himself thought that waiting for theologians to agree must mean that they would wait forever. Theology was something led by life itself and Christ was alive in the whole church now. They had been too preoccupied with constitutional debates, too fearful that identity might be lost through negotiations and compromises. Fisher looked not to a constitutional unity on one hand or a mere federation on the other, but ‘a process of assimilation, of growing alike’. Distinctness might remain but within ‘a free and unfettered exchange of life in worship and sacrament’, as indeed already existed in life and thought. They should remove obstacles to the exchange of ministers and ministries and acknowledge that ‘every church’s ministry is defective because it is prevented from operating in all the folds of His flock’. If some feared the abuses of episcopacy they could ‘guard’ themselves against such danger, and may do so more effectively by ‘taking it into their own system’. The

---

<sup>19</sup> Dix to Fisher, 17 January 1946, Fisher Papers, Vol. 76, fols. 293-5v.ns in Rome

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, fol. 294 r. & v.

Church of England had not so far discovered the ‘finally satisfying use of episcopacy’, any more than had the Church of Rome.<sup>21</sup>

This sermon appeared to present a decisive moment. It was certainly a considerable one. It took Gregory Dix wholly by surprise. He almost wondered if there was any point in a group of Anglo-Catholics meeting at all if the Archbishop could simply make up his own mind, disappear off to Cambridge and talk broadly and invitingly like this. But in return Fisher was amiably emollient and the little group did continue to meet.

### *The work in progress*

Across 1946 there took place three meetings, two of them lasting for three days. The papers accumulated and the ideas matured. As he read the reports of the discussions Fisher was cordial but also perceptibly wry, and slightly detached, in response. Once he protested. When he read of Ramsey’s views as to what had been God-given and what had been merely the additions and accretions of history he wrote to Dix, ‘I detect in your observations a tendency possibly to evacuate the Protestant tradition of any positive and reputable reason for existence. It will not serve much purpose if you label all the positives of Protestantism as Catholic and leave it nothing but the dregs.’<sup>22</sup>

This ambivalence emerged again when a final text was submitted to Fisher and he set to work on drafting a foreword for its publication. At first he introduced a gripe about those who had objected to the Church of South India. This offended the group: Demant thought it ‘decidedly unfair’.<sup>23</sup> Fisher was persuaded to abandon it. Then came the matter of a single word, the significance of which might have been obvious to him. The published version reads ‘Readers may wish to alter some of its proportions and to dissent from some of its judgments: but they will profit by the survey.’<sup>24</sup> Cool praise indeed. The original draft read more caustically: ‘Readers may *well* wish to alter some of its proportions and to dissent from some of its judgments: but they will profit by it.’<sup>25</sup> Fisher observed that in many ways this report was more effective and impressive analysis than it might be in elaborating a right method. Members of the group were not exactly happy about this either. Demant himself remonstrated to Ramsey, ‘We should admit, I think, that we are weak in synthesis, as is everybody today’,<sup>26</sup> whilst Lionel Thornton grumbled of the archbishop: ‘I think he is incapable of thinking in terms of anything except programmes of immediate action.’<sup>27</sup> None of this would have nettled Fisher at all. The Foreword was done, and only with mild editorial scuffles. The whole work was dispatched to the offices of the publishing house favoured by Anglo-Catholics at large, the Dacre Press in Westminster.

---

<sup>21</sup> Various published, but here in Andrew Chandler and David Hein, *Archbishop Fisher, 1945-1961: Church, State and World* (Farnham, 2012), pp. 163-8.

<sup>22</sup> Fisher to Dix, 19 January 1946, Fisher Papers, Vol. 76, fols. 296-7.

<sup>23</sup> Demant to Ramsey, 1 June 1947, Ramsey Papers, Vol. 2, fol. 132.

<sup>24</sup> *Catholicity: A Study in the Conflict of Christian Traditions in the West – being a Report presented to his Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury* (London, 1947).

<sup>25</sup> Fisher to Ramsey, 11 February 1947, Fisher Papers, Vol. 76, fols. 307-15.

<sup>26</sup> Demant to Ramsey, 1 June 1947, Ramsey papers, Vol. 2, fol. 132.

<sup>27</sup> Thornton to Ramsey, 29 June 1947, *Ibid.*, fol. 138.

*Catholicity: the text itself*

Although it presented itself as a Report, *Catholicity: A Study in the Conflict of Christian Traditions in the West* was more an essay in history than anything else.<sup>28</sup> It came in five chapters. The Introduction at once settled to a brief analysis of the terms Protestant and Catholic, soon looking beyond them to that other, earlier rupture between the Western and Eastern Churches. This was fundamental: ‘The West will hardly solve its own problems unless it recovers certain Christian perceptions which have been emphasized by the East, but which really belong to the East and West in common.’ Because a history of fragmentation had produced distortions in understanding, it would be mistaken simply to think that the broken pieces could now be put back together. Union must instead ‘spring from a vital growth towards a genuine wholeness or catholicity of faith, thought and life.’<sup>29</sup> There followed a discussion of ‘The Primitive Unity’ of the Christian Church, a church many sided, created by Christ himself, inhabiting still an age in which the Old Testament was fulfilled in the New and ‘wholeness’ was achieved in the whole visible Church devising its own rites of initiation and eucharist, *kerugma* and practice. To be sure, this primitive unity possessed tensions, not least between things temporal and things eternal and between the divinity of the Church and the tendency of Christians still to sin. But these tensions were still held within ‘the authentic perspectives of apostolic ministry’. Only the recovery of this wholeness could create the reunion of what had subsequently been divided.<sup>30</sup>

A second chapter examined ‘the background of the western schisms’. With this *Catholicity* bounded into the sixteenth century rather in the fashion of a theological college syllabus. This was the age in which the loss of wholeness became ‘notorious and palpable’. Yet what happened now was not utterly new, but an extension of what had been wrong in the western church since the great divorce on the eleventh century, not least the turning towards an administrative legalism which produced clericalism and theological rationalism and an increasingly individualistic piety. All of this western morality the mysticism of the Eastern Church might have corrected. But if the West had lost a sense of what it must learn from the East, the East was no better. It had preserved its ancient tradition, certainly, but in part by ignoring what had happened in the world at large. It was because of 1054 that both traditions, existing in isolation from each other, were ‘defective’.<sup>31</sup>

The Western tradition now broke into three enduring ‘types’: orthodox Protestantism, Liberalism and post-Tridentine Catholicism. To Orthodox Protestantism the authors of *Catholicity* sought to be ‘truthful and fair-minded’. But it clearly required something of an effort: ‘Our difficulty is that neither in the Reformation nor since, have Protestants ever been able to agree on a positive statement of their common convictions’. Even so, Protestantism possessed ‘great positive truths’: ‘the Gospel of the living God’; the authority of the Bible; the necessity of faith and ‘the truth of his justification through Faith’; the active participation in the life and governance of the Church of the laity; the importance of preaching. But also manifest were two ‘radical errors’: ‘the dissociation of Justification from the doctrine of Creation’ and the detachment of ‘Justification from Sanctification’. Protestantism had

---

<sup>28</sup> I have worked closely to the text in this section. For this reason I have adopted references to ‘Man’, made in the original. Because I have dealt with each chapter in turn, readers may easily trace particular quotations without the adoption of needlessly intrusive page references.

<sup>29</sup> *Catholicity*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11-17.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.



brought a loss of faith that man was made in the image of God and that what was fallen in man could be restored by baptism into Christ. The consequence was an immovable belief in man's 'total depravity' and a 'catastrophic pessimism' about the capacity which man possessed to be rational. Luther had affirmed grace while denying nature, and affirmed faith 'alone'. Lutheranism at large announced a repudiation of natural theology, something rooted in the Old Testament and in Greek philosophy. A neglect of the doctrine of Creation had brought a loss of the sacramental principle which was at work in the Incarnation and identified the 'spiritual' with the 'non-material'. Protestantism had missed the great sanctification of life itself and retreated to an inward piety, abandoning the world in the hands of principalities and powers. This constituted a 'retreat from history' itself, even a desire to 'contract out' of it. Yet while Protestantism had turned to 'activism and good works', it had produced 'very little' ascetical or mystical theology.

Orthodox Protestantism was divided from Catholicism by its doctrine of the Church and Authority. Across Protestantism the individual came before the Church. For Catholics it was the visible Church which came first. Lutheranism was 'indifferent' to the principle of succession in the Church it could not think of it as a 'continuous historical society'. For Luther the Church existed wherever it bore the marks of the Gospel and was made up of those who believed; for Calvin the church was constituted by the Gospel and the Law: it was a society of those who believed and obeyed. When it came to doctrines of Authority the Protestants had removed the Church and replaced it with only the authority of Scripture. This distortion was particularly 'notorious', 'for how are the Scriptures to be interpreted? Lutheranism had subjected the reading of the Bible to the requirements of a doctrine while Calvinists saw the Scriptures as 'a self-contained Divine volume', in no way related to a Tradition of any kind. Accordingly, there was in Protestantism no sense of who had the authority to interpret, and why. It had become a matter of the 'private judgement' of the individual. In all these respects the Protestants had lost sight of the tradition of the primitive church – the very thing to which the authors of *Catholicity* looked for the fulness of union. Such a distortion could only be 'grievously misleading'.<sup>32</sup>

*Catholicity* found that the claims of the Renaissance and Liberalism together constituted the 'second factor' in the division of Western Christianity. Both had done much to provide the 'common presuppositions' of the modern world. The Renaissance had affirmed the dignity of man, the ideal of freedom and the idea of history as a progress towards happiness and enlightenment. It possessed a reverence for man, as something created in the image of God, for goodness and beauty as things born of God, and a reverence for Truth, whether it be found in the Bible or anywhere else. But in the isolation of these ideas from 'other insights into man's relation to God' lay the 'tragedies of modern secularism and godlessness'. Man had come to believe not in God but in himself.<sup>33</sup>

The liberalism of the nineteenth century had brought two essential strengths: the critical study of the Bible and a refusal of literalism. But such things could also be misused, and they had been. Man himself had moved to the centre of the picture and much had now been placed outside any apprehension of the judgement of God. It was an 'ugly nemesis' of the understandings let loose by the Renaissance. Liberalism had also brought the theology of Schleiermacher, in whose work human discovery had replaced revelation, the Word of God had been pressed aside by 'religious consciousness' and sin had been dispatched by notions

---

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., pp. 20-8.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp. 28-9

of mere imperfection. Hegel had proven a rich mine for Christian thought, but in the long run a great 'source of corruption', for in Hegel's thought man had forgotten what it was to fear God, was no longer a creature of God and no longer dependent upon him. Then had come Ritschl and the search for a Jesus merely of human history, a figure divested of metaphysical questions and of arguments about the very Being of God. Ritschl had inspired 'no little mischief', reducing the figure of Christ to the value judgements of man. This was not the theological world of the New Testament at all. God himself had ceased to be God, but become instead 'the loving Father, conceived after our own notions of love and without a word about the Divine Judgement'. Redemption had become a matter of spiritual progress within history. Resurrection had become merely the survival of the goodness that was in man. Such ideas were now to be found at large everywhere, in sermons, in hymns, in class-rooms. Where Liberalism had preserved what was the 'primitive and essential being of Christianity' it had yielded positive insights. But, like the Renaissance, Liberalism had become a world in itself. The task was now to see how to reintegrate such strengths within a greater picture. Yet there was much in Liberalism which was 'fiercely intolerant' of the faith of Evangelicals or the church order of the Catholics. Liberals must therefore recognize their place and not assume that it was only within a liberal broad-mindedness that every other insight and traditions must be drawn together.<sup>34</sup>

What, then, of the Post-Tridentine Papal Communion? Anglicans, as Döllinger had once observed, had thought too little of this. For centuries Christians had been divided by politics but now they could look to reason with each other on a primarily theological basis. The Church of the Counter-Reformation was in doctrine and organisation the successor of the church which existed before the ruptures of the sixteenth century. The reforms of Trent had revived much that was ancient and authentic in worship. They represented a sifting of 'haphazard accumulations' of history, which the Protestants had deplored and repudiated. It was under a reformed Papacy that the Roman Catholic Church had achieved a new coherence. It began to show diversity, a growing humanist-liberal tradition, a rich culture of learning which showed spontaneity and vitality. It remained a part of social life and it had the power to launch missions in quite new lands. An organic, universal church appeared clearly to involve the institution of the Papacy, if only as a 'pragmatic necessity'.

Yet this was a church which still maintained a medieval structure which was unsound and flawed and still it did not look to the East for an enlargement of its vision. It retained the 'whole vast elaboration' of a rigid scholasticism and 'the codification of a huge syllogistic structure of reasoning' which had pressed Biblical revelation with the teaching of the Roman Church itself: 'It would be difficult to devise anything more likely to repulse the instructed Protestant at the outset.' The Church had become a 'closely articulated legal machine': 'It is a sheer perversion when the process of Christian salvation can be represented as fulfilled by a merely mechanical human obedience to a human jurisdiction acting in the name of an absentee Christ.' In all this the revolt of the Protestants was surely a thing much needed. It was canon law, not the papacy itself, which had produced curial bureaucracy, centralisation, papal absolutism. Even Quakers, *Catholicity* wryly observed, were liable to discover that 'close centralization', and the bureaucracy which it demanded, achieved the same effect. It was true that the Church of Rome had often come to behave as one church among others. But in the Papacy itself still lay the only Christian institution which could still 'command the attention and to a large extent secure the following of all Christians'. It remained 'a mighty witness' to the central Christian truths of the Trinity, the Incarnation and the Redemption,

---

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., pp. 29-32.

‘the strongest single bulwark of the historic tradition of Christian civilization’, the foundation of modern Christian social teaching and of world mission.<sup>35</sup>

All of these forms and categories *Catholicity* now sought to order and compress into a list of ‘opposed conceptions’ presented by the religion of Renaissance and Reformation, juxtaposing Salvation by faith and Salvation by works, Grace and Reason, Justification and Sanctification, Christ as Saviour and Christ as pattern, History as sin and History as Divinely ordered progress, God transcendent and God immanent. This list was developed in a discussion not only of what had divided Christians in history but by a recollection of things which might well have brought division if they had thought of them. What *Catholicity* dreaded quite as much as false division was a false synthesis, a unity of errors, which must only cause fresh disunity to break out. ‘There can’, it stated, ‘be no synthesis between a broken half and the original whole, but only a renewed unity between the parts which have been falsified by separation.’ Christians must not now begin the work of reunion on the basis of their own, present systems, but go behind them to discover the fulness of tradition which yet survived in each of the ‘sundered portions of Christendom’. *Catholicity* turned towards the wider world in which Christians of all kinds now lived, one which had slid by degrees into a ‘mass-made pattern of life’ and one often shaped by ‘an aggressively secularist “conformism”’. In such a world the churches were now pressed to sink their differences and stand together against such a ‘sweeping tide’. But to do so could only bring the tearing up of dogmas, traditions and patterns and foster new, distinctive forms of corruption. This could not be the unity for which Christ had prayed.<sup>36</sup>

What then of the Church of the Anglican Communion? Its distinctive comprehensiveness qualified it to be a ‘school of synthesis over a wider field than any other Church in Christendom’. Within the Anglican Reformation itself there had been ‘some degree of return to the fulness of the Christian Tradition’. Thereafter, ‘the history of Anglican theology shows that it possesses a power of construction which has made for synthesis rather than for division’. It had shown how to combine the appeal to Scripture with sound learning. Hooker had preached the Incarnation; Lancelot Andrewes had prayed for the whole Church, East and West. Here was a biblical scholarship which acknowledged both the divine and human elements in Scripture in a distinctive theology of the eucharist, in a ‘blending’ of what was traditional and contemporary. Synthesis was the vocation of Anglicanism. It articulated, and sought to integrate, von Hügel’s elements of the institutional, intellectual and mystical.

If the promise of these characteristic qualities of Anglicanism remained largely unrealised, it was because they had been obscured by the disputes and distortions of parties. There were Anglicans who thought hardly at all of the Church, preferring to think of the spiritual vocation of a community, while others practised ‘an introverted and pietistic ecclesiasticism under the name of “Catholic” churchmanship’. Meanwhile the Anglican communion was itself under strain. Once the Establishment of the Church of England had helped to hold together its different parties. The State had also done much to govern its expansion abroad. Now this had grown weaker. Once Anglicans had all worshipped by the Book of Common Prayer. No longer was it the bond of their unity; Anglicans could be found worshipping by different patterns and broader sources. Now the principles of the Lambeth Quadrilateral were a basis for the unity of Anglicans but this could not be enough. They must go behind this, too, and learn to see it not as a formula sufficient in itself but ‘a symbol of the fulness of

---

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pp. 32-41.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., pp. 42-8.

Tradition'. What of episcopacy? It was one thing to insist on bishops, and *Catholicity* certainly did. It was another to look to 'the recovery of the true place of the Bishop in the Church, not as an organiser of a vast administrative machine, but as the guardian and exponent of the faith, as the bond of sacramental unity, and as an organ of the Body of Christ in true constitutional relation to the presbyters and people.' A church which lived and worshipped by a united constancy in Scriptures, Creeds, Sacraments and Apostolic Succession offered still 'the highest precondition of the task of theological synthesis to which the Anglican Communion is, in Divine Providence, called.'<sup>37</sup>

At the last *Catholicity* turned, and only briefly, to Fisher's final question: if synthesis could not be attained, under what conditions could coexistence be achieved within one ecclesiastical body? 'We would shrink', came the reply, 'from any general answer.' But it was a question which Anglicans of all kinds might just as clearly ask of one another.<sup>38</sup>

### *The two reports of 1950*

*Catholicity* did, as Fisher had hoped, become the first point in a design of three parts. Once it had been published the other parties to which Archbishop Fisher had looked in 1945 found that there was a reason to state their own, different cases, and not least because much of what they cherished themselves had in one way or another been criticised or questionably represented. *The Catholicity of Protestantism*, the work of the Free Church leaders, appeared in 1950. *The Fulness of Christ: The Church's Growth into Catholicity* was the work of the Evangelicals of the Church of England. It appeared in the same year.<sup>39</sup> If Dix might have earned the right to congratulate himself on recruiting men of some distinction and eminence then it was clear that the Free Churches and the Evangelicals could certainly match them in creative force and eminence. The group which produced *The Catholicity of Protestantism* included the Methodists T.W. Manson, Rupert Davies, Robert Newton Flew, Kenneth Grayson and Gordon Rupp, the Congregationalists Nathaniel Micklem, John Marsh and R.D. Whitehorn and the Baptists Ernest Payne, Robert L. Child and P.W. Evans. *The Fulness of Christ* brought together another sterling cast including Henry Chadwick, Donald Coggan, Geoffrey Lampe, C.F.D Moule, Stephen Neill and R.R. Williams.

*The Fulness of Christ* made very little reference to *Catholicity*, preferring to outline its own understandings and to pursue, graciously, the construction of what was in many respects a quite different approach. It was *The Catholicity of Protestantism* which presented the firmer response to the worldview of *Catholicity*. Here it was affirmed that the venture of 1947 had misinterpreted and misrepresented Protestantism in almost every respect. In particular, it fixed its sights on the figure of Luther – and did so with power, not least because Watson was a formidable scholar of Luther and because in Franz Hildebrandt they had secured the additional services of a Lutheran theologian who had been exiled from Germany by the persecutions of the Third Reich. It would be very difficult for a historian, or a historian of theology, to maintain that *The Catholicity of Protestantism* did not present a more secure understanding of the things which *Catholicity* had ventured to chastise. Yet its authors were

---

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., pp. 49-55.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp. 55-6.

<sup>39</sup> R. Newton Flew and Rupert Davies (eds.), *The Catholicity of Protestantism being a report presented to His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury by a group of Free Churchmen* (London, 1950) and *The Fulness of Christ: The Church's Growth into Catholicity being a Report presented to His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury* (London, 1950).

as purposeful in seeking to affirm common ground with the authors of *Catholicity* as they were in criticism. Turning to the authors of *Catholicity* in their Foreword Newton Flew and Davies wrote, ‘We hope that the spirit of charity and candour, of penitence and of passion for “sanctification in the truth”, which breathes through that document, will also be evident in ours. Our agreements with them are many. Many also are our disagreements.’ Significantly, they added, ‘We still know too little about one another, and this is true on the protestant side as well as on the catholic.’<sup>40</sup>

Fisher supplied an eirenic foreword to these two reports as he had to *Catholicity* three years before. He thought that all three of them, ‘so admirable in spirit and in substance’ could only do good. Had they discovered or discerned anything which must preclude a ‘steady advance’?<sup>41</sup> That he left readers to judge for themselves, but now they did so in a landscape which had again been altered. November 1950 had brought a further significant publication, this time a decisive one. It was a joint report on ‘Church Relations in England’. This was the fruit of another succession of ecumenical meetings chaired by Bishop Rawlinson of Derby and Nathaniel Micklem. With this the intercommunion of churches was claimed and almost realised. Fisher now looked back to *Catholicity* itself. They could now, he said, look towards a full intercommunion as something based on mutual recognition of ‘the constancy of one single pattern’.<sup>42</sup> This achievement of intercommunion was very likely as far as Fisher thought everything would go in his own time. Certainly, they moved no further.

### *Re-placing Catholicity*

All these three reports were in their different ways studies in history. The authors of *Catholicity* alleged that ‘Protestantism has not really come to terms with the reality of History as the scene of the continuous presence of the Divine life that flows from the Incarnation.’<sup>43</sup> The authors of *The Catholicity of Protestantism* replied that Catholicity had not come to terms with Protestantism altogether. The authors of *The Fulness of Christ* declared, ‘The Church owes its existence, and its power to grow, to the acts of God in history’, adding that if they all could but penetrate more deeply into the will and purpose of God they should ‘be able to establish criteria by which the Church in history can be judged’.<sup>44</sup> All three came to their own distinct conclusions not about what was transient in Christian history but what was, to use the phrase ventured in *Catholicity*, ‘constant and unalterable’.<sup>45</sup>

But, however the arguments fell, *Catholicity* attempted a vast model of Christian history that was not only restlessly and insistently creative but conspicuous in its scope and ambition. It would surely have occurred to none of its authors that their work shared at least something with other more widely acknowledged, and equally debatable, *tours d’horizon*, like Jean Jacques Rousseau’s *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* of 1755 or the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848 by Karl Marx. But in its powerful integration of critical method and idealistic purpose it achieved a comparable effect. *Catholicity* represented a moment in the history of Christian thought, albeit a small one. It affirmed the intellectual possibilities which could be claimed by the Catholic movement in the Church of England, and showed how they

---

<sup>40</sup> Newton Flew and Davies (eds.), *The Catholicity of Protestantism*, p. 6.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7-9.

<sup>42</sup> *Catholicity*, p. 56.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>44</sup> *The Fulness of Christ*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>45</sup> *Catholicity*, p. 55.

might be offered to inspire the wider church to think, imagine and hope. It insisted that the vision of union was something fundamental to Anglicanism altogether and that the Anglican position could hardly expect to be justified if it ever abandoned such a vision. It was a call not for shallow solutions but for profundity; an appeal to look beneath the surfaces and outward forms of Christian life and to acknowledge that all Christians are caught up in something far greater, richer and deeper than they can truly understand. If the authors of *Catholicity* were found to understand important things well it was much to their credit. If they misunderstood them creatively the debt which others owed was perhaps still greater because it stirred them to answer. If their evocation of primitive unity was inevitably to be criticised as a myth, it was an important and eloquent one. Nobody who read *Catholicity* could rest content with the state of the Christian Church as it was now to be found.

It was Fisher's achievement to ensure that it happened: when at least a side of him might well have preferred to get results to the problems of history by putting down layers of ecclesiastical concrete he knew how to incite an intellectual contribution, how to irritate its authors into a firmer self-expression, and how to commend what they had given him to the whole Church. To Ramsey, who showed himself to be a steadfast and effective chairman, *Catholicity* owed much. To Dix it owed most of all. In 1947 these three principal figures were launched, intentionally or unintentionally, on their own trajectories. Fisher, who had held Ramsey to be uncooperative over the Church of South India, would in retirement be as uncooperative in the later conversations with the Methodists for which Ramsey cherished such hopes. Both lived to be old. By 1950 Gregory Dix, now prior of Nashdom, had only two years to live. The scholar whom Kenneth Kirk once described as 'the most brilliant man in the Church of England' died from intestinal cancer on 12 May 1952. Kirk himself wrote, 'He was one of the saintliest people I have ever known, & though he died young the mark he left on the Church of England will live for a long time.'<sup>46</sup> Late in his life Nathaniel Micklem remembered a meeting which had taken place in Mansfield College, Oxford late in 1949, between Free Churchmen and 'strong Anglo-Catholics': 'We met for two or three days: we knew well that at some point there was profound difference between us, but at the end of our sessions we were utterly unable to define that point.' The conclave had still left him with one 'sacred memory':

It fell to Dom Gregory Dix to lead our devotions in the College Chapel. He called us to prayer, and then it was as if he forgot all about us. He began to speak to Jesus as a man speaks to his near friend: he poured out all his heart, all his longings in passionate spontaneous prayer It filled me with awe ... Reunion will come when disunity has become intolerable to us. Officially, of course, I am bound to regard some of Gregory Dix's opinions as quite outrageous but I held him in warm affection. He lived radiantly and triumphally *in Domino*.<sup>47</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> Eric Kemp, *The Life and Letters of Kenneth Escott Kirk, Bishop of Oxford 1937-1954* (London, 1959), p. 204, 206.

<sup>47</sup> Nathaniel Micklem, *The Box and the Puppets (1888-1953)*, (London, 1957), pp. 139-40.