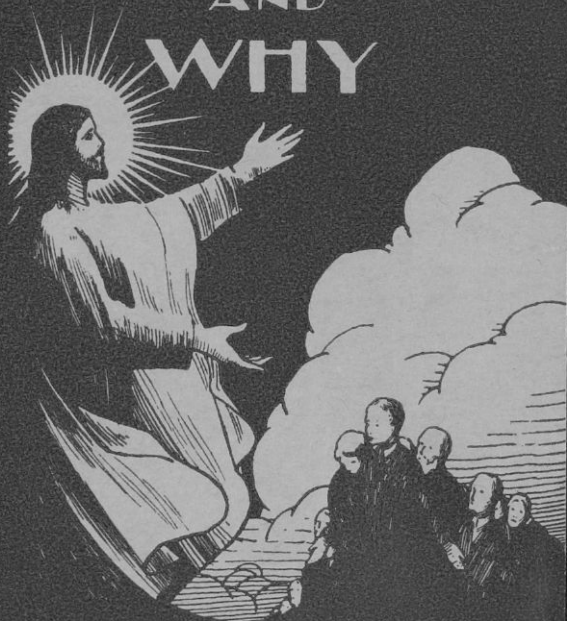


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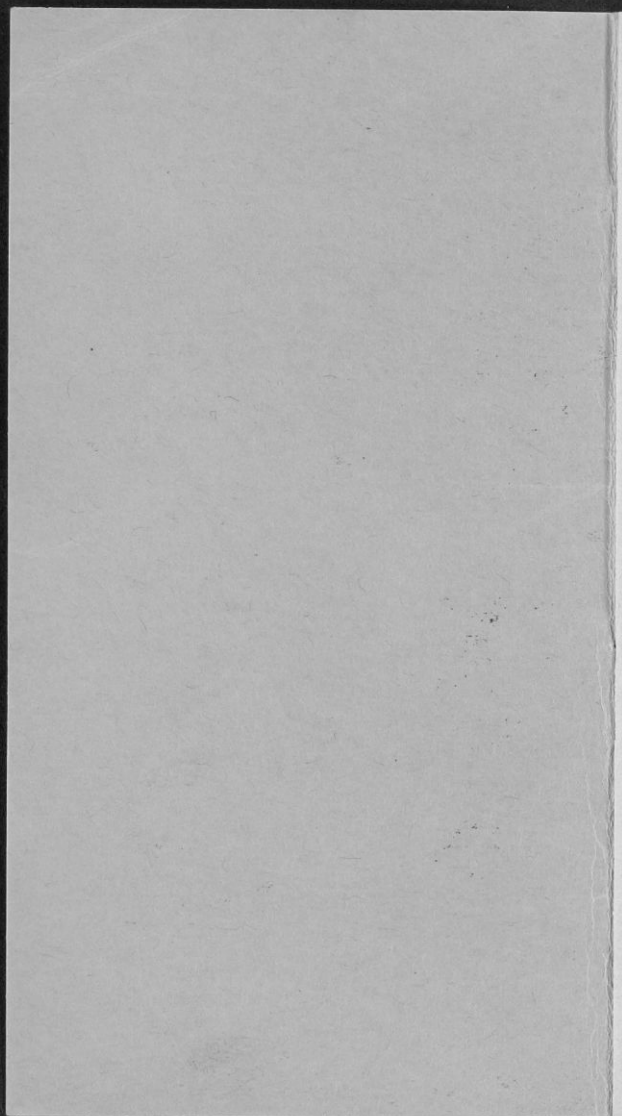
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RECENT CONVERSIONS AND WHY



BY REV. E. V. DAILEY
OUR SUNDAY VISITOR PRESS

T. Y. FETTC



RECENT
CONVERSIONS
---AND WHY!



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Nihil Obstat

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Recent Conversions ---and Why!

"If there is a thing alien to religion, it is division. If there is a thing specially native to religion, it is peace and union; hence the original attraction towards unity in Rome."—Matthew Arnold.

Preamble

NO Catholic periodical would dare endorse the following denunciation: Protestantism is undergoing a revolution—As an organized religious force, it is moribund—As a moral guide it is superficial—It relies on legislation to effect the redemption of the race—Its rites are coldly dignified—It has stripped the element of beauty from the Churches—Protestantism is being torn apart by its position of private judgment—It is doomed.

This is the tenor of an article written nearly seven years ago by a minister, Herbert Parrish. The article appearing in the Atlantic Monthly caused a furore in theological circles. He represented the mentality of an intellectual Protestant divine. It was akin to apostasy

for him to expose the inner dry-rot of his Church's system. His further criticism of their advertising methods, namely the glad hand, Negro singers, free ginger ale, and worst of all, St. Mark's of New York City employing rhythmic Greek dancers to beguile the jaded congregation, is beside the point and of little importance.

It is not wholesome to drag the mistakes of men into the sunlight. They are consistently inconsistent when juggling the dogmas of Protestantism, which in its concept, is a contradiction. What interests us is the reasons underlying the fears of many of its ministers. Since 1926, there have been wholesale conversions in the United States. Parrish must be congratulated. He saw the hand-writing on the wall and courageously pointed to the causes, namely lack of authority, compromising with doctrine, the presence of the destructive principle of private judgment.

Our purpose is not to trace Protestantism's failures; rather it is to trace the alarming exodus from its communion.

Herbert Parrish wrote his article directly between the periods we intend to examine. His reasons were

both historic and prophetic. They were written against the background of the conversions of 1908, and before the stage of the modern Oxford Movement.

I think the trend of the last twenty years will explain why Parrish feared the complete break down of his doctrinal structure. It will become evident in the course of this discussion why Protestantism appears moribund, why its guidance is becoming superficial, why it seems doomed.

In these later years the Open Pulpit Controversy of 1908 first opened a gaping wound. The subsequent years served to press it open wider, until we arrive at the present year of 1934. It looks back at myriad conversions to Catholicism.

We shall see why.

The Argument

Morals are governed by dogmas. To forbid murder you must necessarily convince people that their neighbors have an inherent right to life. Charity, purity and tolerance presuppose belief in God and His law. Otherwise there can be no constant morality.

Men begin to love that by which they live, like a captain his ship or

a child his mother. Such love nearly always expects perfection in the loved. Fanatics believe the wheels of the juggernaut will grind them to glory, a mussulman expects to rise, phoenix-like to Heaven over the carnage of Christian blood and death. Frightful as they are, these doctrines must be revered above suspicion by their devotees; else they shatter faith. When it comes to the highly specialized religions, the body of doctrine must be proportionately error-proof. Herein lies a world of history.

The Protestant Revolt

Millions of men once believed strongly in Protestantism. It presented to them a different spiritual life. They claimed that the Roman Church disinherited its rights to be considered divine. There were many unworthy priests, they claimed. There had been a worldly Pope or two. Nuns had, at times, violated their vows. Therefore, change everything. Their logic would have disavowed Christ Himself, who picked one colossal scoundrel among his chosen twelve. But the Reformers were bent on revolution, logical or no. Accordingly, they began to deform the religious

face of the world. Fortunately, their vandalism was frequently fostered by the State. Seizure of lands, despoliation of Church possessions were encouraged by moral pigmies like Henry VIII, Elizabeth, and Phillip of Hesse.

For years, people neglected to search for reasons. The smoke of battle clouded the heights where truth shone in the sunlight of Christ's teaching. Lutherans, Anabaptists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Unitarians, Congregationalists and the like accepted their creeds without much hesitation. It seemed a question only of what particular doctrine happened to please them out of the scrap heap of the so-called Reformation.

A Negation

There came a time when people demanded definite dogma. Protestantism was born a negation. It simply protested against the teachings of Rome. It grew up like a gangling boy, scurrying away in an escape, with nothing certain in its own life. This attitude of protest could not for long satisfy reasonable men and women. So various doctrines were excogitated. The suicidal tenet of private judgment

was introduced. The purifying of ceremonial was demanded, and the Pope and all that he represented were everlastingly flayed in the pulpit and press.

For over two hundred years, the skeleton worship of the Reformed Churches has endured. These centuries were taken up with a religion, "pure and undefiled", calculated to reform the inward man. Statues of Mary and the Saints were ground to pieces, Sacred vessels of the "Idolatrous Mass" were desecrated, Altars were dragged down, the cathedrals were stripped of their age-old panoply. A church became a cold, joyless place in which to gather and commune with a tremendously rigid and distant God.

The emphasis on interior worship necessarily paralyzed the little personal ceremonies that had surrounded the memories of Christ and His Eucharistic presence. Salvation had become a terrifying business, to be worked out in the grim arena of one's own soul.

Strangely enough, no intellectual Protestant had the power to drive successfully through this maze of contradiction. It was left to the Tractarians first to wedge open the

“rock-ribbed” dogmas of the Reformers.

The Oxford Movement (1833)

The work of Newman, Pusey, Froude and the other Tractarians is well known. They started innocently enough. They wanted rebirth, not revolt. They felt that the traditional ceremonies of the Church should be revived, that the theology and faith of the Fathers of the Church should return. It was a bombshell to the smugness of the old school. Controversy followed, and Protestantism began to show its fatal shortcomings.

The decision of Newman, Ward, Manning and the hundreds of others who followed, was inevitable. Against the glare of reason, Protestantism was found wanting. Private interpretation of the Scriptures manufactured as many religions as there were religionists. State dictation in dogma destroyed any absolute divine authority. Diverse doctrines in fundamentals unbalanced the whole structure. No thinking man could sincerely view the hodge-podge and consider it the Church Christ founded as “My Church,” that was to teach “these truths,” a unified system of truth.

that was to be the touchstone of salvation.

In the light of these facts, we can understand the inheritance of our present day. The phenomena of ministers meeting in discussion and agreeing on no one doctrine of faith, ecclesiastics like Dr. Barnes, Anglican Bishop of Birmingham, preaching radical evolution, criticizing Transubstantiation in the Eucharist, generally indulging in heretical pronouncements, and withal remaining spiritual head of a diocese are found without number. They are the natural offspring of the Protestant Revolt. Only in myth, does Chaos ever beget anything but Chaos.

Open Pulpit Controversy

Before the dawn of the twentieth century there was no definite Romeward Movement in the United States. The Churches were held together by their one and only common doctrine, hatred of Rome. Waves of bigotry, like the Know-Nothing flare-up, served to distract the intellectual Protestant from clear thinking. Only a few individualists like Orestes Brownson and Stoddard thought their way into the Church.

The first significant movement followed the Open Pulpit Controversy of 1908. The Gorham case, which swept Cardinal Manning, Wilberforce and others into the Catholic Church some years before had its counterpart in the Pulpit Controversy. It suddenly exposed contradictions in the doctrine of the Episcopalian Church. Men, who had loved the traditions of their faith, looked with horror at a fundamental truth stretched apart to meet the procrustean length of an empty pew.

In the year 1908, the Episcopalian Church was comparatively calm, not too affected by the tragic plight of its Mother Church in England. The spirit of the Tractarians had already permeated its liturgy. At Nashotah Seminary, Divine Office was said, vestments and altar lights used; even Mass with reservation of the Eucharist obtained; and most important, there was a firm adherence, in the High Church Party, to a set body of doctrine, particularly to the absolute necessity of an Episcopacy. It held as fundamental that the power to preach and to perform ministerial duties was transmitted through the bishops.

Against this background, a General Convention was held in Richmond, Virginia. The Liberals controlled the meeting. Their modernistic ideas conspired to weld together Protestant sects by a relaxation of their own ecclesiastical discipline. They argued that any non-descript minister could occupy an Anglican pulpit.

A protest arose concerning the Episcopal character of the Church. But the Liberals had it all figured out. Do not stress the idea of Episcopacy. Have all Protestant sects admit a universal Episcopacy. Later on, worry whether it was sacerdotal, or ministerial or of apostolic origin. Give non-Anglican ministers the right to preach, invoking the "prophet and priest" distinction from the Old Testament. With these temporizing arguments basing their decision, the Open Pulpit Legislation was passed with hardly a dissenting vote among the bishops.

The decision tore at the soul of Episcopalianism. Bishop White stood nearly alone in condemning it as "a step in progressive apostasy". Immediately, nearly twenty ministers resigned their offices. Dr. William McGarvey, the learned Super-

ior of the Holy Saviour Community, published a provocative pamphlet, "The Open Pulpit in the Episcopal Church." It gave the signal for apostasies from the Episcopal Church. Close to twenty members of McGarvey's community abandoned it. McGarvey, himself, became a priest and labored in an obscure parish in Philadelphia until his death. He was a liturgist of note, a fine dogmatic writer, and an inspiring leader. His pamphlet reflected perfectly the doubt that existed in the ranks of sincere theologians. Paul Francis, with his Anglican Community of Graymoor, N. Y., followed, as also did Dr. Kinsman, Bishop of Delaware.

There came natural divisions such as the "Pro-Rome group" and the High Church Modernists. Nashotah House, symbolic of serene doctrine, was shaken to its foundations. Dr. Edward Hawks and Dr. Bourne, instructor in theology, embraced Catholicism. Recently Dr. Hawks wrote of the contending thoughts that passed through his mind during these times.

"If we were right, then Rome must be heretical. Rome heretical! How absurd. . . . Perhaps, this Anglican Church was only a sect.

. . . I lay awake nights wondering how I could assure myself that the Anglican Church was at least in material schism, a hierarchical church, and not a sect. . . . How can anyone feel that he is a priest? . . . How to go?—How to leave Nashotah, whose every tree, lake and cloistered building was knit to my spirit by unnumbered memories—?”

It is characteristic of the mind of the convert. His sacrifice is intense. His beginning a new life with no personal guarantee for happiness is heroic. The same courage carried men like Benjamin Musser and Sigourney Fay of Nashotah House, Wilbur Russell, of Fond-du-lac, John Ewens and very prominently, Dr. McGarvey into the Church.

Again we find the “Principle of death” appearing inevitably in a system conceived in revolt and contradiction.

Recent Reactions

Nearly a quarter of a century has passed since the storm of 1908. Still the havoc of the thing sprawls itself over the countrysides of America. Men are continually embracing Catholicism. Nearly to a man,

the modern convert in the United States has gone to Rome against the ruin of the Open Pulpit, not necessarily through a study of the controversy itself; but its principle revolted them, namely, that dogmas could be stretched conveniently to fit emergencies.

In recent newspaper reports, we read of a mysterious psychology among the celebrants of the New Oxford Movement. The Lord Archbishop of Canterbury rejoices over "the restoration in England of the great Conception of the Catholic Church." There is alarm over Bishop James de Wolf Perry's attendance at the Anglo-Catholic Congress. He presided over a Solemn Mass in Philadelphia. John Steele writes that "Evangelical Protestants from thirty-two dioceses" urged the Archbishop of York to "give heed to the deep and widespread anxiety and grief of a very large body of laity of England at the manifest favor and approval which is shown to the celebrations of the centenary of the Oxford Movement by yourselves, by many of the bishops, and by a large body of the clergy." They conclude that the Oxford Movement's "Goal is Rome." The protest came hard on

Anglican Archbishop Lang's approval of High Masses and ceremonies that are decidedly Roman.

Throughout the length and breadth of the world, these Roman Movements are striking terror into the hearts of Protestants.

In the year 1929, there were 38,232 conversions to the Catholic Church in the United States. In 1930, 39,528 and so on through the years. Since Newman's conversion in 1834, hundreds of Protestant clergymen have become Roman Catholics largely through his inspiring example. The Beda College in Rome has absorbed on the average of three Anglican ministers a year for study for the priesthood. It can boast of such men as Vernon Johnson, his friend, Rev. Ralph Underwood, R. Vernon Glennie, Peter Harris of St. Peter's Church, Vauxhall, P. M. Clark, head canon of Truro Cathedral, W. F. Harper of Aberdeen University, B. Scott James, Cyril Henslow of Cambridge University, the nationally known Dr. Delany, one time editor of the American Church Monthly and rector of the Church of St. Mary, Virgin, John A. Staunton, now preparing for Holy Orders at the age of 69, and a host of others. They were

all highly respected ministers of their particular churches.

Other prominent converts are Francis Fenn of St. Bartholomew's Church, London; Daniel Davies of St. Mary's Church, Denbigshire, who was distinguished in action during the war; Culver Alford, former rector of Calvary Episcopal Church in Cairo, New York; H. W. Cox, Anglican clergyman; Viscount Uffinton; Lady Perdita Asquith; the Earl of Asquith and Oxford; Viscount Tiverton; Alex Waugh, the novelist; the Earl of Halsbury; Horace Mann; Arthur Lunn; Theodore Fry, husband of another convert, the famous novelist Sheila Kay-Smith.

In Norway, the recent conversions of Lars Eskeland, director of the Norwegian Popular University; Sigrid Undset, a Noble Prize winner, and Olaf Offerdahl have caused a profound effect on the Protestant thought of this Lutheran stronghold.

Proof of Inconsistency

This emphasis on intellectual conversions is not ill-founded. The Church presents a doctrine that has captivated the illiterate as well as the intellectual giants of the ages.

She glories in the fact that her gentle teachings can penetrate the convictions of old and young, rich and poor, barbarous and cultured. Her famous sons are signalled out precisely because they prove a point, namely, that Protestantism has been unable to hold its intellectual men. Many ministers remain in its communion, some because it furnishes them a living, others because it is an expedient, more or less convincing, for eternal glory, others because they feel the urge to alleviate suffering of soul and body within a vague something called the "Brotherhood of man", others, and we feel that they are in the majority, have a sincere vocation. These study continually and are keenly sensitive about the soundness of their theological system. When fundamental inconsistencies crop up through the years, there is necessarily a drifting away of these men from the ministry. Sane thinking cannot be consistently wed to contradiction.

Whither?

Will the Romeward march gain momentum with the years? It seems almost certain that conversions will increase in proportion as

weaknesses appear in the ground work of Protestantism. Lately, the 10,000 participants of the Anglo-Catholic Congress in Philadelphia, under the leadership of Bishop Perry, did everything as Rome does except actually submit to it. Against the muddle of it all, the Episcopalian "gadfy", Dr. Cummings, scornfully asks "why do not these men if honest, respond to the urge of their convictions and make their submission to Rome?" The same query is written across the strange actions of the two thousand clergymen who participated—"are they fish or fowl?"

This straddling the issue disturbs clear thinking in their camps. Logic demands that they jump this way or that; otherwise they are bound to lose caste. Swaying back and forth on a conspicuous doctrinal fence is terrifying and certainly far from convincing the masses of any theological stability.

Even more puzzling is an article in Scribner's Magazine of November by William Pierson Merrill, a New York minister. He utters absurdities such as "theology is important, but imposed theology is wholly vicious (as if certain truths as two and two equal four, do not

always impose themselves upon the mind). There is one more habit which Protestant Christianity must put off, that of overemphasis on orthodoxy. If Protestantism is to represent truly the sources of its faith, and to appeal strongly to the soul of our day, it must learn how to stand by the faith without lording it over the conscience, how to be at once firm and free. Organic unity is not necessary and may not be wise—”.

Dr. Merrill is a Presbyterian pastor in good standing, educated at Rutger's College and the Union Theological Seminary. From his position and training, he must represent the sort of thinking done in the Protestant groups that are not allied to the High Church parties.

Can it be possible that men knowing the mind of Christ in founding one Church that would persevere intact to the end of time, can possibly live by the shifting, compromising theology of such thought? No wonder that 20,000 preachers are out of work, that millions of sincere Protestants are groping “amid the encircling gloom”, that inversely, there is a constant influx of men and women into the Catholic Church, the

Church of unity, the harbor of positive morality, the citadel of unchanging faith.

The Deformation

It is not our purpose to exult in the topsy-turvy aspect of the reformed religions. After all, they hold the legacy of an illogical birth, which somehow or other has survived four centuries of suicidal doctrine. They chiseled down the religious instincts of men to a cold unnatural pattern and let them battle life with simply a broadsword of inversion and protest.

"It would be a strange world indeed," writes Chesterton, "if nature were suddenly stricken with ethereal shame, if the trees grew with their roots in the air and their load of leaves and blossoms underground, if the flowers closed at dawn and opened at sunset, if the sunflower turned towards the darkness and the birds flew, like bats, by night."

It is a picture of the Reformation. The traditions of ages were violently uprooted, leaves of thought and blossoms of sanctity were trampled underground, the finest flowers of the Church were stifled in bitter deeps of hatred. It

could not go on forever, this cruel forbidding night, this striking cold the sun. Men, by the impulse of their heart, must fight back to normal, natural things.

And Rome stands so directly against the reaches of coldness and doubt.

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