

Editorial

THE question of the eucharistic presence of Christ is one which will have to be faced afresh today both in the Anglican Communion, in which the biblical consistency of Cranmer's teaching has become obscured by a confusion of incoherent and discordant voices, and also in the wider sphere of ecumenical encounters between the leaders and theologians of the different churches. Anglicanism, indeed, embracing as it does at this present time so many divergent sacramental beliefs and practices, is in this respect an ecclesiastical microcosm which mirrors the disordered scene to be observed in the Church as a whole. It would be excusable to think nostalgically of the days when the issue was a relatively simple one between the reformed doctrine of Canterbury and the unreformed doctrine of Trent. The Anglican mind is now so seriously split, indeed splintered, that it is no longer able to express itself coherently and therefore cogently to others. The convictions of Cranmer, whose own mind was formed through the prolonged study in depth of Scripture and liturgical history, are still valid, and are ever before us in the Book of Common Prayer, that chrestomathy of centuries of Christian worship. We do not suggest, of course, that with Cranmer the last liturgical word has been spoken. Beyond doubt, the more recent centuries also have their treasures to contribute and the old established churches of the West may be enriched (if they are humble enough) by the vigorous adventures of the younger churches in many different lands.

Prompted, however, by the appearance of four more volumes in the excellent new edition and translation of the *Summa Theologiæ* of Thomas Aquinas being prepared by the Dominican Order of Preachers and published by Messrs. Eyre and Spottiswoode,* and especially Volume 58 on the Eucharistic Presence, for which William Barden of the Dominican House, Tehran, is responsible, the main purpose of this editorial is to inquire how far the theologians of the Roman Catholic Church are prepared to cast off the shackles of medievalism and to re-examine the theology of the eucharist on the basis of a fresh appraisal of the scriptural evidence. The Aristotelian synthesis which Aquinas so ingeniously expounded is vitiated by an irreconcilable confusion of categories as he seeks to develop a logic of transubstantiation. The dilemma is indicated when Aquinas observes that "we could never know by our senses that the real body of Christ and His blood are in this sacrament, but only by our faith" (3a, 75, 1). Faith is brought in to affirm what every canon of experience contradicts. Christian faith, it is true, is something transcendental, but it always marches in step with Christian experience. The miracles of Christ would not have been signs (and in fact would rightly have been rejected as no miracles) if they had not been confirmed by the senses of the onlookers.

* Vol. 6, 170 pp., 30s., Vol. 26, 178 pp., 42s., Vol. 39, 281 pp., 42s., Vol. 58, 219 pp., 42s. A review of the first volumes to appear was included in our December 1964 issue.

Doubting Thomas should have had faith to believe the report that Jesus was alive from the dead ; but when in due course he did come to belief, faith and sense co-operated as he encountered the risen Lord. Had he been shown the corpse of Jesus, faith that the resurrection had taken place would have become an absurdity.

But this is just the problem with the supposed miracle of transubstantiation : we are invited to exercise an absurd faith, the consequence of which is that, both in particular where this sacrament is concerned and in general (for, once the principle is admitted, the possibility of its applicability elsewhere cannot be forbidden), we cannot be sure of the evidence of our senses. *Credo quia absurdum est* is not a principle encouraged by Scripture, which, however much its doctrine may transcend human reason, always addresses man as a rational being. Irrationality and faith are not synonymous. In certain respects faith may be described as supra-rational, but only in the sense that the transcendental God in whom we believe is Himself supremely and absolutely rational, and therefore never the author of irrationality. We cannot approve the suggestion of Aquinas that to believe in something irrational is in itself meritorious (*loc. cit.*, 75, 5).

Aquinas maintains that wherever the sacrament of the eucharist is celebrated Christ "is present in an invisible way under sacramental appearances". He denies, however, that the body of Christ is in this sacrament "in the way a body is in a place", since "the dimensions of a body in a place correspond with the dimensions of the place that contains it", and on this basis it would be impossible for Christ to be present in more than one sacrament at a particular time, whereas in the papal church it is customary for an unlimited number of celebrations to be taking place in many different places at any given moment, and even for several celebrations to be proceeding within a single church at the same time. Aquinas explains that "the body of Christ is on different altars, not as in different places, but as in the sacrament", or "in a way that is proper to this sacrament". And he defines what takes place in a manner which does violence to the relationship between the substance of a thing and its accidents. "There is no other way in which the body of Christ can begin to be in this sacrament," he says, "except through the substance of the bread being changed into it. Now, what is changed into something else is no longer there after the change. The reality of Christ's body in this sacrament demands, then, that the substance of the bread be no longer there after the consecration" (*loc. cit.*, 75, 3).

But the accidents remain ! How is this credible when the whole of experience and all scientific investigation confirms (indeed is dependent on the instinctive presupposition) that in all things substance and accidents are inseparably associated with each other. This is an essential principle of identification. The isolation of either substance or accidents is at best an intellectual abstraction. Although Aquinas grants that what limits everything in its actual existence is its form, and that every change that takes place according to the laws of nature is a changing of form, he solves the dilemma by introducing as a *deus ex machina* the Aristotelian God who is "unlimited actuality" to effect what is not a formal change but a *substantial* one, the uniqueness

of which, as "it does not belong to the natural kinds of change", is marked by giving it a name proper to itself—"transubstantiation" (*loc. cit.*, 75, 4).

This, of course, involves the isolation of the accidents from the substance, which is nonsense. In any case, who is to say where the accidents end and the substance begins? After consecration, we are told, a radical change has taken place in the substance of what was formerly bread; yet on examination it is found to look, feel, smell, and taste like bread, and analysis shows that its chemical composition is that of bread. What justification is there for declaring that everything which would normally demonstrate it to be bread belongs to the accidents and not to the substance? It is not enough to assure us that "our faith is not in opposition to what our senses tell us" (*loc. cit.*, 75, 5), because the doctrine of transubstantiation, which requires the belief that under the appearances of the bread "not only the flesh, but the whole body of Christ, that is, the bones and nerves and all the rest", are present (*loc. cit.*, 76, 1), means that faith and senses meet in head-on contradiction.

A valuable feature of this new edition of the *Summa Theologiæ* is found in the appendices, in which particular doctrines and themes are discussed by the editors of the respective volumes. These help to bring us into touch with contemporary Roman Catholic thought, and in this volume (No. 58) there are three such appendices: on the sacramentality of the eucharist, the presences of Christ in the eucharist, and the metaphysics of the eucharist. It may well be felt that Father Barden adds, if anything, to the confusion when he states that the unique presence of Christ in the eucharist "is real and 'physical' (or, let us say, metaphysical), but it is not natural"; for this confusion of categories, which permits the terms physical and metaphysical to be proposed as alternatives, only serves to emphasize the irreducibility of the dilemma in which the sacramental theology of Rome is enmeshed. It is true that he places the word physical between inverted commas, but a little later on he uses the same adjective without even that mild modification, when he says that at the eucharist Jesus comes "among his baptized people in the power of his transubstantiating action, *in the physical reality* of his still giving the body and the blood that go with that action" (the italics are ours). When Father Barden speaks approvingly of the way in which, on the philosophical level, Aquinas was able to "exploit the riches of Aristotelian metaphysics" in propounding a metaphysics of the eucharist, we feel bound to respond that he did so in a manner which Aristotle himself would never have sanctioned since it does violence to the system of his thought.

The objections to the sacrifice of the mass, the transubstantiation, and the sacerdotalism of the Roman Catholic Church are in essence no different today from what they were four hundred years ago. But few will deny that the situation has altered at least in this significant respect, that Protestants and Roman Catholics now find themselves able not only to talk to one another but also to *listen* to one another. There is a spirit of openness and attentiveness which must not be despised. It is of real interest, for example, to discover that on occasion Father Barden uses language and defines a position which Cranmer himself

would have found unexceptionable. Thus, with regard to the act of feeding on Christ in the eucharist, he writes: "We eat him really, though not naturally—that would be horrible; we eat him really, but sacramentally". Does this mean, we must ask, a willingness to abandon the "horrible" accompaniments of the concept of transubstantiation which imply that there is a natural kind of eating of Christ involved—the alarm lest the consecrated host should be bitten with the teeth and the preparation of the stomach by fasting to receive so sacred a guest, on the ground that it is most improper for "him" to rest on food in process of digestion (though why it should be any less improper to place a meal on top of "him" immediately after communion is a deep mystery)?

Again, Father Barden emphasizes faith as coming before the sacrament. The sacrament, he says, is always a sign of Christ's presence; "but if it be not also the sign of a faith reaching out to receive him, it is a lifeless presence that radiates no grace. Unless the risen Christ who died for us first dwells in our heart by faith, a sacrament, from which we should draw the waters of life, is like a fountain sealed". On the face of it this is good receptionist doctrine and we welcome the clarity with which it is expressed. But, we must inquire, does it imply a departure from the *ex opere operato* teaching which for so long has been characteristic of Roman Catholic sacramental theology, and the discarding of the idea that faith is in some sense a meritorious work of man giving him a claim on the grace of God?

Statements such as these which we have quoted could serve as starting-points for frank and friendly discussion even on so controversial a theme as the theology of the eucharist. It would be a considerable advance if together we could agree with Augustine, who asked: "To what purpose do you make ready teeth and stomach?" and replied: "Believe, and you have eaten already!" and who affirmed that the man who truly feeds on Christ is "he that eats within, not without, who eats in his heart, not who presses with his teeth" (Tract. XXV, 12, and XXVI, 12, on the Gospel of John). But, like Augustine, we shall wish to conduct the discussion in the light of and in submission to the teaching and authority of the Word of God.

P.E.H.