

SCRIPTURE, TRADITION AND THE PAPACY

Some Considerations upon a Recent Book

Most of the modern attacks on the position of the papacy in the Church are ultimately indebted to Launoy, a Gallican of the seventeenth century who wrote four or five massive tomes which only a strong man can lift from their shelf. The modern controversialists may never have seen his book, but they are content to go on using his arguments at second or third hand without ever examining what they are worth in the light of the vastly more extensive evidence about patristic times which has accumulated since Launoy wrote. The present writer has attempted¹ such an examination of one point only of Launoy's work which has often been used in the controversy, and the results of his investigation show that Launoy's work is entirely misleading when judged in the light of modern knowledge. The particular point investigated was the patristic tradition about the Petrine text in Mt. xvi.18. Launoy's figures were as follows :

In favour of Peter as the Rock	17 testimonies
„ Peter's faith as the Rock	44 „
„ Christ	16 „
„ all the apostles	8 „

In reality these figures should read, in the same order :

In favour of Peter	16 testimonies
„ Peter's faith	17 „
„ Christ	4 „
„ apostles	6 „

Thus the argument from statistics does not prove what it set out to prove, that the Catholic Church had departed from tradition in taking the text to refer to Peter alone, and this by a mere counting of texts, quite apart from the weighing of them to see why an individual Father had some reason good or bad for departing from the received derivation of Peter's name from the Aramaic word for rock. This correction of Launoy was published in 1951, but none the less in 1954 Launoy's

¹ In a contribution to the *Festschrift für Max Meinertz* entitled "Peter the Dispenser" (pp. 60-7). The *Festschrift* was published at Münster in 1951 under the title *Vom Wort des Lebens*, and its contents were noticed in the chief Scriptural reviews at the time.

figures are still used by Mr H. Burn-murdoch in his work *The Development of the Papacy* (Faber & Faber, 1954) at p. 49 with no further justification and with no indication of their source. Mr Burn-murdoch declares in his Preface that his aim in writing yet another book of papal controversy is not so much controversial but : "the scrutiny of every fact and the weighing of every serious argument opposed to the opinion towards which the searcher inclines" (p. 7). One can only say that in the present instance the search has not gone very far.

On the Council of Jerusalem Mr Burn-murdoch, following his method of stating both sides of the case as he sees them, gives as the Catholic view of Acts xv.19 : "St James only meant 'I think' or 'I am of opinion' by the words 'I judge' ". Against this he puts the statement : "St James . . . presided and pronounced judgment as president or at least summed up as chairman—*ego iudico*" (p. 56). In a note he alleges Chrysostom as authority for saying that James was invested with the chief rule. Now, had Chrysostom wanted to speak of the "chief rule", he knew the word for it, and in fact he had used it earlier in the same *Commentary on Acts*, when he was discussing the martyrdom of James the Greater and the escape of Peter from prison. Here (*Patrologia Graeca*, VOL. LX, col. 199) he says that Agrippa knew whom to seize, for the principal authority (*kephalaion*) lay with Peter, James and John, and most of all with Peter and James. When he reaches chapter xv of *Acts* he cannot have forgotten what he had said about chapter xii. When he comes to the Council he is struck by the fact that Paul, speaking after Peter, says things which cannot have been palatable to many in Jerusalem, and yet he is not shouted down by James ; it would, after all, have been natural for James to follow Peter as he was the Bishop of Jerusalem. That is all that can be got out of the words of Chrysostom about James having been "invested with the position of rule". There is no mention of *chief rule* at all.¹

The *Epistle of Pope Clement to the Corinthians* is side-tracked by Mr Burn-murdoch with the consideration that : "Corinth had close associations with Rome. . . . In its official life, whether political or religious, Corinth appears in the first century as a city entirely and exclusively Roman". Further, though the letter is written with a note of authority, it is "the authority of the brotherhood, declaring the mind of Christ by the Spirit, not the authority of one man" ; thus are Light-foot's words brought into play to counter the effect of his admission elsewhere that the letter was the first step to papal domination. But

¹ The text of this part of Chrysostom's *Commentary* is not in a very good state, but, as Fr E. R. Smothers S.J. has recently shown in the *Harvard Theological Review*, XLVI (1953), pp. 203-15, Chrysostom took the Symeon mentioned by James in xv.14 to be the Symeon of the Presentation in the Temple and later scribes have tampered with the text to conceal this fact.

the first consideration is worthy of a little attention. It is drawn from the article¹ of a Belgian Catholic, R. van Cauwelaert, published in 1935, which argued the thesis that Corinth was in its civil status so closely attached to the city of Rome as to be legally no more than an outlying suburb. If this was so in political matters, then the intervention of the Church of Rome in Corinthian affairs would need no explanation at all. But was it? The legal status of towns which the Romans regarded as closely bound to the central *Urbs* was known as *Ius Italicum*. Philippi in Macedonia, Beirut in Syria, Carthage and other places round the Mediterranean had the *ius Italicum* and were thus extra-territorial Roman enclaves in the soil of the province to which they belonged geographically, but Corinth had it not (*Digest* I, 15, 1-8). The evidence brought in the article to show that Corinth was a Roman town in religion and political life was largely the product of a sad misunderstanding. Whenever a monument was put up in Corinth to one of the governors of Achaëa, it carried a full statement of all his former offices, priesthoods, titles of honour, etc, as was the ordinary practice. Incredibly, the Belgian author took this to mean that all these offices had existed *at Corinth*; one might as well go round the statues at Calcutta, collect all mentions of K.C.B., V.C., or even L.M.S., and then postulate the existence of all those institutions in Calcutta for the Indians. Dr Lowther Clarke, in his edition of Clement's letter, while adopting the Belgian's view, does feel somewhat embarrassed by the fact that, as he says: "It may be asked whether a Greek-speaking community (in Rome) could write in Greek to a Corinthian one, actuated by a feeling that both were essentially Latin". Corinth was a new foundation made in 44 B.C. on the ruins of the old city and was used by Julius Caesar as a dumping-ground for all those who had contrived to get their names on to the roll of Roman citizenship without having the right thereto. By what is known of Roman politics at the time (e.g. in the *Pro Archia* of Cicero), it is clear that most of these were Greeks, either Italiote or from the homeland, and when banished to Corinth they can have retained but little of the Latin veneer they had acquired in the capital.

As is now generally admitted, John the Apostle was living at Ephesus at the time when Clement wrote, or perhaps was nearer still, on the isle of Patmos, when he issued his stern rebukes to the churches of Asia, but no appeal was made to him to heal the strife at Corinth, nor does the letter which was sent from Rome betray any knowledge of his existence. That is in itself a fact hard to explain if one does not admit some pre-eminence of the Roman church at this early date.

¹ R. van Cauwelaert, "L'Intervention de Rome à Corinthe vers l'an 96", in *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique*, xxxi (1935), pp. 267-306.

But is it true that the letter is from one brotherhood to another, rather than from its chief minister? The heading of the letter is indeed general; one church writes to another. Our warrant for calling it Clement's letter, apart from the title added in the MSS, is the statement of Denis, Bishop of Corinth about fifty years after the letter was written, who refers to it as the letter which the church of Rome wrote to his church *by means of Clement*. It seems more reasonable to trust a Bishop of Corinth from the second century than a Bishop of Durham from the nineteenth. In the course of the letter (ch. xxxvii) the Corinthians are told that not everyone can hope to be captains and colonels in the army of God, which surely implies that there *are* such. The order of the Jewish liturgy is cited as an example of freedom from strife. The high-priest and the priests, the Levites and the laymen, all keep their places and offer sacrifice acceptable to God. But all this is spoken of as still going on, while no-one can suppose that Clement is writing at a time before A.D. 66 when the Jewish revolt brought the temple worship first into confusion and then to a sudden end with the destruction of the temple. What the letter means is that Christian worship, the liturgy of the true Israel, is the fulfilment of these Jewish types and foreshadowings and that the harmony and unity which can be observed in the liturgy should be an object-lesson to the unruly Corinthians. Now this liturgy was not simply an affair of brotherhood and the Spirit. Finally, in ch. lvii, the authors of the disturbances are roundly told to be obedient to their presbyters and to bow the knees of their hearts; hardly the language of fraternal correction.

Clement had told (ch. xlv) how the apostles, knowing from Christ that there would be strife over the name of the bishop's office, instituted a law of succession, and not long after Clement's time there came to Rome one Valentinus who, as we learn from Tertullian, had hopes of the episcopate there, for he was talented and eloquent. Evidence of his talent and eloquence has recently come to light in the Coptic papyri from Nag-Hammadi in Egypt, amongst which a work has been found (not yet published) which seems to be the *Gospel of Truth*¹ by Valentinus. He failed to secure the episcopate, says Tertullian, because one who had suffered for the faith was preferred before him and so he turned aside to heresy. This was in the time of Pope Hyginus (probably just before the death of Hadrian in A.D. 138) and the sufferer for the faith who succeeded to Hyginus, thwarting the ambition of Valentinus, must have been Pius I. It is under this Pope that Irenaeus

¹ Dr G. Quispel, who is editing the papyri, reports that this *Gospel of Truth* can reasonably be identified with the work Valentinus composed at Rome before his sect had split up into the Western and Eastern branches which are known at the time of Irenaeus. It uses practically all the books of the New Testament except the Pastoral Epistles—perhaps there was a reason for that—but no apocryphal Scriptures.

places the *floruit* of Valentinus (*Adv. haer.*, III. 4) and Tertullian (*De praescr.*, xxx) says that he was more than once restored to communion before a final breach. Soon after Valentinus Marcion, son of a bishop in Pontus, came to Rome and went through much the same process of orthodox teaching and gradual lapse into heresy. That two such prominent intellectuals among the Christians of that time should come to Rome and there, after repeated attempts to get their doctrines accepted by the Church, should set up monarchical heresies with themselves as popes is indicative of a *de facto* primacy of the Roman see being in operation, as Jalland¹ among Anglican writers is ready to admit.

The *Letter to the Romans* of Ignatius of Antioch, written when he was on his way to martyrdom (c.A.D. 110) has long been known for the exceptional nature of the prescript with which it begins. Here Ignatius piles up titles of honour in a manner quite different from his practice in his other six letters. Among these titles are two which are puzzling but suggestive. The church is described as "presiding in the locality of the region of the Romans" according to the single Greek MS which has survived and some of the Oriental versions, but the Latin version (which was made in England from a good Greek MS in the Middle Ages) has: "in place of the choir of the Romans". The only reasonable way of reconciling this divergence of text so far put forward is the suggestion made by Professor Phillimore² in 1918 that both "region" and "choir" are wrong, being mistaken attempts to expand an abbreviation in an earlier MS which was the abbreviation for Christ (*Christou*, *choriou* and *chorou* in the Greek), so that the sense should be this: the church presides over the Romans in place of Christ. This explanation of an otherwise meaningless title is apparently unknown to Mr Burn-murdoch, who does not refer to it. The other title that causes difficulty is: "presiding over the love" (or the *agape*). Here the general Anglican view is to say that the Roman church was noted for its charity in almsgiving and thus it is singled out by Ignatius as meriting first praise for that. But the presence of the definite article in the Greek makes that rendering less easy to maintain.³ Lightfoot's only parallel is a phrase from the pseudo-Clement literature where Peter is described as presiding over truth, and here no article is found. On the other hand the word *agape* had a definite connotation in the

¹ Dr T. G. Jalland, *The Church and the Papacy*, (London 1944) p. 109.

² In *Journal of Theological Studies*, XIX (1918), pp. 272 f.

³ The word *agape* is used by Ignatius to refer to the love-feast in *Phil.* VI. 2, and probably in *Smyrn.* VI. 2. He uses it metaphorically to refer to the churches of Smyrna and Ephesus in *Trall.* XIII. 1. It is somewhat naïve of Jalland (*op. cit.* p. 104, note 5) to claim after this that Ignatius never used the word to apply to the universal church. That is the point in dispute. If he does so once in the course of seven brief letters, is he behaving abnormally?

earliest days of the Church ; it meant the love-feast or charitable supper following the Eucharist. No-one seems to have inquired what the early Church could have meant by presiding at the *agape*, though the rules for this event can be found in the *Traditio apostolica* of Hippolytus, a work compiled (with some personal prejudices) in the early years of the third century. In this work it is laid down that those present shall recite psalms after the bishop has said the prayer for the lighting of the lamp, and then : "the believers shall take a little bread from the hand of the bishop before they partake of their own bread. . . . And if the bishop is not present, they shall receive the bread of blessing from the presbyter or deacon. And when the bishop speaks let everyone be silent, nor shall one answer another a word, for the bishop shall ask them". The presidency or pre-eminence at the *agape* would convey, therefore, to an early Christian some notion of authority, whereas the fact of being chief subscriber to charity does not. Lightfoot's interpretation cannot be entirely excluded, but in view of the presence of the definite article (which his view would require to be absent) it must be judged very much the less probable.

Lightfoot¹ gave some evidence of the profane use of the word "preside" (*prokathêsthai*) which is applied by Ignatius to the church of Rome, but this evidence is now more ample. Tarsus claimed to be the pre-eminent city of three provinces, Cilicia, Isauria and Lycaonia on an inscription of the time of Alexander Severus cited by Lightfoot, but it is now known that its great rival, Anazarbus, had already made the same claim in exactly the same terms. Three inscriptions from Anazarbus which make this claim were discovered in 1949-51, and can be dated, one to A.D. 207 and the others to 217. Thus a century after Ignatius has used the word it is a bone of contention between the two foremost towns of an Eastern province that bordered upon Ignatius's Syrian homeland. One would like to think, too, that the inscription cited by Malalas from Antioch itself, where the word is said to have been used by Julius Caesar, could be accepted as genuine, but the writings of that historian are not above suspicion. At all events, the evidence shows that the word had a political connotation in Ignatius's time and could not have been used to indicate a mere excess of generosity. Leo's sermon² about Rome has caught the true sense of the term : *latius praesideres religione divina quam dominatione terrena*.

Origen is often appealed to by Protestants as having eviscerated

¹ Lightfoot, *Ignatius and Polycarp* (London 1889) VOL. II, p. 190. The new inscriptions were found by Mr M. R. Gough, Lecturer in Classical Archaeology at Edinburgh University, and published by him in *Anatolian Studies*, II (1952), pp. 85-150.

² *Serm.* 82, Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, VOL. LIV, col. 423.

the Petrine texts of all their meaning. Cullmann¹ is content to say that for Origen every Christian, and not Peter only, is the foundation on which Christ builds, and Mr Burn-murdoch argues that according to Origen the Petrine promises are now diffused among the faithful of the Church. What Origen does in his *Commentary on Matthew* (xii, 11) is to add to the literal explanation of the Petrine text in Matthew a spiritual interpretation. He does this consciously, saying, "If anyone says this to Christ, when it is not flesh and blood that has made it known to him but the Father who is in heaven, he will receive what is promised. The letter of the gospel says this to Peter himself, but the spirit teaches that it is said to everyone who becomes such as Peter was". What Origen adds at the end of his very extensive enlargement upon the text was not quoted by Launoy and therefore does not figure in the Protestant discussions of the text. Origen closes his treatment of the passage with these words: "If anyone who is not Peter and who has not the things said in the text, thinks that he can bind in Peter's fashion upon earth and that what he binds thus will be bound in heaven, or that he can loose upon earth so as to see his work ratified in heaven, that man is blinded by pride, not knowing the meaning of the Scriptures, and being blinded by pride he has fallen into the devil's judgment". Clearly what can be applied by analogy to any one among those who believe with divine faith in the divinity of Christ cannot be extended so far as to give them free use of the prerogatives of Peter. Origen did not want to make every Christian a pope. Later on, when he comes to the promise of powers to the Apostles (in Mt. xviii.18), Origen remarks, "If we attend carefully to the literal meaning of the gospel, we shall find in this passage and in its circumstances that what seems to be given indifferently to Peter and to all the apostles yet admits of much difference and superiority in what is said to Peter alone", and he goes on to instance the grant of the keys and the fact that Peter's binding and loosing is said to be valid for many heavens, while theirs is for one. The recovery of the *Dialektos* of Origen a few years ago has shown us how far his plain style of speaking differed from the elaborate teaching of his *Commentaries* on the Scriptures, for in the *Dialektos* we have in effect a verbatim report of what may be called a local Council of the Church somewhere in Arabia, while in the *Commentaries* we are faced with a wealth of spiritual meanings which can only have been meant for his better pupils on whom an exposition of the literal sense would be quite wasted. It need cause no surprise then if Origen seems to take for granted the literal sense of these Petrine passages and to

¹ *Peter, disciple, apostle, martyr* (London 1953), p. 159, note 3. Cullmann takes the matter to be so obvious that he does not bother giving references.

launch out into a spiritual exposition almost at once. One looks in vain for an appreciation of any of these points in Mr Burn-murdoch's account of Origen.

One might continue to list the errors and omissions of Mr Burn-murdoch's book if time and paper would allow, but it must suffice to mention a final point. From the time of Pope Zosimus (A.D. 417-18) onwards it became common for the popes to be styled or to style themselves *episcopus* (or *papa*) *ecclesiae catholicae urbis Romae* (Bishop of the Catholic Church of the city of Rome). The assumption, which this title makes, that the pope was bishop of the whole Church, would seem to make idle any further debate about the primacy after the year A.D. 417, yet Mr Burn-murdoch has devoted some seventy pages to the attempt. Of the title itself he says, following here Fr P. Hughes (*History of the Church*, VOL. II, p. 60), that it came into use to distinguish the orthodox bishops of Rome from the Arian.¹ Now while it is true that the patrician Ricimer in the period between A.D. 459 and 472 allowed the church of St Agatha of the Goths to be set up in Rome to pacify his Arian soldiery, this cannot be the reason why the papal representative at Chalcedon (A.D. 451) signed the acts as *vicarius . . . universalis ecclesiae papae Leonis urbis Romae*.² Nor can appeal be made to the fact that the Novatians had a bishop in Rome, for Rusticulus, the last of these, had been dispossessed by Pope Celestine about A.D. 430. The apparently contradictory addition of a local name to the term "universal, or catholic, church" should be accepted, till a better explanation can be found, as a sign that the users of that designation are conscious that somehow the universal Church is centred upon Rome.

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¹ Fr Hughes himself depends upon Kidd (*History of the Church*, Oxford 1922, VOL. III, p. 390, note), who was the first to give this explanation when Edmund Bishop had produced the evidence for the use of the title (*Journal of Theological Studies*, XII (1911), p. 408, note). The Arian church in Rome is known to have existed, but the Arian bishop is postulated in consequence of the theory, as Jalland admits. The theory seems too modern; it would fit modern conditions in Southwark better than Rome of the fifth century.

² This suggests the *universalis papae vita* of the acclamations and *laudes* which begin soon after this time.