

Project Canterbury

Popular Misconceptions of the Episcopal Church.

By William Reed Huntington.

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Chapter V. That it is honeycombed with Romanism.

IT is a popular opinion, at least in many parts of the country, that the Episcopal Church is a diluted form of Romanism, that it is simply Rome mitigated and modified, Rome with the rough edges smoothed off--in a word, Rome made easy for people who, lacking vigor and rigor enough to incline them to take up with the real thing, are still willing to enjoy a pretty imitation of it, if only the disagreeable and hard features be left out. I hope to be able to prove that such representations are misrepresentations. The Episcopal Church is "next door to Rome," that is true, but true, observe, in the same sense in which we say that Germany is next door to France. The two countries have a common frontier, but there are heavy fortresses dotted along the line, and although patches of territory may change hands, there is not the slightest prospect that the two governments will ever coalesce. It was this fact of proximity that won for the Church of England her proud title of the Bulwark of the Reformation. The bulwark, to be sure, is the nearest part of all the ship to the wave that beats against it, but the wave, remember, breaks as it strikes, and that is the end of the wave.

[64] In attempting to show the groundlessness of the suspicion to which I have referred, I find two courses open to me. One way would be to vilify the Church of Rome and everything connected with it in such a manner and to such an extent as to convince the reader that although all the charges brought might not be just, a very large proportion of them must be true. This is a device for blackening the character of our neighbors, often successful in practice, but never commendable. It has too long been a generally accepted maxim of denominational etiquette, that while the preachers of the various Protestant communions are to be bound to say only civil things of one another, all shall be at liberty to throw as many stones as they will at the Pope and the cardinals. We are reminded in would-be justification of this one-sided comity, that Rome for her part has always been lavish of her curses, and quick to round with an anathema every sentence that falls from her lips. But have we forgotten Him who "when He was reviled, reviled not again"? Or have the exhortations grown obsolete, "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good"; "Bless, and curse not"?

Say what we will, the fact remains that by far the larger number of those millions whom we are proud to reckon as Christians when we are writing up the religious statistics of the globe are members of the Church of Rome. It may be an unwelcome fact, but the fact it is. To treat them as the enemies of the truth, the disciples of Antichrist, the dupes of the Evil One, may be a convenient method of disposing of them for controversial purposes, but it involves a sad shrinkage in the area of Christendom when we come to look at the map.

[65] The Anglican Church, as a Church, has always taken a more charitable view of the matter.

While stoutly resisting the encroachments of Rome in the field of ecclesiastical polity, and firmly protesting against Roman excesses in the line of doctrine, she has never read the Roman Catholics out of the pale of the Church universal, nor denied to the Bishop of Rome the jurisdiction that belongs to him in his own place--that is to say, in Rome.

The Church of England did, indeed, in the first heat of the Reformation, put into the Litany a petition that ran thus: "From the tyranny of the Bishop of Rome, and all his detestable enormities, Good Lord deliver us;" but the nation's sturdy self-respect was quick to detect in the words a touch of panic fear unworthy the calm composure that befits a book of prayer, and the deprecation was dropped. Instead, therefore, of taking up any line of hot invective, instead of trying to shower upon our fellow Christians of the Roman following sarcasms and bad names, all I shall attempt will be a calm and, so far as may be, a lucid statement, first of the points which the two churches have in common, and secondly of the points wherein they differ. Every reader will then be in a position to judge for himself, supposing my statements to be accurate and fair, whether the Episcopal Church be or be not "honeycombed with Romanism." It will be my endeavor not to understate the points of resemblance and not to overstate the points of difference.

First, then, how far do the areas occupied by the two churches overlap? What measure of agreement is there between the religion of the Missal and the religion of the Book of Common Prayer?

[66] To begin with the most important point, the Faith, they agree in recognizing the value of the two great historic Creeds, that called the Apostles' Creed and that called the Nicene Creed. The first of these the Roman Church encourages her members to repeat along with their daily private devotions; to the second she gives a conspicuous place in the service of the Mass.

Having already glanced at the history of these Creeds and looked into their value as helps to the interpretation of Scripture, I need not dwell upon them now. With the simple remark that had Rome never added to these Creeds all might be well to-day, and Christendom at peace, I pass on to a second point of resemblance, which is this, that in both the Roman and the Episcopal Churches a stated ritual of worship is observed. This, perhaps, is what strikes the popular eye and impresses the popular mind more vividly than any other feature of similarity that could be named. There is, it is true, a very much more elaborate and, not to use the word offensively, a far more "showy" ceremonial in the one case than in the other. The burning candles on and about the altar, the smoking incense, the colored vestments of the priest, and, far more important than all these, the strangeness of the tongue in which the prayers are said, combine to give a very different impression from that conveyed by the comparatively plain and unadorned worship of the Episcopal Church. Still, the casual observer notices a certain resemblance which is undeniable; prayers are read from a book instead of being uttered extemporaneously, and the minister officiates in an attire which is not that of ordinary, every-day life.

[67] Again, the two churches observe in common certain festivals and fasts, holy days and seasons. The methods of observance are, to be sure, very unlike, and many more such days are kept in the Roman than in the Episcopal Church, but that is a matter to which our "casual observer" naturally pays little heed. He remarks in his morning paper a notice to the effect that this being the Feast of the Epiphany, or this being Good Friday, or this being the Ascension Day, there will be services in the Roman Catholic and Episcopal Churches of the city at such or

such hours, and he passes on to the next paragraph with the mental comment that, after all, the two Churches are so much alike that it would be a waste of time to try to find out what the petty differences between them may happen to be. Again, we hear of "bishops" in both Churches, and "dioceses." Now it is the Bishop of New York who holds an ordination, or administers confirmation; and now it is the Archbishop of New York who is reported as having done the same thing; and we are informed that one of these is a Roman Catholic and the other an Anglican ecclesiastic. So, then, it appears that both of these Churches have bishops who ordain candidates for the ministry, and who confirm baptized persons in anticipation of their admission to the Holy Communion.

And now, in the face of all these points of similarity, can you, asks some one, have the effrontery to affirm that any considerable gulf of difference separates the two Churches? Is not the Anglican religion really just that very thing--Romanism watered down?

I shall best answer the question by first calling attention to the distinctive principle which guided the [67/68] reformers of the Church of England in their memorable work, and by then proceeding to particularize certain points of difference which, it will be generally conceded, more than balance these striking features of likeness.

The great principle to which I refer as having governed the English reformers was that of retaining whatever there was of good in the old religion of the country, unless it could be shown that the good thing was one dangerously liable to be turned into an evil thing by the abuses of superstition. The fact that Roman precedent could be quoted in favor of any particular usage or observance was not by them held to be condemnatory of such observance or usage, provided it could be also shown that there was primitive precedent--precedent, that is to say, drawn from the life of the early Church--to justify it. The English reformers, for instance, no more felt bound to reject government by bishops as a feature of church polity because bishops had flourished under the usurped authority of the Pope, than they felt bound to give up the New Testament for the like reason. The Pope believes the New Testament. So with the other matters under review, the use of forms of worship, the hallowing of days and seasons, the wearing of ministerial vestments--all these things the Church-of-England reformers believed to be good in themselves and primitive in their origin, and, accordingly, all they did was to cut loose from them the parasitic growths that encumbered them, and to let them stand. In a word, the English Reformation, to use a homely but just illustration, was a cleaning of the old family silver, rather than a re-melting of it. The aim was to restore the [68/69] Church as nearly as might be to what it had been before the days of the papal usurpation; to get back, if possible, to the original constitution. Imagine, for example (if it be imaginable), a subversion of our own national Constitution for a series of centuries. Suppose a successful adventurer, in some crisis of our country's history, getting possession of supreme power, and governing the land upon the basis of just so much of the Constitution of the United States as he might choose to recognize and no more. Imagine this arrogated power, moreover, handed on for generations in the family of the first dictator, and gathering about itself more and more flagrant abuses with the lapse of time.

At last there comes a general rising on the part of a whole section of the country. Ten or fifteen States start up in protest, and say: "This is something which we can endure no longer; we must and will have civil liberty once more." But presently there is developed a difference among the protesting States themselves. Some of them say: "It is hopeless ever to try to have things as they were. Let us break with the past entirely and start afresh." But the people of New York,

New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, we will suppose for the purpose of our comparison, reply: "No; we purpose to have back again in its integrity and purity the Constitution of the United States as it was before the usurpation. That instrument has only been in temporary abeyance all these years; it has never actually died. Underneath the innovations and perversities of the false rule, that Constitution has lived on, it is living still; and whether you count us insane visionaries or not, we propose to restore it, or [69/70] at least to try, within our own borders, to live up to it ourselves. Who knows but that the whole country may even yet come back to it?" There you have the position England took in the Reformation. She was not to be frightened into breaking the precious bond of historical continuity that linked her to the Church of the first century. For three hundred years since that time, the rest of Christendom, including a large fraction of her own people, has been ridiculing her for the position she took. Men have reproached her for her "insularity," made sport of her "middle way," chided her for attempting a forlorn hope, pictured her as posturing with one foot on Geneva and one on Rome. And yet here she is to-day, occupying that distinctive, well-defined position of hers, taken up so carefully three hundred years ago--here she stands, neither Roman nor yet German, but, nevertheless, the chosen home of more English-speaking Christians than any other organized religious body that exists. I speak, of course, of the Anglican Communion as a whole, including not only the Episcopal Church of America, but the Episcopal Churches of England, Scotland, Ireland, and the Colonies as well. With their many local differences, these churches are all of them as one in their attitude towards Rome, and it is the attitude, be it noticed, not only of protest against what is distinctively Roman, but also of assertion of what is undoubtedly Catholic. "Catholic" is an inestimable word, never to be surrendered to any fraction of the Christian Church for its exclusive use. This is why, without intending the slightest discourtesy, I feel in duty bound, throughout, to speak of Romanists and Roman Catholics rather than of "Catholics." The [70/71] word Catholic means, literally, "universal" or "all-embracing." "Catholic" imports the opposite of what is provincial, and the opposite of what is temporary. "Catholic truth" means truth held by the whole Church, and held from the beginning. "Catholic usage" means a usage concerning which the memory of man runneth not to the contrary. "The Catholic Church" is that far-reaching society (far-reaching in both time and space) of which the apostles and prophets are the foundation, and Jesus Christ Himself the head corner-stone.

This, then, is the constitutional ground, to revert to our illustration, upon which the Episcopal Church builds, and perhaps no single short maxim better sums it up than the easily remembered one: "The true Catholic, no Romanist."

Now, then, we are in a position to look understandingly, though, of necessity, in a rapid way, at the main points of difference between the churches. We have seen upon what principles the English reformers made their protest; let us now count up the particular things they cast aside.

Foremost among these rejected tenets stands the doctrine of papal supremacy, the claim that the Bishop of Rome, and the local Church over which he presides, have the right to rule the entire flock of Christ. This claim rests upon three assumptions, no one of which admits of proof. Before allowing it, we must be convinced, first, that our Lord, when He said, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church," intended to establish a visible headship over his people for all time; secondly, that St. Peter ever was, as a matter of fact, the bishop of the Church of Rome; [71/72] and, thirdly, that any such supremacy as the one claimed was recognized as attaching to the see of Rome in the early ages of Christianity.

To the claim of supremacy there was added by the Vatican Council, in the year 1870, the further claim of infallibility in matters of faith and morals. The wording of the decree is as follows: "We teach and define that it is a dogma divinely revealed that the Roman Pontiff, when he speaks *ex cathedra*--that is, when, in discharge of the office of pastor and doctor of all Christians, by virtue of his supreme apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine regarding faith or morals to be held by the universal Church--by the divine assistance promised him in blessed Peter, is possessed of that infallibility with which the divine Redeemer willed that his Church should be endowed for defining doctrine regarding faith or morals, and that, therefore, such definitions of the Roman Pontiff are irreformable of themselves, and not from the consent of the Church. But if any one, which may God avert, presume to contradict this our definition, let him be anathema."

The Episcopal Church braves this anathema without the slightest fear; she unhesitatingly contradicts the definition and rejects both the claim to supremacy and the claim to infallibility as fictions of which the primitive Catholic Church, whose constitution she is aiming to restore, knew nothing.

The second important ground of difference between the Churches is the doctrine of the Holy Communion. This was the question which vied in importance with that of the supremacy in the controversies of the English Reformation. The Roman Church teaches [72/73] that after the officiating priest has spoken the words of consecration at the altar, a conversion is made of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ, and that it is right to pay to the Christ so present the same supreme worship that is due to Almighty God. When, therefore, the priest holds up in a gilded frame before the gaze of the congregation the consecrated wafer, the people bow the head and bend the knee in adoration. Roman theologians themselves admit that if the wafer so held up were really what to the eye it seems to be, a piece of bread, the act of bowing down in reverence would be plain idolatry; but they teach that the eye is deceived, that the bread is bread no longer, but true Christ, and that, therefore, the act of worship is both justifiable and right. The Episcopal Church, on the other hand, holds that the consecrated bread and wine of the Holy Eucharist are bread and wine still, and, in the language of the Communion Office, takes pains to refer to them as such. Hence, the Episcopal Church accounts the worship of the host to be idolatrous worship, and as such she, of course, rejects it.

Another point of lesser importance in this connection is the mutilation of the sacrament by the denial of the cup to the laity. The Roman arguments in defence of this confessedly non-primitive usage are singularly weak and evasive. The Episcopal Church disallows all such novelties, and ministers the communion in both kinds as was originally ordained by Him who said, "This do in remembrance of me."

People sometimes think they have made a startling discovery when they find that the Communion Service [73/74] of the Book of Common Prayer has much in common with the Roman Missal. But, before drawing hasty inferences from this fact, it will be well to observe carefully just what those things are which the Book of Common Prayer omits. No better breakwater against Roman error in the matter of the Holy Eucharist exists than is found in the Communion Service of the Episcopal Church.

The next point of difference has to do with the kinds and degrees of devotion, and the objects to which worship ought to be paid. The Roman Church assorts worship, so to speak, into grades

and classes. First of all, there is the worship which is due to God in heaven, and to Christ as held up before the people in the Mass. This is the supreme worship, and they have a technical theological name for it, with which we need not burden our memories. Next to this comes the peculiar devotion due to the Blessed Virgin, the mother of our Lord, an intermediate variety of worship, less in degree than that owed to the Supreme Almighty One, and yet higher than the worship which is paid the saints. Another technical word is used to express this sort of adoration; we will not trouble ourselves with that. Again, there is prayer addressed to saints and angels, the messengers of God and the spirits of just men made perfect. This, in its turn, is designated by still another, to us, unfamiliar word. [Perhaps, after all, it may be as well to give the names: they are "latria," "hyperdulia," and "dulia."] Below all these in grade comes the sort of veneration due to images and relics, a reverential feeling alleged to be akin in kind, though of greater intensity, [74/75] to that with which we regard keepsakes and mementos of those whom we have loved. No Roman Catholic, no well-informed Roman Catholic, would find fault, I think, with this statement of the teaching of his Church upon the subject of worship. Ignorance of these distinctions often leads Protestants to make charges which are easily refuted. And yet how foolish to suppose that the mass of a population can possibly, when it comes to every-day practice, draw any such accurate boundary lines between their varieties of adoration! When we see a man spending five times as many hours of prayer before the shrine of Mary as he gives to the worship of Almighty God, we are not much comforted by the assurance that it is only "hyperdulia." The Episcopal Church knows nothing of all this fine-spun classification of prayer. She sweeps the whole complicated fabric away by recognizing only one Mediator between God and man, and only one sort of worship, the worship which the creature pays to the Creator.

The Episcopal Church honors and reveres the Blessed Virgin as the one highly favored, the model of gentle womanliness, the pattern of sweet and holy motherhood. But here she stops, esteeming it sacrilege to go one step further; yes, worse than sacrilege, to transfer to the human mother the attributes of Him who is both human and divine.

Neither does the Episcopal Church forget or disregard the saints, those blessed ones departed, who stand in the light of God's countenance, having entered into his rest. But it is one thing to recall with gratitude the good examples of those who have gone on before, and quite another thing to offer prayer to the departed [75/76] souls themselves. This last we cannot do so long as we remember a certain paragraph in the last chapter of the Bible, which reads thus:

"And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellow-servant and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God."

There is one more of these points of difference about which I ought to speak, and that is a matter rather of discipline than of doctrine. I refer to what is known as "The Tribunal of Penance," or, more popularly, as the Confessional. The Roman theology reckons Penance one of the seven sacraments, and divides it into four parts i namely, contrition, confession, absolution, and satisfaction. No Roman Catholic is allowed to receive the sacrament of the Holy Communion unless he has first received the sacrament of Penance. Time does not admit my either entering into the history or discussing the merits and demerits of Confession as a system. That the Confessional has been, and is to some extent, a means of ministering comfort and promoting genuine penitence for sin, there can be little doubt. That it is compassed around with

many and great dangers is also clear. The verdict of the Anglo-Saxon mind upon the institution as a whole has been decidedly unfavorable, and there is no feature of the whole Roman system more offensive to what we may call the-popular conscience of English-speaking communities than this.

The Episcopal Church recognizes no such sacrament as the sacrament of Penance, except to disallow it and [76/77] disown it. It is true that in recent years certain English Churchmen have introduced a modified form of the Confessional, and a few of their imitators upon this side of the water, a very few, have done the same. People ask, Why do not your authorities put a stop to it? The reason is easily given. The line between such confidential intercourse as ought to exist between pastor and people in matters spiritual--the line between this and formal confession, is such a shadowy and wavering one that any machinery of ecclesiastical legislation planned for the purpose of pulling up the tares would be only too likely to root out also the wheat with them. This much is probable, however, that were any clergyman of the Episcopal Church to attempt to enforce openly the Roman usage of making confession a prerequisite to communion, he would be called to account with exemplary promptness.

And now I must leave it to the reader's judgment to determine whether, in view of the number and the seriousness of the points of difference between the two Churches, the points of likeness are sufficient to prove the one to be a weak imitation of the other. The strength of the Episcopal Church lies in the fact that she possesses all, or almost all, of what is good and true in Rome, without being encumbered with what we cannot but account uncatholic accretions. Rome knows this, and there is nothing on earth she more cordially dislikes than Anglican religion. Infidelity she is always ready to meet, it offers so many opportunities of successful assault. Popular Protestantism she also cheerfully encounters and frequently discomfits in debate. But the Anglican walls have stood the [77/78] siege for three centuries, and never were the garrison in better spirits than to-day.

And this mention of a siege suggests what is, after all, the crying sin of Rome, her Inst of dominion. The spirit of the old Roman Empire, whose genius for organization she has inherited, breathes from every pore of her huge bulk. In the very tones of her music we seem to catch an echo of the tread of the legionaries marching to conquest. The dream of empire floats before her eyes continually, and a fascinating dream it is. Men can die brave deaths, and women live out patient lives of self-denying toil, with the great thought for ever in the background of their minds,--we, too, are aiding in the Church's subjugation of the world; ours is a portion of the joy of victory. Beside this figure of imperial make, this queen-conqueror, triple-crowned, marshalling her forces for attack, put now another picture. It is the figure of a woman, gentle-eyed and motherly, majestic in her bearing, but majestic with a dignity born rather of nature than of art; unbedizened with tinsel splendors, robed in simple white. She wears no jewelled tiara; she cannot frame the word Anathema; but benignity is written on her brow, and in her tongue is the law of kindness. There she stands, reaching out one hand to guide and one to bless. The first picture is that of the self-asserting Mistress of all Churches; the second, that of Holy Mother Church as Anglo-Saxon Christians love to think of her, pure, peaceable, and true, the Bride and Spouse of Christ.