

How the Reformation Came About by Hilaire Belloc

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I.—THE PROBLEM

I PROPOSE to approach in these pages an historical problem which has never yet been solved: The answer to the general question, "How and why did the Reformation happen?" The answer, could it be fully given, would be the solution of an historical problem which may be formulated as follows:

"What were the total causes (and in what proportion did they act) of that disruption in our civilization which took place between four hundred and three hundred years ago? How came our European unity to be destroyed?"

This problem, I say, has never been solved, and is in my judgment not fully to be solved by men; because it concerns one of those major spiritual phenomena the causes of which must include a number of factors outside our human and terrestrial experience. Heaven and Hell were at work. Nevertheless, the knowledge of at least the human factors at work can be increased, and (what is much more valuable) these factors can be put into the right order of importance. We can discover what historical events had what particular effects. We can correct the legends which have disfigured historical reality, and we can estimate the relative weight of each.

Yet this, I say, has never been done. There are libraries upon libraries of writing and discussion upon every aspect of the period and every detail of it; yet the mind of that inquirer who is most fitted to inquire, and to whom a reply is most necessary—I mean, the Catholic—remains quite unsatisfied.

To the anti-Catholic, whether he belong to the Protestant culture and have inherited its conceptions (even though he have lost its doctrine), or whether he be of the

Catholic culture, but an anti-Catholic opposed, as it were, from within to the religious side of his social traditions, the answer seems simple enough.

To the first, the man of Protestant culture, the process leading to the Reformation seems obvious. A somewhat barbaric state of mind, uncritical, merely imaginative, and docile, called "Catholicism" or "Mediaeval Religion" (of which he knows little, but which at any rate, he disliked and regards as irrational and in some ways inhuman), was discredited by the better minds in Europe (that is by people like himself) as knowledge and experience suddenly and rapidly expanded towards the end of the Middle Ages. Under this new enlightenment Catholicism was rejected as insufficient, as puerile, as cruel, as insulting to the reason—and so forth. It was, indeed, retained by some of the more cultivated; but this retention was due either to their cowardice or their routine. In part the continued practice of superstitions was due to racial inferiority; more often to the forceable action of persecuting governments which forbade inquiry and put out the growing light of knowledge.

To people in this attitude (which I need hardly say is enormously and fantastically unhistorical) the Reformation presents no problem at all. It was a natural sequence, like that whereby a people sunk into barbarism become civilized again by recovering the knowledge of their original culture.

Neither is there a problem apparent to your atheist or sceptical historians (until recently they have been much the most prominent) writing within the Catholic culture, notably in France.

To these men Catholicism seems a phase of thought present among their ancestry, when all the world

was indifferent to reason and experiment, and when critical examination of the past and of ideals was unknown. It lamely survives to-day—principally in women—through a mere adhesion to traditional and homely things. It has naturally disappeared under the effect of advancing knowledge, advancing intelligence, and an advancing critical faculty. The process is, with calm assurance, compared, in that particular world of anti-clerical historical work, to the growing up of an individual. When he was a child he believed in fairy-tales, but he has reached maturity, and he now laughs at the fairy-tales which he formerly entertained with such charming simplicity.

This kind of historical writer—until recently a typical French and Italian academic type, and still, on the whole, perhaps, the most common one in Catholic countries—has the great advantage of knowing what the Catholic Church is all about.

He does not write ignorant stuff, nor is he necessarily warped by hatred. Some, indeed, of his sort are spoiled by a spirit of mere antagonism, but the greater part—on account of their early memories, of their friendships, of the Catholic air about them, and of unbroken social traditions from the past—have, for at least some portion or another of the Catholic scheme, a real affection (much what a grown-up man would feel for the innocent illusions of his boyhood).

To them the Protestantism of the Reformation is ridiculous and intellectually contemptible—far lower than the Catholic past—and they despise the Protestant culture of to-day. Yet that the united Catholic scheme of Europe should have broken up in the sixteenth century seems to them inevitable; its loss they regard as an advantage to mankind, though they smile

at the odd (now ending) interval of Bible worship and the rest. Though, then, such Continental "anti-clericals" are far better fitted to deal with European historical problems than writers of Protestant culture (who are out of the main stream), yet they also find the problem easily solved—only because they do not know in what terms it should be stated.

It is to the Catholic (that is, to the man in the very heart of European tradition), to the man who knows fully what it was that was abandoned, to the man who can test, as it were, the quality of the loss involved, that the full problem appears.

He knows the balance, the satisfaction, the fullness of that which was rejected. How on earth came it ever to be rejected for such grotesque and petty aberrations as the various sects indulge in?

Thus, anyone who thinks Greek sculpture to be dull, barbaric stuff would see no problem in the neglect and destruction of it in the dark ages. The man who thinks it, though excellent as an attempt, inferior to modern work will equally think that he understands the later neglect of it and even its wanton destruction. But a man who knows what Greek sculpture is has a very different problem before him. He has to try to understand how a thing so manifestly excellent, satisfactory to our civilised sense, ennobling, and, as it were, part and parcel of our expression at its highest, could possibly have been left aside and, still worse, destroyed. The Catholic can easily understand how there should arise an indifference towards Catholic practice, or even a reaction of hatred against official Catholic action and individual Catholic authorities; but what remains for him a problem still unsolved is how that which was the very nature of Eu-

rope, and surely necessary to the European mind; that in which it had been nurtured and which was intimately itself, so that European and Catholic meant the same thing, so that "civilisation," "occidental," "Catholic," meant the same thing—should have what was, as it were, its own being utterly rooted out of it in certain regions, and an original, stable, character, happy because it was in tune with itself, transformed into a new, uneasy and unhappy thing which yet preferred to remain transformed. That is the problem; that is the difficulty.

To take the individual case. We all know of Catholics who lapse into indifference and who cease to practise. We all know of individuals—the cases are not very common—who upon coming across a bad member of the official Church, or a tyrannical or foolish action on the part of an official of the Church—or one that seems to them such—enter into a violent quarrel with strong Catholic discipline. That is understandable enough. But what is not normally understandable to a Catholic is that a person arriving at maturity in Catholic surroundings should develop a general distaste for all the Catholic atmosphere and social tradition. That, I say, hardly ever, if ever, happens to the individual. If it did, it would be like a loss of memory, or one of those strange phenomena which pathologists now and then discover in neurotic subjects.

Yet exactly that thing did happen to great groups of Europeans from three to four centuries ago, and what we have to try, in part at least, to explain is how so astonishing a revolution and loss of personality was made possible: and in so many places achieved. That is the problem. That is the question for which we have to try to find an answer.

(Part II, Next Week)

The Catholic and the Negro by Bishop Francis Haas

With respect to Catholics and race equality, Bishop Haas said: "It would seem appropriate on this occasion to take up two questions. The first is 'What is the Catholic position regarding Negroes?' and the second, 'What does that position require Catholics to do?' The first calls for a discussion of doctrine, the second for that of action."

Catholic reasons for interracial equality, Bishop Haas declared, run far deeper than those of a good American who finds his reasons in the nation's Constitution and the Declaration of Independence.

"It was into the human race that Jesus Christ was born Man," Bishop Haas reminded. "It was for the human race in its entirety—Caucasoid, Monogloid and Negroid—that He suffered and died and rose gloriously from the dead. And we may not forget that He prayed that the human race be one in Him, in order, as He Himself declared, that the world should have visible proof of His

divinity. Oneness through Him was to be the evidence that men could see that God has sent Him as His Divine Son."

Used carelessly and selfishly, Bishop Haas said, the term "race" has been employed to incite class hatred, exalt the national ego and even to promote war. The prelate declared it unnecessary "to spend any time on the widely held differences between Negroes and whites, such for example, as to blood constitution, body odor and natural gifts."

"Needless to say," he continued, "these supposed differences are completely without foundation. Sister Mary Ellen of Rosary College, Chicago, has examined them from a scientific standpoint in her splendid pamphlet, 'Racial Myths,' found them to be wholly without factual basis and rightly consigned them to the realms of imagination and prejudice."

Bishop Haas concluded that the idea of minority groups is directly in conflict with the concept of oneness in Christ and is essentially

pagan. He also concluded that in Catholic thinking there can be no such thing as isolationism, political or racial. The virtue on which the obligations rest that men as equals have toward one another, Bishop Haas said, is charity, the mother of justice.

"Justice, to be sure," the Bishop said, "has different forms: the justice binding a government to apportion burdens and privileges equitably to all its citizens, which is called distributive; the justice, binding each citizen in proportion to his ability, to discharge his duties to the entire body politic, which is so called social; and the justice binding the citizen to render to every other what is his, which is called commutative. But whatever form justice assumes, in Christian thinking it has its roots in charity of Him who taught; 'By this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.' This then is the Catholic doctrine on race equality and the duties it entails. It is the

answer to the question, 'What is the Catholic position regarding Negroes?'

Bishop Haas asserted that the question of what this position requires Catholics to do, goes without saying that it means not merely belief but a resort to action. There is need, Bishop Haas said, for many more conferences "on the racial problem in the Church and besides organized action, there is an urgent need for individual action by Catholics.

"Unfortunately," the prelate declared, "the number of Catholics is all too few who make it a matter of conscience to be fair and just and charitable to Negroes the same as to their other fellow citizens. Nevertheless there are such Catholics, both men and women, and some who have even immunized themselves against the ridicule and 'razzing' of shallow friends and acquaintances. They are the salt of the earth."

The Bishop recalled an instance of a Catholic man and his wife who refused to sign a petition in

their neighborhood binding home owners against selling their homes to Negroes and hereby received the sarcasm and abuse of their neighbors. This he said was "heroic action."

Bishop Haas declared that an un-Christian attitude toward Negroes is more prevalent among employes than it is among employers in the field of industry. He said that individual Catholics and non-Catholics should call on Federal and State governments to enact Fair Employment Practices legislation, which merely would prevent an employer from denying a man an opportunity to earn a livelihood or to improve himself because his skin is black or because he belongs to a minority group.

In conclusion, Bishop Haas declared: "What should Catholics do? What should all our people do? The Saviour answers: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart . . . And thy neighbor as thyself. Do this and thou shalt live.'"

Coming Next Week: Philip Murray in an Article on Labor