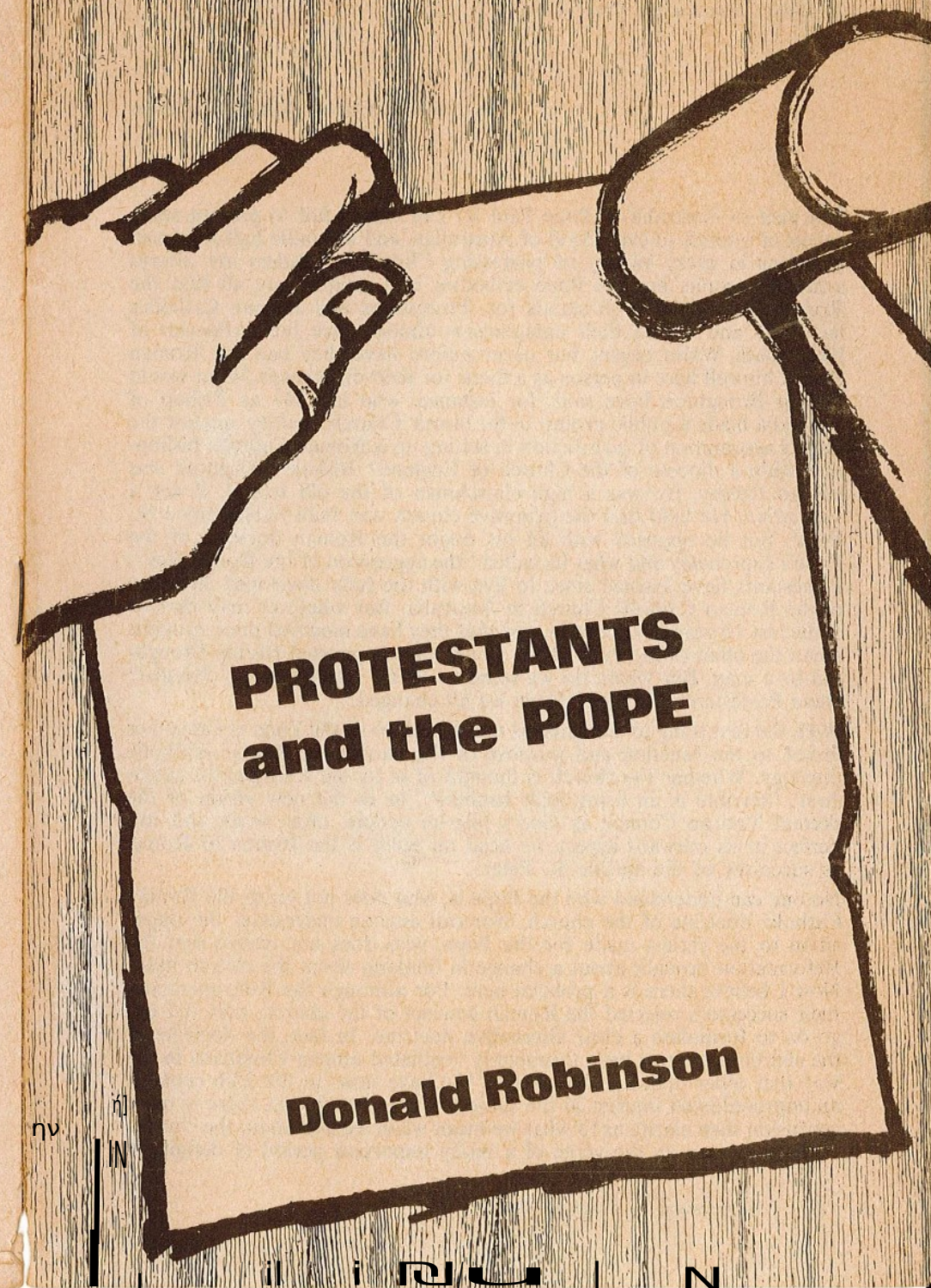


Protestant views of corporate worship. The service arranged jointly by the Roman Catholic Church and the Australian Council of Churches in Sydney this week well illustrates this difference. From the Roman Catholic side, it is not regarded as liturgical worship, and so it is permissible. For Protestants, Bible reading, common prayer, hymn singing and exhortation is worship as corporate and liturgical as any other form of worship. Roman Catholics cannot divorce their prayer for unity from their belief that God has revealed to them that the coping stone of such unity is the office of the Pope. To pray for such unity with the Pope himself present will be a very significant experience for them. Protestants, on the other hand, are divided as to the propriety of this service. Some are willing to overlook the anomaly of praying together for Christian unity while differing as to what they understand by unity. They are no doubt hopeful that God will provide a solution which perhaps neither side can at present envisage. Others think it is a false economy, even a disservice to truth, to join in this kind of prayer at present. Common prayer, according to Jesus himself, requires agreement as to what the parties are asking for, and this, especially where the Pope's presence is the sole occasion of the service, is simply not possible. Protestants are very confused here. Their lack of agreement on a doctrine of the church has caught them on the wrong foot when confronted by a Roman Catholic Church suddenly concerned with reunion and ecumenical relations more thoroughly and consistently than is any single Protestant denomination, or all of them altogether.

May I bring this talk to a close with a personal recollection. My first serious conversations with Roman Catholic scholars took place some 17 years ago and were due to the initiative and large charity of the late Dr. William Leonard of St. Patrick's College, Manly. It was a time when the mists had hardly begun to clear. But Dr. Leonard constantly urged us to begin where we were united, with our common love for the Bible. And this approach has indeed proved fruitful in the intervening years. It could be said that the most hopeful features in the documents of Vatican II are themselves due to the renewal of Biblical studies in the Church of Rome.

Now, if it is really possible that the Pope's office should become pastoral rather than jurisdictional, and if his pastoral ministry, in accordance with the New Testament, is based only on the discipline of Christ's word and not on coercive discipline, a new day may dawn. I can see nothing which would prevent Protestants from recognizing in the Bishop of Rome, as in other bishops, an office and ministry of openly proclaiming the truth of God; if you like, a prophetic office, in which he will declare the gospel and the apostolic word, to city and world as he may choose, and with whatever weight the antiquity of his See may lend him. The sons of the Reformation are bound in conscience to the Word of God and to that Word alone, but they will give their Amen if he speaks always according to that Word. Hereby, of course, I introduce the very basic question of Christian authority, and that is another subject. But I do not think we have by any means yet fully explored our common ground in the gospel and the scriptures, and if there be a way forward it will surely be along this path.





by the Rev. Canon Donald Robinson

The visit to Australia of Pope Paul VI can hardly fail to present some aspect of interest to every kind of Australian, and to kindle half-forgotten emotions in every variety of professing Christian. Leaders are always symbolic people, but the Pope embodies in a unique way all that the Roman Catholic Church stands for. Protestants and Roman Catholics have had and voiced their antagonisms almost since the settlement of New South Wales began; but never before have they had the Roman Pontiff himself here in person as a focus for their differences. What would Bishop Broughton have said, for instance, who in 1843 as Bishop of Australia made a public protest in St. James' Church, Sydney, against the Pope's assumption of jurisdiction in setting up a Roman Catholic bishopric within a diocese of the Church of England? Bishop Broughton was no lam Paisley. He was a high churchman of the old school, if not a Tractarian. He held that the primitive church was built indeed upon St. Peter. But he opposed with all his might the Roman doctrine of the Pope's supremacy and what he called "the aggression of the Roman See". Protestants have learned since to live with the fully developed structure of the Roman Catholic Church in Australia. But whatever may be true of the last 10 years it cannot be said that they have modified their opinions about the office of the Pope. They would have supported Bishop Broughton to a man. But where do we stand in 1970? Has the Pope changed? Have Protestants changed? Have we all changed?

Well, the first thing to recognize is that the office of the Pope is altogether linked to the function and purpose of the church, in Roman Catholic theology. Whether the church is thought of in its old triumphalist splendour, "terrible is an army with banners", or in the new vision of the Second Vatican Council as God's pilgrim people, often weak and imperfect in its outward aspect, its head on earth is the Bishop of Rome, as successor of the apostle St. Peter.

No one can understand who the Pope is, who does not grasp the Roman Catholic doctrine of the church. Nor can anyone understand the opposition to the claims made for the Pope, who does not realize that the Reformation brought about a change in thinking about the church itself. Now I believe there is a problem here. For although the Reformers and their successors rejected the Roman concept of the church, they did not go on to formulate a clear alternative doctrine. In fact, the doctrine of the church has never been thoroughly ventilated among Christians in the way that other doctrines have been. We have now, in the 20th century, an unprecedented interest in the subject of the church, but there is more confusion than clarity as to what we mean when we talk about the church. Perhaps we are on the verge of a really important period of definition.

"Whether that is soon or not, it may be useful to remember that arguments of the past 400 years about the Pope may well have remained fixed at a certain level simply because the way has not been clear to relate them adequately, as they ought to be related, to the question of the church itself."

However, at least until the eve of the Second Vatican Council, it was possible to define the papal claim, and the Protestant opposition to it, with devastating simplicity. The visible church of Christ on earth was simply the Roman Catholic Church, definable as those churches and Christians who were under the Pope's jurisdiction and rule. The famous papal bull, *Unam Sanctam*, of 1302 stated the doctrine of both church and Pope: "... there is one holy catholic and apostolic church, and ... Outside this church there is neither salvation nor remission of sins." The church is likened in the bull to Noah's ark, with its one helmsman and captain, Noah: everything not in the ark was destroyed in the waves. "Of this one and only church there is one body and one head, namely Christ, and Christ's vicar is Peter, and Peter's successor." Christ is to be understood as having committed all his sheep to Peter and his successors, not merely some of them, as the Greek Christians claimed. Moreover, "God had given Peter and his successors two swords, the spiritual and the temporal swords, so that the Popes had civil power over all men as well as spiritual power. Finally, there was the blunt assertion that "it is altogether necessary to salvation for every human creature to be subject to the Roman Pontiff."

The Reformation, both on the Continent and in England, was fundamentally a rejection of this concept of the church and also of the papal claim. When Martin Luther was involved in a disputation with the theologian John Eck at Leipzig in 1519, it became clear to him that the crux of his discontent with the ecclesiastical situation of his day was the claim of the Pope to supremacy. So when the Pope issued a bull excommunicating Luther for his views, Luther responded by publicly burning not only the bull but the Pope's decretal laws, since these were the means by which the authority of the Pope was exercised over the lives of the faithful. Pope Paul's visit to Australia in December, 1970, happens to coincide with the 450th anniversary of this event, which many would regard as the effective beginning of the Reformation.

In England, the Reformation followed its own distinctive course, but it began from the same point of rejection of papal jurisdiction and of the concept of the church which went with it. The fulcrum of the whole reform movement to follow was the proposition which exercised the king-dom of England in the mid-1530's: "that the Bishop of Rome has not any greater jurisdiction in England than any other foreign bishop." That was the acid test. Henry VIII made it a matter of treason to deny his own supremacy over the English Church. The men who were executed under those laws had no wish to be disloyal either to their king or their country. But they died because they believed that to deny their obedience to the Pope was to jeopardize their salvation. Such was the burden that the Roman doctrine laid upon them. Monsignor Philip Hughes, in his *History of the Reformation in England*, quotes the defence made by those who first came to trial. "The old obedience," they said, meaning their obedience to the Pope, "is to the salvation of man a necessity, and..."



this superiority of the Pope (is) a sure truth and manifest of the law of God, and instituted by Christ as necessary to the conservation of the spiritual unity of the mystical body of Christ." Despite the mixed motives of Henry VIII, the matter was regarded on all sides as a theological issue as well as a political one, and the scriptures were called in evidence. The papal supremacy was, and in fact remained, the only doctrinal issue to become a matter of life and death for Roman Catholics in England.

The issue became especially difficult after 1570 when the Pope excommunicated Queen Elizabeth and incited her subjects to dethrone her. Again, what from one point of view was treason condemned by the teaching of the New Testament, from another point of view was fidelity to a revealed dogma of the Catholic faith, namely the authority of the Pope.

But can we not now regard these old arguments as something to be forgotten? It is not as easy to do so as some people might think. No historical episode which shapes the future course of a great nation can be easily—or wisely—forgotten. Nor can we simply bury the arbitrations of the past: it is still possible to ask who may have been right? For churchmen, especially Roman Catholic churchmen, the concept of continuity in the church is more than mere succession of events. The particular episode we are thinking of has been kept alive in the Roman Catholic Church by a long process which—you may think it coincidence—has come to a widely publicised climax only last month, just 400 years after the Pope's excommunication of Elizabeth I. I refer to the canonizing by Pope Paul VI of 40 of these English martyrs. This canonization carries with it the fullest possible endorsement by the Pope and his Church of the stand taken by those whom the laws of England condemned to death for treason during the Reformation. They are not merely being honoured for brave men. They are being declared persons of special rectitude and sanctity. The Pope is reported to have expressed the hope that making these men saints "would help heal the 400 year old rift between the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches." It is hard for an Anglican to see the logic of the Pope's expectation. We all have enough common humanity these days to respect men who suffer for their beliefs, or who "remain faithful to the 'revealed truths' of their faith," which is how Pope Paul described the conduct of the 40 martyrs. But the so-called "revealed truth" for which they suffered was the papal claim of supremacy over the English Church, and the Church of England has come to regard this not as a revealed truth but as a grievous error. For the Pope, in 1970, to underline this claim to authority, by canonizing the men who died for it, can hardly be viewed by Anglicans as an ecumenical or reconciling gesture. On the contrary, it has the appearance of reviving the quarrel between the English Church and Rome in its original and most undisguised form. It is true that the Pope speaks very kindly of the Church of England in his address at the canonization, but his hope that the Roman Catholic Church will one day embrace the Church of England again in a "communion of rule" seems to take us back to where we started.

We must remind His Holiness that Protestants do not regard the Reformation as he does, as a "great wound inflicted upon God's Church", but as a liberation and a blessing which restored a truer experience of what the church really is. The first English Litany, issued in 1544, contained the petition "From the tyranny of the Bishop of Rome, and all

his detestable enormities. Good Lord, deliver us." Queen Elizabeth thought it prudent to drop this petition in 1559, as she did not want unnecessarily to offend those of her subjects who still adhered to Roman Catholic beliefs. But the issue of the Pope's authority remained. We have recalled that Pope Pius V excommunicated Elizabeth in 1570 and purported to depose her from her throne and to absolve her subjects from their allegiance to her. This was a practical demonstration of his claim to wield the temporal sword as well as the spiritual sword. Spain tried to act as the Pope's temporal arm to enforce his jurisdiction over Elizabeth. But the defeat of the Armada only strengthened the resolve of Englishmen to repudiate the Pope's claim. The 39 Articles of Religion, agreed on by the convocations of the Church of England in 1562, and subscribed to, to this day, by every clergyman of the Church of England and for that matter by every Anglican clergyman in Australia, asserts that "the Bishop of Rome hath no jurisdiction in this realm of England".

The Presbyterian churches have as their subordinate standard the Westminster Confession of Faith, which was drawn up by English divines in 1643. It states that "there is no other head of the Church but the Lord Jesus Christ; nor can the Pope of Rome in any sense be head thereof; but is that anti-Christ, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the Church against Christ, and all that is called God". Not many would fling these epithets at the Pope today; but then not many would understand what the Westminster divines meant by applying these titles from the epistles of St. Paul and St. John to the Pope. As they saw it, the function claimed for the Pope in regard to the church was a function which belonged only to Christ himself or to Christ working through His Holy Spirit. Christ had said, "I will not leave you orphans, I will come to you." They believed that this promise was fulfilled in the sending of the Holy Spirit, and that this left no room for any supposed succession of St. Peter to be Christ's vicar. "Anti-Christ" means, not "opposed to Christ" but "instead of Christ", and this was precisely what was claimed for the Pope in calling him vicar of Christ. This is the real heart of the theological objection to the papacy. The role assigned by the dogma to the Pope is a role which Christ has given to the Holy Spirit. The papal claim is not therefore a peripheral matter, and is certainly not merely a political thing: it touches the centre of the church's relation to her Lord.

We have been speaking of the 16th and 17th centuries, but has there been any modification in the way the papal role has been stated by the Roman Catholic Church? Let us come to more recent times. The first Vatican Council in 1870 passed a solemn anathema on anyone who denied that the power of the Roman Pontiff was ordinary and immediate over all churches and all Christians. The same Council of course went further and defined the doctrine of the infallibility of the Pope, making it a matter of faith. Successive Popes since then have continued to impress the claims of their office on Christian people. Pius IX said that true Christians afford exactly the same belief to the dogma of papal infallibility as they do to the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Pius XII in 1943 said in his encyclical *Mystici Corporis*: "Christ and his vicar constitute a single head . . . Thus they who think that they can hold to Christ, Head of the Church, without holding faithfully to his vicar on earth, are placed in dangerous error. If this visible head be taken away, and these visible



bonds of unity be broken, the mystic body of the Redeemer is so obscured and marred that the haven of eternal salvation can no longer be either discerned or reached!" Even Pope John XXIII in his encyclical *Aeterna Dei*, issued in November, 1961, at the very time the Assembly of the World Council of Churches was meeting at New Delhi, proceeded to affirm in no uncertain way the Roman Pontiff's primacy in teaching and government. And when the present Pope Paul VI visited the headquarters of the World Council of Churches at Geneva in June last year, he took the opportunity to assert in his reply to an address of welcome: "Our name is Peter."

So despite an immense amount of goodwill which has been generated between Roman Catholics and Protestants in recent years, there remains this huge obstacle to which the sons of the Reformation are as much opposed today as they have been for the past 450 years.

It should not be thought that this is merely a Protestant assessment of the situation. It is equally the Roman Catholic view. No one is clearer about this than Professor Hans Kung, who is one of the most progressive and (to a Protestant) congenial theologians among Roman Catholics. Not long after the Second Vatican Council had been called he offered this analysis: "The chief difficulty in the way of reunion," he said, "lies in the different concepts of the Church, and especially of the concrete organizational structure of the Church." Then coming closer to the matter: "Ultimately all questions about the concrete organizational structures of the Church are crystallized in the question of ecclesiastical office." And then finally: "The heart of the matter of ecclesiastical office, the great stone of stumbling, is the Petrine office. The question 'Do we need a Pope?' is the key question for reunion." Kung is right, and nothing that has happened at or since the Second Vatican Council has made this analysis obsolete. However closely the role of the Pope is related to the college of the bishops, however sincerely it is divested of its traditional pomp, however graciously it is portrayed as pastoral rather than governmental, we are divided here on a question which is really "What is the fundamental character of Christianity in this world?" We are immensely grateful for the kind of interlude which presents Roman Catholic discussion about the church makes possible, for we can now discuss these things together without duress on either side. Roman Catholics are at once more appreciative of the genuine faith and grace to be discerned in their Protestant friends, and more patient as to the outcome they desire. But the issue remains. Does God's will for the fullness of his church include the Bishop of Rome as chief pastor and ruler, whose voice is as the voice of Christ? "What is needed," says Hans Kung with his usual clarity, "is for Protestants to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd," and by "the Good Shepherd" he means the Pope. In these words, this most conciliatory writer uncovers the heart of our quarrel. The Pope has usurped the place of Christ, the only Good Shepherd. The immediate and ordinary rule of Christ in the hearts of his people through his word and his Holy Spirit, has been displaced by the immediate and ordinary rule of the Pope over all the faithful.

Is there any way forward for us? Only the ignorant would think there was any obvious way forward. Even more recently than his book

*The Council and Reunion* from which I have quoted, Professor Kung writes: "All Christians outside the Catholic Church, even when they are motivated by goodwill and the best intentions, decidedly reject a Petrine office." Indeed, as Kung had said earlier, "A negative answer to this question, Do we need a Pope? seems often to be the one and only thing which unites Protestants of completely different denominations."

Now since the Pope is no Pope apart from the Petrine office, our Protestants are in an awkward position this week. Can we welcome Pope Paul to our city? With respect and charity our response can only be: "We welcome you as Paul, but we cannot welcome you as Peter." We would even, in the spirit of the New Testament, appeal to Paul against Peter — for we read in the New Testament that Paul "withstood Peter to the face because he was to be blamed?" — when even Peter, in Antioch, proved guilty of laying obligations on Christians which he had no right to lay, and thus of misdirecting them as to the right road to the truth of the gospel.

Now I say this boldly because I believe that only the frankest exchange of views is of any value in present discussions; and I believe moreover, that my Roman Catholic friends know how to take this kind of approach. I say it also in full appreciation of the plea of Hans Kung that Protestants should show prudence and tolerance in the face of the present Roman Catholic re-assessment of the Petrine office. We must listen gladly to those who tell us that the Petrine office in the last resort should be concerned not with its rights, authority and power but with ministering to the brethren. Some Roman Catholic theologians regret that so many definitions with respect to the position of the Pope talk more in juridical than in biblical terms. But Protestants must be excused for wondering if there is any real hope of making such a transformation in view of all that stands so clearly defined in Roman doctrine. On the Protestant side, it is true, Professor Lindbeck, who was a Lutheran observer at the Second Vatican Council, speculates on how the Roman Church might conceivably at some future date so relegate the papacy to the periphery of the hierarchy of truth as to render it ineffectual as a barrier to unity. But he admits that an attempt to modify the concept of "Divine institution" is possibly only "in moments of speculative fancy", and he notes "the absence of any glimmer of insight in the documents of Vatican II on how to solve this ultimate issue."

But although effective relations between the Roman and other churches must be regarded as impossible where the papal office obstructs, this does not mean that no meaningful relations with Roman Catholics are possible. There is, admittedly, an element of ambiguity in all such relations, since Roman Catholics are bound to enter upon them with expectations as to their outcome which Protestants cannot share. But these pre-suppositions are at a minimum where fellowship is informal. There will be uncertainty and difference of opinion as to the possible extent of common worship. The Roman Catholics are clear that there is no possibility of joint liturgical worship. They have a certain advantage here, in that their distinction between liturgical and non-liturgical worship is one which does not correspond to anything in



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May I bring this talk to a close with a personal recollection. My first serious conversations with Roman Catholic scholars took place some 17 years ago and were due to the initiative and large charity of the late Dr. William Leonard of St. Patrick's College, Manly. It was a time when the mists had hardly begun to clear. But Dr. Leonard constantly urged us to begin where we were united, with our common love for the Bible. And this approach has indeed proved fruitful in the intervening years. It could be said that the most hopeful features in the documents of Vatican II are themselves due to the renewal of Biblical studies in the Church of Rome.

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