

TO AN INTENDING CONVERT--PART II

"If you love me you will keep my commandments. I shall ask the Father and he will give you another Advocate to be with you for ever, that Spirit that the world can never receive since it neither sees him nor knows him..."

John 14 : 15-17

The enquirer will profit by a study of the conversion (in 1955) of Anglican clergyman Hugh Ross Williamson dealt with in chapter 22 of Pearce's *Literary Converts*. Williamson was chairman of the BBC's Brains Trust at the time of his conversion. Pearce quotes the recollection of Williamson's daughter of what followed :

"[W]e lost the vicarage where we were living, we lost his income, we lost the rent-free accommodation. If it hadn't been for the fact that my mother was working we would have been in severe straits. But he thought at least I still have the Brains Trust money coming in. Very soon after... he was phoned up by Carleton Greene and told that he was no longer needed on the Brains Trust. He couldn't believe it and I remember him sitting in his study looking very dejected for a very long time."

Soon afterwards he received a phone call from Hugh Carleton Greene's wife who told him, off the record, that he had been removed from the Brains Trust because 'you present the wrong image now you are a Catholic'. "My father protested," [his daughter continued] "that it was 1955 not 1555 but Mrs Greene said that a trendy Anglican clergyman was fine but that a Catholic convert was not."

ABC (Anything But Catholic) is the wry mnemonic Catholics apply to the Protestant imperative. Any reason, any excuse, will do so long as one distances oneself from Catholicism, that is, *from the religion that Almighty God established on earth*. Williamson shook himself out of his depression and later passed this judgement on the step he had taken :

"I have been a Catholic less than six months and already it is difficult to understand why I did not submit thirty-eight years ago. The slowness with which I saw the truth ; the misconceptions, which were only partly the result of my heredity and upbringing, as to what the Christian Faith in fact was ; the individualism which persisted in pursuing a course for 'reunion' which I had worked out theoretically without a proper appreciation of the practical difficulties ; the laziness in scholarship, which allowed me to accept... the gross Protestant perversion of facts as 'historical truth' instead of going at the outset to the proper Catholic sources ; the comparative triviality of the issue of South India which finally forced a decision in my middle fifties when the major fact of the Reformation had been staring me in the face since my teens—all these, and more, are part of a *mea culpa* which found relief in the formal utterance demanded and made gladly on my reception: 'With a sincere heart and with unfeigned faith, I detest and abjure every error, heresy and sect opposed to the Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Church'... No one, I think, has been able to describe a conversion in terms which are objectively appropriate. As in the language of the mystics, analogies which give only a shadow of the substance have to be used. Chesterton, in his sonnet on his conversion, perhaps has suggested the reality of it most vividly when he speaks of—

...the one moment when I bowed my head
And the whole world turned over and came upright
—and how suddenly he found that the old controversies and arguments
...are less than dust to me
Because my name is Lazarus and I live..."

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Nothing demonstrates the gulf between Anglicanism and Catholicism so eloquently as the debate between C S Lewis and Dorothy L Sayers (*Literary Converts*, ch. 21) over the issue whether the priesthood was open to women. The two were, laudably, opposed to the thought, though Sayers betrayed some ambivalence. Despite the quality of their analyses of Christianity neither was a Catholic. At the root of their concern was a misunderstanding of the faith and the Church Christ had established and of the sacrament of Order He had instituted. The two thought the issue of the priesthood was one for human deliberation and decision. Implicit is the Anglican aberration—an aberration many modern, proto-Protestant, Catholics share—that the Church is a human institution and determined by men. It is not.

The Catholic faithful had never worried themselves over whether the priesthood was open to women in twenty centuries. Only in our own age, afflicted by the escape of the Protestant distortion from its bounds (an escape facilitated by the bishops of the Second Vatican Council), did Christ Our Lord resolve the issue for His Church. He did so through the ruling of Pope John Paul II in the Apostolic letter *Ordinatio sacerdotalis* issued on the Solemnity of Pentecost, 1994—the 22nd May of that year. The Pope's ruling was infallible for it fulfilled each of the pre-conditions laid down in *Pastor aeternus* (18th July 1870—DS 3074-5 ; D 1839-40), namely, that—

- i. in the course of his duty of pastor and teacher of all Christians ;
- ii. in accord with his supreme apostolic authority,
- iii. the Pope explains a doctrine of faith,
- iv. to be held by the universal Church.

Incidentally, it is not necessary—*pace* the views of various of the Church's theologians—for a pope to declare that he is teaching infallibly in order for him to do so. Here is the Latin text :

Romanum Pontificem, cum ex cathedra loquitur, id est, cum omnium Christianorum pastoris et doctoris munere fungens pro suprema sua Apostolica auctoritate doctrinam de fide vel moribus ab universa Ecclesia tenendam definit, per assistentiam divinam ipsi in beato Petro promissam, ea infallibilitate pollere, qua divinus Redemptor Ecclesiam suam in definienda doctrina de fide vel moribus instructam esse voluit; ideoque eiusmodi Romani Pontificis definitiones ex sese, non autem ex consensu Ecclesiae, irreformabiles esse.

The verb *definit* does *not* mean “he defines” ; it means “he sets the limits, or the boundaries, to”, and *cum ex cathedra loquitur* means “when he speaks with the authority of his supreme office”.

The Anglican 'priest' was never a priest of Jesus Christ, never able to confect the Blessed Eucharist. He was, as Spike Milligan might have said, only a life-sized cardboard replica. *Non dat quod non habet*. No Anglican bishop had the power to confer the sacrament of Order, so he had nothing to transmit. Moreover, as Leo XIII made clear in *Apostolicae curae* (13th September 1896), even if he had the power, the action by which the Anglican 'bishop' purported to ordain a priest lacked the necessary form and intention.

For the philosophically inclined, the root of the disorder in the Protestant imperative is the subjectivism inaugurated by Henry Tudor when he sought to make truth the product of human will, *his* human will, in the matter of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon. Marriage would be not what

God had ordained, but what Henry ordered. Henry's henchman, Thomas Cromwell, used parliament to pass 'laws' giving effect to Henry's will. Truth was no longer to be determined by reality—the identity between what is asserted and what is. Now the definition was reversed : truth was to be determined by human assertion. *That* is subjectivism.

The virus released from its pandora's box was extended by Henry's religious reformers to the liturgy, the Mass and the priesthood and the English parliament passed other 'laws' to enforce these aberrations. All in vain. Despite the best efforts of the Protestant reformers, the Mass and the priesthood remained what they were when Christ instituted them. Indeed, it is beyond human power to change them.

Marriage is of God, not of man. It is immutable. The priesthood and the Mass, too, are of God and immutable.

Michael Baker

15th May, 2016—*Solemnity of Pentecost, 22nd anniversary of Ordinatio sacerdotalis*