

CYPRIAN'S BACKGROUND

THE ROMAN provinces of North Africa, that nursery of barristers,¹ bred a religion which had the hardness as well as the clarity of a legal mind. Tertullian, its most brilliant early representative, was able to formulate precise technical terms for Latin theology; Augustine, its later and still more distinguished ornament, stamped the impress of his intellect on much of subsequent Western thought; but both the saint and the heretic added to their mental acumen a moral acerbity which can only be described as puritan. And if the fervour of African Christianity was, in Benson's² phrase, "not unlike that with which Ireland has enriched the English bar", it also had the sharp and severe cutting edge of a diamond. For its records³ begin with the cruel ecstasies of martyrdom, as a stubborn protest against even the best of what was secular; behind it lay the rabbinic legalism of a strong Jewish element, especially at Carthage, which moulded the temper of the first Christians in the locality; around it there flourished a native Phoenician cult of Saturn, whose central act had been the appeasement of an angry god by human sacrifice; and as the church in Africa developed, its language became exclusively Latin, with much Roman influence, and an almost complete absence of the more mellow tones of Greek philosophy.

Few external signs distinguished the African Christian from his pagan neighbour. The linen tunic, dalmatic and cloak⁴ which Cyprian wore at his martyrdom formed the common dress of a gentleman at that time. The church buildings were like ordinary houses, except perhaps in having an apse with raised seats for the clergy;⁵ and as in other parts of the empire, Christians were known⁶ to meet on occasion in their cemeteries. During the third century the size and number of congregations were increasing rapidly, so that by Cyprian's time there must have been about one hundred and fifty⁷ bishoprics. Of the bishops' names extremely few are Punic, and only a dozen seem to be non-Latin; hence it may be inferred that at least for its leaders, and probably also in its membership, the church drew heavily on colonial stock. Politically, North Africa was divided into three provinces,

Proconsularis, Numidia and Mauretania, but the church refused to be bound by these divisions. In all his controversies, Cyprian summoned the African episcopate to act together as a united whole, thereby following the conciliar practice of his predecessors, and, although all bishops were theoretically equal, the Bishop of Carthage⁸ in fact acted as primate and was popularly known as pope.

This thriving Christian community had enjoyed a long period of prosperity and peace when it was suddenly smitten, about the middle of the third century, by the twin scourge of plague and persecution. A type of malignant typhoid fever, comparable in some respects to that which attacked the Athens of Pericles, broke out in Ethiopia and Egypt during the year 250; by 252 it had reached Carthage and it continued to ravage the empire for a further twenty years. In many minds it inspired an almost morbid meditation of death, but Christians responded with aid to the victims, under the motto of *noblesse oblige*⁹ and without discrimination of either race or creed. Meanwhile, the persecution of Decius had touched the weak spots in an unprepared church; along with martyrs there were many apostates; and these lapsed Christians felt so deep a sense of ignominy that in several cities they came near to lynching¹⁰ the bishop whose absolution they had sought in vain.

Among such a people, severe, proud, practical, fervent and at times ferocious, Caecilius Cyprianus¹¹ was born at an early date¹² in the third century. He belonged to Africa Proconsularis, the most decidedly Roman of the provinces, and seems to have spent his life at Carthage where he practised as an orator and owned a pleasant house with gardens.¹³ But the easy, opulent life of a provincial capital began to dissatisfy him, despite the obvious integrity of his somewhat Stoic¹⁴ character. Becoming disillusioned with his former occupation,¹⁵ he turned to a study of the Bible¹⁶ and was then guided into the church by the venerable priest Caecilian. Cyprian's account of his conversion is less personal and vivid than the spiritual autobiography of Augustine, but it describes what is fundamentally the same type of Christian experience.

“After the stain of my former life”, he writes,¹⁷ “had been cleansed through the laver of regeneration, and a light from above poured into my heart now purged and pure, after the second birth with its draught of celestial spirit had refashioned me into a new man, then at once my doubts were miraculously resolved, doors opened, darkness became light, and what had formerly seemed difficult turned into an easy task. . . .”

Like Augustine, Cyprian belonged to the twice-born type of religious

CYPRIAN'S BACKGROUND

genius. Like him again, he combined catholic churchmanship with an evangelical experience of grace.

As a result of his conversion, Cyprian took three immediate steps. Although Caecilian his mentor had been a married man, he vowed himself to celibacy, for which his main reasons seem to have been disgust at contemporary sexual ethics¹⁸ coupled with a belief in the world's decline¹⁹ and approaching end. In the second place he sold his property²⁰ for the benefit of the poor, retaining or otherwise receiving back a portion which he subsequently administered²¹ as bishop, and throughout his Christian life he showed a marked concern for social welfare. In the third place, renouncing secular studies, he confined his reading for the future to the Bible and Tertullian.

The break with his classical past was not in fact complete, for although his works contain no citations of pagan literature, rhetorical training still coloured his pure Latinity; and according to a reliable tradition²² he had perfected the ancient system of shorthand known as Tironian Notes, by means of which he was able to record with great accuracy the views of the eighty-seven bishops²³ who attended his council on rebaptism in 256. It is, however, true that "he carried out with much more consistency than Jerome"²⁴ his self-denying ordinance against the pagan classics, a fact which must be borne in mind when tracing the sources of his particular ideas.

A man of Cyprian's background and ability was bound to be treated from the outset as an eminent member of the church. None the less it was surprisingly quick promotion when he became a bishop after having been a Christian for no more than two or three years. The date of his conversion is not precisely known, but it probably took place in 245²⁵ or 246;²⁶ his consecration as bishop must be dated²⁷ not earlier than June 248 nor later than April 15 (Easter Day) 249. From the start of his episcopate he had to face the opposition of disgruntled rival candidates, but although he had not himself desired office, he belonged, like Ambrose, to the ruling classes and demanded obedience with the imperious tenacity of a Roman magistrate. Within a matter of months the Decian persecution had been launched, to be continued with intermissions by that Emperor and his successors until Cyprian's death by martyrdom in 258.

The conflicts and trials of the period are reflected in a series of letters and treatises²⁸ which show the high ideals and sometimes unpractical conclusions of an intensely dedicated mind. Ardent love for his flock forms the keynote of all that Cyprian did and wrote.

THE CHURCHMANSHIP OF ST. CYPRIAN

“My very dear brothers”, he told²⁹ his people, “I suffer pain in not being able to come to you in person at this moment . . . constant sorrow and groaning . . . tears which flow day and night, because the bishop whom you elected with such love and ardour has not yet been permitted to greet you and hold to your embrace.”

But if the bishop was bound to the flock which had chosen him as pastor, he felt an even closer tie to God from whom his appointment ultimately derived. For Cyprian, as for Ignatius before him, the episcopate is a supernatural gift or charisma which places its holder under divine inspiration and control. Not only his preaching but also his administrative actions are inspired of God. Cyprian often receives special revelations which direct his conduct.³⁰ He has to ask his Lord whether he can grant absolution to an individual, and enjoys frequent dreams and visions which his opponents think absurd.³¹ And he concludes a letter to Pope Cornelius with the words:³²

The Lord, who deigns to choose and institute bishops in his church protects them once chosen and instituted by his will and assistance, controlling them through inspiration (*gubernanter inspirans*) and supporting them not only with strength to restrain the contumacy of the wicked but also with mildness to encourage the repentance of those who fall.

Early in his episcopate³³ he compiled a treatise in three volumes called the *Testimonia*. This was a collection of biblical passages used in catechesis, with an amplitude of quotation and a skill of arrangement which make it an outstanding example of the genre.³⁴ The attitude is one of deep reverence for scripture, but the method of using detached proof-texts does not indicate a very profound approach. Several characteristic themes make their appearance—a marked sacramental emphasis, abhorrence of schism and respect for the clergy, a long section on moral conduct, appeal to prophecy and the guidance of the Spirit—but in one respect the work shows traces of its early date among his writings: Cyprian makes no reference to priesthood in the Christian church, and when he mentions the priest of the new sacrifice³⁵ he thinks of Christ alone.

If Cyprian's piety was nourished on the Bible, he interpreted it by the light of his personal experience, and in terms of his constant study³⁶ of Tertullian. Thus, his beloved concept³⁷ of the church as mother doubtless had a biblical basis, although the classic text in Gal. 4: 26 is never quoted in his writings. It has been plausibly connected³⁸ with the new birth which he had himself experienced at his conversion. But

above all it was derived from Tertullian, who makes an exceptionally³⁹ frequent use of the idea. Tertullian finds it by implication in the doctrine of the Trinity, since the names Father and Son suggest the existence of a mother;⁴⁰ it is in the house of a mother that the newly baptized spread out their hands in prayer for the first time with their brethren;⁴¹ and "our lady mother the church" cares for the imprisoned martyrs.⁴² Further, God knew that man was to benefit from the sex of Mary and thereafter of the church,⁴³ for Christ's sleep in death resembled the sleep of Adam in that from his wounded side the church was shown forth as the true Eve or mother of the living.⁴⁴

While there can be no doubt of Cyprian's constant dependence on Tertullian, verbal parallels⁴⁵ are not numerous and the influence is shown in thought content rather than in literary style.⁴⁶ Thus, when Cyprian says⁴⁷ that heresies and schisms are of recent birth, abandoning the head and source of truth, he borrows a leading idea from Tertullian's *De praescriptione hereticorum*; but a subtle change from legalism to mysticism is effected by the more ecclesiastical context in which the Bishop of Carthage writes. One of his earliest productions as a Christian, the little treatise *Quod idola dii non sint*, makes use of Tertullian's Apology in its closing section and its ninth chapter⁴⁸ is inspired by the same author's *De testimonio animae*.

It has already been noted that Tertullian links his doctrine of the church with his doctrine of the Trinity. The same point can be illustrated from a number of metaphors which are carefully repeated by his disciple. *Matrix* is a term employed by Cyprian to denote the church as the womb or source of spiritual life. Thus, converted heretics return to the *veritas* and *matrix*, and travellers to Rome must recognize the true church from schismatic bodies by attaching themselves to the *matrix* and root of catholicity;⁴⁹ above all, those who separate from the *matrix* cannot live and breathe apart, but lose the substance of salvation.⁵⁰ The same term is applied by Tertullian both to God and to the church, when describing the original source of divine life and apostolic truth. Of God he writes:⁵¹

When a ray proceeds from the sun it is a portion from the whole, but because it is the sun's ray the sun will remain in it, and the substance is not separated but extended, as light kindled from light. The *matrix* of a substance remains whole and unimpaired, even if you derive from it several offshoots of its quality; in the same way, what emerges from God is God and the Son of God and both are one, and again in the same way, Spirit from Spirit, God from God, has made a numerical distinction of degree and not of essence,

THE CHURCHMANSHIP OF ST. CYPRIAN

being different in measure and proceeding but not separating from the *matrix*.

Of the church he writes⁵² that the apostolic preaching can only be verified from churches of apostolic foundation, and he continues:

If this is so, we must at once agree on the truth of all doctrine which conforms to those churches, the apostolic *matrices* and originals of the faith, since it indubitably holds what the churches received from the apostles, the apostles from Christ, and Christ from God.

Since Tertullian thus traces a succession running back through the apostles to God, he can readily describe the divine unity by a term which is also applicable to the church's fountainhead. Ecclesiology is expressed in the language of theology because the life of the church is a real extension of the life of God. Cyprian equally regards the church's unity in charity as a terrestrial image of the triune being of the Godhead writing⁵³ of "this unity which descends from the divine consistency and co-inheres with celestial mysteries . . . which if a man does not preserve, he loses life". In consequence he can transfer directly to the church a series of similitudes which Tertullian had employed in definition of the Trinity. In a well-known passage⁵⁴ Tertullian expands his earlier picture of a ray of sunlight by adding those of the stem from a root and of the river flowing from a spring (*solis radius, radice frutex, ontis fluvius*) to express distinction of persons in unity of substance:

For God emitted his Word, according to what the Paraclete also teaches, as the root sends forth a stem, the spring a river, and the sun a ray . . . every source is a parent (*omnis origo parens est*) and everything which proceeds from the source is an offspring . . . and yet the stem is not separate from the root, nor the river from the spring, nor the ray from the sun . . . nothing is divorced from the *matrix* from which it draws its peculiar attributes.

Cyprian takes⁵⁵ the same three similitudes, makes a slight change of language (*solis multi radii, rami arboris multi, de fonte uno rivi plurimi*), and uses them to illustrate the relation between the one church and its many local congregations:

The church is one but extends broadly into a multitude by increase of fertility, just as the sun has many rays but one light, a tree has many branches but one strength drawn from the clinging root, and while many streams flow from the spring . . . unity is preserved in the source (*unitas tamen servatur in origine*), . . . there is one head, one source, one mother abundant in fertile issue.

CYPRIAN'S BACKGROUND

If Cyprian figures above all as the apostle of church unity, it should be remembered that he based his doctrine on what Tertullian had taught him of the unity of God.

From this it follows that, although the apostles preached throughout the world and founded churches in every city, yet there is only one apostolic church of which each local cell is an offshoot; and Tertullian finds⁵⁶ the proof of their unity in the practice of inter-communion, brotherhood and mutual hospitality, governed by the single tradition of one and the same sacrament.

“There is only one baptism for us”, he writes,⁵⁷ “according to both the Lord’s gospel and the apostles’ letters, since there is one God and one baptism and one church in the heavenlies . . . but heretics have no share in our discipline, and the very absence of communion indicates that they are foreign . . . since they do not have the same God as us, nor one and the same Christ, and therefore not one baptism because it is not the same—when they do not have it lawfully, they doubtless do not have it at all.”

Cyprian’s denial of the validity of baptism ministered outside the church, which was to provide the occasion of his major conflict and to bring on him the anger of the Pope, was directly derived from the teaching on the one church which he had found in Tertullian.

Ecclesiastical unity must have a point of origin, since the apostolic church is founded on the apostles. Tertullian pertinently asks⁵⁸ heretical sects to indicate the source of their existence, and if they wish to link themselves with the apostolic age, to show an episcopal succession deriving its authority from some apostolic figure at the beginning of the line. When he wrote in these terms Tertullian was still a catholic, expressing the traditional orthodox apologetic, and after becoming a Montanist he would have placed more reliance on unmediated contact with the Spirit. But it is worth dwelling on this side of his theology because of its importance for the thought of Cyprian.

Both of the African writers employ the term *cathedra* to describe an apostolic see. Whereas Irenaeus, who anticipates their appeal to episcopal succession, prefers to speak of bishops occupying the place⁵⁹ of the apostles, Tertullian advises⁶⁰ his reader to scan those churches where the very chairs of the apostles (*cathedrae apostolorum*) still preside in their localities, and Cyprian⁶¹ makes pointed if perplexing use of the phrase *cathedra Petri*. Both had attended the rhetorical schools in which the teacher occupied a chair, and thus there may be some pagan background to the term; but one may surmise that it originated at Rome, where Hermas⁶² had beheld the church as an aged lady sitting on a

throne and the Muratorian fragment had described Bishop Pius as occupying the *cathedra* of the Roman Church.

To a Christian of North Africa Rome was bound to appear eminently apostolic, but Tertullian does not connect its status exclusively with Peter.

“If you are close to Italy”, he writes,⁶³ “you have Rome whence for us also authority is near at hand. How happy is that church on which the apostles poured their whole doctrine along with their own blood, where Peter imitates the Lord’s Passion and Paul is crowned with the same death as John.”

In addition to Paul’s emulation of the Baptist, he refers to the Apostle John being plunged at Rome into burning oil and subsequently banished, and continues by mentioning the doctrinal unanimity which extends to the African churches. Peter stands with the other apostles at the source of this authority, and the church’s unity is in fact symbolized by his position.

“Only Peter”, Tertullian writes,⁶⁴ “I find from the mention of his mother-in-law to have been a married man, but I assume him to have been the husband of one wife for the sake of the church which, built upon him, was to appoint every rank of its ministry from among monogamists.”

As the Rock, Peter received the love-token of a peculiar name,⁶⁵ derived from the biblical typology of Christ as the chief corner-stone; and it should further be remembered⁶⁶ that it was through Peter, who first received them, that the Lord bequeathed to the church the keys of heaven. However, when Maccarone contends⁶⁷ that such language implies an office over the church universal, it must be added that Tertullian nowhere regards Peter as the sole and unique holder of such an office.

Writing the *De praescriptione* in his catholic days, he had joined Paul and John with Peter as witnesses to the apostolicity of Rome. Later, as a Montanist, he extended the apostolic gift to include all spirit-filled Christians, and accused catholics of confining to the institutional church what belongs of right to each disciple of the Paraclete. The passage⁶⁸ is so significant for Tertullian’s ecclesiology that it deserves a fairly full quotation:

I am now investigating your (catholic) opinion and the reason why you usurp this right for the church. If it is because the Lord said to Peter, On this rock I will build my church, I have given you the keys of the heavenly kingdom, or, Whatever you bind or loose on earth will be bound or loosed in heaven, do you therefore claim that the power of loosing and binding has

CYPRIAN'S BACKGROUND

also descended to yourself, that is⁶⁹ to every church related to Peter? Who are you to overthrow and alter the Lord's clear intention of bestowing this gift on Peter personally? He says I will build my church on you and I will give the keys to you, not to the church, and, Whatever you loose or bind, not what they may loose or bind. . . . In Peter himself, that is to say through him, the church has been built and it is he who handled the key . . . finally he was the first to open the gate of the heavenly kingdom by Christian baptism . . . thus the power of loosing and binding transferred to Peter had no reference to the mortal sins of those who already were believers⁷⁰ . . . what then has this to do with any church, and particularly with yours who are unspiritual? For in view of Peter's person that power will suit spiritual men whether they be apostle or prophet. Indeed the very church is properly and originally⁷¹ the Spirit himself . . . and in this sense the church will certainly forgive sins, but it will be the church of the Spirit acting through a spiritual man, and not the church considered as an aggregate of bishops. For right and judgment belong to the Lord and not the servant, to God himself and not a priest.

Despite its authorship, this passage does not represent the extravagant ravings of a nonconformist.

Origen⁷² gives a similar if more restrained exegesis of the Petrine texts, remarking that the promise of the keys was given "to Peter and to every Peter", so that bishops are justified in using it as a basis for their claims, provided that their conduct is similar to that which first deserved the promise; and in criticism of a uniquely Petrine prerogative he asks the question, "But if you think that the whole church is built on Peter by himself alone, what have you to say of John and each of the apostles?"

To Cyprian, the visible church with its organization meant more than it did to Origen;⁷³ but what is remarkable in Tertullian's account is the way in which he combines a symbolic unity with a practical multiplicity. Notwithstanding his refusal to see in the Bishop of Rome, or indeed in any member of the episcopate, a continuing prerogative of office, he none the less attaches to Peter's person an immense significance for the structure of the church. At the outset Peter was the church, it was built upon him, and without him it could not have come into existence; yet his primacy means nothing more than a temporal priority, and his successors are not the holders of his office but those who share his spirit.

Cyprian adapted much of Tertullian's argument in expounding what he meant by the Petrine primacy, but he was able to apply it within an institutional conception of the church, because he regarded the episcopate as a charisma and thus identified bishops with Tertullian's

spiritual men. In order that this identification should be plausible, the bishop had to be endowed with the Spirit—if he fell from grace he ceased to be a bishop—and thus the agreement between Tertullian and Cyprian is even closer than might at first appear. Both writers regard ambition and disobedience as the main cause of schism;⁷⁴ both object⁷⁵ to the title *episcopus episcoporum* as presumptuous; and both use a form of conciliarism⁷⁶ to express the corporate nature of the church.

Since authority thus depends on a spiritual charisma, whether it be of office or of personal endowment, a continuing presence of the Spirit is essential to the church's existence. Tertullian the catholic⁷⁷ quoted Pentecost as its scriptural foundation, asking heretics who rejected the Book of Acts on what ground they could claim either a mission of the Spirit or the status of a church. Tertullian the Montanist⁷⁸ was so anxious to emphasize the church's spiritual nature that he interpreted 1 Cor. 5: 5 to mean that the sinner must be excommunicated in order that the *church's* spirit may be saved.

It is at this point that he differs from the thought of Cyprian. Where the latter relied on sacramental grace and the inspiration of the clergy, Tertullian came more and more to teach the priesthood of all believers. In his catholic days⁷⁹ he had accused the sects of interchanging clerical and lay functions:

Today a presbyter, tomorrow a layman, for even on the laity sacerdotal duties are imposed.

Yet even at this early date, while insisting on differences of rank he had none the less believed in a universal priesthood.

“We”, he wrote,⁸⁰ “are the true worshippers and the true priests, who pray in the Spirit and sacrifice our prayer in the Spirit as God's fitting and acceptable victim.”

And so he had not changed his fundamental outlook when, in a Montanist work of later date,⁸¹ he declared that second marriages are no more permissible for laity than clergy, since laymen too are priests (*sacerdotes*); that the difference between ordained and unordained is one of purely ecclesiastical arrangement; and that where there is no constituted bench of clergy, any Christian offers and baptizes and is a priest for himself alone.

Hence arose a minor difference of terminology. By Tertullian⁸² the bishop is described as “high priest” since every member of his flock has a sacerdotal character and he is the leader of a priestly people. By Cyprian, who may well be following a Roman tradition at this point,⁸³

a human high priest is never mentioned and in his developed conception of the church the bishop is the one and only priest.

While Tertullian distrusts⁸⁴ an indiscriminate exercise of the priestly power of absolution, he has such confidence in spiritual gifts that he would prefer an inspired layman to an official pope. One of his most revealing passages⁸⁵ describes the dear sister who received charismatic revelations during divine service. When the Spirit came upon her in ecstasy, she conversed with angels or even with the Lord, saw and heard mystic secrets, discerned men's hearts and issued prescriptions for the sick. Her revelations tended to substantiate the views of preachers whose teaching she approved; and thus, while Tertullian himself was discoursing about the corporeal nature of the soul, she beheld a spirit in bodily or substantial form, God and the apostle being both invoked to sponsor her veracity.

This account, however lurid and fanatical it may appear, is not entirely remote from the spiritual experience of Cyprian. He also⁸⁶ saw visions and dreamt dreams which guided him by direct communication with Christ; but in his case, and this is the distinctive feature, it was as a bishop that he received these gifts. Indeed, his official status may explain the one case in which he departed seriously from the moral teaching of his predecessor. Tertullian had entirely disapproved of flight in persecution, but he made an exception⁸⁷ for the peculiar circumstances of the apostles, to whom alone he thought that the instructions of Matt. 10: 23 applied. Did Cyprian justify his own flight because, in the circumstances peculiar to the third century, he identified⁸⁸ apostles with bishops? His flight was certainly not due to cowardice and he agreed with Tertullian⁸⁹ on the supreme bliss of martyrdom. In Cyprian's view, which here expresses the quintessence of African Christianity, spiritual charisma and sacerdotal character are both manifested to the full when the bishop offers himself in imitation of the Passion of his Lord.

"C'est jusque dans le martyre", as Colson⁹⁰ well puts it, "que le grand évêque de Carthage incarnera cet idéal."

But Cyprian believed that the martyr no less than the charismatic must be integrated into the corporate life of the Christian institution. He was determined⁹¹ to suffer in his episcopal city, surrounded by his own flock, in the dual role of God's spokesman to them and of their representative at the court of heaven. One is inevitably reminded of the attitude expressed by the great martyr-bishops of the second century,

Ignatius of Antioch and Polycarp of Smyrna. During his lifetime, Cyprian had encouraged by letter those who suffered for the name of Christ; after death, his memory continued to inspire the martyrs, as in the case of the little priest Marianus⁹² who, after horrible tortures, dreamt that the Bishop of Carthage appeared at the right hand of the divine Judge to strengthen him and lead him forward.

Thus Cyprian's biography written by Pontius became a model for subsequent saints' lives. And whenever she sings her *Te Deum*, the church quotes Cyprian, for it was his pen⁹³ which first described the glorious choir of the apostles, the band of triumphant prophets and the innumerable host of martyrs.

In preparation for the world's imminent end and final judgement, he believed that the church must be disciplined for the fight with Anti-Christ as an army under her appointed bishops. But stalwart churchman as he was, he appreciated the immense spiritual power which Montanism had attempted to embody. He sought to harness that power within the confines of institutional religion, and to combine two anti-thetic concepts of the church⁹⁴ through the medium of what can best be described as prophetic catholicity.⁹⁵ Too often the institution falls short of the ideal; frail earthen vessels are unable to contain the fervour of the Spirit; and the tension between priest and prophet reaches breaking point. Starting from an exalted pattern for the episcopate, Cyprian developed a false doctrine of the sacraments, because he confused personal spirituality with official status; seeking to promote sanctity among his colleagues, he came to deny the indelibility of orders and the objectivity of sacramental grace. But if the Donatists were justified in appealing to one aspect of his doctrine, their sectarianism was the direct opposite⁹⁶ of all that he held dear. And although in practice it may seem rent by contradictions, his teaching on the church and still more his love of unity retain an ecumenical significance. Seventy years ago, Benson⁹⁷ wrote words which still deserve attention:

He was tempted into the noble and alas! too fruitful error of arraying the visible church in attributes of the Church Invisible. But he said and showed how men might gravely dissent without one wound to peace. He spoke a watch-word of comprehension which, for lack of the charity which possessed him, we do not receive in the churches, although it must needs precede the Unity we dream of.