Correspondence

THE DOUBLE CURE

Sir,

By spending five pages reviewing my thirty-nine page booklet: *The Double Cure*, it seemed your intention to take it seriously. Further examination forced me regretfully to revise my judgment. I am happy that to those who read the booklet it will speak for itself; but for the sake of those who might only read the review I must try and detail at least some of the misquotation and misrepresentation in it—to detail all would take almost as many pages as the review.

You quote me as writing: "Confession . . . why is it called a sacrament? It is 'an outward and visible sign' . . . as are Baptism and Holy Communion." In fact I say it is *not*. I thought this might be a misprint, but the statement is repeated. I make it clear that I conceive of it as a sacrament (exactly as does Richard Baxter in 1658) only because it is "sacramental of Our Lord's own word of authority and power".

You say that I come very near to the position of the Roman Church "that the remission of mortal sin after Baptism is confined to sacramental penance (the confessional)". I wish you could tell me how I could say more clearly and explicitly what I write in the booklet: "What of sins you confess by yourself, or in the General Confession at Morning and Evening Prayer and Holy Communion? Are those sins forgiven? Certainly they are."

You say: "Any student of the development of the sacrament of penance knows that the practice of private confession as a regular feature of the Church's life developed very gradually and was comparatively late". You infer that I maintained otherwise. On the contrary I wrote: "This ancient system of *public* penance (the beginnings of which are clearly evident in the New Testament) gradually gave place to private confession in the presence of a priest".

You say I am unmindful of the "total effects of the practise in the Unreformed Church over a long period". On the contrary I wrote the booklet in part because these effects made me long for its reformed use. Too long has abuse abolished use.

You say that I am at fault in writing that the "great Reformers, Latimer and Cranmer, recommended those who would be helped by the sacrament to resort to it". There is not room here for a catena of the writings of the Anglican Reformers. I can only ask those interested in the truth of the matter to read *A History of the Cure of Souls*, by John T. McNeill, 1952, with particular reference to Chapter 10: "The Cure of Souls in the Anglican Communion". I cite this book not because it is the latest history of the subject, but because it is by an American Presbyterian who presumably has no axe to grind.

You say "he uses Roman Catholic arguments". I do not know to what this refers. Having said that the sacrament is *not* a sacrament of the Gospel as are Baptism and Holy Communion; having said it is entirely voluntary—"all may: some should: none must"—what Roman Catholic would agree with your reviewer?

My booklet was an eirenic attempt by someone who has come to value both the Catholic and Evangelical insights of the Anglican Church to meet what I believe to be a deep pastoral need. I am sad it has been reviewed with such partisanship. One of the reasons which made me write was some words of Leslie Weatherhead (*Psychology, Religion and Healing*, page 449) : " Members of all religious denominations ought to have at the hands of their minister all that is of value in the Roman Confessional. They ought to feel that they can pour out their troubles to one who will regard all that is said as an inviolable confidence, who, because of his training and experience, will be able to help them, and who, because of his office, will be able, with authority and confidence, to declare to people the fact of God's forgiveness, a fact which is, in my view, the most powerful psychotherapeutic idea in the world." Does this plea from a nonconformist minister and psychologist mean something to the reviewer, even if my booklet did not ?

Yours sincerely,

ERIC JAMES.

Trinity College, Cambridge.

Our reviewer, the Rev. Richard Coates, writes :

I am sorry that Mr. James should think that I have wilfully and consistently mis-quoted and mis-represented his booklet. I can only answer the one case which he cites. I have charged him with confusion in his theology because he calls Confession a Sacrament. His attempt to justify this status is found in the words from which I quote, and which I here give in full : " But why is it called a sacrament ? It is ' an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace '. It is not a ' Sacrament of the Gospel ' as are Baptism and Holy Communion, both instituted by Our Lord Himself, but it is ' Of the Gospel ' in a very real sense, for it brings each of us to the foot of Christ's Cross." It seems clear to me that he contends that there is an outward visible sign in Confession and that it is " of the Gospel " as are Baptism and Holy Communion, but yet in some different sense known only to Mr. James, and certainly not clear from his words. His attempt in other places to base the teaching of the Confessional on St. John xx. 22, 23 implies Dominical institution. The confusion he shows is similar to the difficulties which Roman Catholic theologians find themselves in when they seek to defend the sacramental status of Penance. If the words of Absolution are the outward sign in Penance then they cannot be the form of the Sacrament. How can words be a visible sign ? Also, presumably, the words of Absolution in Holy Communion or spoken from the pulpit, constitute the Sacrament of the Confessional. Where do we stop ? The necessary requirement in Mr. James' theory, as in the Roman, is that you should confess your sins to a priest. Is not that the real thing for which he pleads ?

I hope those who have access to the book which Mr. James recommends (*The History of the Cure of Souls*, by J. T. McNeill), to support the claim that the Reformers Latimer and Cranmer taught the benefit of the Confessional, will do as he may not have done, take particular

note of the dates of the utterances in Chapter 10, and also, if possible, read in full the very Evangelical Sermon of Latimer in 1552. The late Bishop Drury, in his book *Confession and Absolution*, quotes and examines all the references made by McNeill and places them accurately in their historical context.

The words of an old-fashioned High-Church Bishop of the last century (Bishop Wordsworth of Lincoln), not an evangelical partisan, may suffice to summarize what we Evangelicals believe, as to the historic position of our Church on this issue : " The Church of England rejects the terms ' Sacramental Penance ' and ' Sacramental Confession '. She affirms, in her Twenty-fifth Article, that ' Penance is not to be accounted a Sacrament of the Gospel '. And her divines have shown that the doctrine of the so-called Sacrament of Penance, as taught by the Church of Rome, is beset with contradictions, inasmuch as there is no consistency in her teaching as to what constitutes the form of the said Sacrament, and in what its matter consists, and inasmuch as that Church makes satisfaction to be a part of the Sacrament of Penance, and yet separates satisfaction from it, by pronouncing Absolution first, and by imposing works of satisfaction to be done afterwards; which is repugnant to the teaching of Scripture, and to the doctrine and practise of the primitive Church ".

RICHARD COATES.

Christ Church Vicarage, Weston-super-Mare.

MISSION TO OXFORD UNIVERSITY

Sir,

I should be very grateful to be allowed to make known to your readers the fact that from November 10th to 17th this year the Oxford Inter-Collegiate Christian Union is planning to hold a Mission to present the claims of Jesus Christ to the members of the university. The Rev. John Stott, of All Souls, Langham Place, has agreed to lead it, and he will be assisted by a team of missioners who will work in the colleges. There will be a series of nightly addresses, and at many smaller meetings throughout the week the Gospel will be presented.

We are very conscious that this Mission can bear no fruit unless the Holy Spirit is present and working both in the organization and, more important, in the hearts of non-Christian members of the university, and that to do this work He is graciously depending upon our believing intercessions. It is for the prayers of your readers that I would therefore appeal now. We are circulating a prayer card, and letters will be sent out from time to time to those who desire more specific information. I shall be very pleased to send these to any who would contact me.

Yours, etc.,

W. R. WESTON,

St. Edmund Hall, Oxford. *Mission Prayer Secretary.*