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## **Scots, Jansenists and the Chinese Rites: Failure in the Far East**

Review Author: Leo A. Cullum

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## SCOTS, JANSENISTS AND THE CHINESE RITES

**FAILURE IN THE FAR EAST.** Why and How the Breach between the Western World and China First Began. By Malcolm Hay. [1956] ix, 202pp.

This is another work based on The Blairs Papers by the author of *THE BLAIRS PAPERS, THE JESUITS AND THE POPISH PLOT, THE ENIGMA OF JAMES II*, etc. The Blairs Papers are the remnants of the archives of the Scots College formerly in Paris. At the time of the French Revolution they were removed to Blairs College, a Catholic seminary six miles from Aberdeen, Scotland. Malcolm Hay has been working for thirty years on this mass of disorganized material.

*FAILURE IN THE FAR EAST* tells the story of one William Leslie, a Scottish priest who lived in Rome for sixty-two years, from 1640 to 1702. For forty-three years he held the important position of archivist to the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. He wrote nearly every week to friends at the Scots College, Paris, and Hay has examined over a thousand of his letters, many of them running into several thousand words. The correspondence has of course been censored, and damaging items removed, but much remains that is of historical value.

William Leslie hated the Society of Jesus. He was hostile to religious in general, but against Jesuits in particular he charged that they were enemies of the secular clergy of Scotland, were opposing the appointment of a bishop there, and were exercising a pernicious influence on James II. Many of his own correspondents wrote to tell him that he was wrong on all counts, but his animosity was of too durable a quality to melt under the rays of truth. He was also tainted with Jansenism and was in constant intercourse with Jansenists at Rome, believing and contributing to their vicious propaganda against the Society.

He was a powerful influence in Rome. He wrote in 1697; "It is a strange paradox to say that the Pope, the Cardinals, and the Court of Rome, the supreme tribunals of the Church, give more credit to old fool dottled Will Leslie than to such a body as the Societie." We might be inclined to dismiss this as vanity were there not evidence from other sources. Walter Innes, who was being groomed to succeed him, and who was a temperate man, said that the pope and the cardinals had great confidence in Leslie, who was regarded in Rome as a man "that is altogether disinterested and speaks freely and sincerely what he thinks."

From 1685 to 1694 William's brother, Walter Leslie, a widower, was closely associated with him, and equalled him in hatred if not

in caution. Walter wrote: "My good fortune is that I am in a place where I can fight the whole company of St. Ignatius that are upon the earth." The place was the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith.

This Congregation, founded in 1622, had as its policy to take over from the Catholic powers control of the missions. To do this it was necessary to replace the bishops with vicars apostolic directly responsible to the Congregation, and to place the missionaries under the vicars. This policy naturally affected all the Religious, but the Jesuits were especially involved for several reasons. First of all the Congregation's missionaries and vicars were largely recruited from the Society of Foreign Missions of Paris, an institute at that time under Jansenist influence. Secondly, in China, a principal scene of the Congregation's action, the Jesuits were more numerous than other missionaries. Finally William Leslie implies that the Congregation itself was antecedently not in sympathy with the Society. He wrote: "Here in Rome when they [the Jesuits] are forced to compare before their [Rome's] tribunals, unless their cause is manifestly just, they are ever still condemned, as for the space of forty years I have observed." Leslie seems to mean that the Jesuits were guilty until proven innocent, and the "tribunal" about which he was best qualified to speak was the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith.

The work of the Jesuits in China was a departure from contemporary mission methods. They had won the favor of the Chinese court by learned services; they had sought to make acceptance of Catholicism easier by permitting certain national customs which they judged compatible with Christian belief and practice. This attempt at "adaptation" gave rise to the Chinese Rites question in which ultimately the Holy See passed judgement against the Society of Jesus.

It will readily be seen how these two facets of the Jesuit apostolate—influence at court and toleration of suspect practice—were seized upon by the Jansenists as new revelations of Jesuit ambition and lax morality. The Rites Controversy, whatever else it may have been, was an opportune club in the hands of the Society's enemies. And they used it to the full.

The controversy over the Chinese Rites lasted roughly from 1635 to 1742. The decisive ruling of the Holy See, which was merely repeated in subsequent decrees, was the confirmation of an order by Charles Maigrot, of the Paris Society of Foreign Missions, Vicar Apostolic of Fokien. In 1693 Maigrot forbade the Rites in his vicariate and sought confirmation from Rome in the same year. The Holy See referred the case to three Cardinals whose attitude to the Society caused a correspondent of Fénelon to write at the time that

the party of the Foreign Mission Society had already begun to cry victory. Around 1695 Leslie's correspondence too contains a jubilant note, inspired by the course events were taking and by his intimate knowledge of the Congregation's intentions with regard to Maigrot's order.

It is Hay's thesis that the condemnation of the Chinese Rites was the successful conclusion of a Jansenist plot, with William Leslie playing a leading role. "It is the story of a plot: a plot engineered by groups of clerical conspirators in Europe who waged relentless war against the Society of Jesus during two-thirds of the 17th century... The failure of the West in China was in fact the first triumph of Jansenism."

What are we to think of this thesis? Hay has not precisely revealed anything new in showing that powerful influences were at work other than zeal for purity of faith and worship. The Jesuit Castner in an audience with Clement XI, 11 September 1704, took the liberty to observe that many of their opponents were clearly more intent upon disgracing the Society than upon reforming the Chinese Rites. The Pope replied that this was also his conviction. A contemporary publication calls attention to the keenness manifested by heretics in the condemnation of the Rites, and to the satisfaction which "would be given to the Jansenists, the first accusers in the affair."

This much is clear and Hay has brought forth unexpected and powerful evidence to support it. But was that the reason for the condemnation? A study of the qualifiers to whom Maigrot's order was referred reveals them to be an impartial group. They were Serrano, general of the Augustinians, Filippo di S. Niccolò, ex-general of the Discalced Carmelites, and Varese, former commissary-general of the Franciscans. In fact the impartiality of this board so alarmed Charmot, the agent of Maigrot in Rome, that he sent the *quaesita* to Cardinal de Noailles of Paris to obtain a censure by the Sorbonne "to offset the authority of those qualifiers who might be favorable to the Jesuits."

In their opinions, Serrano agreed with Maigrot, Varese with the Jesuits, and di S. Niccolò cautiously thought that the Rites were *more probably* superstitious and that in such matters the safer course should be followed. The final decision against the Society was based on these votes. Until proof is produced to the contrary, we must believe that these men voted on the evidence and not under any untoward Jansenist influence.

The revelations of The Blairs Papers are not edifying and perhaps Hay has allowed his indignation to see a Jansenist behind every bush. Pastor says: "A satisfactory history of the dispute..."

has not yet been written." When it is, its author will certainly have to take into account the researches of FAILURE IN THE FAR EAST.

LEO A. CULLUM

## PREPARING FOR VATICAN COUNCIL II

THE GENERAL COUNCILS OF THE CHURCH. By John L. Murphy. Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1960, x-193 pp., \$3.50.

Pope John XXIII's announcement of the convocation of Vatican Council II has, *inter alia*, resulted in the publication of a number of works on the history of past ecumenical councils. The present book is one of these. Its author, Father John L. Murphy, teaches in the Department of Religion of the Catholic University of America. Readers of Father Murphy's previously published writings, THE LIVING CHRIST and THE MASS AND LITURGICAL REFORM, will expect that THE GENERAL COUNCILS will be a clear and competent study written for the general reader. They will not be disappointed.

After giving a brief summary of Catholic teaching on the ecumenical councils and their role in the life of the Church, Father Murphy takes us through the history of each of the councils, from Nicea to the first Vatican Council. Fourteen chapters give us straightforward accounts — the situation that called for the council, the people and issues involved, the course of the council itself, its outcome; these accounts are interestingly presented, but have little in the way of literary coloring. Regarding the book's general theme, we are told that "the single unifying element in all these chapters is the Spirit of Christ, who dwells always within His Mystical Body."

There are eight pages of illustrations — mainly papal portraits. (Incidentally, the illustration labelled "Council of Trent, 1545-1563" depicts the Sistine Chapel at Rome. Why? The Council's great events are associated with Trent's own *duomo* and Santa Maria Maggiore.) A nine-page index completes the work. One wishes Father Murphy had appended a select bibliography. We might note that a qualified Church historian, Dom Anselm Biggs, has (in WORSHIP, 34 [1960] 421) detailed some of the book's shortcomings "in the strictly historical field."

THE GENERAL COUNCILS will be of service especially as a sort of extended encyclopedia article, well-informed, informative and concisely written; it can be recommended as a good general introduction to the subject. This is, we believe, precisely what Father Murphy intended his book to be.

C. G. AREVALO