

THE IDEAL OF THE CHURCH

(A paper read by request to a gathering of Anglican clergymen; assembled to discuss the question of Reunion with the Church of Rome.)

LET me begin with an assumption. I assume that I am speaking to an audience, every member of which has much in common with me. Above all we have before us a common end. We have a common desire that all believers in Jesus Christ our Lord, the true Son of the true God, should be one, even as He and the Father are one. We have all an ambition, and it is more than a mere Utopian dream, to restore in Christendom what we recognise as having been severed, 'the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. One body and one Spirit: as we are called in one hope of our calling.'

Nevertheless, before I begin to say anything positive at all, I am conscious that there is a fundamental difference of outlook between many who kindly listen to me here and my colleagues and myself. Though in words we may seem to reach the same goal, we start from different standpoints. It is a difference, not so much of theological definitions as of philosophical first principles. We may profess to believe the same truths, we may express them in the same terms, and even in the same actions, yet, because of the different foundations on which we build them, they have not for us the same substance, or value, or solidity. Many, whether consciously or not, will not easily accept the external evidences, the objective truths, which to us, as to all Catholics, appear conclusive and convincing. To them truth is more subjective, more a matter of personal judgment, and personal interpretation, than it is to us; to them it is something that comes rather from within a man himself than from without. One side believes, on authority indeed, but on authority in so far as it is interpreted and approved by its own personal judgment; the other believes, on authority first, and its personal judgment confirms it. To the one the subjective comes first, the authority after; to the other authority comes first, the argument from its own understanding second. In discussing all

THE IDEAL OF THE CHURCH

differences between Christians, nay more, in discussing even those things in which we agree, it is necessary for me at least to bear this difference in mind. The mentality of Europe, outside the Roman Catholic Church, is no longer dominated by the dogmatism of a Luther or a Calvin; it is permeated by the subjectivism of Imanuel Kant and his successors.

Still let us begin by stating some fundamental truths which I venture to presume we all have in common. I think we all accept the moral obligation that there is on every man, if he is to fulfil his duty to his Creator and attain the end for which he has been made, of professing some kind of religion, of paying some kind of homage to God. We are agreed, moreover, that to help man to discover and worship Him the better, to know God and love Him as he ought, it is not repugnant to reason, indeed it is most reasonable, that God should in some way beyond that of ordinary nature and human experience make Himself known to man. In other words, we all admit the fittingness, from God's side, of supernatural revelation. I think we all go further and agree that the human race, in its present condition of ignorance and confusion, could not without some kind of revelation, some unerring guidance given to it from outside itself, know certainly, and without error, the full truth even of natural religion; in other words we believe that supernatural revelation of some kind, some kind of speaking to man by God, would seem to be a moral necessity if man is to live his life as a creature of God in any adequate way.

The fact that we believe that this revelation has been given to man is what we mean when we speak of the Christian faith. The Christian religion is not an evolved religion, whatever evolution may or may not have gone before it by way of preparation; in the fulness of time it was revealed by God to man. Jesus Christ, the true Son of God, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, came down upon this earth; while remaining truly God He became also truly Man; He died, and He rose again from the dead.

BLACKFRIARS

While on earth He revealed to men what He said He had learnt from His Father, what His Father had given to Him to make known; a knowledge of God, His Father and our Father, and a rule of life in accordance with that knowledge, which of himself man could never have attained. This, I assume, is what we all accept when we say that we are Christians, that we believe in the Christian religion, that we are believers in, and followers of, 'Jesus Christ, His only Son, Our Lord.'

But after this it is possible that we may part company. The Christian religion is one thing; is it the same thing as the Christian Church? We have those believers in Christ and His revelation who say that He revealed the one but did not establish the other; that beyond faith in Jesus Christ and His teaching, and adherence to Him by faith, there is no such thing as an organised Church coming from His hands. There are others who claim that He founded a Church, but not its constitution and nature; this, they tell us, so far as it exists at all, is entirely the creation of man. Others again will say that Christ gave us a Church indeed, but only in its leaders as a body, in its Apostles and its bishops, without any subordination or subjection of one to another; these alone, when taken together, are the rightful successors of Jesus Christ, their united voice, and no other, is His voice. Lastly there are those who would agree that Christ founded a Church, but that His Church was rather mystical and hidden than real and visible. They would agree with the first of these classes and say that all who believe in Jesus Christ and are baptised are members of the Church. They would tend to agree with the second class, and see in the external constitution of any of the so-called churches only a human effort to preserve what Christ has given; not in itself an absolute essential, only a means, which may have one form to-day and another to-morrow, one manifestation in one country, another in another.

On the other side let me try to state my case; or rather not mine, for I share it with three hundred million others,

THE IDEAL OF THE CHURCH

who have all derived it from one source. In the short time given to me I cannot, and I think I am not asked, to do more; I am not able here to give my reasons for the belief that is in me.

First, then, we believe that Jesus Christ Our Lord, when He spoke of His Church, meant a definite religious society, as definite as the synagogue from which he distinctly separated it. This distinct and definite society was to be the recipient of His doctrine; by its means that doctrine was to be preserved and propagated.

Secondly, we believe that Jesus Christ Our Lord conferred on the College of the Apostles, as the bond or basis of this society, the prerogative of infallibility in handing down His doctrine, in all things concerning faith, and in all things concerning morals.

Thirdly, we believe that Jesus Christ Our Lord conferred on this same Apostolic College the authority to rule the society, His Church; that is to say, they received from Him full legislative, judicial, and coercive power.

Fourthly, we believe that this twofold authority of teaching infallibly and of ruling the Church, was granted, not merely to the Apostles as private individuals, but to their office, and to their successors in that office, to the end of time.

And fifthly, we believe that the successors of the Apostles, in regard to their authoritative powers of teaching and ruling, are, by right divine, the duly elected and lawfully consecrated college of the bishops of the Church.

I now go further. We believe that Jesus Christ Our Lord conferred on Peter, chosen from among the other Apostles, the primacy, not of dignity only, but of actual jurisdiction; that is, he received the fullest power to teach and to rule the universal Church. When he spoke as such, his voice was the voice of Christ Himself. He was in the full sense the Vicar of Christ upon earth.

Again we believe that this primacy of authority and jurisdiction over the universal Church was conferred, not merely on Peter as an individual, but on his office, and

BLACKFRIARS

therefore on all his successors who were to hold that office, by right divine. We believe that the successors of Peter in the primacy are the Roman pontiffs, and that therefore to them, as to him, belongs the supreme authority, both to teach and to rule. There is no other authority in the world that dreams of making such a claim; nevertheless, granting the foundation, the succession must follow.

In this way, by this means, and under God by no other means, has the Church of Christ Our Lord stood out in the past against all efforts to destroy her, as a visible, united society, which historians can plainly see; by this means does she stand out to-day, not materially only, but formally and truly, more manifest than is now any single nation. She is visible to all as a city on a hill. On this account can we say, without a moment's doubt or hesitation, that the Church of Christ, with Him in His Vicar at its Head, founded on the apostles, will never fail. What is made by man will fail with man; what is from God, and lives with His life, is everlasting. Not only will she endure to the end of time, but she will endure essentially the same as she is to-day, and as she has been from the beginning. The Church of Jesus Christ is a complete society, an independent society, depending on no human or temporal power, confined to no one place or time or generation or circumstance. And this Church of Christ, we venture to assert, is seen, and has always been seen, in the Church of Rome, and in no other. She alone has consistently maintained that position through the ages and has suffered for it; she maintains and suffers for it to-day.

We come now to test the ideal Church of Jesus Christ by what are familiarly known to us as the four visible marks or characteristics that must belong to her; the marks given in the Creed: *Credo in unam, sanctam, catholicam et apostolicam ecclesiam*. If the Church is what we believe her to be, the one, infallible foundation of Christ, the Son of God, then must she always possess that unity and stability which He the Omnipotent gave to her and assured to her. She must be one, not in spirit only, not in soul only,

THE IDEAL OF THE CHURCH

not only in what individual members may believe in their hearts; she must also be one externally and visibly, one for all the world to see, one for all the world to handle. She must be one within, all her members agreeing in one faith; one without, all her members under one government; she must be one as a society, as an organism with its life from within, not as an organisation, brought together by artificial means, by any contrivance or convention of man. The Roman Church, and the Roman Church alone, possesses this unity of faith, and rule, and living worship. By many she is censured for this unbreaking unity; she is called intolerant, uncompromising, exclusive, but the unity within her is not seriously denied. To all the world the Church of Rome stands out as consistently one, in belief, in rule, in practice.

Next, in the true Church of Christ, if she is in reality the successor of the apostles, if she is what she is in virtue of succeeding to their office, there must be found the same powers as those of the apostles, the same mission, and the same fulfilment of it. Her mission will not ever have begun as a new thing, founded by any individual, it will have existed from the first; it will not merely depend on the zeal of any individual, however much zeal may have furthered it. She will be able to show that her mission has been handed down from the apostolic age; her shepherds formally, specifically, authoritatively endowed with power to teach and to rule derived from the apostles themselves. That claim the Church of Rome, and the Church of Rome alone, vindicates for herself; if any others claim it, they can claim it only through her, as her foundation, her children. She has been accused of arrogance for making that claim; so was her Founder before. She has been accused of making herself akin to God, being only human: she bears the charge made against her Lord, that while He was but man He made Himself equal to God, calling God His Father. She speaks as Jesus spoke, because He bids her; as the apostles spoke, because she is one with them, and can do no otherwise. She commands as they commanded,

BLACKFRIARS

no more, no less. She confers power in their name, and in the name of Him who gave it to her; she decides when and how far that power shall be used. If her own children use it, at the altar, in the confessional, it may only be with her express sanction, as the guardian of the apostolic treasure; should they use it without her sanction they incur censure. By what sanction do those claim to use so sacred a power, who act only on their own authority?

Again the true Church of Christ must be truly Catholic, truly universal. She must spread herself everywhere, she must bear not even a name which confines her in any one place or people. She must be all to all, open to all; she must have within her neither Jew nor Gentile, neither bond nor free; the rich man and the poor, the educated and the ignorant, are the same to her. She must be ever progressive, in the sense that the Apostles understood the term. Like a living tree she must grow; death will no more have dominion over her. At the same time, while she is universal, she must remain one and unchanged. She will not compromise, she will not surrender one tittle of the truth she holds, she will not modify her teaching to adapt herself to one people or another, she will not look for words that may contain two meanings for the sake of making a false friendship, she will not sacrifice unity for universality, for then she would not be universal. The Church of Rome, and the Church of Rome alone, is universal in this sense. How often has she been told that if she would yield a little she would have whole nations, even continents, at her feet! To-day how often she is called intransigent, unwilling to come down from her seven hills, to meet seekers after her half-way! If she would condescend a little here, a little there, she could conquer the world. But, like the apostles, she 'must obey God rather than man'; if she yielded unity for universality, she would not be the Catholic Church of Jesus Christ. She would be but one of those organisations made by human hands which for ever spring up about her.

Lastly the Church of Jesus Christ must be a holy Church. She must offer to her children the ideals, and the means

THE IDEAL OF THE CHURCH

of holiness, which have been given to her by her Founder. She must not say that other times require other standards; she must not alter them, no matter how much the world about her may call for re-adjustment. The Church of Jesus Christ must be marked by its effects, not of learning only, not of material prosperity only, nor of comfort and what is called progress, for these things belong wholly to this earth and, for our purpose, are neither here nor there. But there must be seen in her the fruits of holiness, sanctity eminent and supernatural, alike in the learned and the ignorant, in prosperity and failure, in comfort and in distress. This, again, the Church of Rome possesses, and, in its fullest sense, the Church of Rome alone. Her history is bright with a galaxy of saints, from Peter and Paul to Thérèse of Lisieux. Under her influence the social order has been lifted up; she has taught to a barbaric world humility, chastity, and love; she has held up for man's veneration models of self-renunciation and sacrifice; never for the sake of a passing social problem has she yielded to the clamour of a self-indulgent world, sacrificed purity of life, lowered the standard of morals, public and private.

Let us not forget that the sanctity revealed by Jesus Christ is more than that of mere nature. He Himself said that our standard must be higher than that of the heathen, higher even than that of the scribes and Pharisees; its model was to be the perfection of our Father who is in heaven. If Christian revelation can teach us no more than the pagan world taught before it, or than the neo-pagan world teaches around it, of what use has the Incarnation been to us at all? Break from the Church, and immediately we descend to natural standards; we descend to the level of 'a sound mind in a sound body,' and no more. But that is not the standard set before us by Christ our Lord; He reaches far beyond it, He would have us chastise the body, not pamper it; face our problems, social and other, not succumb to them; conquer them by renunciation, not by yielding to a self-indulgence which can only end, as it has always ended, in the suicide of the race. There are

BLACKFRIARS

other heresies, besides those of faith; there are moral heresies as well, and the Church that teaches morals which have never been the morals of the Church of Jesus Christ, declares herself formally heretical, on whatever ground that teaching has been based. There is progress in the development of teaching in the Church, there is never contradiction; the faith or the morals of one generation cannot contradict the faiths or the morals of another. The progress which involves the denial of all that has gone before, even of its very first principles, is not the progress which can claim unity with the past, succession from the apostles, universal teaching to the world, holiness of life. Whether it is human progress must surely be questioned: it is certainly not divine. 'The wages of sin is death; but the grace of God life everlasting, in Christ Jesus our Lord.'

Let us now try to sum up our Ideal of a Church, or rather our Ideal of *the* Church, for in our hearts we all know there can be only one. Jesus Christ Our Lord founded only one Church; when those who came after Him taught and ruled it, as they would recognise no difference of race or status, so they would tolerate no free-thinker, however orthodox, no maker of schism, however zealous. They would insist that all should be of one mind, and this was to come wholly and only from obedience to one ordinance; it was not to come from mutual agreements, much less from mutual concessions. Building upon them we could make our definition thus, a definition which at once includes the Church of the Apostles and our own:

'The Church, the one and only Church, is the union in one visible society of men upon this earth, professing the same faith, partaking of the same sacraments, under the authority and rule or jurisdiction of the same lawfully appointed pastors, and especially of the one chief pastor, the successor, the representative, the vicegerent of Him Who is the Head of all.'

It is a society animated by one same life, by one same soul; not a convention between parts, not an organisation

THE IDEAL OF THE CHURCH

brought together, and kept together, by human, artificial means, but an organism living by a life within it, and eternally manifest, as a living body, for all the world to see. It is an organism, a body, with head and members, with a voice to speak even as Jesus spoke, and a hand to rule even as Jesus ruled. A trunk without a head is not a body, much less a living body; a mouth that cannot speak is dead.

The Church is a society of men united in the profession of the same Christian faith. A Church that does not profess the same uniform faith is no Church of Jesus Christ; there is a contradiction in the very terms. A union of opposites, or of those who believe opposites, can be no union. It is an external assembly, a convention and no more, the inner union of the living creature, with one mind, one heart, one soul, does not exist. The Church of Jesus Christ, if she is worthy of her origin, her name, her supernatural existence, is and must be a union of the same living faith, and with living authority to preserve it; a society which has no such power, which cannot eject from itself false doctrine, the seeds of its own corruption, is surely not the everlasting Church of God.

The Church of Christ is a society of men united by the bond of the same sacraments. What those sacraments mean to them all her members know, all define alike. Who shall give those sacraments, who shall receive them, the Church herself shall say: 'Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed also in heaven.' The priest may have the power, but he shall use it only under due authority; the recipient may seek the rite, but he shall receive it only under due conditions. So has the Church always guarded, faithfully preserved, those visible signs and media of grace which were given to her by Jesus Christ Himself; in these above all things else she has kept the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

This, then, is the Ideal of the Church as the Catholic sees it. It is an ideal, yet it is also real; because He who founded it was able to accomplish His own appointed task.

BLACKFRIARS

It does not depend on you or me, or on any individual, or any combination of individuals; it depends on its Founder, Jesus Christ Our Lord. Individuals may fail, the Church will always go on. It is not evolved from the inner consciousness, or even the inner belief, of anyone; it comes from Him. I am a Catholic, not merely because I believe all that the Catholic Church teaches, but because, by his favour, I have been engrafted into Him, His true living Body, and live by His life. And my faith comes not from myself, it is not of my own making; it has come to me from His infallible teaching, and, apart from any understanding of my own, I accept it as such. ' Faith cometh by learning,' not by mere thought; it is an act of the will, more than of the understanding; reasonable more than of reason. It has come from without, and has taken root within. Jesus Christ has spoken, the Way, the Truth, and the Life; and we know and have believed that He is the Christ, the Son of the living God. He knows and I do not; His conclusions are certain, mine can seldom be. I believe, not in myself, but in Jesus Christ, and in His one, holy, Catholic and apostolic Church, manifested here on earth in herself, manifested, perhaps not less, by contrast with those who are separated from her, to be manifested yet more in eternity, in all her perfection.

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