

## THE CHURCH AND ITS MINISTRY.

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TO deal adequately with a subject like this would necessitate the compilation of a large book and not a short paper of about twenty minutes' duration. I take it, however, that the intended scope of this paper is a short statement of the nature and essentials of the Church and its ministry in special relation to the prominent and pressing problem of Christian Reunion and inter-communion.

I have first of all to make a small apology or explanation. It would have been practically impossible for me to have got together these rather elementary and familiar thoughts on this subject (by which I hope to stir up your minds by way of remembrance), during what has been an exceptionally heavy term, just ended, had I not trenched largely on what I had previously thought out and put together in my little book on "Ministerial Commission." I have therefore not hesitated to use arguments and extracts from that freely.

Let me say at once that I shall deal with this question, as I feel sure you would wish me to do, on the Catholic principle, asserted by our Church, of an *appeal to the teaching of the Word of God*, illustrated, as this Appeal is, in the practice and teaching of the Primitive Church.

There is little doubt that in the intention of its Founder the Christian Society or Church was designed to be a *World-wide Fellowship*. It is also true to say that to-day if this Divine Catholic Society is to be properly effective in the World, it must be a *vitally UNITED Fellowship*. This has recently been concisely expressed by Mr. Basil Mathews: "To get a world-wide voice, to exercise a world influence, the Christian forces must share a world fellowship."<sup>1</sup> This is practically translating into modern language Our Lord's Prayer, "That they may be one—that the *world* may believe that Thou didst send Me" (John xvii. 21). How then are we to define the membership and extent of this World-wide Fellowship—the Catholic Church? I think we may shortly define it in a sentence, as "*all those who BELIEVE in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.*" But this does not carry us far enough, because we then want to know how we are to distinguish such as a Visible Society of "believers." For an answer to this question we must at once turn to the origins of the Church in the New Testament. Although I shall have a word to say later concerning the invisible aspect of the Church, for practical purposes we can only deal with a *visible* Society, and such a Visible Fellowship must have some outward signs or marks or conditions of membership just as every secular

<sup>1</sup> *Roads to the City of God*, p. 100.

society has. In the New Testament we may set forth these distinguishing marks under three heads :

(1) Baptism into the name of the Trinity, according to the command of Christ.

(2) The Breaking of bread and the Prayers.

(3) Profession of Apostolic doctrine.

Or to put it more concisely, the only essential conditions of membership in the early Christian Society were repentance and faith in the Risen Christ, of which the outward rite of Baptism was the witness, while the Breaking of Bread, in remembrance of His death and Passion, was the special ritual and the common symbolical bond of union.

We may safely say that wherever these conditions obtained in the New Testament times, *there* was a true branch of the Christian Fellowship, which was destined to be world-wide. Certainly there is little doubt, from a study of the New Testament and the early Christian centuries, that only those who had evidenced their belief in Christ as Saviour and Lord, by accepting the separating rite of Baptism, were regarded as members of the Visible Christian Fellowship. I am bound to confess that I do not see how it is possible to-day, on true Catholic principles, to regard unbaptized people, however sincere may be their profession of Faith in Christ, as members of the Universal Visible Church of Christ. For the practical purpose of the Visible Christian Society, Baptism is the necessary determining mark of membership. Other "notes" or marks may be devised, such as signing a roll of membership, or wearing a special uniform, but they cannot be accepted, because they are not divinely ordered or Scriptural; and thus they are, even if unintentionally, a breach of true Catholic order and orthodoxy. But this is not to say that the outward rite of Baptism is always essential to salvation. Such a statement could not be justified from the general teaching of the New Testament. For instance, St. John tells us that those "who *believe* on the name of the Son of God" "may know they have eternal life" (1 John v. 13). But it does mean that Baptism is practically essential for membership in the Visible Church, and that those Christians who neglect it can only be regarded as belonging to that indeterminate, and, therefore, to that extent, "invisible," Society or Church of believers, which our post-Communion Prayer describes as the "blessed company of all faithful people"—"the mystical Body of Christ."

I would like to say here that the term "invisible" Church, so frequently ridiculed, is not only implied by the language of our Liturgy and Articles (XIX and XXVI), but is also a strictly Scriptural deduction. For in the New Testament the baptism *by water* is only the attestation *to man* of the presumed essential inward baptism of "the Spirit," by which all true believers are made members of the "one Body" (1 Cor. xii. 13). And this "one Body" must have an *invisible* aspect, since only God can truly know those who have "the Spirit of Christ," and are therefore "His" (Rom. viii. 7). The one Catholic Church therefore, viewed in its *invisible* aspect,

consists, as St. Paul says, of "the whole family in heaven and earth" (Ephes. iii. 15). In its *visible* aspect it embraces all baptized Christians, but many of these may not belong to Christ's true Body for "they are not all Israel which are of Israel" (Rom. ix. 6). Hooker, you will recall, emphasized this important distinction in his insistent differentiation of the "true and mingled body of Christ," while Thomas Rogers (Archbishop Bancroft's chaplain) puts it most clearly when he describes the "invisible" members of the Church, as all the elect in heaven and on earth, who are invisible because "their faith and conscience toward God is not perfectly known to us." And he calls the "visible" members, those "both for and against God," who "have made no manifest or open rebellion against the gospel of Christ."<sup>1</sup> Luther also regarded the Church under the two aspects of "visible" and "invisible," and Dean Field makes a similar careful distinction, "We say there is a visible and invisible Church, not meaning to make two distinct churches, but to distinguish the divers considerations of the same church, which though it be visible in respect of the profession of supernatural verities revealed in Christ . . . yet in respect of those most precious effects and happy benefits of saving grace, wherein only the elect do communicate, it is invisible, known only to God" (*On the Church*, Bk. I, ch. X, p. 31).

But important as this distinction is, in considering the Universal Christian Fellowship to-day, we can only deal with its *visible* aspect, and the chief thing to notice is that the Visible Church now differs from that in New Testament times not even mainly in the fact that it is "made up of many communions, and organized in various modes," but especially because these different societies have often *no fellowship with each other*, and alas! in fact sometimes excommunicate one another.

In Apostolic times *the unity of the Visible Christian Society was apparent and real* since a corporate life was maintained by the *fullest fellowship* between all societies of believers who acknowledged the "One Lord, the one Faith, and the one Baptism" (Ephes. iv. 3-7). All the Christians claimed fellowship with all "who in every place called upon the name of Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. i. 2). "The whole Society was in fact a brotherhood based on the one hope of salvation through the one Lord."<sup>2</sup> But we should remember that the ties which connected the various societies of Christians were *spiritual*. There was *very little outward unity of organization* between the different local Churches. On a different plane the link which bound them together was similar to that uniting the various sections of the British Empire to-day—a spiritual bond arising from a common honour of, and allegiance to, one visible or supreme Head. It was the "One Lord, one Faith, and one Baptism" which bound them together. As Professor Gwatkin says, "even during the second century every Church was independent of the rest and free to serve Christ in its own way, if only it did serve Christ" (*E.C.H.*, I., 301).

<sup>1</sup> *Catholic Doctrine of the Church of England*, pp. 164-5.

<sup>2</sup> *Ministerial Commission*, p. 83.

It is also important to remember what Bishop Headlam has reminded us of, that "the Universal Church or ecclesia was not formed out of Churches but out of individual Christians, a person was not made by Baptism a member of the local Church, but of the Church of God" (*Doct. of the Church*, p. 78). To-day also, strictly speaking, the Universal Church is formed from all the *baptized* Christians, but where we differ from Apostolic and primitive times, is that this sign of membership does not now, as it did then, constitute a common right to union and brotherhood, exemplified by the common participation in the one distinctive sacred Feast. It is this *marred* and broken Fellowship which is the scandal and shame of Christianity to-day, and which we are bound, as disciples of the One Lord, to do all we can to restore. And may I say here that it is because the Catholic Church originated and developed in this way, that it seems to be seriously mis-stating and confusing the problem of Christian Unity to lay down an unqualified assertion that "the Catholic Church in England consists of all the baptized in England," explained by the further statement that "the Church of England is the Catholic Church in England *and none other is.*" If both these statements are correct then we have no problem of Christian Reunion to solve in England, since there can be no other Christian Society of baptized to unite with, and the English non-episcopal ministries are in effect, if not in intention, excluded as ministries of the Catholic Church, since they are certainly not "ministries" of the Church of England. But on the other hand, while it is correct to state that the section or branch of the Catholic Church in England is comprised of all the baptized Christians, it is simply a denial of plain facts to declare that all *these* Christians belong to or acknowledge the authority and discipline of the visible Society called the "Church of England." It may be legally correct to say that every baptized Christian has a potential right to membership in the National Church, but we must not forget that he also has a clear legal right to neglect or renounce that membership and join in full communion with another Christian Society differently organized. This right was given him by the Toleration Act, which Lord Chief Justice Mansfield declared, in a legal Judgment (in the eighteenth century), had given Nonconformity an "established" position in England. Baptized members of legally established orthodox Free Churches are therefore, by the fact of their baptism, equally members of the Catholic Church with Anglicans. It is not therefore, I venture to suggest, so much the fact of two or more differently organized churches in one district, country or city, which contradicts Apostolic standards, since there may well have been two distinct societies or "churches" of believers meeting in different "houses" in one city, in the early days. The type of worship also may well have differed slightly, and the organization in those times was not apparently identical everywhere. One Society was governed by a Council of elders, another church by an Apostolic delegate like Timothy or Titus, while yet another had a sort of President or bishop like St. James at Jerusalem. But the crucial

point was that there was the fullest *fellowship* between these various Societies. Because they all professed the "Apostolic doctrine," their members would, when, like the itinerant prophets, they were visiting another Society, naturally join in "the Breaking of Bread and the Prayers"—the common bond of union and fellowship. *The Church then*, though scattered in different countries and amongst different races, *was one*, and this unity was outward and *visible* and the marks of the Fellowship depended not on uniformity of worship, government or Order, but on *Faith*.

And this leads me to say a word on the **MINISTRY** of the Church. A careful study of the New Testament, and especially of the Pastoral Epistles, abundantly proves that the unity and grace of the Christian Fellowship was not dependent on any definite or prescribed form of Ministry. In fact there is scarcely a trace of *Ministry*, in the exclusive or technical sense, in the New Testament. All believers were "ministers," and although they received "diversities of gifts," "the manifestation of the Spirit was given to every man for the common profit" (1 Cor. xii. 7). Each set himself "to minister to the saints" (1 Cor. xvi. 15) as a "good steward" of the special gift or grace which he had received. There was no modern essential distinction between the "layman" and the "priest," and when the body of believers found it necessary normally to delegate certain functions to special officers, the Christian presbyter or elder was never regarded as inheriting the functions of the Jewish priesthood.

Again, there is nothing to indicate or even to suggest that the "Breaking of Bread" was always presided over by an Apostle or a Prophet or even by a presbyter or bishop. Setting apart or "ordination" to a function of ministry was, when conferred, usually performed by these officers, or also by Teachers, but even the outward symbolical act of laying on of hands was not universally observed (see Acts i. 26, xii. 2 and xiv. 23).

Churches, like that at Antioch, were apparently founded possessing distinctive officers, without any Apostolic commission or connection. The mark of their genuineness or orthodoxy was simply that the members possessed "the grace of God" (Acts xi. 23). Barnabas accepted this necessary qualification as sufficient. In fact the all-important thing to notice in the ministry of Apostolic days is the *call*—the realized "gift of Christ" (Ephes. iv. 7), and not the official recognition or confirmation of it, whatever form this might take.

We may safely say that the much later theory—that an Apostolic episcopal Ministry was *essential* to the unity of the Catholic Society, finds no support whatever from New Testament teaching or practice. How then are we to explain the emphasis placed on episcopacy by such early Fathers as Ignatius and Irenæus? In a sentence, we might reply that in the experience and development of the Church episcopal government was found to be the best and safest method not only of shepherding and guiding the Church, but also of preserving Apostolic teaching. The Epistle of Clement of

Rome furnishes us with the most natural explanation or suggestion of a prudential government of this character. The "other approved men" whom Clement declares "the Apostles appointed," would be the presbyters or bishops in the churches, who were naturally the best taught in Apostolic traditions and practices, and therefore the best exponents of the Apostolic Gospel and doctrine. When by the exigency of circumstances monarchical episcopacy developed, the chief presbyter, now called bishop, was naturally regarded and appealed to as the guardian of the Apostolic Faith. It is surely in this way that Irenæus appeals to a succession of bishops as a guarantee of orthodoxy, against Gnostic claims; not because of any special grace vouchsafed to them for the purpose at their ordination, but because being in historical official connection with the Apostles, they would be the most likely faithfully to have preserved Apostolic Truth. As Tertullian expressed it, "We have communion with the Apostolic churches because we have no *doctrine* differing from them."<sup>1</sup> The test of orthodoxy was in fact *doctrine*, and not a particular Apostolic *Ministry*. Tertullian makes this point quite clear, when he says, "By this test the heretics shall be tried by those churches, which although they can produce *no apostle or disciple of the apostles as their author*, as being of much later origin, and such indeed are daily formed, yet agreeing *in the same faith*, are considered as not less Apostolical on account of the consanguinity of *doctrine*."<sup>2</sup> Or as Jerome similarly expressed it a little later, "The Church does not depend upon walls but upon the truth. The Church is there where the *true faith is*."

We should also remember that this appeal to bishops as the guardians of orthodoxy was rendered necessary because the Church as a body had not yet formulated its summary of Apostolic teaching, which the rise of heresy soon after necessitated. We may say therefore that the *Creeeds*—these summaries of Apostolic Faith—now supersede the function of the bishop as the correct interpreter of Catholic teaching. It follows that on the *New Testament* principles of "The Church and its Ministry," every existing branch of the Christian Society, whatever its form of Ministry, can easily be tested as to its orthodoxy (and thus as to its claim to be a part of the Universal Fellowship), by its acceptance of the *Catholic Creeeds of the Church*. But this rule should not be interpreted as condoning or justifying every schism from historic Catholic Churches, started on trifling or frivolous grounds, but simply as a safe and sufficient principle, to guide us in the presence of our existing divisions, as to what are the *essentials* with regard to the Church and the Ministry for restoring the broken Fellowship of Christendom. What we have to deal with to-day are not outworn and indefensible theories, but the fact of well organized and historic orthodox Christian Societies, whose saintly members testify abundantly to their vital connection with the living Head of the One Church by the real "fruits of the Spirit," evidenced in their lives, but who yet are

<sup>1</sup> *De Præscriptione Hereticorum*, ch. xxi. p. 207.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

separated by artificial and unnatural barriers from real and corporate fellowship with other members of the Catholic Church. Brethren, those who possess the "One Spirit" and "confess Christ's Holy Name" *ought and must live in visible unity and fellowship*. And to restore this proper and primitive condition of Church life is the most urgent and pressing problem for Christians to-day.

In our own Communion we have made a hopeful and promising start towards this goal, not only by the historic "Lambeth Appeal," but by the official statement issued in July 1923 by the Anglican representatives of a Joint Conference on the "Status of the existing Free Church Ministry." This frank declaration definitely asserted that "ministries which imply a sincere intention to preach Christ's Word and administer the Sacraments as Christ has ordained, and to which authority so to do has been solemnly given by the Church concerned, are real ministries of Christ's Word and Sacraments in the Universal Church." Such a statement is certainly true to primitive and Scriptural standards. The Anglican representatives, however, practically modified this frank admission by adding that the rule requiring episcopal Ordination laid down in the "Preface to the Ordinal," "embodies principles to which the Anglican Church has *throughout its history* adhered," and therefore must continue to require. But, as the Free Church leaders pertinently replied, such a statement is *historically incorrect*, and certainly a Church which received in the seventeenth century non-episcopal ministers from foreign Reformed Churches, without losing its Catholic character and position, can, if it so wills, practically recognize similar non-episcopal ministries in the twentieth century. We cannot believe that in the sincere and earnest quest for Unity such an artificial, non-scriptural, non-*historical* barrier will be long suffered to bar the way to the visible restoration of the broken Fellowship between different branches of Reformed Christendom. We at least should do our utmost to avert such an unnecessary and unjustifiable delay.

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