

THE TASK OF THE LIVING CHURCH¹

THE sublime fact of being members of the essentially *living* Church, bestowed upon us in Holy Baptism, implies a *task* with regard to our people. The Living World-Church wills, through us her living members, to build our German people into a living Church. There is very little sense to *start* by drawing up magnificent plans for the re-conquering of the de-christianized populations for the Church, although it goes without saying that this re-conquest remains an important task to be accomplished by us. But in order to achieve it successfully, another task is even more important, viz., the total christianization of those who are still living in the Living Church. Re-christianization of the estranged population is only possible by means of total christianization of the Christian community itself. In conferring together as to the method of building up our contemporary German people into a Living Church, ways and means will have to be discussed, and in the first place, how to make each one of us into a Living Member of the Church.

By far the most important element in this personal transformation into a Living Church will be the Life-preservation and the Life-intensification by means of the Holy Eucharist.

It is important that we should be realists in our policy. The *real* man as he is, and as each one of us knows him by experience, is subject to a perplexing dualism. In him the old man, Adam, lives according to his corrupt nature—in him, too, Christ lives according to His Divine Nature. Thus, we are in practice a perpetual contradiction. Life rises against Life, the life of nature against the life of Grace. If, therefore, the Life of Grace is not cultivated systematically, the life of our corrupt nature, of necessity, gains the upper hand. Then the image of man looks thus: in his mind he is rationalist, in his will egotist.

It seems to me that here lies the point where the reform

¹ The second part of an address to German Catholic university men.

will have to set in. In academical circles, much rationalism, much intellectual pride is rampant. This infatuation with our intellect and its reasoning prevents a living faith from growing up in the soul. This kind of intellectualism is, moreover, inaccessible and hostile to discussion. For, very often, the intellect has no desire for disputation because it is lacking interest in the truths of Faith. And if it is still interested, it does not *listen* to Faith, but criticizes. But where Faith is absent, logically, life by and according to Faith is absent also. And where there is no life of Faith, Faith itself has no chance. Faith is excluded, and therefore the valuation of Life according to the truths of Faith is wanting. In consequence we have two attitudes: one a pronounced lack of interest in the Church and her intentions, and the other a continual leaning towards the doctrines and world-philosophies diametrically opposed to the Church. In practice, this produces the Catholic who no longer understands his Church, who shakes his head at ecclesiastical decisions, who cannot comprehend how the Church takes up such and such an attitude towards such and such a problem of the day: who, on occasion, may even feel scandalized at the Church and her character of absolutism. Such a Catholic is more in tune with time and its fleeting ideas than with the Church and her eternal truths. Thus, the Catholic ceases to be "Living Church." He has lost the "sense" of the Church. Such a rationalistic attitude is to be discountenanced by the intellectuals of the new Catholic Germany, at any cost. The only means of counteracting this tendency is union with Christ in the Holy Eucharist. For he who receives Christ experiences a mysterious transformation into Christ, by means of the Eucharist; and in consequence Christ's Life becomes *his* life, Christ's thought becomes his thought: and this is Faith, to think what Christ thinks, and *because* Christ thinks it. The genesis of a living Faith is this: it always begins with love; a living faith in someone always begins with the love of Him. It is love which creates a living faith, for faith lives only by love. When, therefore, in the Holy Eucharist, the physical union between Christ and the

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Christian takes place, regularly, consciously, and with requisite attitude of soul, then the glowing flame of the Holy Spirit of Love leaps across from Christ to the Christ-united soul—the oneness of life becomes the oneness of love. The transformation of the loving Christian into the Beloved Christ takes place, and thereby the soul is made to see and believe. Faith becomes as much a matter of course as reasoned thinking. Faith becomes a joy. The way is open to a life of Faith. The living Christian grows at the table of the Eucharist, and his faith is so vivid that already from a distance he distinguishes ideas and organizations that are in opposition to the Church. To be “Living Church” means, above all things, to feel and think with the Church in a vivid manner—to prefer the Church before all else because one lives the Church—one realizes oneself to *be* Church. Two things are very much to be deplored in our land and these things must be abolished. There is, first of all, the fact that our Catholic compatriots approve of attitudes obviously hostile to the Church with the same naturalness as our non-Catholic countrymen. And, secondly, the fact that we Catholics seem scarcely capable of achieving a united front which would carry into the people our own religious thought. Living members of the Church ought, at all costs, to be able to found a through-and-through Catholic press. However, all these plans and, above all, the courage for their active fulfilment, can mature only in him who maintains within himself, by means of the Holy Eucharist, a permanent union with Christ. These Eucharistic men shall need no Conferences, Assemblies, with many Acts and Proposals: for the many who live with the One Christ acquire, through the One Christ, their united way of thinking—their oneness of faith—as a matter of course.

For the building-up of the Living Church a second point is of decisive importance: the knowledge of Jesus Christ and of His world. All of us, more or less, have grown up in an age which was destitute of religious knowledge. We had perhaps the misfortune to be educated at a school or college where no living religion was taught: so that we have stepped out into life without Christ. The typical college of the past

was swayed more by the heroes of antiquity than by Christ. A very large percentage of to-day's intellectuals has never gained any relation at all to Christ in their youth because they never came to know Him: or, if they knew of Him, it was only by inane and sentimental descriptions. Still more was He ignored at the universities; nobody read the Gospels, the daily Press did not mention Jesus Christ. Hence there grew up a generation with very scanty knowledge of the real Christ. In future we shall have to leave no stone unturned in order to gain a true knowledge of the real Christ. The Gospel must be *the* Book of the Catholic. The frequent, immediate contact with Christ in the Gospels infallibly makes us His captives. Very often one does not believe because one does not know what to believe. The reading of the Gospel, however, necessarily requires a simultaneous study. The Gospel is the fundamental and principle work. But next to the Gospel, and all around it, are stored up valuable religious works, which all have, more or less, the intention of being commentaries or explanations of the Gospel. I only mention here the theology of St. Augustine and St. Thomas. The entire theology of these two classics means, and cannot mean anything else, a commentary on Christ's Gospel, a scientific interpretation of the Gospel. To assume that the whole theology of the Fathers and Doctors is meant only for the clergy is a quite erroneous idea: it exists quite as much for the Catholic laity. There are many contemporary problems which are not directly answered by the Gospel, but which should be answered in accordance with the principles of Christ's Gospel. This is the mission of theology. Why should it be impossible to organize regular circles for intellectuals, where the great classics of theology, especially St. Augustine and St. Thomas, and the Fathers, would be read by theologians? Such circles would contribute, in no small manner, to the building-up of a Living Church. Our Catholic intellectuals would, first of all, gain a wide outlook into the world of Faith, and, in consequence, the reverence for, and admiration of, the power of Faith would greatly increase. Secondly, with regard to the various intellectual professions, the

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necessary fundamental attitude would acquire clarity, which is an indispensable element in the building-up of the popular mind. Where religious knowledge does not go beyond the status of the child, there can be no question of a Living Faith. Finally, a third thing is necessary for the building-up of a Living Church: a conscious cultivation of a personal apostolate. Christ's interest in mankind will communicate itself to us by the twofold meeting with Him in the Gospel and the Eucharist. Our fellow-men will mean something to us. This interest in our fellow-men and in each individual needs cultivating. Each one is called to be a shepherd of souls, because each one is "Church." Indifference towards the welfare of our neighbour is excluded: the quest of souls is of obligation. How can we rest tranquil if one of our circle is estranged from Christ? He who is a stranger to Christ must be won for Christ in a discreet and kindly manner. This will demand personal sacrifices, *emancipation from human respect. It supposes strong personal concentration on the world of Faith.* Yet, such an apostolate from man to man belongs to the first and fundamental elements of the Living Church.

Unity with the Eucharistic Christ until a permanent union is achieved, the systematically cultivated penetration of the mind of the Gospel, and of the classics of theology, the courageous apostolate from man to man in kindness and patience: the personal cultivation of these three things, and their realization among small groups: this seems to me to be the solid foundation on which a Living Church can be built once more. It matters not that we are few; if the few are Living Church, then, by means of the *few*, the German people will become a LIVING CHURCH.

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