

'THE FORM OF THE CHURCH'¹

It is significant of the better relations existing between bodies of Christians that theological differences can be discussed without the bitterness that was one time so prevalent. This Anglican book is a model of the way in which such discussions should be conducted. We must recognise and acknowledge the sympathy and humility with which he puts forward his views. The points of difference we develop can contribute to the discussion only in so far as we make that recognition, and acknowledge ourselves to be as individuals poor vehicles of the Divine Truth.

'The essential forms of the Church,' says Fr. Hebert, 'mark out its shape or structure, by mediating to us the Redemption on which the Church's existence is based . . . Old Israel, the *ecclesia* of the old covenant, was based on the redemption by which God delivered Israel from bondage in Egypt . . . The Church of Christ is based on the Redemption effected by His death and resurrection, on the New Covenant inaugurated thereby, and on His establishment of it as the New Israel. Both the Old and the New look back to a Sacred History, a *Heilsgeschichte*, an epic story of God's saving work. The Bible tells the story, the Creed sums it up, as a Gospel-message, the Sacraments set it forth, the Apostles proclaim it to men. There could be no such essential forms if Christianity consisted essentially of moral and religious ideals, nor yet if its essential proclamation were that there is an Inner Light. There must be such essential forms for a faith that rests on a Sacred History' (p. 14).

That is the thesis that he develops. He says much, and says it well, that a Catholic apologist can make his own. This is to be expected, since 'it was in order to find out what I really had to say about the questions raised by a recent Protestant book, *The Nature of Catholicity* by T. D. Jenkins, that I started to write out the material that is now taking form in this book . . . Jenkins' book was written to the glory of God the Holy Ghost, to show the peril of all one-sided development of formal religion in the direction of becoming impersonal and mechanised . . . But it is equally disastrous to undervalue the element of Form, as if there were something unspiritual in the Forms of the Church, in formulae, sacraments, hierarchy' (p. 16).

It is fundamental to realise that the Incarnation is not only a

¹ By A. G. Hebert. (Faber and Faber; 8s.).

doctrine. It is a fact. There is no word to express the full reality. It is both a divine and human fact. Like all things, it finds its complete purpose within the Divinity itself and not outside it. But in so far as it is an invasion of the Divine into the human, one can distinguish secondary purposes. The Incarnation is God's plan for the redemption of mankind, and this is eventually achieved by a union of God with each individual soul.

It is our Lord himself, God made man, who is the means of this union. His teaching is what he first gave us, and gives us, but his teaching is the good news about himself. It is he himself who is the living gospel. He is the way, the truth and the life. He gave himself for us to the Father, and to us for the Father. But this divine work of the redemption is not exclusively the work of the Son, of God made man. He is the Word of God, a manifestation of the Father, of the Truth of God. He is the light of the world. 'Philip, he that seeth me, seeth the Father also. How sayest thou, shew us the Father' (Jn. xiv, 9). He is also a manifestation of the divine love. 'God so loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son' (John iii, 16). This he does in his person, as God made man, through his birth, life, death and resurrection. Further, our Lord himself explained how his mission would remain incomplete unless after him there came another. The divine life in the world would be incomplete until the Holy Spirit took up the work which he had started while living in the world in his human nature. 'These things I have spoken to you, abiding with you. But the Holy Ghost, the Paraclete, whom the Father will send in my name, He will teach you all things, and bring all things to your mind whatsoever I shall have said to you' (Jn. xiv, 26). It was to be a manifestation of the Father and Son, by showing to the world, after the manner of the Holy Spirit, the person and works of God made man, and convincing the world that he came from the Father. 'And when he is come, he will convince the world of sin, of justice and of judgement' (Jn. xvi, 8). Thus would the riches of the whole divine life be brought down into the world.

Our Lord completed his work on the Cross and the Holy Spirit took it up on Whit-Sunday. Let us examine the Sacred History at this point a little more closely.

Our Lord completed his work on the Cross. By his Resurrection he showed that it was complete. He conquered sin and death by dying. When he rose again, he showed that it was no ordinary death. On the Cross he was redeeming mankind. At the resurrection he was the Redeemer; his work had already borne fruit. He had descended into Hell, to present himself as the living gospel,

to proclaim his dominion, the dominion of his Cross, over the souls of the just, his first fruits. At the Resurrection he manifested his victory and assumed again his integral human nature; he re-entered the world of the body, but it was to a new state of existence that he came. As God made man, redeeming, his work was complete.

'I will ask the Father and he shall give you another Paraclete that he may abide with you for ever' (Jn. xiv, 16). Christ's work was to build the Church. It was the Church, the Kingdom of God that had first been proclaimed by John the Baptist, that he was handing over to the Holy Ghost. He had gone about his work by teaching and by offering his Cross as a source of sanctification. But he had not only given his disciples truths to retain and to proclaim, he had given them himself as the source and criterion of Truth, and his death on the Cross was a gift of himself as the source of holiness and the foundation of the New Life. His work was to set up the Church, the Kingdom of God, but he was the Church, he was the living centre. Christ redeeming was to come and go, but Christ the living redeemer was to remain; he was to be brought back and made to live again by the Holy Ghost as the eternal Redeemer, the light of the world; not only the divine Truth but the divine authority for the truth, since he had given us himself as the source, and by the action of the Holy Ghost he was to remain as the source of the Truth.

We must see the history of the Kingdom of God in terms of what happened after the Resurrection, where we find our Lord established in his position as the living head of the Kingdom, the source of the truth and the centre of its life. He had already promised the Holy Ghost in his place; a promise that was to be fulfilled by the Ascension and the coming of the Holy Ghost on Whit-Sunday. After the Resurrection when he first appeared among them again, those events were still in the future. At this point a lively faith could have over-run the divine intentions, and expected our Lord to remain in the Church as its head in his risen presence. But whatever they expected, it is clear that by the Ascension they understood that our Lord was not to remain with them in his risen presence, and it is also clear that they understood on Whit-Sunday that he was to live and act through them by the power of the Holy Ghost.

But the whole matter turns on the way he was to continue to live and act through them by the power of the Holy Ghost. He had come to give them himself as the living gospel. His presence could not be gainsaid by the Ascension and the coming of the Holy Ghost. He did not merely hand over his teaching and the saving

merits of his Cross to be dispensed by the Holy Ghost. He was to remain in person somehow, to be presented to the world as a living person by the power of the Holy Ghost. It is true that, ascended, he reigns from Heaven, but any sharp separation of Christ reigning from Heaven and the Holy Spirit acting on earth not only misrepresents the Sacred History but fails to take into account the whole delicate relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Ghost in the Incarnation and the redemption. The salvation of man is the work of God; the operations of the persons of the Trinity are, as it were, cumulative. Strictly speaking we cannot talk of the Holy Ghost taking over where our Lord left off.

Our Lord, then, continues as the living gospel. The truths of that gospel he revealed when he was building the Church, but as the living gospel he continues to present them to the world by the power of the Holy Ghost. In the first place, the Holy Ghost has recorded them; we have a written record of the living gospel. Through the scriptures in our midst we have news of him; authentic news because of divine as well as of human origin. But his teaching was left to a living body, not only to be received but to be proclaimed. The written word of the Scripture needs to be proclaimed by the living voice of the Church, which is Christ still speaking through the Holy Ghost. This is not the voice of Christ gradually unfolding his revelation, as he was engaged in the building of the Church, nor is it the voice of Christ risen from the dead, but the voice proper to Christ risen and ascended into heaven having completed his work, to reappear again through the power of the Holy Ghost. Thus it is not a new voice, adding new truths, nor is it the voice of Christ repeating himself, but the same divine authority to teach, once physically present in the world and at that time built into the Church, and now timelessly made to resound throughout the world and throughout time, proclaiming the origin of truth.

Since it is the proclamation of a revelation already completed, Christ's actual divine intervention is, as it were, negative, but that is a circumstance proper to a Christ risen and ascended into Heaven, speaking through the Holy Ghost, and with the help of the Scriptures. The Church teaches what he has given it and he, by the action of the Holy Ghost, guards it from falling into error. It is a complete and final guarantee that the divine truth remains with us and lives.

Père Lagrange, speaking of the change that took place in the function of the Scriptures, between the Old Law and the New, says: 'The Christian no less than the Jew venerates Holy Scrip-

ture and regards it as inspired by God; nor does he admit that anyone, not even the Sovereign Pontiff himself, has the right to contradict its teaching. But for us scripture is not everything; its teaching is completed by Tradition handed down from the time of the Apostles, and this Tradition is of equal authority with Scripture. The rule of faith, however, is not the interpretation of Scripture given by this or that doctor of the Church; it is a definite formula which the Church recognises as correctly representing the truths or dogmas revealed by God . . . Jesus, whose mission it was to reveal the truth of his own authority, a power not shared by the Church, for she teaches that revelation finished with the last Apostles. It is her office to guard the revelation deposited in her care, a treasure created by Jesus and entrusted to her' (*The Gospel of Jesus Christ*, English trans., Vol. I, p. 126).

This teaching authority is only one of the functions of Christ present in his Church: 'It is certainly true that those who possess the sacred power in this Body must be considered primary and principal members, since it is through them that the divine Redeemer himself has willed the functions of Christ as teacher, king and priest to endure through the ages.' Through all three we have Christ present in the Church.

This is a consistent development of the Sacred History, a development that takes account of all the essential factors: Christ's personal presence and authority which he used to build the Church and which he made the corner-stone of the Church; he promised to remain and yet he told them he must leave them in order that the Holy Ghost might come and complete his work; he ascended into heaven and at the coming of the Holy Ghost they realised that Christ was to speak through them, with the help of the written gospel.

We have tried to develop a line of thought starting from the same point as Fr. Hebert: Christ is the form of the Church; the Church is the mediation of his redemption, which was effected by his life, death and resurrection. It 'looks back to a Sacred History, an epic story of God's saving work.' The evangelisation of the world through this redemption is the work of the Holy Ghost. Christ ascended into heaven is the ground and substance of the Church's unity, and its holiness, catholicity and apostolicity.

It will be seen that we draw a different conclusion about the nature of the Church. Once say that the authority of Christ is present in the world and the visible organisation of the Church is placed in a new light. To base the Church on the person of Christ in this sense does not 'make difficult the notion of the Church as an in-

stitutional system of which our Lord is the founder, and which he has committed to men to be administered by them, with its title deeds set out in black and white, certain and indisputable.' Nor does it follow that such an institutional system administered by men is thereby precluded from being primarily personal in character. The two ideas are not mutually exclusive, they are complementary. Indeed, it is a misrepresentation (one that is made by Catholic apologists) to correlate by way of contrast the inner personal life of the Church with the outward legal structure. The Church visible is primarily personal. It is a manifestation of the person of Christ, by the power of the Holy Ghost; it is a manifestation *presupposed* by that further and fuller manifestation in the lives of individuals by sanctifying grace. In that sense the Church is here amongst us; Christ is here amongst us, inviting us to follow him, whether we take heed or not. Christ's presence *in the world* is not dependent on us as individuals. We have tried to show how such a notion is in keeping with the historical Incarnation. Far from setting up men in the place of God ('Absolute authority is never committed to men; it belongs to God'), it establishes our Lord as the true and *effective* Head of the Church. The Head must hold the initiative. He must not be entirely dependent on and conditioned by the good-will of his followers for his existence in the world. When our Lord taught in the world, his hearers could agree or disagree, but the divine revelation did not depend for its earthly existence on their faith. They could put him to death; by his resurrection he showed that they could not destroy him. He was, and is, the living gospel.

Nor must it be supposed that such a notion leads to a cut and dried and mechanical system of salvation. When everything has been done for us by the Father, the Son made man, and the Holy Ghost, there is still everything to be done by us. It is in this sense that the Catholic accepts and applies in all its rigour Jenkins's 'reformation according to the Word of God.' Even in the matter of belief Catholics do not possess, and do not consider themselves to possess, a final and stereotyped system merely because they submit to a visible teaching authority. The truths still need to be possessed as living truths by each one in his own fashion and according to his needs. It is not belief until it becomes personal. No one possesses the truth perfectly; no one has arrived at the end. Indeed, so imperfectly do we discharge the duty of absorbing our Lord's teaching that most of us are heretical privately and in points of detail. But Christ's voice is still amongst us, guarding his truth lest it be menaced by misinterpretation.

If Christ is present amongst us in this sense, it follows that the nature and identity of the Church is very much bound up with its visible organisation. Its primary perfections, particularly the formal property of unity, while containing much of Fr. Hebert's notion of unity, will have as its central point of reference the person of Christ as he is present in the world, functioning, by the power of the Holy Ghost, through the organs of his Church. The form of the Church is the divine authority in the world; an authority (which includes both the commission and the power) to teach, to rule and to sanctify.

During the last four hundred years, and particularly during the last hundred years, owing to the course of controversy and the need of the times, the tendency has been to view this authority as concentrated in the Pope. But this is not so. We repeat in the words of the present Pope: 'He imparted to the Apostles and their successors the threefold power of teaching, governing and sanctifying men, and established that authority, determined by appropriate precepts and rights, as the primary law of the whole Church.'

Clearly, many matters have been left untouched. Only one thing has been attempted: to discuss the nature of the Church in terms of the Incarnation, and even within those limits, only a very brief sketch of a line of thought has been possible.

'The constant accusation of Anglicans and Protestants against the Church of Rome is that a confusion is made between the essential, God-given forms of the Church and the secondary or ecclesiastical forms; between the divine and the human elements of the Church. The result is a totalitarian system. Obedience is demanded to men who hold office in Christ's name, such as is due only to Him.' (It is only just to add that Fr. Hebert adds to this statement an expression of his own reluctance to criticise fellow-Christians; and we wish to make those words our own.) That is an accusation not merely of a teaching as expounded by theologians, but of a practise characteristic of the whole body of Catholics in their submission to the authority of the Church, and they, without the aid of theologians, would repudiate the suggestion that it was the result of a confusion of the divine and the human. Here and there the submission may be indiscriminate and unintelligent, but on the whole it clearly looks past the men to the office. That there should be such an authority on earth, we have tried to show, falls into place in the scheme of things of which the Son of God made man is the Light and the Life.

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