

THE LIVING CHURCH¹

STORMS have a sacred mission from God: the twofold mission of *sifting* and of *rooting*. Firstly, they have the mission to *sift*: they separate the weak from the strong, and thus preserve the strong from the pernicious influence of the weak. After the storm has passed, only the strong remain. Secondly, storms have the mission to *root*: while shaking the powerful trunks these are forced to take deep root in the undermost layers of the fertile soil. After the storm, the strong continue, deep-rooted, unconquerable, in the depths of Life.

This double Mission is being fulfilled by the tempests which in our time have broken upon the World-Church in German as in other lands. They have wrought separation: weakly members who never fully lived of the trunk of the Church have broken off in the onslaught. The stronger members have remained, and in them we witness the glorious fact that, in the face of the most formidable attack, they tend only and desire to root deeper and deeper into the soil of the Church.

Both these effects—the segregation of the weak from the strong, and the rooting of the strong into the deep layers of life—have in the Mind of the God of Providence but one meaning: the building-up of a *Living Church* in our lands. In these our stormed-tossed times, God wills to build into our people a Living Church by means of *living Catholics*.

God will not build this Living Church without our help. God always builds with the help of man, not because He needs his help, but because He desires to make man participate in His Divine Greatness. It is always something unspeakably great for a man to be the Instrument of God; however, God is a God of Wisdom—He does not choose His instruments at random, He *prepares* His instruments. He

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who has received from God great mental endowment is therewith pointed out as a Leader of his people. For, if intellectual greatness has any meaning at all, it is to serve for Leadership . . . Therefore, our Catholic intellectuals have, as intellectuals, the God-appointed task to be Leaders of the Catholic people, and very especially to-day, at the turning point in history, when it is a question of building into our German people a Living Church: *for it is a matter of Life!*

We are members of an essentially living Church. It is of primary importance to know this in order to value the fact. To be a member of a vigorous family and of a strong race is valued by all of us as a great blessing. By Baptism we have become members of a Church which is essentially alive, because she carries within her, with no possibility of loss, Christ Who is the Life. Hence, we must learn to understand these two things: that our Church is an essentially *living* reality; and that we are become, by Baptism, living members of this living Church.

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Our Church is a Living Reality. The notion of Life includes two essentials; (a) that which is alive moves itself automatically, from within; (b) by means of this self-motion life achieves its own perfection: self-motion is self-perfection.

(a) A living thing moves itself from within. It is this fact that distinguishes the living thing from the non-living thing. Although we observe inanimate things move, their motion, nevertheless, comes from without and not from within. A machine may be in ever such powerful motion; yet it will move only as long as the external impetus lasts. When this stops—when the motor-power is exhausted—the machine stops. The living thing, on the contrary, is self-moving. Even the plant, the lowest form of animated things, moves independently of any external impetus: it is the *cause* of its own movement. Whilst, therefore, the non-living thing *is being* moved, it is essential to the living thing *to move* itself. If, therefore, our Church is a living reality, she must also be in movement, but movement *from within*,

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from her very essence. And as all self-motion of living beings signifies fruitful self-expansion and growth, so the Church as a living reality, must be fruitful and must grow. She must, in her deepest constituency, be of such vitality, that her life-abundance will overflow to without: she must grow and be fruitful! Only *life can grow and be fruitful*. And the degree of fertility in a living thing is the infallible indicator of the degree of its inner vitality. Whosoever, even as an outsider, approaches our Church and her history of two milleniums, will be able to conclude from her overflowing fruitfulness as to her mighty vitality. The Church gives proof of a fertility which we see nowhere else. This fruitfulness is one of inner pervasion, together with a fruitfulness of exterior development and growth. A fruitfulness of inner pervasion: Christ compared the Church with the leaven permeating the entire mass; so also has the Church in the course of 2,000 years pervaded the masses of men and of nations with her Life. A fruitfulness of growth: Christ compared her to the mustard seed, smallest of all seeds, which grows into a tree wherein the birds of heaven make their nests; so also the Church developed from an insignificant life-germ into the World-Church which, by her majestic proportions, towers above all institutions and kingdoms of this earth. This double fruitfulness of our Church is so strong that in spite of all hindrances to her growth she continued powerfully to expand. In this lies the astonishing miracle of her fruitfulness, that, in spite of the initial superior force of every hostile movement, she excelled them all as to her indomitable power of self-movement: every counter-movement proved nothing but a powerful factor in her own growth. She proved herself to be so much alive that every effort to kill her only rendered her more alive. Such inexhaustible fertility and indomitable growth spring from her fundamental constitution: her external fruitfulness is possible *only* because in her innermost being she is *Life*. Her fundamental essence is *Christ* and Christ is *Life*: so much so that she has *one* life with His. Christ and the Church, according to His mind, may not be considered as two realities, for they are but *one same*

identical Reality. The Church is Christ Himself in so far as Christ has, mystically, but really, extended His Life into all ages and all nations. Christ forms together with the Church the one Organism of the *Corpus Christi Mysticum* whose Head is Christ, Whose Body are the Redeemed. Christ is the Vine, those redeemed by Him are the branches on this Vine. Vine and branches are imbued with one identical Life-Principle, and this Life-Principle is the inexhaustible Source of all life—the Holy Ghost. Christ, the God-Man, is given Life by the working of the Holy Ghost, and from the Vine Life overflows, by the working of the same Holy Ghost, into the countless branches of the Vine. The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, is the Soul, the life-giving principle of the Church.

Now, the Holy Ghost as the Third Person of the Deity is the Climax of the "Process" of the Inner Divine Fertility, the Sum Total, so to speak, of Life in God—the Divine Life Itself. He, therefore, who is Divine Life Itself, the Holy Ghost, is, as the Spirit of Christ, the essential being of the Church. Hence, the Church is alive from the depth of her innermost being—she is Life Itself.

In practice, this essential vitality of the Church works itself out in a three-fold manner. Because she is life in the Holy Spirit she owns three qualities: (1) endurance, (2) continual growth, and (3) infallible power of victory.

Our Church possesses a brazen *endurance*, because her soul, the Holy Spirit, is indestructible, and because this Holy Spirit will never desert her. The consciousness and the increasing experience of this permanence give to the Church a majestic calm in the face of every storm. St. Thomas, in admiration of this majestic calm of the Church, says: *Ecclesia lento passu pertransivit varietates temporum.* The Church is fearless, on principle, as to all hostile movements: the Church waits, suffers, but she endures; for the Holy Spirit of Christ lives in her. Our Church is calm with the calm of God.

Secondly, our Church shows permanent growth and progressive development. For He who animates her, the Holy Ghost, is given to her by Christ as the Spirit of Truth: Christ

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communicates to her His Spirit who is the Spirit of Infallibility, in order that He may by means of Christ's Representative, the Pope, unfold the hidden depths of Christ's teaching. Thus, we see in the Church a great dogmatic development. This Spirit of Truth is also a Spirit of *Love*; hence a Spirit of oneness and of unity. This is His ultimate essence. As a Spirit of unifying, impelling Love He is the Spirit of Holiness and of Catholicity—through Him the Church becomes the Holy Catholic Church. This is why, on principle, the Church embraces all men in order to form them into *saints*, into men filled with the Holy Ghost: hence *living men*. Therefore our Church is a sacred society, an image of the Sacred Society in God, a fellowship of love.

Thirdly, our Church possesses an infallible power of victory. She not only endures, she attacks. As soon as one of her innate divine rights is attacked, the Church declares war, and carries it through with undaunted tenacity. The ultimate victory is always hers. Where the Church seemingly succumbs, there the apparent defeat is ever followed by a glorious Resurrection, as with the historical Christ. It is of the essence of the Living Church to fight for the preservation and the development of her Life, and in this fight, to carry off the ultimate victory.

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(b) We defined the *second constituent* of every living thing thus: it is essential to every living thing to move itself, and to achieve by this very self-movement its own self-perfection. This is not the case with inanimate things. Because they do not move from within and of themselves, they are not perfected by this motion; on the contrary, they are used up by it in proportion to the degree of the motion. It belongs to the essence of the inanimate thing to *serve* for the perfection of another. It has no end, ultimately, in itself, neither does it strive to bring itself to perfection. The living thing, on the contrary, always seeks, through its own self-movement, its own perfection. It goes out of itself in its life-activity, in order to draw into itself everything within its reach, and thereby to expand and develop more and more. The more fulness of life there is in a being, the more

intense is the process of its self-perfecting. When it is, however, already and ultimately perfect, as in the case with the Living God, then the urge for self-perfection is transposed into the absolute adherence to the ever-owned perfection. Therefore nobody affirms his own perfection like the absolute perfect Living God. From here we gain a very profound understanding of the Church. Because she is a Living Church, she possesses and manifests the elemental urge for Catholicity. There exists in the Church an indescribable impetus for expansion, and beyond this, a magnificent impulse to prevail. The unbounded urge for expansion is due to the overflowing fulness of life within. She is seeking for receptacles wherein to pour out her superabundance. Therefore, the Church is essentially *Apostolic*. No sooner a colony of men has settled on the outskirts of a large city than the Universal Church presses after them in order to build a place of Worship in their midst. Every missionary, on his lonely island in the ocean, is the World-Church, following her urge for self-communication. The Church must needs communicate the Holy Spirit. In this self-communication the Church exercises all the functions of life. She begets and brings forth, like every living thing begets and brings forth, in order to multiply itself: by communicating the Christ-life in the sacraments of Baptism and Penance, she begets the "new man" in Christ. The Church nourishes herself like every living being: she incorporates into herself peoples and nations, adapting men to herself, and assimilates human and racial peculiarities without destroying them. The Church has proved herself to be marvellously discreet during the ages gone by in this her tendency to assimilation. Without surrendering her principles she has absorbed the characteristics of peoples and cultures, and by their means has built her own life into the respective nations. Further, the Church rejects harmful elements like every other living thing: she seeks to protect her organism and its healthy members, and therefore pronounces anathema against heretics and oppressors. She is, moreover, an organizing power, creating organs by means of which to live, and to work out her life effectually. Lastly, the Church desires to prevail in pro-

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portion to the degree of her vitality: she opposes her power of resistance to everything that approaches her in a hostile manner. The Church shall be the last one to surrender.

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By Baptism we have become members of this Living Church. The Church, as a living reality, possesses all the essential functions of living things: the Living Church assimilates, as far as may be, all men and all peoples with their characteristics: *she incorporates men into herself.* By this incorporation no destruction of what is human takes place, but rather a sublimation and transformation of human nature into Christ. To become incorporated into the Church, as a member, means to become essentially living, like the Church. The member of the Church becomes himself "Church." But he who becomes Church becomes, like her *alive.* The Church lives through Christ and His Holy Spirit. Therefore, incorporation into the Living Church is equivalent to assimilation to Christ, the Head of the Church, and, as a consequence, to quickening by the Holy Spirit, the Soul of the Church. When in Holy Baptism we became incorporated into the Church two marvellous things happened to us: first, we were embodied into Christ, and second, by this embodiment into Christ we became animated by the Holy Spirit.

To become a member of the Living Church means to become alive through the assimilation to Christ as Head of the Church. Christ is Life and he is the Life of the Church. The fullness of all life and all grace has been bestowed on the Sacred Humanity of Christ. For, by the hypostatic union of Christ's humanity with the Divine Person of Christ, the Sacred Humanity is divinized in the highest possible sense, and filled with the Divine Life of Grace: in the Man Christ dwells the entire plenitude of the Divinity. Christ the God-Man is equipped in His Humanity, with the plenitude of every grace. And since grace is Divine Life, it follows that the Sacred Humanity of Christ carries within It the fullness of Life: Christ is therefore *the Life.* For our quickening by the Living Church, the knowledge of *two things* is of decisive importance: first, that Christ is the Life, the *fullness*

of Life; second, that by embodiment into the Living Christ, our transformation into Him has begun, has received its foundation, and is to be built up by us, His living members. Christ the Head of the Church is the fullness of life. St. Thomas ascribes to the Man Christ an infinite fullness of Sanctifying Grace. *The measure of the Grace of Christ is grace without measure.* St. Thomas adds this important reason: according to the intention of God, the Man Christ is to be for the entire human race as well as for every individual, the universal *source* of all Grace; therefore, Grace has been communicated to Him in infinite fullness: *gratia Christi pertingit ad summam mensuram gratiae.* Grace being Life, namely the participation in the Divine Life, we therefore find in the Man Christ, who possesses an infinite measure of Grace, an infinite measure of Life which can never be exhausted. By Holy Baptism we are assimilated to this fullness of Life in Christ. For by Baptism Christ became our Head, and we became His members. By this fact the Christ-life was infused into us. We became Church of the Living Church. The all-important fact that happened at our Baptism is this: that by means of the Baptismal Character we have become irrevocably and for ever joined to Him our Head. We became, for ever, something belonging to Christ, something that is organically, physically, bound up with Him. We were grafted on to Him. The Baptismal Character so to speak, inserted us into the Person of Christ, and thus the current of His Life was conducted into our souls. Baptismal Grace, Christ's Life, can be lost by grievous sin, but never the Baptismal Character which binds us to Him. As baptized members, we are for ever marked as members of Christ. This organic, physical commitment to the Person of Christ was the beginning of our transformation into Him, of His growth in us; as self-acting, living members we have to maintain and increase it. Baptism gave us an initial union with Christ, but not yet the fullness of union. Just because we are by nature living, viz., self-actuating beings, therefore, Christ's Life must also be our own act. For, the Christ-Life is to be *our* Life. Baptism gave us only these two things: the indelible Character which

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binds us physically to Christ our Head, and commits us to becoming "Christ," and the baptismal Grace which is as yet but a seed of Divine Life. Baptismal Grace is but a first inception of the Christ-Life in us, which, owing to the Baptismal Character, puts us under the physical obligation to develop and mature this life by our own action: just as our spiritual soul commits us to develop our spiritual life by our own activity. This personal development of the Christ-Life obliges us to the energetic repression of all that tends to diminish or extinguish that Life in us, i.e., sin. For Baptism is communion with Christ's death, as St. Paul puts it: by Baptism, we are, with Christ, dead to sin. And because Baptism is communion of Life with Christ, we must develop His Life in us daily. Christ must pass completely into us—we must become completely transformed into Him. The result will be the "perfect Christian," who can say of himself what St. Paul declared: "I live now, not I, but Christ liveth in me." The living Church has become reality in us. And when she will have thus become reality in many, then the Living Church will be a *fact* in the "New Age and the new People." The building-up of the Living Church in the people begins in the individual member of the Church.

Through complete mystical union with Christ the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Ghost, becomes *our* Spirit. From Christ He passes, as spirit of Love, into us. And the Love of Christ becomes our soul. The Love of Christ is to be the soul by which the many will be drawn together into fellowship and oneness. The Church, as communion of Life in Christ, becomes a communion of *Love* in the Holy Spirit. Thus the Living Church is being built up in the individual Christian. The soul of the Church, whereby the Church is alive, becomes, *as love*, the soul of the *individual member* of the Church. The *Living Christian* is being formed, in will and in strength, in order to build a Living Church into his people.

A GERMAN DOMINICAN.