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THE APOSTOLIC SEE

A DISCOURSE DELIVERED BY

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AT THE EPISCOPAL CONSECRATION OF RT. REV. DENIS
J. O'CONNELL, D. D., TITULAR BISHOP OF
SEBASTE, IN THE CATHEDRAL OF
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I.

Our knowledge of the century that includes the death of St. John the Apostle and the first establishment of the Christian religion throughout the broad Empire of Rome is indeed imperfect, not to say obscure. But two lines of Christian thought and action stand out clearly and are admitted by all, however various and self-contradictory are the interpretations of the admitted facts and documents. The infant Church, apart from her memorable struggle with the civil power of Rome for the right to exist, was all along engaged in a no less momentous domestic conflict, first with the converts from Judaism and second with the converts from Greek and Roman paganism. Too many of the former looked on the new movement as no more than a fresh awakening of the Old Testament life and polity, the anxiously-awaited dawn of fulfillment of those promises that had so long fed the courage of Israel, a glorious proselytism for the Temple

¹ A discourse preached Sunday, May 3, 1908, in the Cathedral, Baltimore, on the occasion of the consecration of Rt. Rev. Denis J. O'Connell, D. D., as Bishop of Sebaste, from Matth. xvi, 18-19:

“And I say to thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth, it shall be bound also in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, it shall be loosed also in heaven.”

and its institutions destined in this way to rise again from the material ruin and moral humiliation that had fallen on Jerusalem. Too many of the latter saw in the new Christian teaching and organization a kind of academic mixing-bowl into which might be cast the Gospel of Christ, the idealism of Plato, the erudition and logic of Aristotle, and the multitudinous vagaries of the Graeco-Roman Orient, in other words the system known as Gnosticism or the highest spiritual knowledge. The first post-apostolic century of the Church is very largely nothing more than a life and death conflict with these two movements, as deeply antagonistic to the nature and calling of the true Church as they were to one another. They were after all not new movements, but activities of a much earlier time, newly-quickened by the rapid advance of the religion of Jesus Christ, or rather sharply challenged by the latter, which daily swelled the ranks of its adherents at the expense of the old Israel, of Greek philosophy and of a hundred forms of Oriental worship and speculation from the Nile and the Orontes to the Indus and the Ganges. No doubt there was reasoning a-plenty against the narrowness and selfishness of the Judaizers and the misty hallucinations of the Gnostics, but the records of Christian antiquity are there to show that the victory was won for the Christian multitude by a vigorous appeal to the criterion of *Apostolicity*, i. e., to identity of Christian belief with that of the apostolic age. St. Justin, himself a native of Palestine, might dispute learnedly with the Rabbis of Ephesus, and even after him we hear echoes of second and third century disputes between the synagogues and the churches. But when it was all well over, by the middle of the second century, the figure and the teaching best remembered were those of Hegesippus, himself a Jew and the first historian of the Catholic Church. He had travelled widely through the Roman world in search of a working criterion of the religious truth taught by the Christian Society, and found it in the universal identity of doctrine with that of the apostles. Some precious fragments of his description of the sub-apostolic period have reached us, and from them we see that while on the one hand he enumerates all existing half-Jewish, half-Christian

sects and gives the names of their founders, on the other he praises the universal agreement of the Christian Churches throughout the Roman Empire based on the regular succession of their bishops from the apostles. Towards the end of his life he spent a long time at Rome, and drew up from the archives of the Roman Church the first known list of the successors of St. Peter, some of whose names have reached us (Anicetus, Soter, Eleutherus), though the rest of the document has long been lost, perhaps not hopelessly. Quite certainly he looked on the succession of Roman bishops as a guarantee that the apostolic doctrine had been preserved at Rome in its virginal purity, and that no concept of the Old Testament or of the rôle of Israel could pass for Christian which was there condemned. It is indeed unique and persuasive when we meet this conclusion in the extant fragments of the earliest history of the sub-apostolic period, in the mouth of a man who, St. Jerome tells us, followed closely on the Apostles' own time and whose life covers the period from about 120 (the death of St. John the Apostle) to about 180 when the Christian religion had fairly won its first hard battle for existence. His sole aim in life was to assure himself that he was believing in all that the Lord Jesus had taught. He travelled far and wide for that sole purpose, and believed firmly that the true criterion of Christian faith was in the unbroken succession of the properly appointed successors of the Apostles (i. e., the bishops). He had himself collected many principal facts and documents concerning the apostolic times, and dying left in his account of those times, and as a principal document, not the succession of bishops of Jerusalem or Antioch or Alexandria, but the full catalogue of the bishops of Rome, as though satisfied that he had reached the living centre of Christian truth where the new heresies, especially the Judaizing falsehoods, would certainly be cast out, as indeed they were. The mass of Israel, however, was yet no less carnal than in the time of its Redeemer and the millions of its children, both in and out of the empire, long continued to dream, and even to plan, a restoration of Sion to political greatness and even supremacy. Our good Hegesip-

pus, as simple in heart as he was in style, belonged to the race of Nicodemus, and they were ever few in Israel. Nevertheless, in the remote beginnings of the Christian religion he is an important witness to an early and general consensus of all Christians that in the succession of Peter and Paul was to be found always genuine Christian truth, and that all teaching which differed from theirs was the particularistic teaching of sects and heresies, and offered no guarantee of a living contact with the teaching and the will of the Divine Founder.

But while Israel long and fiercely opposed the divorce of Christianity from its own too secular concept of the Old Testament religious life and organization, the new religion was in even greater danger from the miscellaneous multitude that thronged to it from the temple-spaces and the lecture-halls of the philosophers. The rapid and compulsory unification of the mighty Mediterranean state known as the Roman Empire was not accompanied by any similarly thorough transformation of the minds and hearts of its hundred million subjects. The wide tossing sea itself was not more restless and changing than the multitude of any Greek or Roman city, especially in the refined and luxurious Orient, where freedom of thought was as untrammelled as political servility was abundant. The religions of conquered peoples, East and West, had long been affecting to its detriment the rude and rather austere pagan worship of Rome and the Latin peoples; with similar hopes they approached the new religion of Christ and sought alliance with it now in one shape and now in another, but chiefly through curious speculations about the origin of the world and man, the nature of evil, the relations of spirit and matter, the future resurrection, etc. This is what came to be known as Gnosticism or Scientific Religion. The countless advocates of this antique "Modernism" assured the Christian authorities of their orthodoxy, the compatibility of their teachings with the Gospel, even of special secret revelations of the Apostles and first Christian converts. Its propaganda was incredibly active, widespread and seductive. The yet extant relics of its religious literature are enough to astound us when we think how little has been saved, let us concern-

ing the earliest popes or many of the Roman emperors. It was really responsible for the creation of what we call Christian theology, i. e., a rational and scholarly defence and illustration of the teaching of the Gospel and Holy Church. The most vigorous opponent of this pseudo-Christianity arose at Lyons in Gaul, a Christian bishop known as Irenaeus, born towards the year 150, probably in populous Asia Minor, itself a hotbed of Gnosticism. He had spent some years at Rome as a Christian teacher, and was therefore well equipped to produce his large Greek work "Against All Heresies," in which he explains and confutes all the false forms of Christianity that were current before the end of the second century. With extensive knowledge and much acumen he pursued the hydra-headed Gnosticism of his day, and his book remains forever a curious monument to the character of the Christian Church, its constitution and its teaching, its aim and even its history, also in some ways a valuable record of the age in which he wrote. But against the heresies of his day, in particular Gnosticism in all its shapes, the chief line of argument of this great scholarly bishop of the end of the second century, this cultured and travelled and practical administrator of the most important Western Church outside of Italy, this Asiatic Greek in the See of Lyons, is neither scriptural nor theological—it is the lack of genuine apostolic character. The true sense of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, he says, is easy to learn and to use his own words "it is within the power of all in every Church, who may wish to see the truth, to contemplate clearly the tradition of the apostles manifested throughout the whole world." It is visible in the unbroken succession of bishops instituted by the apostles in the Churches founded by them.² But he goes on to say that the apostolic succession is

²The following words of his contemporary Tertullian (*De Praeser.* ch. 39) exhibit with the legal precision peculiar to him the attitude of the African Christians towards the apostolic office of the Roman Church.

"Come now, thou that wilt exercise thy curiosity to better purpose in the business of thy salvation, run over the Apostolic Churches in which the very chairs of the Apostles, to this very day, preside over their own places, in which their own authentic writings are read, echoing the voice, and making the face of each present. Is Achaia near to thee? Thou hast

lodged principally in the succession of Roman bishops; he enumerates the twelve successors of St. Peter and St. Paul from Linus to the contemporary Eleutherus (and this is the oldest extant catalogue of the popes, also the oldest history of the popes, for he enumerates touching details of their lives); he insinuates clearly that they were especially honest, perfect and blameless men, in whose ears the preaching of the Apostles still echoed and before whose eyes their traditions were ever supreme. Above all, this particular succession of Christian bishops stands in a peculiar and pre-eminent way as a guarantee of apostolic truth, a touchstone of un-Christian or anti-Christian teaching, a shining light to both friend and foe. His golden words deserve to be quoted in full:

“Since, however, it would be very tedious in such a volume as this, to reckon up the successions of all the Churches, we do put to confusion all those who, in whatever manner, whether by an evil self-pleasing, by vainglory, or by blindness and perverse opinion, assemble in unauthorized meetings; (we do this, I say), by indicating that tradition derived from the apostles, of the very great, the very ancient, and universally known Church founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul; as also (by pointing out) the faith preached to men, which comes down to our time by means of the successions of the bishops. For it is a matter of necessity that every Church should agree with this Church, on account of its pre-eminent authority, that is, the faithful everywhere, inasmuch as the apostolical tradition has been preserved continuously by those (faithful men) who exist everywhere.”

He then enumerates the list of Roman bishops, as one might enumerate the list of Presidents of the United States, and adds:

Corinth. If thou art not far from Macedonia, thou hast Philippi, thou hast the Thessalonians. If thou canst travel into Asia, thou hast Ephesus. But if thou art near to Italy, thou hast Rome, whence we also have an authority at hand. That Church how happy! on which the Apostles poured out all their doctrine with their blood; where Peter had a like passion with the Lord; where Paul is honoured with an end like the Baptist's; where the Apostle John was plunged into boiling oil, and suffered nothing, and was afterwards banished to an island; let us see what she hath learned, what taught, what fellowship she hath with the Church of Africa likewise.”

“In this order and by this succession the ecclesiastical tradition from the Apostles and the preaching of the truth have come down to us. And this is most abundant proof that there is one and the same vivifying faith, which has been preserved in the Church from the apostles until now and handed down in truth (*Adv. Haeres*, III, 3, 3).”

It would be hard, says an illustrious modern Church historian, to find a more concise expression of the doctrinal unity then existing in the universal Church; of the sovereign and unique importance of the Roman Church as witness, guardian and organ of the apostolic tradition; and of its superior pre-eminence in the group of Christian communities.³

Through these three centuries the Roman Church had no rival for its perilous pre-eminency, which was so marked that the Emperor Decius, when about to undertake the extermination of the Christian religion, declared that he would rather behold the rise of an usurper than another bishop of Rome. The oldest Christian Churches, like Corinth and Antioch, recognized its supreme dignity. Before the end of the first century the former appealed to the Roman Church to heal a painful schism, and while the second century was yet young, Ignatius of Antioch addressed the Roman Church as the president of the Christian Society and acknowledged with gratitude the reception of its instructions and commands. During this period the bulk of the Christian body was in the Roman Orient, yet its supreme government, as far as we can now grasp it, was certainly in the See of Peter. Thither came the heads of the great heresies of Gnosticism, Marcionism, Montanism, Sabelianism, asking for recognition, and rebellious only when they fail to secure the authority and prestige of that ancient Church. In all the domestic controversies of those centuries that Church ever dominates the scene. It is not Rome that weakens during the earlier controversies, but Asia Minor; not Anicetus who visits Smyrna to confer with Polycarp, but that aged man of

³ Mgr. Duchesne, in *BULLETIN*, x, 430. For a good commentary on this famous passage of St. Irenaeus, and a refutation of various efforts made to blunt its point, see L. Rivington, *The Primitive Church and the See of Peter* (London, 1894), 31-38.

80 years who comes to Rome to deal with the pope. And later no bishop of the Orient, nor all of them, dared to order all their episcopal brethren to meet in councils and report to him as Pope Victor did; much less did they dare to excommunicate, or threaten to excommunicate, entire provinces, if they did not obey, i. e., to cut them off from the common unity in Christ, as the same pope did, and as Pope Stephen did a little later when the African churches clung stubbornly to their narrow views on the re-baptism of heretics. In matters of Christian faith it brought before its tribunal the highest Christian scholarship in the person of Origen, and it called for explanation and submission from high-placed and saintly bishops like Dionysius of Alexandria, while the supreme tribunal of the empire recognized at the same time that in practice the bishop of Rome was the judge of Christian life and discipline. It is to the Roman Church that critical scholars, some of them neither Catholics nor genuine Christians, trace back the most solemn and far-reaching measures and institutions that consolidated the fluent elements of the earliest Christian life,—the closing of the canon of the New Testament and the diffusion of its books; the formulation of the Apostles' Creed or that simple and ancient rule of faith that each convert, Jew or heathen, had to learn and accept as a sufficient catechism of the new belief; the creation of a special religious code for Christians, i. e., the beginnings of the canon law, which the oldest Greek Christian texts with curious unanimity refer to a Roman origin. I might add other grave considerations that place beyond a doubt the unique magisterial office of the Roman Church in the earliest and darkest days of the Christian religion, when its bishops everywhere were in daily peril of their lives as confessedly the sources and guarantors of the peculiar religious obstinacy that maddened at once and appalled the governors of the Roman world. I will mention but one more such illustration. Out of the remotest Christian antiquity come reliable statements that the Roman Church during these three centuries was wont to exercise a truly imperial charity towards multitudes of Christians in all parts of the Roman Empire. From Greece, Syria, Asia Minor, Arabia came pitiful cries

for help amid the ceaseless local persecutions of the brethren, and it is no Latin writer, but a Greek, the great Church historian Eusebius of Caesarea, who tells us that even to his day, i. e., the first quarter of the fourth century, the Roman Church still dispensed to the ends of the empire her rich and immemorial bounties.

If I have dwelt at some length on these features of the primitive Roman supremacy among the earliest Christian Churches, it is because, considered in their entirety, they reproduce for us at that early date not only the continuous fact of the apostolic authority in its fulness, but also its original aim and its genuine spirit, i. e., the practical effective unity of the Christian ideals in belief and in life, and a permanent, deep, transforming affection for the common welfare that was like a tide of new blood in the veins of a decadent age and a corrupt society. The history of the Roman Church in these three centuries is in reality an enlarged Acts of the Apostles.

Feature for feature all the traits of the primitive Church found in the inspired record are met with in the Roman Church of this period—the conviction of responsible authority visibly lodged in an organized body; a full and sure and ready sense of all the Christian faith and an equally reliable sense of religious falsehood; an adequate appreciation of the universal interests and the common welfare; a large and moderate view of the exercise of authority; an habitual confession of a higher will, that of Jesus Christ, as the true source of the new power over men's minds and hearts. In faith, in discipline, in government, in its public services, in its continuous charitable solicitude for all the scattered brethren in Christ the Roman Church was in those centuries truly an "imago primaevi saeculi," a mirror of the apostolic age.

"Thus," says an illustrious historian, "the churches of the entire world, from Arabia, Osrhoene, Cappadocia, to the extremities of the West, experienced in everything, in faith, in discipline, in government, in ritual, in works of charity, the incessant activity of the Roman Church. It was everywhere known, as St. Irenaeus says, everywhere present, everywhere respected, everywhere followed in its advice. Against it there rises no opposition, no rivalry. No com-

munity entertains the notion of putting itself on the same footing as Rome. Later, patriarchates and other local primacies will come into being. In the course of the third century, one barely sees their first outlines, more or less vague, in process of formation. Above these organisms just forming, as well as above the collection of the isolated churches, there looms up the Roman Church in its sovereign majesty, the Roman Church represented by its bishops, the long series of whom is connected with the two coryphaei of the apostolic chorus; the Church which knows itself and declares itself and is considered by the whole world to be the organ and center of unity.”⁴

During all this time, moreover, its bishops were held in peculiar veneration by all Christians. Many of them shed their blood for Christ, and each of them was looked on in his own time as St. Peter himself in all the fulness of his public character. The individual pope might come from any part of the vast Empire of Rome, but his family and personality were ever of little account. Each one stood for the highest and most attractive religious idea and the most efficient religious organization that the world had yet beheld. And though he usually perished violently (for Cæsar was yet unwilling to sacrifice his own religious authority), it was not felt that his disappearance imperilled the precious interests committed to him as to a spiritual dictator in face of the ignorance, apathy, stupidity, malice, selfishness, and habitual vacillation of too many minds and hearts in all that pertained to the life of the spirit. Men spoke of them interchangeably as the *See* of Peter, the *Chair* of Peter, the *Place* of Peter. The authority of the great apostle, granted him as a reward of his faith, and for the preservation of the unity and efficiency of the Christian organization both in its primitive growth and amid the dramatic vicissitudes of later persecution and conflict, seemed even then solidly anchored, as it were, to a mighty rock, was identical and equal in each successor, identical and equal being the divine gift itself and the necessity for it, the good accomplished, the evils averted. What wonder, then that long before the Roman Church emerged

⁴L. Duchesne, *BULLETIN* (1904), x, 448.

from the catacombs, its bishops were wont to claim, and at Rome itself, an hereditary fulness of apostolic authority, and to quote for their flock as early as the time of St. Cyprian's death that divine charter of the papacy, the memorable words of St. Matthew (XVI, 118-19):

“And I say to thee: That thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give to thee the keys of the Kingdom of heaven. And whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth it shall be bound also in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth it shall be loosed also in heaven.”

O fateful words! The pilgrim to the Fisherman's Tomb at Rome and the idle visitor lift up their eyes to-day and behold them written in gigantic letters about the base of the dome of St. Peter's, heralding forever and consecrating, as it were with befitting majesty, the incomparable genius that built for them this pedestal thrice glorious among the works of human imagination and skill. But far more glorious is the historical career of these words of power from the day when they were first uttered in remote Palestine to our own time. Nothing but their sacramental efficiency can explain the influence they have exercised in every century, in every form of civilization, amid all kinds and manners of men. They have sundered the spiritual from the temporal order, at an awful price, it is true, nevertheless by no means excessive; they have shaped the exercise of this dearly bought spiritual independence and conditioned the framework of ecclesiastical authority, whose dignity and serviceableness they have saved, while they prevented it from degenerating into anarchy or becoming hopelessly the tool of secular passion or purpose; they were ever and are yet the sufficient instruction of the successors of St. Peter, replete with freedom of action, but also replete with terrible admonition for men who believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ, His tender affection for Holy Church, and His inevitable just judgment of those who sit in the place of Peter, but do not the works of Peter; they have affected the growth of great sciences, doctrinal theology, canon law, moral theology,

Church history, even of philosophy; they have fashioned effectively the civil and social order, for there was a long and troubled period when the average Christian mankind of Europe looked to the papacy as a paternal power, and saw in each succeeding pope a moral patriarchal authority, the only one capable of dominating an arbitrary feudalism, of compelling for the poor, weak, and helpless, some measure of justice, of enforcing basic principles of the law of nations, and of planting deeply in the heart of Europe those principles and ideals through which the Western world put off its ancient paganism and even yet stands out as fundamentally different from and superior to the non-Christian Orient; they were and are the divine source of the combined insight and courage which have regularly distinguished the successors of St. Peter, even when European society had reached the lowest ebb of its fortunes, and was everywhere dominated by a narrow and selfish secularism that abused holy institutions for vile ends. Through these divine and imperishable words the successor of St. Peter is forever lifted above the ordinary course of human passions and purposes, forever exhibited to mankind as the symbol of Christian unity, the criterion of Gospel truth and life, the witness and custodian of Christ's teachings, the judge of the brethren in all charity and equity, and therefore the natural guide and adviser of Christian society in all that pertains to religious faith and morality, and even in those large spheres and phases of human life that are affected for good or evil by our moral principles or rather by the lack or weakness of them.

II.

An essential feature of the original apostolic office was its witness unto Christ, not unto a portion of his life, but unto all His public career. On the morrow of the Ascension, when yet the Christian Church numbered about a hundred souls, the Apostles met under the presidency of Peter (Acts, I, 14-26) to select a successor to the traitor Apostle Judas. It may be truly called the first General Council, presided over by the first pope. "Wherefore," said the Prince of the Apostles,

“ of these men who have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus came in and went out among us one of these must be made witness with us of His resurrection . . . to take the place of this ministry and apostleship from which Judas hath by his transgression fallen.” It is precisely this feature of the apostolic office that stands out most strikingly in the Roman Church during the thousand years of medieval life. The other apostolic churches, like Jerusalem, Antioch, and Alexandria, gradually decayed, or were involved in wretched heresies, or became the prey of Islam. The brilliant civilization of the apostolic age was soon obscured in the Mediterranean world. The original monuments and documents, both of Church and State, disappeared or became unintelligible. Passionate new controversies killed off the interest in primitive Christianity, and a new order supervened everywhere, rather a total lack of order in those rude ages when the political, social, and economic life of the Greco-Roman world was everywhere overlaid with crude barbarism freshly renewed in every century by the eager sensual hordes that poured without ceasing from the mighty womb of the North and the East. At Rome itself a consul, that immemorial symbol of the Roman State, was no longer named; the majestic Senate-house on whose floor were debated the fates of kingdoms and provinces was closed and dumb; the vast population shrank to a handful; the prestige and power of the City men proudly called Eternal had passed away, or rather were disputed by jealous Greeks, fanatic Arabs, and proud and turbulent Germans. A little more and the prophetic fear of Scipio Africanus had become a reality; Rome, like Troy and Carthage would have passed into the realm of shadows. It was a crucial time, whose true significance can be read in Cardinal Newman’s *Historical Sketches* and in the noble volumes of Mr. Allies. But graver than the decay of the glorious city itself was the peril that threatened Christian unity when for a while it seemed that for the future not the Roman by the Tiber but the Byzantine Greek by the Golden Horn would henceforth represent or dominate the apostolic witness to Jesus Christ, that the ever-latent secularism of the imperial office would strangle the hardbought spiritual indepen-

dence, and soon Rome would be as Constantinople, and later as Moscow, the seat of more or less venerable arch-chaplains of an Oriental ruler, local custodians of dead magnificence, Grand Lamas for the West.

But for the welfare of Holy Church and of humanity this early crystallization of the spiritual forces of the Gospel was not to happen in the West on the border line of the ancient world and the new states of Europe whose last most hopeful progeny even we of the New World now are. In the names and the memory of the glorious Apostles Peter and Paul the popes found always something sacramentally vigorous and restorative, a lasting echo as it were, an undying image of the "praedicatio veritatis," the fulness of Christian truth as it had been made known by the great Apostles and ever preserved in the Church founded by them and consecrated by their labours and their blood. The apostolic office and apostolic faith soon created their own monuments unique and wonderful, eternally voiceful of the purpose that underlay them. There stood, visible to all, the glorious sepulchres of Peter and of Paul. There rose the old basilica of St. Peter, for a thousand years the most venerable monument of the world, hallowed by a thousand great events, itself the silent witness of the permanency of the apostolic office, crowded with memories and proofs of the tender gratitude to Christian Rome both of the ancient world that lay dying and of the new peoples rudely surging in to take its place, one day to bear its complex burden. In the old St. Paul's stood during all this period the evergrowing series of medallions that exhibited in imperial mosaic the list of the successors of the Fisherman, while throughout and around the City were scattered venerable relics and evidences of their sojourn, their apostolic activity, and the deep respect that the Roman Christians showed their fathers in the faith while yet a Hadrian pondered over the Gospel or in his immortal memoirs a Marcus Aurelius with imperial melancholy fixed its essence as an incorrigible resistance to the omnipotence of the Roman State. To-day the genius of Catholic investigators and the pick of the new fossors reveal not a few incredibly convincing proofs of this, as both scholar and excavator work

their way through such early Christian cemeteries as that of Domitilla and that of Priscilla, where once were buried members of Cæsar's household and foremost consular nobles, whose names yet grace the pages of Tacitus and Suetonius, but who had then caught the Gospel from the lips of Peter and Paul. From all parts of the world, despite the wretched anarchy of the times, long armies of pilgrims never ceased to visit the sepulchres of Peter and Paul and to acquire within their shadow both the letter and the spirit of the Gospel. This pilgrimage to Rome was the most unifying institution of a period when the entire West had scarcely a city worthy of the name and function. It is to-day as important as ever in the regular visit of every Catholic bishop to the source of apostolic authority, but its origin is lost in the dim beginnings of the papal succession, while at the same time it is one of the most irrefragable evidences that Christian Europe at least always saw in the succession of Peter the only divine guarantee that it was receiving an uncontaminated gospel, and not the conclusions of Arius and Nestorius, or the secular make-shifts of court-bishops and ignorant soldiers.

And in as far as the successor of Peter could not behold the entire Christian world, his letters, issued always by the authority of Peter and Paul, went far and wide every day of this thousand years, and brought home, for example to the most lonely priest of the Orkneys or the Faroes, a sense of union and communion with the entire Christian world and a conviction that the Christian religion held its way continuously, that Christ was not preached in vain nor was faith in Him a vain thing both for priest and people. The countless missionaries who in those ages went forth to conquer for Christ the surrounding moral darkness held their work but weakly done, if it was not begun with the approval of the Apostolic See, like that of Saint Patrick, or if it was not soon placed under the saving direction of the same like that of Saint Boniface. Well indeed for all those strong but uncultivated races that they were so soon in touch with the Eternal City, for thereby they not only secured easily and permanently religious unity with the rest of Europe, but they also obtained the first elements of civilization. May they

always be thus divided for the benefit of Rome, says the pagan Tacitus, describing the internecine quarrels of the Britons under the stern generalship of Agricola, that perfect apostle of the old order. Nay, rather lay aside your wasteful warfare and be united in Christ Jesus, and learn the arts of a higher and a better life, said the missionary to the Angles and Saxons, those rude men of Schleswig-Holstein and Jutland who soon drove out the Britons from their pleasant home. And they were united, and with the Christian faith that they received from Pope Gregory, whom they ever revered as their special apostle in Christ Jesus, they soon also entered on a higher culture, learned of an alphabet and of the preservation of the most useful thought, of written law and fixed judicial procedure, of a better warfare by rational argument, of the refinement of the spirit as more desirable than the gross pleasures of violent passions. And as the missionary worked in union with the See of Peter his efforts were never in vain, for he was only the far-flung pioneer in the great system of Christianity that centered at Rome, and knew that when he fell another would come to take his place. The obligation of the metropolitans to obtain the pallium from Rome came soon to remind the new churches that they were offshoots of a great trunk, and that only by close contact with the parent stem could they be protected at once against themselves and against the forces of secularism that too often they did not recognize, and when they did were too weak to resist it or cast off its yoke. They owed it to the Apostolic See that they kept for a thousand years that beneficent unity of faith which was the basis of all their spiritual advancement and of their growth in all the arts of civilization. Indeed, whatever monuments they have left, like their beautiful old cathedrals, are the products of Catholic faith and still cry out for its once majestic exercise.

We need not wonder therefore that in the thousand years which elapsed from the Fall of Rome to the invention of printing, the successor of Peter was universally known as the apostolic man par excellence, the "Apostolicus," the "Domnus Apostolicus," the Apostolic Chief, or that men spoke less frequently of Rome and more often of the "Sedes Apostolica,"

the apostolic seat or centre of Christian religious authority visibly identical with its divine origin amid the vicissitudes of the ages as they came and went. Nor ought we forget that if in the more refined East a subservient episcopate had not soon sacrificed the Catholic doctrine concerning the divinity, person, and natures of Our Lord Jesus Christ, it was chiefly owing to the courage with which at all times the Roman church set forth its testimony to the truths handed down by its apostolic founders. From the fourth to the seventh century, in popes like Julius and Damasus, in Celestine and Leo, in Martin and Agatho, the Eastern bishops and the great Eastern Councils of Ephesus, Chalcedon and Constantinople are dominated by the traditional authority of the Apostolic See, which in all this dogmatic strife ever appears not as an equal, but as head and judge, as a sure and only witness to the original Christian truth.

III.

But if the Apostolic See has been at all times and among all other peoples the indispensable and indestructible centre of religious unity and the root of spiritual progress, it has been all that in our own beloved land, and in a very eminent degree. Without question the Catholic Church in this United States owes to the successors of Peter its existence, preservation and progress, to such an extent that without their power and influence steadily exerted in every year of this "saeculum mirabile" the majestic unity of religious sense and forces and institutions that we call American Catholicism would now be a series of weak and divided factions and parties, or submerged in an undistinguishable mass of rationalism and naturalism. We have only to recall hurriedly the conditions in the Old World and the New out of which our Church arose.

One hundred years ago this world of ours went through a chain of crises such as it had never experienced since the dissolution of the civil power of Rome. Men have agreed to call these crises by the name of the French Revolution, because France was the principal scene of these mighty overturnings,

and because she has never ceased to maintain the results and to propagate the spirit and the aims of these marvelous decades. Her children were the philosophers, prophets, poets and generals of the Revolution, as well as its law-makers and executors. From Syria to Drontheim, from Paris to San Domingo, wherever the tricolor waved and the drum beat out the Marseillaise, there rose from the throats of countless men of France such a protest against the existing condition of things in this world as had never yet been heard by any ill-fated shepherds of men. The oppressed everywhere sympathized with this wild outburst of a whole people. Their rulers in vain tried to curb the new power that had broken its bonds like a volcano and was vomiting on all sides death and destruction. All know the story—that awful “Night of the Gods”—the unparalleled decade from 1790 to 1800, the glorious shame and the shameful glory, the injustice of men and the long-delayed justice of God, the tottering and engulfing of thrones and altars and the upbuilding of new social foundments, the final passing of old and decayed social strata and the consolidation anew of rank and class, the golden roll of the world’s greatest victories and the unspeakable groanings and agonies of a whole society, slaughtered apparently for ambition’s sake,—more truly as an enormous providential blood-letting for a fever that was running in irresistible paroxysms. Behold now the deepest mystery of it all! These millions, drunk with license and triumph, free from all restraint, clamor once more for a master. On the blood-soaked soil of France, under the shadow of a thousand guillotines, in an atmosphere of savagery and blasphemy, they are building anew the throne of a king,—nay, of a king of kings, an emperor, and will lift upon it the figure of the Little Corsican! Marengo, Austerlitz, Jena hallow it with more blood than was poured out about the throne of Alexander or Cæsar. In the wake of this great consecration, law and order, peace and humanity come timidly back to their places. Time mends again her shattered loom and spins anew the usual web of life. Man had wanted to see by what original processes and vicissitudes society was formed; he had wished to penetrate those ancient and awe-

some secrets of God and history that were well forgotten. One brief hour of Marat, Danton, Robespierre, and the thousand human monsters that he had loosed from their cages, was enough. Let there be one chief henceforth, and let men shudder no more before these fatal

“Dragons of the prime
That tear each other in their slime.”

But it was on the head of the Church of Rome that this storm broke with the utmost violence. In all those wonderful years two popes, Pius VI and Pius VII, walked a dolorous way and were the broken-hearted witnesses of the deepest humiliation that had yet befallen the See of Peter. Out of the revolt of Martin Luther, but after incredible exertions, the popes had saved the Mediterranean world. Now the Latin genius itself seemed to apostatize and was calling loudly for the crucifixion of the mother which bore it, nursed it, raised it to manifold greatness, and when its original empire was lost gave it a new world for the exercise of its gifts. The so-called Catholic States of Europe vied with one another in attaining over religion within their domains the same free hand that the non-Catholic States had acquired, and as we near the end of the eighteenth century, and the first wild mutterings of the Revolution are heard, Gallican and Jansenist, Febonian and Josephist agree with the apostles of Deism and Rationalism that the See of Peter must cease to exist, must perish amid every evidence of contempt and injustice. And as for more than a thousand years the Western Churches were most intimately dependent on the See of Peter, it followed logically that the fall of the queenly mother would entail the overthrow of the daughters; nor was it otherwise, as is known to all.

Amid these circumstances were formed the first Catholic Churches in the United States, timid and insignificant, almost purely spiritual entities, with nothing but a doctrine and some memories, disheartened beyond measure by the contemporary wreckage of the stately churches of their European brethren. All other Christian bodies were historically antagonistic to

them, and tolerated them often only for their pitiful helplessness. They were without traditions or customs, without literature or art or schools, without monuments or institutions, for the most part scattered groups of exiles driven hither by poverty or civil oppression or religious persecution. If the great Catholic Churches of the Old World lay then in the dust, those of the New World were in the beginning all but invisible. Happily for them a series of providential circumstances had made the new state a land of religious freedom and in this new State the Catholics had been generally foremost in patriotic conviction, toil, and sacrifice, for the establishment of the new republic. They could say, as Melito of Sardes once said to Marcus Aurelius, that their religion and the new republic had arisen at the same time and that an equal prosperity of growth had been vouchsafed both, as though an index of their mutual sympathy and service. With blood and counsel and treasure they had bought the right to worship God freely according to the dictates of their conscience, had anchored deeply in every Catholic heart the holy passion of patriotism, and had secured it forever by an inextinguishably grateful memory of religious equity and peace, written into the fundamental law of the people, and destined one day to repay a thousandfold the noble confidence which prompted a law surely indispensable at that time for the development of the Catholic religion.

The perils of American Catholicism were not therefore from without, but rather from within. How should the new Church be governed? Who should appoint its bishops, its ministering clergy? Where should their support come from? Who should own and administer the ecclesiastical property? What should be the limits of authority and obedience between the laity and the clergy? How should ecclesiastical justice be administered? In a word how should the constitution of the Catholic Church, partly divine and partly an ancient historical growth, be made to work in circumstances that on the one hand were truly favorable, on the other extremely difficult? It must be remembered that out of the eighteenth century anti-ecclesiastical and anti-papal conflicts and discussions some Catholics, both ecclesiastics and laymen, had brought with them to the New World a

certain menacing Liberalism, principles and views concerning ecclesiastical government not easily compatible with an immemorially hierarchical church. Then, too, the Catholic population was almost at once fed by an ever-expanding volume of immigration, men of various nations and tongues, likewise of divergent civil and religious training, of unequal social advantages, as different in mentality as they were in racial traits and temper. Nor could they be kept within easy reach and control of such toil-worn clergy as existed. Tempted by the vastness and freedom of their new lives the immigrants roamed far and wide over the boundless extent of the new state, wherever opportunity tempted or fate bore them, so that even the most elementary influence of religion was often foreign or rather unattainable to these children of untold generations of Catholics. The Catholic Church in the United States was confronted, at once and over half a world, with the most delicate internal problems and the commonest calls of justice and charity. And as though to render more difficult the adaptation of an old historical religion to such new and extraordinary circumstances human nature itself, the average social capacity, seemed suddenly to experience an incredible uplift. The native genius of the new republic attacked with vigor its chief obstacle, distance, and in a brief time had endowed humankind with the beneficent inventions that render forever famous the name of the United States. Space seemed at once to roll up and disappear, while time was so multiplied in value that the individual man seemed now to dispose of a quasi-eternity. In this new state the plain common man rose rapidly in dignity and self-respect. No law of caste, no tradition of hereditary government, no ancient privilege barred the way of the most lowly. Equality of citizenship, vastness of opportunity, and abundance of all natural resources so conditioned and developed human personality that often there was almost the force of an antique state in each superior man who arose to grapple with resisting nature or to forge into a working organism the raw political material that lay about him. The poor immigrant, usually from the humblest strata of European life, ignorant of the uses of political freedom and the solemn responsibilities of self-govern-

ment, was suddenly clothed with the dignity of a ruler in a very complex governmental system. Moreover, his fathers before him had been modest tillers of a few worn acres, and now he was given an abundance of virgin soil, with every advantage of climate, cultivation, demand and transportation! He had lived as a rule close to nature in a simple, frugal and obscure way, and now he was thrown by thousands into the most active, ambitious, and productive urban centres that the world had yet seen! His pleasures had hitherto been few and innocent, and the means of satisfying the higher and more violent passions had been to him, happily enough, unattainable. But now he was mightily solicited on all sides by a superb and manifold joy of life and action that knew no bounds, and was the exact opposite of the patient and gentle humility of sentiment, timidity of thought, and habitual self-repression that for long ages had been natural to him! Finally, he had lived under a paternal absolutism that looked with immemorial jealousy on all political freedom of thought and speech, especially in the plain multitude, holding it by nature and history incapable of political sense or wisdom. And now he was daily witness to an incredible universal frankness of criticism, a freedom and fulness of individual judgment on all subjects, an untrammeling of the mind scarcely imaginable to one brought up to respect the existing order and institutions of life as a little less than divinely ordained, certainly in practice unimpeachable or unimproveable by the majority of mankind!

IV.

Therefore whether we consider the vast scandal of the apparent failure and undoing of Catholicism in Europe, one hundred years ago, or whether we reflect on the dubious conditions and circumstances amid which the Catholic life began to organize itself in the United States, or whether we recall the contemporary universal discredit of all institutions that bore the stamp of antiquity and the huge pride of a new and free life that was everywhere in evidence, or whether we remember

that Catholicism, which from time immemorial counted the State itself and civil institutions as friendly and protective, was now as poor and insignificant as the lowliest of its members, the outlook for a rapid and orderly growth of its churches was not then encouraging to prudent men who properly appreciated at once the true nature of the Catholic Church and the character of the new times and new surroundings. Could she seek once more her origin in the womb of time and be truly born again? Could she renounce all but the essentials of her being, and recommence the toilsome and perilous and uncertain conquest of her own children, forget the glory of the past, the reverence and fear of kings, the admiration of entire peoples, the habit of motherly domination without close regard to the exact limits of the temporal and the spiritual? In other words, was a genuine Catholicism possible in the United States?

The answer lies in a century of unequalled growth, during which all the internal forces of Catholicism have had free play and after which it stands demonstrated to the world that in the United States the deepest religious sentiment and the most ardent civic loyalty find an equal shelter in every Catholic heart. We have all rejoiced these days with the populous and progressive dioceses of New York and Philadelphia at the rounding out of a century of vigorous religious life, nor is it necessary to point to the material evidences of the vigor and solidity of the faith and generosity of the three generations which have made possible the wonderful Catholic monuments of worship, education, and charity that grace these noble cities and exhibit publicly the true spirit and the real uses of the Catholic faith. In such matters these two dioceses are only foremost among a hundred others equally zealous according to their population and their means. But infinitely greater for our nation's welfare than all the external works of this century of Catholicism is the undeniable evidence of the fundamental sympathy and harmony that have always existed between the genius of the American Commonwealth and the Catholic Church. By their fruits ye shall know them. As a rule great working ideals that are widely shared by an epoch or a people create for themselves strong and bold personalities

in whom these ideals are forever embodied and consecrated. And it has been even so with us in the short span of one hundred years. As long as our Catholic people can remember the names of such prelates as Archbishops John Carroll and John Hughes, and such citizens as Charles Carroll and Roger Taney, so long will they remember that the most glorious conquest of Catholicism in the New World is its unbroken moral coöperation with the Constitution and the institutions of this United States, and that if in the future men's souls should again be tried in some consuming furnace of public peril, the response from the children of the Catholic Church will never be unworthy of their famous ancestry.

And where could this assurance be more strongly felt or more justly proclaimed than in this mother church of our religion in the United States? Its prelates from the first to the latest have ever been men of strong and pure Catholic faith, but likewise men of equally ardent and enlightened patriotism. Its clergy and its laity, inheritors of a sturdy Catholicism that began nobly in the Ark and the Dove, have ever been conspicuous for their religious zeal, their generosity, and their civic devotion. From this pulpit, as from its native place, has ever issued a high and solemn appeal for the love of this glorious fatherland, for a perfect service of it, above all for lives that shall perpetuate it to the end of time in keeping with the ideals that were shared and proclaimed with equal earnestness by our First President and the first archbishop of this See. The world to-day looks on with astonishment at our rich development in fullest freedom of all the forces of Catholic life. But it ought never to be forgotten that to the prelates of this primatial See, and by reason of its very antiquity, its prominence, and its proximity to our seat of government, is largely owing the ample and well-justified confidence of the public authority in the devotion and fidelity of the entire Catholic body to the welfare of the nation. The fair daughters whose joy this venerable See shares these days went forth from her, but they went forth well equipped for their splendid career, indoctrinated with admirable principles of true religion and true patriotism, each in turn provided with a sum of experience

and insight that in those early days were invaluable, and each confident that here were wisdom and courage, affection and charity, tact and sympathy.

On the other hand, dearly beloved brethren, any outline of our Catholic life and progress would be at once unreal and unjust that did not take into consideration and acknowledge with gratitude the share of the Apostolic See, its constant solicitude, its wise direction, the benefit of its secular experience, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit that in the administration of the Church is ordinarily vouchsafed most abundantly through its head, the Vicar of Jesus Christ on earth. Since the division of the first diocese, the venerable See of Baltimore, one hundred years ago, some ninety dioceses have been created, about one-tenth of the actual Latin episcopate, so that a new diocese has arisen in our Church for nearly every year of the last century. When we reflect, on the one hand, that the diocese with its bishop is the original living cell of the Catholic organism, and on the other hand that the formation of each diocese means long and careful study, the exercise of prudence and equity, tact and conciliation, it must be at once evident that we are deeply indebted to the Apostolic See for what is on the whole an admirable repartition of our religious capacities, duties and resources. To this we must add the constant and immediate control of religious and ecclesiastical observance, the execution of the public laws of the Church, by frequent reports to the Apostolic See and by frequent visits of the bishops to the same immemorial source of Catholic wisdom. Within the same period three national councils and many provincial synods have been held, in all of which the Apostolic See has been immediately helpful and has brought the organization of the Catholic Church in the United States into full harmony with the intention and the general principles of universal canonical legislation. The same venerable See has never failed to insist on the education of a native clergy, and it is very largely to this that we owe to-day the system of provincial and diocesan seminaries and the novitiates of the religious orders out of which in no small measure have come the 16,000 priests who now minister to the needs of the American Catholic people.

It has been ever intent on diminishing and removing all causes or occasions of friction within the ranks of this clergy. We owe to it the harmony of action that exists to-day between the secular clergy and the religious orders working in the same territory and subject to the same wise general laws. To it also we owe the high degree of reverence and obedience that to-day everywhere marks the practical relations of the bishop and his clergy. In the Apostolic See the Catholic people of the United States have always found a final court of appeal, at once accessible, equitable, independent and powerful, which no unrighteous influence could easily deceive, or deceiving hope to maintain what it had gained. In a very particular manner we owe to the Apostolic See the practical and considerate legislation that in the course of a hundred years has enabled the Catholic Church in the United States to assimilate gradually and affectionately many millions of immigrants speaking many languages, formed differently by immemorial institutions and history, broken off with violence and often with hard injustice from their parent stem, cast across wide seas into a new and strange land.

Nor ought we forget that in all this legislation the Apostolic See has always been thoughtful for the public welfare of the Republic, the closer harmony of all its citizens for the common good and growth, an increase of respect for the public authority, and a larger and more intelligent co-operation for the knowledge and practice of those political virtues without which no State has hitherto managed to exist with peace and progress. In all these and other forms of beneficent direction the habitual instrument of the Apostolic See has been for us the Congregation of Propaganda. Amid these centenary feasts of rejoicing it seems certainly proper to pay just tribute to the wisdom and equity of its prefects, the learning of its canonists, the administrative skill and vigor of its secretaries, and the habitual devotion of its officials. Through this body the ancient legislation of the Church has been constantly revised for us and adapted to our needs, or new provision has been made for our new circum-

stances and conditions. It has borne the brunt of responsibility in all the larger activities necessary to safeguard the unity of Catholicism in the United States, to protect its dignity, to maintain its intrinsic strength and health, and to keep it in harmonious contact with the civil order.

If now I add that by sending an immediate representative to the Catholic Church in the United States the Apostolic See has recognized the full dignity of the latter and has provided for a more expeditious and satisfactory administration of its general interests, I shall have omitted no important step of the central authority in favor of the welfare of Catholicism in our beloved fatherland.

Dearly beloved brethren! It seems to me that in the sacred ceremony of this morning, the most solemn in all the rich ritual of the Church, we have a remarkable illustration of what I have been trying briefly to set before you, namely, the union of civic spirit and religious zeal. In the Catholic priest who has this day been raised to the fulness of the episcopal order devotion to his native land has ever been a prominent trait. In the high and responsible offices that have been entrusted to him he has never failed to make it plain that he was a profound believer in the fundamental principles that have always regulated the relations of the Catholic Church and the United States, principles of mutual respect and coöperation, a large and kindly amity that recognizes fully the nature and history of each society and emphasizes particularly all those points of contact that make for a deeper intelligence of one another, a fuller sympathy, and a more efficient promotion of the great beneficent aims that are common to both. In his long and successful career in the Eternal City as a representative of the Catholic Church in the United States he was called on more than once to render highly prized services to whole classes of our citizens, while an army of individuals, bishops, priests, and laymen, still live to thank him for innumerable courtesies and benefits conferred on them during the same period. If we consider that the Catholic life flourishes

particularly where good order, venerable tradition, sure and rapid justice, and a general wise equity prevail, it is not too much to say that no priest has contributed more to the welfare both of our clergy and of the Catholic laity in general. Let a partial witness of this be his acknowledged service to the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore and his share in the establishment of the Apostolic Delegation at Washington. The chief merit, however, of this priest's life is the service that he has rendered to the education of the clergy, always a matter of primary importance in the Catholic religion which is kept alive, taught and administered, protected and illustrated chiefly by the ministers whom it selects from its own members and trains with exceedingly great affection and earnestness as the guardians and representatives before God and man of its spirit, its honor and its dignity. As Rector for many years of the American College at Rome he brought that beloved institution to a high degree of academic efficiency and placed it on a sound economic basis whence it has arisen regularly to its present high status. The unification of all our teaching in the annual assemblies of the Catholic Educational Association and the increased interest in the work of the Catholic teacher in the United States are largely due to his intelligent zeal and influence.

Finally, as Rector of the Catholic University of America he has won the support and approval of his superiors, has guided faithfully and successfully that institution amid peculiarly trying and even disheartening circumstances, and has received from the Apostolic See the highest note of recognition that can be conferred on a Catholic priest. More than this it would be unnecessary to say, did not the present magnificent assembly of Catholic prelates, probably the largest ever gathered in this country for an episcopal consecration, demand from us an expression of gratitude. While they have come from far and near primarily to honor the distinguished ecclesiastic who this day enters their high rank we cannot forget that their imposing array, for numbers and dignity, is almost a council of the Church, and that their assembly adds one more title of just

pride to this venerable Cathedral and is one more well-merited joy for the eminent prelate who, more than any one else, rejoices in the happy culmination of the life that he has this day irrevocably consecrated to an absolute service of our Common Master.

THOMAS J. SHAHAN.



