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CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH

THESE TWO ARE ONE



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CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH

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Accept Christ, You Must Accept the Church

“Of course like any man of even limited intelligence, I admire and respect Jesus Christ. I could almost wish I were one of His disciples. But, and you’ll forgive me for saying it, I cordially dislike the Catholic Church.”

Ford Osborne had laid aside his professionally humorous mood. He spoke almost grimly. And his sentences were rock-hard as he flung them out into the little group, of which Helen Webb was a sympathetic second. She sat back now with a hardly perceptible sigh. And her eyes swung quickly to the third member of the group. But Father Hall, far from rising in wrath to smite the “insulter of his faith” (as she had feared he might do), simply knocked the cold ash from his pipe, filled it in leisurely fashion, and leaned over and rang a little hand bell on his small table.

Ice for Three

Into the doorway popped Mary his housekeeper. Mary was to the people of Lakeside more an institution than a person. But as an institution she served Father Hall and his infrequent guests with delightful relish.

“It’s hot in here,” said Father Hall to his ancient housekeeper. “I think we should all like something with ice in it. Perhaps our two New York visitors would like something more than ice?”

He looked from Helen to Ford and back to Helen again.

"Mary can undoubtedly find something to make you a julep with, if you'd like a julep."

"A julep?" Ford Osborne almost leaped with joy. "If I may mix my figures, father, that would be heaping coals on fire."

"Bring us two long, tall mint juleps, Mary," said Father Hall. "And bring me an iced coffee, my own particular strength. And frost on all three glasses, please."

Spiritual "Bromides"

As the housekeeper disappeared, Father Hall turned back to his guests.

"Your remark, my dear Ford, was intelligible but stupid. I understand people who use that religious bromidiom, but I wish they knew more about both Christ and His Church."

"Thanks," replied Osborne, a bit ruefully. "It isn't often that I'm told frankly that I'm stupid and talk in bromides."

"No," commented Helen. "Your friends are usually more merciful than truthful."

"Young lady," said Osborne, sternly, "remember you are depending on me for your lift back to Manhattan."

"Am I? Not while there's still hitchhiking and I can waggle a thumb."

They all laughed and settled back in the comfortable if venerable chairs in the priest's little rectory. Ever since their meeting at the Open-Mind Forum the visits of these unusually assorted three had grown more frequent. Father Hall had come to

love quite sincerely the clever Ford Osborne, whose prose humor appeared in all the smart magazines; and he had grown to feel a real affection for the bright, intelligent Helen Webb, whose verse had the tang of Dorothy Parker's without the latter's cynical malice. The fact that they were professed unbelievers with a modern slant on all things religious proved merely stimulating to the priest, who found their objections exhilarating and the discussions they precipitated clarifying to his own thoughts.

Really One

Now he swung back to the young man's objections.

"You see, admiring Christ and disliking the Church is like wanting to decapitate a man because you think his face is handsome but you dislike his body. The Church is really Christ. They are head and body of one divine personality, mystical but real. You can no more say, 'I love the head, Christ, but I dislike the body, the Church' than I can say, 'I think you would be vastly improved if one of Herr Hitler's headsmen went to work on you and performed a major decapitation'."

"That," replied Osborne, "is Greek to me."

"The Greek of St. Paul perhaps," the priest answered, "or the Greek of the New Testament. But it's truth just the same."

Silly Ideas

"You see, Protestantism has rather knocked all sense out of the concept of the Church as Christ established it. You think

of the Church as just an organization like, let's say, Harvard University, only not so smart; or the New York Central Railroad, only not quite so efficient; or General Motors, only lacking its ability to juggle the stock market.

“Or you think of it as a building where a group of more or less congenial people meet in order to be emotionally entertained by a clever preacher and to be mildly stimulated by fairish music. Or it's an assembly of people who find that they admire the same style of church architecture and the same general type of service and who meet with more or less regularity, as other groups meet for bridge or lectures on art or the discussion of politics.

“Which is as far from Christ's concept of the Church as...”

He fumbled about for a term for his comparison. Mary opened the door and stood balancing a tray on which were three frosted glasses and a generously heaped plate of cakes.

“Ah,” cried the priest, “as circus lemonade is from a rich and mellow julep! Bring them here, Mary, and brush those books off the stool.”

Identical

It was only when they sat back, Helen and Ford feeling the tang of the julep against their lips and palates, Father Hall savoring the strong brown body of his iced coffee, that he resumed.

“Let's put in a phrase. The Church began at the moment of Christ's Incarnation. Or inversely: Christ's life on earth

and His work will be ended only when the last Pope has laid aside his tiara at the call of Gabriel's trumpet blasting the end of the world. You cannot separate Christ and His Church. They are one."

Ford Osborne shook his head reluctantly.

"It's not quite cricket (whatever that means) to disagree with a man over his own inspired julep."

"Besides," interjected Helen, "he, poor man, is drinking only coffee; you should be able to talk brilliantly on alcoholic stimulant."

"I accept without acknowledging the handicap," said the priest.

"But," persisted Ford, "I see no similarity whatsoever. Here's an elaborate organization in place of the simple Christ. Here's a complicated system of theology and ritual replacing the carpenter and itinerant preacher of Nazareth. I love or could love Him. I find nothing lovable or attractive—except such charming persons as yourself—in the Church. And I frankly doubt if you can show me any similarity, much less identity."

"There," cried Helen, almost as if she were the umpire, "is an honest challenge."

A light in the eyes of the priest flashed the signal that the challenge was readily accepted.

Training for Organization

"Let's go back to the history of Christ and see just what He Himself was planning for His own Church. That will give us our start.

“Christ’s preoccupation with His Church is one of the outstanding facts of His public life. He talks of it constantly. More important, He begins to build that Church almost from the start of His career. It was as if He knew, as certainly He did, that His own career of teaching and working would be extremely short and He must build up a group to carry on His work when His death had been decreed. Loving the whole world and every man and woman in it, He wisely reached out beyond the bounds of His own time and nation and began at once to plan for the carrying of His truths and His means of salvation to all people of all races and ages. He would die and rise and ascend into heaven. But His work must go on without pause or interruption. All men must find available the truths He had come from heaven to reveal and the strength which He poured out in the blessing of His outstretched hands.

Training Specialists

“Hence quite obviously He was preoccupied from the beginning about His Church. For His Church was to carry on His work, as He put it Himself, ‘until the winding up of the world.’

“Christ was consummately an organizer. We find Him assembling some seventy-two men. Out of them He carefully sorts a group of twelve. And upon these He lavishes the most exact and careful training. He explains to them in His parables things which are hidden and mysterious. He tells them just what to say and how to say it. He walks with them, talks with them, eats with them, discusses with them His ideals

and high purposes, prays for them that His Father will give them the strength and courage of their important office, promises to send the Holy Spirit into their souls and literally fulfills that promise on Pentecost, and for three years gives the major portion of His efforts, not to teaching and miracles, but to the training of a college of Apostles.

“In His company they see just what He does and how He does it. He focuses their attention on those toward whom His heart goes out in special interest. And experimentally He sends them off to carry His message to the towns He does not personally visit, checking up on their success or failure when they return.

“The whole process was that of a skilled organizer’s imparting to his followers his spirit and ideals and purposes. He was visualizing an entire future in which they would carry forward His work. And He trained them elaborately and painstakingly for the task of carrying His name and work before all the people.

With One Mind

“Then He passed a step further. He identified Himself with them. They were, these cornerstones of His Church, to be one with Himself. Their voice was really His voice. ‘Who heareth you heareth me.’ He was the Good Shepherd; yes; but He transmitted to them the task that was the Good Shepherd’s; for they were to feed His lambs and His sheep. He had brought the Gospel, the good news that was to save the world; but it was their sublime privilege to ‘preach the Gospel to every creature,’ carrying on the work He had personally kept

confined to the narrow boundaries of Judea and Galilee. His frequent expression, an integral part of His work for souls, was, 'Thy sins are forgiven thee'; now He turns to His disciples and confers upon them the power to carry on this forgiveness of sins. Wherever they go and whatever they do, He will be with them. Time will pass and they will die; their successors will take up their work. He will still be with them. Until the ending of the world, till everything has been finished and done, He will be standing at their side, one with them, their strength, their inspiration, their source of power and unity.

"Upon this group of specialists, who were first of all specialists in His own thought and work, He built His Church. Later St. Paul was to call Christ the cornerstone of the Church. Christ Himself had anticipated St. Paul by choosing St. Peter as the rock on which the cornerstone and the whole Church was to rest, so that we can picture the Church rising out of the rock of Peter and imperceptibly melting into the cornerstone that was Christ and rising without break into the towering edifice that was the whole visible Church.

Transfer of All

"It was the most complete possible transfer of power. No skillful business organizer laying out the plans for his corporation ever so completely identified the corporation with himself as Christ identified the Church with His own person. He was the bridegroom, and the Church was the bride; but, He insisted, bridegroom and bride were really one flesh. Each important action of

His life, each significant interest of His heart He transferred to the Church. And the early Christians looking upon the identity of the bishops and Christ, of the priests and the Christ they served, called them by the lovely name of '*Alter Christus*,' 'Another Christ.' And St. Paul, feeling as a bishop this identity with Christ, cried out in those words, 'I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me.' The Apostles and the early Church felt they had no individual identity; they were the living and walking continuance of the mission of Christ to the world. They spoke His words, performed His actions, loved those He had loved, lived only to see His kingdom triumphant upon earth."

"A beautiful concept and easily intelligible," Osborne agreed. "But quite aside from the fact that it has nothing to do with the Church of the present, I find it a pretty and sentimental idea and hardly a rock-fast reality."

He sipped appreciatively at his julep, watching the priest from down the long frosted sides.

Father Hall lifted his own deep brown glass to his lips and then set it down on the low table at his side, carefully clearing a space among the litter of books, letters, magazines, manuscripts.

Reason for Love

"If I didn't believe with all my heart that the Church was merely the continuance of the work of Christ, if I were not persuaded with the deepest conviction that the thoughts of the Church were the thoughts of Christ, and its interests, ideals, activi-

ties, objectives essentially His, I should not be in the slightest concerned with it. But because I am sure that the Church in all essentials uses Christ's very words, speaks with His accents, and does only the things that He started and gave to it to carry on, I love the Church as I love Christ and only because I love Christ."

"But I think of the Church as a powerful and brilliantly managed organization like—say, the Standard Oil Company or the Pennsylvania Railroad." Ford Osborne was sincere in his emphasis.

"Personally," interjected Helen, "I've shied away from all organizations since the stock crash."

"If the Church were primarily an organization," Father Hall replied, "it would share the fate of all organizations. Primarily it is not. Primarily it is the continuance of the work of a divine person; and that is why, while other organizations falter and crash, it moves serenely along its way. The Christ who rose from the dead holds the Church, which carries on His work and speaks with His voice, superior to the fate of other organizations. It will never fail simply because Christ cannot fail."

Still the Same

"But I still don't get the identity," protested Osborne.

"We're coming to that. Let me see how I can make it clear to you.

"Well suppose we start with this. A dear friend of yours disappears for a matter of some thirty years."

“A modern Rip Van Winkle without the schnapps,” suggested Osborne.

“Enoch Arden without a wife,” amended Helen.

“He comes back as changed — well as changed in appearance as old Rip himself. His personality has remained. His face is aged and bearded, and his lithe young figure has grown bent and sagging. How do you recognize him?”

“Not from his passport pictures,” was Helen’s offer, which rapidly decrescendoed under Ford’s “Don’t be frivolous, young lady.”

Identical Voice

“You recognize him when he begins to talk. In all probability his voice identifies him. If it doesn’t, you recognize him from the things he is interested in, the things that still are the fundamental concerns of his heart and mind. His body may have changed; but you know him when he begins to talk of the things that he loved and to press on toward the interests that have in times past engrossed him.”

“That’s right enough,” agreed Osborne.

“Well precisely that test proves the moral identity of Christ and His Church. He said that the Church should speak with His voice, so much so that those that heard the Church would hear Him. But what He really meant was that the Church would continue to say over and over again precisely the things that He had said during His mortal life. And that voice would keep repeating and stressing His fundamental interests.

Whence This Power?

“No man who has ever heard a Catholic priest talk has failed to notice that he spoke with a certain power superior to any mere eloquence. I have quoted so often a pagan friend of mine who, when he returned from a trip through Ireland, said to me: ‘I never failed to be astonished at the Irish priests. You see, I used to drop into village churches for Sunday services; it was part of my way of learning to know the people. Well a priest would get into the pulpit, a chap who I knew was my inferior in education and experience. He might speak with a blanket-thick brogue. But do you know? when the old chap began to talk, he spoke like a person with power.’

“‘And do you know,’ I asked him, ‘that you are quoting?’

“He looked surprised.

Same Words

“‘When the Son of the carpenter began to preach, the people marveled and said of Him, “He speaks as one having power, and not as the Scribes and Pharisees.” Your Irish priest speaks with power simply because, like all the priests of the world, he speaks Sunday after Sunday with the voice of Jesus Christ. He simply repeats Christ’s message, explains a little more fully His parables, draws the inevitable conclusions and applications from His doctrines. But unlike many ministers, who go romancing out into the fields far, far from the mind of Christ, the priest as an official of the Church knows nothing to say and nothing to preach that he has not found in the mind and heart of Christ. And that is why,

though he may speak with a brogue and talk with deplorable syntax, he still speaks as one having power'."

Osborne nodded.

"I've noticed that myself," he said.

"Now you can identify the Church as the continuance of Christ visible to the world if you'll listen to its voice even in passing. All the so-called difficult mysteries and dogmas of the Church are simply repetitions of the teachings of Christ: The Holy Trinity, the Blessed Sacrament, the mystical union of vine and branches in the one Mystical Body of Christ, the relative importance of soul and body and of time and eternity, the impossibility of winning heaven without the continued help of God—known as grace—the fact of hell, the supremacy of the successors of St. Peter, to whom were given the keys of the kingdom of heaven, the necessity of prayer and penance, the enduring character of marriage, the value of personal purity, and poverty of spirit, contempt for riches—go down the list, and you'll find that the main dogmas of the Church are simply endless repetitions of the doctrines of Jesus Christ, spoken in unchanged terms by the voice of the Church, which learned to speak as it listened to the voice of Christ.

New Dogmas

"The same type of people who grew impatient with the doctrines of Jesus Christ and said, contemptuously or reluctantly, 'This is a hard saying and who can hear it?' today grow impatient with the dogmas of the Church. Yet even the most cursory study of the great and essential body of the

Church's teachings throws the student back to Christ with immediate precipitancy. What Christ taught, the Church repeats. What He said, the Church says in identical words. Even the vast *Summa* of St. Thomas is only an amplification of the words of Christ, which the Church had been repeating from the first to the thirteenth centuries and which it has kept repeating until the present moment."

"It rather seems to me," Osborne objected, "that the Church is always pulling a few new dogmas. There's the infallibility of the Pope, for instance."

"And there is the Church's attitude toward divorce," supplemented Helen, "and its demand for a monopoly of religion and education."

"I'm not going to go into the whole question of the infallibility of the Pope, but I'm just going to ask you if the dogma of Papal infallibility did not become inevitable (as it was for centuries the accepted principle on which the Church acted) the very minute that Christ told Peter he was a rock against which error would beat in vain, and promised him that in all he taught He, Christ, would be with him as the sustaining force, and ordered him to feed His entire flock—with the implication that he would feed them the bread of truth and not Milton's wind of error."

"Well of course . . ." Osborne said, slowly, and then stopped as if stymied.

"As for divorce," continued Father Hall, "the Church has done no more than repeat with tireless insistence the saying of Christ that divorce with remarriage is adultery.

How the Protestant churches get around the flat, almost brutal condemnation of divorce by Christ is just a little beyond me. They have to ignore His plain teaching in order to satisfy a divorce-mad generation. The Church cannot and never will. It must repeat with merciless insistence what Christ taught.

Monopolists

“Of course the Church demands a monopoly of religion. Didn’t Christ pray that all might be one as He and His Father were one? Didn’t He look forward to a time when there would be one flock and one shepherd? Did He establish a series of churches all saying and doing different things? Or did He talk in season and out of season of one Church, one flock, one people? Christ was the bridegroom of the Church. In the Protestant and unbelieving point of view, with scores or hundreds of churches, Christ becomes the strangest sort of spiritual bigamist. The Church is no more insistent upon monopoly of religion than Christ Himself was. With St. Paul it simply clings to Christ’s one faith, one Church, one baptism.

“The Church does not precisely demand a monopoly of education. But like Christ, it finds that system of education which places the values of earth far ahead of the values of heaven intolerable and unchristian. And it hears Christ cry out in protest to those who deliberately keep religion out of education, ‘Suffer the little children to come unto me.’ Surely the Church is closer to Christ than those Protestant bodies who gladly applaud a school system that forbids Christ’s entrance into the classroom. Isn’t

the Church simply echoing Christ when it demands that the little children be permitted to come unto Him?"

Helen nodded.

"I see," she answered. And then toward Ford, "And I think that answers you pretty thoroughly too."

Osborne regarded the melting ice in his glass without comment.

A Father's Business

"Now," continued the priest, "let's take a look at those essential interests of mind and heart that so completely and adequately identify the personality of Christ. Early in life, you may remember, He remained behind in the Temple because He must be about His Father's business. That business He later transmitted to the Church.

"What was that business? What were His consuming interests?"

Father Hall paused as if allowing the two young people to make their own answer. As neither of them spoke, he pushed on.

"You may remember that on a certain occasion the Pharisees tried one of their tricks. They asked Him to give them (in a phrase or two) the great commandment of the Law. They hoped He would pick badly and they would be able to attack Him for His mistake.

"Instead what they did was give Him a magnificent opportunity to summarize His own interests and the absorbing concerns of His mind and heart.

"So He gave them the two commandments. You know them, I'm sure; though

in the most astonishing betrayal of Christ's own primary interests the whole unbelieving world and most of the Protestant churches have completely forgotten the commandment to which Christ gave first place."

Which Was First?

Again he paused, and Osborne looked up.

"Wasn't His commandment," the young man asked, somewhat doubtfully, "that we should love our neighbors as ourselves?"

The priest smiled in something like mild triumph.

"I thought you'd say that. Is that what you think too, Helen?"

"I thought it was something about doing unto others as you would have them do unto you," she answered.

The priest's smile broadened.

"Out of the mouth of our own times you've answered. And it's precisely our times that have completely forgotten the first and greatest commandment of the law of Christ."

The young couple were more puzzled than ever.

"I know you're at sea. The modern Protestant bodies are holding up the love of the neighbor as the important and all-embracing commandment of God. They are strong for humanitarianism and believe that those who love their neighbors will find their names leading the list of those who love. But Christ gave as His first commandment—"

Out of the dim past Helen called forth a forgotten phrase and uttered it in a very shaky and hesitant voice: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole mind—"

A Richer Love

"Correct," smiled the priest. "The first commandment of Christ was the command to love God. The command to love one's neighbor took second place. Now I'm not going to stop to consider whether He was right or wrong in the way He rated their importance. That's not the point. He put the love of God in first place, and so does the Catholic Church, and only the Catholic Church. Today the honor of God is the main concern of the Church. Hence the unending Sacrifice of the Mass, the insistence on prayer of praise and honor to God, the emphasis on the relationship of the individual soul to God, the whole magnificent liturgy of the Church, which is a grand effort to love God and honor Him in the most perfect possible form.

"And all that is part of the other interest of Christ in our ultimately gaining heaven. Protestantism has largely dedicated itself to making a heaven upon earth. The unbelievers have shrugged their shoulders hopelessly, admitting that they know nothing of heaven and care less. But the Church remembers that it profits a man nothing if he gain this whole world and lose that immortal soul of his and with it his eternity of happiness and joy in heaven. Christ was essentially a supernaturalist. So is the Church. Christ was intent upon focusing the attention of His followers on the love of God and the gaining of heaven. So is the

Church. And in that the Church is as unique in this age of humanitarianism and earth-bound interest as Christ was unique in His very similar age.”

“Personally,” Osborne interjected, “and though I admit it is aside from the direct question, I’m for humanitarianism.”

Then Love Men

“And so, if humanitarianism is rightly understood and applied, was Christ and is His Church. For the second commandment is, ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.’ This commandment is immediately connected with the first. In fact it is impossible without the first. For the best and really the only permanent reason for loving one’s neighbor is one’s love of God.”

“That I certainly don’t see,” interjected Osborne.

“It’s a large subject and I’m not going to enter into it now. But loving this twisted, unruly, selfish, self-seeking, sinful mass of humanity known as thy neighbor is a terribly trying and difficult job. We love them best only when we remember that they are all children of the same Father in heaven, that they were loved by Jesus Christ to the point of His dying for them, and that they are destined to an immortality like our own.

Near His Heart

“But the Church, intently watching Christ, saw who those were whom Christ loved best. They were the poor and afflicted, the little children and the feeble old men, the offcasts of the world. Inevitably then the Church had to love these beloved of Christ. And it did and does. For them in

Christlike fashion it builds its institutions of charity, founds its hospitals, and opens the doors of its refuges. Nietzsche would have all these institutions leveled to the ground as keeping in existence the weak and maimed, who hold back the species. The Catholic Church holds them in its warm arms simply because it has seen Jesus Christ love them and fold them to His breast. The heart of the Catholic Church, like the voice of the Catholic Church, is that of Christ Himself."

The priest paused and drained the last drops of coffee from the crushed ice in his glass.

"Yes," he said, "outside the Catholic Church the first commandment of Jesus Christ, the commandment to love God, is almost forgotten. His interest in seeing souls safely reach heaven has been pushed aside in favor of an absorbing interest in success on earth. And the love of His poor and weak has given place to scientific philanthropy, which is oftenest based, not on a love of a needy neighbor, but on an acute dislike for his unpleasant smell and a wish to remove from my offended sight his unwholesome skin and starving body. I'm afraid that it is the Church who in all this keeps alive the interests of Jesus Christ."

Consequence of Love

Sensing an objection in the eyes of Osborne, the priest anticipated him.

"And I am personally convinced that when we love God we will be wonderfully and deeply concerned with the interests of our neighbor. When we are concerned with

heaven, earth becomes a lovelier place in which to live, simply because we cannot be sinful or really selfish when we are aspiring to heaven; and sinfulness and selfishness are the things which make earth unhappy. But that is all a tremendous question and not quite the point at issue now. Let's stick to the identity of the Church and Christ.

“As the Church speaks, so it acts. Endlessly and tirelessly it does what Christ did and what He commanded. Let's look at that side of the Church's life.

“Christ at the Last Supper chose the most solemn moment of His life, the moment before death, to issue a command to His disciples. They were to turn bread into His body and wine into His blood. The Church continues this in its daily Mass.

“In His all-night talk with Nicodemus, Christ stated in clearest possible terms the need to be ‘born again of water and the Holy Ghost.’ Later He commanded His disciples to make baptism the gateway of admission into His Church. The Church continues to stress in theory and practice the essential need of rebirth through baptism.

“Christ said simply, ‘Without me you can do nothing.’ While modern religions stress self-sufficiency and the ability to carve out one's career in time and eternity alone and unaided, the Church confers the strength and immediate help of Jesus Christ in the grace of the sacraments. It admits that without Christ we can do nothing worthy of eternal life. And it sees that we move and work in constant union with the divine Christ.

Sin and Solace

“Christ Himself forgave sins. One of His most consoling and recurring greetings was, ‘Be of good heart . . . thy sins are forgiven thee.’ This power of forgiving sins He gave in explicit delegation to His Church. ‘Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them.’ Yet the Catholic Church alone exercises this sweet and consoling and most important power of Christ. In fact only the Catholic Church is deeply concerned about sin, for it draws that concern from the heart and mind of Christ, who felt sin so terrible a thing that He died to break its power over the world.

“Christ promised the Church the abiding presence of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, who would come and dwell in the hearts of the faithful. The Church still brings down the Holy Spirit in the sacrament of confirmation.

Miracles of Healing

“Christ, to confirm the fact that He was the Messiah and the divine teacher speaking with authority given Him by His Father, raised the dead and cured diseases. The early Church found itself with the same power because this power impressed and convinced unbelievers. But Christ’s concern was primarily with souls and not with bodies. So the exercise of the power was largely abandoned. Yet the miracles of healing, so important in the eyes of the Christian Scientists and many another parvenu religion, continue uninterruptedly within the Church. Lourdes is the scene of constant miracles of health restored. No saint is lifted to the altars until he has

blessed with extraordinary and proved miracles those seeking his intercession.

For All

“The command which Christ gave to His Church was universal. Teach all nations, ‘preach the Gospel to every creature.’ Amusingly enough the early Fathers of the Church took this so literally that they wondered if the ‘every creature’ might not also mean the animals. They thought perhaps they might be in duty bound to go out and preach to the horses and dogs and sheep.”

“I thought St. Francis did preach to the birds,” suggested Helen.

“Or was it the fish?” asked Osborne. “I have a hunch that he gave a sermon at the seashore that was attentively followed by the bass and pickerel and swordfish and sharks.”

“You’re right,” said Father Hall. “He preached to the birds and the fish both. And he made an excellent convert out of the wolf of Gobbio.”

“I wonder,” puzzled Ford, ruefully, “if he had better luck changing the habits of his congregations than most preachers have.”

“That,” Father Hall replied, “is one of the secrets of history.”

Again they laughed, and the priest resumed.

Constricted or Catholic

“Well at any rate the Church has taken very seriously that command to preach to all races and all people. You must remember that Protestantism was for the first two hundred and fifty years of its existence—

that is, from the revolt of Luther—almost entirely a series of little national or local groups. Its missionary enterprises are only about one hundred years old. The early little Protestant sects were content to settle down and become national. Lutheranism adjusted itself to the Scandinavian countries and parts of Germany. Anglicanism considered itself as English as roast beef. Calvinism was either notably Swiss or belligerently Scotch. The Pilgrim fathers never dreamed for a minute that it was part of their duty to preach the faith they believed to the Indians. Protestantism in the main was more racial than is Buddhism or Shintoism.

“The Church on the other hand had Christ’s restless missionary zeal. It preached from the beginning to every creature. From Rome went out the great apostles: Boniface to Germany, Patrick to Ireland, Augustine to England, Cyril and Methodius to the Slavs, as Peter himself had gone to Antioch and Rome, and Paul went to the peoples of Grecian lands. The Catholic missionary invariably preceded the first explorers of each newly discovered country. And while the English discoverers and colonizers obliterated the Indians of North America, the Catholic colonizers brought with them to South America their priests to give the Indians Christianity. Today, as always, the Church is the one ever advancing missionary organization in the world. It still preaches the Gospel to every creature.”

Divine Parallel

Father Hall summarized briefly on his fingers.

“It would almost be easy to put the words and actions and interests of Christ into one column and into a second column the doctrines and actions and interests of the Church, and you would find them in perfect parallel. It’s a task I commend to your attention.”

“Sounds like a game,” suggested Helen.

“Make it a game. It’s the sort of game you couldn’t lose.

“You could push the comparison however even farther,” continued Father Hall. “You could, if you cared to, find in the life of Christ and the life of the Church another startling parallel. It is almost as if Christ meant His Church to carry the external identity of birth and career, of friends and enemies.”

“And I don’t get that either,” Osborne objected, looking constantly more puzzled.

His Life

“The life of Christ,” explained Father Hall, “was one of birth in extreme poverty and among the world’s outcasts. But to Him flocked at once not merely the smelly shepherds but a handful of brilliant Magi. Instantly His appearance is the signal for persecution, bitter and fierce enough to drive Him into exile and take the life of innocents killed in His stead. Then He passes into the obscurity of the Hidden Life.

“His reappearance among men is the signal for men to flock to Him in intensest love and most relentless hatred. He is surrounded by friends willing to die for Him; by enemies who first plan with consummate skill and then boast with triumph of His

complete collapse. His doctrines arouse the utmost enthusiasm and meet with the most resounding ridicule and contempt. He goes down under the accumulation of conspiracies into apparent failure—the Passion that terminates in His death. But His enemies find Him able to break even the tomb in which they have sealed Him and able to rise to new triumphs and glories.

“I hardly need to sketch the parallel, do I? The Church was born among the same poor people who had surrounded Christ. The slaves and fishermen, the outcasts of society, the women and little children so despised in those days were the first Christians—those and the publicans and sinners sought and saved by Christ, the founder of the Church.

Love and Hate

“The first appearance of the Church is the signal for passionate love and bitter hatred. And persecution drives at the Church as it drove at the Infant Christ. Those who are loyal to the faith taste martyrdom, as did the Holy Innocents slain for Christ. Even in early times we find flocking to the Church brilliant minds like those of the first Fathers, whose apologies for the faith rang loud enough to reach the ears of the emperors. And yet that same Church was forced into the hidden life of the catacombs.

“And as in the case of Christ Himself, the doctrines of the Church, really His doctrines, reawaken the same enthusiastic love and the same contempt and anger. Men loved the teaching of the Church well enough to give up all in a desert or a mon-

astery to become specialists in its practice. And other men hated these specialists furiously, beat them with every sort of club or argument, laughed at them as Herod had laughed at Christ, snubbed them as the materialistic Sadducees had snubbed the Savior, and held them up to the ridicule of the brilliant of every age.

“Christ was attacked by a thousand contradictory theorists and for a thousand contradictory reasons. The most unusual people — Herod and Pilate, who hated one another; the Pharisees and Sadducees, who were at one another’s throats—joined willing hands in their hatred of Christ, as the most diverse people, Turks and Protestant English, pagans and Arians, Gnostics and Manicheans, joined hands in their hatred of His Church.

Joint Enemies

“The Church has been happy in its enemies. I could not imagine that Arius or Simon the Magician, Henry the Eighth or Voltaire, the merciless Robespierre or the greedy princes of early Protestant Germany, the sneering doubters and cruel persecutors of every age and nation would have felt any love or loyalty for Christ. I personally think there is no stronger proof for the identity of Christ and His Church than the fact that the Church has been honored by the hatred of the very men and women who would have found Christ’s doctrines oppressive, His practices tiresome, and His life a direct affront to the lives they were living.

“And those who would have followed Him gladly in life, the men who admired

unselfishness and the women who loved purity, the strong in faith and the sinless of heart, have gladly accepted the Church once they have come to know it, as they have gladly accepted and followed the lovely Christ.

“So the Church lived, as Christ lived, in the midst of continuous conspiracies. And how often have its enemies boasted, as the enemies of Christ boasted, that it was just about to be crushed from the earth, if it had not already been slain beyond the hope of resurrection. The emperors were sure they had slain it. So was Julian, who had been a Christian. The Arians knew they had driven it from among the living. Each new heresy rose to foretell its immediate death. Protestantism foresaw its own complete triumph over a slain Catholicism. The exultant and arrogant science of fifty years ago gave the Church not another quarter of a century to live.

Immortal

“Yet like its founder the Church defies Calvary. It rises again after crucifixion. It is slain to outward seeming a thousand times. Yet it lives on stronger and more nearly immortal than before its apparent death, while like the enemies of its founder its enemies walk unsteadily toward those dark tombs and graveyards of history in which rest only rotten bones and unrecognizable skulls.

“Not for nothing has Christ promised His Church that the gates of hell itself would not prevail against it. Calvary could not drive Him into an unbroken tomb. The calvaries that have marked the pathway of the

Church leave it stronger and more like its immortal founder and master.”

Too Sandy

They were silent for a few minutes. Then Osborne broke the silence.

“I can see all that. But certainly you are not going to tell me that the Pope of Rome, surrounded by waving palms and shouting multitudes and retinues of guards and living in a magnificent palace, even remotely suggests Christ. And this elaborate Catholic Church with all its intricate laws and organization bears no resemblance to the simple, quiet, unobtrusive Christ.”

Father Hall smiled.

“I might answer you in the case of the Pope by reminding you of Christ on Palm Sunday. The whole city turned out for that celebration; and He rode as a king, surrounded by waving palm branches and the shouts and acclamations of a multitude.

What's Essential

“But let's not offer that as an answer. Let's rather say that it is too bad people of today can see no difference between what is essential and what is accidental. Men love the Church. Because they do, they bestow upon it the finest things of art or music or architecture or pageantry that they possess. Men do the same thing for the country they love. And they get no keener joy than in decking out the woman of their hearts in all the beauty of silk and jewels, while they sing her their poems (if they can write poetry) set to beautiful music (if they can write music) and kneel gladly and proudly at her feet.

“Don't mistake all the beauty and pageantry of the Church for its essentials. It is only essential that men express in their finest emotional terms the joy that is in their hearts and the faith that is in their minds. Men surround the Popes with beauty because they see in the Popes the representatives of Christ. And since they cannot reach Christ directly, they reach Him in His representatives.

“The Church took the simple things which Christ left and surrounded them with the glory of ritual. But the elements themselves are essentially simple, as simple as bread and wine over which are whispered unheard words; as simple as the pouring of water, and the lifting of a hand in absolution or in the conferring of the Holy Ghost. And if all the beauty and architecture and pageantry were to be swept away tomorrow, the Church would still be essentially the same, as though the Pope in some cave said Mass upon a broken piece of board, and poured water over the head of a little shepherd's baby, and gave absolution to a sweating farmer kneeling at his unsandaled feet.

Beyond the Person

“Naturally a world-wide society needs laws and organization to keep in touch with its members, consisting as it does of the most diversified people in the most diversified places. But no one believes that—aside from the simple organization of Pope, bishops, priests, and faithful given the Church by Christ, and those fundamental laws which govern any perfect society such as the Church—the rest are to be regarded as the laws of the Medes and the Persians.

“If a persecution tomorrow should drive the Church into hiding and make impossible the enforcement of most of ecclesiastical law, the Church would continue its divine mission and still be the visible representative of Christ to the world.

“And that day may not be so far off as some of us think.”

Osborne was smoking silently. Father Hall took time to refill his pipe. Helen Webb went to the window, drew back the curtain, and looked out at the priest's garden that nestled in the shadow of his little church.

A Double Love

“I love the Church,” said Father Hall, quietly, “simply and solely because I love Jesus Christ. I obey the Church simply because I hear in the voice of the Church the voice of my Savior. If I had the Protestant or non-Catholic viewpoint that over there in a remote past and in a history book was Jesus Christ, and that here was a host of organizations, all doing some good work, all gathering some congenial people together, all nice societies to belong to, I'd have no slightest interest in the Church or what it said or what it did.

“But to me and to all us Catholics who understand our faith the Church is simply Christ extending His mission to all time. And because I love Christ, I must love the Church that speaks with His voice and by His authority, carries on precisely the work that brought Him from heaven, keeps high before the eyes of the world the interests that gripped His Sacred Heart, and loves

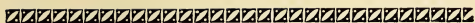
the God He called His Father and the souls for which He died.

“The more you know the Church, the more you see its identity with Jesus Christ. And the more you grow to love it. Then if you happen to dislike some bishop or object to the not-infallible pronouncements of some Pope, you’re not worried or distressed. You can look beyond him to the Christ he represents and love the imperishable Church even though you sometimes see the human defects and shortcomings of churchmen.

“To me the Church is Christ. The Church actually brings me Christ not only in the Blessed Sacrament but in the repetition of His doctrines and the reenacting of His life. And if I obey the Church, I obey that representative of my beloved Savior which speaks with His authority and is motivated by His love, as it is inspired by His unflinching wisdom.

“And once you have grasped that concept, you open your heart gladly to welcome Christ in His Church and the Church, which is only the continuation of the work of Christ for the world.”

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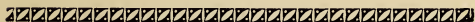
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