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## THE PRINCIPLE UNDERLYING CATHOLICITY AND DEMOCRACY.

BY THE VEN. ARCHDEACON MACDERMOTT, M.A.

**D**EFINITIONS are dangerous things! We cannot get on without them, but we cannot be too careful in making definitions and in their use when made. An important point is that definitions limit the thing defined. The best and most permanent things elude complete definition. The moment you define and use precise terms in connection with things of the highest value, you begin to feel doubtful of your definition, for it has left out something, it has cabined and confined that which refuses to be thus imprisoned.

Faith, hope, love, joy, peace, sympathy and bliss—have you ever come across satisfactory definitions of any of these things? They are states to be experienced, values highly prized, eternal treasures which cannot be put within the compass of a definition. Their content is too large, too deep, too much involved in personality to be expressed by formal propositions.

There are terms, also, which evade definition owing to the history of the past, the association of the terms with certain events and with movements which have now taken another direction. In the course of time, a term may have come to connote something the very opposite to that which originally caused its use. Theological terms seem especially to have an unhappy knack of passing into common speech and then becoming so much altered in meaning that considerable confusion of thought arises when an expert uses the term correctly. The term "original sin" is an illustration of this change which occurs. Original sin is bound up with heredity, and does not refer to sin in the sense of wrong-doing on the part of the individual. Original sin is neither original, nor is it sin in the ordinary, everyday use of this term.

In politics, the labels distinguishing certain parties have become so misleading that you will find a Conservative backing measures which are intensely Radical, and Liberals applauding to the echo Socialistic schemes, while Socialists are acting in a wonderfully Conservative way!

I remember well a keen Conservative agent saying that he quite thought the time had come for the nationalisation of railways and coal-mines. I ventured to suggest that that was Socialism. He seemed surprised, but finally agreed that it really was, only he "had never thought of it like that!"

The fact is, labels are liable to get mixed and to be attached to the wrong parcels! It might help to mitigate much political asperity if there were more clear thinking, and if attention were paid to the things spoken of as well as to the terms by which they are expressed.

This applies to theological or religious argument with even greater force. Take the word "Catholic." What does it convey to different people?

When I was an Inspector of Schools, a favourite question of mine was: "Are you Catholics?" If the children heard this question for the first time, the answer was usually "No"! A reference to the Apostles' Creed and to the fact that they all professed their belief in the Holy Catholic Church soon led up to the acknowledgment that they were Catholics after all.

You will find adults who have used the Prayer Book from their childhood and yet have not realised that they belong to the Catholic Church! This is curious seeing how frequently they repeat the Catholic creeds, which mention the Holy Catholic Church to which they belong. They seem to forget that in the prayer for all conditions of men it says "we pray for the good estate of the *Catholic* Church."

It is a pity that the Preface to the Prayer Book is never read, especially that passage where it states that the reformers rejected all such alterations as were of dangerous consequence as secretly striking at some established doctrine; a laudable practice of the Church of England, or indeed of the whole *Catholic* Church of Christ.

Some time ago in the Church Assembly, one of the speakers frequently referred to "Catholics." At last, two or three members called out "Whom do you mean by Catholics?" There was a breathless pause. Then the speaker quietly replied, "All of you, of course." And a round of applause showed that the Assembly was quite alive to the importance of our claim to Catholicity.

But I have not yet put before you a definition of "Catholic,"

and I must do so if we are to be clear when we come to the principle underlying Catholicity.

The Epistles of St. James, St. Peter, St. Jude and St. John are called "Catholic" because they were for the *whole* Church, the Church in general, and not for local Churches or for particular persons only. The word Catholic is used of the Church in one of the Epistles of Ignatius of the second century (Smyrna 8), of the general resurrection in Justin Martyr (*dial.* 81), and in Theophilus (ad Autol. i. 13); how soon it found its way into the creed is not exactly known. "Catholic" means universal, for every one.

There is no antithesis between Catholic and "Christian." It is because the Church is Christian, or Christ-like, that it is Catholic.

We find that this meaning, viz. the inclusiveness of Christ's Church, was somewhat lost sight of from the fourth century onward, and wholeness, Catholicity of doctrine attracted more attention. This wholeness, or Catholicity of teaching, is defined by the formula of Vincent of Lerins, A.D. 434, viz. that is Catholic doctrine which has been taught everywhere, always, and by all. (*Quod ubique, quod semper, et quod ab omnibus.*)

I need hardly say that several doctrines are taught nowadays as Catholic which by no means can be so called if they are to square with the Vincentian rule.

I have said that "Christian" and "Catholic" are not exclusive terms, neither are they simply complementary. Christ was the first Catholic, so to be Christ-like implies that you are a Catholic. His appeal was and is a universal one. His Gospel was and is for all mankind. It was this which, partly, caused His crucifixion. Hardly anything so deeply moved the Jews as our Lord's statements which referred to the Kingdom being for the Gentiles. In the parable of the vineyard He speaks of His rejection by the Jews and then says that the lord of the vineyard shall give the vineyard to others. "And when they heard it, they said, God forbid" (St. Luke xx. 16).

In the parable of the great supper, when those that were bidden neglected the invitation, the master tells his servant to go out quickly into the streets and lanes and bring in the poor, the maimed, the halt and the blind, and then he is to go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in (St. Luke xiv.).

On another occasion, He says, "And they shall come from the

east and from the west and from the north and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God" (St. Luke xiii. 29).

"God so loved the *world*," that is Catholicity.

The Lord Jesus was known as being "no respecter of persons," i.e. He respected everybody—little children, harlots, publicans, outcasts as well as those who were commonly held as being respectable. His last command was that His apostles should make disciples of *all* the nations.

Peter, in the case of Cornelius and his company, once for all showed the Catholicity of Christianity. "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness is acceptable to Him" (Acts x. 34, 35).

There is to my mind nothing which is so convincing of the truth of the Incarnation as this Catholicity of Christ. If we are creatures of God, surely God cares for us *all*, and the Son of God, God Incarnate, must be equally Catholic in His love.

The Church of Christ is the organ which carries on His work, and, obviously, the Church must be Catholic if it be really and truly the body of which Christ is the Head. And whenever and wherever the Church erects barriers, ecclesiastical or doctrinal, shutting out those who believe in the Lord Jesus and love Him as their Saviour, there must always be the suspicion that the Church is losing Catholicity and becoming hardened by the baleful spirit of ecclesiasticism which caused the rejection of our Lord by the Jews. Our Lord pronounced "woe" unto those who offend His little ones, and "little ones" may refer not only to children, but to those who are simple-minded and unable to grasp theological niceties or to distinguish between doctrinal propositions. The Church has no call to place stumbling blocks in their path. The criterion of judgment given in St. Matthew xxv. is the way we have used or abused our talents, and the doing or not doing deeds of kindness, of love. Alas! the Church has been at times so uncatholic in spirit that its criterion has been as different as possible from Christ's. We may be sure that over and over again when the great Assize is sitting, the Church's judgment will be reversed and the first be last and the last first.

I now ask you to consider Democracy, and then in a few words

I will venture to suggest the one principle which seems to underlie both Catholicity and Democracy.

If "Catholic" is a word used with a variety of meaning, and frequently misused when applied to something which is quite opposed to Catholicity, so too does "Democrat" suffer in the same way. You may have heard men speak as if they favoured Democracy, whereas they are autocrats who veil their autocracy under beguiling terms which deceive the unwary and uneducated.

We want to be on our guard when the word "democracy" is too much to the fore.

The word "democracy" is taken from the Greek. In most Greek communities there were two marked divisions of the freemen: "the few," or rich, and the "many," or not-rich, between whom a fierce contest for political superiority was waged. The same state would be called an oligarchy or a democracy according as the one or the other party possessed the political superiority.

Aristotle defines a democracy to be when the freemen and those not the rich, being the majority, possess the sovereign power. In another passage he speaks of different kinds of democracy, and the first kind is characterized by equality; and the fundamental law of such a democracy declares that the "not-rich" have no more political power than the rich, neither body being supreme, but both equal, and all participating equally in political power.

Montesquieu in his *L'Esprit des Loix* says, when the body of the people is possessed of the supreme power it is called a democracy. He has an interesting passage in Book III where he says: "A very droll spectacle it was in the last century (the 17th) to behold the unavailing effort of the English towards the establishment of democracy. As they who had a share in the direction of public affairs were void of virtue; as their ambition was inflamed by the success of the most daring of their members (Cromwell); as the prevailing parties were successively animated by the spirit of faction, the government was continually changing; the people, amazed at so many revolutions, in vain attempted to erect a Commonwealth. At length when the country had undergone the most violent shocks, they were obliged to have recourse to the very government which they had so wantonly proscribed."

The principle of democracy is virtue. But when Montesquieu says this he is thinking of the quality necessary for the continu-

ance of democracy. Democracy has no superior and virtue must guide and rule the government. When virtue is banished, ambition invades the mind of those who are so disposed and avarice possesses the whole community. The object of their desires are changed ; what they were fond of before has become indifferent ; they were free while under the restraint of laws, but they would from now be free to act against law ; and as each citizen is like a slave who has run away from his master, that which was a maxim of equity he calls rigour ; that which was a rule of action he styles constraint ; and to precaution he gives the name of fear. Frugality is termed avarice. The members of the Commonwealth riot on the public spoils, and its strength is only the power of a few and the licence of many.

I must quote one passage because it is so full of wholesome warning for these days. In Book VIII Montesquieu says : “ The principle of democracy is corrupted not only when the spirit of equality is extinct but likewise when they fall into a state of extreme equality—or when each citizen would fain be upon a level with those whom he has chosen to command him. Then the people, incapable of bearing the very power they have delegated, want to manage everything themselves, to debate for the senate, to execute for the magistrates and to decide for the judges.

“ When this is the case, virtue can no longer subsist in the republic. The people are desirous of exercising the functions of the magistrates, who cease to be revered. The deliberations of the senate are slighted ; all respect is then laid aside for the senators and consequently for old age. If there is no respect for old age, there will be none presently for parents ; deference to husbands will be likewise thrown off and submission to masters. This licence will soon become general, and the trouble of command as fatiguing as that of obedience. Wives, children, servants will shake off all subjection. No longer will there be any such thing as manners, order, or virtue.”

I should like to see Montesquieu's examination of the advantages and disadvantages of democracy published broadcast. His views were based on history, which is the experience of nations, of men and women of the past. It is the acme of folly to try to live as if we were the first people to exist and to ignore the lessons obviously taught us by the experience of others.

Democracy is said to be government by the will of the people. What people? Does the ordinary average man know all about government and what, in the largest sense, best conduces to the welfare of the nation? Do you mean the majority of the people? Are we to suppose that if two or three average men have average, ordinary wisdom that two or three million men must have superior, extraordinary wisdom? As it has been put, does wisdom increase by the multiplication of noses!

Again, when we talk of the will of the people, which will do we mean? The Jewish people cried with respect to our Lord, "Let Him be crucified!" "His blood be on us and on our children"—we, the people, condemn Him and take the responsibility for all time! Pilate (who really knew better) in the end gave way to the will of the people. What a tragedy!

Is the voice of the people the voice of God? Think of what popular clamour has done in the past, and let us try to get clear ideas on the matter.

Surely there are times when we need leaders who will lead, persons who have personality; prophets with a message. The shallow opportunism which allows the tail to wag the body and not the body the tail, is bound in the long run to land a democracy into disastrous complications.

The predominance of the average mind is deadly, especially when expressed in state regulations. Dragooned from morn till eve, bound by the same restraints in all directions, the freedom allowed is the freedom to keep in step.

Is not democracy then a good thing? Of course it is. We are the most democratic people in the world. Rightly so. Our nation has gone through all the stages which seem inevitable to a proper development. An autocratic king; an all-powerful aristocracy; mob tyranny; sectional domination; suffering minorities—all these have struggled and competed and taken their turn. A compromise in the best sense of the term has resulted, we have a constitution not hand-made, but grown-up, an organism not simply an organisation. Nature itself is a compromise, a balance of opposites, an adaptation of one part to another, and we in England have, almost unconsciously, followed nature, our best guide, in our Constitution.

When people sneer at compromise I think they cannot have



studied any of the sciences which disclose to us the operations of nature.

With reverence, be it said, is not our Redemption a compromise? Justice and mercy; sin and a Saviour; Jesus Christ, God and man in one—sinners accounted righteous and reconciled by the blood of the Lamb of God. Is there no compromise in the scheme of salvation?

So far, I have not put into words the principle of Catholicity and Democracy. I think it is the same. Not that the Catholic Church is a democracy, it is rather a theocracy, for the kingdom of God implies the rule of God. The Church is the kingdom of God because in it God rules and it is out to spread the rule of God over all the world. Yet the principle underlying Catholicity and Democracy is one and the same: viz. every human soul is of distinctive and peculiar value and forms an integral part of the Cosmos; this is true of God's universe as a whole and of the State in particular. But this principle can be expressed more simply in two words—*everyone counts*.

Observe that this does not state that everyone counts as equal to others. That is the mistake so frequently made. This is no more true than it would be if it were said that we are all equal in height, strength or brain-power. We all have our betters—those who are our superiors in one way or another. To take a simple illustration: a committee is a democratic institution; but experience soon teaches that while every member of the Committee counts, they are by no means of equal value. Two or three members emerge from the rest and their influence carries more weight than that of the other members. There are the silent members who seldom speak. There is the loquacious member so fond of details who will tell us we have forgotten to dot our "i's" and cross our "t's." There are the average ordinary members who take their usual share. The members of the Committee, certainly, are not of equal value, but they all have this equality—each one counts and must not be ignored.

There are some things done in our country which are supposed to be democratic, but are not, for they are in the interest of a section of the community only. A violent and vociferous faction rides roughshod over the main body of the people, disregarding the principle that everybody counts.

But the Church should not throw stones! A curious and interesting parallel could be shown between the Catholic Church and a democracy in the faults of both. There is, e.g., a parallel between a modern strike and an interdict of the Middle Ages. The strike may arise from various causes, and it stops services which affect the community locally or universally. The interdict also arose from various causes, frequently to extort money from reluctant Church-people. It affected religious services for the community locally, or the whole kingdom.

A blackleg and a heretic. Think of the treatment of heretics in the past. A blackleg is a Labour heretic—hence his treatment by those who excommunicate him!

Church history is a wonderful corrective to the pride of a Catholic Churchman, and it should make us very patient and tolerant with the ills which beset our democracy. "Labour" is more considerate, more humane in its strikes and treatment of blacklegs than was the Church, with its interdicts and burnings and torturings of heretics!

Catholicity—the principle that everyone counts. What right has the Church of Christ to set up barriers which He did not erect? How dare we be exclusive when He was inclusive?

Is it not significant and full of salutary warning that the man born blind, who was excommunicated by the Jews, was sought for by Jesus and when He had found him out, He said unto him, Dost thou believe in the Son of God? He answered and said, Who is He, Lord, that I might believe on Him? And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen Him and it is He that talketh with thee. And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped Him (John ix. 35-38).

Excommunicated! Yet a special and most gracious revelation of our Lord to him—could there be a greater blessing?

Everyone counts with Jesus. He was and is the Catholic of Catholics. His Church is to show forth the Son of God who loves *all* mankind.

The Catholic Church and the democratic State have, then, this principle in common which should make them respect one another and help one another, viz. that everyone counts and everyone is the object of the love of God, which is inexhaustible, undaunted and eternal.