

THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD.

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A paper read at the "D" Society, Cambridge.

OUR subject is indeed a vast one. There are a large enough number of problems connected with the idea of the Church itself to occupy our attention for a considerable period, and when those problems of the nature and function of the Church are linked to those of the world, at this time almost terrifying in their number and scope, the subject begins to assume quite unmanageable dimensions. For our purpose, however, I propose to divide the subject, sermonwise, into three heads, for it seems to divide itself almost naturally into some such arrangement. First we shall consider the question of the Church's relation to the good things of this world, this world's values, which will demand some study of asceticism in its various forms. Then we will pass on to a consideration of the Church's attitude to the Civil Power: finally, we will consider the Church's attitude to the Social Order, which is a slightly different thing from her attitude to the Civil Power. In each case our method will be primarily historical, but we will also try to gather from the lessons of history some practical light for our own days.

Our first subject then is the Church's attitude to the good things of the world—if we may so far beg the question as to call them at the outset "good things." We must find a beginning for our study somewhere, and perhaps we cannot do better than to begin with the teaching and life of Jesus Himself. Jesus was a countryman, and perhaps for that reason found it easy to look on Nature as God's handiwork: the petals of the wild flowers were the raiment which God had provided for the grass of the field, the birds were the object of God's daily care. Children were sufficiently in accord with God's intentions to be taken as typical of God's Kingdom, and the parental care of Jewish fathers and mothers seemed to Jesus a fair picture of the Heavenly Father's love. He enjoyed life's good things, refused to encourage His disciples to fast, and actually was abused as "a gluttonous man and a wine bibber," which though no doubt an absurd exaggeration must have been an exaggeration of an obvious enjoyment of the simple pleasures of the table.

Yet there was another strain. He called His disciples to the most complete self-sacrifice, Himself knew what it was to have nowhere to lay His head, and finally was content to surrender His life altogether, an act of the most complete and uncompromising asceticism. But one point stands out at once. These sacrifices were demanded from Him by external circumstances. If he was to remain true to His convictions He must pay the price. This

was a very different thing from entering on an ascetic path because this world and its values were essentially tainted, or because He wished to store up merit in some other world. There was also the apocalyptic background which must be allowed to carry some weight. He clearly expected the dawn of God's Kingdom in the near future, and this would give an appearance of asceticism to His life and teaching which it would be wrong to carry over into a non-apocalyptic environment.

The early disciples were not unlike their master in their general spirit. Our chief authority, St. Paul, was a townsman, unlike his master, and we do not find the same sympathy with Nature as we find in Christ. He really seemed to think that God did not care for oxen. But in spite of this, there is a real appreciation of this world at times. "Whatsoever things are lovely" he commends to the meditation of his Philippian friends: the law written in the hearts of the Gentiles had a real value and efficacy, and if we may trust the picture of him in the Acts he would point to the rains and fruitful seasons, the food and the gladness of men's hearts as evidence of the loving activity of God. In the matter of sex, his temporary dislike of marriage is clearly occasioned by the shortness of the remaining time, and, even so, he is clearly hesitant about what to say. Once he said plainly, "Nothing is unclean in itself," and any self-sacrifice which he made or advised originated in the urgency of the mission rather than in any dislike of this world's good things. This attitude is fairly common in the New Testament, although in the Apocalypse we find a more ascetic spirit dawning: they are celibates who follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth (Rev. xiv. 4).

The early Church soon developed strongly this ascetic attitude. There were several causes of this: the wave of Gnostic dualism which swept over from the East, the increasing worldliness and prosperity of the Church, the ebbing of the true spirit of self-sacrifice, for which artificial hardships were invented and substituted. Whatever the exact causes, there arose a widespread flight from the world among "those who would be perfect." Some became hermits, others later joined monasteries, many remained celibate, others took vows of silence (though Dean Inge is cruel enough to add that this form of abnegation was not common among female ascetics). Most of all they developed a morbid horror of sex. Jerome and Augustine use the most revolting language about this subject. Professor Raven speaks of "the massive evidence of ecclesiastical writings which everywhere reveal a contempt almost amounting to loathing, a denunciation ferocious in its brutality, and a pruriency which exaggerates the coarse invective of Jerome."

Against all this degradation of what most of us would consider "good things" there is little to be balanced. Clement loved Nature, Origen took a scientist's interest in the Universe. But such bright spots are rare. Professor Raven's dictum must be accepted: for these people "the Church was the Kingdom of God, the world the antechamber of Hell."

Through the Middle Ages the same attitude continued. There were some exceptions: St. Bernard welcomed the oaks and beeches as his teachers, St. Francis claimed kinship with sun, moon, earth and water, but such exceptions were few and far between. The monasteries remained as the true way of righteousness. Their asceticism was looked on as a vicarious offering, made for those who could not leave the world. The large bequests to the monasteries were efforts to assure the donor of a share in the efficacy of the vicarious offering of asceticism.

The Renaissance and the Reformation brought an end to this form of world-denial, but others were soon to follow. Innocent pleasure was the next "good thing" to be offered up. The Calvinists rigorously excluded from their lives most forms of amusement, and purged their Churches of most forms of beauty. In England the Humanist spirit of the Renaissance was to some extent carried on by the Higher Anglicans of the seventeenth century. Andrewes, Herbert and Taylor retained a real appreciation of the beauties of nature, the delights of music, and the "more noble faculties of men's own souls."

In the eighteenth century asceticism was at a low ebb, but deep spiritual insight seems to have departed at the same time. The Evangelical Revival brought its new forms of self-abnegation, and to this day various "neutral" things are considered "taboo" in some circles. Smoking, card playing, theatres are banned from some circles of the Church as ruthlessly as other more fundamental human activities have been banned hitherto. In history it has apparently been impossible for Christian folk to realise that the good things of the world, though inadequate to satisfy men's deepest needs, have nevertheless a real value, at their own level.

What is the Church's attitude to be to all this? Surely it must claim all the good things of the world as part of the Kingdom over which God rules, and to which they seek to belong themselves. The Creed professes to believe in a God who is the Maker of all things, visible and invisible—revealed and unrevealed—and in these days of increasing scientific discovery this should be a very living part of the creed. More particularly these ordinary human values, nature, art, poetry, music, friendship, amusement, should be boldly brought into the scope of our public worship. Our worship then might cease to be the barren formality which it is, and the worldly values might themselves be purified and safeguarded. There will still be the place for self-discipline—it is possible always to have too much even of a good thing—and some will feel called to concentrate much on purely religious work and activity, but it must be clear to all who come within our portals, that we stand for life, and life more abundant, a life which includes some of the things which to the ordinary man help to make life worth living.

Our next subject is the relation of the Church to the Civil Power. Again we begin with the attitude of Jesus. He might

be described as tolerating, passively accepting, the civil power. He told men to render to Cæsar the things which were Cæsar's, but He seems not to have set much store by the official Jewish leaders at Jerusalem. But it would be quite misleading to extract from these chance remarks and happenings a "Christian" attitude to the State. Our Lord's thought was obviously conditioned by His thought of the coming Kingdom of God. It was for this that He wished men to prepare: for the ordinary civil government He seems to have had little concern.

In the early days the Roman Empire was looked on as a protective agency. It certainly gets the best of the deal in the Acts of the Apostles. St. Paul admits that it has a useful restraining function—"the powers that be are ordained of God." Again, however, the Apocalypse shows a later stage. "Her smoke goeth up for ever and ever," the writer says with obvious exaltation, as he beholds in vision the conflagration of Rome, for Rome is already "drunk with the blood of the saints."

But for some time the loyal attitude of the Christians remained. The early Apologists claimed, "We are the best citizens of the Empire." The Epistle to Diognetus says of the Christians, "They bear their share in all things as Christians." They claimed to be to the world what the soul is to the body. Persecution made this attitude more difficult, but when Constantine recognised the Church there was again a friendlier feeling towards the Civil Authority. Constantine, in fact, as arbiter in the Church's disputes became almost a *pontifex maximus*.

The real breach between the Civil Power and the Church can be first seen clearly in Augustine's "City of God." Rome was sacked in 410, and part of the blame for it was laid at the Christians' door. Augustine undertook to defend the "City of God," by which he practically meant the Church, and contrasted its history down the ages with the City of the World, by which he practically meant the Civil Power. These applications were only suitable, so to speak, to the current representatives of the two cities. For their past history he went to the Old Testament, taking all the approved characters as inhabitants of the City of God, and all the others as belonging to the Worldly City. For the future, he went to the Apocalypse, claiming the "Heavenly" scenes for his city, and the others for the City of the World.

He had a good deal of precedent for this idea of the City of God. It was the old name for Zion: the Psalms sang her praises—"Very excellent things are spoken of thee, thou city of God"; the Epistle to the Hebrews had said, "Here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come"; the Apocalypse had told of the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven. But the theory had not been worked out so fully before. The two cities meant there were two loyalties, and the Christian need be in no doubt as to where his true loyalty lay. Yet the City of God needed the State to protect it, and if it was a Christian State, its duty was to assist the Church in every way. Here was the germ of the doctrine of

the Theocracy which was to have such widespread results in the next age.

Troeltsch puts down the great change, however, to almost accidental circumstances. These are, first, the division of the Church of the Imperial Period into Germanic Roman Territorial Churches, and especially the development of the Frankish Territorial Church (that is, the Church marked by the possession of land, which it held in fief from a feudal lord). Then this Church expanded, so to speak, till it included the Papacy, and eventually the Church became the ruling body of a great theocratic civilisation. Some landmarks of this process are the coronation of Charles the Great by Leo III in A.D. 800, and later the tremendous claims of Hildebrand, who claimed the right to depose Emperors. The Church became a great landowner; in fact, it would seem difficult at first to picture anything less like the little flock which began its story in Galilee. But we must not be too hard on this stage of the Church's development. Perhaps it suited the times as nothing else quite could have done: it certainly played a leading part, in fact the only part, in the great task of civilisation which had to be carried through in the Middle Ages.

At the Reformation, National States took the place of the great Universal Theocracy. Sometimes the new unit was the Nation, filled with a strong sense of growing patriotism, retaining its part, as it were, of the old Universal Church, though ceasing to have any fealty to the Papacy. This was the case in England, where Parliaments passed successive Acts of Uniformity, laying down the conditions on which the Church was to carry on its work. In Calvinistic countries, however, another goal was aimed at. Mr. Barry describes that aim as "economic collectivism under the rule of an omniscient church." Work was exalted to the honour of a sacred rite, but in practice this led to selfishness, and eventually to the evils of *laissez-faire* and the Industrial Revolution.

In England the idea was that the Church was one aspect of the State: the State, functioning on the Godward side. In practice the Established Church has usually been on the side of conservatism in politics. "Church and State" went together in the main for two centuries.

With the Industrial Revolution, the growth of big towns, and Parliamentary Government in the real sense this tended to change. A large part of the population ceased to have any vital connection with the Church as an organised body, and new churches sprang up quickly, which of course were not "Established."

That is the situation with which we have to deal to-day. Officially the State is Christian, "C. of E." But in any Government, certainly in any Parliament, there are many who would not like to be called even professing Christians. This corresponds to the situation in the country at large. But in spite of this, the policies on which the country is governed are probably more "Christian" than ever before. Some churchmen are so anxious for complete independence that they would ask for disestablishment at once.

They feel compromised by an official connection with so motley a body. But surely this is a mistake. We cannot expect the State always to act perfectly "Christianly": often we are not sure ourselves as to what is the Christian thing to do. But while there is the Establishment, the State says, as it were, "We are trying to be Christian," and those who feel that they constitute the Church must be patient, and be content gradually to raise the public opinion which eventually controls the Government. Meanwhile, too, Christians must remember that they also belong to the Nation. Christians are inhabitants of both cities, and it is the duty of Christian folk to be good citizens, even in matters which do not seem to have a *religious* reference. In the last resort, "the State cannot claim us entire." The Church might possibly, though not probably, have to disown the State for the sake of the State.

Our last question is the relation of the Church to the Social Order, which is not quite the same thing as its relation to the Civil Power. When Jesus proclaimed the nearness of God's Kingdom he probably thought of an earthly, though not a worldly Kingdom. He would envisage a social order after the heart of the great Hebrew prophets, "where justice should be throned in might and every wrong be healed." But He did not state clearly *how* it was to be achieved. He merely called men into it, and taught them to expect its speedy advent. From the spirit which He sought to invoke in His immediate followers we can see the features of the Kingdom as He envisaged it. It was, as Troeltsch says, marked by two apparently conflicting, but really united stresses: it was completely individualistic, in that it believed in the infinite value of every human soul: but it was completely universal, in that it taught a fellowship of complete love and trust on a basis of the Universal Fatherhood of God.

Within the primitive Christian Church something of this spirit continued. On the whole the early Church tolerated the existent social order, though they transcended it within their own fellowship. Inside the Christian Church there was the communism of love, and social distinctions were all but abolished. They were told to put up with the outward circumstances of slavery, for instance, but personally the slave could be regarded as a "brother beloved." They did not expect to affect the outward world. St. John tells his readers not to love the world—ordered society without reference to God—neither the things which are in the world. To him the whole world lay in the Evil One. They expected soon to be transferred to a brighter realm by the Parousia: sooner or later the elements of this world would pass away with fervent heat. As Professor Burkitt so often says, grandchildren were not expected: there was therefore little incentive to seek to reform the world as it was.

When we pass over to the early centuries of Church History we find a similar situation, with death and translation to Heaven replacing the hope of the immediate Parousia. Evangelistic work

went on, but the social order as such was left unaffected. The only difference which the Christians cared to work for in the world itself was the extension of privileges for themselves. Even after the recognition of Christianity by Constantine there was only a slight influence on the laws, of a humanitarian nature. The only opportunity for carrying out in any literal sense the Christian ethic was within the Monastic Communities. The state of the world, however, had to be accounted for somehow, and this was achieved by a borrowing from Stoicism. The world was considered as under "natural law": originally this natural law was identical with the law of Christ, but owing to the fall it had had to be modified. The result was the State as then known, in which it was impossible to live a full Christian life. The State was the punishment and the remedy for sin.

The Middle Ages present a different picture. Now the Church and the World were brought closely together, through the interpenetration of their two organisms. The new centre of civilisation, the farm with its manor, serfs, and Church, lent itself to this close interaction. Yet the Church was not concerned with any policy of social reform: it merely invented a new and more thorough explanation of things as they were. This explanation culminated in the elaborate system of St. Thomas Aquinas.

The Thomist system was briefly this. The whole of society was considered a vast organism, carefully graded, so that each member had his appropriate calling.

" The rich man in his castle,
The poor man at his gate,
God made them high or lowly,
And ordered their estate."

That would have been good medieval social theory. Its tendency was naturally conservative rather than reforming. There was another development which was important—the rise of the conceptions of nature and supernature. Nature had its place, it existed for the fulfilment of certain *ends*, but the work of the Church was to impose on nature, *supernature*. This it sought to do by its Sacraments. Thus there was no real continuity between the better aspects of the social order, and the religion of Jesus as taught by the Medieval Church.

Nevertheless, the Church was the great civilising factor, and also responsible for much charitable work of an alleviating, though not a preventive character. More than at any time before or since, civilisation was welded into a unity, and the dominant element in that unity was the historic Church of Christendom. But before this could be so, the Church had to go a long way to meet the world, in fact the Church seemed to be animated by the very principles of covetousness and domination which in its early days it decried. We certainly cannot go to the Middle Ages for an example on which to build up a modern Christian, unified civilisation.

The Reformation must now be considered. Most important perhaps of the Reformation developments is the arrival of a new type of Christianity which Troeltsch contrasts with the "Church type" by calling the "Sect type." Those who form the "Sects" are discontented with the witness of the official Church to Christianity, so they form themselves into a close community where the Gospel ideals are to be literally carried out. Often a high type of personal piety is achieved, but there is no attempt to control Society, or to inspire it with Christian principles. Against this, "the Church" is interested in numbers, and would rather have a whole country and its institutions tinged with Christianity than a few very pious groups, in the midst of an entirely naughty world.

Calvinism represented a blend of both types. It sought to govern the whole State by its policy, but also to come into exact line with New Testament Christianity. It preserved the heroic, ascetic strain, by a new form of intramundane asceticism, which consisted in the abolition of pleasure, and the glorification of hard work, thrift and large profits. It had a fine ideal for Christendom—a union of Christian nations each governed by a Theocracy—but there was too little regard paid to human values on the one hand and human weakness on the other for it to be a workable policy.

In England the importance attached to the calling continued in religious circles, but there was no thorough examination of the social order from Christian principles. It was true that the Catechism taught the young to serve God in that state of life unto which it *should* please God to call them, but there was no suggestion that the call was likely to have any very startling results. The social distinctions, involving great differences of circumstance, education and wealth remained. War was considered a righteous duty; justice remained vindictive and primitive. Not till the Christian Socialists of the last century was there a real change. F. D. Maurice and his friends were innovators when they tried to bring all commerce and industry into the obedience of Christ, an ideal which is now tacitly accepted by all intelligent Christians.

What is to be the Church's attitude to-day? The world is faced with many grave problems. Previous social and political theories are manifestly failing. New forces have come into being which seem beyond human control. Many think that the Church can now step in, and preach its Gospel as a panacea for all human woe. But here great caution, as well as great courage is needed. Behind our troubles lie great economic laws, on which Christians, as Christians, have no especial right to speak. We cannot claim to give detailed guidance to politicians and trade union leaders, and must be very slow to interfere in industrial disputes. But we must be unceasing in our efforts to spread in the world a certain spirit of love and co-operation. For this reason the missionary work of the Church remains in the forefront of her programme. Nevertheless, on certain clear issues she must make her witness, and each congregation must be trained to think Christianly about corporate matters as well as personal ones.

We would draw a final picture of the ideal place and nature of the Church to-day, in the light of the considerations of this paper. We picture the Church rapidly growing in numbers and enthusiasm, spreading all over the world. She will be very liberal in her conditions of membership. All who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity will be acclaimed its members: modern equivalents of them of Tyre with the Morians, will be once more acclaimed the freeborn sons of Zion. Gradually the social order may then be permeated with a Christian spirit. Her chief weapon will be her worship, considered in its widest aspect. Here all life's values will be recognised, worship "will spring vitally out of the sap of life." The worship of Christ, historic, crucified, risen, and active in the world will be her only regenerative force. Much will depend on the Christian character as evidenced in the members: this will involve a quick response to all the varied callings of the Spirit, not a vague influence, but the Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Father through the Son. Troeltsch regards the ideal as doomed to remain for ever an ideal, but we may question his pessimism. If we can share the faith of Jesus, the Kingdom may for us be ever at hand. An ideal known to be only an ideal would soon lose its power. We must believe that the Kingdom of this world really may become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ.

Yet there must be a final "but." We can never be finally content with a kingdom of this world. With Barry and Troeltsch we must look for another city, one which hath foundations, whose maker and builder is God. The exigencies of life and death demand an eternal Kingdom for our final goal, a Kingdom above all the "relativities" of time and space. We close with the words of F. R. Barry, who has been our inspiration throughout this study. "The Kingdom which is the goal of the Christian ethic is a good, final, absolute and eternal in the fruition of the glorious Godhead. It is a Kingdom which cannot be shaken. And this transcendent finality in the ultimate convictions of faith gives the Christian his spontaneity in welcoming the gladness of His life, his firmness in accepting its duties, his sureness of attack on its moral tasks. God for ever makes all things new, yet Himself abides for ever the same, and the Christian seeks to renew this present world, ever changing, and ever passing away, by 'the Powers of the World to Come.'"

A PHILISTINE RAID. A Tale of 1100 B.C. By Margaret Cooper, S.Th. *Thynne & Co., Ltd.* 2s. 6d.

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