

## The Church and the Kingdom.

THE recent conference at Birmingham on Christian Politics, Economics, and Citizenship, indicates the modern emphasis of the religious mind. The primary concern to-day is with the idea of the Kingdom of God. C.O.P.E.C. registers the intense earnestness with which representatives of the various Christian bodies are inquiring into the nature of the Kingdom, and are resolving to realise it, by the enabling of God, in the present order. For this reason it behoves us to investigate the relation of the Church to the Kingdom. Is the Church, for instance, identical with the Kingdom, or to be distinguished from it? This is a question concerning which our masters, the theologians, differ. Some affirm that there is little difference in principle between the Church and the Kingdom. Moreover, it must be acknowledged that in practice, as history shows, the visible Church has functioned as if it were the complete outward embodiment of the Kingdom. How otherwise are we to explain its complacency in the presence of evils, social and political, without its pale?

There are others, however, and they form the majority to-day, who claim that the Kingdom is wider than the Church. Some, indeed, declare that it is greater than the Church, and by the term they appear to mean not greater in dimension, but greater in quality. The Kingdom, they say, is the end, and the Church is the means—the instrument—by which God ordains to promote it. Now, no one questions that it is the mission of the Church to realise the Kingdom; but, in my judgment, this fact does not constitute the Church as inferior to the Kingdom. I shall return to this later; I would, however, say here that we must be on our guard lest, in magnifying the Kingdom, we belittle the Church of the living God, which is the pillar and ground of the truth. I may perhaps explain, if only because the term is used so variously, that by the Church I mean, throughout this address, unless otherwise stated, the ideal Holy Catholic Church. What we have in view, in our modern outlook, is the ideal Kingdom of God; and, for a just estimate of values, we need to relate to it, not the actual, but the ideal Church.

### I.

What, then, is the idea of the Kingdom as expressed in the New Testament? There is no simple notion; the idea is complex: but in the main three conceptions are distinguished. First of all, our Lord seemed to identify the Kingdom with the Church, when He said to Peter, "On this rock I will build My Church; . . . and I will give to thee the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven." In other passages, the Kingdom is synonymous with the bliss of

the Hereafter. Consider, for example, that glowing prediction of the Master: "There shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of the Father." Once more, in other contexts, Christ evidently means by the Kingdom the rule of God in the individual, and in society. He sets forth this religious and ethical realm of the divine—this spiritual reign—as the supreme quest, the chief good, for mankind: "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness." He reveals that this Kingdom of God has already come, and is ever coming. It is like heaven—an intensive spiritual principle, silent, contagious, all pervasive in its operations. It is like the seed of a mustard-plant—an expansive influence, externally manifest in the whole complex of human relations, in the disposition, the laws, and institutions of nations. For, to quote the late Dr. Orr, "it is not the idea of Jesus that this Kingdom should be confined solely to the inward life; it is rather a principle working from within outwards for the renewal and transformation of every part of every department of our earthly existence (marriage, the family, the state, social life, etc.). The Kingdom is not fully come till everything in human life, in the relations of men and society, is brought into complete harmony with the will of God."

Now, it is this conception of the Kingdom, as the rule of the divine righteousness and love, all sovereign in every relation of human life, which has captured the imagination, and is firing the zeal, of modern Christendom. His followers recall that the Master came "preaching the Gospel of the Reign" (as Dr. Moffatt renders the passage), "and healing all the sickness and disease of the people." Further, they note that He sent forth His band of disciples with the command, "Preach as you go, tell men, the Reign of heaven is near. Heal the sick, cleanse lepers, cast out demons." They also observe that where the Kingdom came, there the life of men was exalted, their woes compassionated, and their burdens eased. And, besides all this, the teaching of the New Testament is not overlooked, that any who, by their brotherhood, so manifest the genius of the Kingdom, themselves become in the Beyond possessors of the Kingdom in its eternal fulness: "Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world . . . for inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these, ye did it unto Me." Hence the significant emphasis of the modern mind.

## II.

It will be clear, from what we have understood of its idea, that the Kingdom is wider than the Church. The Church is, or should be, the visible expression on earth of the spiritual aspects of the Kingdom. But the Church, as an organised fellowship,

does not embody the complex whole of the Kingdom; for that whole, as we have seen, extends beyond the visible society of believers, and is, or shall be, immanent in every department of human life. The Church is Christ's Body—the extension in time of His incarnation; and, in the measure in which that Body possesses the fulness of Him, who filleth all in all, it is Christ's mind, revealing the Will of God to mankind—it is His heart, seeking and saving the lost—it is His hands and feet, ministering succour to the forlorn; but in all this activity the Church realises the Kingdom, which is one with it, yet something other and wider than it, even the reign of God in the world at large. For the Kingdom overflows the Church and fertilises the parched and barren life of mankind, even as the flood-waters of the Nile overflow the channel of that historic stream, and irrigate the thirsty land.

But I would not say that the Kingdom is greater than the Church: that is, in any sense disparaging to the Church. We must not forget that the true subjects of the Kingdom are identical with the true members of the Church. In so far as we conceive the Kingdom to be wider than the Church, we think of it in terms of its principles, and of their influence in the manifold relations of life, rather than of its subjects. For whosoever is truly within the Kingdom is also of the Church invisible, whether his name is registered on our denominational rolls or not. So that, as regards its human subjects, the Kingdom is not even greater numerically than the Church. Neither is it greater qualitatively. Nothing under heaven is greater than the Church, ideally conceived. Redeemed personalities are greater than emancipating principles—the principle exists for the personality. Transfigured lives are greater than illuminating ideas—the idea is the servant of the soul. The destiny of the Church is ineffably sublime. Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself up for it, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church; and that destiny comprehends, in the mercy and grace of God, the ultimate inheritance of the Kingdom throughout the ages of the ages. So that, while it is true to say that the Church is a means to an end, I suggest with diffidence that it does not express the reality to affirm as does that honoured teacher, Dr. Horton, in his book on *The Mystical Quest of Christ*, that the Church is “only a means to an end, the immediate instrument for the realisation of the Kingdom of God on earth.” The Church should be the beating heart of the Kingdom here, and it shall be its bright and consummate expression hereafter.

### III.

Whether, in what has been said concerning the relation of

the Church to the Kingdom, I have carried you with me or not, we shall all be agreed that it is the mission of the Church to promote the Kingdom. We are not here simply to fit ourselves for a heaven to be. It belongs to us to seek to bring that heaven down to this present earth. The Kingdom is the realm of heaven; it is heavenly in its origin, its nature, and its expression: for this reason our Lord has taught His Church to pray, "Our Father . . . Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven." The colonies of veteran soldiers, which ancient Rome planted in strategic areas of her far-flung dominions retained their political rights of Roman citizenship and modelled their government on that of the mother city. They sought to reproduce the laws and institutions of the capital, insomuch that they became Rome in miniature. Philippi was such a colony; and the members of the Church there understood perfectly Paul's allusion when he wrote: "Our citizenship is in heaven." They lived in Philippi, but their political citizenship, of which they were so proud, was of Rome. "Even so," says Paul to them, in effect, "your spiritual citizenship is above—you are a 'colony of heaven.'" And he surely implies that just as the Roman colonists sought to make of their cities fac-similies of Rome, so should the Philippian Church, and all other redeemed communities, aim to establish on earth the righteousness and truth, the purity and love, of heaven. Consider in this connection the significant vision of the Exile of Patmos: "And I, John, saw the Holy City, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people." That vision epitomises the idea of the Kingdom of God. It has reference, as I believe, to what shall be hereafter; but I hold, with equal conviction, that it contains the promise of what may be now. The vision is the challenge of the ideal—the divine summons to the Church to build the City of God in this present world. Brethren, is it faith, or is it our lack of faith, that prompts us to relegate the heavenly to some apocalyptic future?

"But," some one may ask, "is this ideal practicable?" For answer you have the testimony of history. We must not permit our very valid dissatisfaction with things as they are to blind our eyes to the difference that Christianity has made in the world. "The nations of them which are saved," says the Seer of Patmos, "shall walk in the light of that city; and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it." That has happened, and is happening. Look, for example, to the South Sea Islands, or to tracts of Africa. To those regions belonged

the dark places of the earth, where were the habitations of cruelty; but, to-day, their chiefs and peoples are bringing the glory and honour of uplifted nations into the Kingdom of God. What was England achieving when, at the cost of twenty million sterling, she liberated the slaves of Jamaica? She was bringing the glory and honour of her humanity into the City of God. That also is what America is attempting by her great act of self-repression in the prohibition of alcohol—she is seeking to bring the glory and honour of her national “self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control,” into the Heavenly City. Even so, the many nations, from China to Peru, which have entered the Covenant of the League of Nations, are bringing the glory and honour of the will to universal peace into the New Jerusalem. The Kingdom is being progressively realised. “It is not,” to quote the words of Papini, in his Story of Christ, “the forgotten dream of a poor Jew, who lived twenty centuries ago. . . . The Kingdom is of to-day, of to-morrow, of all time, a future reality, a living actual reality.”

The call of the hour, therefore, to the Church is solemnly to rededicate itself to the service of the Kingdom. It is humiliating to realise that the impact of the Church on the life of the nations has been relatively so feeble and futile. The growth and spread of civilization during the past century has been prodigious. The introduction of machinery into industry, the application of the discoveries of science, the annihilation of distance by means of the steamship and railways, the telegraph and wireless, have produced a new civilisation. But, alas! this expanding body of civilisation has not been informed and inspired to the degree it might have been by a Christian soul. The progress of industry and commerce has been attended by evils which have embittered the masses. Poverty and slumdom make virtue difficult, and vice resistless for many of their victims. The vices of gambling and intemperance pervade and corrupt our national life. While, to crown the appalling indictment, despite the presence in its midst of the Church of the Prince of Peace, Christendom drifted into the colossal horror of the Great War, with all its tragic entail of blood and tears, and moral anarchy. If there is one lesson more than another taught us by such grim facts, it is that the inherent, natural tendency of civilisation is not towards the good, is not productive of the Kingdom of God. A false optimism is both stupid and wicked. It is futile to trust in a vague and passive way that “*somehow* good will be the final goal of ill.” “The progress of mankind,” as Edward Caldwell Moore has said, “is a task. It is something to which the worthy human spirit is called upon to make contribution: progress is not a natural necessity, it is an ethical obligation.” I would add it is the

spiritual obligation of the Church. It is not for you and me "to know the times and seasons" of the Kingdom, "which the Father hath set within His own authority." But, in respect of the Kingdom, we receive power, as the Pentecostal Spirit comes upon us, and become witnesses unto Christ. That is to say, it is not for us to know the epochs in which the Kingdom will emerge, or the periods within such epochs that shall be especially critical for the Kingdom; but it is for us, nevertheless, as Christ's witnesses, to shape such epochs; and to this end power is ours.

Note that the power is ours as individual units composing the fellowship of the Church. It is not by the Church as an abstract idea, but by the Church as an active society of redeemed and consecrated men and women that God establishes his reign on earth. "It is to be remembered," says Prof. H. R. Mackintosh, "that the religious life of man has always moved upward, not by the influence of abstract conceptions, however rich or versatile, but by the power of great personalities. Each vast movement starts with a man. It rises into strength because an idea and a mind have become fused in one—the thought embodied in a soul, the soul dedicated to the thought and acting only in its service." How true! Reflect, for example, upon any time or season of the Kingdom in the past, and you will find yourself associating it in your mind with some God-inspired man, who was the divine agent in effecting it. For instance, you connect the first missionary expansion of the Church with Paul; the Reformation with Luther; the emancipation of the slave in Jamaica with Wilberforce, or in America with Lincoln; prison reform with Howard: "God's one deliberate method," as Carey—himself a shining illustration of the truth—said, "is to work through consecrated men."

So the Church member must consecrate himself if, in England, the Kingdom is to come. Your part and my part may be humble, but it will be no less real and privileged. The lines of Kipling, on the Glory of the Garden, are to the point here:

Our England is a garden that is full of stately views,  
Of borders, beds, and shrubberies, and lawns, and avenues,  
With statues on the terraces, and peacocks strutting by;  
But the glory of the garden lies in more than meets the eye.

Our England is a garden, and such gardens are not made  
By singing: "Oh, how beautiful," and sitting in the shade,  
While better men than we go out and start their working lives  
At grubbing weeds from garden-paths with broken dinner-knives.

Oh, Adam was a gardener, and God who made him sees  
That half a proper gardener's work is done upon his knees,

So when your work is finished, you can wash your hands and pray  
 For the glory of the garden, that it may not pass away!  
 And the glory of the garden it shall never pass away!

## IV.

But granted that it is the mission of the Church to promote the Kingdom, to what must we direct our chief effort? I would say that we should aim primarily at the evangelisation of all classes of the people. The world looks to us and loudly challenges us to witness more boldly to the ideals of the Kingdom of God. Let us tell our brother men candidly that the true Kingdom comes within the human heart. "Except a man be born anew he cannot see the Kingdom of God." "Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the Kingdom of God." Our Lord came preaching the gospel of the Kingdom; but there was one imperative word with which He introduced His message: "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." Men may become beneficiaries of certain material results of the presence of the Kingdom in the world, and yet know nothing of its transforming power in the personal life, or of its joy eternal. Let us imagine that our fondest dreams for society have materialised. Our cities have become garden cities; war is abolished; alcohol is prohibited; pauperism is unknown; every citizen enjoys equality of opportunity; education and culture grace the lives of all—suppose Utopia, the most perfect material civilisation—would such a kingdom suffice for man made in the image of God? Ah, these things are worthy in their degree; but they do not constitute the soul's deeper content. In the final analysis, "the Kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." Equality of opportunity cannot bind up a broken heart. Material well-being is no salve for a wounded conscience. Moreover, whatever progress we achieve, there is one enemy we cannot destroy. Our human love may become more tender; but that enemy will intrude his sable presence, leaving the heart the more desolate as it has loved the more. "The days of our years are three-score years and ten." No progress can eliminate that reality. The Kingdom mocks men if it hold the promise of nothing more than material good. As mortal and as sinful men, who would say at the last, "O death, where is thy sting, O grave, where is thy victory?" *we* have need of a Kingdom that redeems us from the thralldom of sin, and begets us into a living hope.

If we see men as Christ saw them, under the aspect of eternity, we shall not make the mistake of confounding the Kingdom with its external results. We shall strive the rather to establish God's rule in the heart of the individual as the secret

of his highest well-being. For Christ, who knew what was in men, saw them, despite their sinfulness, as holding within themselves potencies unspeakable, and full of glory. He died for men, unquestionably, because they were bankrupt utterly, apart from the riches of His grace; but, as has been finely said, He also died for men because they were "worth dying for." The materialist regards men as being but links in the chain of a mechanical process—links of the machinery of the universe, which, by the way, have this peculiarity that though mechanisms they can reason about themselves. Your economist is tempted to conceive of his fellows as producers merely. But Christ says to men, you are more than a process, you are something other than mere agents of production; you bear on your brow the signature of My Father, you enshrine in your hearts capacities with which eternity alone is commensurate; and the Kingdom that I can give you may be in you as a well of water, springing up into eternal life. We must get back to our Lord's sense of human values ere we attempt to realise His Kingdom in the world. Dr. L. P. Jacks, in his Hibbert Lecture on "Immortality in a Living Universe," quotes Kant's definition of a moral world. "It is a place where *persons*, individual *persons*, are treated as ends in themselves, and not as means or instruments to an end beyond themselves." And Dr. Jacks goes on to say: "If I treat you (or you treat me) as merely an instrument, which I may use for furthering some end of my own, then, no matter how high that purpose of mine may be, . . . I am not treating you morally, but immorally." Persons! persons! each an end in himself—but if you regard men thus, not in terms of Capital, or in terms of Labour, not in terms of masses and in terms of caste, but in terms of human values, your primary aim will be to win them back to God, and to set their feet in those high paths of their appointed destiny.

Further, it should be recognised, that your true evangelist, who is actuated by his sense of human values, proves, at the same time, your keenest reformer: for his indignation is fierce before any system which degrades personality. Chiefly he is concerned to persuade men to enter the Kingdom for themselves; but he abhors with all his strength those wrongs that deprive men, made in the image of God, of the sanctions of the Kingdom in their social life.

Once more, the Church must begin with the individual if we are to realise our social aims. For unless a sufficient number of the units of society are governed by the principles of the Kingdom, its reign cannot sway the conscience nor actuate the will of the community. It is not by legislation that the Kingdom comes in the social order; it is by renunciation and by brotherhood, that is, by the sacrificial spirit of Christ manifest in the



various relations of life. The Golden Rule is not to be enforced by Act of Parliament. Legislation may express its spirit, it never creates it. "If," says Dr. Garvie, "in the past the Christian Church had been less eager to legislate, and more anxious to convert, more concerned about renewing the character and less about ruling the conduct of men, the Christian ideal might have been nearer realisation than it is." It is so. You need Christian industrialists in order to moralise industry. You require Christian diplomatists in order to ennoble diplomacy. You must have a Christian democracy if you would transfigure the present order; for nothing but the rule of Christ acknowledged in the heart of democracy can eradicate selfishness and constrain it to use its will for good, its power for righteousness. Principles! Ideals! These do not effect themselves. They are contingent upon character. Consider the French Revolution. They had heavenly principles in those days—Liberty, Equality, Fraternity; but they fell into hellish practices:

"A wild and dream-like trade of blood and guile,  
Too foolish for a tear, too wicked for a smile."

What was it that restrained England in that period? The Methodist evangelists. The historian affirms that the Revolution took a different course in England, leading to the Reform Measures, because the Great Revival had given sanity, poise, restraint, character, to the people. By the services of the men who, in village, town, and city, heralded the Gospel of the Reign, the country was spared the terrors of a period that was lurid with horror. We must evangelise if Christ is to reign.

But, in conclusion, at the same time the Church must witness, with no uncertain testimony, to the social implications of the Kingdom. We must boldly insist that economics and politics reflect the moral obligations of the Kingdom; that the marriage relationship, as the basis of any worthy state, that the amusements, the sport, and the habits of the community, shall express "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honourable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report. Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God." Speak ye first to the heart of the people, telling of the enriching mercy of a pardoning God. Then "prepare ye in the wilderness (in the barren tracts of the national life), the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God." For "these ye ought to have done, and not to have left the other undone." Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven.

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