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The Mission of Rededication.

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We have been called to a rededication of Scotland and of its national life. The word has seemed to imply previous dedication: it recalls something in our history—we have, then, formerly made an attempt to achieve that at which now again we aim. The attempt as then made was unsuccessful? Be it so—but we made it. They accuse us Scots of an excessive love of the world—we are canny, we are practical, we are hard-headed, we are careful, they say, hinting perhaps at an element of the sordid and grasping in our character. However that may be—and it is not easy for us to judge in our own case—as a nation Scotland is capable of idealism, and has proved it, when over the rest of Europe ideals were out of fashion.

Through the long Middle Ages and their confusion the Church had stood in secular life for three things—social duty, human brotherhood, and corporate responsibility; and on the whole it had stood for them successfully. It had maintained the idea of *Christendom*—a certain unity demarcated by the Christian civilization, under the sceptre of Him by whom kings reign and princes decree justice. The Reformation in the West, and more or less simultaneously the consummation of Ottoman conquest in the East, broke down that solidarity and shattered the Church's international and social influence. The modern system of States based on nationality began to take form. By and by there was reaction from the spiritual fervours of the Reformation period, a weariness of the struggles which it had provoked, and a distaste for 'principles,' as the cause of those wars of religion which had desolated Europe. The State as such regained much of the importance which it had possessed in the old pagan days when the State was all and the individual conscience nothing. Religion became a matter of statecraft—it followed the flag—*cujus regio, illius religio*; the conscience (or the convenience) of the prince was to determine the faith of his subjects. Over great part of 'the Christian World' the prince became Head of the Church. Instead of a supra-national Church, 'in the world what the soul is in the body,' there came into existence a series of 'establishments of religion,' which were little more than departments of State, and that of States whose politics made little pretence to be Christian. With all this Mr. H. Belloc has made us familiar.

In this dreary time Scotland constituted herself the exception; she stood alone in adherence to the earlier ideal, resolved to be a really Christian country—Christian in fact as well as in profession, Church and State identified in God's service and based alike in God's truth. This resolution became explicit in her successive *Covenants*. The Covenants failed—that may be frankly recognized; but they were a genuine effort to realize a conception whose value we may now, in the distress which has resulted from its general abandonment, appreciate: and in such an enterprise it is something even to have failed. The Covenants stood for the moral duty of the State, for the spiritual nature of nationality, and for the recognition of the corporate responsibility of citizenship before God and man. That is to say, that they stood for what Mr. Burroughs has taught us to call the wholeness of life, and for that Whole which includes our life—God in whom we live and move and exist.

The Covenants failed—no doubt in part because the world which they attempted to consecrate embraced so many elements of opposition to their idea; in part also because of their controversial outlook, and of their concern mainly with a single aspect of the Kingdom of God (its relation to the temporal power) which has for too long obsessed the Scottish mind to the exclusion of aspects not less important; and in part by reason of the 'persecuting principles,' the will to repress and concuss opposition, and the swift resort to extreme measures, which disfigure our ecclesiastical history. They took the sword, and they perished by the sword. Such were the tendencies of the time; we have learned something since; because the attempt as it was made in the seventeenth century came to nothing, it does not follow that, if made again in better form, it need be hopeless now.

The attempt which the Covenants represented—the attempt, namely, to build on Scottish fields a true City of God, to construct a society based on complete recognition of Christ as Lord of Life for

this present world as well as Lord of heaven and of the world to come—that has not since been renewed. Through the last two centuries the tendency has been for the secular organization of life to become more and more entirely secular; for religion to become more and more individualistic; and for the Church to hold itself concerned more and more exclusively with the salvation of souls, and less and always less responsible as to the condition of this world's affairs. We have lost the wholeness of life; and the reaction upon our spiritual life has been to infect it with a certain sense of unreality, almost of artificiality. Religion has lost conscious touch with the world of fact, that actual world which God so loved, for which Christ died. *En revanche* the world has broken touch with faith, and in its theory of social conduct has 'forgotten God.' Our life is organized mainly for finance, commerce, and industry; can we venture even to think that for these purposes (which are distinctively our purposes) we are organized in Christ and under the law of Christ? So what is comprehensively called 'the social question' is upon us—that question which is not one but many, and yet is always the same question: that, namely, of 'society organizing itself apart from God,' and the question of whether such a society can stand, or for how long; and now it is upon us in its ultimate and conclusive form, the international form, in which 'discussion is continued by other means' such as bombs and poison gas, as the question whether men shall be able at all to dwell together in a world which does not own the Kingdom of God. This is the *ultima ratio* which we have reached in present discussion; but the discussion itself originates at an earlier point—that at which the right of self-interest is assumed as the co-ordinating factor in human association; the assumption which negates the kingship of God. Our need just now (and this is the thing which is implied by the word *rededication*) is to recognize afresh (for once certainly Scotland knew it) that God alone is King over all the earth, that God deals with the actual which is before Him, that we are corporately and socially responsible to God, that our national and social life is a real moral life which involves us individually in the Divine criticism, that the Kingdom of God is meant for realization, and that we must seek it, seek it first, seek it as men in desperation seek till they find.

Scotland at least has the capacity to grasp the thought, and the capacity to attempt its accomplishment in fact—the idealism of it does not for her exclude consideration. That is certain, because she has already attempted it; her history is her witness. 'The gifts and calling of God' (so St. Paul says of another nation) 'are without repentance'; capacity to entertain a Divine idea is the gift of God: it is more—it is a calling of God to follow that idea and to endeavour its realization again and yet again. Scotland has always kept some hold of this idea of the Kingdom of God, spiritual but factual; it is but yesterday, as the life of a people is counted, that she was torn to the depth of her life on a question of 'the crown rights of the Redeemer.' The merits of that convulsion do not enter here—let it serve as a later example of that idealism of which we Scots are capable. The old France has risen from its grave, the France which led the Crusades; will not the old Scotland reawaken? We may acknowledge that since the seventeenth century material interests have engaged us; since the union of the Parliaments prosperity has drugged our conscience; we have lost our dream of having God for King. Yet the dream is our own; who else of the nations has shared it? And now God is calling the earth—will we answer?

'The Kingdom of God'—'Christ supreme in all spheres': not in State relations only (as was perhaps the flaw in the conception as our forefathers conceived it), and not in the soul only (there perhaps was the too exclusive emphasis which cropped of its strength that older evangelicalism, which nevertheless had the root of the matter); but now 'in all spheres and in all causes,' including first those humble spheres of common traffic in which we ourselves most of us move: Christ to rule in politics, in business, in the labour-market, in the shop and factory and counting-house and exchange, in town council and committee and school board, in legislation and in diplomacy — with an acknowledged Christian standard in them all.

The Church in Scotland has adopted this word *rededication* as the watchword of its war mission—it has not as yet (so far as I know) set itself to expound the content of the word thus applied. When it does so, there are certain precautions in definition which would naturally suggest themselves. (1) Rededication does not involve any proposal to establish a theocracy. In relation to

the secular order the Church is not a government, and should not be a government. The Church is a witness. I do not mean that it must limit itself to 'the proclamation of great principles'; it must also demand their application. It should testify against concrete evils, and for the attainable good. It should indicate the wrong against which it protests and refuse to be silent until that is redressed, and it should with definiteness and persistence claim for the community such ameliorations as are requisite. But it is not responsible for measures or for policies. Society is organized for its own regulation and possesses its own executive: to that the Church must appeal for reformation, which, as the monitor of society, it has a duty to demand. (2) Further, in speaking of *re*-dedication and thereby implying reference to historic precedent, there must be care to avoid even the appearance of an intention to follow such a precedent further than resuscitation of its radical principle. History cannot be repeated; the Covenants cannot be revived. The Covenants were corporate national actions in which the nation as such was, as is proper, represented by its king and parliament. Such action is in these days impossible, were it only for the reason that Scotland has now no separate national representation. (3) On the other hand, rededication is a term which can hardly be applied with reference to the *Church*: the Church is already and always Christ's own; it may be conceived of as repenting of failure to give adequate effect to its consecration in Him; it may be called to reformation or to revival; but it can hardly be conceived of as dedicating or rededicating to Christ His own Bride and Body. The Church is not its own; it is Christ's purchased possession.

We shall possibly find ourselves interpreting the rededication at which we aim as an individual action, but an action taken by so many individuals consentaneously[1] that it may be in effect the movement of the mass of the nation into a new reading of social obligation as obligation to God; with the resulting effective prevalence of a higher standard of social duty, defined as the acknowledged 'supremacy of Christ in all spheres.' Our hope would be in this movement of the public conscience and in an elevation of the accepted conventions of conduct to a new plane. Dedication is, at least in the first place, an interior action of the will, a temper of mind, and a resolve. Only in the second place does it become the expression of this temper, and the fulfilment of this resolution in action. The immediate aim of a mission of rededication would be to obtain a certain conviction of the general mind of our countrymen, possibly some explicit formulation of intention to give this conviction effect. The conviction to be sought is that the way of Christ is the only way of hope for the world, and that it is a way applicable 'in all spheres'; the intention to be formed and expressed is an intention to adopt this way, each man for himself in all practice, and to require that it be taken for granted as our way with one another in all honourable traffic of man with man: this instead of the present assumption that in our intercourse each should seek his own things and therein be blameless.

It is, one understands, the Rededication of the Nation which is meant; and if so, we must have in view the national, the social—may we not say, the secular?—as distinguished from the ecclesiastical. The proposal is not, on the face of it, one of ecclesiastical adjustments or of Church revival. These may also be desirable or even requisite: they may be parallel and contemporaneous; probably they must be involved. But they are not national rededication. A revived Church, or a united Church, or a perfectly ordered Church may quite well exist in a country which is far from confessing God in national affairs or in social institutions. Our thinking as to rededication should primarily envisage the public conscience, the current ethics, and the secular practice of life. Two difficulties stand in the way of our adopting this outlook. On the one hand, there is in the Church itself a fixed habit of minding its own business and of

[1] The proportion of the population of Scotland accessible to the Church's direct influence is large. The population in question probably approaches 5,000,000 in number. The communicants of the Church of Scotland alone were reported for the year 1916 as 725,900—those of the U.F. Church (which in this Mission is acting along with the Church of Scotland) as over 518,000: together not less, let us say, than 1¼ million—or perhaps something approximating to or exceeding one-half of the adult population. But there are also very many who, not being communicants, adhere to the Church and in their measure are responsive to its appeal. It may be further hoped that in the later and concluding stages of the Mission other Christian communions may support the movement which the Mission represents. (This hope has been fully realized.)

judging itself, often severely enough, by such results as it discerns in what is called its 'hold upon the people'—by Church attendance, statistics of membership, and so on—rather than by the conditions, moral and material, of the world to which it testifies. We are more accustomed to be criticised (by ourselves and others) than to criticise, and to justify our existence, rather than to require our world to be justified. Our instinct is to correct ourselves rather than to ask for the reformation of our environment. It is an amiable instinct, but for the present necessity it may be apt to lead us into irrelevancies. On the other hand, when we address the world with our call to repentance, and the country with our call to rededication, world and country have the obvious retort, that we should first reform ourselves, and that the Church too has room for repentance. And we cannot deny the need—the Church will undoubtedly be in a better position to address its call to the world, when it has cleared itself of worldliness in its own system.

The retort is effective as a retort. Coming to the facts, it remains that we are dealing with *the war*, and that the war has been a secular and social, not an ecclesiastical, phenomenon. Its problems are ethical rather than religious. It has arisen not out of the Church, but out of the nations. Its origins and its processes are in the mundane order, and there they remain, and will remain. Ecclesiastical repentances and reformation are for the question of the war side issues. We have to deal with the fact that our social method and practice have been in part non-moral, and that the cleavage between theoretical and practical ethic has run through our whole organization of life, beginning in individual relations and culminating in international relations—with the recent result. The question is of unifying personal and corporate standards of conduct, of moralizing and christianizing our society, its standards of thought, its agreed aims, its approved activities. We have to substitute conceptions of justice and brotherhood for conceptions of self-interest and rivalry.

Translated into the terms of national life, *dedication* would, on the one hand, involve the popular acceptance and common prevalence of the recognition of God as the Lawgiver and Judge of our society, a general persuasion that it can be well with nation or man only so far as God's intention for each is adopted, with a conviction that God's will can be and must be done on earth. On the other hand, in the field of duty to man, it would involve a general determination to attempt the arrangement of the various spheres of social organization and activity in accordance with an absolute morality: that is to say, that what is right should be demanded and expected by the common conscience and opinion. It would thus be no longer possible to say among us, 'I am not a moralist—I am practical.' We have to create the conviction that morality is of all things the most practical, since its abeyance has brought the world to its present ruin. To do so we have to substitute the idea of service for that of profit as the proper motive of action. We have to suggest the conception that the man of business, the official, the employer, the workman are in positions of stewardship and trust for their fellows, equally, for example, with the minister of religion or the physician; and that if they are indifferent to that fact, they are as culpable as a clergyman or doctor who places his interest before his duty, or occupies his position with a view to his own advantage. We have to exclude the idea of obligation to the interest of certain persons—for example, the obligation of a director to his shareholders—rather than of obligation to the community. We have to discredit the idea of class codes and of professional codes, which differ from the absolute code—which are proper to particular spheres or departments of life. We have to unify the standard held in the current conscience, so that what is in itself wrong or less than right shall not be held excusable on the ground of practical exigency. This is only to say that God should be owned in practice. No more than that is needed to constitute a dedicated nation.