

The Catholic Church & Reason

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INTRODUCTORY

The object of the Talks during the Catholic Hour (The Catholic Hour comes from Station 3AW Melbourne: from 9 to 10 p m. every Sunday.) is to make known the Catholic Church and her doctrine. Why should we be so anxious to do this? Is the motive self-advertisement, or self-assertiveness, or the love of religious controversy? No. We want to make the Catholic Church known because we believe that it is a matter of vital importance for all to know what the Catholic Church is and what she teaches. She has, we believe, the solution of life's problems, both the problems of the individual and the problems of the race as a whole. The Catholic Church offers men the means of living as men ought to live - that is, as rational beings who have been placed in this world by God to serve Him and by so doing to deserve a better and everlasting life with God hereafter. The Catholic Church offers to men not merely human opinions, which they can take or leave as they please, but the truth which God Himself has revealed. It offers them, therefore authoritative guidance in the conduct of life and it also puts within their reach special helps which God has provided for their assistance in the difficult task of leading a good life. When we say, therefore that we want you to know the teaching of the Catholic Church, we really mean that we want you to know the teaching of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of mankind. For we believe - and can give good reason for our belief - that Jesus Christ instituted the Catholic Church for the instruction, guidance, and sanctification of all men.

IGNORANCE AND PREJUDICE

The majority of non-Catholics do not find it so easy to get to know the Catholic Church. They do not come in contact with Catholic priests; and the latter are usually so busy attending to the needs of their own flock that they have little time for seeking the other sheep that are outside the fold. (For a Catholic priest's work does not consist merely in preaching a sermon or two on Sunday, and then waiting and preparing for the next Sunday). Moreover, the ordinary bookshops give no opportunity of getting to know the really remarkable number of Catholic books of a high order that are now appearing. And Catholic layfolk, through custom, timidity, or indifference, do not do all that they should to share with their non-Catholic friends the treasure which they possess in the Catholic Faith.

But this is not the whole story. Besides ignorance, prejudice and misrepresentation also have to be overcome. There is no other body in the world that has to endure so much in the way of calumny as the Catholic Church. The result is that in many cases we have not simply to supply a picture of the Catholic Church where there was none before, but we have first to erase one that has been drawn by prejudice and falsehood. This is a fact which should make men of good will all the more determined to find out the real truth about the Catholic Church.

THE CONSPIRACY OF SILENCE

More dangerous even than the campaign of slander is the conspiracy of neglect and silence which the Catholic Church has to face. That Church is, of course, the dominating religious influence in the world today. But it is the fashion for many writers on religious topics to ignore the Catholic Church. How often, for instance, do we read the unqualified statement that men nowadays do not go to church, though Catholic churches are filled to overflowing? "The Church is losing her hold on the modern mind," we are constantly being told, though the Catholic Church - the great Christian Church - never held the allegiance of her children so firmly as today. "No one now believes" in this or that article of Christian faith, we are airily told, as if some 400,000,000 Catholics were non-existent or of no account. Though the British Empire has no official form of religion, we are constantly being given to understand that the Catholic Church is something alien to it and negligible in it, permitted to endure on sufferance. Yet in the combined populations of Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Newfoundland, South Africa and Ireland, Catholics are easily the largest religious body, exceeding, for example, the combined number of Anglicans and Presbyterians. Even if you leave out Ireland, Catholics still remain the largest religious body in the other five Dominions.

There is no publishing house in London which is at present issuing books of such a uniform standard of excellence as a Catholic one, the head and founder of which is an Australian. (The firm is that of Sheed and Ward.) Will you find its books in the ordinary bookshops of Melbourne? I think not. Is this accidental? Perhaps. There is a well-known English writer named Arnold Lunn. In the course of his life he had written a good deal of vigorous criticism of the Catholic Church. A few years ago he became a Catholic. Studying the Catholic Church in order to attack her, he learned enough about her to become convinced of the truth of her claims. He has written finer books since he became a Catholic than he did before. Will you find these later books in a general bookshop? Again, I think not. Last Christmas I wanted in a hurry a copy of his book entitled *Now I See*, which, published at the end of 1983, has already gone through five editions. The Catholic booksellers in Melbourne and in Sydney were sold out, so great was the demand for the book. I tried the general booksellers. They had not got it, and were not interested in it. But I could easily have got, not so long ago, at the same booksellers the same author's *Roman Converts*, in which he tried to explain away the conversion to the Catholic Church of G.K. Chesterton, Mgr. Ronald Knox and Cardinals Manning and Newman.

Catholics are not surprised nor unduly troubled by all this. They are accustomed to it. And they remember that Jesus Christ Himself was ignored or actively opposed by the official religious powers of His day. But it is a serious matter for the ordinary man. Everything conspires to make it difficult for him to gain a knowledge of the Catholic Church. Yet if it is true that the Catholic Church was established by Christ to guide men to eternal life, there can be nothing more important for a man than to know the Catholic Church thoroughly. This knowledge I must be got, not from those who are ignorant or prejudiced or hostile, but from those who are able and willing to tell the truth about the Catholic Church. There you have the reason for this Catholic Hour, of which these talks form part. The particular series of talks which I am now beginning has as its general title, "The Catholic Church and Reason," and its object is to show the close accord which there is between the Catholic system and reason.

WHAT IS OFFERED

I have chosen this particular topic because one of the commonest misapprehensions about the Catholic Church is that there is some kind of opposition between her system and reason. That idea is without foundation, but it has to be exploded again and again. I have chosen this subject, too,

because nowadays people want religion that has a reasoned and logical foundation. It is unfortunately true that a great many people outside the Catholic Church, especially men, are taking little interest in and are certainly not practising religion. The main cause of this is that they are not offered any definite, coherent religious teaching based on sound and reasonable principles. We have "stunts" for attracting people to church; we have sentimental appeals or revivalist meetings; we have a fevered search for preachers whose literary and oratorical gifts will draw large congregations, and whose harmless, indeterminate teaching will offend no one. "The hungry sheep look up and are not fed." We have high-placed ecclesiastics who make a boast of knowing no philosophy or theology; and others who seem to think that their shallow, trivial, and subjective views of great Christian truths are sufficient guidance for a troubled world. There are others who kowtow to science as to a goddess, and are amusingly fearful lest they be thought to differ from this infallible oracle of truth. We find popular religious writers whose style of expression is: "I feel that it is more in accordance with what we may conjecture to have been the original teaching of Christ to suppose..." and so on. And they wonder why religion - as expounded by them - does not appeal to the thinking man. When someone who has no training in exact thought, and little intellectual grasp of religion, denies a truth that his grandmother believed he is hailed by many of these modern religious teachers as "a daring and advanced thinker." It is so childish, and so pitiful. Vagueness, inconsistency, and scepticism in matters of belief, confusion of mind and inexactitude of expression in teaching, and the ceaseless change of doctrine with the object of propitiating that elusive entity which is labelled "modern thought" - these and similar characteristics of the religious world outside the Catholic Church quite naturally destroy the average man's belief or interest in religious teaching.

It is the same in the sphere of morals. Men need clear and authoritative teaching. But outside the Catholic Church they do not get it. There is no authority to appeal to. The consequence is wrong or confused or contradictory teaching. Or else the teachers keep silence about matters of deepest import, and wax indignant over matters in which the ordinary conscience can find no wrong. Not long ago the head of a religious denomination in Ireland was reported as having sent a telegram to the English Prime Minister and the Speaker of the House of Commons, protesting against the use of brewers' horses for the Speaker's State coach on Jubilee day in London. I do not wish to make unkind comment, but is it any wonder that the ordinary practical man can find nothing to interest him in religion of this kind?

WHAT THE WORLD WANTS

You can see that it really is of the greatest importance to insist on the clear, logical, and coherent nature of the teaching of the Catholic Church. Could a member of any other religious denomination set down clearly and definitely what his religious beliefs are, and the logical grounds for those beliefs? If he did attempt the task, would he not be contradicted by his neighbour of the same persuasion? The Catholic Church knows exactly what she believes, and can state it in unequivocal terms. Moreover, she has and can give logical reasons for her belief. That is what the ordinary man wants, and that is what the Catholic Church offers.

I A RATIONAL RELIGION

Let us assume that I am talking to people who believe in God, and believe that He is the Creator of this world and of all men who regard themselves, consequently, as servants of God, bound to do His will here on earth and thus deserve to enter into the true life which God has planned for us hereafter. Now suppose that you who are listening to me and I who am speaking to you met when this life was

over, on the way to judgment. And suppose - just for the sake of argument - that it then became perfectly clear that the Catholic Church had been established by Jesus Christ for the sanctification and salvation of all mankind - that it was, in other words, the one true Church. And suppose, again, that I had had an opportunity of putting the truth before you, but through reserve or indifference or a desire to avoid what might look like proselytising had not done so. Would not those of you who are not Catholics have just reason in that case for reproaching me? You might well say to me: "You knew that there was one true Church, but you kept your knowledge to yourself. You knew that there was one fold in which we might have found security, but you never tried to lead us there. You knew the beauty and holiness as well as the truth of Catholic doctrine, but you had not sufficient interest in us to be anxious to share with us what you enjoyed. You knew how much happier life on earth would have been, and how much more safely we should have passed through the dangers of the world, if we had been members of the Catholic Church, yet you never tried to enlighten us. You knew that Christ established His Church for us as well as for you and others, but you never tried to teach us that. We had only one life to live, and eternity depended on the way we lived it, yet you would not help us to know the truth that would have made such a difference to us. Why had you not a greater love for the truth, and zeal for the honour of God, and interest in our welfare?" And if it were true that I had done nothing, what reply could I make?

THE END IN VIEW

I have said this to explain once more the purpose of these talks which I am giving; because it is important to keep before us that we are not engaged here in mere academic discussion of questions of theoretic interest only. It is a matter of life and death for every man to know God's will and do it. We Catholics believe - and can give you reasoned proof for our belief - that the Catholic Church was founded by the Son of God precisely in order to teach you truth which God wanted you to know, to guide you with authority - divine authority - through the maze of this world and to give you special supernatural aids which man is so badly in need of in order to lead a good life.

In the introductory talk I pointed out some of the obstacles which prevent the ordinary man from getting a true knowledge of the Catholic Church and her real teaching. Ordinary Catholics are not very communicative; Catholic books are not so easy to get; there is hostility and misrepresentation even in quarters where this would not be expected; worse still, there is a conspiracy of silence about the Catholic Church. It is ignored as of no account, though it is, of course, the greatest religious force in the world. Not being acquainted with the Catholic Church, a great many men know religion only as a vague unsatisfactory thing based on sentiment or emotion, or on the blind acceptance of truths which have no reasoned foundation. They are puzzled by contradictory teaching; they are unsettled by changing opinions; and they find the real needs of the human mind and will unsatisfied. As a result they do not take religion seriously. You can hardly blame them.

On that account I said that I was going to insist on the reasonableness of the Catholic faith. It is logical and coherent, it bases itself on reason and asks to be tested by reason. If that is so, then the Catholic Church merits your most careful study.

THE HUMAN SOUL

The Catholic religion may be called a rational religion in the first place because the Catholic Church believes in the human soul, maintaining uncompromisingly that it is essentially different from matter and is immortal. In that respect man differs altogether from an animal. His soul makes him a rational animal, that is, a thinking, reasoning animal. Outside the Catholic church there is not such

unanimity as you might think on this point, even among those who profess a religious creed, and did time allow, I could give you some striking evidences of that. I may recall that the well-known psychologist, William McDougall, in the preface to his most important work, *Body and Mind*, writes: "I am aware that to many minds it must appear nothing short of a scandal that anyone occupying a position in an academy of learning, other than a Roman Catholic seminary, should in this twentieth century defend the old-world notion of the soul of man."

MAN'S INTELLECT

Because she believes in a soul, the Catholic Church believes that men have an intellect, a reasoning faculty, quite different from and far superior to sense faculties. She is the steady defender of the human intellect against all kinds of attacks. It would be amusing, were it not so serious, to read so many books and listen to so many arguments which seek to prove - in a logical manner, observe - that we cannot reason. It is like a man raising his voice in heated argument to prove - that he is dumb!

The Catholic Church teaches authoritatively, against all sceptics and agnostics, that by using our intellect in the right way we can find out truth and reach certitude. The Catholic Church is, therefore, the champion of the rights of the intellect. She has a system of philosophy, special to herself, which is a model of reasonableness and coherence. The late Dr. Inge was certainly not prejudiced in favour of the Catholic Church, and yet he wrote, in *God and the Astronomers* (p. 13): "I am convinced that the classical tradition of Christian philosophy, which Roman Catholic scholars call the *philosophia perennis*, the perennial philosophy, is not merely the only possible Christian philosophy, but is the only system which will be found ultimately satisfying." This philosophy, note, is the official philosophy of the Catholic Church.

REASONABLE AND CONSISTENT

Furthermore, the Catholic Church gives you clear, solid reasons for all her claims. Not only is the Catholic position taken as a whole, an eminently reasonable one, but there is not a single article of Catholic doctrine which you are asked to believe without satisfactory reasons being given. No wonder that even enemies are struck by this. C. E. M. Joad, who used to attack Christianity, has written (*Is Christianity True?* p. 866): "The only branch of christianity which, so far as I can gather, has not declined is Roman Catholicism. Logical, definite, and, above all, dogmatic, it offers a sure foundation to those whose feet are beset by the quicksands of modern doubt."

Because she is logical, the Catholic Church is also - necessarily - consistent. She does not teach one thing in Melbourne, C.1, and another thing in Melbourne, C.2. (For the benefit of those who are not familiar with Melbourne it may be mentioned that St. Paul's Cathedral is in the postal district of C.1. and the "High" Anglican St. Peter's Church is in C.2.) In Rome or London or Hong Kong her doctrines are precisely the same. Nor does she say one thing today and another thing tomorrow. She has not one doctrine for this generation and another for the next, because - no matter who denies it - truth is truth for ever.

THE SPHERE OF MORALS

The same logical and consistent character appears in her moral teaching. Outside the Catholic Church there is nothing but vague foundation to rest on. The Convocation of Canterbury recently discussed the majority and minority reports of a committee on the Church and Marriage, and the most amazing divergences of opinion were revealed. Most amazing of all was it to find that some of

those who maintained that re-marriage after divorce was wrong were prepared to admit those who had remarried to Holy Communion. Those who have remarried have committed sin, in this view, and are living in sin; but they are to be told in effect: "You can forget all about that and go on as if it didn't matter." Can anything be hoped for from minds which will accept such inconsistencies? Other forms of immorality are now openly stated, and with good reason, to have ecclesiastical approbation by those who are anxious to push their wares. But the Catholic Church, in this as in all other essential matters, stands where she always stood. For her, sin never becomes merely "a second-best course," as it was termed by the Bishop who introduced in Convocation the Reports which I have mentioned.

In the very important domain of sex morality the Catholic Church has not merely definite and unchanging teaching, but teaching that is based on reason. And, unless men distinguish themselves from mere animals by making reason and not inclination the basis of their conduct, destruction awaits them.

THE LIMITATIONS OF REASON

Finally, though the Catholic Church takes her stand on reason, she is no blind worshipper of reason. She knows, and insists on, the limitations of the human intellect. The intellect of man is not all-powerful. There are many things which we are incapable of comprehending. But we have a source of truth far more sure and reliable than our own reasoning, the teaching of God; and the Catholic Church never fails to point out that our own speculations must always yield to God's teaching. If God tells me that something is true, I know it must be true, even if I do not understand it fully. So, while upholding the true dignity of human reason, the Catholic Church at the same time subordinates reason to faith. And in this she proves still further her reasonableness.

If the Catholic Church appealed to sentiment or feeling, or if what she taught was put forward as a matter merely of human opinion, it would be intelligible if you took little interest in her doctrines and paid little attention to her claims. But the Catholic Church maintains that she has authority from God to teach what He wants men to know, and to be the shepherd of men's souls, and she offers you a reasoned proof that her claim is justified. You cannot afford to be indifferent to this. The Catholic Church puts forward claims that are astonishing, but of vital importance for every man if they are true. Do not make the mistake, therefore, of failing to examine thoroughly her credentials.

II IS LOGIC WANTED?

I have been insisting in these talks that the Catholic Church presents religion to men as a reasonable thing, and makes no claim for herself or for her doctrines that cannot stand examination in the light of reason. You may not be able to accept the doctrines of the Catholic Church, or admit her claims, but you need be in no doubt about what are her doctrines and her claims and the arguments for them. She teaches the same doctrine always and in every place; she states her doctrine in carefully chosen terms, which have a clear and definite meaning; and she gives plain and reasoned proof for everything she teaches. In the case of the Catholic religion, therefore, the appeal is to reason I have already given some proof of all this. But now, before I begin to develop the point further, a troubling question presents itself: will reason be listened to? Is logic wanted? There are reasons for doubting.

OPEN ATTACK

We all know, of course, that there are some who are actuated by a blind hatred of the Catholic Church and make no pretence of appealing to reason. We had a striking and public example of this not long ago, when the names of three distinguished men were put forward together as recipients of the freedom of the city of Edinburgh. One was a Scotsman and a Protestant, one was an Australian and a Catholic, and one was an Indian and a Hindu. Objection was raised by some bigots to one of the three on the score of his religion; and, as you know, that one was not the Hindu. Some Australian papers have spoken of this insult to Australia in the terms which it merited; others did not allow themselves that honour. I do not intend to go over again matter which has already been sufficiently dealt with, but I may draw attention to one point which perhaps has not been mentioned. The type of bigotry which we are considering is fond of parading its loyalty and devotion to King and Empire. In London Mr. Lyons (Prime Minister of Australia 1932-1939) was entertained by the King; but when he went to Edinburgh, the honoured guest of the King was insulted by those who, in their own estimation, were the King's dutiful subjects. One who was fit to be entertained and honoured by the head of the Empire was not fit to receive common courtesy from a small section of Edinburgh loyalists.

Other and more outrageous manifestations of the same spirit have been given in the same city of Edinburgh since then, but they have not, as far as I saw, received any notice in our press. The Catholics of Edinburgh held a Eucharistic Congress without public display of any kind. The meetings and religious exercises were held in churches, halls, and other enclosed places. There was nothing that the most critical could call provocative. But these same bigots resolved to interfere with the rights of Catholics to carry out their own business in their own way. With a discretion that may or may not be considered to enhance their valour they let the men's meeting pass undisturbed, and chose the women's meeting for the particular object of their attacks. The savagery that was displayed was stated to have been almost unbelievable in a civilized community of today.

Such opposition to the Catholic Church is not, of course, based on reason, nor can it be met by appeal to reason. The examples I have mentioned are extreme, no doubt. But something of the same spirit shows itself often enough where it might not be expected. We have seen ourselves how, when Catholics here in Melbourne resolved to make their contribution to the Centenary celebrations by organizing a great act of worship centering round the Person of Our Lord, there were mutterings and threats and plots and protests. Instead of devoting themselves to the task of filling their own empty churches and settling their disputes about fundamental Christian doctrines, the leaders of the opposition chose instead to attack the one consistent and effective religious force in the world. Is the contrast not striking? Would it be conceivable - would even our enemies say that it was conceivable? - that in any Catholic city in the world a good man would be opposed on the ground of his religion? If any other religious body wished to perform an act of devotion or worship in accordance with its beliefs, Catholics would mind their own business and rejoice that religion was not dead. The Catholic Church appeals to reason; but will it be met on the ground of reason?

FALSEHOOD AND FOLLY

But it is not attacks of the kind I have mentioned which arouse my misgivings and force me to ask, Is logic wanted? It is the wild and foolish statements that are made, and worse - the falsehoods that are fabricated and spread about Catholics and the Catholic religion by those who profess some form or other of religion and pretend to be guided by the spirit of Christ. Were it necessary, I could find examples very near home. I could, for instance, quote for you a foolish and bitter article against the Catholic Church published in a Church newspaper, containing - besides unworthy innuendoes -

plain, blunt lies. And remember, this did not happen in Gunn's Gully, but in Collins street, Melbourne, and it was not the work of some negligible band of bigots, but of a denomination which holds its head high in the community. Why is it that men who would consider it unjustifiable to utter a falsehood about a fellow-man in ordinary matters will yet, apparently, have no scruple about calumniating Catholics and their religion? Is it any wonder that I ask, Is logic wanted?

In the Genealogists' Magazine (London) for December last it was asserted, on the authority of a correspondent who wrote from Australia (his name is of no importance) that "the Papal Registers of pre-Reformation Births, Marriages, etc., are kept with such secrecy that no British archivist, although accredited by the Government which employed him, would be allowed even to know of their existence, much less to consult them." Here was a statement, damaging to the credit and honesty of the Catholic Church, purporting to be a statement of fact. The attention of the Director of the Vatican Archives was drawn to the statement, and fortunately the editor of the Genealogists Magazine was a gentleman, and gave publicity to the reply. Though the Vatican, like all other Governments, does not make available for students documents dealing with more recent events that have not yet passed into history, "the Registers of Papal Letters from 1198 till 1846 are accessible to every serious student, and would with pleasure be placed at the service of any member of the honourable British Society of Genealogists." But not only was the charge false, it was, like so many anti-Catholic utterances, nonsensical. For, as Mgr. Mercati, the Director, pointed out, "there are no 'Papal Registers of pre-Reformation Births, Marriages, etc.,' at all. In Italy, as in England, inquirers into such matters must go, not to government archives, but to parish registers." Is it an accident that so much nonsense and falsehood is written and spoken about the Catholic Church? Once again, is logic wanted?

A PULPIT ORATOR

Misrepresentation is so common that we now almost take it for granted. Only a week ago an orator who evidently let his eloquence go to his head a little, was reported as telling a listening world that "it may be yet that an Abyssinian War will mean the crash of Rome. ("The Sun," 26 August, 1935.) So many greater prophets have lost their reputations during the last five hundred years by prophesying the imminent downfall of Rome that I should have thought it would have been a warning to a minor prophet of Collins street. "What of the ominous silence and inactivity of the Pope?" we are asked. "He is silent on the Abyssinian question." It is really remarkable how people who never in all their lives listened to a word or suggestion uttered by the Holy Father are some times suddenly smitten with a desire for his guidance and leadership. They close their ears to his words and then complain that he has not spoken. During the First War the reigning Pope made several attempts to bring about peace; and it would have saved the world from the worst consequences of the War and of the peace that followed if he had been listened to; but he was not. He has often been blamed, however, for not trying to bring about peace. We do not hear from our orators denunciation of the intrigues which were successful in barring the Pope from having any part in the Peace Conference. Shut him out, and then blame him for not coming in. Here is the latest charge, and a definite one: "The Pope has been ominously silent and inactive" in this matter of the peace of Europe and the world. It calls for a definite answer. Obviously I cannot, in a short time, go into the whole history of the Pope's earnest desire and work for peace. I give only one brief extract from an address to the Cardinals at Rome, which attracted world-wide attention a few months ago: "Since universal rumours of war are spread abroad and cause the greatest fear and agitation everywhere, we consider it opportune, in virtue of the apostolic office entrusted to us, to speak our

mind. That peoples should once more take to arms against each other, that brethren should again shed each other's blood, that from earth, sea, and sky should come ruin and destruction, this is a crime so enormous, a manifestation of such mad folly, that we hold it to be absolutely impossible, according to the judicial saying, 'What is against justice is not to be considered a possibility.'

"We cannot be persuaded that those who should have at heart the prosperity and well-being of the peoples are ready for the ruin and extermination not only of their own nation, but of a great part of humanity. But if anyone thinks of committing this infamous crime - may God put far off the realization of such a sorrowful presage, which on our part we believe unthinkable - then we can only again direct to God with anguished soul the prayer' 'Dissipa gentes quae bella volunt.' 'Scatter the nations which desire wars.'"

If this is what is meant by "ominous silence" I should like to hear an example of plain speaking.

A COMMON RESPONSIBILITY

There are many who are opposed to the Catholic Church, and I do not necessarily blame them for that. But I do blame them and God most certainly will blame them, if they make use of falsehood to attack the Catholic Church, or if they do not take reasonable care to find out the truth about that Church and her doctrines. The Pope has issued encyclical letters on such important matters as Christian marriage, the reunion of Christendom, and the present social and economic situation. Nothing has been written or spoken on these subjects to compare in weight and importance with the utterances of the Holy Father. They should be carefully studied - and they are not hard to get - by everyone who pretends to be interested in the problems which confront the world today. But has one in a thousand outside the Catholic Church even heard of these important pronouncements? I think not. They are not noticed in the daily press, though we could well spare much of the matter which is presented to us. But simply because secular newspapers, especially at this end of the earth, frequently ignore the Pope's pronouncements, that is hardly reason for denying that he has made them.

The Catholic Church puts forward a case based on reason. The appeal of reason will be futile if met by violence, calumny, ignorance, or neglect. The question is a practical one - Is logic wanted?

III THE DANGERS OF PREJUDICE

What is prejudice? Prejudice means, according to the derivation of the word, a judgment already formed, and is used to indicate a judgment which precedes the exercise of reason. Prejudice involves bias, unreasonable dislike of a thing. The prejudiced person does not approach a question with an open mind. Prejudice prevents people giving a fair hearing to a case, blinds them to the real merits of a thing, inclines them to believe the worst of a person or an institution against which they are prejudiced, and makes them reluctant to listen to the truth. If the prejudiced person can see at all he sees with distorted vision.

Prejudice is, therefore, the enemy of truth, and is at the same time most injurious to those who are infected by it. The harm which it does is in proportion to the importance of the truth to which it is opposed. It is particularly harmful when it prevents people from finding out the truth about religion. And strangely enough it is in the religious sphere that prejudice is most common and most strong. That is why I devote this talk to the danger of prejudice. My object is not to protest against manifestations of prejudice, but to set forth the real and serious injury that prejudice inflicts on those who are - so often unknowingly - its victims. It is all the more necessary to insist on this

because the prejudiced person does not realize the injury which he is doing to himself. He gets satisfaction out of his prejudice.

"ALL GENERATIONS WILL CALL ME BLESSED"

Let us take example of prejudice and see how it works. Catholics honour the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, above all other creatures. They do so on account of her incomparable dignity and the virtues with which she was adorned. Was she not addressed by the messenger of God as "dowered with grace" and "blessed among women?" We do not give - it should not be necessary to say so, but there is no harm in repeating it - we do not give to any creature the honour which is due to God. Between the holiest of creatures and God there is an infinite distance, and no Catholic could ever forget it. God is God, the one self-existent Being from whom all other beings derive everything that they have. There cannot be comparison between God and any creature. But Mary has been honoured and enriched by God as no other mere creature has been. The devotion of the Catholic Church is founded on her own prayer of praise and thanksgiving: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God, my Saviour. For He has looked with favour upon the lowliness of His handmaid, and from henceforth all generations will call me blessed. He that is might has done great things for me, and holy is His name" (St. Luke i., 46). It is the Catholic Church alone that habitually gives the Mother of God the title of "Blessed." Is it not a strange idea - and it is a common one - that the honour given to the Mother of the Son of God in some way detracts from the honour of God? Do we dishonour an artist by admiring and praising his greatest masterpiece?

Do we offend a good man by honouring his worthy mother? When the first worshippers of the Redeemer came to pay homage to Him in the manger they found Him "with Mary His Mother." The Catholic Church has never broken this association. Because we love and honour Jesus Christ, God and Man, so much, we also love and honour her from whom He took His human nature. And it is remarkable that only in the Catholic Church, which gives due honour to the Mother, is the divinity of her Son safe from all attack.

MARY EVER VIRGIN

Now it has been the constant belief of the Catholic Church, based on the teaching of the Gospels, that our Blessed Lady always preserved her virginity. She had, therefore, no children except Jesus Christ, who was, of course, conceived and born miraculously. Outside the Catholic Church a kind of fanatical dislike of the Mother of God has been common and there is no surer sign of a false religion and separation from God. In particular, efforts have been made to throw doubt on the perpetual virginity of the Blessed Virgin; and here is where the effects of prejudice are apparent. Critics have seized upon the term "first-born," which is applied to Our Lord in the Gospel of St. Luke, and argued that "first-born" implies other children. Some have gone so far as to say that it proves there were other children. Now to the person who considers the matter without any prepossessions, and without a desire to support any particular theory - without prejudice, in other words - it would appear that the term "firstborn" is quite neutral, implying nothing as to subsequent children, when you remember its significance in Jewish law. By the Mosaic law the first-born son had to be offered to God forty days after birth and bought back. Obviously, it would be impossible to know forty days after the first birth if other children were to follow or not. But an only child was "first-born" for the purposes of the law, just as much as one which was first of a series. An this seems perfectly obvious; yet the greater number of Protestant and rationalist commentators keep

repeating in wearisome chorus: "If Jesus was the first-born He was manifestly not the only child of Mary" - a clear example of how people can be swayed by prejudice.

NEW EVIDENCE

But there is another chapter in this tale of prejudice. In 1922 there was published a newly-discovered inscription from a tomb in an ancient Jewish cemetery in Egypt. The tomb was that of a young mother, who died in giving birth to her child. The verses - the epitaph is written in elegiac couplets - ask the passerby to pity Arsinoe for her misfortunes. While still young she had lost her mother, and after marriage she died in giving birth to her "first-born." The Greek word is "prototokos," the very word used in the Gospels. And it is interesting to note that this inscription may date from the very year of Our Lord's birth. Here is our term used where not only were there no other children, but where there was known to be no possibility of other children, because the mother had died. The "first-born" was an only child, and could be nothing else. So the whole supposed case based on this term tumbles to the ground. But the force of prejudice is strong. The inscription to which I have referred was published in 1922 in a Cairo archaeological journal and reprinted next year, without translation or comment, in a German scripture periodical. Have the critics taken any notice of it or made any withdrawal? I open a new volume of the Cambridge New Testament, an edition of the Greek text of St. Luke, edited by H. K. Luce M.A., published by the Cambridge University Press, and dated 1933 and I read in the notes on the seventh verse of the second chapter: "'Ton prototokon' that is the term we have been discussing, '[firstborn]' naturally implies the birth of other subsequent children." Either the editor does not know what any serious Scripture student should know, or else he deliberately conceals an important piece of information and misleads his readers. University degrees are not always proof against this kind of disingenuity, and scholarship has often been used in the service of prejudice.

ARE YOU PREJUDICED?

That is only one among a host of examples which could be brought forward of the warping effect of prejudice on the mind. But I am more concerned now, not with such public and striking manifestations of prejudice, but with the prejudice that blinds and distorts and embitters the minds of ordinary people. I am thinking of those who will believe any evil about Catholics and their doctrines. It is supposed to be a principle of justice (and is often boasted of as a characteristic of British justice in particular) that no man is to be held guilty until his guilt is proved. But I know, in point of fact, that there are many who will believe the most outrageous things about Catholics and the Catholic Church without any proof whatever. There are others who have their minds made up on the subject of the Catholic religion, and they do not intend to listen to reason. They have passed judgment before any evidence has been placed before them. They have inherited prejudice against the Catholic Church, and have had biased views impressed upon them from youth. Prejudice has become a second nature with them, and they may not even realize that they are prejudiced, nor do they realize the serious harm they are suffering through their prejudice. For remember, the Catholic Church is not the real sufferer; it is those who are infected with prejudice. You do not hurt truth by shutting your eyes to her light; but you condemn yourself to darkness and error.

A SERIOUS MATTER

Prejudice is largely the reason why so few who are otherwise interested in religion will take any trouble to find out the truth about the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church asserts that she has a commission from Jesus Christ to teach the truth which He brought on earth and to exercise authority

in His name. Do those who fail to investigate her claims realize that they run the risk of dishonouring and disobeying the Redeemer of the world? I know that there are many well disposed persons listening to me. I should like to impress upon them the great danger of negligence in this matter. We shall all one day have to account to God for the way in which we spent our life on earth and carried out, or failed to carry out, His will. God will not blame those who honestly did their best to find out His will and do it. But we must do our best. Those who are able to say that they never had an opportunity of finding out that Catholic teaching was true will not be blamed for their failure. But suppose that when you stand before God to be judged you will see perfectly clearly then that His plan had been that you should be guided and sanctified by the Catholic Church. And suppose that you are then questioned about your failure to admit the authority of that Church.

You may say: "I did not know. If I had known that the Catholic Church was established by You, and taught with Your authority, of course I would have made any sacrifice to be a faithful member of that Church." But may not the answer be? "You had sufficient reason to inquire, and you did not. The Catholic Church was the dominant religious force in the world. It was obviously one in doctrine and in discipline, as you would have expected Christ's Church to be. It was always consistent and unwavering in its teaching, as you would have expected if it had authority from God. You had only to make an effort and you would have found out what fruits it produced in those who whole-heartedly accepted its teaching and authority. Above all, it offered its credentials and appealed to reason in support of them. Surely if you were really in earnest about finding out God's will you should have made sure to study the claims of the Catholic Church."

Ministers of religion have a particularly serious responsibility. They are generally in a better position for getting knowledge about religious matters. On their own principle of private judgment they are surely bound to seek, not a superficial knowledge, nor a knowledge drawn from hostile sources, but an exact and careful knowledge of the Catholic Church, and of her doctrines and her claims. They should study the Catholic Church, not with a view to attacking her, but with a sincere desire to learn the truth. Is that how, as a body, they act? It is not for me to judge them. To another both they and I must answer. But I should not like to be in the position of one who, in the presence of God, had to admit that he had been prejudiced against the Catholic Church and had made no effort to overcome that prejudice, that though there was one Church and one only that claimed to speak to him with God's authority, he had never made an effort to investigate seriously and candidly her claims.

Prejudice is a great danger, and its evil results are widespread. You owe it, not so much to the Catholic Church, as to yourselves and to God, to approach the study of the Catholic Church in a sympathetic and unprejudiced spirit. If she has been founded by the Saviour of mankind you are doing a serious wrong in treating her as a merely human institution. If her doctrines are the doctrines of Jesus Christ, you are insulting Him by regarding them as merely human opinions. If she is the divinely appointed means of salvation for all men, you are endangering your soul's salvation by allowing prejudice to keep you away from her. If she has a reasonable case to offer, you are guilty of criminal folly by not endeavouring to understand it. What, then, is the case for the Catholic Church? That is what I shall deal with in my next talk.
