

EDITORIAL

THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT has just entered its fourteenth year of separate life, since it ceased to be simply a supplement to BLACKFRIARS; it is of an age at which some assessment of its purpose is in order. It began as a journal concerned with mystical and ascetic theology, and the religious life, but while it has never ceased to be interested in these matters, it has necessarily somewhat widened its scope down the years, to include theology in the widest sense. This means the understanding of that faith which every Catholic shares, and especially as it is expressed in scripture, the liturgy, and the Fathers. The need for such a treatment is beyond question. Humanly speaking, the survival of the Church in the modern world depends on a real and living appreciation of these things by every one of her members, by lay people as much as by priests and religious, and this in turn means that theologians must be ready to express their ideas in a language that all can understand, yet without any loss of precision, any over-simplification of content, any 'talking-down' to people. These are the lines along which we hope the review will continue to develop.

 CHURCH AND COUNCIL

HENRY ST JOHN, O.P.

AS yet we know nothing in detail of the agenda, doctrinal and disciplinary, for the deliberations of the Vatican Council to be convoked in the near future by Pope John XXIII. These no doubt will be made known to us as the Commissions go forward during this year with their preparatory work. We can however take the coming Council as a symbol, as all its predecessors have been, of the historical development of the Church's life and teaching. It is a symbol of what may be called the *togetherness*, in doctrine and life, of all the parts of which the Mystical Body of Christ in the world is made up. Another word for this might be the *conciliarity* of the Church; both of these are clumsy words for what they are here used to express, namely

the living and spreading of the faith by a society in which by grace every individual person is deeply concerned and closely united with his neighbours in the whole. This holds good of the total hierarchy of its being, from its highest ruling authority down to its humblest member.

From the earliest times the Church has held Councils of different kinds and degrees,¹ some of which have come to be called General or Ecumenical because they express the insights of the whole body of the faithful concerning the divine teaching; the revelation entrusted to the divine society, enshrined in the written word interpreted by the Church's living tradition. Historically the Ecumenical Council was a supreme focus of witness concerning this revelation. Each bishop came to it bearing with him the *sensus fidelium* of his diocese, the insight into the common faith, which was the common possession of the believing community, regarded and regarding itself as the grace-filled Spirit-guided organism of Christ's Mystical Body on earth. The bishop was its head, its official teacher, as successor of the apostles. Through the bishop all others received their divine mandate to teach and witness to the faith; the priest by ordination, the faithful by confirmation. Upon the bishop was conferred, in virtue of his consecration, a special gift, which secured that his witness to the tradition, given in unity with his fellow bishops all the world over, should be and be seen as the true faith to be held by all the faithful with the utmost security as the very word of Christ.

On no occasion in the history of the Church did all the bishops of the *Catholica* succeed in assembling in one place to make a General Council. Yet the Councils that did assemble to witness to the true faith against heresy, as in the case of Nicaea, Constantinople, Ephesus and Chalcedon and the rest, were always of such standing that their witness was assured of acceptance by all the absent bishops, including of course St Peter's successor, the bishop of Rome. Only by such acceptance did the Council obtain recognition from the whole *Catholica* as an ecumenical Council, in the name of which the bishops of the universal Church were speaking with a unanimity that admitted of no doubt. Such acceptance by the absent bishops might often be a tacit acceptance,

¹ For a clear account of the different kinds of Council in the Church's history, their nature and authority, see *Ecumenical Councils in the Catholic Church* by Hubert Jedin; Introduction on explanation of terms. (Herder-Nelson.)

which came as a matter of course; sometimes the assembled Fathers received guidance in their deliberations and decisions, as in the case of the reception by the Council of Chalcedon of the Tome of Pope Leo I.

At no time would the Fathers assembled in a great Council have regarded their decisions as completely final apart from their acceptance by the first of the apostolic sees; at the same time it was for them hardly conceivable that any decision would be come to by them which was not consonant with the traditional teaching of that see. The representatives of Rome and Constantinople in the middle, say, of the seventh century would have probably found it hard to answer the question whether the verdict of the bishop of Rome was final and decisive in establishing a doctrine defined in a General Council, or whether it was simply the completion of the verdict of the universal episcopate, without which that verdict could not be regarded as absolute. It is more than probable that they would never have put the problem in those terms. They would have looked upon their coming together in Council as bringing a certain inevitability of consent, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and that this consent would be accepted with equal inevitability by the occupant of the apostolic see, because it was the right interpretation of the tradition that that see preserved in its purity. They believed, as the apostles did, in the power of the impulse of the Holy Spirit, and they would have echoed the words of the apostles, *It has seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us*.

The problem whether and under what terms the voice of the see of Rome is finally decisive in matters of faith and discipline came to be dealt with explicitly as the breach between East and West grew wider and began to threaten schism. It was one, though only one, of the factors which led to the hardening of the division in the period between the ninth and eleventh centuries. It came to the surface in the West at times during the medieval period and particularly in the conciliar age when the papacy itself was divided. It saw a revival in France and other countries during the age of Gallicanism in the seventeenth century, and it was only finally solved by the Vatican Council.

It is not necessary for us to maintain that the Vatican decree was the perfect answer. The Council was deeply divided on the issue of expediency. Gallicanism, in the sense that the pope is

under the authority of and responsible to a General Council, had virtually lost its hold. It is probable that there was no more than one really Gallican bishop, and perhaps a few waverers, among the seven hundred or so prelates present. But Gallicanism still lived and with it the fear that any concession in the Gallican direction, towards making the pope dependent in any way upon the consent of the Church, in his power of defining doctrine, was highly dangerous to what was considered a proper definition of the infallibility itself. This drove the ultramontane bishops into an intransigent position against the very thing that the minority were pressing for, namely a clear recognition in the decree that there is only one infallibility, that of the Church, and that the pope's possession of infallibility is an expression, the supreme, final and decisive expression, of that one infallibility; that the pope is dependent upon the Church, as is every baptized Catholic, for his knowledge of what is to be defined, and that he can get it from nowhere else.

There had been talk within the Council and outside it, which seemed to say that the pope was God's mouthpiece in a special way, by a special inspiration of the Holy Ghost, altogether apart from the grace of his episcopal status. That he was inspired in such a way that he did not need to study the mind of the Church in its age-long tradition or consult with his brethren in the episcopate set with him by the Holy Ghost to rule the Church of God. Had not Pius IX, in an interview with a Cardinal pleading the responsibility of bishops as witnesses of tradition, said (with a twinkle, as I think, of Italian humour in his eye), 'Witnesses of tradition? There's only one; that's me.'² All this seemed to the minority bishops and to many of the moderate middle-of-the-road men, who would have claimed to be ultramontanes, evidence that the neo-ultramontanes were separating the pope from the Church, from his togetherness as a bishop with his fellow bishops and making him an authority, the supreme authority, not within it but above it, imposing his authority upon it. However, as the Council proceeded it became clear that for lack of time it would be necessary to drop out discussion of the complete programme on the Church as originally proposed and pass straight on to that of the primacy and infallibility of the pope. So

² Butler, *The Vatican Council II*, page 98.

it came about that these doctrines were discussed and defined before the infallibility of the Church, with the result that the relation of the pope to the bishops in the teaching authority of the Church was not dealt with except by implication, nor his infallibility in relation to theirs, nor his relation to them and the rest of the Church.

The Vatican definition, when achieved, was not therefore a perfectly balanced one, and the result of it has been, in current teaching, a tendency to over-emphasis upon the pope at the expense of the Church, which is not justified if the function of the pope is viewed in its full context as a function, the supreme function, of the Church's teaching authority. Nevertheless the definition in the give and take of debate became a moderate one, covering many of the requirements of the minority and failing them, where it did fail them, more by what it omitted than by anything it actually said. But the main question was settled. The pope is the divinely constituted mouthpiece and organ of the universal apostolic episcopate, itself divinely constituted as such. He is the finally decisive element in the Church's ruling and teaching office and he speaks with an authority that focuses and makes absolute the authority of the episcopate as a whole. His authority in dogmatic definition is the final and supreme authority of the Church.

It should not be forgotten that this dogmatic definition is a human formulation of the word of God to men contained in the scriptures and embodied in the tradition of the Church—God's revelation itself is mediated through human acts wrought out in human life by God himself made man, these acts are interpreted through human minds and expressed in human ideas and language under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the scriptures. Thence they must be formulated for greater clarity of thought and expression by definitions, the creeds and other dogmatic statements of the Church. These of their very nature cannot exhaust the depth and fullness of the mysteries they contain, the mysteries of our redemption in Christ, but they are secure in spite of their human limitations in representing the truth of Christ human-wise and thus safeguarding it from corruption. No doctrine defined by the Church is ever a new doctrine; the definition is new, not the doctrine defined in it. The doctrine itself is only new in the sense that it is made more explicit and better understood in the mind

of the Church. Thus the tradition remains in substance always the same; it grows only by increasing explicitness.

It should not be forgotten either that the normal day-to-day expression of the Church's teaching authority is the *ordinary magisterium*, as it is called, and it consists in the teaching of all the episcopate as a unity dispersed throughout the world, each bishop representing his own diocese. In this dispersed unity the bishop of Rome, St Peter's successor, has his place as supreme pastor; without his concurring voice there would be no unity and no incontestable teaching. The supreme *magisterium* in the person of the pope confirming a General Council or speaking by his sole authority in the name of the Church expresses its faith, not simply as registering the consent of the rest of the episcopate, but as confirming its verdict and putting it beyond question. That is the meaning of the *ex sese* clause in the Vatican decree.³ It is not the consent of the Church that ratifies the papal decision, it is the papal decision, given under the conditions laid down, that ratifies and makes absolute the consent of the Church. It is noticeable that in recent years, in the two public definitions of dogma made by the pope independently of a General Council, the definition of the Immaculate Conception and of the Assumption, careful concern was shown by the holy see in each case to consult the mind of the Church through the universal apostolic episcopate. This togetherness is characteristic of the life and structure of the Roman Church, as it is also of that of the Eastern Orthodox Churches, though there the togetherness seems to be wanting in the maintenance of external structural unity, which so often fails of actualization with them.

But to understand this togetherness completely we must look at it, not simply in the hierarchy of authority, but in the life of the Church as a whole, in the *ecclesia discens*, the learning Church, as well as in the *ecclesia docens*, the part of the Church that teaches with authority, the bishops with their delegates the priests. We must not forget in thinking of it in this way that every member of the teaching Church, from the pope downwards, is also, all his life, a member of the learning Church. Pope John XXIII today learns his faith, he studies and meditates on the scriptures and the Fathers, and his only source of knowledge of the faith is that which

³ 'And therefore such definitions of the Roman Pontiff are irreformable of themselves (*ex sese*) and not from the consent of the Church.' Denzinger 1839, page 490.

is open to every baptized Catholic. It is here that we see illustrated the togetherness of the Church. Already in the New Testament, and especially in the Acts of the Apostles, the deposit of faith, the sum of Christ's teaching, was the possession of the whole body of the faithful, but it was authoritatively interpreted by the apostles. It was, as the Acts tell us, the *didache*, the teaching of the apostles. The distinction between the *ecclesia discens* and the *ecclesia docens* was present from the beginning. During the sub-apostolic period the canon of scripture was gradually formed, and it was formed by the common mind of the faithful, under the continuing guidance of the Holy Spirit. In this the whole Church had its part, the teaching authority certifying under the guidance of the Holy Spirit as true and according to the mind of Christ in his Church, what was already present in the common mind of the faithful. The criterion of the inspiration of the various forms of written document, which thus came under consideration for inclusion in the canon of the New Testament, was: how far did it express faithfully the substance of the apostolic preaching, the oral tradition which was gradually being embodied in a written tradition? As this took place progressively, the mind of the Church more and more took scripture as the source of doctrine; a *corpus* of written tradition inspired by the Holy Ghost, but always scripture interpreted, first by the common mind of the faithful, under divine guidance, drawing out by prayer, worship and study the content of God's word, while at the same time this common interpretation, if certified as authentic and true by the authoritatively expressed mind of the Church, was embodied in its tradition and held to be *de fide*.

Non-Catholics not infrequently say of us that some of our teaching is un-scriptural; our mariology, for instance. But on the contrary we maintain that the whole range of doctrine so called, intimately connected with the incarnation, the cross of Calvary and the triumphant resurrection and all that flows from it, is profoundly scriptural, though it does not lie on the surface of scripture, but must be drawn from thence by the Spirit-guided mind of the Church. To give one instance in a deeply complex process; from very early times the Church has regarded our Lady as the second Eve and seen this as implicit in St Paul's doctrine of Christ as the second Adam. The whole parallel, found originally in the second century in Irenaeus and Justin Martyr, has been

worked out by the mind of the Church to signify the reversal of the ruin caused by the fall of our first parents, Adam the head of the human race and Eve the mother of all living. This reversal was the redemption and restoration wrought by Christ through the co-operation of Mary, made the mother of all the faithful as she stood at the foot of the cross.

From the beginning of the Church's history, then, two equally important elements may be discerned in the doctrinal authority of the Church; the objective or transcendent law, externally formulated and proposed by the authority directing the community, and the same law, subjective and immanent in the consciousness of the community and spontaneously lived by faith. The former corresponds to the *ecclesia docens*, the latter to the *ecclesia discens*. The transcendent law has its origin in the teaching of Christ by act and word during his earthly life. In so far as that teaching is accepted and lived by the community which is his Mystical Body, it becomes immanent in it; and the living of this law both by prayer and worship, and by the intellectual probing of the philosopher and theologian, continually draws out from it new implications—moreover, from time to time the historian and the scientist seek to adjust newly acquired knowledge to the eternal and unchanging truth of revelation, as for instance in the case of the hypotheses of human evolution, or the discoveries of the archaeologists. The resulting growth and development of scriptural knowledge, the knowledge of God's word in the immanent law which is lived, demands a corresponding elaboration in the transcendent law which is proposed. At every point the growth must be controlled by the teaching authority of the *ecclesia docens*, the guardian of the faith, whose function it is, under the grace and guidance of the Holy Spirit, to judge whether such growth is a true development and such adjustment a true interpretation of the original word of Christ. Both these elements are essential to a balanced religious authority, and both together secure the true *togetherness* which is the outward sign of the fellowship of the Mystical Body of Christ.

This true togetherness which characterized the primitive community at Jerusalem in the first years of the Church's life can only be fully realized in a visible organic society, the external and internal unity of which is secured by a special gift of God's providence; an indivisible Church which is never divided,

though parts of it can be severed from its unity; those parts are in schism, and the Church itself though it retains its organic unity is the poorer for their loss. This is all the more so when the cause of the schism has been largely on the part of those who remained within the Church and by their sloth, indifference and bad example had become a scandal. Catholics must acknowledge these things with humility. But at the same time they remain deeply convinced that Christ willed his Church to be and to remain *one* in external structure and inner life to the end of time.

The Church, through its biblical tradition, presents us with the person of Christ; Christ embodies it and by the power of the Holy Spirit makes it his Mystical Body. By making our act of faith in Christ in his Church, it is not for reasons supplied by the researches of scientists that we do it, but because Christ himself, in the power of his spirit, commends to us the gospel his Church speaks in his name, by awakening the response of faith in our hearts. We know in faith that *he* is speaking; it is the voice of God we hear. Our hearts leap out to meet his words, we realize that *this* is what has been seeking us out, that here is the good news which we could not have dared to believe otherwise. Scientific history has its place, an important place, but it is not the ground of our belief, even in the facts and events of history on the interpretation of which our beliefs depend. Only if scientific history *per impossibile* could demonstrate, past a doubt, that those facts and events were illusory, would our faith become baseless, because it would be involved in a contradiction between scientific truth and what we had hitherto believed was revealed truth. Catholics accept the Church as it exists in the world today, they accept its own account of itself and the claims it makes by an act of God-given faith which leads to Christ himself as he is embodied in his Church.

We know of course that others, who are without this experience, have come to a true faith in Christ through the scriptures, as presented to them and interpreted to them by their own particular tradition and allegiance; and we thank God for it. But this is far less than the best; far less than Christ wills. They lack the fellowship, the togetherness, the fullness of truth and many of the means of grace which Christ wills for all his followers. Though their good faith can bring them grace and salvation they remain separated from many of the means which Christ

has ordained to bring it to them, though we may believe that where their loss is not realized he will in his mercy make it good.

A divided Church cannot speak with certainty about its own nature and constitution, because each part speaks differently. About itself as bearer of God's word to men it falls, as a unity, into vagueness and contradiction. Allegiance to a divided Church leaves much therefore to be decided by the individual conscience, without firmer ground for decision than a personal one. The landmarks and signposts of God's revelation to men must be clearly perceptible to faith. They are relatively few amongst the multitude of human knowledge, but they should be definitive. Within these terms of God's revelation of the way of salvation, there is plenty of scope for the exercise of human initiative in the affairs of day-to-day life. Yet about some of these terms a divided Church speaks necessarily with an uncertain voice or does not speak at all.

In the togetherness for the perfection of which a visible and organic society is a prerequisite, the papacy, as we have seen, plays its part as the final and decisive element in the external structure which safeguards the inner life of the Church, its truth and its means of grace. Yet it is constantly made a charge against the papal institution that it is an excrescence, a false growth on the body politic of the rest of the Church, which depresses and virtually destroys its freedom of action. This charge is made by non-Catholic theologians, some of whom are stout defenders of episcopacy as being an essential, because divinely ordained, part of the structure of the Church's teaching authority and government. And those non-Catholics who have no belief in episcopacy as a divine institution fear in it the wielding of sacerdotal power and are averse to admitting it into their system, even for the sake of unity. There is a further division too among the Christian Churches as to whether the authority of any ministry at all can be extended further than the mandate it receives by delegation from the congregation, the people of God in whom all authority is ultimately held to reside.

The Catholic Church is not a democracy in this sense. All authority is held to come to it direct from Christ to his appointed ministers, the bishops, who are successors of the apostles; priests are delegates of the bishop. The bishop receives his authority direct from Christ by consecration and is entitled to exercise

jurisdiction over a diocese as soon as he enters into possession of it. A priest receives the power of order from Christ by ordination, but jurisdiction is given him by the bishop. The chief bishop of Christendom, the pope, who exercises episcopal jurisdiction over the universal Church, has power to appoint to or confirm a bishop in his diocese and to remove him in case of necessity; and in that indirect sense the bishop's jurisdiction is dependent upon him.

None of this however interferes with the *togetherness* of pope, bishop, clergy and laity within the Body of Christ. It is recognized, for instance, that in any particular parish the priest is instituted to the cure of souls, but the same cure of souls is also the charge and responsibility of the bishop, and in a remote but plenary manner the same cure of souls is the charge and ultimate responsibility of the chief bishop, the pope. Each in his own degree is responsible to God for the same parish. It is not true to say that the pope is *qualitatively* different in his relationship to the Church from any other member of it. In his quality of authority he is a bishop and he differs from other bishops only in degree. The jurisdiction he exercises is universal, but theirs is local. A priest differs from a layman and from a bishop in his quality of authority. But in all other respects pope, bishop, priest and layman do not differ in quality, except for differences in personal sanctity, in which a layman can be above a pope. Every member of the Church belongs to the *ecclesia discens* at every moment of his life. The pope in that capacity must submit to the Church of which he is the head on earth under Christ. He is bound in submission to the structure of the faith of which he is supreme guardian. He is bound in person to the laws which govern the day-to-day life of the Church. He attends or celebrates mass on Sundays and would commit sin if he wilfully and of malice were to fail in this duty. He goes to confession and keeps fasting days in the spirit of obedience to the Church in which all faithful Catholics do these things. Only in his authority does he differ from other members of the Church, just as his fellow bishops and priests have each, in that regard, a position which is distinctive.

The hierarchy of the Church is like an arch. An arch remains in being in virtue of its keystone, and the pillars on which it rests; faith and obedience. Apart from the keystone it will fall to pieces. Yet it remains an arch, not solely in virtue of the key-

stone, but so long as the separate stones of which it is composed remain in contact with each other, with the keystone that unites them, and the pillars on which they all rest.

The coming Vatican Council is a symbol of the teaching authority of the Catholic Church and it will show in its summoning and planning the *togetherness* of its constituent parts. The bishops, with the pope at their head, each representing the faithful of his own diocese of which he is pastor and teacher; the abbots and heads of religious orders standing in a similar relationship to their brethren as the bishop does to the people of his diocese; the theologians as representative of the *schola theologorum* in an advisory capacity to those whose function it is to define and decree: members of the *ecclesia docens*, it is true, but each too, even the pope, belonging to the humble ranks of the learner, taught by the Holy Spirit. Catholics in company with our separated brethren will be glad to unite in praying that its deliberations under God's grace will be for the great good of the Roman Church now, and beyond it for the ultimate unity of Christendom.

ST AUGUSTINE'S PICTURE OF THE CHURCH¹

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THE title of *The City of God* is taken by St Augustine from that verse of Ps. 86 (87), which is paraphrased by the well-known hymn, 'Glorious things of thee are spoken, Sion city of our God'. Is this city, in his mind, a picture of the Church? Clearly yes, but of the Church in its widest, its cosmic dimensions, the Church which is the heavenly Jerusalem of the *Apocalypse*, that Jerusalem which is above, which is our mother (Gal. iv, 26), of which the earthly Jerusalem is the type and figure. We attain some apprehension of this city of God by contrasting it with another city, the city of confusion, the diabolical city, of which the archetype is Babel, Babylon.

These two cities are cosmic because their history begins with the creation and ends with the end of the world. In their beginning and end they are clearly distinct—distinct in the holy angels and the fallen angels at the beginning of creation, distinct in the com-

¹ A lecture given at Cambridge in March 1960.