

*THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS LIKE
UNTO ?*

A DESIRE to identify the Kingdom of God with the dominion of good taste, to give the authority of divine inspiration to an honest prejudice, can plainly be recognised. Whether or no the strong distaste for the products of vineyard, brewery and distillery is the cause or effect of the prejudice against fermented liquor, it is clear that the prejudice is a compelling force in the 'free churches' to-day. Hardly will a minister be called to the pulpit unless he be a trusted professor of total abstinence. The layman who takes his 'modest quencher' cannot hope to become a deacon or local preacher when the Kingdom of Heaven is likened to a society of total abstainers in full and constant session. Much liberty of departure from the old paths of creed and catechism is allowed to nonconformist ministers, always provided they hold stiffly and expound eloquently this prejudice against intoxicating drink. True religion, in fact, in the minds of many is merged with the personal distastes of the believer, so that 'prohibition' is proclaimed the hope of this world and the glory of the Kingdom. A prejudice unchecked, smiled upon rather than discouraged, is contagious. There is no telling in what fanaticism it may end.

We recognise also that it crops up periodically in the history of Christianity, this conviction that an enlightened few alone possess the truth of the Kingdom. The esoteric doctrine is held by the few, and they are God's elect. Exclusiveness is the note of the Kingdom. The enlightened few are the chosen vessels specially favoured, and therefore in the right, though all the rest of the world be lost. The seventeenth century was a prolific time for strange groups of these exclu-

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sives: Cameronians, Muggletonians, fifth-monarchy men—who can complete the list of the queer sects?—with each proclaiming as dogma its self-possession of infallibility. And they still arise, especially in England and in America, new groups, preaching for gospel the most fantastic faiths; imposing on credulous souls and insisting, as of old, that the ‘saints,’ and the saints alone, must rule, that the ‘converted,’ and the converted alone, form the ‘church.’ No development of doctrine can be contemplated, since all truth has been revealed to the chosen leaders of the group. No great enlargement of borders is expected, since the elect are necessarily few in numbers. The Kingdom of Heaven is likened to a grain of mustard seed that does not grow into a tree.

The note of exclusiveness was boomed with no less assurance, but with far different instruments, by the Church of England in its lowest period. ‘When I mention religion I mean the Christian religion, and not only the Christian religion, but the Protestant religion; and not only the Protestant religion, but the Church of England.’ Fielding’s Parson Thwackum is the mouth-piece of his age. Religion for eighteenth-century England meant the Church of England. Dissent was low, though Whitfield might be patronised, and Catholicism was ‘foreign’ and therefore suspect. And ‘the church’ still means the Anglican establishment to vast number of people. Personal taste dictates a preference for the forms of Anglican worship. ‘I like it’—therefore, it is true. ‘It suits me’—therefore I am suited. The Kingdom is likened to—what is likeable.

The vagaries of private judgment in realms that know not papal rule are unmistakable. But the seeds of heresy are sown within the Catholic Church. A prejudice, often enough a prejudice for the good, eager for recognition, is ignored; consideration of the

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scheme is postponed by authority; Rome cannot be in a hurry. Pride resenting delay first challenges authority, then makes itself judge, and condemns authority; till finally self-approval is alone found sufficient. The prejudice is the only flower that blooms in the garden. The Kingdom is no more to be likened to the field of wheat and tares. Heresy will have the similitude a bed of roses, or of thistles.

These, however, are extreme cases. Prejudice may intrude within the Kingdom, seeking its own and yet not drive its owner beyond the frontiers. Taste, not always rooted in prejudice, but as often as not the fruit of good training, may strive to identify the Kingdom with its cherished refinements, and inevitably—but not universally—defeated, it must needs put up with the bad art and worse craftsmanship of ecclesiastical ornament. To go elsewhere would be to fare worse. No Catholic artist has yet established a heresy, nor Catholic poet devised a schism.

Again, zeal for a cause or way of life, not directly or obviously related to faith or morals, is apt to urge the advocates of some pressing social reform, political theory or economic system to cry up their programme as 'Catholic,' their platform an extension of the Rock. A little while, and Catholic doctrine is forgotten in the enthusiasm for the 'cause.' (Many Catholics, seeking justice in Great Britain forty years ago, turned to socialism for the hope it promised. How many Catholics to-day are turning to communism for the same reason? If the former mostly returned to the faith of their fathers, can we say confidently the latter will also return?)

The distraction arises because a particular plan for the satisfaction of temporal needs in a definite area is confounded with the universal truth that the temporal needs of man are justly to be satisfied. Because there is a God-given right to live, therefore divine sanction

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is claimed for a particular plan that promises the general enjoyment of that right. Without any disparagement of the plan, and a fresh plan is offered as fresh changes occur in the development of industry, the claim cannot for a moment be allowed. Man has the right to live, but man does not live by bread alone.

However urgent the social reform, however admirable the political theory, however attractive the economic system, there is finality in none of these things. In time the urgency will pass, another theory of politics appear more admirable, the attractiveness of the economic system be tarnished and grow less. No theory of government nor social system that has yet been concocted by the wit of man can be guaranteed to suit all mankind all the time. (Against the plea for a common faith and a common morality no similar objection can be proposed, since there is evidence that men and women in every age of the Christian era and in every land have gladly accepted the promises of the Kingdom.)

While enthusiasm for the 'good cause' may result in confounding the things of time with the Kingdom that is eternal, a similar confusion is produced when the pleasing social customs of the group, or the highly organised civilisation of a people, are held as essentially Catholic. When kings entitled 'most Catholic' or 'most Christian' are quite inconspicuously of the Catholic faith and quite unostentatiously of the Christian religion, disaster follows. When Catholicism comes to be regarded as a fine flower of civilisation, as part and parcel of that civilisation, in the shattering of that civilisation all seems lost.

And much is lost.

The high civilisation of France, singularly attractive to a variety of minds, has been frequently acclaimed as essentially Catholic. (Is not the Faith Europe and Europe the Faith? And is not France

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Europe? 'When I mention the Faith I mean Europe, and not only Europe but France.') It was even said in the eighteenth century that in Canada the Indians came to understand that Christ was a Frenchman who had been crucified by the English. The union of Church and State can be so close, the relation of Catholicism with a governing class so intimate, that only the expert can mark the distinction. And the nemesis of the *mésalliance* is a bitter awakening. The church identified with the government of a nation is invariably plundered and afflicted when the government is overthrown. The faith identified with the follies and fashions of a ruling class will be widely repudiated when the pillars of society topple, and those clinging to them fall to the ground.

But some would identify Catholicism with a medieval English civilisation.

As though the restless, changing centuries we call the middle ages were the static order of the vision of William Morris. For Morris, the pattern of human society, was static, never dynamic. His socialism was a settled state of the future, as the medieval order was a settled state of the past. (Of course Morris really knew better than this, and said so. He never mistook the fancy of the poet for actual fact. Though it never rains in the romances Morris wrote, he was quite aware that wet days did occur in England.)

This prejudice for an imaginary fixed society of the middle ages persuades certain of our writers that whatever is of modern England is wrong. A personal bias for agriculture over all other industry, and with it an equal bias against the science that would make agriculture a great industry for a great population, is partly responsible for the preaching up of the middle ages and the prophesying against these latter days.

The dispute itself, concerning the respective advantages of town and country life, is as old as the hills;

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the merits of rural and urban conditions have been canvassed and discussed since cities were invented. In a reaction against the overweening tyranny of the artificial manners of the town, the cult of the noble savage is set up and the glory of a simple country life extolled. Dr. Johnson stoutly rejected this view of society. Taste for him meant nothing of the sort. Civilisation was the town, and one green field was the same as another.

But because England was agricultural in the Catholic middle ages—and remained agricultural in the Protestant centuries right down to Victorian times—why are we to select the peasant proprietor as a typically ‘Catholic’ figure rather than the leasehold farmer? Why are we expected to approve the small owner and the small shop-keeper—no sturdier supports than these of British Protestantism—as ‘Catholic’ institutions, and deplore big-scale farming and the increase of multiple stores? Farming in England was on large enough scale when the Cistercians flourished, and the multiple store has at least provided some alternative to the heavy charges and inferior goods supplied on credit at the village shop.

Personal taste may liken the Kingdom to a community of happy peasants, sturdy independent craftsmen, rejoicing in their work, contented with their lot, taking their recreation at the village inn, making merry on feast days at the parish church, and the fair in the country town. And why not such a picture? Only let us accept the composition for the idyll it is, a picture laid up in the mind, and not in reality a medieval reproduction. The countryman of the middle ages was too frequently in revolt against the medieval conditions that galled and fretted him in his daily life to be an ardent or genuine medievalist. To escape from his rural environment into the crowded city seemed more desirable as the middle ages passed.

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The joys of country life are the townsman's dream. A personal liking for the village shop—stocked with mass productions—can be fostered till fancy creates an aura of Catholicism for the village shop-keeper; who himself for business reasons inclines to a comprehensive and undenominational faith. We may cherish a picture of farmer and labourer staying their work at the sound of the angelus; but in England farmer and labourer have long declined from Sunday worship and only on very special occasions attend either Anglican or nonconformist services. When or where in these days are farmers or labourers converted to the Catholic Faith?

Of course, the temptation is ever with us to have the Kingdom ordered as taste would order it, to liken it to the ideals that taste approves.

Because the middle ages had neither gas nor electric light, neither telephones nor wireless, neither motor cars nor air-ships, and neither drainage nor bathrooms (and the ages of Protestant prosperity were no better off in these respects), and yet had architects and builders whose work was of surpassing beauty, had artists and craftsmen who wrought so wonderfully in gold and silver (the Protestant period also had its admirable and still admired domestic architecture for nobility and gentry), are we to refuse the present ingenuities and cunning inventions as things unclean and un-Catholic, and rail at mechanical toys as an encroachment of the world on the Church?

Because our personal taste inclines to that noble quadruped, the horse, disdaining the humbler bicycle, and our preference is for the solemnity of a barouche or coach-and-six rather than for the utility of motor car and bus, must we denounce all motor transport as evil, and display the temper of the shuddering, sensitive mind, the temper exhibited by various non-Catholics when railways were first set up in Great Britain?

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(Wordsworth broke out in sonnets to express his bitter distress at the novelty of illustrated books and newspapers, his wrath at the railway.) Horror of petrol is displayed by some of our Catholic writers with the peculiar violence employed by the teetotaler for alcoholic refreshment.

Yet surely it is too much to ask of common men that we should approve the horse as a suitable figure in the Kingdom of God, and prohibit all motor traffic within the precincts as against the laws of the Kingdom. It is the last thing the folk of the middle ages would have done, this rejection of novelties. What people they were for new ideas, those medievalists, and what little respect they had for ancient buildings. What centuries the middle ages for the flowering of Catholic devotion, and fruiting of Catholic doctrine. And at the end how grave the decay in Catholic practice.

To indulge personal disrelish for the distracting habits of our neighbours, till these habits are seen as a manifestation of the devil, is as unreasonable as to liken the Kingdom to the fine utopian vision, the baseless fabric of our dreams. An extravagance of personal taste, explicable but not less unreasonable, persists in likening the Kingdom to the vision of a British Empire, an Irish Republic, a French monarchy.

After all, the scribe instructed in the Kingdom of Heaven is like to a man who is a householder who bringeth forth out of his treasure new things and old.

Differences of taste commonly produce greater exasperation than differences of faith or morals. When taste, predominant, can make the householder refrain from bringing forth the new of his treasure, the glory of the Kingdom is diminished. The notion of a Kingdom where no modern device may enter because it is modern is as fantastic as the idea of a civilisation peculiarly 'Catholic' because the rural water supply

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is inadequate and the roads mostly impassable in winter. Of course, no grave hurt will come of the notion or idea, provided it is not taken seriously and our minds are clear of cant; clear in especial of the cant of the simple life, and the happy peasant.

If the tastes of a younger generation are disagreeable to us, it may be the fault is not in the stars, dear Brutus, nor yet in the bright young things whose manners we so solemnly deplore.

If we are no better than old fogeys, elderly and therefore old-fashioned, in the eyes of irreverent youth, all the more reason why our holy religion should not seem to appear as the religion of old fogeys, our faith come to be figured as the faith of long past, the Catholic Church represented as a back-number, the Kingdom of God a quaint survival of the middle ages. God forbid that personal repugnancies, reluctances, idiosyncracies, and the sheer inability to keep the pace of our daring and lively young people, should make the latter dismiss the practice of religion as an old-fashioned habit, something in a drawer with a flavour of lavender.

For it remains that the Kingdom of Heaven is like to a net cast into the sea and the gathering together of all kinds of fishes.

Each fish, knowing himself enlightened and a fish of taste, may no doubt utter his own opinion concerning his fellow captures of the net, and whisper regrets at their goings on, hint doubtfully at the unfishiness of certain characteristics.

But not until the end of the world will it be revealed who is the good and faithful fish and who the unworthy. And in the meantime any attempt at a sorting of the netted—to the disparagement of contemporaries for their distasteful habits—is as likely as not to prove a premature decision; as wide of the mark as Calvin's unhappy separations into saved and lost.

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Once personal taste usurps the throne of reason and prejudice seeks to broadcast its private view as 'essentially Catholic,' depend upon it the devil is mischief making in the net.

To the suggestion that agricultural pursuits provide the surer training in sanctity, that holiness flourishes more abundantly in the country than in the town, that the Catholic Faith is dearer to the peasant than to the citizen, the reply is: history can but partially endorse these *obiter dicta*, the experience of rural life contradicts them. It has been observed with truth, 'we live in times that were quite unknown to the ancients.'

JOSEPH CLAYTON.

PAX ROMANA

PAX ROMANA is the International Secretariate binding together Catholic University Students, organised in their respective national Federations, for all forms of common action.¹

From this definition, it is at once evident that one cannot in general become a member of Pax Romana individually.² First the student joins the local Catholic Students' Union or Group of the University to which he belongs, this Society in turn adheres to the

¹ Definition given by Mr. Edward Bullough in a pamphlet *Pax Romana*, printed by Wm. J. Schneider & Bro., New York.

² A resolution was however passed this year at the Bordeaux-Lourdes Congress-Pilgrimage that two classes of persons may now become individual members—the *Anciens* (old fellow workers in Pax Romana) and the *Amis de Pax Romana*, namely anyone interested and sympathising with it. Ordinary students must nevertheless become members in the way described in the text.