

**SERMON PREACHED AT THE OPENING OF
THE PRIORY OF THE HOLY GHOST,
BLACKFRIARS, OXFORD, 21 May, 1929**

'And not for them only do I pray, but for them also who through their word shall believe in me. That they all may be one, as thou, Father, in me, and I in thee; that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.' (JOHN xvii. 20, 21.)

THIS year, 1929, has already been a year of happy thanksgiving for the Catholic Church in this country. But let us not forget that we rejoice not for ourselves alone; indeed, perhaps more we rejoice for the sake of others. Another centenary falls this year, of which we do well to remind ourselves. In 1529, exactly four hundred years ago, the then King of England, for his own ends, first began the process of severing the Church of England from the Church Catholic. In that process, deliberately, and defying the consequences, he cut this land adrift from the rest of Christendom. In that sense, more than in any other, the intellect of Europe at that time interpreted the deaths of Fisher and More. We read in contemporary records that their execution 'staggered Christendom'; it was staggered, not so much because in a Catholic country, at the hands of a Catholic monarch, who had but recently been honoured with the title of 'Defender of the Faith,' for the defence of that same faith these heroes had been put to death; rather it was staggered because the two brightest lights that shone from England over Europe had been so wantonly extinguished. It was a blow not only to the unity of the Christian faith; it was also a blow to the unity of Christian mankind. But after three hundred years of isolation, by the Act of 1829, England again recognised the Catholic Church as within her law, and thus accepted Catholic thought, and Catholic ideals and

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aspirations, as not incompatible with her own. By that recognition she once more herself took a place in the ranks from which, during all that time, she had been severed. You cannot unite A to B without uniting B to A. When the Catholic Church was restored, however incompletely, in England, England to that extent was restored to the influence of the Catholic Church. Therefore we rejoice, not only because in 1829 we were set free from the bondage which had held down our forefathers; we rejoice perhaps more because, by the same act, our country was delivered in part from a still greater bondage, which for three hundred years had shut her off from the spiritual influence, and almost the intellectual influence, of Christendom.

On this account we take the ceremony which we are witnessing to-day to be a fitting part of our Emancipation rejoicings. For it throws our minds back to the days when England and Catholic Christendom were essentially one; when men abroad throughout Europe thought of Englishmen as being of themselves, one with them in the fundamentals of faith, one with them in the same Jesus Christ, one with them in His Body, which is the Church, no matter what other differences there might be. It reminds us of the time when this university, more than any other place in the land, was the abiding link between our English people and the rest of Christendom; and when that link was kept secure, in great measure, by the faithful service of the sons of St. Dominic. Eight years ago, when the foundation stone of this chapel was laid, His Eminence the late beloved Cardinal Gasquet, so recently taken from us, showed to us something of what that link had implied for England, and how very much during three centuries the Dominican fathers of those times had contributed to England's well-being. Now we are here to witness the

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completion of the work begun in 1921; how can it fail to stir in us the hope that in no long time the link will be forged anew, and will again in our own day be strengthened by those same fathers who have done so much for the soul of England in the past?

It is not, therefore, to be thought that this house of studies has been founded in the heart of this university merely that its students may receive what they may of the learning and culture about them. Were that the only object, if I understand the mind of St. Dominic at all, it would never have been begun; for of all men St. Dominic was a man of generosity, whose craving was always to give more than he received. It is true this place will have its students, and it will wish them to take what part becomes them in the life of the university about them. But, please God, it will hope to do much more than that. It will itself have something to give; something which will materially contribute to the life, and soul, and mind both of Oxford and of England; something which to-day England does not possess, of which for four hundred years she has been deprived, and for which, as is manifestly seen on every side, she hungers more than she knows or is willing to acknowledge. England knows, indeed, that she lacks something; she hungers, as probably no other country in the world to-day hungers, but she does not know what it is for. She looks with wistful, almost jealous eyes on those who seem to possess that satisfying thing which is not hers, but she cannot satisfy herself. It is the firm hope of those who have built this house of God, and have given to it the name of His Holy Spirit, both that they can define for England the nature of her hunger, and that they can offer to her the means by which that hunger shall be satisfied.

For, indeed, this hunger is a very real thing, to be found in England as it is found, I think, nowhere else

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in all the world. It is not only the hunger that belongs to all thinking men; it is more than that which is fed by science and learning. In these England shares with the rest of the world; nevertheless, in addition, she shows a hunger of her own, written on every page of her history, especially in recent years, stamped on the very features of her children, revealing itself in many ways which are scarcely to be found elsewhere. It is a longing, not for something new, but for something which once was hers and she now has lost; for a light which once she could follow and is now extinguished; for a truth which she once understood and now has faded away; for a love, the memory of whose embrace clings like a haunting dream about her, and will not die. It is a longing akin to despair; one she scarcely dares to acknowledge to herself lest she be found wanting and impoverished. She looks through the darkness that surrounds her, and endeavours to persuade herself that the light still shines, and is only for a time eclipsed. She tells herself that the truth she once understood is still hers, and has only altered its form. She claims that the old love is not dead, but is only asleep for a night. It is a longing which makes her cling to any substitute, see likenesses where there are none, cover a corpse with the clothes of the living in her effort to convince herself that the dead is still alive. It is a longing which reads in its past history the names of those who have made the glory of England: Augustine, Bede, Alfred, Dunstan, Edward the Confessor, Lanfranc, Anselm, Stephen Harding, Thomas of Canterbury, Hugh of Lincoln, Stephen Langton, Grosseteste, and it knows too well that it is not of their tradition. It looks across the country and sees the ruins of the ancient monasteries and abbeys that cover it. It reveres them, it preserves

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what remains of them, it cherishes them as its own; but it knows they are only the withered bones of a life long since departed. It pays honour to its ancient cathedrals and houses of God; from time to time it galvanises them into a show of life; but it knows that not for such a life were they founded; that the true life for which they were built is no longer there, that almost their only use to-day is to make of them resting places for the dead. It clings to a name, or revives a name, as if in a name the past could be made to live again in the present. All Souls, Corpus Christi, Christ Church, Magdalen, St. John's which was once St. Bernard's—where in all the world will you find such haunting names as in the streets of this city close about us, preserved in spite of persecution, in spite of the rejection of all that they imply, as if they would still keep the memory of a life; and a faith, and a love that are now no more? At times, in spite of itself, the longing cries out in its literature. Wordsworth lost in admiration at the feet of Mary; Scott catching and repeating her praises from the past; Charles Lamb wishing that, to honour her as he would, he might be a Catholic; Keble singing hymns to his 'Mother out of sight'; Ruskin awed by the beauty of the Church's handiwork; Macaulay acknowledging that universal and everliving Church, in whose life his country no longer has a part; Tennyson's Arthur pleading for prayers for his departing soul; in our own day, everywhere about us, writers whose pens must seek their inspiration either in the Church of their forefathers or in the Catholic Church abroad; these are signs, but a few among many, of that sense of loss and of longing in this country which will not be silenced, the like of which will scarcely be found in any other nation's literature.

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And the cause of the longing is not far to seek. The English people did not, four hundred years ago, surrender the religion of their forefathers of their own accord. It was not here as it was in other countries. There, for the most part, the separation began from below; here it was forced upon the people from above. For a thousand years England had grown along with the rest of Christian mankind; on a sudden she was wrenched away and was compelled henceforward to revolve upon herself. But the training and habits of a thousand years do not perish in a day. For four centuries England has attempted the task imposed upon her; she has struggled to make for herself a world unto herself. She has come through the years reeling from side to side, changing from one form of faith to another, as if her heart were not in the deed that had been done, adapting herself and her principles to her circumstances, for she has had no other guide. She has turned ever round upon her own axis, and with each revolution has lost something of her first momentum, something of that universal Christian faith with which she first began. Today, at last, the wheel has slowed down, and she no longer knows whether there is any faith left with her or not; she is no longer sure what faith means. What remains is not her own; to save her soul alive she borrows it from elsewhere, she goes back to the faith of her forefathers. Theology, the Queen of the sciences, has all but perished; she has fallen among robbers, and they have stripped her, and wounded her, and left her half dead, and there comes no Good Samaritan to pour into her wounds oil and wine (Luke x, 34). Philosophy, her Handmaid, wanders from door to door a beggar in the streets. Poetry despairs, and harks back to the days before Christendom was born, with scarcely a voice of her own.

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Now in our own day there has come a fresh awakening; it has been forced upon us from outside. Mankind has suddenly been drawn closer together; nations can no longer live alone; from every side there is brought home to us the need for unity and co-operation. And that not only in political alliances; not only in leagues and pacts; from the very heart and soul of the nations there rises the cry for something more. Men appeal that at last they may be of one mind, of one mutual understanding, resting on one fundamental faith, and trust, and love, finding together and keeping together some basic principle of truth on which all other truth may be built, preserving that always in common, however different in every other way men and nations may be. Day after day we behold around us, in this hungering England more than elsewhere, efforts made to reach this common understanding, to make at least a semblance of unity; and since to secure the substance seems impossible, men delude themselves with a form and a name.

But even were these efforts to succeed, were they to reach the goal of their ambition, an external semblance of unity, what would they have gained? On their own confession, truth with clipped wings, truth which may not teach, which may not define itself, which is almost forbidden to express itself in words lest it break this artificial, man-contrived unity, truth which can only crawl silently along the ground, and be trampled upon, and die. In the name of religious liberty, religious truth has been gagged and put in prison. But truth cannot be confined and live; truth cannot even be nationalised. There is a great and a noble nationalism, for which it is an honour to die. But there is a nationalism which is ignoble; and the nationalism which would cut a people off from thinking and praying with the rest of the family of men must inevitably be evil. We may nationalise our

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resources, our wealth, the material things that belong to us; but truth, and religion the guardian of truth, Jesus Christ, and that living organism which is His Body, can in no sense belong as a thing apart to any nation. They are the equal inheritance of all mankind; and if men choose to make of them something peculiarly their own, if they separate them, and themselves with them, from that which is the common possession of their fellow-men, then may they know that they have paid for their treasure a fatal price. The truth they have captured, and separated, and imprisoned, and make their own and labelled with their own special label, marking it off from the truth of Christendom, must of its very nature be a maimed truth, a crippled truth, a truth that can bear little fruit, but can only droop to death in its bondage and confinement.

This again in their hearts the men who make these efforts know, or would know if they would but look into themselves. For their action bears witness against them. While they sacrifice their beliefs to one another, that they may keep a semblance of unity at home, while they jettison much that they may preserve their national isolation, at the same time they stretch out feeble hands across the seas, with the body of Christian mankind. To Lutheran churches, to Old Catholics, to the nodding and tottering churches of the East, to any form of faith but one that will receive them, let them differ in belief as they may, they make despairing plunges even as a drowning man grasps at a straw. But in all this again they fail, and must inevitably fail. They come home to their separated truth, cooped up in her cage, sick and starved and dying, and nothing from all these foreign alliances can be brought home for her recovery. For by no such efforts can the heart of Christendom be reached; they are surface ambitions and cannot ever

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be more ; and only when that heart is reached can there be any hope of success, and revival, and real oneness. Only by breaking down that which hedges isolated creed about ; only by becoming one with the truth which is universal, can their truth awake again to life and make them free. 'Amen, amen, I say to you, unless the grain of wheat falling into the ground die, itself remaineth alone. But if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit' (John xii, 24, 25). On the battle-field, eleven years ago, in a moment of crisis, a great English general knew how to yield to another so that a vast divided army of millions might think and act together unto victory. That yielding proved his greatness more than any other deed in his career. Not until the like noble act of submission has been made on the battle-field of faith, will England be able to take the place that should belong to her, and do the great good she might, and, we believe, she alone can do, in the army that lives, and labours, and fights, and dies for the world's natural and spiritual regeneration. She has a great work before her ; but she will never be able to do that work alone.

It is, in part, with the hope that this happy and fruitful coalition may be fostered, and in the end brought about, that the Dominican fathers have ventured on this foundation ; as, at least, one who looks on from outside reads the future of this house. As they came into Oxford seven hundred years ago, and by their coming linked up this infant university with the universities abroad, on the one hand giving to Oxford a more universal scope, on the other hand giving to Christendom the healthy young mind of Oxford, so they come to-day. They come with the unbroken tradition of united Christendom behind them, the steady, fruitful growth of seven hundred years past, and with a world-wide horizon of the present, into the midst of this English seat of learn-

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ing. They come to unite all that has been done, and is being done, and will yet be done in England with what is being done elsewhere; that so, if it may be, they may give to both alike a yet greater life in themselves, a yet greater scope throughout the world, because of a yet greater influence on one another. They come to offer back to England that spirit of universal Christendom which once was hers; and in return to give to Christendom the benefit of that patient judgment, and shrewd resource, and analysis of truth from many angles, and wide sympathy, which we believe to be characteristic of our English mind and scholarship. They bring to us the genius of other generations and countries, of an Albertus and an Aquinas and their followers in the past, of a Lacordaire, a Denifle, a Lagrange, a Mandonnet in the present, whose learning is the common property of Europe. They come to receive and they come to give; to receive with gratitude what English scholars have to give them, and in return to give what they possess. They come to renew once more the link so cruelly broken four hundred years ago; to renew, if they may, the work of Fisher, and More, and Colet, and Erasmus.

But they would not stop there. For the spirit which urges them is more than that of man, more than that of mere human covenant; it is a living spirit, and the unity which they ambition is a living thing. It is not a makeshift, it is no mechanical adjustment, it is not a name and nothing more, it is no result of compromise, it is not even a code of common doctrine, much less a welding together of worn-out creeds. The spirit in which they come is itself a life; the unity they bring is a living organism. From the beginning it has grown, and still it continues to grow, inside the hearts and souls of men. It is a life which has born fruit in every age, in every nation which has accepted

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it, which bears its fruit to-day throughout the world, and must bear its fruit in the future. As the sap runs up the vine and gives it ever new foliage and vintage, so is it, and in no metaphoric language only, with the spirit which flows in the veins of united Christendom. As it lives by no human power, so can no human power destroy it. Lop its branches, and it will only break forth elsewhere with greater vigour; leave it alone, however hacked and scarred, and it will heal its wounds and again throw out new shoots. It is immortal, it is universal, it is one, not the living body of man is more united; for it is Jesus Christ Himself living in his own, 'Jesus Christ yesterday, to-day, and the same for ever' (Hebrews xiii, 8), who lives and is not divided (I Corinthians i, 13). It is that one living Body of Jesus Christ, of which we are the living members; that living organism of which He is the Head. We live, no not we, but He lives in us (Gal. ii, 20); and through that indwelling we are one with a oneness that human effort cannot reproduce, nor can human words fully express. What we say may 'to the Jews be a block of stumbling, and to the Gentiles foolishness,' but we cannot say any more; to us it is, and we know it is, 'Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God' (1 Cor. i, 24). This is the unity we would give to our beloved England; participation in that Body, international, or rather, supranational, for it is on another plane than that of nations, which would draw into itself all human nature, making it one as by no other means it can be made one, one in mind, one in heart with itself because it is one in mind and heart with Him whose indwelling is sanctifying grace. It is not we who teach His truth, it is Jesus Christ who teaches through us; not we who invite, but Jesus Christ, the ancient of Days, the Man no less of this our own day, the All-in-all, the Desire of the nations,

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little as the nations realise it. It is Jesus Christ who prays no less to-day than before that all men may be one in Him, who speaks with assurance that He will yet draw all men to oneness in Himself. 'And other sheep I have that are not of this fold; them also I must bring. And they shall hear My voice: and there shall be one fold and one shepherd' (Jn. x, 16).

Let it not be supposed that this is an idle dream, that the union of men and nations in Jesus Christ is an ambition too high to be attained, or too ideal to be realised. It is the ambition of Jesus Christ Himself; and Jesus Christ is not deceived, Jesus Christ is true. 'Thus saith the Lord God: Behold, I will open your graves, and will bring you out of your sepulchres, O My people, and will bring you into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord: when I shall have opened your graves, O My people, and shall have put spirit into you. And you shall live and I shall make you rest upon your own land. And you shall know that I have spoken and done it, saith the Lord God' (Ezechiel xxxvii, 12—14). So spoke the Lord God over the dead bones in the vision of the prophet. 'And the spirit came into them, and they lived and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army' (Ezechiel xxxvii, 10). When the Apostle St. Paul first went to Ephesus, he was met with opposition even unto death, when he went to Athens and Corinth he found little but contempt; when he went to Rome he was a prisoner in chains. Who would have supposed that in the wake of those visits would have followed a union between those seats of learning such as had never been imagined before? When in Hippo St. Augustine wrote his *City of God* in the midst of the despairing chaos of his time, while pagan Rome made merry because the end had come, eating and drinking because to-morrow it would die, he laid the foundations of a new unity, stronger and

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deeper and more fruitful than had ever been dreamt of till then. When the great St. Gregory sent his Benedictines throughout Europe, he made Europe one as no Constantine, no Charlemagne could make it. When that other Augustine and his brethren stood trembling on the shore of France, and feared to cross the sea as they had been bid into barbaric Britain, who could have thought that from the coming of these monks would follow the making of the English people, the making of England? When St. Dominic in his turn cast his net of scholars over Europe, he gave to Christendom itself a new unity, built upon a common thought and understanding, which stood the test of centuries to follow. The same God who guided them is with us to-day; if He be with us, who shall be against us?

And we believe there is that in the heart of Oxford which will give to the sons of St. Dominic a gracious welcome. None of us who have watched can have failed to recognise the open-handed generosity of English scholarship in recent years, especially in this university. We have felt the touch of fellowship shown during the Great War, when Oxford opened its doors to the exiled scholars of Louvain. We have marked with keen thanksgiving the satisfaction that was expressed when one who had walked the streets of Oxford as a student, and had read in its libraries, was raised to the chair of St. Peter in the person of the Holy Father. We have noted the honours given to men who in a special way have represented the scholarship of Christendom; to Pirenne, Delehaye, Battifol, de Broglie, Legovis, Thureau-Dangin, Breuil, Gilson, Bremond, and there may be more, to speak only of those whom Oxford has distinguished since the Great War. We have ourselves been honoured in the honour conferred on our beloved and distinguished Cardinal, whom we rejoice in having

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with us to-day. We have seen the approval with which those have been received and encouraged who have wished to lecture in the university in the mind of Catholic tradition. The same generosity, we believe, will give welcome to the sons of St. Dominic, in what I would like to call their home-coming.

So may we hope that from this foundation England and Catholic Christendom will be brought yet closer together. We look forward to a renewal of that ancient alliance by which the whole world may be brought the nearer to think as one, to pray together as one, to serve as one the common Father; by which man may be to one another no longer as hereditary rivals in religious creeds, which nature itself declares to be a lie, but as brethren in the household of the Lord God of nations, 'where there is neither Gentile nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian nor Scythian, bond nor free, but Christ is all in all' (Coloss. iii, 11). With confidence we hope for a reconciliation and reunion, or rather a new union, deeper down than has ever been before, founded not only on theological agreement, but on the broader experience gained from four hundred years of bitter trial, and on a more universal, all-embracing love, the fruit of these centuries of enmity. Thus shall be drawn closer together, not England only, not an Empire only, but the whole family of all mankind, the family of the sons of God, the living members of the living Body of our Lord Jesus Christ. 'One body and one Spirit . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism. One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in us all' (Eph. iv, 4—6). This blessing every English Catholic prays unceasingly that God may grant to this country, which he loves, no less than his fathers, even unto death.

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