

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.

pany of the blessed and the company of the damned at the end. The Church as it will be in the resurrection is the society of the just, and of the just alone. But in the middle of the course, in this aeon, they are inextricably mixed together, *perplexas, invicemque permixtas* (*Civ. Dei* XI, 1). Man is very much of a mixed-up kid, and Augustine's awareness of this is crucial to his idea of the Church. But before we come to it, in order to grasp the essence of the City of God, we must look at it in its beginning and end.

It is 'the congregation and society of the saints, predestined to reign for ever with God' (X, 6; XV, 1). What constitutes this association, as any association, is a sort of love. He says of the two cities, 'They are made by two loves; the earthly city by the love of self even to despising God, the heavenly by the love of God even to despising self' (XIV, 28). As Professor Versfeld says in his *Guide to the City of God*, Augustine's tale of two cities is the story of their love affairs.

Loving God means cleaving to God (Ps. 72). This is done by offering him true sacrifice, which Augustine defines as 'every work done in order to cleave to God in a holy association, every work, that is, which is referred to the ultimate good which alone can give us true bliss'—notably works of mercy (provided they are thus referred to God), whose essence it is to relieve misery and bestow bliss. 'And so it is that this whole redeemed city, that is, the congregation and society of the saints, is offered to God as a universal sacrifice by the high priest who also offered himself for us in his passion, in the form of a servant, that we might be the body of so great a head. . . . This is the sacrifice of Christians, for we being many are one body in Christ. This sacrifice the Church resorts to in the sacrament of the altar, where she is clearly shown that in the very thing she offers she is offered herself' (X, 6). Augustine's sequence of thought is not, I confess, very clear to me here. Perhaps we should look at it less as an argument than as a pattern of ideas. He is talking, in the context, about the true worship of God. This means cleaving to God; this means belonging to the city of God, the holy association of the saints; this means being offered to God in and by Christ. The love for God which constructs the city of God is first and foremost Christ's love, which his body the Church is drawn up into, which it shares with him.

The earthly city, by contrast, is drawn down into, and indeed built on, fratricidal strife—Cain slaying Abel, Romulus slaying

Remus. While on the subject of Cain and Abel, let us observe something else which is needed to build the city of God—faith. Cain, Augustine notes, founded a city (Gen. iv, 17). Not so Abel, the first unequivocal human representative of the city of God; '*Tanquam peregrinus*, as a pilgrim and a foreigner he founded no city. Up above is the city of the saints' (XV, 1). And so belonging to it requires faith in something not seen, which Augustine brings out again by his interpretation of the names Abel and Seth, the first two heavenly citizens. He is commenting on Genesis iv, 26, which in his version reads, 'And to Seth was born a son, and he called his name Enos; this man hoped to call on the name of the Lord God'; he writes, 'In these two men, Abel which means Grief, and Seth which means Resurrection, is sketched the death of Christ and his life from the dead. It is of this faith (in Christ's death and resurrection) that the city of God is born, signified by this man who hoped to call upon the name of the Lord' (XV, 18). So indeed hope, as well as faith and charity, is a formative cause of the heavenly city. For 'in this man (Enos) is prefigured the society of men which lives, not according to man in possession of earthly happiness, but according to God in the hope of eternal happiness' (*ibid.*).

One God, one Christ, one charity, one faith, one hope—and therefore only one Church. One Church because one faith and one charity, and equally one faith and one charity because one Church. Augustine is quite unequivocal on this. Talking of the spread of the gospel and the growth of the Church, he says: 'The devil stirred up heretics to withstand Christian teaching under the name of Christian; as though there were room for them indifferently without any correction in the city of God, as the city of confusion (Babel) found room in itself indifferently for philosophers holding different and contrary opinions. Those then who have warped and unsound views in the Church of Christ, if they resist obstinately when they are corrected and told what they should rightly and soundly hold, if they refuse to emend their deadly dogmas and persist in defending them, they become heretics, and going forth outside the Church are reckoned among the enemies who exercise her . . . in patience . . . in wisdom . . . and in benevolence' (XVIII, 51).

Here we are then, face to face with the mix-up of the two cities in this world. The city of God is indeed visibly embodied

in the unity of the Catholic Church, the *catholica* as he calls it; but he was not so naïve as to say that all inside it are good, all outside it wicked. This description of the heretic, not as a man who *is* outside the Church, but as one who *goes* out of the Church, shows that the evil starts inside. 'Many reprobate and wicked men are mixed with the good inside. . . . Both sorts are caught and swim about indiscriminately in the apostolic nets, and when hauled aboard they almost cause the boat to sink' (XVIII, 49). The parable of the wheat and the cockle is also one of his favourite texts to illustrate this matter—or wheat and chaff on the threshing-floor.

If the one true Church, then, has a very mixed bag of members, if the city of God endures the presence within itself of a fifth column from the earthly city in the shape of wicked Catholics, who will only be sorted out when the great day of threshing and winnowing comes—is the converse true? Are there genuine citizens of the heavenly city to be found among those not visibly in communion with the Church of Christ?

This is a question, to be perfectly frank, that I do not think Augustine ever asked himself. That however does not mean that it is a question we cannot ask him. A great part of theology consists in searching authorities, from scripture on, for answers to questions which the authorities themselves never asked. This is perhaps the chief way in which doctrine develops. But we must expect the answer to be obscure, perhaps not altogether coherent. Here are a few elements of an answer from *The City of God*.

(1) Certainly there are many among God's enemies at the moment who will end up by being his friends, just as there are many among his friends who will end up his enemies. True discrimination, *discretio*, between the just and the reprobate is a prerogative of the divine foreknowledge. But this is not directly on our question—it simply states the possibility of conversion for the wicked and of lapse for the good.

(2) Falling away can happen within the Church without a man's overtly leaving the Church. But overtly leaving the Church, like the case of the heretics already described, is an unmistakable sign of a man's lapse from justice, no matter how upright or virtuous he may otherwise be. For no amount of virtue separated from the Church, not referred to God in the body of Christ, avails to make a man just before God.

(3) For the Church is the only ark of salvation. Noah's ark, which the Book of Wisdom calls 'a contemptible piece of wood', was a traditional figure of the Church saved by the wood of the cross, and outside the ark there is no means of escaping destruction in the flood.

(4) Yet Augustine did envisage the possibility of conversion outside the Church, as well as of falling away inside. He says somewhere—I have not managed to find the reference—talking about the necessity of charity for salvation, that if a man begins to have it outside the Church, then he already begins to belong to Christ.

(5) He gives two curious B.C. instances of what one might call extra-territorial citizens of the heavenly city. One is the Erythrean Sybil, who was in fact a Christian invention, but was thought to have prophesied Christ centuries before. She, he thinks, though clearly a pagan, not a member of the chosen people in whom the city of God was then officially though imperfectly established, nonetheless very possibly belonged to it. From the Bible itself he gives the example of Job, a non-Israelite who belonged to God (XVIII, 47). If in old testament times, why not in new? But he never explicitly draws the inference. Against it is the fact that the Church of the new testament, unlike the people of the old, is a society open to all nations; all are welcome and invited to join. If they do not join, is it because they refuse the invitation? He says nothing clear on the point one way or the other.

Let us now examine what he has to say on the Church in his controversy with the Donatists. This was essentially a conflict between two ideas of what the Church is, between two societies each claiming to be the one true Church of Christ. The Donatists did not really exist outside North Africa, but there for most of the fourth century they dominated the scene. They said that the self-styled Catholic Church was not the true Church of Christ, because it derived from wicked bishops who in the last of the persecutions, under Diocletian, had surrendered the sacred books to the imperial authorities—they were *traditores*, traitors—and by this lapse they had forfeited the power not only to govern the Church but even to propagate it by administering the sacraments. All sacraments administered by sinners—a *fortiori* by heretics—were, they said, spurious. Hence there was no genuine baptism, no valid orders to be found in bodies deriving from such men—

no Church therefore; and what is more, any other Church, even though not directly involved in the treachery of the *traditores*, if it maintained communion with them or their successors was itself defiled and its sacraments invalidated, and it thus ceased to be part of the one true Church. So the Donatists claimed to be the Church of the saints—very violent and fissiparous saints too, constantly splitting up into smaller sects. Their idea of the Church is very simple and straightforward; it is quite simply the Church of the saints. The sinner *ipso facto* ceases to belong—*totally* so. There are no sacraments outside the body of the saints, no perpetuating of any Church life outside. So when Catholics joined the Donatists, they rebaptized them.

The Catholic idea of the Church, as presented by Augustine, was not so cut and dried, but it was, if anything, even simpler. Why were the Donatists not the Church of Christ or a part of it? Why, because they had broken away from it; they had committed 'the sacrilege of schism, which far outdistances all other crimes' (*Contra Parmenianum* I, 7). Nothing could justify schism, no conceivable enormity or scandal in the Church could justify breaking away from it or disrupting its unity. Even the proper authority in the Church must refrain from excommunicating evil-doers when this might involve schism. 'If one of the brethren, a Christian within the Church, is convicted of such wrongdoing as deserves excommunication, let this be done where there is no danger of a schism, provided it is done with charity, for the man's correction not his destruction. This can be done without ruining peace and unity, without harming the wheat, when the congregation of the Church as a whole has no part in the sin that is being punished by excommunication. . . . But where the disease has caught hold of very many, nothing remains for the good to do except to grieve and groan. In fact, if an epidemic of sin has invaded the multitude of the faithful, what is needed—all that can help—is the severe mercy of God's discipline (ecclesiastical discipline is now powerless); for counsels of separation are vain, pernicious, sacrilegious' (*op. cit.*, III, 13, 14). *A fortiori*, if authority may not do anything in enforcing discipline which would provoke schism, those under authority may not withdraw themselves and set up rival institutions and authorities for any reason whatsoever. This the original Donatist bishops had done.

Why is schism so fearful a sacrilege, worse even, I think

Augustine would say, than heresy? Because it is a sin against unity, hence a sin against peace, hence a sin against charity; and without charity, as St Paul tells the Corinthians, nothing else is of any profit whatever. This is undoubtedly the keystone of Augustine's idea of the Church. The Church is the very embodiment of charity, of love of your neighbour. And this love is not just kindness and benevolence; it is kindness and benevolence referred to the love of God, which means it must be directed to the building up of the body of Christ. To those of the household of faith, charity is kindness and benevolence which expresses and strengthens unity in Christ. To those outside—or to sinners inside—it is benevolence and kindness such as draws them to unity in Christ, such as keeps the Church of Christ open to all comers, forbids it ever to become a closed society, an exclusive set. Charity is the Church-building virtue.

The unity of the Catholic Church is above all a manifestation of God's charity. Hence apart from that unity nothing whatever avails to make a man pleasing to God, to make him a member of the city of God, because the city of God is at unity in itself. Unlike the Donatists, Augustine and the Catholics held that the sacraments of the Church could be found outside the Church; because they can be validly conferred by bad ministers inside and by heretics and schismatics outside. The Catholic Church recognized the validity of Donatist orders and baptism. In fact, Augustine would say to the Donatists, you have everything—you have the true doctrine of Christ and of the Trinity, you have the scriptures, you have faith, you have orders, baptism, eucharist, bishops and clergy—everything except the one thing that makes these things any use, and that is unity, that is charity. The Donatists have orders, and baptism, 'but they have each to their own undoing, as long as they do not have the charity of unity' (*op. cit.*, II, 28).

The Donatists claimed to be only the loyal followers of St Cyprian, bishop of Carthage (*ob. c. A.D. 253*), who had maintained that no baptism given outside the unity of the Catholic Church was genuine, and so converts received into the Church from heretical sects were to be rebaptized. Augustine says that Cyprian was wrong in this matter, that what had been disputed in his time had since been settled against him by a council of the Church at large, and now there is simply *no question* to dispute (*op. cit.*, II, 30). But the real lesson to learn from Cyprian is that

he did not disrupt Catholic unity for the sake of his opinion, nor as a protest against evil behaviour. He spoke very severely about some of his colleagues for their avarice—yet he did not consider that being in communion with them, guilty though they may have been of a sin St Paul calls idolatry, in any way unchurched him. It never occurred to him to separate from them and to sever unity, peace, and charity. Had the time come, said Augustine, Cyprian would have accepted the Church's decision, and allowed himself to be corrected in the Church's unity which he had never left, and which he adorned with martyrdom. He would have been like St Peter, who went wrong in the matter of Judaizing but allowed himself to be corrected by St Paul his subordinate (Gal. ii, 11-21), and preserved thus in the bond of peace was carried forward to martyrdom (*De Baptismo contra Donatistas* II, 2). Augustine invites the Donatists to return to the '*catholicam concordantem quam Cyprianus non deseruit fluctuantem*', to the Catholic Church in agreement which Cyprian had not deserted in its bewilderment (*op. cit.*, II, 20).

We might say that for the Donatists the Church is a closed society of the saints; for Augustine it is an open society of union with Christ, which can tolerate all kinds of unholiness and sin thanks to the strength of the charity which holds it together. It is a part of this openness, one might add, that Christ can operate outside the visible unity of his Church in the sacraments and teaching of sects like the Donatists. He can also operate more directly still, without any sacramental means, as in the case of the centurion Cornelius. 'His prayers were heard, even though he was a heathen; indeed he was thought worthy to have an angel sent to him and to see the angel. But since whatever good he had to his credit in his prayers and almsgiving could be of no use to him unless he were incorporated in the Church by the bond of Christian fellowship and peace, he is told to send for Peter. By him he is baptized and joined to the Christian people by the partnership of communion, whereas he had previously been joined to them only by the similarity of his good works. But supposing he had been so proud of the good he already possessed (good works) that he scorned the good he did not yet possess (the partnership of communion), it would have been his ruin' (*op. cit.*, I, 10).

Cornelius is a case of a man who begins to have charity outside the Church and thus starts on the way in. And if he had deliber-

ately held back from entering, as something unnecessary, it would have been the end of the charity he had started to have. But suppose a Cornelius who never got that far—to whom the idea of sending for Peter never presented itself, a Cornelius in Timbuctoo; did Augustine ever consider the case of such a Cornelius? He does at least say this at the beginning of his *De Baptismo*: 'The case is very different of those who incautiously stumble on these heretics (the Donatists) and suppose them to be the Church of Christ; and of those among the Donatist clergy who *know* that only that is the Catholic Church which in accordance with the promises of scripture is spread over the whole world to the ends of the earth' (I, 5).

This brings us to another feature of Augustine's open society Church; the last we have time to consider. That is its universality. Scripture has foretold that it would spread all over the earth. It is for all nations because Christ is the one and only Saviour of all nations. Abraham had been told: 'In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed' (Gen. xxii, 18). The Church's world-wide mission was visibly and graphically indicated by the phenomena at Pentecost, when the apostles spoke with the tongues of all nations.

So in his pastoral letter to his clergy and people, *De Unitate Ecclesiae*, Augustine tells them to point to two signs when trying to show where the Church of Christ is: (1) The doctrine of Christ; is the doctrine taught in a society the doctrine of the gospel? If not, then that society or sect cannot be the Church of Christ. (2) The promises of Christ; is that body or society spread over the whole known world, is it apostolic in the mission sense as well as in the continuity of tradition sense? If not, if it is insular, provincial, a closed shop—as the Donatists were; if it is naturally inclined to split into warring factions and sub-sects—as the Donatists were; then it cannot be the Church of Christ.

To sum up Augustine's doctrine on the Church:

There is only one Church of Christ;

It is constituted in being, and kept one by charity—which never falls away;

There are degrees of belonging to it; all sorts of ecclesiastical things may be had outside it, sacraments, doctrine, orders, etc.; a man may lack charity inside it, he may at least begin to have

charity outside it; but the essential mode of belonging is to be united to Christ in the Church by charity;

It is also one in apostolic faith (this implies a structure of authority which Augustine took for granted and helped to operate as a bishop of the Church, but never said very much about);

Finally it is Catholic, that is, universal, open to all nations, the heir to promises which cannot fail.

A SYON CENTENARY¹

ERIC COLLEDGE

IN 1861 Syon Abbey at last came back from Portugal to England, having been driven into exile, for the second time, in 1558; and this year in their present home, their third since their return, at South Brent in Devon, the abbess and her sisters can look back with especial thankfulness over their long history of trials and wanderings endured for God's glory and the true faith. And in this year of prayers for the cause of the Forty Martyrs, Syon, which gave one of her sons, the 'Angel', Blessed Richard Reynolds, to witness with his blood to her constancy, should be in the minds of all Catholics in England as they thank God for his mercies shown to them.

It is not surprising that an English house of St Bridget's order should have been founded soon after its approval and her canonization in 1391, for England had been long renowned for the great devotion in which the Blessed Virgin was here held, and the Bridgettines were and still are very specially dedicated to her. 'This order shall be founded in honour of my most holy mother': so St Bridget tells us in her *Revelations* that she was commanded by our Lord, and everything possible was done to make this real. Hence the Bridgettine breviary (not at all to be confused with the 'Little Office') which had to be abandoned in the days of Trent, but which, to Syon's great joy, has with other special privileges in modern times been restored.

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