

RELIGION OF TODAY: WHAT'S WRONG WITH IT?

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By "Religion of Today" I mean the religion of the great mass of our fellow-countrymen, excluding, of course, Catholics, and excluding also the little group of "Anglo-Catholics," and some other little groups, who have more or less definite religious systems of one kind or another. I mean that rather vague collection of ideas on the subject of religion which is part of the mental furniture of the average man of today in this country, and which often finds expression in the public press, in articles in magazines and newspapers. Certainly this religion is not anything very definite. As a rule none of these writers would care to define anything, and they differ from one another on many points. But there is enough likeness in the general attitude of all of them to make it possible to deal with them as a whole, and to speak of their ideas as forming something, which we may call the "Religion of Today." And the object of this little pamphlet is to try to point out a few of the fundamental mistakes made by these popular writers and their readers, and to suggest how they may find their way to the truth.

"Orthodox Christianity"

In the first place, then, it is to be noticed that our popular exponents of religion nearly always begin by rejecting what they call "orthodox Christianity." Sometimes they hardly condescend to mention the fact that they do reject it. They assume that "orthodox Christianity" is something quite out of date, and no longer worth the consideration of any "thinking man." They never, of course, explain very clearly what they understand by that term. You are left to gather that from more or less casual references.

The limitations implied

Sometimes they seem to think that "orthodox Christians" regard God as a sort of superman, who deals with His creatures in an entirely unreasonable and capricious way. They think that the words "person" and "personal," when applied to God, must imply those limitations which belong to human personality, and then scoff at such puerile ideas. They imagine that faith means blindly accepting a number of unintelligible statements taught by clergymen, who can give no reasonable grounds for their belief, but expect others to believe them on their authority. They of course assume that those clergymen have worked out their doctrines from the Bible with nothing but some mysterious "inner light" to guide them. They regard the doctrine of the Trinity, for example, which they find in the Athanasian Creed, as a jumble of unintelligible and contradictory statements, which can have no possible bearing on human life. They interpret the doctrine of the Atonement on the analogy of a human father, who punishes his son for the misdeeds of his servants, and then lets the servants off free. And, in general, they can see no connection between what they suppose to be "orthodox" beliefs and the practical conduct of life. They believe Christians to hold that it does not matter much what a man does, provided that his opinions are theologically correct. They do not see that belief and practice hang together, and that the conduct of an intelligent man must depend upon what he believes about God and his relation to God.

Hearing or reading such statements as these, one can only wonder how those people arrived at their idea of orthodox Christianity. It looks as if they had picked up a few fragments of doctrine taught by some small Christian sects, or by the less intelligent members of them, and without further inquiry, and indeed without trying to understand what they have heard, put these things down as "orthodox Christianity." But that is hardly worthy of men and women with any pretension to intelligence and culture. Supposing them to have been so unfortunate as to have been taught such nonsense in their childhood, you would hardly have expected them to jump to the conclusion that that, and that alone, is a fair representation of the Christian Faith. You would have expected them to look a little wider, to look in a comprehensive way at Christendom, at the Christian Religion in its various forms throughout the world, to see whether possibly there was not some other form of Christianity which had a better title to the name of orthodox.

One large central community

You would have expected them to notice that besides the little local sects, which were familiar to them in their childhood, there is one large central community of Christians spread throughout the world, a community which is larger than all the other Christian communities put together; which, in spite of its size and universality, is closely united in one compact organisation; which, as history plainly testifies, goes back to the beginning of the Christian religion, and from which, in fact, all the little local sects have at various times broken off; a body which has always contained, and does now contain, innumerable men and women in every country of the world distinguished in science and literature and art and statesmanship; a body which in fact made the civilisation and culture of Europe, the highest civilisation and culture that the world has ever seen. I say you would have expected men of intelligence and culture at least to have noticed the Catholic Church.

If they had done so, and had also tried to gain an elementary knowledge of the teaching of the Catholic Church, they might have discovered that the real “orthodox Christianity” is something very different from what they thought. They might have discovered that it does not contain any of those grotesque doctrines which they very properly reject, and that it is not a hotch-potch of isolated and more or less unintelligible statements but a perfectly reasonable and consistent body of doctrine concerning God and our relation to God, that it forms a consistent whole, that it all hangs together. Taken as a whole it throws a flood of light on all the practical problems of life. It gives the only sane and satisfactory account of the universe, of the origin and meaning and end of human life. It is not a mere abstract speculation on things that do not concern us.

To be taken as a whole

Of course, if you isolate one doctrine, such as the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity, from the rest, you may fail to see its practical bearing. But that is not reasonable. You must take it as a whole, a consistent whole, of which you cannot leave out one part without destroying it all. Then you see that it is something very practical indeed, perfectly adapted to the needs of men, both individually and socially. To the individual it gives an intelligible meaning to the universe and to human life. For society it provides the only basis of a sound civilisation and culture. Nobody can deny that it was the Catholic Church which gave civilisation and culture to Europe. And if people were not so wilfully blind, they would see that it is through a partial abandonment of Catholic teaching that Europe is in chaos today, and that, if our civilisation is to be saved, it can only be through a return to that Faith on which it was originally built.

That, then, is the first and most fundamental mistake made by most of our popular writers on religion. They happily dismiss “orthodox Christianity” without having first taken the trouble to find out what the Christian Religion really is. And they never can know, so long as they ignore the Catholic Church. For to discuss Christianity while remaining in complete ignorance of that Body and its teaching, is very much as if an American visitor were to write a book about the manners and customs of Europe, and were to show that he knew nothing at all about England, France, Germany, and Italy, and had only visited some obscure tribes in the less civilised parts of the Balkan States.

God’s Revelation

The second mistake made by most of our popular writers is even more astonishing. They write as if they were quite unconscious of the elementary fact that the Christian Faith claims to be a revelation from God. They persistently talk as if it has never occurred to them that Christianity was anything, or claimed to be anything, but a collection of human opinions. But Christianity does not present itself as a collection of human opinions. It presents itself as a Revelation, a message from God. That is how it first presented itself to the world. That is what all Christians believed for many centuries, and what we Catholics at least believe still. We believe that this revelation was made by Jesus Christ; that He was not a mere man, but nothing less than God Incarnate, God come amongst us in human form, having taken a human nature to Himself for that very purpose. We believe that He brought to us a message from God, that He made a definite revelation of the mind and purpose of God; that He taught us just those things which human reason can never attain to, and which are of the utmost practical importance.

What happens after death?

He explained to us, as far as our finite minds can grasp it, the nature of God, our relation to Him, the meaning and purpose of life. He told us what God requires of us in this world; how He desires to be served. He told us what happens after death; how there is the awful alternative of heaven or hell; either we may reach a state of eternal happiness in union with God, sharing the very life and happiness of God Himself, or we may find ourselves shut out from that happiness, cast into outer darkness for ever. He showed us also the way to attain that eternal happiness, and provided the means of reaching it. We also believe that He committed this teaching to a permanent teaching body, which He called His Church; that He guaranteed that He would be with that Church always, guiding it, keeping it right, enabling it to teach always, without error or change, the truth revealed by Him. We believe that that Church exists still according to His promise, that it is the body known as the Catholic Church, that great world-wide community, of which the earthly head is the Pope. That is Christianity as it has always been understood by the vast majority of Christians.

This, then, is the claim that has to be judged. Is it true, or is it not? Is the Christian Religion a revelation from God, or is it not? The importance of understanding this cannot be exaggerated. Those who fail to grasp it approach the consideration of Christianity in an entirely wrong way, a way which cannot possibly lead to a satisfactory result. A simple illustration will make this clear. Suppose you have a brother in a distant country, and one day a stranger comes to you, professing to bring you a message from your brother. You do not begin by criticising the contents of the message, saying, as he proceeds with his narrative, "Yes, that seems all right, I can believe that. But, no, I do not believe that other part of it; that does not seem at all likely." No, you deal with the matter in quite a different way. Before you listen to the message at all, you ask for the messenger's credentials. You ask for proof that the message really does come from your brother, and that the messenger is such a trustworthy person that he is sure to deliver it correctly. If you are not satisfied on these points, if you discover on enquiry that the man is an impostor, or a fool, who has evidently got the message all mixed up, you politely show him the door.

The messenger's credentials

On the other hand, if you are satisfied that he is genuine and trustworthy, if he shows you proof that the message is authentic, then you are ready to accept it. Now, when the Catholic Church comes to us, professing to have a message from God, that is the only reasonable way to deal with the matter. It is mere folly to begin by discussing the contents of the message, and to say: "Yes, I can accept this part, but that other part does not seem at all likely or credible." The only rational thing to do is to ask for the messenger's credentials, to find out whether the message really does come from God or not. And yet that is the question which it never occurs to most of those people who discuss religious problems to ask, or to attempt to settle.

What Think You of Christ?

There are, therefore, two main questions to be settled. The first is: Was Jesus Christ what we believe Him to have been, the Son of God, who came into this world to reveal to us the mind and purpose of God? And the second is: Has His message been correctly handed down to us by the Catholic Church?

Let us begin with the first: Was Jesus Christ the Son of God, not in any metaphorical sense, but actually, being Himself God, the Eternal Son of the Eternal Father, as Christians have always believed Him to be? And here let me observe that, if anyone rejects this belief, he is bound to give some other reasonable account of Him. And that is the problem which most of the people who discuss Christianity in a vague and superficial way never really face. Without discussing it, they just assume that He was merely a great human teacher, who taught a beautiful system of morals. They picture Him as a good and amiable man, who went about telling people to be good and kind to each other. But such a picture of Christ is a pure invention. The Christ whom they imagine never existed. The only means we have of knowing what sort of person Christ was is by reading the accounts of His life given in the four Gospels. And the Person there described is not in the least like the amiable human teacher whom our friends imagine. The Personality there depicted is something quite unique. Let me try to sketch it briefly.

The three years of active life

I will leave out for the moment the accounts of His birth and the strange incidents connected with it, and take merely the three years of active life. What do we find? A young man from Nazareth, the reputed son of the village carpenter, after Himself working quietly at the trade of His supposed father from His boyhood until the age of thirty, suddenly appears in public and announces that the Kingdom of God is at hand. He says that He is the Messiah, the Man from Heaven, the anointed of God, to whose coming all the Jewish prophets had looked forward for centuries. He had come to set up the Kingdom of God on earth, and to invite men into that Kingdom. He claims to teach, not any human opinions, but a message from God. That was the thing that struck His hearers, as one of the Evangelists records: "They were astonished at His teaching, because He taught as one having authority, and not as the Scribes." The Scribes taught their own opinions. He had nothing to do with opinions, but delivered an authoritative message. "My doctrine is not Mine," He said, "but His that sent Me."

Moreover, He said that He had come, not merely to teach, indeed not primarily to teach, but to do things. He claimed to have extraordinary supernatural powers, to have brought a new Divine power into the world, to give a new Divine life to men. "I am come," He said, "that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." And as proof of His supernatural power He did many wonderful works. He distinctly points to those works as proof of His supernatural power. He also said some very strange things about His death. He spoke of it, not as a calamity, but as something that had to be done, indeed as the main thing that He had come into the world to do. He came into the world to die, and through His death to bestow some vast and mysterious benefit upon mankind. He came, He said, "to give His life as a ransom for many."

But that is not all. He claimed quite clearly to be not merely the messenger of God, but to be God Himself, the Eternal Son of the Eternal Father. There is no doubt about it. "Before Abraham was, I am." "I and the Father are one." "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." It is the Father's will "that all men should honour the Son as they honour the Father." He puts Himself quite clearly on an equality with God the Father.

Parables and other teaching

That is the picture of Christ as depicted in the authentic records of His life written by those who knew Him, or friends of those who knew Him. That, therefore, is the Person with whom you have to deal. If you reject His claims, the account He gave of Himself, what do you make of Him? It is useless to invent a fancy picture of a good man teaching a simple and beautiful moral doctrine. You have to deal with a Person who made these startling and unique claims. The fact is that, regarded as a mere man, He is a quite impossible man. On the one hand you have His undisputed goodness, His wisdom, the most wonderfully subtle thought, the most profound, well-balanced mind that the world has ever seen, with His beautiful parables and other teaching, at which the world has never ceased to marvel, and to which it has no parallel. And on the other hand you have these personal claims, which in the mouth of a mere man would be the wildest extravagance, the ravings of a lunatic. Great and good men do not talk like that.

The empty tomb

Then there are His miracles, which cannot be eliminated from the narrative. They rest on precisely the same evidence as the rest. Especially there is the great miracle of the Resurrection. And notice that for the fact of the Resurrection we have as abundant first-hand evidence as for any fact in history. There are not only the accounts in the Gospels, but St Paul's letters, the authenticity of which (at least the chief of them) no sane critic has ever doubted. There we have St Paul, writing within a few years of the event, declaring that he himself knew a large number of people, several of whom he names, who had seen Our Lord risen from the dead. There is also the well-attested fact of the empty tomb, which nobody has ever been able to explain away. But more than that, it is really impossible to account for the existence of Christianity apart from the fact of the Resurrection. You have the undoubted fact that Our Lord's life ended in what was apparently the most ignominious failure. And yet, almost immediately afterwards, you find His followers confidently believing and asserting that He was God. Unless His miracles, and especially the Resurrection, really took place, what could possibly have made them believe that ?

No, take Our Lord as a mere man, and He is an insoluble enigma. It is easy enough to invent a fancy picture out of

your own imagination. But read the Gospels without any preconceived ideas. Try to read them as if you had never read them before. Try to picture to yourself the Person there described. Then try to explain Him to yourself as a mere man. Try to make out what sort of man He was. You will be utterly bewildered. It is a hopeless puzzle. And the only solution to the puzzle is the very simple one of accepting His own account of Himself, of believing about Him what we believe, that He was God, the Eternal Son of the Eternal Father, who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was made Man.

Have We Forgotten Our Founder?

It is a very common assertion that Christians of today, or (as people say) “the Churches,” have departed very widely from the teaching of Christ, and especially that they have added many dogmas to the simple truths that He taught. And this brings us to our second question: Has the message of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, been correctly handed down to us by the Catholic Church? I say the Catholic Church, because I am not concerned with any other. In fact I believe that all the others have gone wrong, but I am sure that the Catholic Church has not. And this I proceed briefly to prove.

I do not, however, propose to prove this by taking various doctrines, as now taught by the Catholic Church, and showing that they are all contained in the records of Christ’s teaching as given in the Gospels. No, I propose to prove it in a much simpler and more conclusive way, namely, by showing that the Catholic Church cannot go wrong, because there is in it a divine power, which prevents it from going wrong. Clearly, if I can prove that, it is enough. There will then be no need to examine each separate doctrine, and see whether it was taught by Christ. For, if the Church cannot go wrong, then it has not gone wrong. And consequently whatever it teaches must be true.

The records of His life

Look, then, once more at the records of Our Lord’s life in the Gospels. Having taught certain truths to the comparatively few people whom He was able to reach during the few years that He lived in one little corner of the world, what means did He take to ensure that that teaching should be handed on to others, to people of other lands and other generations? He did not come to teach a few; His message was for all the world and for all ages. What steps did He take to ensure that it should be taught to all the world, handed on unchanged and uncorrupted to future generations? He did not leave it to chance. He did not trust to luck, if I may use the expression, that somehow those who heard Him would pass it on to others, and those others to their children, and so forth. That certainly would have been a very precarious method. Nor did He write it down, nor tell others to write it down. That would have been a little better, but still very unsatisfactory. For people would have disputed for ever over the meaning of what was written, as they always do.

A teaching society

No, what He did was this. He founded a teaching society, which He called His Church. From His hearers He chose out twelve men, whom He called Apostles. He trained them carefully, formed them into a society, and then commissioned them to carry on His teaching, to teach in His Name after He was gone, to take His place in the world as the authorised Divine Teacher. See the words that He spoke to them: “As the Father sent Me, even so send I you.” Can anything be clearer? He had repeatedly said that He was sent by the Father, that His words were not His own, but the Father’s who sent Him. And now He says to the Apostles, to this teaching body which He had founded, “even so,” in precisely the same way, “I send you.” As I have taught in the Father’s Name, you will teach in Mine. As My words are not My own but His, so your words will not be your own but Mine, and therefore also His. Your teaching will be the teaching of God. Again, “He that heareth you heareth Me, and he that heareth Me heareth Him that sent Me.” And finally, His last words: “All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Going, therefore, teach ye all nations; baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world.”

Here notice two things. This society, which He has founded, is to be permanent. It is not merely to the Apostles that He gives this commission, but to them and their successors, to a permanent society, which is to go to all nations

and to last until the end of the world. And He promises that He, to whom all power is given in heaven and in earth, will be with them to keep them right, to enable them to carry out the task that He gives them. They are to go to all nations, and to continue until the end of the world, teaching precisely what He has commanded. That is a task from which they might well shrink. They might well turn round and ask: “How can we do this? How can we be sure that we shall always teach just what You have commanded, that we shall not make mistakes, that Your message will not get altered in course of time?” “I am with you,” is His answer. The meaning is quite clear. The phrase is common in the Old Testament. When God sent one of His prophets to accomplish some difficult task, from which human weakness might shrink, He always adds, “I will be with you,” that is, to enable you to do it; I will see you through. So Our Lord, then, said to the Church which He founded. He will be with it always, to keep it right, to see that it always does teach just what He commanded and nothing else.

“Christ preaches Christ”

But that is not all. There is a still more remarkable saying in St John’s Gospel, Chapter XV: “I am the Vine, you are the branches.” What can that mean but that Christ goes on living in His Church, the abiding Source of all its knowledge, wisdom, life and powers? As life flows from the vine-stock through all the branches, so the divine life of Christ flows through the Church. St Paul expresses the same thing in another way when he calls the Church the Body of Christ. It is the Body, of which Christ is the Head, and of which the Holy Ghost, who is called the Spirit of Christ,” is the soul. Indeed so close is the union between Christ and His Church that it is in a manner identified with Him. Thus, when Saul (who is also called Paul) was persecuting the Church, Our Lord said to him: “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?” And St Paul, following the Master, in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, actually calls the Church Christ. “For as the body is one,” he says, “and hath many members, and all the members of the body, whereas they are many, are yet one body, so also is Christ.” You would have expected him to end—so also is the Church. But no, he says “so also is Christ.” The Church is Christ. Or, as Pope Pius XII puts it in his beautiful encyclical, *Mystici Corporis Christi*, following St Augustine, “Christ, the mystical Head, and the Church, which like another Christ represents His person on earth, together constitute one new man . . . Christ, Head and Body, is the whole Christ.” And so again St Augustine, speaking of the Church’s preaching, says quite simply “Christ preaches Christ.” When the Church teaches, it is Christ Himself who, living in the Church, teaches through the Church.

What, then, is the sense in saying that we have forgotten or altered the teaching of our Founder? The Catholic Church can never do that, simply because it is His Body. He is not a teacher of long ago, whose teaching we must gather from ancient documents. In His Body He still lives on earth—lives, speaks and acts, as really as He lived, spoke and acted long ago in Galilee and Jerusalem.

The meaning of the revelation

The obvious difficulty, however, about all this is that at first sight the Catholic Church does seem to have changed, or at least added to the teaching of Christ. You look, for example, at our Catechism, and there certainly seems to be a good deal there that is not in the Gospels. That is because the original teaching has been—to use a common phrase—developed. The Divine Teacher, Christ speaking through His Church, has become more explicit, more detailed in His explanations of the original doctrine, as time goes on. Not that anything has been added. We do not claim that any new revelation has been made. On the contrary, we maintain that the revelation made through Christ and His Apostles was final. But it does not follow that the whole meaning of that revelation, all that it implied, all that it implicitly contained, was known all at once. If you look at a beautiful picture, you do not see all its beauty at once. You have to study it, to study it long and often, and gradually you see new beauties and new meanings in it. Little by little the conception of the master-mind who painted it, the ideal of the artist, becomes clearer.

The Church uses new terms

So it is with God’s revelation. Our understanding of it progresses. The Church, guided by the Spirit of Christ, sees more and more clearly the meaning of it, sees continually new meanings and new beauties in it. And to make it clearer the Church does not hesitate to use new terms. It is not afraid to use human knowledge, to borrow words and ideas

from human science and philosophy, to explain and illustrate its teaching. It accepts what is suitable and rejects what is not, just as any other living organism does in seeking its food from its environment. It takes whatever comes to hand and selects; retaining what is wholesome, rejecting what is unwholesome for it. Since the Church is a living teacher, not a mere record office, that is what we should expect. It does not go on mechanically repeating the old phrases, and never anything more. As new difficulties arise and human knowledge grows, the old revelation requires continually new and fuller explanation. In a word, it is that Scribe of whom Our Lord spoke, the Scribe instructed in the Kingdom of Heaven, who brings forth out of his treasure things new and old.

Faith and Reason

There is a popular idea among people who do not know very much about the Catholic Religion that we Catholics entirely reject reason in religious matters. They have heard us talking about the necessity of faith, and they think that faith means believing blindly without any reason. Now, on the face of it, this does not seem likely. For the 300,000,000 Catholics in the world are not all fools. For example, to take two names at random, Rontgen, one of the most famous men of science of our time, the discoverer of X-rays, was an excellent Catholic, and Field-Marshal Foch was a most devout Catholic. Is it likely that such men as these would believe anything blindly without reason?

The fact is that our critics do not know what Faith is. Let me therefore briefly explain. Faith means believing a statement on the authority of another person. If I tell you that I saw a person knocked down by a motor car yesterday, and you believe me, you are making an act of faith. And it is obvious that that is a perfectly reasonable thing to do, provided you are satisfied that the person is one on whose knowledge and veracity you can rely. Now, the Catholic Religion, as I have already pointed out, presents itself as a revelation from God, making known to us facts concerning Himself and our relation to Him which we cannot know by other means. But, if it is reasonable sometimes to believe our fellow-men, it is always reasonable to believe God. And that is what we call Divine Faith. It means believing certain statements, not by any means blindly, but because they have been made by God Himself. And what can be more reasonable than that?

The only thing necessary, therefore, before we can reasonably accept the Catholic Faith is, that we must first be convinced that it does come from God. And here again reason comes in. We are not asked to accept that blindly. We are invited to use our reason by examining the evidence. Some of that evidence I have already briefly indicated. There is the claim made by Jesus Christ to be the Son of God, and the Revealer of God to men, and the proofs He gave of that claim. There is also the plain fact that He founded the Catholic Church, sent it to teach in His Name, and guaranteed its infallibility.

The work of God

There is plenty of other evidence to corroborate this. There is the whole wonderful history of the Catholic Church; the marvellous way in which, in spite of the greatest moral and physical difficulties, it conquered and transformed the whole pagan world; the wonderful lives of the Saints it has produced in every age and still does produce; its fertility in every kind of good; the way in which it keeps united in one body and in one faith countless millions of men of every race; and above all its indestructible vitality; how over and over again it has seemed to be on the point of dying, of being destroyed, either by its enemies without, or by the faithlessness of its own children; and yet every time, instead of dying, it renews its youth, blossoming out into new life and vigour. It is facts such as these that we invite you to consider. It is only possible briefly to indicate them here. You must go to larger works to find them stated at length. There you will find abundant evidence to satisfy your reason that the Catholic Church is altogether above the category of merely human institutions, that it is the work of God, and that therefore its message is the message of God.

But here a caution is necessary. You are invited to examine the evidence, for Faith must be founded on reason. But reason alone is not sufficient to lead to Faith. The evidence is abundant, but all are not convinced by it. That is because the evidence, though strong, is not compelling, like a mathematical proof, leaving no loophole of escape. Therefore, in arriving at a conviction of this truth, that the Catholic Religion comes from God, two other elements come in. And first, the will has a good deal to do with it. I cannot now enter into the very difficult question of the precise relation and interaction of the will and the intellect. But a very little consideration of the workings of the human mind will

show that it does enter into this matter in various ways. Some people do not care enough about God to take the trouble to examine the evidence with attention.

There is an obligation

Then there is intellectual pride. People think they can get on very well without God. Or they do not wish to be taught by God. They think they can find out everything for themselves. Or they insist on serving God in their own way, in the way that they think best, instead of humbly trying to find out how God wants to be served, and serving Him in His way. Again, to accept the Catholic Faith carries with it the obligation of practising the Catholic Religion, and that means doing many things that are not congenial to our fallen human nature. All these things influence the will, and the will, often half-unconsciously, influences the judgment. And so people do not believe, because they have not the will to believe.

But there is yet another factor in the process of arriving at the truth, and that is the Grace of God. Just because we are dealing with something supernatural, we need a supernatural power to appreciate it and grasp it properly. We require Divine Grace to illuminate the intellect and to strengthen the will. That is what we mean when we say that Faith is a gift of God. We do not mean that it comes like a sort of intuition, apart from all use of our reason. God's Grace does not take the place of the intellect, nor supersede it. It makes it work properly in this difficult matter of perceiving Divine Truth so that it sees things as they are, appreciates at its true value the evidence presented to it. And it strengthens the will. It helps you to get rid of all those wrong motives which blind the reason. It helps you to have a pure and sincere desire to see God's will, and to follow it at any cost. That is why you will never arrive at a knowledge of the truth without God's Grace. And Grace is given in answer to prayer. Therefore, to find the truth, you must not only think and reason, and examine the evidence. You must also pray.

Scope for the intellect

You see, then, the proper use of reason in leading us to the Faith. But afterwards? After we have accepted the Faith, must we then abandon all use of reason? Is the act of Faith, as some people say, an act of intellectual suicide? Nothing of the kind. You will no longer, of course, reason about revealed truths, to see whether they are true. You accept them on the authority of God, who cannot lie. But you can go on reasoning about these truths, comparing them with one another, and with other truths known by natural means, trying to find out more and more of their meaning. There is still plenty of scope for your intellect, as much as you like to use it. In fact, far from being intellectual suicide, acceptance of the Catholic Faith makes for intellectual freedom. There is only one sense in which we in the Catholic Church are not so free as those outside; we are not so free to go wrong. We have the infallible guidance of the Church to warn us off dangerous paths. But that is not to deprive us of freedom in any real sense. If you are motoring in a strange district, and you find that the Automobile Association has put up notices to warn you off dangerous roads, you do not complain that the A.A. has deprived you of freedom. It has made you more free. You can drive much more rapidly and securely, knowing that where there are no danger-signals you have nothing to fear. So it is with us in the Catholic Church. We have the truth revealed by God to guide us, and to warn us off dangerous paths. And so we have merely to observe this guidance, avoid the ways marked dangerous, and then use our intellects as freely as we like. And so it is that we appreciate the meaning of those words of our Divine Lord: "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

The Church and Science

"The discoveries of modern science have made it quite impossible for any thinking man to believe any longer in orthodox Christianity." How often we read statements of that kind in our Sunday newspapers and popular magazines. It might be answered very shortly by merely pointing to the fact that, in spite of the discoveries of modern science, a great many "thinking men" do still believe in orthodox Christianity, that is to say in the Catholic Religion. It is very easy to mention the names of a number of men in the very front rank of science, either still alive or not long dead, who are or have been devout Catholics, and that is really a complete answer. If men of our own day like Rontgen, Secchi, Perry, Cortie, Breuil, Windle, Whittaker, and Sherwood Taylor have found no obstacle to their belief in the

discoveries of science, then it is simply a plain fact that these discoveries cannot have made it impossible.

But it is also quite easy to prove the falsity of this statement directly, even to those whose knowledge of science is as limited as that of most of our popular journalists. Of course it is impossible to do so here, in the very limited space at my disposal.

On the whole subject of the relations between science and religion the enquirer cannot do better than consult “The Fourfold Vision” by Professor Sherwood Taylor.

The objection answered

But very briefly the objection may be answered as follows. If you assert that the discoveries of science have made it impossible to believe any longer in orthodox Christianity, you must prove your assertion. And notice what it is that you have to prove. You have to prove that certain facts, demonstrated by science to be facts, show one or more dogmas of the Catholic Faith to be false. There are two points here to be emphasised. They must be dogmas of the Catholic Faith that are shown to be false, for I am not concerned to defend any other variety of Christianity, as I have said before. And secondly, the facts adduced to disprove these dogmas must be facts, proved facts, not mere theories or hypotheses. Facts and theories are very often confused by people who have not learnt to think clearly. But the distinction is of the utmost importance. You cannot disprove anything by merely bringing forward a theory. You must adduce solid demonstrated facts.

Very well, then, I simply put forward the challenge: What proved facts are there, demonstrated by science to be facts, which contradict any dogma of the Catholic Faith? Most people, when faced with this question, will begin talking vaguely about evolution. But what dogma of the Catholic Faith does it contradict? None. It is a dogma of the Faith that all things were created by God. But whether He created all forms of life as they are now, or whether He at first created a few primitive forms, and in the course of ages, by the continual action of His divine power, evolved other forms from them, has never been defined by the Church. The possibility of some kind of evolution was discussed and admitted by Doctors and Fathers of the Church many centuries ago. Therefore there can be nothing in the theory that is contrary to the Faith. And certainly there is no proved fact that is contrary to the Faith.

Early chapters of Genesis

Another common objection concerns the narratives in the early chapters of Genesis. They say science has shown that the account of creation there given is quite inaccurate. But that is not so. All that science can possibly have shown is that these chapters are not to be interpreted literally. But the Church has never held that they must be interpreted literally. From the earliest times there have been all kinds of different ways of interpreting those narratives. They were never intended to give us a strictly scientific account of the world’s beginning. They are intended to teach us certain great truths about God and our relation to Him. And if the account of these things is put in a more or less symbolic or metaphorical way, that in no way interferes with its truth.

Then there is the doctrine of the Fall of Man. This is a favourite objection. “Surely,” people say, “science has conclusively proved that this, at least, is a myth. Is it not true that in all the remains of early man there is no trace of a fall, but only of gradual upward progress? Now, this is a very good example of how people object to Catholic doctrines without having taken the trouble to understand them. Those who talk like this show clearly that they do not know what is meant by the Fall. Briefly, what is meant is that when Adam, the first man, was created, he was endowed with that supernatural life which we call “sanctifying grace,” and that presently, by disobeying God, he lost it. Now, what trace of such an event could you find? Or what evidence could you have that it did not take place? Supposing even that you had discovered the actual bones of the first man, what indication would you expect to find that in the first moment of his creation his soul was in a state of grace, and that a little later he had lost that grace?

But I cannot go into all these questions here in detail. Fuller information must be sought elsewhere. I can merely indicate the lines to be followed in the enquiry. And if the reader will take the trouble to go into it carefully, he will find that every objection can be answered in one or other of three ways. Either it will turn out that the alleged facts are not facts at all, but only unproved theories, or that the alleged Christian doctrine is not a Catholic dogma at all or that the facts have no bearing on the dogma. And so I repeat that there are no facts, ascertained and proved by science to be facts, which contradict any dogma of the Catholic Faith.

What They Have Missed

These are some of the mistakes made by popular writers of today with regard to Christianity. But I find in their writings something much more serious than all these mistakes of detail. And that is, that they have missed the whole essence of it. They have really no notion of what Christianity is. They seem to think that it consists entirely of a number of doctrines concerning God and our relation to Him, together with a very high code of morals, for which some express their admiration, while others regard it as impracticable. Now it is quite true that the Christian or Catholic Religion includes both these things. But they are not the very essence of it. The essence of it is a Divine Gift, a Gift of Life. The earliest name of Christianity is the "Gospel," the Good News, that the Eternal Son of God has come into the world with a gift of Life for men.

Something new had happened

If you read the New Testament, you will find that what the first Christians believed was not merely that they had learnt something new, but that something new had happened. A new divine power, a new divine life, had come into the world through Jesus Christ. They believed that they had received this new divine life from Him. It is the keynote, the central theme, of all St Paul's teaching. "So do you also reckon that you are dead to sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." "Present yourselves to God, as those that are alive from the dead."

Now I live, yet not I, but Christ in me." But it is still clearer in Our Lord's own teaching. He makes it perfectly plain that the purpose for which He came into the world was to give a new divine life to men. "I am come," He says, "that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." "As the Father raiseth up the dead and giveth life, so also the Son giveth life to whom He will." Moreover, He makes it quite plain that He is the only Source of this life; it is not to be had apart from Him, or by those who refuse to believe in Him. "He that believeth in the Son hath life everlasting, but He that believeth not the Son shall not see life." And so He complains to the Jews:

"You will not come to Me that you may have life." That is the essence of the Gospel of Christ, the Gospel, which the Catholic Church has taught from that day to this; that Jesus Christ is the Source of a new divine life to men, a life that we cannot have apart from Him.

The gift lost by sin

But what is this life? And why is it necessary? This also the Divine Teacher makes perfectly clear. Briefly, the facts are these. We are fallen creatures. We are not as God originally intended us to be. God gave to our first parents, Adam and Eve, the gift of a supernatural life, or in other words what we call "sanctifying grace." As the Council of Trent puts it, Adam was "constituted in original holiness and justice." And if he had not lost that gift by sin, not only would he have continued in holiness, but he would have had perfect control over all his faculties; he would have remained free from that weakness and rebellion of the lower nature which makes it so difficult for us to do right, and so easy to fall into all kinds of sin; and that same sanctifying grace would also have preserved him supernaturally from suffering and death. But he did sin, he disobeyed God, and so lost all these gifts. And because he lost them, he was unable to transmit them to us. Consequently we are born in what is called "original sin." That is to say, we are born without sanctifying grace, and all those other gifts which would have flowed from it, and which we should have had if Adam had not sinned. In other words, as St Paul puts it, we are "alienated from the life of God," and utterly incapable by ourselves of attaining that end for which God created us, eternal happiness in union with Him.

Now, it was precisely to restore that divine life to us that Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God, came into the world. And that is the clue to the whole meaning of the Christian or Catholic Religion. It is nothing more nor less than God's way of raising us to a new and higher kind of life, which we cannot have by nature, to which we can never attain by our own efforts. It is a supernatural life, a divine life, a real sharing in the life of God Himself, for, as St Peter says, it makes us "partakers of the divine nature." That is the point that so many people miss. They do not understand that through His Church God offers them this gift of eternal life, which they have not and cannot have by nature. I cannot go into it all here in detail. But, briefly, God's plan, which He has revealed to us, is this. First, God Himself, God the eternal Son, came into the world. "The Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us . . . full of grace and truth." Then He offered that mysterious sacrifice of Himself upon the Cross, to make satisfaction for the sins of men.

The infinite love of God

There we see the infinite love of God taking upon Himself, in a way that is far beyond our comprehension, the burden of our sins. Having died, He rose again from death and ascended to the Father. And so He remains, God and Man, the Source of life and grace to all who will receive Him. Nor is He far away, dwelling in the depths of light inaccessible. For, though He is in heaven, He also remains amongst us on earth, living in the Church which is His Body. I have already referred to this, showing how according to His own promises He remains in the Church and continues to teach, thus guaranteeing its infallibility. But because of His abiding presence the Church is more than a Divine Teacher; it is the living and life-giving Body of Christ. From Him who is the Head, grace and life flow to all the members, and so it is by membership in the Church that we have union with Christ and live in Him. That life flows to us specially through the seven Sacraments, which Christ gave to His Church, for that very purpose, to confer upon us and to nourish in us the divine life. Here and now that divine life, is hidden, working secretly in the depths of the soul, but none the less real, making us new creatures, transforming the soul into the divine likeness, so that when we pass away from this perishing world, we shall be capable of union with God and eternal life in Him.

That is the life which Our Lord offers us. And without it what solid hope to assurance have we? It is curious how many people in these days seem to assume that somehow in the next life, whatever they may do here and now (at least if they make some kind of effort to lead decent lives, and keep the conventions, and are reasonably kind to their neighbours) all will be well. But, unfortunately for them, God's revelation tells us the exact opposite. It tells us that, as we are by nature, we are alienated from the life of God, fallen away from God, with no prospect before us but of drifting away into eternal separation from Him and from all good, into eternal misery, into that outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth, where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched. And it is only through Jesus Christ, by faith in Him, by accepting His gift of life, and following the way of life taught by Him and His Church, that we can be saved from that awful prospect, and enter into that life of eternal joy which God has prepared for those who love Him, and follow in the way that He has shown us.

Some plain proofs

This is the Gospel, the message which the Catholic Church teaches, and which it claims to have received from God. Is it not worthwhile to enquire into the truth of this claim? We do not ask you to take our word for it that the Catholic Religion is God's revelation. But we do suggest that it is worth your while to examine the matter. I have, so far as was possible in the brief space at my disposal, given some very plain proofs that the Catholic Church is the messenger of God to men. Think it over. Do not imagine thoughtlessly that your eternal welfare will take care of itself. You do not behave in that way with regard to the affairs of this life; is it wise to do so in the affairs of eternity? Take some trouble about it. Enquire further. Examine the proofs at your leisure. Examine them with the same care that you give to your worldly business, and pray earnestly to God to help you in your search. Then sooner or later you will see the truth. You will see that the Catholic Religion comes from God, and is the way that leads to God.
