

Chapter V

THE CHURCH

Article XIX

OF THE CHURCH¹

The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ's ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same.

As the Church of *Jerusalem*, *Alexandria*, and *Antioch*, have erred; so also the Church of *Rome* hath erred, not only in their living and manner of Ceremonies, but also in matters of Faith.

IN the New Testament, the Church is conceived of as a building in course of erection,² or, more frequently, as a body, a living growing organic unity of members, a Body of which Christ is the Head.³ Theologians differ as to the precise relationship between the Christian Church and Israel. Some consider it is essential 'to emphasize the freshness of the new start through the new covenant, without denying the continuity of the Christian Church with Israel; to others it has seemed more important to emphasize the continuity with Israel without denying the freshness of the start. The truth appears to be that both are of vital importance, and there should be no question of sacrificing the one to the other: the need is to relate them rightly.'⁴ On the one hand, our Lord regarded Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as members of the Kingdom,⁵ and many of the terms used to describe the old Israel are in the New Testament

¹Another of the Articles of 1553. It closely resembles the definition of the Church given in the Seventh Article of the Augsburg Confession, viz.: 'The Church is a congregation of the saints, in which the Gospel is rightly (*recte*) taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered.'

²Ephes. ii.19-22.

³Ephes. iv.15f.; Col. ii.19; I Cor. xii.27.

⁴Archbishops' Commission on *Doctrine in the Church of England* (1938) p. 100.

⁵Matt. viii.11; Luke xiii.29.

applied to the Church.¹ On the other hand, it is argued that 'the moment we allow the doctrine, mystical though it may be, that "the Church is His Body," we are committed to the truth that the Church, in both its metaphysical sense and its historical sense came into being with the Resurrection.'²

Without entering into the controversy, it may be agreed that our Lord was a member of the nation of Israel, and as such would be conversant with the prophetic doctrine that God's purpose would be fulfilled through a faithful remnant.³ When, in the Garden of Gethsemane, all the disciples 'forsook Him and fled,'⁴ the faithful Remnant was narrowed down to one person, Himself. He is the link between the Old Israel and the New, the Christian Church.

By His Resurrection He revitalized the faith and transformed the lives of His disciples,⁵ and restored them to union and fellowship with Himself. The Church is a Divine Society, the 'new creation' of God in Christ. Having commissioned the Apostles,⁶ our Lord gave the Spirit to the Church at Pentecost. The 'cloven tongues like as of fire sat upon each'⁷ but if each was separately visited, the outpouring was simultaneous and collective; the Spirit was given to the Church as a whole. Thenceforth. 'The Spirit was the corporate possession of the Body of Christ, and it became the property of the individual convert when he became a member of the Church. No man could be Christ's who had not Christ's Spirit, and ordinarily no man could have Christ's Spirit but by being "added" to the Church in Baptism.'⁸

¹E.g., The Church is called 'the Israel of God' (Gal. vi.16); an 'elect race' (I Pet. ii.9f; Deut. x.15; Isa. xliii.20); a 'royal priesthood' (I Pet. ii.9; Exod. xix.6); 'an holy nation' (I Pet. ii.9; Deut. vii.6); a 'people for God's own possession' (I Pet. ii.9 R.V.) Exod. xix.5; Isa. xliii.21; Mal. iii.17). It will be observed, however, that the identity is not complete—the Church, like Israel, is 'an holy nation' not 'the holy nation,' etc. The absence of the definite article may be significant.

²*The Ministry and the Sacraments*, Faith and Order Theological Commission Report, (1937), p. 478f.

³Amos ix.8.

⁴Matt. xxvi.56; Mark xiv.50.

⁵cf. p. 38 above.

⁶John. xx.21.

⁷Acts ii.3.

⁸H. B. Swete, *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament*, p. 307. cf. Acts ii.47.

Christ—the Church—faithful individuals, is the right order of thinking. 'Men speak as if Christians came first and the Church after: as if the origin of the Church was in the wills of the individuals who composed it. But, on the contrary, throughout the teaching of the Apostles, we see it is the Church that comes first, and the members of it afterwards. . . . In the New Testament . . . The Kingdom of Heaven is already in existence, and men are invited into it. The Church takes its origin, not in the will of man, but in the will of the Lord Jesus Christ Everywhere men are called in: they do not come in and make the Church by coming. They are called into that which already exists: they are recognized as members when they are within; but their membership depends on their admission, and not upon their constituting themselves into a body in the sight of the Lord.'¹ 'Being the Body of Christ, it is no self-constituted Society of like-minded seekers after ideal truth or admirers of the prophet Jesus: it is a Society founded and constituted by a now Invisible Head, in whom resides all its vitality, and apart from whom it can do nothing. The distinguishing and confessed characteristic of its being lies in GIVEN-NESS. "When He ascended up on high He gave gifts unto men."²

The Article, like the Bible, speaks only of '*the visible Church of Christ.*' The title, 'the Body of Christ,' is used in the New Testament of the union of all the local churches. But each of those local Christian communities was a visible group of people, with a visible service of admission (Holy Baptism), a regularly appointed ministry, a definite standard of belief, and a visible sacrament of Holy Communion. 'They continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine, and in the fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in the prayers.'³ Such characteristics are marks of a visible society. If the local parts of the Church are visible, the union of those parts must also be something visible. The rules for the exercise of Church discipline, as expounded below,⁴

¹Archbishop F. Temple in his sermon *Catholicity and Individualism*.

²Archbishop J. A. F. Gregg, *Reunion*, p. 3.

³Acts ii.42 (translated literally).

⁴Article XXXIII.

also presuppose a visible Church. Nevertheless, the evidence of sin in the Church and its members has led some men to believe that the Body of Christ is invisible. But the apostolic writers cling to the paradox that the Church both is the Body of Christ and also consists of sinful and fallible members. However corrupt the Christians may be, St. Paul does not suggest that they do not belong to the 'true' or 'real' Church. For instance, there was much sin amongst the members of the Corinthian Church,¹ yet he regards them as being 'in Christ.'² and addresses them as 'the church of God which is at Corinth.' He did not suggest for one moment that the less worthy members of the Corinthian Church were not members of the Body of Christ. In the New Testament there is a looking forward to the glorious Church of the future, but it and the imperfect Church of the present are one Church. The Body of Christ is ONE across the centuries and across the world, for St. Paul regarded schism as 'in the Body'³, rather than 'from the Body'.

The '*faithful men*' who comprise the Church are those who have been admitted to membership by Baptism. They are commonly called 'saints'⁴ in the New Testament, but this has nothing to do with moral or spiritual excellence; it denotes sainthood rather than saintliness, and refers to their new calling in Christ. There are, of course, exemplary and imperfect saints, but both classes are still saints.

Other marks of the visible Church are that in it '*the pure Word of God is preached*', and the Sacraments are '*duly ministered according to Christ's ordinance*'. The two things most feared and abhorred in the early Church were apostasy and heresy, and the '*pure word*' here probably means 'sound doctrine'⁵, the

¹ I Cor. iii.3; v.1f.; vi.6f.

² I Cor. i.30.

³ I Cor. xii.25.

⁴ 'All who have entered into the Christian covenant by baptism are "saints" in the language of the Apostles. Even the irregularities and profligacies of the Corinthian Church do not forfeit it this title. Thus the main idea of the term is *consecration*. But, though it does not assert moral qualifications as a fact in the persons so designated, it implies them as a duty.' J. B. Lightfoot, *Commentary on Philipians* i.1.

⁵ Cf. I Tim. i.10; II Tim. iv.3; Tit. i.9.

Apostolic teaching¹ preserved in the New Testament, Creeds, and historic traditions of the Church. Christ's authority can be claimed for the two Sacraments of the Gospel, Holy Baptism and Holy Communion². Holy Baptism is the indispensable form of initiation into the new status and life of the Church, and the Holy Communion, or Lord's Supper, is the means whereby sustenance for the new life is drawn from its Source.³

Both the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments imply an ordered Ministry. Our Lord calls and commissions the Apostles to proclaim the Gospel,⁴ and an authorized Ministry has a necessary place in later evangelism by the Church: 'How shall they preach, except they be sent'⁵. The evidence of early Church history is that administration of the Holy Communion was confined to the higher orders of the Ministry, Bishops and Priests. It is also required that Sacraments should be administered '*according to Christ's ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same*'. And He commanded that Baptism should be performed with water 'in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost⁶', whilst in the Lord's Supper He used bread and wine, gave thanks for them, blessed and broke the bread, and declared the elements to be His Body and Blood⁷. Even the variations in the several versions of Jesus' words and actions at the institution of the Holy Communion serve to indicate the importance attached to them in the evangelical tradition, and our Article is well warranted in requiring their due observance.

Our Lord intended the Church to be truly CATHOLIC, to 'go into all the world'⁸ to proclaim 'the whole truth'⁹ of the Gospel to 'every creature'¹⁰ and to deal with every type of sin¹¹.

¹ Acts ii.42.

² Cf. Mtt. xxviii.19; Jn. iii.5; Lk. xxii.19; I Cor. xi.23-26; Chap. IX below.

³ Jn. vi.51-58.

⁴ Mtt. x.5-7; Jn. xx.21.

⁵ Rom. x.15.

⁶ Mtt. xxviii.19; Jn. iii.5.

⁷ Mk. xiv.22-24; Mtt. xxvi.26-28; I Cor. xi.23-25.

⁸ Mk. xvi.15; Mtt. xxviii.19.

⁹ Jn. xvi.13 (Greek).

¹⁰ Mk. xvi.15.

¹¹ Jn. xx.23; Mtt. xviii.18.

It is also APOSTOLIC, as having been 'sent'¹ and given its mission and Apostolic Ministry by Him. To these three 'Notes' of the Church, given in the Nicene Creed, the Apostles' Creed adds that the Church is HOLY too. The members of the Church are not yet perfectly holy, but we have the capacity for holiness, for, in the words of the Epistle to the Hebrews, already 'we are become partakers of Christ'² and have been 'made partakers of the Holy Ghost'³.

The doctrine of the Church in the New Testament is in full accord with our own experience. We know very well that we are often unworthy of our high calling as members of the Body of Christ, yet we remain members of the Body unless we wilfully reject the privileges of membership. The Prodigal Son was still a son even when he was in the far country; he did not become a son by his act of repentance. We, in our Baptism, became 'members of Christ' and 'the children of God'. As St. Paul says to the Galatians, 'Ye are all sons of God, through faith, in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ'⁴. We received 'the adoption of sons' in our Baptism⁵, and no subsequent act of ours can confer on us any higher status or privilege. After our Baptism we may, and should as we grow in grace, become more fully aware of the redeeming love of God, and the realization should make us more zealous to serve Him in the fellowship of His Church. But the New Testament knows of no case of a person leaving the Church in order to be saved. On the contrary, those who wanted to be saved joined the Church, as we read in Acts ii.47: 'The Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved'.

That carefulness of statement which is a feature of the Articles appears again in the concluding paragraph: '*As the Church of Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Antioch, have erred; so also the Church of Rome hath erred, not only in their living and manner of*

¹Jn. xx.21.

²Heb. iii.14.

³Heb. vi.4.

⁴Gal. iii.26f.

⁵Gal. iv.5f., Rom. viii.15.

Ceremonies, but also in matters of Faith.' The Church of Rome has admitted many superstitious practices in devotion and ritual, and has added to the Faith such doctrines as Transubstantiation, Invocation of Saints, and Papal Supremacy, and since the Reformation, the Immaculate Conception and Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the Infallibility of the Pope. On the other hand, the Roman Catholic Church accepts the Scriptures and the Creeds, and has the traditional Form of the Ministry. As individual Christians do not necessarily forfeit their sainthood through sins and shortcomings, neither do the errors and corruptions of the Church of Rome deprive her of a place in the Body of Christ.

Chapter VI

THE CHURCH'S AUTHORITY IN DOCTRINE

Article XX

OF THE AUTHORITY OF THE CHURCH¹

The Church hath the power to decree Rites or Ceremonies, and authority in Controversies of Faith: And yet it is not lawful for the Church to ordain any thing that is contrary to God's Word written, neither may it so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another. Wherefore, although the Church be a witness and a keeper of holy Writ, yet, as it ought not to decree any thing against the same, so besides the same ought it not to enforce any thing to be believed for necessity of Salvation.

THIS most important Article asserts the authority of the Church (against those, particularly Puritans, who minimized it), and indicates the limits of such authority (against the Roman Church which exaggerated it). The Latin text indicates an important distinction between the Church's authority in matters of Ceremonial, and her authority in matters of Doctrine: In general, authority is of three kinds: (1) legislative, making laws, (2) judicial, applying and interpreting laws and (3) executive, enforcing laws. The Church can exercise all three types of authority, subject to certain limitations:

The Church has legislative *power to decree (ius statuendi) Rites and Ceremonies*,² which includes revision of her forms of Worship, etc. For instance, she could abolish the use of the ring in the Marriage Service, or make regulations concerning the vestments to be worn by the clergy. Only Scripture limits

¹When first drawn up by the English Reformers, this Article lacked the most important first clause, and commenced, 'It is not lawful . . .' Archbishop Laud was once accused of forging the clause, but he was able to refute the charge by producing four editions published in Elizabeth's reign which contained it. The clause was probably inserted on the Queen's authority, and was ratified by Convocation in 1571.

²A Rite is a Service, a Ceremony is any act accompanying it. But the distinction is not always strictly observed; sometimes the two words are used synonymously.

this authority. The Church may not 'ordain anything that is contrary to God's word written.'¹ Such authority was given to the Church by our Lord,² who recognized the authority of the Jewish Church.³ The Apostles exercised such authority, e.g., by making regulations for the conduct of worship.⁴

When people act together for a common purpose, conformity to a prescribed procedure is necessary. Since the presence of Christ among His followers is specially promised where they assemble in His Name for worship⁵, a fixed Form of Service will help to actualize that unity which their coming together already suggests—that is one of the positive advantages of an Order of Service. On the negative side, it checks the expression of individual partiality and contention, which would be incompatible with seemly proceedings. For such reasons the Rites and Ceremonies used in worship are an important concern of the Church.

There are not many references in the New Testament to details of behaviour in places of worship. In his ruling on the dress of worshippers, St. Paul defends the established practice of his day, and suggests that if anyone disagrees with him in holding that a man's head should be uncovered and a woman's veiled, he is just being troublesome, and has the custom of the churches against him.⁶ Much unbecoming conduct accompanied the observance of the Lord's Supper in the Corinthian Church, which emphasized the social differences among members, and was contrary to the oneness of all in Christ: the Apostle severely rebukes them and promises to put matters right on a future visit.⁷ Clearly St. Paul, as an Apostle and leader in the Church, regarded himself as having authority to intervene and regulate.

¹E.g., the Church may not introduce the worship of Angels, or abolish the use of water in Baptism or wine in Holy Communion.

²Matt. xviii.18 (cp. xvi.19). In Jewish usage 'to bind' = to declare forbidden; 'to loose' = to declare allowed.

³Matt. xxiii.2f.; Luke xvii.14; Matt. viii.4.

⁴I Cor.xi.4f.; xiv.26ff; Cf. Article XXIV.

⁵Mtt. xviii.20.

⁶I Cor. xi.2-16.

⁷I Cor. xi.34.

The considerations recommended in the New Testament for the performance of the Church's services are respect for tradition¹, the fitness of things for edification, and a sense of comeliness and order². Complete uniformity in Rites and Ceremonies is not to be expected among the churches of Christendom; a complete lack of uniformity, on the other hand, can gravely imperil the unity of the Church—a proper balance between the two extremes is essential.

A varying appreciation of forms of art, and different standards of decency and appropriateness,—these are part of the many cultures in which the Church has been planted and has grown up, and the churches of different nations and civilizations have the power to devise such ritual and Forms of Service as they deem will be most effective in presenting the Christian message: that is the important matter. Ceremonies, as the Preface *Concerning Ceremonies* (1549) declares, should be 'neither dark nor dumb', but such as convey their meaning clearly and are least conducive to misunderstanding and superstition.

In matters of faith the Church's authority is more like that of a guardian or a judge. It may be exercised in binding and loosing, that is, in deciding what is lawful or unlawful for the Christian³. St. Paul tells the presbyters of the Church in Ephesus that he had communicated to them 'the whole counsel of God'⁴. He knows that after his departure false teachers will appear, and he exhorts them to be vigilant; they are to feed the Church and resist the seducers by continuing to proclaim the Gospel he had preached. The warning was soon needed. According to I Timothy some of these perverters of the truth, influenced by Gnostic speculations, are known in Ephesus⁵; and there were others who challenged the Church's doctrine in the interests of Judaism⁶. The bulwark against these dangers was the original apostolic teaching which became

¹I Cor. xi.2, 16.

²Ib d. 26, 40.

³Mtt. xviii.15-18.

⁴Acts xx.18-35.

⁵I Tim. i.3, 4.

⁶Gal. i.6, 7; Tit. i.10, 11; iii.10.

the tradition of the churches, and was regarded as the only genuine and authoritative presentation of the Gospel; the Church's leaders claimed exclusive possession of it by right of their appointment: 'But though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach unto you any gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema.'¹

The content of the tradition was the historicity of the life of Jesus, especially His Death and Resurrection, with commentary on their significance. When the tradition was afterwards committed to writing, selections from the collected words of Jesus and an account of the occasions on which they were spoken, were added to form our Gospels. The position of the Apostles² invested their Epistles with high value among the churches, and along with the Gospels, they made the New Testament very much the property of the Church; it was the Church's own record of the Gospel of the grace of God in Jesus,³ written by members for members, and it was for the Church to say what its sacred writings meant. Whenever disputes arose, the Bishop, as head of the local community and successor of the Apostles, was looked upon as the guardian of the Faith, and a decision was sought from him on what the Christian truth was on the questions at issue.

We have seen from St. Paul's Epistles the bearing of tradition on the active teaching of the Church, and now that the tradition has been embodied in the New Testament and become Scripture, it is a matter of the relation between Church and Scripture. And the relation is the same; the Gospel contained in the written tradition governs Church teaching: the Church is 'a witness and keeper of holy Writ, yet . . . besides the same ought it not to enforce any thing to be believed for necessity of Salvation'. When considering Article VI we noted that the Church not only took over from the Jews the Old Testament, but also adopted the Jewish attitude to Scripture. To the Jew the Law was the perfect word of God to man; the Christians of the

¹Gal. i.8; I Cor. xi.2; xv.1f.; II Thess. ii.15; iii.6.

²I Cor. xii.28; Gal. ii.9; Eph. ii.20.

³I Cor. i.4; Acts xx.24.

first centuries had the same idea of finality in the communication of divine truth, only for them it was the revelation of Jesus: 'other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ'¹. It is the office of the Holy Spirit to work on the total Fact of Christ, His teaching, example and work, and lead the Church to new and fuller insights into its inexhaustible meaning. Thus the Church must ever be the teacher and discoverer of the truth which has always been hers in Christ, and never an inventor. All that is necessary for our redemption is to be found there, and however interesting or helpful beliefs and speculations on other subjects may be, they are not to be held essential to salvation.

Thus, the Bible is bound up with the life and witness of the Church. The New Testament books were written by members of the Church; the Church decided which books should be in the Bible²; the Church preserved the Bible by having copies of it made by hand before the invention of printing; the scholars of the Church translated the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament into English, and more recently into almost every known language. Unfortunately these facts are not always acknowledged by those who sometimes use the Bible to persuade people to renounce their allegiance to the Church in order to join some novel sect.

Biblical truth should be seen and taught as a consistent whole; it is not permissible '*so to expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another*'. There must no resort to favourite proof-texts bearing a construction and interpretation they were never intended to support; that is the way of the Church of Rome and the sects. It is the duty of the Church's members, particularly of the Bishops, to safeguard the Faith³ and to preserve her doctrine from diminution or accretion⁴. The

¹I Cor.iii.11; cf. Gal. i.8f.

²At first the selection was made by the Bishop of each church who decided which books would be most edifying, but soon a tradition grew up as to which books were of apostolic origin and should be read. Amongst the books which were not included in the Canon are The Gospel of Nicodemus, The Gospel of Peter, The Epistle of Barnabas, The Revelation of Peter, etc., Cf. *Excluded Books of the New Testament*, p. x.

³I Tim. vi.20; II Tim. i.13f.; Tit. i.9, 13; ii.1, 7; Jude 3.

⁴II Jn. 9.

early Church was suspicious of any novelty, for novelty was often tainted with heresy. The principal object of most of the early Councils of the Church was to condemn heresy and to preserve the ancient Faith. Hence, the words of St. Vincent of Lerins became a rule for testing doctrine: 'We within the Catholic Church are to take great care that we hold that which hath been believed everywhere always and by all men (*semper, ubique, ab omnibus*) . . . and that we shall do if we follow universality, antiquity, consent'.¹ Thus, when controversy arose the Church had to exercise the functions of a judge, and it is this judicial authority (*auctoritatem*) in controversies of Faith that is asserted in the Article. As a judge has no legislative power to create new laws (that is the function of Parliament), but only authority to interpret and apply the law, so in matters of Faith the Church has no power to create new doctrines, but only judicial authority to determine what is true doctrine.²

While the Article repudiates the Roman Church's practice in adding new dogmas to the ancient Faith, by asserting the Church's judicial authority, it repudiates also the ultra-Protestant view that the Holy Spirit in the individual is the sole interpreter of Scripture (a doctrine which has produced innumerable Protestant sects). Article VI limits the Faith to 'whatsoever' is 'read therein' or 'proved thereby', but it does not state who is to decide what is proveable by appeal to Scripture. Article XX is therefore supplementary to VI, for it in fact declares that when a dispute arises as to the correct interpretation of Scripture, the Church has authority to decide the issue. The exercise of private judgement is also controlled by Article XXXIV. In interpreting Scripture we follow the traditional Catholic practice of interpreting difficult passages as they have usually been interpreted by the Church. 'Let the

¹*Commonitorium*, c.2. The general acceptance of this principle in the early days of the Church indicates that the Church then did not claim any power or right of adding to the Faith.

²The Article thus denies the right of even the Church of Rome to add new dogmas to the ancient Faith, such as Transubstantiation (added 1215), Purgatory (1439), The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1854) and her Assumption (1950) or Papal Infallibility (1870).

Scripture, therefore, as sensed by the Primitive Church, and not by the private judgement of any particular man, be allowed and agreed by us to be the Rule of our Faith; and let that be accounted the true Church, whose Faith and Doctrine is most conformable and agreeable with the Primitive'¹.

Article XXI

OF THE AUTHORITY OF GENERAL COUNCILS^a

General Councils may not be gathered together without the commandment and will of Princes. And when they be gathered together (forasmuch as they be an assembly of men, whereof all be not governed with the Spirit and Word of God), they may err, and sometimes have erred, even in things pertaining to God. Wherefore things ordained by them as necessary to salvation have neither strength nor authority, unless it may be declared that they be taken out of Holy Scripture.

In the preceding Article on the authority of the Church we noted the distinction between the Church's judicial authority in matters of Faith, and her legislative authority in respect of Rites and Ceremonies. The Preface *Concerning Ceremonies* (1549) concedes that 'every country should use such Ceremonies as they shall think best to the setting forth of God's honour and glory . . . without error or superstition'. It is generally agreed that, owing to different customs and standards of taste among different peoples, the churches of the various nations must be allowed to decide which Rites and Ceremonies are most convenient and appropriate for use in public worship. Each national church, as the local representative of the one Catholic Church, acts in such matters through its own synods or councils.

^aWm. Payne, Rector of Whitechapel (1650-1696). Cf. further on this point, W. G. Wilson, *Church Teaching*, pp. 30-34.

^bOnly a few small verbal alterations have been made in this Article since its composition as one of the Forty-two Articles, for instance, after 'erred' it had originally 'not only in worldly matters but also in'.

This Article, however, is concerned with General Councils as distinct from local or national synods or councils. A General Council is an assembly of the chief persons, especially the Bishops, in the churches throughout the world for the purpose of determining the truth on subjects of controversy which vitally concern the doctrine and order of the whole Church. Our Lord commissioned the Apostles to 'make disciples of all nations'¹, and promised them the guidance of the Holy Spirit to teach them 'all things'² and to guide them into 'the whole truth'³. The same authority and responsibility for safeguarding the Faith was given to Timothy and Titus and to Bishops generally. But even Apostles could err⁴, and Bishops as individuals have sometimes failed to express the true voice of the Church. Hence the early Church found it desirable to follow the Apostolic example⁵ of summoning Councils representative of the whole Church to decide disputed points of faith and practice.

There was no means of summoning a General Council until the Roman Empire became officially Christian, for only an imperial edict could command obedience everywhere, and provide the facilities for attendance. The first General Council, held at Nicaea (A.D. 325), was summoned by the first Christian Emperor, Constantine, and all the other 'General' or 'Ecumenical' Councils were summoned by the head of the state: the Council of Constantinople (A.D. 381) by Theodosius I; the Council of Ephesus (A.D. 431) by Theodosius II; the Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451) by Marcianus; the second Council of Constantinople (A.D. 553) by Justinian; the third Council of Constantinople (A.D. 680) by Constantine Pogonatus; the second Council of Nicaea (A.D. 787) by the Empress Irene, (which sanctioned the adoration of images and declared the Bread and Wine in the Eucharist to be the very

¹Mtt. xxviii. 19f.

²Jn. xiv. 26; cf. ii. 22; xii. 16.

³Jn. xvi. 13 (GK).

⁴E.g., Peter's vacillation—In Acts xi. 1–18 he justified eating with Gentiles; later he refused to eat with Gentiles and was rebuked (Gal. ii. 11f.).

⁵The Apostles summoned the Council of Jerusalem to decide the vexed issue of the relation of the Jewish Law to the Gospel (Acts xv.).

Body and Blood of Christ). Hence the remark of the 5th century ecclesiastical historian, Socrates: 'We continually include the Emperors in our history, because from the time they began to profess Christianity the affairs of the Church depended upon them, and according to their will the greatest Councils were and are still assembled'.¹

There was abundant precedent in the history of Israel for this relation between the civil and religious departments in the state. It was Moses the leader, and not Aaron the priest, who called together the seventy elders², the predecessors of the standing Council of the Jewish people, the Sanhedrim; David commanded the priests to arrange for the return of the Ark of the Covenant³; and Solomon ordered them to bring it to its place in the Temple⁴.

The Church survived the collapse of the declining Empire under the attacks of the heathen Goths and Franks in the 5th century, and set about converting them. In the work of stabilization and reconstruction that followed, the influence and pretensions of the papacy steadily grew; the struggle for supremacy between Church and State began in earnest, and a decisive event in the conflict took place on Christmas Day, A.D. 800, when the Emperor Charlemagne did fealty to the Pope and received from him the imperial crown. Papal claims were a main issue in the separation between Eastern and Western Christendom in A.D. 1054, after which the West settled down under increasing subjection to the Roman see in the Middle Ages.

But the desire for freedom was not totally crushed during what Luther called the Babylonish captivity of the Church; there was always an underground resistance movement, which occasionally broke into open revolt. Several events in the century preceding the Reformation gave an immense impetus to this spirit: the Greeks with the traditional freedom of their civilization poured into western Europe after the capture of

¹Socrates, *Hist.* v. 1.

²Num. xi. 16.

³Chron. xiii. 1–3.

⁴I Kings viii. 1–6.

Constantinople by the Turks (A.D. 1453); the view was put forward that the earth was not the fixed centre of the universe, but turned on its axis and moved like the stars; most exciting of all, the discoveries of the navigators had proved that there were other peoples and cultures whose existence had never been guessed. The liberating and expansive effects of these happenings were enormous; they powerfully contributed to the intellectual atmosphere of the Reformation age. A new-found sense of freedom was abroad which expressed itself in resentment at papal usurpation and fostered demands for national independence. The Anglican Reformation is the best example of this movement. By abolishing papal jurisdiction and asserting his headship of the national Church, Henry VIII laid the foundation of future ecclesiastical reform.

The Act of Supremacy restored at once the ancient rights of the civil power in Church affairs, and implied a return to the original method of summoning General Councils. At the time of the Reformation considerable effort was made to get a General Council convoked; both Luther and Cranmer appealed for one. Pope Paul III summoned the Council of Trent (1545–1563), but the Reformers did not acknowledge his authority to do so; besides, no representative from the Church of England could have attended without royal consent.

Many Councils have been held, but not all of them are recognized as 'General Councils'. In practice, 'the ecumenicity of a Council depends on the after reception of its decisions by the whole Church'.¹ Thus, the first Council of Nicaea (325) received recognition as 'General' because its decisions received general approval, but the Council of Arminium did not. The Roman Church recognizes eighteen Councils as 'General' or Ecumenical, but most of them (like Trent) were purely Roman Councils and not strictly ecumenical. The Anglican Communion only recognizes the first six Councils 'which were allowed and received of all men'², and the Greek Orthodox Church accepts only the first seven (including Nicaea II) as ecumenical. Article XXI was composed by the English

Reformers in 1552, and was then intended as an explicit declaration that the Anglican Church would not be bound by the decisions of the Council of Trent.

The purpose of General Councils has been to state the Church's belief on disputed questions, and to determine matters of discipline and order. The qualification for this task is not that the members of a Council are the elected delegates of the churches, but that they should be men '*governed with the Spirit and Word of God*'. The supreme requisite is a sincere desire to know and do the divine will: 'If any man willet to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it be of God'¹. Spiritual things are spiritually judged, and possession of the Spirit is the condition for discerning 'the deep things of God'. To have the mind of Christ is for St. Paul the one way of knowing the saving truth which is in Him². As the history of the Councils fully shows, these qualities were not prominent in their proceedings, which were ruled too often by political intrigue and party interests. Composed as they were of fallible men, Councils '*may err, and have erred . . . wherefore things ordained by them as necessary to salvation have neither strength nor authority, unless it may be declared that they be taken out of Holy Scripture*.' We regard as errors the decrees of the second Council of Nicaea (A.D. 787) which sanctioned the adoration of images; that of the Council of Constance (A.D. 1414) withholding the cup from the laity in the Holy Communion; that of the Lateran Council (A.D. 1215), defining the doctrine of Transubstantiation; the belief in Purgatory drawn up by the Council of Florence (A.D. 1439); and the decrees of the Vatican Councils of 1869 (which declared Papal Infallibility), 1854 (declared Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary), and 1950 (declared the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary). None of these dogmas satisfy St. Vincent's Canon as having been believed and taught 'everywhere, always, and by all'.

¹Jn. vii.17.

²I Cor. ii.10–16.

¹E. J. Bicknell, *Introduction to the Thirty-nine Articles*, p. 272.

²Homily *Against Peril of Idolatry*, cf. Article XXXV.

Article XXII

OF PURGATORY¹

The Romish doctrine concerning Purgatory, Pardons, Worshipping and Adoration as well of Images as of Reliques, and also invocation of Saints, is a fond thing, vainly invented, and grounded upon no warranty of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the Word of God.

The significant term for understanding the intention of this Article is the word 'Romish'. It is possible to see behind beliefs and practices like Purgatory, the Worshipping and Adoration of Images and Relics, and the Invocation of Saints some ideas which are harmless and helpful enough; but as developed in Romanism they have been fatally corrupted. And the most potent cause of this corruption has been a wrong conception of merit. According to the doctrine of Purgatory a distinction is to be drawn between mortal and venial sins: the reward of the former is everlasting torment, and lies outside the scope of the doctrine; it is with the punishment due to less serious offences, that Purgatory deals. The Council of Trent affirmed that after the pardon of eternal punishment there still remains 'a guilt of temporal punishment to be paid for either in this world, or in the future in purgatory'². We have already seen³ that the Final Judgement is everywhere in the New Testament associated with Christ's return 'in glory'⁴ when the dead shall rise to be judged⁵. This suggests an intermediate state of existence between death and resurrection.

¹Composed as one of the Forty-two Articles (1553) by the English Reformers, but possibly had been derived partially from the Smalcaldic Article of 1537 which refers to the same errors as 'not grounded on Scripture' and 'most pernicious'. The word '*perniciose*' was in the 1553 Article but was omitted in 1563. The opening words, 'The Romish doctrine', were substituted in 1563 for the original 'The doctrine of School Authors' in the 1553 version.

²Session vi, Canon 30. The only Scripture passages cited by Fr. Bertrand Conway are Num. xx.12; II Sam. xii.13f.; Wisdom vii.25; Isa. xxv.8; Hab. i.13; Rev. xxi.7; II Maccabees xii.43-46; Mtt. x i.32; I Cor. iii.11-15, but none of these passages really supports the Roman doctrine.

³Article IV, p. 42 above.

⁴Mtt. xxv.31-46.

⁵Acts x.42; I Thess. iv.14-17.

Our Lord said to the dying thief 'To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise,' but we have His own assertion that during the period between His death and resurrection He had *not* returned to heaven: 'I am not yet ascended unto the Father', He said to Mary Magdalene¹, and St. Peter believed that at death He went and preached to 'the spirits in prison'². Paradise cannot therefore be a synonym for Heaven. St. Paul did not regard death as severing the union between Christ and the Christian³, but as the entrance into a fuller union with Him⁴. But he regarded the soul, when separated by death from the body, as in some sense 'unclothed' and waiting for the resurrection body 'our habitation which is from heaven'⁵. The Christian waits for a Saviour from heaven 'Who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of His glory.'⁶ But this clearly refers not to the moment of our death, but to the Appearing of Christ. The award of 'the crown of righteousness' is associated, too, with the Appearance; not with death⁷. And the putting on of immortality and final defeat of death is also assigned to the general resurrection at the last day.⁸ Despite difficulties of interpretation in some cases, Scripture suggests that the faithful departed are still awaiting the attainment of their full bliss. There is a belief in an intermediate state of existence between death and Heaven. That belief is expressed also in the Collect in the 1662 Burial Office—still widely in use in the Anglican Communion: 'We meekly beseech Thee, O Father, to raise us from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness; that when we shall depart this life, we *may rest in Him*, as our hope is this our brother doth; and that, at the general resurrection *in the last day*, we may be found acceptable in Thy sight; and receive that blessing which Thy well-beloved Son shall then pronounce to all that love and fear Thee, saying, Come, ye blessed children of My

¹Jn. xx.17.

²I Pet. iii.19; cf. Article III, p. 34.

³I Thess. iv.13-16.

⁴II Cor. v.6-8; Phil. i.23.

⁵II Cor. v.1-4, (R.V.)

⁶Phil. iii.20f, (R.V.)

⁷II Tim. iv.6-8.

⁸I Cor. xv.51f.; Heb. ix.28.

Father, *receive the Kingdom*, prepared for you from the beginning of the world'. Note the marked distinction between 'rest in Him'¹ the immediate lot of the (presumably) faithful departed, and the 'receive the kingdom.' to be pronounced only 'at the general resurrection in the last day'.

Belief in an Intermediate State between death and Judgement, which is a fundamental presupposition of the doctrine of Purgatory, is part of Christianity's legacy from Judaism. For instance, in the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus² our Lord uses a familiar Jewish conception of the next life, according to which there is a division of souls; some are 'comforted', others are in 'a place of torment', and the 'gulf' between them is impassable. The passage on Christ's preaching to 'the spirits in prison' may have a similar background.³ These Jewish elements in the New Testament are all the support that can be derived from it for the doctrine of Purgatory. It is interesting, also, to find that the earliest instance of prayer for the dead for release from sin comes from the Jewish apocryphal Second Book of Maccabees⁴, which the Roman Catholic Church reckons as Scripture, but we do not.⁵

In Christian teaching based on Christ's complete revelation and achievement, the ruling thought is the same for life here and hereafter: the faithful stand in a new relationship to God in Christ now, and after death they 'sleep in Jesus'⁶; for St. Paul to depart from this life is to be with Christ⁷, or 'at home with the Lord'⁸. The evidence of the epitaphs in the Catacombs at Rome to the Christian Hope is at once simple and eloquent: it is either assumed that the faithful departed are in light, refreshment and peace, or their friends pray that they may be; there is not a hint of discomfort or suffering. In the New Testament future punishment is usually connected

¹Cp. Rev. xiv.13, 'rest from their labours'.

²Lk. xvi.19-31.

³I Pet. iii.18.

⁴Maccabees xii.39-45.

⁵Cf. Article VI, p. 47.

⁶I Thess. iv.14; I Cor. xv.6; Rev. xiv.13.

⁷Phil. i.23.

⁸II Cor. v.8.

with the Last Judgement and after, and not with the experience of spirits in the Intermediate State.¹

Acceptance of belief in an Intermediate State (for which there is considerable evidence) is very different from the Roman doctrine of Purgatory. It is important to note 'the clear and important distinction between the Roman Catholic doctrine of Purgatory and a general belief in spiritual progress in the Intermediate State. The latter may be held apart from any thought of Purgatory, for the Roman doctrine is really part of a penal process, the payment of a debt which was not fully discharged on earth, a view based on the distinction between mortal and venial sins. But to carry the penal consequences of sin into the next world is really to deny the fulness and completeness of Atonement and Justification.'² Belief in Purgatory did not become a dogma of the Faith until the Council of Florence in 1439. The Eastern Orthodox Church, while accepting a process of purification after death, protests against the Roman view of purgatory as an innovation unknown to Scripture.

If Purgatory is a corruption of the Scriptural doctrine of an Intermediate State, the second part of the doctrine described in our Article as 'a fond thing' (*res futilis*), Pardons or Indulgences, is closely connected with Purgatory and furnishes a further example of such corruption. Nothing illustrates better the deep moral earnestness of primitive Christianity than its treatment of offenders. Those who had committed grave sins were excluded from the normal life of the Church for periods proportionate to the transgression, and had imposed upon them disciplinary and religious exercises to bring about their recovery. The whole aim of the course of Penance was to induce a sincere repentance, evidence of which was required before offenders were readmitted to full communion with the Church. Such evidence might appear before the prescribed penance was completed; in which case the remainder could be remitted, and the penitent immediately restored to his Christian privileges; this remission of penance was a Pardon or

¹Even in I Cor. iii.10-15 the 'fire' is probatory rather than purgatorial.

²Griffith Thomas, *The Principles of Theology*, p. 302.

Indulgence. Thus, Indulgences were originally only alleviations or shortenings of the terms of penance imposed on offenders. About the 7th century, however, the system of 'Penitentials' developed, whereby an indulgence or remission of penalty could be *purchased* by almsdeeds and gifts to the Church. At the Council of Clermont (A.D. 1095) Pope Urban II promised *complete* remission of penalties to all who would take part in Crusades. Thenceforth a man could purchase remission of the temporal penalties¹ of sin by performing acts of devotion that would be profitable to the Church. But the most serious development was the growth of the idea that Indulgences could be purchased to reduce or wipe out the punishment to be worked out in Purgatory². The Schoolmen taught that in the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross there was infinite merit—more than was required for the salvation of the world. The surplus formed a 'Treasury of Merit' to which was added the merit earned by Works of Supererogation³. The Popes claimed, as having the power of the keys, to be able to use this excess merit to help the souls in Purgatory, and a lucrative business developed in 'Plenary Indulgences'⁴. In A.D. 1300 Pope Boniface VIII instituted Jubilee Years, which now occur every quarter of a century, and bestowed a Plenary Indulgence on all who should visit the churches of St. Peter and St. Paul in Rome during the last year of any century. The abuse of Penance had reached its height when Indulgences were offered for sale; a stock of remission from temporal punishment could then be built up. It is this debased view that underlies Masses for the dead to mitigate purgatorial pains. The development of such mercenary traffic in Indulgences did much to precipitate the Reformation.

The use of carved images, models, or pictures, can be a

¹We have noted the distinction between mortal sin (deserving eternal punishment) and venial sin (meriting only temporal punishment), cf. p. 83 above.

²Whereas guilt (*culpa*) of sin was forgiven in absolution, a temporal punishment (*poena*) was still due, and this punishment must be worked off, if not in this life, then in Purgatory', E. J. Bicknell, *Op. cit.*, p. 286.

³Article XIV.

⁴'Plenary Indulgence' means remission of all purgatorial suffering.

valuable aid to the teaching of religion, as is recognized in all modern systems of religious education. The Jews used images for sacred purposes¹, and the early Christians adorned the Catacombs with symbolic paintings. But there are few traces of the use of Christian statues during the first five centuries. The Greek Church still regards 'images' as a violation of the second commandment and uses only 'ikons'.² In Western Christendom, however, the use of images as aids to devotion developed. Although there was originally no intention of encouraging the worshipping of images, it was difficult for unlearned people to reverence them without developing a superstitious regard for them that, in practice, differed little from worship. Gregory the Great found it necessary to protest against abuses³, and in the East the Emperor Leo the Isaurian ordered the destruction of all Ikons. This led to the Iconoclastic controversy in the 8th and 9th centuries, between the Popes and the Emperors, in which the former generally favoured retention; the latter, destruction of images and ikons. The Second Council of Nicaea (A.D. 787) decided in favour of the veneration of images, directing that they should be 'treated as holy memorials, worshipped, kissed, only without that peculiar adoration (*latria*) which is reserved for the Invisible, Incomprehensible God'. The Anglican Church does not recognize Nicaea II as a General Council⁴. But the Church of Rome has followed it⁵, and has made distinctions between three degrees of reverence: (1) *Latria*, the supreme worship due to God alone, (2) *Hyperdulia*, a degree of reverence due to the Blessed Virgin alone, (3) *Dulia*, the degree of reverence due to the saints and their images. But 'there is no such thing

¹E.g., the brazen serpent (Num. xxi.9), golden cherubim (Exod. xxv.18), etc.

²Ikons are representations of our Lord and of the saints in mosaic or painting.

³Ep. 7. He forbade the worship or adoration of images, but permitted their use for instruction purposes.

⁴Article XXI. p. 135f above.

⁵The Council of Trent decreed: 'The images of Christ and the Virgin Mother of God, and of the other saints, are to be had and to be kept especially in churches, and due honour and veneration are to be given to them . . . the honour which is shown them is referred to the prototypes which these images represent; in such wise that by the images which we kiss, and before which we uncover the head, and prostrate ourselves, we adore Christ, and we venerate the saints whose likeness they bear'. (*Session xxv*).

as a devotional thermometer', and such distinctions are not observed in practice. While the second commandment does not condemn images in themselves, it states unequivocally 'thou shalt not bow down to them nor worship them'.

With every care to avoid overstatement, it remains true to say that in the Romanism which the Reformers knew, the veneration of images and relics, and the adoration and invocation of saints, had reached the stage of idolatry, the horror of biblical religion. The worshipping of relics seems to have grown out of the immense regard for the martyrs, as the account of Polycarp's death would suggest. Concerning the attitude to saints, St. Peter will not allow the posture of worship¹, and in Revelation, with its background of Emperor-worship, the angel forbids St. John to worship him². Scripture and the primitive Church draw the sharpest line between the object of worship and all other being whatsoever; worship is an honour paid to God alone: 'God's laws', writes Theophilus, Bishop of Antioch (A.D. 168) 'forbid not only the worship of idols, but all other creatures, the sun, moon, and the stars, heaven, earth, and sea; and command the worship of the true God alone, who is the Creator of all things'. The great argument of the Fathers for the divinity of Christ in the Arian controversy was that He had been worshipped in the Church from the beginning.

The Council of Trent declared that, 'the saints, who reign together with Christ, offer up their own prayers to God for men. It is good and useful suppliantly to invoke them³, and to have recourse to their prayers'.⁴ But there is no early evidence to support such a doctrine. The Invocation of Saints is an infringement of our Lord's role in the relation between God and Man, and against the uniform teaching of the New Testament and the early Church on His unique mediatorship and high priesthood: 'There is one God, one mediator also between God and men, himself man, Christ Jesus'⁵. 'Every

¹Acts. x.26.

²Rev. xix.10; xxii.9.

³The invocation may mean (1) a simple request to a saint for his prayers, such as 'ora pro nobis', or (2) a request for some particular benefit.

⁴Council of Trent, Session xxv.

⁵I Tim. ii.5; Jn. xiv.6; Heb. vii.24f.

prayer, and supplication, and intercession, and thanksgiving,' says Origen, 'is to be sent up to the supreme God through the High Priest, who is above all the angels, the living Word and God'¹. Neither in Scripture nor in any Christian writing of the first three centuries is there any allusion to asking departed Christians for their prayers. 'The first introduction of invocations to a saint into public worship is said to have been made by Peter the Fuller, the monophysite Patriarch of Constantinople (c. 480 A.D.)'². We reject the practice of invoking the saints to pray for us, for several further reasons: (a) There is no evidence that the saints can hear our prayers. The strongest argument that can be offered is that 'the saints enjoy the vision of God, and as God sees all things they also see them in God as in a mirror'. But that assumption makes God a medium—we pray to a saint to intercede for us; God hears the prayer and tells the saint; the saint then intercedes! In short, God acts as a medium between man and the saint; and the saint then acts as a medium between man and God! (b) There is no evidence in Scripture or the early Fathers that *any* of the departed enter the full glories of heaven and the inner Presence of God until after the general resurrection 'at the last day'³. The souls of the martyrs may be viewed as praying 'under the altar', but that does not mean 'before the Throne'. There is in fact no evidence that they are in a position to intercede for us as yet. (c) If the saints can hear our petitions at any time, and thousands may be continually invoking them, they must share the divine attributes of omniscience and omnipresence! But there is no evidence that they do. We refuse to impose this doctrine on our people by practising invocation of saints in public worship, because it has not been practised 'everywhere, always, and by all' (*semper, ubique, ab omnibus*), and therefore fails to pass that classic test by which Catholic truth is distinguished from error.

Roman apologists are at their weakest in trying to defend

¹*Contra Celsus*, v.4.

²E. J. Bicknell, *Op. cit.* p. 294.

³I Cor. xv.51ff.; Heb. ix.28. This is the view also of Justin Martyr (*Dial. with Trypho*, c.80), Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* v.31), and Tertullian (*De Anima*, c.55).

these accretions to the Faith; verses have been taken out of their contexts and had meanings forced upon them which no modern scholarship would support. The Article gives the simple reason for their impossible task; these beliefs and practices illustrate the declaration in Article XIX that the Church of Rome has erred in matters of Faith, for they are *'grounded upon no warranty of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the Word of God'*.