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"Why I belong to the Church of England"

(Paper read to the Council of Christian Churches, Gisborne, on June 25th by Canon A. F. Hall, vicar of Holy Trinity Church, Gisborne.)

Let me say in the beginning that membership in any church is in the beginning due to two facts—geography and education. I mean this, that if you or I had been born in Spain we would probably have been Roman Catholics—if in the North of Ireland or Scotland, Presbyterians—if in America, well, there would be many choices, from the Mormons at Utah, to the Holy Rollers of wherever it is.

Education also bears a large share in our church membership. If our parents belonged to a certain church and we were sent to their church for our early training, then we would naturally think that that particular church was the one and only, and that all others were heretical and unorthodox. We have only to look at the Seventh Day Adventists to see that. So that membership in any one church in the beginning is not our fault. It may be our misfortune, but in the early years of our life, cannot be altered.

Early Impressions.

Also, let me say this, that those early impressions are usually permanent, and that it is a common experience among clergy that few people change their membership of their church through theological conviction; of course, there are many exceptions, and often much capital is made out of these conversions for propaganda and bolstering up purposes, but the most common cause

of changing churches is to be found through marriage, injured pride, or neglect by the original church officials. Having thus cleared the way, let me revert to the title of my address. There is no defence of the Church of England. She needs no defence and is able to stand on her own feet without fear or favour.

I belong to the Church of England because I believe that she is the English branch of the original Catholic Church that Jesus Christ founded and which began at Jerusalem. She has had a chequered career and her shores are strewn with wreckage, but she has never lost her identity or her Catholicity.

Originally we know that there was only one church, and that the early missionaries founded branches of that one church in the different places they visited. These churches were only divided by geography and not by doctrine. Gradually the chief centre of trade and civilisation and learning, the city of Rome, became the headquarters of the church, but long before this, within 200 years of the Day of Pentecost, and probably long before that, the Christian Church was brought to England, possibly by Joseph of Aramathea, or by one of the early fathers, and there were Churches, Bishops, Priests and Deacons and a flourishing church for 400 years before St. Augustine landed in Kent.

But when he did come, he found that the invasion of the Danes had driven the church into the fastnesses of Wales and Cornwall and that England was populated by people who were not Christian, and so, with the help of missionaries from the Northern Islands of Iona and Lindisfarne, he was instrumental in reconverting England to Christianity, during which time the original members of the church in England emerged from the west and united themselves with the others, so that there was again THE Church IN England.

Augustine was always anxious that the church of which he was the leader, should retain its national independence and characteristics, though she naturally looked to Rome as the titular authority and as being the senior branch and headquarters of the Christian Church. However, during the next 1100 years that authority became more and more dictatorial and domineering, apart from differences in and accretions to the original doctrines of the early church.

The Mind of the Early Church

Various efforts to abate these demands, both theological and financial, were made by the church in England, and dissatisfaction became more and more intense, until, spurred by the example of the Continental Reformation, the church used the dispute between the Bishop of Rome and King Henry VIII to