

# The Faith of The Church of England

## Aim of The Catholic Revival

In the "Church Times" recently was the following unpublished letter from Canon V. S. S. Coles, written in the last war to a correspondent who had inquired about the Catholicity of the Church of England. The letter discusses whether Catholics form a "party" or a "revival," it explains the position of the Church of England and the faith which it is bound to hold, and it shows the difference between Churchmen's fellowship and humanitarian comradeship. All these are subjects acutely apposite to the present time.

You ask me to say something about a distinction I once drew in conversation with you between a "party" and a "revival." You have felt the sting of being told that you only represent a party in the Church of England, not the Church herself, the Church as a whole, and you feel that there may be something solid in the substitution of revival—"Catholic revival"—for party—"Catholic party."

### Parties in the Church.

I suppose the difference is that the party would not expect to gain the whole Church to its side, and the revival does. Party is a word which has a peculiarly disagreeable meaning with us owing to the character of English party government. Logically, a convinced Conservative ought to hope to convince all Liberals, and make them Conservatives, and vice versa. This would be so if the Conservatives were certain that they are wholly in the right. But hardly any members of either party has this conviction. We have hitherto been used to think that the government of the country could not be carried on without two parties, any more than a game of cricket without two sides.

This has led to a great deal of unreality in politics, but it is worse when a like view comes into religion. You will find people who tell you that the three schools of thought, High, Low and Broad, are necessary to the welfare of the Church of England. Liddon used to say: "I pray every day for the conversion of two of them." This perhaps was a characteristically strong assertion, but we may well say that we hope the High, or Catholic, section will in the end include the other two.

Perhaps you may say: "This is not enough; we cannot tolerate the Low

and the Broad for a day: they never ought to have been allowed to exist: they must be exterminated if we are to avoid extermination." If I am to reply, I must ask you to remember two facts, one concerning the Reformation, the other concerning the nature of the Christian religion.

### The Complaint Against Rome.

As to the Reformation. The position of the reformed Church of England certainly cannot be justified unless we have a complaint to make against the Church in communion with Rome. That complaint is that the Pope is looked upon as representing the divine Head of the Church in a way entirely different from any other bishop, that he is, by divine appointment, the Head of the Church, and that membership in the Church depends upon, and is tested by, communion with him.

This complaint against Rome does not necessarily carry with it that rejection of sacerdotal and sacramental religion which has come to have the name of Protestantism. It was natural that when the Papal claim was rejected those who were led to Protestantism by causes partly excusable and partly unbelieving should have given up much that is really Catholic and true, along with what is not so. As we trust providentially, the Reformation in England was saved from the mistakes made on the Continent and in Scotland. No doubt, the leaders of the Reformation in England were themselves very nearly in accord with the foreigners, but they desired to keep in their communion as many as possible of those who, while they were willing to give up the Pope, did not desire to give up the sacraments as before understood, and the priesthood.

With a view to the effort at inclusion, they took pains to preserve the episcopal success, and they so worded formularies that, while presenting at first sight a Protestant appearance, they avoid condemning Catholic doctrine. The Reformed Church of England found herself, when she was excommunicated by Rome, in a position which allowed her members to make the same claim to sacerdotal-sacramental Church life as had belonged for five hundred years to the Eastern Church apart from Rome.

### The Fundamental Truths.

Secondly, besides this fact about the Reformation, we have to remember that there is a distinction between the doctrines which have been guarded against heresy by the Councils which were unquestionably oecumenical, and which were accepted by East and West, and doctrines which, while they can be shown to have been part of the original deposit, have not been defined by Councils whose decrees were accepted by the Church, before the separation of the East and West. When we turn to the history of these doctrines we find that those concerning the Holy Trinity and the Incarnation were defined before the separation of East and West and are enshrined in the Creed as completed at the Council of Chalcedon. In the Providence of God, the faith of the Church in the three divine Persons and the Incarnation of the Son was established before the separation of East and West.

Moreover, it is to be observed that, necessary as the sacraments are, where they can be had, it is the constant belief of the Church that, where the sacraments cannot be had, the operation of the Holy Ghost is effective without them, as especially in the gift of spiritual Communion where sacramental Communion cannot be had.

### "Party" Misleading.

On these grounds, that the necessary rejections of the Papal claim led to an unfortunate but much less than wilfully rebellious rejection of much that seemed to be connected with, but is really independent of it; that there is a distinction between the fundamental truths which have been defined by the undivided Church and other concomitant doctrines not so defined, and that imperfections in matters which are subordinate to the operation of the Holy Ghost are not so serious as imperfections affecting the foundations of the faith: on these ground we feel able to tolerate the imperfections of Protestant teaching, while teaching which infringes the truth of the Creeds cannot be tolerated. We can tolerate Protestants better than Modernists.

Perhaps we may agree that to call ourselves a party is misleading, if by a party we mean a group which, while it expresses a preference for a certain line of teaching, is content that other members of the communion should continue to teach differently. When we claim to be reaping the fruits of an inspired revival we are avowedly trying to bring all who are linked with us to share in those fruits.