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THE  
NEW CATHOLIC CHURCH.

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A CHURCH is not a mechanics' institute, a philosophical society, nor a political association. Its supreme purpose is the public and associated worship of God. With this it may, and should, connect instruction, and works of benevolence. Worship, Doctrine, Work, are three forms in which man's nature expresses itself under the conditions of what we call Church Fellowship. There are a thousand ways of useful activity in the world, and in a certain wide sense, all men and women who are working for the good of mankind (their own included), are members of one great church and holy brotherhood, though they may never have articulated the fact to themselves, and may be unaware of each other's existence. So, too, the Press makes the whole nation into a school, acts as a public *ensor morum*, sparing not the proudest delinquent, and uttering a voice potential for justice to the humblest member of society—the press, that out-preaches the bishops, erects a sort of common pulpit for all who have anything worth communicating to the people. But neither the press, with its myriad voices, nor benevolent societies, in their thousand modes of activity, include *all* that man needs and desires under the idea of a church. The primary want is some common centre where men may meet to worship the great Invisible, feel those spiritual ties that bind them in a common brotherhood, and receive impulse and inspiration to the practice of a pure and elevated morality. Men feel—at least, the nobler minds among them feel—that they need to be led to those fountains of spiritual

light and strength, which are requisite to prepare them for every needed work, brace them for all trial, give them tranquillity amid turmoil, and sustain them to do their duty as under the eye of the Great Work-master. Now, all this is not to be obtained in philosophical disquisitions, however correct and profound; much less in clamorous appeals to the feelings, or in pictures addressed to the imagination, or in the exciting machinery of public meetings, nor is it found even in "the enthusiasm of humanity," however wide and earnest, if it does not arise from a wise and holy love of man as a child of God, with great powers to be cultivated, and a great career to run. Mechanics' institutes, halls of science, "churches of justice," and other well-meant institutions, have gone but a very little way in supplying this deep-felt want of the human heart.

2. A feeling is growing in many quarters that the existing religious organisations do not completely supply what is needed. The feeling is that they are mostly miserable failures, and that something far superior should be devised to quietly take their place. Taking the largest religious body in this country, who can doubt that the formularies and services of the Church, as by law established, fail to meet the intellectual and moral wants of its most cultivated and devout members? Probably the same thing may be said of the leading Nonconformist denominations. And, if our information is reliable, a like state of things exists outside, as well as within, the pale of professing Christendom. Mohammedanism and modern Judaism are passing through a similar phase. Apparently, too, the Brahminism of India has not escaped the wide-spread influence which seems to be taking possession of many foremost minds all the world over. We can report nothing respecting the Confucianism of the countless millions of China—a system which has never risen to the dignity of a religion, but has always reposed on the lower level of a mere ethical preceptory,—many of its principles, however, reaching a high order of excellence. Taking an extended survey of the field of the world, and noting its great religious systems, we should be disposed to say that ancient traditions are losing their hold, old repetitions grow stale upon the ear, and men in many lands, and of many creeds, are dimly groping after something better. Doubtless in due time this grand aspiration will, as heretofore, seek to realise itself in some *new* embodiment.

3. The religious condition of our own country is anything but

encouraging. The Church of England is not what its name imports—the religious home of the people. Great public movements advance without much reference to the teachings of the pulpit. A considerable proportion of the intelligent working people in large towns attend no place of worship; and many of our most profound thinkers and ablest philosophical writers, our Carpenters, Darwins, Faradays, Huxleys, Lyells, Mills, Owens, Spencers, Tyndals, &c., are connected with none of the popular churches. The Dissenting denominations have no greater reasons to boast than the Establishment. Confessions and bewailments of inefficiency are rife among all the sects. They no longer hold the common mind, as in days of yore. Ideas and usages, we know, may be quite suitable to one age of the world, or one condition of society, which are found totally unfitted for another. How shall we account for the decline of clerical influence? Is it that in the march of improvement, the Church has fallen behind the world? Why, for instance, should the chief shepherds of the flock be distinguished by odd dresses, shovel hats, and knee breeches, that may have been the mode in the days of our great-grandfathers? The laying-on of hands has lost much of its mystic significance to us. Ordinary people *will* feel that robes, and ruffles, and gowns, “black, white, and grey, with all their trumpery,” are not vital parts of religion, whatever the Ritualists may say to the contrary. An unhealthy severance, for six days of the week, of a certain order of men from the free air that visits their fellow-citizens, is not favourable to genuineness or strength of character. Neither is there any reason that when they address us, their discourses should contrast but poorly with the “leaders” of the daily and weekly press, or the articles in our Quarterlies, and be set off by an unnatural sing-song, which has been somewhat irreverently termed the “Bible twang.” If we had a really free and national Church, what should hinder our calling in the aid of the sister arts—music, architecture, eloquence, poetry, sculpture, and painting? Our devotional feelings are fostered as we listen to the solemn tones of the organ, pealing through the arches of the magnificent Cathedral, and join in those sublime harmonies, in the production of which genius has spent its highest energies. There seems neither justice nor wisdom in restricting a National Church to certain prescriptive creeds, mutually conflicting, and to a few types of mind, which are not a full and fair representation of the

nation's many-sidedness. In a Church meant for the whole people, and to include the whole nation, all forms of free, earnest, and devout thought should find their representatives. Lord Amberley, in a highly suggestive and original article that recently appeared in the *Fortnightly Review*, writes :—"A body of educated men, not bound to one special cast of religious faith, nor each insisting upon his own creed as the one thing needful; a clergy not purely sectarian, but containing men of opposite modes of thought, yet all contributing to the grand object of instructing, improving, civilising the people; diversity, rather than unity, recognised as the true ideal; above all, individual speculation not forbidden, but sanctioned by the laws. All this is so contrary to ordinary notions of a church, that it is not surprising if many are unwilling to regard it as either possible or desirable. . . . . That venerable dogmas and old supernatural beliefs are everywhere examined, shaken, and overthrown, appears to be generally admitted. . . . The articles remain as they were in the time of Elizabeth, but men's minds are not such as they were then. Thus it happens that the clergy, the representatives among us of the Elizabethan stage in our intellectual progress, are becoming more and more alienated from, and opposed to, the educated opinion of the country. . . . . No National Church could thoroughly fulfil the duties entrusted to it, if such men as Theodore Parker, Emerson, or Francis (William) Newman were excluded from its Ministry. Such a Church, though it might contain many excellent and distinguished ministers, would still remain partial and defective."

But, without attempting to forestall the future or fix the progressive, we ask ourselves whether the principles of a religious organisation may not be indicated, with sufficient breadth and clearness to form a nucleus for many earnest and devout men?

4. It is clear that a long creed, made up of obscure and disputed points of theology, could never form the basis of a grand comprehensive spiritual community. The experiment has been tried in a hundred forms, and has failed in all—ending only in little sectarian bigotry, disunion, and denunciation, and when opportunity served, not stopping short of persecution. The entire notion of dictating a creed as the exposition of all possible truth, the summary of all attainable religious know-

ledge, the *ne plus ultra* beyond which we must not advance, has now become obsolete. It is needless thrice to slay the slain. A Church must be based on something better and broader than any mere string of theological articles, however correct. We must try to find some basis that shall be certain enough, broad enough, and important enough, to unite a vast majority of religious men. If there is to be any union and co-operation at all, there must be *some* principles held in common; similar views, purposes, and aspirations, are needed to fuse men into a Church. But evidently this fusion is not to be sought through the obscure, the trivial, the controverted, the mystical, the undeterminable. Principles held in common, and felt to be grand, true, and important, must lie at the foundation of a Church. Such points as are debated between Calvinists and Arminians could not enter into the creed of a Universal Church. We say the same of controversies touching sacraments and forms of church government. A Catholic Church can make no declaration of preference for Episcopacy, Presbyterianism, or Congregationalism. Men, equally good and sincere, espouse opposite views on such questions as these, which, therefore, do not belong to the essence of religion; nor are they intimately connected with the formation of human character: they are properly left *open* questions. The whole Ritual controversy, which at this moment so agitates the Church of England, would be untouched by our contemplated new Catholic Church; that is, in so far as this is a mere dispute about forms and dresses, and the charmed efficacy of sacraments, it remains a shred of antiquarianism, and cannot prove its title to link itself with spiritual religion.

The acceptance of two simple, practical, but most comprehensive, principles would seem to be enough. All who accept with loving heart the worship of God and the service of man, may be members of one church. They *are* of one Church, even if they own it not—know it not. This is enough to constitute them of one spiritual brotherhood, how much so ever they may differ in all other matters, important and unimportant. This exactly coincides with the teaching of Jesus, wherein he makes the love of God and of our neighbour the sum of all the commandments, the fountain-head and centre of all religion. The teaching of Jesus seems conclusive here. Every one holding and acting on these principles he would have recognised as a disciple, and admitted to his Church. We have his express

authority for saying, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another." By what authority then, have the sects prescribed more than Jesus himself has made essential? We adhere to the Master. Our new Catholic Church shall be co-extensive with Christ's description of religion; its creed shall be simply the love of God and the love of man. Simple, but surely sufficient; practical, as leading directly to worship and work; spiritual, because detached from all ritual and doctrinal matter of disputed theology. Here would be a Church open to all religious minds of every degree of culture. Theists of every clime and name, who accept a benevolent God and a pure morality, might worship together, if not in the same temples, yet with like spirit, One who is the Maker and Benefactor of them all. There is reason to believe that many of the best spirits of all denominations, are verging toward the standpoint we are indicating. Would not this be the very *euthanasia* of sectarianism?—a consummation to be devoutly wished for.

5. Other truths, principles, and doctrines might be held, and would be held, in connexion with the grand and simple basis on which the Church is founded, but this alone would be fundamental and essential. And if thoroughly and heartily accepted and acted on, this would bind men together into a spiritual organisation, such as no mere dogmas or traditional opinions could ever achieve. Instead of being zealous for some excluding creed or *ism*, which is at best but a fragment broken off from the great sphere of truth, men thus minded would cherish the love of truth itself, and in due course would come to prize God's truth, more than their own petty version of it. The study of all God's laws and will, whether written or unwritten, would constitute the delightful and inspiring pursuit of the Church Universal. And a mind aspiring after unison with the Great Mind that animates the universe, would find worship in work, and would be constantly advancing to grander views of creation and of God; and self-culture, and service to man, our brother, would be the embodiment of our love to God, our Father. Does any one fear that these principles would be too vague and too feeble? We believe on the contrary, that when duly nurtured and unfolded they would become the most powerful influences that sway the human heart; for they have the whole universe for their sphere, and for their inspiration the two grandest objects that can be presented to the mind of man

—God, the mysterious and uncomprehended life of the universe, and man himself, with all the high capacious powers that lie folded up within him.

6. We wish to combat the idea, that by leaving open questions we detract anything from Truth, or oppose any obstacle to its progress. Truth claims only an open field and no favour. But, in this our Catholic Church, men might aim at definite convictions, and the clearest and fullest attainable knowledge on all subjects of human thought. No arrest would be attempted upon the fullest and the freest thought, because (even were this desirable, which we hold it is not) no effectual arrest is ultimately possible. But all those other beliefs and doctrines would be distinct from the creed and practice of the Church Universal. A man might believe in plenary inspiration of Scripture, in miracles, prophecies, water-baptism, original sin, a personal devil, and endless tortures; and he might declare, defend, and diffuse them, if he felt them to be important; but he would hold these opinions as his individual convictions only, and not as the faith of the Universal Church. In point of fact, there is no general agreement on such matters as these, but all are agreed on the love of God and our neighbour. In affirming that the obscure and the dubious ought not to enter into the creed of the Universal Church, we are but stating the fact as it is. Religious men do not agree, never have agreed, on creeds of thirty-nine or more articles; on dogmas implying hundreds of propositions, which may be viewed differently by minds differently educated, and at differing stages of culture. We must not then look in this direction for a basis of union. Even if there were agreement on these points, such agreement could minister no spiritual power, could supply no moral strength that is not contained in the feeling, the consciousness, of a living and loving God and Father, a Holy Spirit nigh to all devout hearts that are open to that holy influence. The faith, the trust, in one pure and benevolent God, is the alpha and omega of religion. Special religious doctrines are but deductions from this. A Divine Government of the world, divine forgiveness, the inspirations of conscience, the future life, and every other noble, elevating, and comforting hope of religion, are all deductions from this one principle, amplifications of this one truth, streams from this one fountain,—the heart's repose on the moral character of God.

Let this be our trust, and what need we more, in the way of doctrine, creed, theology? The theological field is cleared of the lumber of a thousand years, and with open eye and unquailing heart we set out on our great quest after the truth of God, to apply it for healing the woes of human kind.

7. In treating all other questions as open ones, we make no attempt to ignore or shelve them; we merely assign to them a subordinate place. But we must lay the rock foundation of our Church Catholic on the love of God and man. This is the force that binds us to God and to each other. Shall we exclude from our Church a virtuous and devout man, who may have historical or critical doubts of the recorded miracles of the past, or who may not have attained to an unquestioning belief in a future life? This would be to repeat the errors of the old manufacturers of creeds. In truth, there are tender and beautiful natures that would not desire a future life for themselves, under the dread condition that millions of the human race, or even that *one* human being, should personally experience the endless and aimless tortures of the Calvinistic hell. Our Free Church must be dwarfed by no little final and authoritative creed, but shall be open to all loving and devout hearts, though they may be in different stages of intellectual and spiritual development, and have as yet taken in unequal portions of the truth of God. We see but in part, and we prophecy but in part. Our Church then shall include men of full-grown faith like St. Paul, who appears to have had no doubts of the immortal life; and it shall also comprehend babes in Christ, who cannot see afar off, and cannot walk alone. Men, indeed, are not to be admitted, *because of* their doubts on these matters of high and disputed doctrine; but they are to be recognised as members of the New Catholic Church, because they have accepted the grand principles that constitute the Catholic faith, the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. But on all other points their doubts shall not exclude them. If in any there be darkness and blankness, this is rather a reason for admission into the Church, that, like the ancient catechumens, they may be instructed, not anathematised; that if there is any light within, they may have the benefit of it; and, if there is no light, that they may at least learn where their knowledge ends and their ignorance begins. It must be frankly and completely understood and acknowledged, that our Church is not an agreement in some stereotyped creed, which has been

embalmed and bequeathed to us from the past, but an association of free and earnest souls, who have banded themselves together to listen to the voice of God, to study the order of His universe, thence to collect His will, and proclaim it, and apply it for the service and blessing of man.

Some earnest enquirer of blameless life presents himself for admission to the Church, but he has not been able to form to himself any satisfactory ideas respecting the authority of the Bible, inspiration, miracles, and a future life. He does not utter himself confidently, as do the ignorant and the presumptuous: he is at least aware of the depth and difficulty of the themes, and he is trying to keep his mind open to the light of heaven, from whatever quarter it may stream upon him. Shall this man be excluded, because he has become aware of the perplexities that have beset the greatest minds that have searched into these high topics? or shall he not rather be welcomed, because he has accepted the grand Catholic faith (grander, nobler, and truer than all disputed theological creeds), the faith which makes us all one in the love of God and our neighbour?

8. The New Catholic Church, the basis of which we have sketched, *could never be at war with science*, as many of our churches are; would never dread the advance of knowledge, as most of our churches do; but it would foster everything that conduces to the world's improvement,—the most extended good of the human race. For no advance of science could ever render doubtful or secondary, the two primal duties of loving God and loving man. Holding communion with a living and loving God *now* and *here*, we could afford to keep the peace upon the records of the past, whose interpretation is often difficult, hardly ever certain, and which, at the best, must be interpreted through our own experience. We can know other hearts and consciences only through our own. Even our conception of the Divine Being is formed by analogy with our own minds; and kindred minds understand each other best. But if we have the living and present experience of the holy conscience, what boots it to wrangle respecting the phenomena of the past, which for us can have no reality and value except in so far as they are repeated or illustrated in our own consciousness. The Church of the Future will not waste its time and temper in disputes about the past manifestations of God, ordinary or extraordinary, natural or miraculous, but standing upon the present realised truth, drinking in the present

actual and efficient inspiration of God, it will go on from truth to truth, and from glory to glory. Accepting religion at first hand, it will generously construe the past; and affirming all truth to be divine, it will be strenuous to take truth itself for authority, rather than, childishly, be running hither and thither to seek authority for its truth. Whatever of true or good exists in any of the sacred books, or sacred literature of the world, could be appropriated and assimilated. We need not ignore any truths that have been reached by the sages of India or Egypt, of Greece or Rome, any more than the grand lessons and principles that come to us through Hebrew bards or Christian apostles. In honouring the Bible, we need not dishonour the Koran. We may generalise the idea of inspiration, and receive the true and divine, if even it visit us from outside the circle of Hebrew prophets, or beyond the limits of the Christian consciousness. In ancient times, the tenets of those called heretics were not always the least elevated or the least Christian. But, it would be the glory of our Catholic Church to recognise the freedom of conscience and the inspiration of God, wherever we find the noble and the true. Each member of our broad Church would freely appropriate, according to his capacity, the spiritual nourishment fitted to his own special wants wherever found. As there would be no authoritative hierarchy, no act of uniformity, no vain attempts to plane all minds down to the same dead level, each section, congregation, or cluster of congregations, would be able to make rules and articles for its own particular guidance; and all would be growing into a grand community, a glorious fellowship of free minds, gladly accepting the accumulating facts of science, which are the permanent revelation of God by which he is ever speaking to all people.

9. An inevitable outcome of our principles is the right, nay, the duty of free thought and the sacredness of the individual conscience. Yet this is a duty which is seldom voluntarily undertaken. Uncultured minds are averse to the labour of thinking, and the weak and superstitious dread the very idea of thinking for themselves in matters of religion. They call it heresy, pride of intellect, carnal reason, while all the time they are themselves employing this same carnal weapon to recommend and defend their own favourite dogmas. In the last result, every man that thinks must depend on his own individual reason,

for guidance toward the true light, just as he follows his own eyes in walking the streets. If he cannot or does not think for himself, at the very least it is by his own judgment that he selects the authorities he shall trust. To talk of carnal ears and pride of eyesight would be just as logical as the talk about pride of reason. It is inevitable that we should see by our own eyes, hear by our own ears, think through our own brain, judge by our own reason, worship according to our own conscience. When we call in the helping counsel of those we deem wiser than ourselves, reason must still decide: we cannot shift the responsibility upon others. Individual reason is the universal starting point, and it is the terminus.

10. Those who understand the principles we are endeavouring to set forth will see that our proposed Church cannot, as a church, descend to regulate and pronounce upon many details that inert and feeble minds might desire to have settled for them without trouble, in order that they might possess them as they take possession of their paternal estates. Whether we are to have prayers written or printed, prepared or extemporised, what are to be the vestments of the clergy, whether our places of meeting shall be in style Grecian or Gothic;—such questions as these, and a whole host besides, must be left for arrangement according to the discretion, taste, convenience, and conscience, of the members in each locality. The Church, as a community, has no judgment to pronounce upon them, because it keeps itself to higher concerns.

11. Work, not less than worship and instruction, will hold a first place in the Church of the Future. Its mission will be to do good, its prayer will be work. Kind and good hearts will find their mission in bringing comfort to the afflicted, health to the sick, relief to the oppressed, food to the hungry, freedom to the captive, knowledge to the ignorant, and reformation to the sinner. For a long time to come the best spirits of the Church may find ample employment in training the young, *especially the most neglected*, and inducing the habits that lead to industry, order, cleanliness, and economy. The existing condition of the dwellings of the poor of London, and of all our great towns, could not endure in presence of a church animated by the genuine enthusiasm of humanity. Their continuance is a standing reproach to our wealth, our intelligence, and our Christianity. To promote public health and education, to forward every-

thing that conduces to the peace and prosperity of nations; perhaps to send out to foreign lands its trained missionaries, not to spread a doubtful theology, but to convey the arts of peace and civilisation to tribes less civilised; and exemplify, by deeds of kindness, the goodwill that man owes to man all the world over: these, and such services as these, will be the chosen work of the Church of the Future. Nor will the great vital questions of the time be deemed too secular for the spirituality of religion. Pure religion and undefiled, established in men's hearts and lives, and not on Acts of Parliament, would be felt as a moral power in the state, —promoting peace, justice, and goodwill to all, rendering legislation wise and humane, and sending the sweet waters of concord over all the earth for the healing of the nations.

12. There is nothing revolutionary or subversive in the idea of the Church which we present in outline. All noble institutions might be linked with it; all earnest workers for human improvement might be included in it, and draw their inspiration from it, and it could never be outgrown by any advance of society. Those whose thoughts run in the old grooves, will take exception mainly to the shortness of its creed, and the breadth of its platform. "It does not affirm enough," it will be said, "it does not dogmatise enough; its materials would be too heterogeneous; there is needed a common and binding creed." And is not the love of God and of our neighbour, a common and binding creed? We challenge the production of any better, broader, or higher. Surely if there were a community animated by such principles, it would be a blessing in the earth! Let the two grand principles—the Fatherhood of God, and the Brotherhood of Man—take root in the mind, and all other truths might follow; only those other truths would not be prescribed by Church enactment, but would prevail by their own evidence, weight, and authority. Whatever is true in them would be taught not *less* effectually, but *more* effectually, than if it were set forth in an authoritative creed or symbol. Such attempts have proved the failure, the weakness, and the ignominy of the old sects and creedmakers. The Church of the Future will adopt no such retrograde policy. The whole range of truth must be left open to the searching, advancing, aspiring mind of man; as the whole starry heavens are open to the sweep of his telescopes. The fear to leave the soul of man face to face with the facts of the universe, betrays a scepticism

respecting truth itself, respecting its reality and safety, which is far worse than any critical doubts regarding ancient documents. Holding absolute faith in Truth and God, the new Catholic Church would close no avenue of knowledge, and bar no approach to God. We have entire confidence that faith, goodness, and right, will gain the final victory over all forms of error, evil, and wrong.

13. Finally, this Church would harmonise with the spirit of pure Christianity. It would worship the Father that Jesus worshipped; it would recognise the human brotherhood which He preached and practised. The principles that supported the virtue of Christ himself would be the pillars of the New Catholic Church. On the disputed points which have divided the Christian world, our Church would leave opinion, criticism, and advancing knowledge, free; the religion which all accept, it would regard as alone essential. This is a doctrine of charity, a ground of liberality, and a condition of progress. While men lay the foundation of their churches in disputable and secondary matters of mere speculative opinion, they find no agreement, no repose, no orderly progress—but suspicion, ill-will, secessions, and an indefinite dread of the advance of new ideas. Taught by past mistakes, let us lay the foundation broad and deep, on principles which *all* religious men acknowledge to be true, important, and catholic; and we shall, however feebly, be building on a foundation which future ages will not desert, but will continue to honour and to crown with new and ever-growing evidences and monuments of man's restless aspiring spirit; amid all his errors, ever seeking the true; and even amid his vices and crimes never falsifying the ancient testimony that man was made in the image of God, and that of one blood are all nations of men.

AMICUS.

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