

### "The Fellowship of the Mystery."<sup>1</sup>

THE Bishop of Winchester wrote to Dean Church, shortly after the death of Cardinal Newman: "You have done more, so much more, than any other one, to carry on and convey to us the touch of his special spiritual and mental power." What Dr. Talbot said of Church may equally be said of Dr. Figgis, who more than any writer of the day stands in the succession to Newman. He shares with him the same personal fervour and force of conviction. He permits his "illative sense" to lead him to certitude, which, however, does not appear to be as indefectible as that of his master, and in his outlook on life and thought we discover many points of contact between the author of the "Grammar of Assent" and the eloquent member of the Community of the Resurrection. We are not, therefore, surprised that one of our leading ecclesiastics not long ago remarked, after the study of "The Gospel and Human Needs": "I seem to catch the spirit of Newman, and to be following the working of a mind very similar to that of the Cardinal."

In some respects the ancestry of both men laid deep their personal conception of religion. Newman was brought up an Evangelical, and in his "Apologia pro Vitâ Suâ" he tells us how deeply he was influenced by the teaching of that school. He became convinced that there were "two, and two only, absolute and luminously self-evident beings—myself and my Creator." Dr. Figgis, too, was trained in an Evangelical environment. His father is a much respected and beloved Keswick leader, who until recently was a minister of the Countess of Huntingdon Connexion. The young man, his son, showed great brilliancy at Cambridge, and attracted the notice of Lord Acton. During his studies "for some time he gave up

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his belief in the Virgin Birth, or, to be accurate, he treated it as irrelevant; but he did not find it so. Slowly almost everything crumbled." He was led to abandon his unbelief, and, after "long years of struggle, pardon was sought in the sacrament of peace." In 1894, at the age of twenty-eight, he was ordained, and it may be truthfully said that he is the strongest and most independent mind among the neo-Tractarian party. He is honest as daylight. His familiarity with the great principles of historical development is as close as his knowledge of detail is striking. He lives in the thought of the twentieth century, and proves in all his books that the literature of the day is his companion, and that he endeavours to keep in most intimate touch with every movement of thought. More important even than this virile intensity of interest in men and women is the fact that he is one of those men who reveal themselves to their readers, and whether he awakens agreement or disagreement he impresses all as a humble Christian who strives to follow truth.

It is not easy to detect the underlying errors of a man who is head and shoulders above his fellows, and whose spirit makes the critic feel that he is as truth-loving as he is learned. Yet Dr. Figgis, in our opinion, has adopted a standpoint and a method of analyzing and accepting dogma that are opposed to New Testament teaching. This, perhaps, may not trouble him. He knows that the New Testament gives us "a single, deep, and massive impression, that of the action of forces best qualified as supernatural." He appears at times to hold old-fashioned views on the authority of Scripture, and then again he startles us with his plea for wide interpretation of the Creeds. He sees the difficulties that many experience. He does not wish to exclude from the Church those who satisfy their conscience that in using the Creeds they are meaning what the Creeds mean—"not necessarily what each item means, but what the Creeds mean as a whole, and as expressing the corporate mind of the Church as interpreted and illumined by all its life and its liturgy, of which they form a part." He will not allow this

wide liberty to "Protestants." "The priest who wishes to act on the principles here laid down can do so only if he is loyal in a high degree to the corporate and social life of the Church—as were the Roman Modernists. Persons who belittle the institutional side of religion hardly seem entitled to put forward this plea of benefit of clergy."

Here we have the touchstone of Dr. Figgis' position. The Church as an institution, with a life of its own—an especial life, communicated by God in a definite manner—has claims on the loyalty of those who are within its borders. They may apply methods of exegesis that are destructive without suffering any great harm, for they are in the stream of exclusive life, and therefore they are not exposed to the dangers that others incur. In other words, the institution stands in the very forefront of importance, and membership of it is a primary condition of fulness of life.

We should imagine that one who lays such strong emphasis on the Church would be able to give us some definite idea of what the Church is, and of its conformity to the mind of Christ. We certainly have attacks on conceptions of the Church that are not in accord with Dr. Figgis' view. He tells us that a man should not discard any element of the traditional practice or theory of the Christian Society unless he has strong grounds for so doing in the face of the "sanction of experience." Later he lays down: "We must be prepared to go to school to the Middle Ages for much devotion, though keeping away from mere superstitious accretions." If these superstitious accretions have the sanction of experience, how are we to avoid them without breaking with the principle he has laid down? The individual is to be the judge when the whole custom appears to have its root in the ecclesiastical development that wrested from its original meaning the plain teaching of Holy Writ and the example of the Apostolic Church.

Then, again, Dr. Figgis is strongly antagonistic to the dogmatism of the Roman Church. He has imbibed the passion for freedom of his old master—Lord Acton. He is sufficiently

Evangelical to know that life is the one thing that makes membership of the Church a desirable possession. Rome "appears to rest upon a false conception of government, derived from the Pagan Empire; to be provincial in her development, while claiming universality; and to be tied to a legalist notion of authority which is less and less tenable." Nevertheless, Rome has found salvation, or, rather, the means of salvation, in the doctrine of Papal Infallibility. This will preserve Romanists from the dead hand of the past—from the error that assails Anglicans when they "desire to glory the epoch of the first four General Councils." In spite of this, he denounces very strongly the spirit of the Papal Encyclical against Modernism—the last exercise of the principle of Infallibility. The Encyclical denied the laity any real right in the Church. The document convicted the Modernists of errors, but "on the ethics of conformity they were in the main right, and were nearer to a true conception of authority than their adversaries." As we reflect on the newly-discovered virtues of infallibility resident in the Papacy, we look back on history and its lessons, and we are convinced that if the Papacy is to be reformed it can only be reformed at the expense of its life. For Rome, Reform means suicide. A reformed Rome is not the Rome of history. Its exclusive claims are as strongly asserted by a Bonomelli when he writes as they are by the Pope.

We gather from Dr. Figgis that he is at war with the conception of the Church that has prevailed since the Reformation among all the Churches of the Reformation. Dr. Barry tells us that the position taken by the Reformers "reversed Catholicism when it recognized that the individual Christian, united with his fellows, made the Church, and not the Church the Christian." Dr. Figgis is one of those men who win respect by avoiding any attacks on the beliefs that characterized their parents and upbringing. He never speaks in any terms but those of "affection and reverence of that Evangelical piety which is to him hallowed by every sacred memory." Nevertheless he strikes hard at the very root-conceptions of Evan-

gicalism, and sets against it a view of the teaching of Christ which is opposed to the principles of Evangelical piety. We may at once rule out of court as proofs of his attack on Evangelicalism his allusions to the acts of Teutonic Christianity, and his remarks on Unitarianized Christianity. We think we see all through the writings of Dr. Figgis the habit of setting up lay figures the antithesis of his own views, and attacking these with all the strength of his learning and rhetoric. When by the *argumentum ad invidiam* he has prepared the ground for attack, and by his brilliant sword-play he has destroyed the object of his assault, he imagines that he has established his own position. Dr. Figgis does not appear to grasp the difference between *contradictories* and *contraries*. He sees all thought in the form of contrary propositions, a positive affirmation or denial; his is an "all or none" attitude. He knows that God does not save us by logic, and he runs into the idea that we are saved by a mediating institution. He rejoices in sacramental blessing, and he will allow very little force as a means of grace to the preaching of the Word. Any man can become a priest provided he fulfils the conditions that will enable him to receive the gift from authorized sources. Only those who have the gift can preach; ergo Catholicism as he conceives it is more democratic than Protestantism.

He somehow does not see that when he limits the grace of the Sacraments to those who receive them from the hands of those who are ordained in a special way he is most exclusive in his pronouncement; and yet we may be wronging him, for he tells us in a footnote that he says "nothing as to the question of the validity of the official representation" of those Protestant bodies which "retain the Evangelical faith." He regards them as sections or guilds of the Catholic Church which suffer loss by their setting "small store by certain parts of the universal cult." He objects in the strongest way to the acceptance of "sacramental grace" as in any way associated with magic. He is very hard on Protestants who scout in its "developed form the idea of sacramental grace as blasphemous superstition."

He forgets that in its "developed form" Transubstantiation is the doctrine so described, and this wonderful change of substance occurs through the work of a member of a caste which alone possesses this marvellous gift! We are reminded that "most of the objections to the Sacrament make valid arguments against the Incarnation, and, indeed, the latter presents more difficulties to the imagination." We are as convinced as Dr. Figgis is of the manifestation of God in the Incarnate Saviour in space in time, but this by no means carries with it the "developed doctrine of the Sacrament," with its view of the change of substance and localized Presence. On no sound logical principle can we argue as Dr. Figgis implies. Of course, if we accept Newman's theory of the "illative sense," and start with certain principles, we can arrive at any conclusion we choose, and obtain that "indefectible certitude" which will resist all arguments. Dr. Figgis is, however, so steeped in modern conceptions, and so familiar with present-day thought, that he states "many of the most devout souls are at this hour torn by fear lest it all be due to self-hypnotism"—the "*all*" here is the fact of Christ!

The experience of Dr. Figgis must have been very limited, or, to judge by his book, his method of appreciating experience must have been very eclectic, when he attacks the doctrine of justification by faith as the fruit of a man who tried to universalize his own "devastating experience" into this article of a standing or falling Church. He says it contains an error of trying to universalize "a religious phenomenon which, though not rare, is not, and is never intended to be, the experience of all Christians." We have never listened to men of weight enforcing the necessity of "experienced conversion." The truth is that to some the consciousness of communion with God is a life-long joy from childhood to old age, to others twilight passes into dawn imperceptibly, and for others conversion is a catastrophic experience. The fact of justification remains, however the great experience may be reached. The root-difference between the Medieval and the Reformed conceptions of the Church

does not lie in the contrast between Institution and Fellowship. Medievalists and Protestants both acknowledge the two-fold aspect of the Church. We must go deeper and ask which of the two is the determining principle, and when we do this we discover at once that the Medievalist places weight on the institution and its officers, whereas the Protestant or Evangelical insists on the presence of Christ in the midst of the two or three who have gathered together in His Name. The fellowship with one another is with and in the Head of the Church, and is not conditioned by the presence or absence of institutional officials, who, however necessary for the well-being of the Church, are not essential to its existence and participation of all vital blessing.

We admit at once that the words of our Article defining the Church appear bare and cold. There is something more in the visible Church than a congregation of faithful men in which the pure Word of God is preached and the Sacraments are duly ministered. There is the "fellowship of the mystery," that inner oneness of life that makes the preaching effective and the ministration of the Sacraments sacramental. There must be life—spiritual life—in the members of the Church, a common life raised to its highest in Him who is the Life of all and in all. In the congregation we have that social aspect of Christianity which our Lord proclaimed to His disciples. He saw that they are one in Him, and He emphasized the fact. We may accept all the theoretical considerations Dr. Figgis lays down on the essential implication of a Society in the character of man. Man was not meant to be a lonely unit: his capacities implicate social life; and in that sphere of life which is the highest of all—that which deals with communion with God—there must be community life, especially when it is remembered that all share the life of God.

This, however, does not carry with it all the deductions Dr. Figgis draws. There is no room for a mediating Church with a mediating sacerdotal ministry in the conception of the Church as found in the New Testament or in the first Christian

centuries. We need not go over the ground that Lightfoot has covered. His conclusions still hold good. Even the writer of the Essay on "Authority" in "Foundations" says: "What the doctrine of 'grace of orders' really stands for is the recognition that the work of the ministry is such as no man could undertake in his own strength, and the belief that in response to the prayers of the Church those commissioned by the laying on of hands are endued with the needed strength and power from on high; upon the principle that no Christian man is rightly called to fulfil duties of any kind without a corresponding endowment of grace sufficient for his needs." Every Christian will agree with this, and the "fellowship of the mystery" is thereby not necessarily confined to those who think in one particular way and accept one particular view of the character of the Church.

We need to look outside the mechanical, and to see that the teaching of Christ is simple when it is understood on the spiritual plane. We cannot possibly avoid in a pragmatic age the Divine test, "By your fruit ye shall know them." The fruits of the Evangelical Churches are to be seen all over the world. Canon C. H. Robinson tells us that, at the rate of progress—alas! he wrote before the war—made by the Evangelical Churches, the number of converts in heathen lands among the Evangelical Churches will in a decade equal those of the Roman Church. We cannot avoid the thought that the soul of the Church is in union with God, free from the outward restrictions of legal enactments, and sustained by the divinely-appointed means of grace. Our Lord read the Scriptures, so did His disciples; our Lord preached, so did His disciples; our Lord prayed, so did His disciples; He instituted two Sacraments of the Gospel, and the disciples followed His example and obeyed His command. The common obedience in the footsteps of the early Church, which those who are in Christ render to Him, springs from the oneness of life; and although we, as convinced Episcopalians, follow the form of government that has history behind it, we do not in thought or act exclude from the "fellowship of the mystery" those who share our essential life, which, after all, is not our life, but the life of Christ.

We are asked, Will not this lead to anarchy and lack of authority to enforce rules essential for the well-being of the Church? We answer, in the first place, that we accept the teaching of St. Paul, that against the fruits of the Spirit there is no law; and, in the second, that, as we exist in an imperfect world inhabited by imperfect beings, we must expect weaknesses and defects in thought and act among the members of the Church, which has its eye on an ideal Church that it has not attained. We do not stand an isolated island in the march of the centuries. We are influenced by all that has gone before, and especially by the model laid before us in the life of the Christ who is the Head of the Body. His authority is the one authority that is supreme; the laws we follow for the disciplining of the members are those that can be derived from a study of what is implicit in the explicit teaching of the New Testament. We remember that life alone makes the institution of value, and that the claim to authority to confine life to certain man-made channels has no warrant in the New Testament. The true Churchman has a vision of the Kingdom of God which he wishes to see fulfilled here on earth. He strives to have the Church governed by the laws of the Kingdom as found in the teaching of its King; and unless the Church reflects the spirit of that Kingdom and its Living Head, then that Church has forfeited its right to exist. We derive our lessons from the story of the past, we obtain our principles for the application of those lessons from the pages of the New Testament, and thus, in the last resort, in spite of all the assaults of modern criticism, in the face of all that has been made of them for the establishment of medieval ecclesiasticism, with its essential narrowness, we are forced back to Holy Scripture as the ultimate authority in determining the conditions on which the "fellowship of the mystery" may be enjoyed in all its fulness, as well as in everything that makes for its essential reality.

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