

quoad Dei potentiam, quae potest mortuos vitae meliori reddere.”

Chrysostom equally speaks of their life as something still future. ὡσπερ γὰρ ὁ Ἀδάμ, εἰ καὶ ἔζη τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἣ ἔφαγεν ἀπὸ τοῦ ξύλου, ἀπέθανε τῇ ἀποφάσει· οὕτω καὶ οὗτοι, εἰ καὶ ἐτεθνήσκεσαν, ἔζων τῇ ὑποσχέσει τῆς ἀναστάσεως. It was a promise of life rather than life itself.

In any case, if this were our Lord's meaning, the passage in Exodus would afford no proof that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are still alive or that they any longer exist. Such explanations as these, which begin by making Christ's reasoning establish more than it fairly does, end by making it prove nothing at all.

But while we deny that our Lord's argument can by any ingenuity be made to prove the resurrection of the body, we realize that by life He meant no mere continued existence, but life in fellowship with God. An existence, removed from God's presence and outside His providence, would have been regarded both by Christ and His hearers, not as life but as death. Our Lord's reasoning shows conclusively that this cannot be the lot of the righteous. They are raised from Hades<sup>1</sup> and rescued from death. Their life is no joyless existence, but life in communion with God.

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### *THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST IN HIS CHURCH.*

WHEN we speak of the presence of Christ it is well to avoid confusion of thought by asking ourselves, What is the sphere or department of being in which we at the moment conceive His presence to exist or operate? Is it the universe, or the Church, or the soul of man?

As the Eternal Word or Reason of God, Christ is immanent in nature: “In Him all things hold together”

<sup>1</sup> Contrast Job vii. 9, Isaiah xxvi. 14.

(Col. i. 17); He "upholds all things by the word of His power" (Heb. i. 3). This divine universal influence is a function that naturally arises out of His eternal relation to God the Father, and cannot be thought to have been diminished by the Incarnation, since the exaltation of man's nature which was effected by the Word becoming flesh does not lower the nature of God with which it has been indissolubly united: nay, if it be not too bold to say so, the Divine Nature has gained, or rather seems to have gained, in sympathy.

Again, we speak of the presence of Christ in the soul of man, whereby that which is of "the earth, earthy," becomes "of heaven, heavenly." This presence is a principle of new life, in virtue of which Christ is in a man and a man is in Christ, so that a Christian can say, "I live; and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. ii. 20). It is in this connexion that the question arises as to the significance of sacraments. Into that question we do not propose now to enter. But one cannot help remarking, in passing, that since sacraments are the ordinary means whereby the incorporation of man with Christ is accomplished, it is much to be regretted that controversy about the sacraments has had a tendency to confuse men's minds, so that while some would locate the presence of Christ in the sacraments, others, as mistakenly, deny that they are in any way means conditional to the presence of Christ in the soul of man.

Disregarding for the present the cosmos of the universe and the microcosm of the individual human unit, I desire in this article to discuss some thoughts which are suggested by the presence of Christ in His Church. It will be convenient to limit ourselves to the considerations which naturally arise out of His own promise in St. Matthew xviii. 20, "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them."

In these days of minute Gospel analysis some perhaps

may be found to question the real relevancy of these words to the matter in hand; and that on two grounds. In the first place, it will be urged, that St. Matthew, alone of the Evangelists, puts the word *church* into our Lord's mouth: here, "Tell it unto the Church: and if he refuse to hear the Church, etc.," and in chap. xvi. 18, "Upon this rock I will build my Church"; and that this fact is merely an illustration of the comparatively late date at which he wrote, when the Christian Church was regularly organized, and of an alleged tendency to edit Christ's words so as to accommodate them to later ecclesiastical needs. Some slight support for this view may be sought in the parallel to St. Matthew xviii. 20, which has been found in one of the Sayings of Jesus, discovered in 1897 by Messrs. Grenfell and Hunt, at Oxyrhynchus in Egypt. The beginning of this particular saying is partly mutilated, but we need not hesitate to accept the restoration of the text as given in Mr. Vernon Bartlet's translation (*Contemporary Review*, Jan. 1905): "Jesus saith, Wherever there are [two, they are not without] God, and [wherever] there is one alone, [I say], I am with him. Raise the stone, and there shalt thou find me, cleave the log, and there am I."

In all probability it will be found that the last clause is a mystical or fanciful allusion to Habakkuk ii. 11, "The stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it." Διότι λίθος ἐκ τοίχου βοηθήσεται, καὶ κάρθαρὸς ἐκ ξύλου φθέγξεται αὐτά.<sup>1</sup> The clause then would be a declaration of the universal presence of life, even under every stone and in every log, and therefore the omnipresence, the immanence in nature, of Christ, by whom every living thing came into being. If this be so, the first clause,

<sup>1</sup> Here, as elsewhere in the Old Testament, the word ξύλον was thought by some of the fathers to refer to the cross on which Jesus was crucified, and consequently the word κάρθαρὸς, scarabaeus, beetle, was taken to be a title of reproach applied to Him. So Gregory the Great, *Moralia*, cap. xxi.

The point is not noticed by Cyril Alex. in his Commentary.

“Wherever there are two they are not without God, and wherever there is one alone, I say, I am with him,” would similarly refer to the presence of Christ, not with His Church, but with every rational being.

If any one should imagine that such was the original meaning of St. Matthew xviii. 20, it is sufficient to reply that inasmuch as in the providence of God the words have been committed to the Church in a certain context, it is plainly His will that the interpretation which they bear in that context should be their lawful interpretation, though possibly not their only one.

It is perhaps significant that the Gospel which alone contains these words opens and closes with declarations of the presence of Christ with His Church. In the birth of the Messiah the Evangelist sees the complete realization of the promise given through Isaiah, “They shall call His name Immanuel; which is, being interpreted, God with us,” And St. Matthew alone records the assurance of the ascending Saviour, “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”

It will be observed that in the verse under consideration the promise of Christ’s presence is conditional. It is not, “Where two or three are gathered together,” but, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name,” that Christ says He is, or will be, with them. His presence is assured, not to any chance assembly of men, but to those “who come together . . . with the mind directed unto, having regard unto, His name” (Thayer).

And so this promise is most suitably called to mind at the close of Morning and Evening Prayer in the Anglican Use: “Almighty God, who . . . dost promise, that when two or three are gathered together in Thy name, Thou wilt grant their requests.” It would be hypercritical to call this reference a misquotation; for although it subordinates, in the practical English way, the giving of worship to the

receiving of benefits, yet the verse which immediately precedes that alluded to undoubtedly connects the presence of Christ in Christian assemblies with answers to prayer. "Again, I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven. For where two or three, etc."

Once more let us look at the context. The verse preceding that just quoted deals with the disciplinary power of the Church. Our Lord is giving rules for a man's conduct when "his brother sins against him." He concludes by saying, "If he refuse to hear the Church also [which has been appealed to], let him be unto thee as the Gentile and the publican. Verily I say unto you, What things soever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and what things soever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." It is not immediately obvious that there is any connexion between this promised future ratification of Church disciplinary regulations and the promised presence of Christ in His Church; but we are warranted in making the one depend on the other by observing that in actual practice the apostolic Church so connected them. When St. Paul is passing sentence on the Corinthian offender he says, "I verily being absent in body but present in spirit, have already, as though I were present, judged him that hath so wrought this thing, *in the name of our Lord Jesus, ye being gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus*, to deliver such a one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh" (1 Cor. v. 3-5). It would be scarcely accurate to say that the words which I have italicized are an allusion to St. Matthew xviii. 18, 20, but they certainly prove that it is in accordance with the mind of the apostolic Church to connect the subject matter of the two verses; so that we may say that the binding and loosing power of the Church, which from the context

seems to refer to the exercise of discipline, is operative when exercised by a body gathered together in Christ's name, and consequently assured of His assenting presence. This is another way of presenting the familiar truth that the Church is the extension of the Incarnation, as being the Body of Christ. We need, however, to be reminded of the qualifying words, "In My name." Christ acts on the world through the Church, but only that which the Church does truly "in Christ's name" can be said to be the action of Christ.

We find, then, that from the context alone of this passage we may conclude that the presence of Christ in His Church is (1) a condition on which united prayer is answered, and (2) the basis and rationale of Church authority in matters of discipline. Let us examine the first of these points a little more closely.

To a man who believes in a personal God, that is, a Supreme Being who has fatherly personal relations with the creatures He has made, prayer not only presents no obvious difficulties, but is the natural and spontaneous expression of desires the realization of which he feels that he cannot accomplish by his own unaided strength. The analogy between the relations of man to God to those of a child to his father makes it easy to understand that trust in the Father of all, and the maintenance of brotherly relations to the other members of the Family, are both necessary if we would expect our prayers to be answered. We might have guessed as much even if it had not been declared by our Lord: "I say unto you, All things whatsoever ye pray and ask for, believe that ye have received them, and ye shall have them. And whensoever ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any one; that your Father also which is in Heaven may forgive you your trespasses" (St. Mark xi. 24, 25).

Faith and charity, then, in the individual who prays, are

a necessary precondition to his prayer being in any way answered ; but when some or all of the children make request to their Father it stands to reason that they must be agreed among themselves, there must be a joint consent in the case of common needs.

“ One the strain the lips of thousands,  
Lift as from the heart of one.”

Whole-heartedness is as necessary in prayer as in praise ; and it may be that it is just the absence of this whole-heartedness in many, perhaps the majority, of those who come together, professedly in Christ's name, that explains why it is that the “ common supplications ” of their lips remain unanswered.

We are quick enough to note, and to act on, half-heartedness, listlessness and apathy in those who ask us for anything. We cannot suppose that God is more easily deceived than we. And yet, is it not true, that in our public intercessions we do not, speaking generally, put a twentieth part of the will power into the petitions that we do into those we make in our private devotions for objects and persons that are really dear to us ?

Once more, the promised presence of Christ where two or three are gathered together in His name has a significance greater, if possible, than the thought of Him, as the elder brother of us, God's children, acting as a prevailing intercessor at the throne of grace, or as presiding in the councils of His Church. The words, “ There am I in the midst of them,” surely ought to produce in our minds, as we engage in public worship, something of the gladness and awe which was felt by the first disciples when the risen and glorified “ Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said unto them, ‘ Peace be unto you ’ ” (St. John xx. 19). Worship is the most natural, as it is the sublimest, attitude of a Christian in the realized objective spiritual presence of

Christ; worship which has a gladness unknown to the self-abhorring prostration of a Job before his Creator, gladness of fellowship and high communion solemnized by the knowledge that He whom we greet is our Lord and our God.

It is not perhaps too much to say that noble and necessary as Protestantism is it has failed to impress on the great mass of Protestants the thought of worship as the primary object of "our assembling of ourselves together." I am, of course, not speaking of the theory of worship as set forth in authorized Protestant formularies, nor am I suggesting that neglect of worship is a necessary consequence of Protestantism; but it cannot be denied that in this particular point we are suffering from an excessive and prolonged reaction from Romanism. We do well to guard ourselves against the Roman error that localizes and materializes the presence of Christ; but Rationalism which takes cognizance only of that which the eye of sense can perceive is at least an equally dangerous enemy to the spiritual life.

The assured fact that "where two or three are gathered together in Christ's name, He is in the midst of them," is one of which we often need to remind ourselves. Even those who "take delight in approaching God," those "in whose heart are the highways to Zion," are sometimes tempted to regard services at which a very few are present—the daily services in some city church, the Sunday services in a thinly-peopled country parish—as matters of small importance. While such miserable congregations, as they are called, are a matter for scorn and derision to the thoughtless and careless, it too often happens that persons who are usually godly in their thoughts speak and act as though a slovenliness which would not be tolerated where there are many worshippers is excusable where there are only a very few. Could we, if we paused to think, dare to speak slightly of those times and places where, if we believe our Lord, His presence is granted in a special way?



This fact alone surely justifies the maintenance, where possible, of a badly-attended service, and dignifies the assembling together of the poorest and most uneducated. It is scarcely necessary to note what a stimulus to hearty and reverent co-operation in prayer and praise this sublime thought can supply to all who are privileged to share in that which is the loftiest attainment of man, the recognition of his Creator.

“Christ! in Thy Name alone  
As sons of God we come,  
Thou mak'st us partners of Thine own,  
And Heaven is now our home.

Through Thee we come, nor now  
Without the veil we stand,  
But boldly enter in where Thou  
Art set at God's right hand.

Then we in faith draw nigh  
Where Saints and Angels meet;  
Come to the throne of the Most High,  
And find a mercy-seat.”

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### *THE ETHICAL TEACHING OF ST. PAUL.*

#### (6) THE ETHICS OF CONTROVERSY.

THERE is a remarkable disparity, the explanation of which is not very apparent, between the place which controversy holds in the pages of the New Testament and the attention given to it in our handbooks of Christian Ethics. Though, as will presently be shown, we owe the very form in which a large part of the New Testament has come down to us to the controversies in which St. Paul was called to bear a leading part, and though Christ Himself was engaged in almost unceasing strife with His opponents, the need and the temper of controversy are questions concerning which our ethical text-books are almost wholly silent. In such