

Ad Fratres¹

Herbert Kelly

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Catholicism offers the plain man an observance, which is at least within his reach, and which has availed to save thousands from that moralist Pelagianism which I take to be the most godless of all heresies. It has been the alliance of sacramental faith with evangelical piety which has made the later forms of the Catholic movement into the most effective religious power today, and yet Catholicism based its rules of observance on the authority and immemorial teaching of the Church. This conception of intellectual submission involves an ideal of a beautiful humility, but it is not especially for those who have been trained in scientific schools. We are bound therefore to sympathise with the aims of the *Lux Mundi* school, even if one feels that it is too evidently in the nature of a compromise to affect the situation very deeply.² It well recognises that there are two elements which want recognising and those who are not inclined to think very deeply, or have given it up in despair, may be content. Few genuine thinkers however are likely to be satisfied with unresolved antinomies, or with balance for its own sake.

This, then, is the explanation of our present position. It is that there is a vast mass of people who are not constitutionally capable of piety or of submission to authority, as these are commonly understood, who have fallen back upon a Pelagian and anti-dogmatic morality.

The real and central hinge of all hope of a religious regeneration which lies in substituting faith as the dominant religious motive instead of feeling. For its object, this must replace the actual power of God in the place of 'piety'; the delight of learning – beholding, obeying in the presence of all the width of its operation – in place of mere enjoyment and possession of a comfortable sentiment within one's own individuality. The first is possible to all men, most of all to the busiest, for it is the guide, the motive, and purpose in what they have to do. The second is a thing apart, belonging to a world of its own, accessible particularly to the more leisured.

While it has been the whole substance of our aim in teaching to show how religion can be brought, through knowledge of the will of God, into effective possession of men's whole lives, all existent clerical training has regarded theology as a technical study. This study to only be pursued as a voluntary and, scarcely necessary, addition after the serious business of education was over, just because it was based on the latter ideal of religion. The result is manifest in all schools alike. The evangelical idea was developed without any philosophic basis, and to this day the growth of any keen study of theology – though real and effective – has been too much cramped by exclusive attention to authority, in the sense of precedent. Philosophy therefore has been left to the latitudinarians who are more anxious to pare Christianity to what they think it ought to be than to learn what it is.

We have therefore suffered somewhat from the suspicions of all schools. The evangelical feels that we are reaching into an atmosphere where he cannot breathe; to the catholic we seem to be abandoning what he takes to be the only safe ground; the latitudinarian resents an invasion of his ground in the name of a faith he thought he had superseded. So far as we ourselves are concerned these objections may not be felt very seriously, but so far as the adoption of our method is concerned, they reveal what is our greatest difficulty – no one knows what we mean by theology.

¹ In this 1906 address to his brethren, Herbert Kelly sets out his (and SSM's) agenda for religious renewal and seeks to show the dangers of individualism. His central message is that humility, faith, solidarity and joy must form the basis for regeneration. God must be worshipped in all things.

² The *Lux Mundi* school refers to the group of High Church Anglicans who followed the tradition of the Oxford Movement in the later nineteenth century. Mainly based in Oxford they included Charles Gore who edited a volume of essays under that title in 1889. The essays take the Incarnation as the central tenet of Christianity and discuss how this informs and shapes all aspects of Christian thinking and life. They aimed to engage with contemporary society and intellectual movements and present the relevance of Anglo-Catholic teaching.

So far what I would maintain is:

- (1) That the religious reformation for which we are all hoping must, like all real and permanent religious movements, be founded upon a new theological principle.
- (2) That this principle must be constructive. Men receive life from the beliefs they gain, not from those they have lost, and in the new state they must seek 'not to be unclothed, but to be clothed upon.'
- (3) Neither of these is the principle to be 'a new thing vainly invented', but 'new' only in the sense in which the teaching or thoughts or ideas of Cyprian, Origen, Augustine, Athanasius or Cyril were new, in which life is always new, growing from the latent seed of the one Sower, having waited for the Spring.

If this be sound, we have so far justified our immediate method, the work of the SSM College, and its second main principle of making theology the basis of clerical education. The incapacity of English men to follow principles or theories of any kind makes them suspicious of theology in any shape, and therefore, not only unwilling to criticise the ground of their action, but also extremely ready to assume motives in us in place of those which they fail to understand. I do not think we have any reason to be astonished at this; there is ample reason to wonder rather at the rapidly growing sense that an education of this kind is right. The theological movement however is an entirely different matter. I would not say that it lies altogether beyond the possibilities of an individual. Wesley is a proof to the contrary. The Oxford Movement was effected by at least a group of individuals. Westcott and Gore have exercised a tremendous personal influence.³ But we must observe, first, that all these men who did so possess a marked and exceptional personal power and, secondly, that the work of those within our own time has only resulted in the formation of 'schools of thought', not in anything national, not in anything we might call a regeneration. The conditions of our time seem to be unfavourable to personal influences. We are all too eagerly sceptical and too 'independent' to follow anyone; too anxious about opinions to be deeply swayed by a teaching.

Men ask: why cannot we do again by Wesley's methods what Wesley did? Why cannot we do again by Newman's methods what Newman did? I answer: nothing is ever done *again*. I ask: is it not possible that something like what Wesley effected, yet in the Church of England, to bring new and untried forces of organisation? There is at least one good reason for hoping as much. Where the strength of feeling has dissipated itself in emotionalism and the strength of teaching in the jangle of opinions, there even more the manifestation of power reveals actuality; and that manifestation is organisation.

Now herein is the wonder, not to ourselves perhaps, but certainly to others. Kelham is to them a very real power; from their way of thinking they assume it must be an individual power. But while I am (as its head) a conspicuous person, they are all as conscious as any of us that my own personal influence, whether as a writer, as a thinker, or as a man, outside our own circle, is just exactly *nil*. In talking to men outside, I can feel the growing sense of bewilderment, the sense of a power they do not understand, but which I know, and which we know, to be the power of an organisation, of a band of men who, not by virtue of opinions, but in the clear simple conviction of what God has given them to know, work steadily in one unity for one purpose.

All modern religion is based on the principle of individualism, and I assert that this is as true of Catholicism as of Protestantism. The demands are different, but the ends are the same. Both agree in the use of the phrase, 'the preciousness of the single soul' and in the duty of moving heaven and earth to make one convert. That the single soul is precious in God's sight we have the express warrant of

³ Brooke Foss Westcott, 1825–1901, professor of divinity at Cambridge University and bishop of Durham. In 1889 he convened a conference which led to the foundation of the Christian Socialist Union. Charles Gore, 1853–1932, bishop of Worcester, Birmingham and Oxford. Founder of the Community of the Resurrection, Mirfield and one of the founders, with Westcott, of the CSU.

Scripture for believing, but we have no less warrant for affirming that no single soul is in a state of salvation so long as it is precious in its own sight. Salvation is, in Scripture, only a salvation of individuals so far as it is a salvation from individualism. There are in the end two things for which a man may live – God and himself. The deplorable thing is that while all religiously minded people recognise that humane ‘culture’ may be only the gilding of that idol of self which remains essentially detestable, they find it much harder to recognise that just the same thing is true of religious culture. Is there an expression of the fundamental basis of religion more false than Newman’s saying ‘God and his own soul’? True religion is forgetfulness of self; faith in God’s will; a purpose in its acceptance; a joy in His operations and in the manifestation of His glory. Its practices are only efforts, exercises, to call the mind back to this central purpose, but its substance is nothing more than to rejoice in God.

I do not want even to seem to criticise religious societies such as Cowley. God has called them and given them their own work. They have done it far better and more successfully than we have ours; but it must be plain that for this which we set before us, this of which we are to be witnesses, a system of perfected devotion, a system involving some specific separation from the normal life of the church is no use at all. We cannot be ascetic. The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and to appreciate, to enjoy, the reasonable pleasure which God gives, are really part of our work and witness. Again, we cannot have a separate life. We are bound to find God’s will where He operates. We cannot seek a separate and distinct work. It is men, it is the Church as made for men, which is our special sphere of usefulness. It is really part of our calling that we should enjoy food, sights, games, that we should be tremendously interested in politics, business; that we should seek the commonest and simplest forms of Church work.

Asceticism, devotion, separation, are all good, for they are witnesses by men of rich spiritual gifts. Sensual pleasure and worldly occupation are not things in themselves good, cannot dominate a true human soul. We are only witnesses that all things are good if God is seen in all. We, being just the commonest possible sort of men, are witnesses to just the commonest and simplest things. Yet we too are separated; we too have our own calling. All true hearts make sacrifice to God. Some have given up enjoyment; some have given up their way of life, some their work. We are too small for great things, but we have been called to give ourselves. Our rule exists but to ensure in us the reality of this one thing. Our life is very plain, but when we get our Sunday breakfast, we make no shame to enjoy it and laugh. When we come to a fast day, there are beans, and we enjoy the contrast and laugh again. In games and holidays, we enjoy ourselves and give thanks to God, and when we come under discipline once more we enjoy our own helplessness and submission and laugh also. God’s will fulfilled in the knowledge that it is always good.

I am a soldier, and I speak as a soldier. In two ways an army may be lost; if it breaks up, or if it takes refuge in a fortress. Bit or little, advancing or standing fast, it is always a power to be reckoned with so long as it holds stubbornly together and keeps the power of moving in the open field. The Prussians, beaten at Jena, broke up to make a disgraceful peace. The Australians at Ulm fell back on their fortifications – to lay down their arms. In 1813 the allies beaten at Bautzen and Lutzen would neither break up nor seek their own safety, and shortly after they destroyed the Napoleonic empire at Leipzig. But if my military lessons do not commend themselves, then I speak as a priest after the fashion of a priest.

In the way of Thy judgements, O Lord
Have we waited for Thee,
Therefore have I set my face as a flint
And I know that I shall not be ashamed.⁴

⁴ Isaiah, 50: 7.