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1790

Fourth Thousand.

The Conservative Power + of Catholicity. +

BY

CONDÉ B. PALLÉN.

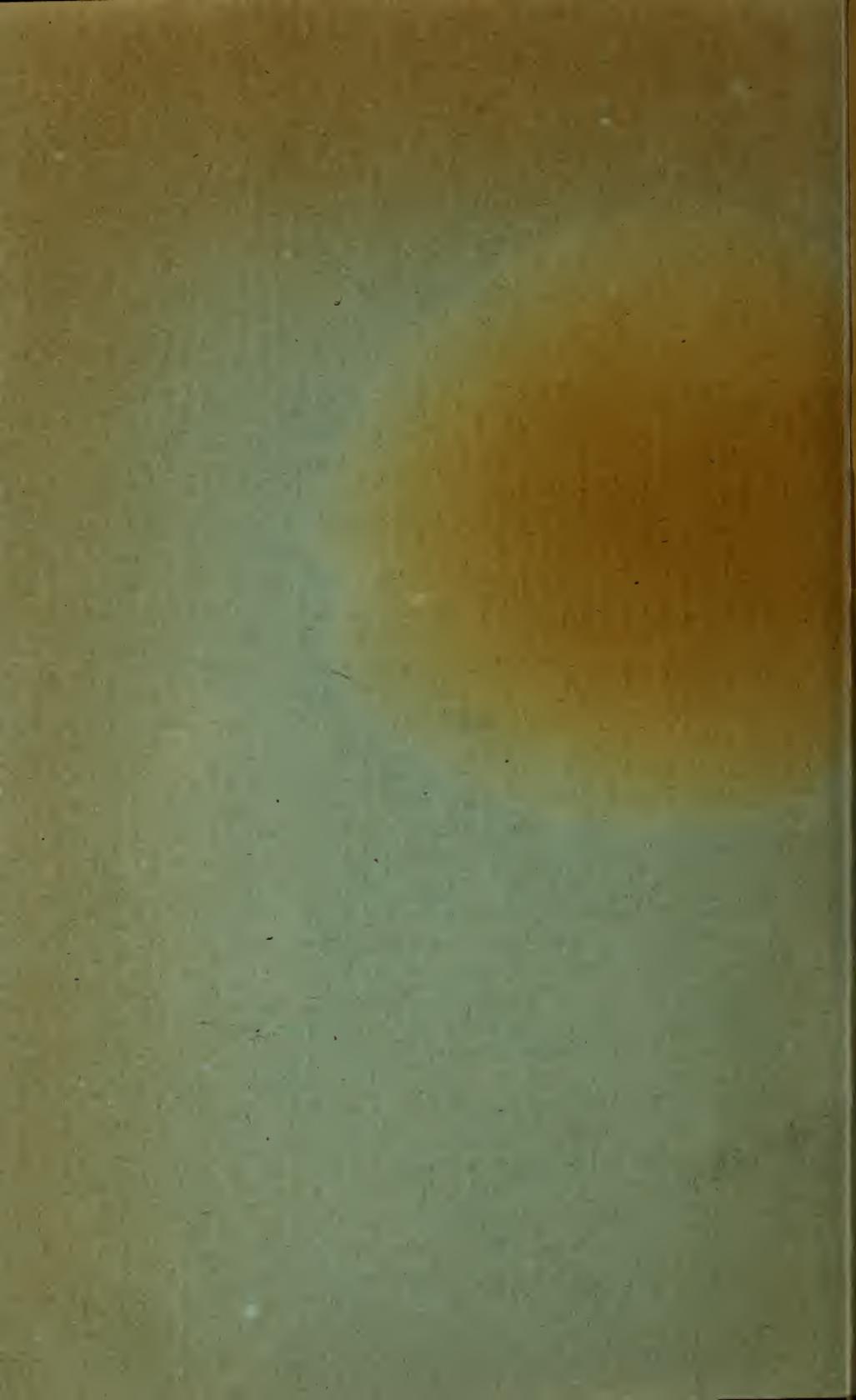
"Omnia in ipso constant."—ST. PAUL.



THE CATHOLIC TRUTH SOCIETY
OF AMERICA.

Pamphlet No. 14.

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA.





THE
Conservative Power of Catholicity

BY
CONDÉ B. PALLÉN.

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"Omnia in ipso constant."—ST. PAUL.
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The principle from which anything springs is the principle through which it is conserved. The world's civilizations, varied at different epochs, have had their root in principles as different as the fruits they have borne. Wherever we look in the history of the nations, we find the creative the conserving principle. The fruit of that principle has ever been in proportion to its virtue. When a civilization decays we may be sure the virtue of its principle is exhausted. Hence do empires and peoples perish: the conservative power, which lies in the virtue of the principle, whence their life is derived, has weakened; the vigor of the social body ebbs; the political structure decays.

Civilization is a comparative term. Its antithesis is barbarism, and as the latter has its degrees so has the former. Civilization has a general meaning within whose limits is ample margin for many differences. In its range may be included the decadent Turk and the ascendant American, the somnolent Egyptian and the keen Frank. It covers, in a general way, all men living in polities according to established law, association and custom. But the character of the polity may be as different as the faces of men from the swart Ethiop to the fair Saxon. The civilization will depend upon the

character of the polity, and that character upon the principle which animates the social body.

India dreams in sluggish passivity; its civilization is rooted in Nirvana, eternal nothingness. Egypt, like its mummies, sleeps in death; it has fallen a victim to the riddle of the Sphinx, What is life? As long as Egypt sought to solve that riddle it grew. When it gave up the struggle, it built the Pyramids—dumb monuments of an unanswered question—and died. China, clamped in the iron bands of meaningless ancestral customs, the worshipper of a past that forgot to look to heaven and so grew rooted to earth, is now a synonym for stagnation. Like the feet of its women, its civilization, swathed in compressing bands in its infancy, has never grown beyond the diminutive. The Turk proclaimed Allah and his prophet, enforced the law with the scimitar, swept Asia and Northern Africa, and only stopped when his crescent, emblem of a creed failing in the fullness of truth, waned on the shores of Europe before the cross, emblem of the plentitude of truth in the Triune God of Christianity. The African mocked paternal authority, and became a savage. He was never a dweller in cities. He knew no civilization. Greece built its civilization upon its traditions of human beauty; it rested satisfied in the enjoyment of mere physical beauty. But it never aspired. It built a parthenon; it could not build a Gothic cathedral. Its human ideal realized in its ideal polity, Athens, it retrograded into a luxurious self-complacency. It contemptuously distinguished between Greek and Barbarian. The foundation of Roman greatness lay in an insatiable ambition for universal dominion. The Roman State fulfilled its destiny. It conquered the world, but it did not transform it. It imposed the Roman yoke upon the nations, but left them as it found them, Greek or Scythian, Jew or Egyptian. It attained universal dominion and then passed into the dust of history. Its principle, whence sprang the prowess and the genius of its arms, was universal but not eternal. Rome could be nourished only by victory; with a conquered world at its feet it no longer had soil whence to draw sustenance. Its

military virtue departed, Rome no longer conquering became the conquered.

With the decline of Roman greatness we witness the planting of another principle of civilization in human history. Up to this time all civilization had been special, peculiar to a certain race or nation. Even Rome, though exercising universal rule, left the peculiar civilizations of conquered peoples intact. Rome's universal dominion was but the mechanical shadow of the universal brotherhood established in the Fatherhood of God through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Rome conquered the world that Christianity might unite it. Rome erected the scaffolding, universal but temporary, which Christianity used in building up the church, universal and eternal. Where Cæsar once ruled through fear, Christ now reigns through love. Roman civilization was builded on the genius of war, Christian civilization on the genius of peace. Where ancient civilizations still linger you find stagnation and death.

The Orient rejected the cross and still dreams in hopeless inactivity. The West accepted the cross, and now inherits the earth.

In a broad sense the world is the subject of two civilizations only, Christian and Pagan. Between ancient Paganism and Christianity there is the sharpest distinction; between ancient and modern Paganism there is none, unless in degree of degradation. Paganism divided races and peoples, Christianity has united them. Paganism was disorder and discord; Christianity is order and harmony. Take the nations within the domain of Christendom and how nearly the same they are! Take the nations within the domain of Heathendom and how widely distinct they are! Christianity introduced a new principle of civilization into the world. The civilization developed by the Christian principle is unique, as sharply distinct from modern Pagan as from ancient Pagan civilization. Whence that vast difference, whence that power of transforming the world?

The civil or political conditions of a people spring from the principle that informs or animates the social

body. This principle always takes its character from the religious life of the people. In other words, the civil life of a people is fashioned upon the conception which men entertain of their mutual duties and rights. These duties and their co-relative rights, based upon this conception, will constitute social life; and these rights and duties in their turn are founded upon that ultimate conception which man has of his position in the universe of things, upon his relation to that universal power greater and outside of himself. Immediately out of this springs his religious life. As he estimates his own position in the universe and his relation to that other power, so will he conceive of his obligations to society, that is, to his fellow-men.

Now man has universally and always conceived of a power other and greater than himself, which controls the universe and to which he himself is subject. The character of this conception has ever shaped his religious life, and, as an inevitable consequence, his social life.

In the pagan world, ancient and modern, this conception of man's relation to that other power is to be characterized by a single word—pantheism. Pagan man has always conceived of the Supreme Power as the animating principle or soul of the world, united with it as the human soul with the body. He has always confounded God with his creation. To the conception of a personal God, distinct from, and independent of, this universal framework of nature, he never attained. Logically then, in identifying the divine essence with the universe of creatures, he looked upon himself as an essential part of the divine totality. Logically enough, denying personality in God, he never rose to the conception of personality in himself. Humanity as a whole he regarded as the highest and completest external manifestation of the in-dwelling soul of the divinity. The individual, therefore, a mere fleeting particle of this divine essence, rises for an instant bubbling to the surface and sinks again, lost hopelessly in the deep.

In social life, therefore, as a natural deduction from

this religious aspect of human life, the individual had no greater stability or dignity. He was a mere ephemera brought forth and lost in the twinkle of an eye. As an individual he had no value; as a particle in the life of humanity he counted for nothing. In civil life the same depreciation of the individual necessarily followed. From this pantheistic conception of the individual's utter insignificance sprang the political principle of the entire pagan world—the supremacy of the state. As the individual counted for nothing in the universe of things, so he weighed nothing in the balance of civil life. As Panthiesm annihilated him in religious and social life, so its effect carried into political existence nullified him. Hence we have what we call pagan civilization. Here we find men living in polities according to established laws, association and customs. But in pagan civilization we find no recognition of individuality or of personal liberty. Paganism created the Supreme State. It produced citizens, not men.

Such was the character of the world's civilizations at the time of the coming of Christ. With our Lord a new manifestation of the relation of man to God was made, and this manifestation changed the entire basis of the world's civilizations. It revolutionized man's religious, social and political life. Before this the end of the science of government had been the State itself. The Christian principle reversed the order—the end of the science of government is to be henceforth the welfare of the individual. Where the citizen was of no value he now becomes of the highest value. It is this extraordinary, we may say supernatural, valuation of the individual that has produced Christian or modern civilization, and this through the revelation of the new relation which Jesus Christ established between man and God.

The new revelation showed that between God and the world (identified in the confusion of the pagan mind) there is an absolute distinction in essence, that the world is the creature brought into existence out of nothing by God the Creator. This fundamental truth

the whole ancient world, except the Jews, had lost. This new knowledge of the relation of the creature to the creator, put the creature on an entirely new basis of existence. It humiliated him, but in the humiliation exalted him, as his pride in the pantheistic conception had puffed him up, and in the puffing up had degraded him. Pantheism had flattered him into the delusion that he was a part of the divine essence, a particle of that eternal flame animating the world. But that particle immersed in matter had only a transitory existence apart from the universal soul. At death its pseudo-personality was extinguished. The individual was re-absorbed into the universal being, whence he had emerged, for a brief moment, to play a part on the world's stage. Hence the latin word *persona*, meaning a mask worn by the actors in a play, came to designate what we, with an immeasurable difference in the conception, term personality. In the pagan sense personality conveyed no deeper signification than the passing characterization of a part in a play. This conception was fatal to the dignity and integrity of human nature. At one stroke it leveled human life to the plane of mere animal existence. It denied the value of the human person, and so left the individual the ephemeral victim of Fate and the State.

The Christian teaching humiliated man by making him the contingent and dependent creature of the Creator's will, brought out of nothingness and sustained in existence every moment by that same will. It destroyed the delusion that he participated in the divine essence itself. But in place of this pseudo-divinity, which inflamed only to degrade him, it taught that man was created in the image of his Maker in order, in the consummate design of the Divine Mind, to dwell eternally in the fullest possession of his own human personality face to face with Infinite Perfection. Without losing his own individuality man is to find perfection in the possession of God Himself. In the recognition of his own nothingness is he to find the means to the fullness of existence; in his humiliation, his exaltation;

in his impotence, his strength; in place of an impersonal immortality he finds an immortal personality.

This new basis of human existence so accentuated the value of the individual, so exalted human nature, that it completely reversed the relation of the citizen to the State. The old civil order had held the citizen to be a mere citizen. His social existence was moulded upon civil ideals. His domestic life was subordinated to civil ends, and became a mere means to civil development. The supreme law, the Supreme Good, was the State. The individual was ephemeral, the State enduring, for whilst the individual perished, the State lived on.

The new revelation declared eternal opposition to this doctrine. Domestic is prior to civil society. Civil society is a means to social and individual development. The supreme law is not the State, but the salvation of the individual. The State is the ephemeral, the individual the eternal element in humanity. Human nature becomes precious, because human personality has become immortal. The individual lives forever and uses the transitory years of this earthly existence to prepare himself for a fuller and completer life in a higher and sublimer sphere. In the light of this doctrine this world with all its belongings becomes simply a means to human perfection in another. Hence arises that inherent right of the individual to personal liberty in order to attain that essential end of his being. No longer a mere citizen, his social existence is more than his civil, and his individuality, founded in a personal immortality, more than his social existence. Human freedom is established in this teaching and in this teaching alone. Take it away and the entire fabric of modern civilization falls, for this doctrine constitutes the absolute difference between the pagan and the Christian conception of civil society.

Before the advance of this new doctrine the old civilization necessarily disappeared. Rome, in the order of providence, had prepared the way for the spread of the new revelation, whose fundamental principle was the very antipode of its own. Rome, above all other an-

cient nations, signified the supreme State and held the individual to be of no value, save as a means to the Roman Imperium. Christianity declared against this doctrine of absolute civil supremacy by exalting the individual, even in the person of a slave, immeasurably above Roman right or might. It taught not only the equality of men in the fraternity of Jesus Christ, but declared their immortal destiny, to subserve which was the purpose of all civil power.

Under the pressure of this new principle in human life the fabric of the old civilization gave way; not at once, but by degrees came the change through the slow processes of toiling centuries, clogged with the debris of the ancient world and choked with the raw material of barbarism. Out of this prolonged struggle, not yet over, has issued what we call modern civilization. The nations not within the scope of the action of this Christian principle have remained pagan, what they were two thousand years ago, save where the impress of Christian peoples from without has irritated them into a superficial activity. We have seen that the principle which creates is the principle which preserves. The principle which has created modern civilization is Christianity. It was the translation of Christian doctrine into civil life which built, and is yet building, up our present civilization, a civilization whose keystone is personal liberty. We have seen that the view which men take of their relation to that other greater power than themselves, a view essentially religious, determines their conception of their relations to each other, and so, constituting their social, shapes their civil life. Civilization is simply the condition of the human polity determined by the principle which informs and animates man's social existence. Religion, or man's conception of his relations to God, whether he conceive God to be the world's soul or not, is therefore the root of all civilizations. Properly speaking, there are only two religious theories in the world—Pantheism and Christian Theism. Pantheism begets Polytheism; Christian Theism, Catholicity. Pantheistic civilization in political life is equivalent to the Supreme State; Christian

Theism in civil life is equivalent to personal freedom subserved by civil law.

The history of Christianity is well enough known but not always well enough understood. Christianity is immutable in itself, but its history is a development. In itself it is a fixed and established system of doctrine from the beginning, yet from the time of its foundation it has been a steady growth. Its immutability consists in the established body of the universal and eternal truths which it has always taught; its development and growth in the deeper and completer comprehension of these teachings by the nations, and in the constantly widening results of these teachings in moulding human society and building up the modern Christian polity. Its effects are plainly visible in the structure of all modern civilizations. To subtract those effects would be to take all the coloring and perspective out of the picture. As in the natural landscape both perspective and coloring depend upon light, so in this picture of modern human society both depend upon the illumination of the Christian dispensation. The sun of this dispensation is the doctrine of the Incarnation.

It will be observed by those who are familiar with the history of the Church, that every attempt to change one iota of her doctrine, by forces either from within or from without, has always been met with strenuous and successful resistance. No matter how fierce or prolonged the effort to shake that doctrinal base ever so little, it has stood immutably secure. In the four first centuries especially, the doctrine most vigorously and persistently assaulted was this doctrine of the Incarnation, either in the shape of the denial of the divinity of Christ or in the denial of His humanity. Around this impregnable rock raged the ancient heresies with malignant obstinacy. That doctrine is the sum and substance of Christianity. It is the foundation rock; to shake it would bring down the entire Christian fabric in ruins. Hence the invincible stand of the Church upon this unyielding base. To yield aught here was to yield all. Want of faith in this at all, was want of faith in all.

The onslaught made at that time on the doctrine of the Incarnation was the concentrated forces of the whole pagan world. Pagan civilization felt its danger in the presence of that doctrine, the lever destined to lift the world from the ancient abyss. The struggle was fierce and long. It was a battle of giants. The Titans were again storming heaven. Ancient paganism concentrated all its strength in that effort, and lost. The doctrine of the Incarnation remained intact; Christ is God, consubstantial with the Father; Christ is Man with the same essential human nature as ours. In this contest the intellectual pride of man met with an overwhelming defeat; the personal liberty of man with an invaluable victory. In this struggle the dignity of human nature was rescued from the ancient degradation. For the Catholic victory established three important truths, around which our modern civilization has gravitated as its proper center:

I. In teaching the doctrine of the real distinction of the person of the Father from the person of the Son, it laid the basis of the doctrine of human personality, unknown to the ancient world and revealed to men only in the person of our Lord.

II. In defending the doctrine of the essential human nature of Christ, assumed by the Second Divine Person of the Blessed Trinity, it lifted human nature from the slough into which Pantheism had sunk it, and gave it an incomparable value.

III. In defending the integrity of the divine-human nature of Christ, Man and God at once, it established the principle of the brotherhood of men through Jesus Christ, our Brother, in God the Father.

In these truths do we find the motive principles of our modern civilization, and these truths essentially depend upon the doctrine of the Incarnation. Deny that doctrine and you deny them all. If you deny that Christ is consubstantial with the Father you deny His Divinity; therefore God did not become man. If you deny that Christ possessed a real human nature, you deny His Humanity; and again, therefore, God did not become man. If you thus deny that God became man,

you deny the revelation through which we have learned the distinction of persons in God, and as the human intellect only knew the nature of personality in the light of Christ's revelation, you deny the divine personality altogether, and thus fall back into the pantheistic confusion of identifying the world with the divine essence. As a consequence you deny, as the pagan world did, human personality.

Eliminate this doctrine from the life of the world and the modern order is reversed, the pagan disorder returns. What then becomes of the personal liberty of the individual? Upon this teaching the doctrine of immortality rests. Christ came to save each and every man born into the world, not the human race collectively, but every individual distinctively, and that salvation is to be found not here but hereafter. Paganism knew no such doctrine. It knew no personal immortality. The dim and confused phantoms of the future which it vaguely strove to picture were shadows not substance. If the individual existed hereafter at all, he was a mere shadow of himself. Death deprived him of the substance of life, and the future, if any, was an empty phantasmagoria. The shade in Hades was a mere reflection of the lost body, a faint mimicry, not a substantial soul, essentially existing. Christianity on the contrary taught, on the foundation of the Incarnation, that existence in this life is the shadow, the future the substance. Not here but hereafter is the fulness of life. The individual is neither swallowed up by death, nor loses himself in this reflection of an empty self, but, freed by death from the bonds of sense, dwells forever in the freedom of a liberated essence. God being infinitely personal cannot absorb the individual into his own essence. The individual being personally immortal cannot pass into nothingness. Destined to be united to God without becoming identified with him, he dwells in the eternal possession of Infinite Perfection.

Here, for the first time in the history of the world, the complete value of the individual is declared. His personality is established. His personal destiny is

beyond all imagination. Nor all time nor all space can contain or equal that destiny. Time and space are for him the transient stage of a probationary life; they are the stepping stones to higher things. Therefore all the institutions of time and space are only the established means to his eternal end. Their purpose is for his use in the light of that end.

As this doctrine is the very antipode of the pagan principle of civilization, Christianity necessarily developed another and different order of civilization. In the pagan state the true order of the universe was reversed; eternity was made subservient to time; in the Christian state that order is restored; time is made subservient to eternity. Without that order freedom is impossible. Without the Christian state liberty has no guaranty.

Such is the principle, essentially religious as we have seen, upon which our modern civilization is built up. This is the only principle by which that civilization can be preserved. The Catholic Church alone teaches and preserves that principle. Hence the Catholic Church is the true conservative power in our modern civilization.

Let it be noted that the point of assault, made by dying Paganism upon Christianity, is the very same point against which reviving Paganism now directs its attacks—the doctrine of the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. What is vulgarly called modern thought has concentrated itself upon the denial of the very doctrine whence we have seen our present civilization to have drawn the spirit of its existence, the Incarnation. The new Paganism, as the old did, finds in this doctrine the one insuperable barrier to its progress, and, with the instinct of hate, battles against it with all the powers at its command. It needs no demonstration to show that the modern movement in the intellectual world has borne directly against Catholic teaching, and it is equally clear that this movement is the outcome of Protestant religious thought. Modern infidelity and the modern movement are synonymous. The sects, lamentable divisions and corruptions of Christian truth,

must bear the odium of the parentage of modern infidelity, which has now arrived at the open, bold and unhesitating denial of the Divinity of Christ. It strikes first and directly at the basis of Christianity, the doctrine of the Incarnation.

Protestanism has neared the term of its complete disintegration. It has no positive and definite standing, shading off at one extreme into downright Agnosticism, at the other vainly striving to become Catholic without accepting the Church. It no longer possesses a creed, much less a dogma. Its beliefs have long ago been threshed out into mere attenuated opinions. It has now become simply a brief passage from Christianity to infidelity. Its final terms are two, Agnosticism and Positivism. These two in their last analysis are one. Both deny God. In their practical resolution they are atheisms.

Agnosticism is essentially anti-religious. It denies what men, at all times and the world over, have held to be a fundamental religious truth, that between man and God there exists a conscious relationship. The establishment of religion at all essentially depends upon the conviction that men can in some way communicate with the Deity. Agnosticism tells us that God is not only unknown but unknowable; that any relation between man and the unknowable is unthinkable, much less practical. Such a doctrine strikes at the very basis of any religious life. It atheizes mankind. How radically this teaching is opposed to Christianity is evident when we reflect that the basis of the latter is the doctrine of the Incarnation, wherein it is laid down not only that God is not unknowable, but has actually manifested Himself in the flesh and dwelt amongst us. It is on this basis, as we have seen, that the whole structure of our modern civilization has risen up. Upon this personal revelation of God to man the personal liberty of the individual is founded. Agnosticism denies even the possibility of such a revelation. At best it makes God a universal Force, with which we can come into no personal or conscious relation. We are the product of its blind energies. It is impersonal;

therefore, so are we. Carrying this teaching into social life, men become the mechanical products of Force, as mechanical as any other material phenomenon in the universe. The individual is nothing more than a temporary crystallization or rather balance of irresistible powers for a moment centralized in him. Personality and freedom are chimerical; the words expressing them mere euphemisms for Fate.

In Agnosticism, therefore, we find no element making towards the conservation of modern civilization. We discover on the contrary, a principle, which, if applied, would destroy it root and branch. Its theory is as radical as paganism. Practically it is the same thing, for in the denial of a personal God it destroys our conception of human personality and therefore of human freedom. As this conception has become the animating principle of modern civilization, Agnosticism cannot be its conserving power.

Positivism is Agnosticism softened down. It is Agnosticism with a halo of sentimentality thrust upon it. It has accepted the premise laid down by Agnosticism, that God is unknowable, but it has inconsistently denied the latter's conclusion, that, therefore, religion is impossible. The harsh mechanical character of Agnosticism has appeared repellent to it. With its sentiment has been stronger than logic, and feeling the necessity of worship in the human heart, while denying God it deifies man. It is the rebellion of the heart, feeling the necessity of religion, against the treason of the intellect, denying its possibility. Striking God from the universe it puts man in His place. It is the worship of an undivine humanity. The human race, past, present and to come, is the object of its adoration. Humanity is the product of the intangible energy laid down in the Agnostic premise. The race, not the individual, Positivism deifies. In the individual, for the short moment of his existence, certain race qualities may burst into blossom, making him, for the time, an exceptional manifestation of the best in human nature. But these qualities are not the fruit of his personality; they are simply the outcome of social forces, combined

momentarily in his transient character. Such a principle destroys personal liberty; it sinks the individual in the ocean of humanity. Translated into civil life it denies personal freedom.

Into one or the other of these camps the modern world is fast dividing itself. Protestantism has no anchorage against the flood. A matter of private opinion, it has no creed, no dogma. In its essence a denial of religious authority, it possesses no authority against this irreligious denial. Agnostic or positivist the modern world is fast becoming. Agnosticism is indifferentism; Positivism, sentimentalism on the same foundations. Both deliberately ignore God. Both deny the divine personality, and therefore man's personality. The outcome of Agnostic or Positivist principles in civil life is the Supremè State. Both are resuscitated paganism. If either or both ever become the animating principles of social existence we shall again see the pagan State.

It is only in the Christian teaching of the Incarnation that we find the principle of modern civilization, and, consequently, of its conservation. On its doctrine of the manifestation of the personality of God, and of the infinite distinction between God and the world has been established the doctrine of personal liberty. In the light of this teaching the individual becomes of first importance, and his life is invested with a tremendous value and a superb dignity as the vestibule of Eternity. The Catholic Church alone teaches the doctrine of the Incarnation dogmatically and authoritatively. Excepting in her fold that doctrine is being denied outright by the modern world. The denial of that doctrine has thrown the modern intellect into confusion and consternation. Man no longer knows himself, because he has renounced the knowledge of God. Except in the Catholic Church this divine and human knowledge is clouded and obscured, and we find the question being asked on all sides, what is man, whence is he, whither goes he, and, what is worse, no answer is given. The modern confusion has again introduced the darkness of the pagan intellect. If this modern darkness were to

prevail, we would once more fall back into the pagan state. The Catholic Church alone, with all the plenitude of divine authority, proclaims and propagates the eternal truth of the Incarnation. With her alone this doctrine is a dogma. With her it is the foundation stone of all Christianity. Not only does she teach this dogma, but she perpetuates the divine fact on her altar in the Eucharistic presence. All her liturgy, all her art, all her ceremonial, radiates from and centers around that divine fact—God made man and dwelling amongst us. That fact is the principle of her existence; for from it she comes and to it she always returns. Without it she would perish, as without it would perish modern civilization. As she alone conserves the principle of that civilization in the dogma of the Incarnation and in its perpetuation on her altars, only through her power of conservation in that first and final doctrine will that civilization survive the storms of modern paganism.



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