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THE SPIRIT AND FORMS OF PROTESTANTISM

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CHAPTER X - The Catholic Church necessary to the full flowering of the principles of the Reformation

The title of this chapter may sound like a deliberate paradox. None the less, it expresses the conclusion to which all the preceding logically leads, if our study, as we hope, faithfully corresponds to the reality in all its aspects. It will be useful at this point to go back, step by step without deviation, over the way we have gradually cleared through the entanglement of controversies, of systems, of numerous schools of thought and spirituality.

We began by affirming that the essence of Protestantism lies, not in any negation, but in certain great positive assertions of Christianity. That is the standpoint from which the great principles of the Reformation must be interpreted, those we see present in Protestantism as lived, those we find immediately we seek, in the abundant production of the Reformers, what they considered essential. Next, we established that, from this point of view, the principles of Protestantism are not only authentically and essentially Christian, as is shown by revealed data, but also that they are corroborated by Catholic tradition, not only prior to but subsequent to the Reformation.

The question then naturally arose: how could a reform which set out from such principles end in schism, even in heresy? We answered that, in the actual development by the Reformers of these principles, there were inserted at the outset negative elements having no intrinsic connection with them, in fact, in formal contradiction with the Scriptural teaching the Reformation claimed for itself. These negative elements, [232] we established, were the presuppositions of the nominalist thought of the fifteenth century, that is, of what was the worst of all the too real corruptions of medieval Catholicism. Brought up on these lines of thought, identified with them so closely that they could not see beyond them, the Reformers could only systematise their very valuable insights in a vitiated framework. Actually, not one of the errors the Church was led to condemn in their teaching was of their own creation; extrinsic justification, faith shut up in subjectivism, purely negative transcendentalism (God beyond reason and morality, or rather beyond the true and the good), the flat opposition of the authority of Scripture to that of the Church —there were so many theses of nominalist theology which had up to then escaped condemnation, simply because they did not leave the sterile playground of the dialectic of the schools. The Reformation, however, to its misfortune as much as the Church's, brought them out into the pulpit and the public square.

This connection of the principles of Protestantism with the worm-eaten framework of a decadent medievalism, far from serving them, simply suffocated them, as we saw from the history of Protestantism from its second generation onwards. In orthodox Protestantism, which only systematised the unfortunate statements uttered by the Reformers under the stress of a too hasty polemic, what, with Luther and Calvin, had been the source of a real spiritual renewal, became a yoke effectively stifling all spiritual life. The misfortune is that, when the inevitable reaction occurs, as long as one maintains the alternatives created fallaciously and develops the principles on nominalist lines, it is impossible to oppose the fatal negations of orthodox Protestantism without denying or misunderstanding what was wholly positive in it. This alone accounts for the strange paradox that the Reformation, begun to extol the work of grace, arrived at a Pelagianism never

equalled before; begun to exalt the sovereignty of God, arrived at an immanentism absolutely closed to all the transcendent (strangely enough, not without getting rid of that spiritual liberty it had wished to promote, as Catholicism had never done); begun to establish beyond dispute the divine authority of Scripture, ended by reducing it to a purely human document and by denying even the possibility of revelation.

In view of all this, it seems to us evident in itself, and confirmed by history, that returns to Protestant orthodoxy or to an uncritical adherence to the principles of the Reformation as expressed by the Reformers, cannot possibly resolve the crisis of the internal conflicts of Protestantism, but only accentuate it. For, if the whole evil arises from the bond forged, unawares at the outset, between the positive principles of the Reformation and the negative elements which had nothing to do with them, to return to this bond, and attempt to tighten it still further, could only result in bringing back to its starting-point an evolution, necessarily disastrous, and to make it more fatal than ever.

On the other hand, we have seen that if Protestantism has been able to retain and renew its vitality, that was due to a series of 'revivals' closely related to one another, which succeeded in some degree in separating the Reformation principles from the conceptual mould in which the Reformers had begun to encase them. However, in view of the traditional and Catholic nature of these principles in their original tenor, it was impossible to do this without at the same time, even unconsciously, drawing nearer to Catholicism. We have seen that this was in fact the tendency of the revivals, that it was furthered by all that remained of Catholicism in the Protestant tradition, and that it ended up, in some of their most distinguished exponents, with a genuine rediscovery, at least part, of the Catholic Church in its essentials.

Arrived at this point, we came up against the reply of Barth. It ignores, or tries to, the historical criticism we made of the principles of Protestantism, not in themselves but in their formulation from the sixteenth century onwards. [234] None the less, confronted with the undoubted trend of Protestant revivalism towards the Catholic Church, and moved by the obvious degeneration of the revivals into a natural religion, either rationalist or sentimentalist, the school of Barth rejects both Protestant pietism and Catholicism. It denounces, in fact, both of them as victims of the same error that lies at the root of liberal Protestantism, that dechristianised religion; namely, the denial, though concealed, of really gratuitous grace, the confusion of the work of God with the work of man, the setting of man in the place of God.

The only way of meeting this objection is to examine the idea of Catholicism considered to be self-evident, according to which it either denies or misunderstands any grace worthy of being so-called, the sovereignty of God and the unique authority of his Word, and is at the same time an organism designed to destroy the liberty of the children of God. In discussing this objection, we shall at the same time be discussing the idea that the Protestant revivals, in drawing near to Rome, betrayed the true principles of the Reformation.

We hope to be able to show, on the contrary, that, in the view of Protestant prejudices which Barthism merely intensifies, Catholicism in so far as opposed to the principles of Protestantism, only opposes a systematisation of them that rests on fallacies and leads to their destruction. In reality, the real tenets of Catholicism, if seen as they are and not through a distorting lens, bring the Reformation principles the support refused to them by the structure actually made for them, and which it is bound to go on refusing so long as it is not itself reformed, that is, until the decision is made to return to those essentials of the Church it caused to be misconstrued and rejected. If this is the case, the instinctive orientation of the revivals towards the Catholic Church, so far from being a betrayal of the Reformation, is a sign of a more perfect allegiance to it. We shall be led to conclude that complete allegiance would bring about in its full splendour the Reformation only begun, would bring in that way a reconciliation between the Protestant movement and the Church, in a Reformation at last achieved.

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In the Protestant preconception, first expressed in the *De Captivitate Babylonica* and reaching with Barth its ultimate development, Catholicism is the negation of the *sola gratia*, in its account both of the source of salvation and of its effect. It sees the Church substituting for grace the action of man, in the sacraments which work *ex opere operato*. At the same time, in canonising saints and, in particular, attributing to Our Lady certain special privileges, it is said to canonise human effort and to ascribe to the merit of man the salvation that is a pure gift of God.

On the first point, it must be obvious that the prejudice is such that it makes the phrase concerned say exactly the opposite of what it really means. Yet, as regards the sacramental doctrine and practice of Catholicism, it is so deeply rooted that no Protestant controversialist, Barth less than anyone, takes any serious trouble to verify it. It is taken for granted that *opus operatum* means magic, man claiming to subject the divine power to his own will. The thing is taken as self-evident and anything Catholics may say in rebuttal is held to be null and void.

The fact is, however, that the phrase *ex opere operato*, applied by Catholic theology to the working of the sacraments, is always expressly opposed to the idea of their working *ex opere operantis*. What does that mean other than that they derive their value and efficacy, not from the man who administers them, but from their very nature, independently of any human agency? And what do we mean when we say they have this value 'in themselves'? We mean, as St. Thomas expresses it with the utmost clarity, in so far as the sacraments are signs given to us by God in his Word, and in so far as this Word has ordered certain men to administer them in his Name. In other words, the efficacy of the sacraments [236] *ex opere operato*, and not *ex opere operantis* (not even *ex opere operantis Ecclesiae*), means that they are efficacious by the express will of God, not only in general, but in each individual case, in so far as administered by this or that | person, here and now, who has received from God the express vocation to do so.

Obviously it may be questioned a priori that God wills this or that sacrament, that he in fact charged certain men to administer them, but, unless one declines to study the Catholic teaching or to make any effort to understand it from within, it cannot be denied that Catholics believe the sacraments to have been instituted by Christ and that their ministers were sent by Christ. They believe, therefore, that each sacrament acts *ex opere operato*, precisely because they believe that it is the sole grace of God, in this case the sole free and loving will of God, that gives the sacrament its being and value, and by no means anything human or created. The sacrament, of course, may be administered in surroundings conducive to devotion or not in a way that inspires reverence or the reverse; it may conduce to a real sense of the presence of God. Catholics are convinced of the importance that everything in the externals and the action of the minister should correspond with the dignity of the sacrament. Canon Law holds any defect in this to be a grave sin in those responsible. It goes so far as to forbid any celebration, unless certain minimum conditions are satisfied. But once these are assured, Catholic faith holds that the sacrament is effective or infallible, not on account of the good sentiments or conduct of man, but according as it is or is not a sacrament willed by God, administered or not by one whom God has entrusted to do so in his name.

If that is so, and it is enough to read any Catholic manual on the sacraments, or to question any Catholic child on his catechism, to assure oneself on the point, the Catholic idea and practice of the sacraments, far from making the *sola gratia* meaningless, gives it the fullest recognition and the most complete application imaginable.

In recalling all that Barth shows us in his theology of the Word, a Word creative, efficacious of itself, and so implying the personal Presence, behind the Word, of the God who speaks, anyone must recognise that for the Catholic the celebration of a sacrament is precisely the occasion of the utterance of this living Word, this personal Word of God in Christ, whence comes the sole reason of its certain efficacy, *hic et nunc*, an efficacy which is always purely an object of faith, inaccessible to sense. The whole question, then, is whether the Catholic is justified in holding that God is present

when the minister claims to act in his name, and if what he does in administering the sacrament is really what God wills him to do. Once this is admitted, the efficaciousness *ex opere operato* of the sacrament is simply a strict application in practice of the scriptural theology of the Word of God so ably constructed by Barth and, therefore, the acknowledgment, not only in the abstract, but in the concrete and in practice, of the *sola gratia* without any compromise.

What, then, is to be thought of the idea that the sacraments of the Catholic Church are signs ordained by the Word of God itself, and that those who administer them do so, not in their own name, but in the name of God alone, in virtue of the command given by this Word.**

The Protestant, prejudiced against the Church, will retort that this manner of binding grace to a particular sign or of attributing to men a power to act in the name of God, amounts to undermining the sovereignty of God, to fettering him to the things of the world, to subjecting him to an authority of this world.

Let us come to the crux of the matter. Must the sovereignty of God be considered something purely abstract, the sovereignty in fact of an idea certain theologians entertain about God, of what he may or may not do? Or is it sovereignty in the concrete, demanding the effective and unconditional obedience of man? In other words, is it to be the sovereignty God has taken the trouble to affirm in his Word [238] or simply the sovereignty of an idea we may have formed about him, if necessary, discarding his Word? Surely Protestants who take their own principles seriously could not hesitate in their answer. The sovereignty of God is but an illusion, if it is no more than the sovereignty of our ideas (or imaginings) about him, and not that of his own Word.

On this point, there has gradually been formed an impressive unanimity among exegetes. They agree, first of all, that Baptism and the Eucharist are presented by the New Testament as formally prescribed by God through Christ. Secondly, these are conceived by the New Testament writings, those of St. Paul especially, as admitting the individual to participation in the Kingdom by continuous communion with the risen body of Christ, in virtue of his own institution. On the real presence, absolutely objective, of the crucified and risen Christ, in the Supper as described by St. Paul and St. John and proclaimed by the apostles as contained in the Word of God in Christ, there is now a practically unanimous agreement among all exegetes of note, free-thinkers and Protestants as well as Catholics. The same may be said of our incorporation into Christ by Baptism, as taught by St. Paul, and of our new birth with Christ, as described by St. John,

Equally striking is the practical comensm of modern exegesis in recognising apostolicity as the fundamental note of the Church of the New Testament. That is to say, the Church and all its activities, in particular the way it transmits to men the Word of God as a living Word, are shown to be conditioned, not only by the fact of its apostolic mission, but by a very exact idea of what this implies. The 'Apostle' is primarily the Christian equivalent of the Jewish *Schaliach*, which means, not any kind of envoy, but one the rabbinical law expressly held to be in practice equivalent to the one sending him, or, rather, to his presence itself. 'The *schaliach* of a man is another self', is repeated ceaselessly in the rabbinical texts. This is the context in which we are to understand the words of the Master: 'As my Father has sent me, I also send [239] you; he that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.' (John 20. 21; Matt. 10. 40. Cf. John 12.44 and 13.20.) In other words, in the 'apostolic' Church, he, whoever he be, on whom the 'apostolate' rests, whatever his personal merits or defects, when he does what Christ has charged him to do, is simply allowing Christ to do it through him and, in Christ, it is God who does it.

If this is so, and if also the Catholic Church is the same as the apostolic Church, possessing this essential character of the Apostolate (which is the presence of Him who sends in those he sent), it must be acknowledged that the Catholic Church, in its celebration of Baptism and the Eucharist, giving them the significance it does, far from opposing the sovereignty of God as expressed in his Word, simply bows down before it, obeying it in the adoring submission of faith.

Here we come upon a final objection which is not confined to Barthians, or other anti-Catholic extremists, but appears fundamental even to such moderates as O. Cullmann, the great exegete of

Alsace.1) The Church, after the time of the apostles, in particular that of today, can only be said to be apostolic in the sense that it has to preach always what they preached, as transmitted to us by the New Testament. But it neither is nor can be apostolic in the sense that it possesses within itself the apostolate. This function was of its nature incapable of being transmitted, for it applies to the foundation only of the Church, not to its continuation. To think otherwise would be to confuse the history of the Church which receives and propagates salvation with the history of salvation itself, to confuse the revelation made once and for all with tradition, the Word of God with the words of man which cannot do more than comment on it and explain it.

This objection is certainly of the highest interest, for it compels us to make clear in what sense the apostolate is a

1) Cf. his article on *La Tradition et le Nouveau Testament*, in *Dieu vivant* 23, and the theological part of his *St. Pierre*, Neuchâtel-Paris 1952.

permanent quality of the Church. However, it involves in its turn a prejudice against the Catholic Church which seems to us to rest on a simple mistake of fact (supported, moreover, by so many vague and misleading expressions often used by Catholics). When the Catholic Church maintains that the apostolic function is always living in her, she does so because otherwise it would have to be said that the Church of the apostles died with the last of them, and it is another Church that has succeeded to it, not the same that has continued, though in different conditions and a more or less altered form. But, in holding this, she does not by any means misconceive what in the function of the apostles was unique and incommunicable. Theirs was the duty of founding the Church. To this end, the revelation had been made to them and they possessed the charisma of positive inspiration, making all that they taught the teaching of God, his own Word. The Catholic Church is the first to proclaim that, if she is apostolic, that does not mean that those she considers the successors of the apostles (the Pope and the other bishops) have the power of laying a foundation other than that they laid, could receive a different revelation from theirs (or even enlarge it in the slightest), are endowed (even in exceptional cases) with the same inspiration as they had. All this the Church not only does not pretend to, but today with greater precision than in the past, when the theology on these points was rather vague, repudiates and condemns. A Catholic, seriously maintaining any one of these propositions, would now be held to have lapsed formally into heresy.

St. Thomas Aquinas explains that the title 'vicar of Christ' given to those who rule the Church in succession to the apostles, does not mean that they can modify in the least its essential structure or its basis, but that their power is so dependent on what God has done, once and for all, in Christ, and entrusted to his apostles, that it is restricted to preserving this legacy, without altering or adding to it. The Church they govern is 'constituted by the faith and the sacraments of the faith. [241] Consequently, just as they are not allowed to set up another Church, neither may they hand down another faith or institute other sacraments'.2)

The decree *Lamentabili* formally condemned the modernist proposition which said: 'The revelation, which constitutes the object of Catholic faith, did not come to an end with the apostles.'3) In so doing, it only repeated and gave precision to the teaching of a decree of the Vatican Council, itself derived from one of Trent: 'The supernatural revelation, according to the faith of the universal Church declared by the holy Council of Trent, is contained in the sacred writings and the unwritten traditions which, received in the time of the apostles from the very mouth of Christ, or transmitted, as it were, from hand to hand, by the apostles under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, have come down to us.'4)

We see in this text how narrowly the word tradition is understood. Those traditions which the Councils admit as capable of containing any part of revelation are only those which are not simply human, even simply ecclesiastical, but apostolic traditions in the strict sense, that is, those which preserve what the apostles themselves handed down as coming from Christ. These, moreover, are

not important as additions to the facts and truths contained in Scripture, but as maintaining these clear and precise in the living Church. As St. Irenaeus says, the apostolic writings, considered in their content, can be appropriated and applied with great brilliance, even by a heretic or pagan. The Catholic Church alone, in its living tradition received from the apostles, knows how to interpret faithfully and respect them, not only in the letter, but in the Spirit which dictated them and expressed itself in them.

Once more we must insist that this permanence of the Spirit and its action in the Church, especially in those who are responsible

2) Summa Theologiae, III, 64. 2, ad 2. 3) Prop. 22 (Denz. 2021). 4) Session 111, ch. 21 (Denz. 1787).

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for maintaining the living fidelity of the revelation made once and for all, is not by any means the 'inspiration' proper to the apostles. Before the Vatican Council, there had been attempts on the part of some to teach this, but the Council rejected them formally and made them permanently inadmissible. According to its teaching, which confirms that of all the great theologians, the way in which the Holy Spirit keeps alive the revelation made to the apostles, whether in the apostolic tradition itself, preserved in the ordinary teaching of the Church, or in the most solemn definitions of the extraordinary magisterium (of Pope or Council), is not at all the same thing as the inspiration of the apostles which produced the last books of the Bible, and which is something unique and unrepeatable. It is no more than a negative assistance, preserving the Church from ever officially teaching error, that is, from adulterating revelation. In other words, the Church, in her ordinary and extraordinary magisterium, is assured by the Spirit of never teaching anything not taught by the apostles. But none of the formulas, even the most solemn, in which she may convey or elucidate this teaching, is or will ever be strictly speaking the 'Word of God'. Only the inspired books of the two Testaments are that; that is why there is not, nor will there ever be, any definition (or still more, any ordinary teaching) of the Church which does not refer to these books of the 'Word of God', in the strict sense, that is, the only word of whose existence God can be said to be the literal author. He is not the author, in this sense, even of the most solemn definitions of the Church, and he guarantees them, with the charisma of infallibility, only as guaranteeing their conformity, both in the letter and its meaning, with the Word given once for all by the apostles.

All that we have just said cannot be stated better than by St. John of the Cross in a passage we have already alluded to and which we now quote in full:

. . . God has said all to us in giving us the all who is his Son. [243] For this reason, anyone who now asks or desires any kind of vision or revelation would not only be acting foolishly but would be doing wrong to God, in not turning his gaze entirely to Christ, but desiring something else, something new. For God could answer him after His fashion: 'If I have said all to you in my Word, who is my Son, I have no other in which I can now answer or reveal anything over and above that; look only to him, because in him I have spoken and revealed all to you, and you will find even more than you ask, more than you could wish. You want a word or a revelation that is merely partial, but, if you look well upon him, you will find there all; for he is my whole word, my reply, my whole vision and revelation, that I have already addressed to you, answered, shown forth and revealed, giving you him as brother, companion, master, your ransom and reward. From the time when I, with my Spirit, came down on him on Mount Thabor, saying: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear ye him", I have stopped all these different ways of instruction and answer, and have committed all to him; listen to him, for I have no other faith to reveal, nothing else to make known. Beforehand, if I spoke it was to promise Christ; and if men questioned me, it was but to ask, and hope, for Christ, in whom they should find every kind of good (as the teaching of the apostles and evangelists has now made known). But now, anyone who questioned me likewise, and wished

me to answer and reveal something, would be, as it were, asking me again for Christ and asking for a further faith, as if something was lacking in the faith already given in Christ: and so he would be doing great wrong to my beloved Son, not only lacking faith in him, but seeking to make him become again incarnate and go through his past life and death again. There is nothing more for you to ask of me; you have not to desire visions and revelations from me. Look well [244] upon him; you will find all that, and even more, given and accomplished.¹

It could not be better said that the Catholic Church is called 'apostolic', not to add or to change what the apostles said and did in the name of Christ, but solely to preserve it.

However, there is one thing most important to clarify. How is this deposit to be kept? Simply by human conservatism? Or by the ecclesiastical authorities confining themselves to compel respect for the letter of the apostolic writings? This would be quite ineffective since, as St. Irenaeus has already observed, heretics excel in keeping the letter, while losing the Spirit. Above all, it would be to fall back under the law, and to lose the Spirit who is precisely the great gift of the New Covenant. It is absolutely unthinkable that the Church is to be 'apostolic' merely by keeping the writings of the apostles as the only source of her teaching. That would be for her to fall back into the Old Testament, and to a purely rabbinical and pharisaic understanding of it. The Church cannot preserve the 'doctrine of the apostles', if all her members have not living in them the Spirit which filled the apostles. And, since the Word they brought us is a living Word, the Son of God entering human history, it will only be the same Word within the Church if it remains an actual happening, part of the life of each of us. That is exactly what is realised in the sacraments of the faith, in which God commits himself freely but truly, not in an abstract, general covenant with a people of God which would be only an impersonal mass, but in a living, individual covenant with a people of God which is but one heart and soul shared by all. The sacraments themselves are such, only because they are not only signs once instituted by Christ, but signs given here and now by Himself, actually and in person, through those who act in his name, since he remains always present in those he has sent to do his work; which supposes that they are only instruments acting always in direct dependence on him. [245]

Further, all this is kept alive in the consciousness of the Church and each of its members, only because those who have the responsibility for the divine Word are preserved by its continual presence from adulterating it and, what is more, do not present it in a lifeless form, but as a Word which continues to be uttered, through those who speak in his name, by Him who has 'placed them, as bishops, by the Spirit, to rule over the Church of God, which he has purchased by his blood' (Acts 20. 28).

This is the sense in which the Church is apostolic, not only materially but spiritually, not only as being once founded by the apostles, but as having the Spirit of the apostles and the living actuality of the Word entrusted to them. She is apostolic because she has present within her, through the successors of the apostles from whom they received the charge of continuing their work, not as a different work, but as the same, living with the same life. Him who is always the Lord of the Church, being 'with her to the consummation of the world'.

This view, far from being an innovation, is what appears with the most perfect clarity in the same post-apostolic Church to which we owe the New Testament, without this Church having the slightest inkling that her view could be inconsistent with it; rather, she was evidently convinced that only so could she be the Church of the apostles, the Church of Christ, and not some other Church substituted for that later on.

Once all this is set in a clear light, it becomes manifest that the Catholic Church, in the principle of her constitution and ordinary life, is the Church where, not in theory but in fact, grace is all. She is the Church where God, in Christ, remains actually sovereign, the Church where the Word of God, the same which was entrusted finally to the apostles, and is kept literally in the Bible, is always speaking. The Word is there, always living, always creative of the new man, because always

¹ *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Book 2, Chapter 20.

directly uttered by Him who willed to be present in his Church, and who so disposed that she herself [246] should be for the eye of faith the enduring sign of his presence.

In the light of these various points, we may finally inquire if the Catholic idea of 'merit' and in general of the sanctity declared by God through his Church to be possessed by the faithful members of his Son, amounts to a denial of grace, as is assumed by the Protestant conception and by the whole system which Barth raised upon it.

We will take first the case of the Virgin Mary. It is certainly the one which best reveals the Catholic idea of sanctity, since to Protestants it appears the height of the idolatry which underlies the whole idea of the worship of saints.

The eminent privilege attributed to Mary by Catholic doctrine, one which asserts the uniqueness of her sanctity and reveals its source, is the Immaculate Conception. Now, it would seem that, provided one takes the elementary care necessary to understand what those who use these words mean by them (which unfortunately seems to be as a rule the last thing any Protestant controversialist thinks about), if there is any Catholic belief that shows how much the Church believes in the sovereignty of grace, in its most gratuitous form, it is this one. It is remarkable that the orthodox controversialists, contrary to the Protestants, reproach Catholics for admitting, in this one case of Our Lady, something analogous to what strict Calvinists admit for all the elect—a grace that saves us absolutely independently of us, not only without any merit of our own, but without any possibility of our co-operation. This reproach naturally seems to us erroneous, but it has some colour of justification, whereas the Protestant view seems, not merely against reason, but completely absurd. To say that Mary is holy, with a super-eminent holiness, in virtue of a divine intervention previous to the first instant of her existence, is to affirm in her case as absolutely as possible that salvation is a grace, and purely a grace, of God. We will add that to present Mary, not so much as an unheard-of exception, but as the masterpiece of grace, which is the central and

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unvarying theme of Catholic preaching about her, is to indicate sufficiently that the Catholic idea of grace in general, far from depreciating it by affirming that man can attain in Christ to sanctity or simply to merit, presupposes behind all this a pure gift of God, unmerited and unable to be merited.

The very foundation of the Catholic idea of sanctity and of merit is this: grace, being the principle of all merit in the supernatural order, cannot itself be merited. 'Merit', in the sense in which Catholic theology takes it, is the property of an action which, being wholly the product of faith, itself purely a gift of God, is, therefore, entirely the product of grace in us. Obviously, to speak of merit supposes the act to be ours, and ours entirely, of our intellect and will; but this act is, not only completely subordinated to grace, but also originated by it, so that the act belongs wholly to God before it is ever ours; or, better still, so that, precisely in the act, we belong no more to ourselves, but, through faith working in charity, we deliver ourselves wholly to God, or, rather, are completely reconquered by grace.

This is admirably shown in the thomist doctrine of the concurrence of habitual, or sanctifying, with actual, grace; in its turn, this doctrine is as a rule made to mean exactly its opposite in the works of Protestant controversialists. In the first place, the fact that sanctifying grace is a habitus, in the thomist sense, does not mean that it gives us a separate, independent power of acting supernaturally without further need in every instance of a special intervention of God; the exact opposite is the case. Sanctifying grace does not cancel the necessity of a particular actual grace for each meritorious act. The *habitus* of sanctifying grace, far from establishing us in some sort of autonomy in regard to God, involves precisely a permanent hold of God, not only on our actions, but on the source of our being, in so far as this could have been alienated from God by sin, and has to become his again, in the strictest possible sense, in Christ. In consequence, sanctifying grace, so far from conferring any power of our own to perform [248] independently supernatural acts, is simply a disposition maintained in us by God to act no more but under the impulse of actual grace. Each of such acts accomplished by the Christian is itself the product of a special grace, immediately given and indispensable, and presupposes that in each case he puts himself in the hands of God, not

indeed on his own initiative but on that of God alone.

When the Church declares someone a saint, she simply affirms that his life in her judgment reached the point of total abandonment to grace, in virtue of a faith that had come to dominate his whole life. She never does so before his earthly life has come to an end. For she holds as a dogma of faith that, whatever the degree of fidelity to God a soul may have attained in this life, perseverance, especially final perseverance, is itself a grace impossible to merit in the strict sense; it can only be asked for with humility in prayer and faith, never taken for granted as due.

Nor is this all. Just as sanctifying grace is by no means an independent faculty of performing acts of virtue, but the re-establishment of the depths of our being in a voluntary dependence on God, neither is the merit of the faithful on the way to heaven, nor the intercession of the saints in glory, ever something autonomous. If the Church has rejected the doctrine of extrinsic justification, according to which Christ alone is, properly speaking, holy, and covers with his holiness our indelible sinfulness, she has not thereby proclaimed a holiness inherent in the just, which they would possess independently of Christ, however this word, independently, may be understood. On the contrary, if the justice of the justified is real, not imputed, it does not exist, if not even conceivable, in Catholic theology, apart from our incorporation with Christ by Baptism and our actual adhesion to him by living faith in his grace. For this reason, the merits of the saints are not, either in patria or in via, by any means additional to the merits of Christ in his Passion, but are a participation in these and nothing more. The holiness of the saints and that of [249] Our Lady, just as what holiness there may be in the least movement of faith and love in a soul still sinful, is and cannot be other than the holiness of Christ communicated; and this holiness is not communicated by being broken and divided, but only in 'gathering into one the children of God that were dispersed'.

This description of the real attitude of the Catholic Church towards what were in fact the guiding principles of the Reformation manifests, by contrast, the unsatisfactory place to which they are inevitably condemned in the 'Churches' apparently formed to uphold them. In the beginning of this chapter we drew attention to the apparent paradox of the intimate harmony existing between the Catholic Church in its inmost nature and the authentically Christian inspiration of the principles of Protestantism. Now we have to conclude it with the establishment of something equally paradoxical: just as the process of reducing these principles to a system stifled rather than promoted them, so the separated 'Churches' born of this process, are actually the greatest obstacle to their realisation.

According as the Protestant sacraments are other than a continuation, more or less impoverished, of the Catholic ones, or as they are quite different, deliberately contrasted with the Catholic sacraments, they are, whether one likes it or not, a practical denial of the Protestant doctrine of grace in its most positive aspect. While the sacraments in the Catholic view bring grace, not in virtue of any contribution of ours, but by the free gift of God who gives them to us over and over again without ceasing; in the usual Protestant view, one could say of them exactly what St. Teresa said of purely human mystics, comparing them to the poor Spanish inns of her time: 'You can only eat there what you bring along.' In fact, the sheer confusion, in the minds of Protestants, between the action of the sacraments *ex opere operato* and some kind of magic causes them to see in the sacraments nothing more than what faith puts there, rather than finds there. Even in the Calvinist [250] system, itself everywhere riddled by the Zwinglianism simply denies any real presence, the presence of Christ in the Eucharist is admitted only for those who believe in it. In other words, it is their faith which gives the sacrament its content. It only brings them a confirmation or, more exactly, a more vivid awareness of what they already had independently of it. So, although orthodox Calvinism persists in describing it as a sign given by God, in the actual reality of Protestant devotion, it is only a sign, given by the faithful themselves, of what they have within them, and in this lies for them its whole value. This being so, it can only be insisted on as necessary in a purely exterior way, like the law of Judaism. Interiorly, no need for it is felt, since it brings nothing that is

not already there and, as is shown by daily experience, one needs it less the more advanced one is in the spiritual life. For the less spiritual, this exterior act, by what it expresses, is a psychological support or stimulant to faith. But, as soon as they have made some little progress, it is only natural for them to think it childish to need this play-acting in order to believe. The more 'spiritual' Protestants are, the more they tend in fact to neglect the sacraments; it will be remembered that the Supper is ordinarily celebrated only four times a year in the Reformed Churches. If they keep them all the same, it is only through a sense of obligation to something purely exterior, and those whose feelings of interior liberty is strongest, like the Quakers, boldly abandon them altogether, leaving the others with a feeling of regret or uneasiness at not being able to follow them to that extent.

The principle of this development had already been laid down by Luther, although in deference to the words of the Bible he kept the Catholic teaching of the objective presence of Christ in the Eucharist. In the *De Captivitate Babylonica*, the idea appears that grace is not given in the sacrament, but that this is simply a psychological help to faith, given by God only in view of our weakness. If that is so, it is impossible to see at all what the real presence in the Catholic sense [251] can mean, being condemned on principle to inaction, since the entire content of faith proceeds from itself, and it is refused all possibility of a supernatural nourishment coming from outside. In fact, in his colloquy at Marburg with the Zwinglians, Luther did not hesitate to admit this, maintaining his belief in the Eucharist only because he did not see how he could escape the force of the Gospel words, but without disguising his regret. After this, it is not surprising that, wherever Lutherans have come up against Calvinists, they have quickly given in to them, while the latter in their turn yielded to the pure subjectivism of Zwingli, and this showed itself in the end incapable of maintaining any real interest in the sacraments. No one could ever take a serious interest in a sacred ceremony which is only an exterior representation of what he has just as much without it—in fact, he has more, for a recollected faith seems to spiritual persons always more living and profound than a faith which displays itself uselessly in more or less theatrical fashion.

All this reveals an actual Pelagianism which ought to astonish those Protestants who have remained true to their original principle. The whole sacramental system of the Protestant 'Churches', except where the Catholic system survives in them, is but a juggling with signs of divine objects to which in the most favourable hypothesis, that of Calvinism, man has to give whatever reality they may have. More often their sacraments are reduced to signs of a subjective faith itself, content not to appear a mere redundancy for a faith wholly satisfied with its subjectivity, and conscious of no need to complete it from outside. Nothing could be imagined more capable of introducing, in the psychology of Protestantism as maintained by its institutions, a current more directly opposed to the spiritual impetus proper to the *sola gratia*. What in fact is more contrary to the principle of a religion in which the gift of God is all than the reality of a religion in which there is nothing beyond what is brought by the personal devotion of each? That the Protestant 'Churches', solely by their [252] natural development, in so far as this took them away from Catholicism, arrived at such a flagrant contradiction, is perhaps the best implicit witness to the fact that they themselves are not the product of the main principle of Protestantism, but of its being stifled by the negations of the system.

This inexorable verdict passed on the fallacious claims of the system by the course of its actual development applies to them with equal force in connection with the doctrine of the divine sovereignty, the *Soli Deo gloria*.

In its rejection of the true 'apostolicity' of the Church, through misconceiving or denying apostolic succession, the Protestant system, which gave birth to the Protestant Churches involved itself in practice in a constant demand of that divine sovereignty it had willed to set up as a principle. Three different possibilities were open to Protestant organisations, once the rupture with the Church of tradition was accomplished. Either, as with the Anabaptists at first, or later with the Quakers, the rejection of all visible authority, resulting in an absolute, anarchical individualism; or else, as in the Lutheran reaction, the handing over to the civil authority of the organisation and

direction of the Church; or, as in Calvinism and the sects following and opposed to it, the artificial construction of a new Church, created in all its elements by the genius (or fantasy) of an individual, according to a system of his own contrivance. In the three cases, the result was the same; in the place of divine authority in the Church Protestantism set up purely human ones, with the inevitable consequence of an enslavement of man to man, stifling the idea of personal religion and Christian liberty.

It must be obvious that, after relegating the authority of God to an inaccessible heaven, the pure individualism into which the Reformation was from the beginning in danger of falling, ended by establishing the authority of the individual in religious matters as the sole authority on earth, making his private experiences, ideas, tastes or reasonings the one criterion; and indeed it is so evident that all the Protestant churches merely continue in order to put a stop to the disintegration of the Church, recognised by believers as the disintegration of the sovereignty of God himself.

But the Protestant churches could only oppose human authorities to this religious anarchy. Lutheranism, where it has not kept, as in some countries, especially Sweden, some elements of the Catholic Church, has only succeeded in hurrying to its extreme a tendency already threatening the medieval Church, which the Gregorian reform had sought to counter. That is, it made the Church merely a department of the State and subjected it to the pleasure of its rulers, making the upholding and organisation of the Church's life depend on the whim of a purely civil authority. The rapidity with which this devolution of ecclesiastical authority to the divine ruler, brought about by a feverish reaction against the excesses of Anabaptism, was to end in such a fundamentally anti-Christian principle as *Cujus regio ejus religio* is once more a self-condemnation which rules out any need for further argument. A Church which from the outset renounces any possibility of independent 'witness', which dissociates itself, as it were, from the 'martyrdom' in which the Christian Church was born, which renders to Caesar what belongs to God alone, is so flagrant a repudiation of the divine sovereignty that it is not surprising that Calvin exalted this principle as much as he did, in the effort to turn aside Protestantism from such a fatal surrender.

In spite, however, of what he intended, can we say that he did any better than Luther in this matter? We think not.

For, though he had the great merit of rediscovering that the whole ecclesiastical organisation ought to be established in obedience to the sovereign will of God, manifested in his Word, he yielded in fact to a narrowly legalistic conception of this obedience, amounting to a Judaic or Pelagian idea of it. He thought it possible to take over, from the New Testament, a particular design for an ecclesiastical organisation, and to realise it by political action, to which he devoted his efforts. Apart from any criticism of the design he sincerely believed to have borrowed from the Bible, it seems to have entirely escaped him that the Church, to be the 'body of Christ' in St. Paul's sense, 'the pillar and ground of truth', is not simply to be made or remade by man, with his eyes fixed on a model supplied from above, but must have been created and kept in being by the intervention of God himself. The Calvinist Church, supposing it realised its own ideal, would be a human structure on a divine plan. But it would not be, and never seriously thought of being, the work of God.

This astonishing inconsequence in practice of a work aiming at establishing the one, absolute divine sovereignty was itself due to a misconception inherent in the idea of the Church Calvin believed himself to have taken from the Bible, and to his failure to see that he was neglecting the essential element of apostolicity, in the sense in which we have defined it. The Church of Calvin is a Church where everyone is a priest, directly in contact with God, without any other intermediary than the purely material one which brings him the letter of the Word of God. But the idea that the knowledge, not only material and exterior but living and interior, of this Word, and above all the knowledge that its actual creative power for the Christian, are all elements of 'apostolicity'—pertain, that is, to the fact that God is in Christ whom he sent, and Christ in the 'apostles' he sent—this idea, or rather fact, object of faith, source of the reality of the Church, as seen in its

development in the New Testament and in Christian antiquity, does not seem ever to have occurred to him. In other words, the Calvinist Church can only be an organisation human in origin, even if it claims (wrongly, in the almost unanimous opinion of contemporary exegetes) to be modelled on a divine plan. In fact, it supposes a complete misunderstanding of what the divine plan really was, as made known to us in the Incarnation; that is to say, of God's design that his Word should affect us, not only as an ideal left to us to realise, but as a creative event in which God himself, in Christ, [255] the chief actor in our history, realises in us what he has decreed.

The Calvinist Church has never known more than a precarious and unstable existence. In the different forms of Congregationalism, opposed almost from the outset to Calvinist presbyterianism, or in presbyterianism itself when it has been actually preserved, we see a succession or aggregate of systems, in which the individual believer simply delegates an authority of which he is convinced he is the only real holder. So, the Churches known as 'Reformed' oscillate between mere anarchical federations where each individual recognises no other authority than what he is prepared to canonise himself, and real dictatorships, such as those of Calvin in Geneva, and Knox in Scotland, a strong personality imposing by his own ascendancy his subjective views on those around him. Hence the fact we have already noted : the splitting up of the Reformed Churches—the liberty claimed by each new founder over against a system he judges oppressive of his own personality becomes unconsciously the source of a new oppression for those who for a time enter his system.

But through all this the divine sovereignty is no more present than in the Lutheran Churches. Always it has to make way for subjectivity, whether that of unbridled individualism, or that of the reaction against it, which invariably occurs in the name of the domination of some other individual's system.

The history of the Churches of the Reformed type abounds in illustrations of this. Whenever they refuse to dissolve themselves in practice into simple associations for worship, without any other doctrinal, moral or liturgical law than the whim of each, they tend immediately to become rigid frameworks in which a particular type of religious mentality or feeling unconsciously results in the oppression of others.

Moreover, in practice, even where the ministers do not wish or claim to be other than delegates of their own communities, [256] Churches of this type always end by delivering over their members to the subjective views of each minister.

The Reformed 'confessions of faith' are extremely characteristic of this authoritarian subjectivism which was in fact substituted from the beginning for the authority of God it claimed to restore. The 'Helvetic Confession', that of Westminster, the articles of Dordrecht, are so many attempts to confine the thought of all the believers more and more closely in the mould of a particular theology. While the Catholic 'definitions' of faith, even when utilising the thought of a particular school of theology, with its local and temporal characteristics, only impose truths which transcend these limitations, and so leave other schools perfectly free to continue within the Church; these 'confessions' being attempts to impose in detail a more and more particularised view of Christianity, have resulted, as might have been expected, in breaking up the Church they were intended to unify.

Still more revealing in this respect is the history of the reformed worship. While Catholic worship, even where a particular rite prevails, is formed, and continually renewed, according to the spirit of the people and the time, it is impossible to imagine anything more rigid and uniform, whatever the time and place, than the meeting for worship in the Reformed Churches. Where Catholic traditions have disappeared and have not been reintroduced, Protestant worship follows the invariable pattern of a place centred round a pulpit, where someone comments, in almost unchanging fashion, on readings from the Bible, interspersed with hymns and prayers that reflect at the most one or two types, practically always the same, of religious feeling and expression— either the severe transcendentalism of the Calvinist type or the conventional imagery of revivalist

sentiment; generally an amorphous mixture of the two.

The sole element that offers any possibility of renovation [257] is the Word of God, in its inexhaustible richness. However an instinctive horror, purely negative in effect, of the Catholic tradition has in practice left to the presiding minister the choice of readings from the Bible, and of the hymns to be sung. As to the prayers, generally he improvises them himself, just as he likes. Ultimately, then, everything normally centres on the ideas or forms of religious sentiment he has decided to impress on the congregation in his sermon. The scriptural passages are chosen with this in view. The hymns are those which in his opinion best prepare his audience to accept what he has decided to say to them. The prayer itself is simply a second version of the first sermon, but addressed to God.

The final result is that the Protestant who seeks, in his Church, food for his faith finds it only in the form of a total subjection to all the peculiarities, the momentary idiosyncrasies, of his minister's personal devotion.

One cannot imagine any system more completely effective in replacing the authority of God by that of the individual minister, at the same time subjecting to him the religious personality of each participant in the worship of his Church.

Moreover, when Protestant Churches try to react against this by setting up liturgies—which, as experience shows, are never adopted without being everywhere adjusted and made subservient to the judgment or tastes of the minister using them—all they do is to impress on a greater number of persons the formulas, the feelings, the private opinions, of a minister or group of ministers, and the remedy is soon found to be worse than the disease.

Even when Protestantism has not gone to this extreme, and has kept some remnant of the Catholic liturgical tradition, as is the case especially with the Lutheran Churches, nothing is more characteristic than the reforms imposed on this tradition, of the rule of the subjective, which is the real substitute of historical Protestantism for the sovereignty of God proclaimed in principle. By the same token, it is always spiritual [258] liberty which is the sufferer under a system bearing the imprint of a particular time and place.

In the liturgy of the Eucharist in particular, the Lutheran innovations, far from returning to what was primitive and essential, the direct product of divine authorship in Christ, have to make predominant the latest, most adventitious elements. So much so that, strangely enough, historians have been obliged to conclude that the Lutheran liturgy is by no means what it claimed to be, the Catholic liturgy restored to its origins, to the purity of its divine institution, but, rather, a medieval liturgy, in which elements of alien growth, or warped in their development through the centuries immediately before the Reformation, had overpowered the rest, or altered its original significance. The Formula Missae of Luther reduced the whole Canon of the Mass to the words of institution. In their turn, the reformed liturgies reduced to the same practically the whole of the Eucharist service, the remainder being no more than a theological commentary on these words, of the sectarian type we have already described.

To-day it is perfectly clear to all liturgical scholars that this was simply the final term of a disastrous tendency in the medieval theology of the Eucharist—a tendency to deal more and more exclusively with the words of consecration alone, isolating them from the rest of the Mass and contrasting them with it. The older theology, on the contrary, had interpreted them only in the context of the great prayer of thanksgiving for all the gifts of God, itself derived from Judaism, a context in which the primitive Church, following the example of Christ, has seen the true meaning of his sacrifice. In tearing these words from their context, the Reformation, so far from returning to the primitive sense and the fundamental reality of the Eucharist, simply rejected what still remained of it in the Middle Ages, which had already begun to misconceive it.

The conviction, widespread in orthodox Protestantism, that the Eucharist is validly celebrated by anyone who pronounces the words of the Gospel account over the bread and wine, is [259] itself

only a hasty endorsement of an erroneous opinion running right through the Middle Ages. Besides, it is obvious that this opinion only rests on a quite openly naive idea of the Mass as a piece of magic. The orthodox medieval ideas, rejected by the Churches of the Reformation, made the efficacy of the words of consecration depend on their utterance by a validly ordained minister, that is, one 'sent' by Christ, and so upheld the principle that the sacraments derived their effectiveness from their being the sovereign acts of God himself in Christ. It was, then, this principle that the Reformation denied, whether consciously or not, in rejecting the necessity of an ordained minister. In doing so, It left no alternative but a sacramentalism having a magical content, or else no content at all.

In general. It follows from these considerations that the Protestant Churches, in spite of their reaction against Catholic 'sacerdotalism', have In fact given rise to a pure 'clericalism', one which emasculates the 'universal priesthood' of the faithful which the principles of Protestantism should have fostered, and eliminates completely the effective sovereignty of God over the Church.

From the moment of their creation, the Protestant Churches were merely the works of man. In so far as they manage to attain any authority at all, It Is always the authority of a man, either of a founder or organiser or of a simple minister, and. If that fails, they break up into fragments, to the sole profit of the authority of each individual, his private views, tendencies or experiences.

This being so, it is not surprising that the *Soli Deo gloria*, so magnificently affirmed in principle by Calvinism, is so completely ignored by Protestantism in its organised practice. The fact is, although French Protestants like to call their services le culte, that there is nothing which resembles so little the worship of God, or is more like the cultivation of a religious humanism, than the general practices of Protestantism, [260] unless they happen to be simply a survival of Catholic worship itself.

The very appearance of a Protestant Church is revealing; it is dominated by the pulpit, which is the centre of everything, showing that all that takes place is the teaching of religion, more or less enlivened by prayer, chant and ceremonial, all strictly subordinated to the sermon. Admittedly, in theory, it is the Word of God that should be conveyed in the sermon, but we have just seen that the reality is quite different, and that the sermon has come to make everything else, even the scriptural reading revolve round It, round a purely personal discourse. Even where this Is not the case, when there is a real 'worship', properly so called, it Is a purely interior worship given by each one individually to God. The people are united as members of a Church, only on the level of an association for mutual religious education; their 'Church' in fact is never anything else; it is a centre for the religious culture of man, tiot a centre for the worship of God. How characteristic of this is the restriction and disappearance of the elements of praise and adoration from Protestant worship. The 'thanksgiving', in the Eucharist itself, so much minimised in the course of the Middle Ages, has entirely disappeared in Calvinism. Along with this, the element of penance, of purification, in which the attention is focused more on the worshipper than on the God he worships—an element that gradually extended in the Middle Ages, but is only marginal in the Mass of the catechumens and the Mass of the faithful—has engulfed practically all that subsists of either in the Protestant liturgies. How could it be otherwise, if it is tme that Christ alone is the tme adorer, being God made man, since God is absent from the Protestant ecclesiastical organisation, it being a purely human creation, even when, as in Calvinism, it aims at least at being conformed to divine command?

The sphere, however, in which the actual reversal of the principles of Protestantism by its institutional reality is most evident, is undoubtedly that of the authority of Scripture. [261]

The Protestant Churches set themselves up in contrast with the Catholic Church, as Churches aiming at total submission to the Word of God, over against a Church they accused of rfcplacng it by tradition. In actual fact, the history of the Protestant Churches, and of their disputes on doctrine, is all comprised in the history of their impotence to maintain, even in their ministers, either submission to the clearest and most solemn affirmations of Scripture, or a practical belief in its authority, even the simple recognition that God has in truth revealed himself, 'spoken' to man,

except in a wholly metaphorical sense. The Protestant Churches either spend their energies in endorsing, and vainly attempting to impose, particular systems of theology, which seem to their authors alone a true reproduction of the divine Word, or else yield to the force of things and give up teaching any definite doctrine, even that of the inspiration and authority of Scripture, however much it might seem to be the only serious ground of their opposition to the Catholic Church. After trying to form themselves into theological schools, whose authority is oppressive because wholly human, they all end up by resigning themselves to be merely in the words of one Protestant, 'associations of old pupils of Christ', without any definite principles.

All this experience makes it plain that the authority of the Word of God cannot be only the authority of a book, because no book is capable of exercising authority on the interpretation men put on it, when there is no living authority to govern its readers. More exactly, since the Word of God is really sovereign only in so far as He himself continues to utter it, with all the creative power that belongs to his Word only when pronounced by Him, this Word can keep its sovereignty only where the divine presence continues to be; in other words, where the Church is not merely an abstraction drawn from the ideas contained in scriptural texts, but a reality created and kept in being by the 'apostolate' of the Son of God, of the living Word made flesh, prolonging himself in all times and places, in human form, by the [262] 'apostolate' of those the Son sent in his turn, as he had been sent by the Father.

Apart from this fundamental condition, all precautions against the temptation, only too natural, to humanize the divine Word, immersing it in the word of man, will be ineffectual, because it will be attempting the impossible: to make the divine Word remain divine, after it has ceased to be uttered by God; whereas 'God alone speaks truly of God'.