

THE CHURCH UNCONQUERABLE

By REV. OWEN FRANCIS DUDLEY.

Two thousand years ago an archangel said, “Of His kingdom there shall be no end.”

For two thousand years the world has been saying, “Of His kingdom there will be an end. Christianity will perish. The Catholic Church will go.”

Towards the end of the Great War we were assured that now, at any rate, the Catholic Church was doomed: she had proved her utter incompetence to deal with the situation. She had kept on the war; she had tried to stop it. She had interfered; she had done nothing. Anyhow, whatever she had done or hadn't done, she had failed. She was doomed.

At the present moment, while Europe is still seething with divisions and discontent, the Catholic Church stands calm and serene, strong and united—the one stable moral force in the world. And, by way of demonstrating her complete failure, nearly thirty nations now send their representatives to the throne of Peter in Rome.

Failure?

One notices, too, the grave concern of the secular press today over what it calls “the failure of Christianity.” You doubtless are aware of the heroic efforts of English newspapers (the same is true in America) to stem the tide of unbelief with highly paid articles from unbelievers, novelists and other theologians—“Has Christianity Failed?” “Are Dogmas Doomed?” “Are Creeds Necessary?” “Is the Fall a Fable?” “Dean Inge Abolishes Hell,” and so on.

May I prepare the way to my thesis by estimating how much truth there is in this challenge, “the failure of Christianity”? I say “challenge” because in reality all this pretended concern is so much cant, covering a hope that Christianity will fail. The world does not want Christianity, for the simple reason that it brings God so terribly close to man. The world does not want God close. “No dogmas, no creeds; let's just be good to one another!” It sounds so well, that parrot cry. It means: “No Incarnation, no Redemption, no God come down from heaven, no Saviour for this world!”

The modern method of assisting the departure of Christianity is to suggest perpetually its failure—the suggestion method. The Protestant bodies are responding with avidity and are already honeycombed with Modernism. Modernism is a denial of the Christian revelation, an endeavour to rationalise Christianity by reducing it to the standard of human reason, the issue of which is to reduce it to naught in the minds of the drifting millions who have been pulled away from the anchorage of dogmas and creeds.

Protestantism is failing—as all heresies eventually fail—and not merely in the sense of rejecting what was left to it of the Christian revelation after the Reformation. It is failing numerically. In England, for instance, the Established Church now holds a mere fraction of the nation.

Failed in What?

But this does not mean that Christianity is failing. It does not mean that Catholicism is failing.

Now the world strives to inculcate the idea that the Catholic Church too is a failure. It may be interesting to note the grounds on which it bases the charge at present. They are these:

First, the Catholic Church has failed to establish the universal Utopia of worldly prosperity so dear to the heart of the secular progressivist. She has neglected the amelioration of humanity. She is a failure from the utilitarian standpoint.

To this our obvious reply is that Christ did not found a mere philanthropical society for curing public and social ills—although, actually, the Catholic Church has done more for humanity than all the philanthropists put together. Christianity does not exist to establish man in security and prosperity on earth. Its purpose is to put men in possession, not of the things of this world, but of the things of heaven. The success or the failure of the Catholic Church, if we may use such terms, is in proportion to the number of souls she sanctifies and saves. Her critics are scarcely in a position to judge of this. Neither are they interested in the matter.

The Acceptance of Pain.

Again, we are charged, and very insistently today, with the doctrine of the cross. We accept suffering. We weep and whine beneath the cross of Christ. We encourage the retention of pain in opposition to modern eugenics. We even bar the way to human happiness by our refusal of divorce, birth control, euthanasia, and the elimination of the unfit, by our refusal to recognise a progressive morality. We chain men to doctrines which involve discomfort, suffering, and inconvenience. We have failed humanity. We stand in the way of its happiness.

It is the old challenge, "Save thyself: if thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross" (Matt., 27-40). The materialists and pagans of the twentieth century challenge us to renounce the cross of Christ.

We can only reply: The cross is the very pivot on which Christian life and morality turn. We are fully aware that its teaching is intolerable to a pleasure-seeking age. We are also aware of the immense folly of this revolt against all that hurts and pains, against self-restraint, against all that hinders self-indulgence and worldly enjoyment. Human happiness comes, not from pandering to our natural desires, but from supernaturalising our fallen nature. We would remind those pagan materialists, who sneer at Christianity as a myth encumbering man's happiness, that the "myth" has actually produced for millions of all ages the happiness which they, the pagan materialists, have yet to find and which, in their way, according to all the past experience of men, they never will find. Pain and suffering are conquered by sharing the cross with Christ. The very capacity of the Catholic Church to embrace them is her strength. Like Christ, she conquers by the cross, by transforming this world of pain into a crucible of God's love wherein men are tested for eternal life. For those who shirk the test the world becomes a cauldron. It is they who are the failures.

Lust in Moral Masquerade.

As for "progressive morality," it is merely progressive lust—an attempt to overthrow the fixed divine code of moral law, a code that the Church will never suit to the liking of a soft generation.

The other ground on which the world bases its charge of failure is that our dogmas are antiquated. We cling to the obsolete notion of a fallen world, of men having been created instead of evolved, of original sin, of God made Man, of a repellent doctrine of Redemption. We even have the audacity to insult the modern mind with the doctrine of eternal hell. The Catholic Church has failed to tune up to the level of modern thought, to unshackle herself of medieval superstitions. She is an intellectual failure.

Angels and Apes.

I wonder if this boasted "modern mind" is aware of the insincerity of such a charge, of the manner in which our doctrines are twisted about before being proclaimed "unacceptable to reason," and of their inconvenience being the real grievance. These dogmas, from the Fall to the Redemption, all rest on the fact of sin, and sin is an inconvenient notion.

It is far more comfortable to be assured by the enlightened ones of today that sin, so-called, can be explained by evolution, that it is merely the relics of man's monkey nature, merely the monkey coming out. Men, who once thought themselves little less than the angels, should now rise to the dignity of being little more than the apes.

It is not the modern mind but the modern will which is rejecting the inconvenient facts of Revelation. It is sheer, despicable pretence to term "unacceptable to reason" dogmas which are accepted by some of the greatest intellects in the world—I mean by Catholic scholars, theologians, and scientists. The failure is not with those who do accept them, but with those who do not—those who refuse the facts revealed by God.

Thesis.

I have endeavoured, then, briefly to repudiate the charge of failure imputed by the enemies of the Catholic Church. Those who level it so persistently and loudly today are merely advertising the fact that the Church is not a failure. They would not pay attention to a failure.

To come now to my central thesis. The world (I use the word in St. John's sense—those who love the darkness rather

than the light), the world ever expects Christianity to come to an end, that the Catholic Church will pass like all else.

“I feel it necessary to emphasize,” said Sir Arthur Keith recently, voicing the world’s opinion, “that no Church or creed can possibly be permanent.”

We might venture to remind Sir Arthur Keith that the test of time has already been applied to the Catholic Church. Could he say the same of his own dogmas? The Catholic Church is a 2000-year-old fact.

The missing link is still missing. The world looks upon the Catholic Church as a mere human organisation. In denying the divinity of Christ it denies His power to institute an imperishable Church, a Church which shall endure by divine sanction, divine will, and divine life.

Divine, Not Human.

Now, it is in virtue of His divinity that the Church of Christ is a divine organism and not a mere human organisation. It is in virtue of being a divine organism that the Church is imperishable. It lives and endures by divine life, by the Divine Presence within the promised presence of its Founder.

“All power is given to Me in heaven and in earth,” said Christ to His Church, as He sent it forth. “Behold I am with you all days, even unto the consummation of the world” (Matt., 28:18).

It is clearly manifest in that promise that Christ, Who is God, will be with His Church for ever. His aid will be efficacious; all power belongs to Him. His promise is absolute, not conditional. He will be with them “all days” (without interruption; not only with the Apostles themselves, but with their successors constituting with them one moral person), “unto the consummation of the world.” The original Greek meant “until the completion of the age.” The word “completion” in conjunction with “age” is very telling—in fact, final, as far as Christ’s meaning is concerned; for the same two words in conjunction are used by Christ on two other occasions to signify the last judgment. It is clear, then, that Christ’s promise covers the Messianic period consummated by the last judgment at the end of the world. And what Christ promises He wills.

Again, the dictum, “He that heareth you heareth Me,” involves the perpetual, active exercise of Christ’s legateship through His Church. If the Church were to cease, His mission would fail, because the appointed channel through which He acts would be no more. Or, again, if the Church were to end, how could the Paraclete remain with it “forever,” as Christ Himself declared? Neither, unless He made His Church indestructible, could Christ have made that very categorical statement, “The gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

Enduring Ever.

The Church, then, is imperishable. In what sense?

“We declare that the Church of Christ,” says the Vatican Council, “as regards both its existence and constitution, is a lasting and indefectible society, and that after it no economy of salvation is to be looked for, either fuller or more perfect.”

This explicit definition involves that the Church will persist to the end of time and that it can never undergo any constitutional change which will make it, as an organism, other than what Christ made it originally. Its constitution includes the apostolic Hierarchy and the system of worship and sacraments. These can never change. And since no other economy of salvation will take its place, it follows that its teaching, which is part of that economy, can never change.

Vital Growth.

But an unchanging Church does not mean a stagnant Church, as suggested by her critics. Her essential sameness does not deprive her of vital evolution. She is a living organism. She grows. She grows, for instance, in the understanding of herself and those stupendous, unchanging truths committed to her care. She grows theologically.

Again, owing to her indefectible constitution, she never changes those marks by which she perpetually identifies herself, the four-fold glory with which Christ marked her at the beginning. As the centuries roll by, her amazing unity becomes more manifest. By her innate holiness she grows more beautiful with age. Her obvious and undisputed

catholicity put to shame the spurious claims of others to that mark. She alone can show you her Apostolical Line, her pedigree, reaching back for two thousand years to Christ and His Apostles. She alone received the commission of Christ: “As the Father hath sent Me, so also do I send you.”

Age-Long.

Will you forgive a slight digression here, of rather a personal nature? It is an impression of the unbroken Apostolical Line that I once experienced.

I am a convert to the Catholic Church. Many years ago now, while I was still a Protestant, a member of the Established Church of England, I went out to Rome on a holiday. During my stay there I went one Sunday morning to St. Peter’s. It happened to be the occasion of a canonisation. I found a vast multitude inside. Solemn Mass was being sung at the choir altar. I remember how I pressed my way up through the crowd, until I was within reasonable distance of the altar.

And then I stood there watching the great drama of the Mass—the Bishops, the priests, the ceremonies, the ease with which everything went, the matter-of-fact manner which comes from long custom and usage. There was an atmosphere of the centuries, subtle, yet insistent.

Unbroken Line.

As I watched, there came upon me the sense that there was something about it all that the Church of England lacked. This great act was connected with something. age-long, something continuous, some thing that went right back. . . .

And I did not know what that something was.

Today, as a Catholic priest, I do know what that something was. It was the Apostolical Line. And today, as a Catholic priest, I can look down that great, long line, and at its end I can see Christ and His Apostles standing. And I can see a great, long chain of hands being laid on heads, hands-on-heads, hands-on-heads going right back.

And I know that to every single Bishop and priest in that great, long line—and even to myself, as a Catholic priest—Christ has said: “As the Father hath sent Me, so also do I send you.”

The Apostolical Line, reaching back to the beginning, will reach forward, too, until the very end.

That mark will persist with the others.

Divinely Self-Conscious.

For all time the Catholic Church will show the imperishable marks of Christ.

There is something besides the marks upon herself. There is within her an imperishable personality—the very secret of her endurance.

I have already said that she lives and endures by divine life, by the Divine Presence within.

This secret, invisible presence of Christ within His Mystical Body may be actually experienced by the member of His Body. The very first spiritual experience of converts to the Church is that of entering into a new atmosphere, a supernatural atmosphere. It is a completely new experience. And it is more than just sensing an atmosphere.

It is entering into an all-pervading consciousness, the consciousness of an indwelling Divine Presence permeating the Catholic Church through and through. We Catholics are conscious of God, as those outside can never be. We feel the great, throbbing heartbeats of God. His very life pulsing through every vein of His Mystical Body.

The Catholic Church, by virtue of this divine life within, is divinely, supernaturally self-conscious. Being one with an Eternal Presence, her self-consciousness is abiding and continuous. It is communicated to all her members. It matters not whether we live in the first century, A.D., or the twentieth, or the hundredth; we are all sharers of this self-consciousness.

The Catholic Church is supernaturally self-conscious in the same sort of way in which we are naturally self-conscious as human beings.

For instance, when you reflect, you become conscious of things that happened to yourself when you were young. You are aware that you are the same person as the person who experienced those things. You are conscious of yourself as

being one and the same person all through life. You find in yourself an “abiding identity of personality.”

In the same way the Catholic Church is conscious of herself as being the same moral person all through. She has an “abiding identity of personality.” She is conscious of the things that happened to her when she was young. We, as her members, share her consciousness of those things.

Our Presence in the Gospel Events.

And, therefore, to us, the things we read of in the Gospels are not merely historical facts, not merely dogmas of the faith that we assent to. We are vividly conscious of the truth of these things, as sharing them with the Apostles themselves in the self-conscious life of the Church.

In this sense we experience what they experienced. With them we can cry: “I am there with Christ in Galilee. I witness what He says and does. I see Him build His Church on Peter. I am with Him in the Upper Room; in the garden of His agony. I stand beneath the cross; I see the empty tomb; I see Him risen from the dead. To me all glorified He comes; to me He shows the pierced hands and feet; to Him I cry ‘My Lord, my God!’”

That is the assurance given to members of His Mystical Body. It is the Church’s abiding identity of personality that gives this spiritual experience to Catholics for all time. The things of Revelation are ever-present realities. And though one thousand centuries pass, yet, at the end of them, in that far-away future, every Catholic, as sharing in her self-consciousness, will be a witness to the truth of what the Church proclaims, as you and I are witnesses today.

One With Christ.

This is one of our glorious privileges.

And it is in virtue of being members of the Mystical Body of Christ, Who is God eternal, that we constitute with Him, in a mystical sense, an imperishable personality in an imperishable body—His Church.

It is thus, by union with the person of Christ, that His Mystical Body endures.

The only further point required in proof of my thesis—the imperishability of the Church—is the reason for it. This is so obvious that it may be stated in the fewest words:

As long as there are souls to be saved, so long will there remain in this world the means which God has provided and made necessary for their salvation. Since there will be souls to be saved until the end, it follows that the Church, which is the means of salvation, will endure to the end.

I have said enough now to show you that the Catholic Church is not only unailing and unending, and unchanging yet living, but that she also bears upon herself the marks of Christ proclaiming her forever as His own, and endures by His divine life within.

It remains for me to demonstrate that, historically, she is unconquerable.

Relentless Foes.

We may divide her would-be conquerors into two classes—first, the innovators, and, second, our old foes, the world, the flesh and the devil. The innovators, who include most of the heretics, are those who fondly seek for something new to supersede the Catholic Church. The world, the flesh and the devil need no introduction.

Concerning the innovators, they, from the beginning, have endeavoured to supplant God’s scheme with a better scheme of their own. Prominent amongst them in the early days were the Gnostics, the Montanists, the Manicheans, and the Donatists, all of whom sought something purer and more spiritual than the Church for whom Christ sacrificed Himself that she might be sanctified in truth, all of them ignoring the parable of the tares and the wheat, all of them preaching and awaiting a new Pentecost upon themselves or their future followers.

Too Good for the Church.

For such as these the Church of God is never good enough.

The same spirit of innovation resided with the Protestant Reformation. Protestantism is supposedly an attempt to improve upon the Catholic religion. Its representatives, like their predecessors of the early days, have all claimed for themselves the special enlightenment and guidance of the Holy Ghost. Their refusal to submit to authority and to trust their spiritual life to a divinely-guided body has resulted in at least three hundred splits; in contradictory and warring sects. This hopeless jumble of contradictions is a sufficient refutation of their own claims. The Holy Ghost cannot be the author of contradictions.

The final consequence of all this individualism run mad is the production of monstrosities like Christian Science and Theosophy; also of dangerous irresponsibles, such as Dr. Marie Stopes, who claims a special revelation for propagating birth-control. Ultimately all Illuminism and Individualism spells megalomania. We may instance the hysterical scenes witnessed at Protestant revivalist meetings.

They Fall, Not We.

The innovating heretics, for twenty centuries now, have been watching for the Catholic Church to crash into ruins. One by one they have endeavoured to shatter her claim to be forever the unique Spirit-bearing Body of Christ. One by one they have been disappointed. Long ago their fallacies were exposed. Saint Justin, Saint Irenaeus, and Saint Augustine saw that. To one Church alone, built on a Rock, Christ promised the presence of His Holy Spirit—"that He may abide with you forever."

One by one the innovating sects have perished—and will perish. For their own spirit, and not the Spirit of God, is with them. And over their strewn corpses the Church of God marches on.

The Terrible Three.

The other would-be conquerors of the Catholic Church are, as I have already said, the world, the flesh, and the devil.

All down the ages of Christendom these three have worked together to cast Christ and His Church from the face of the earth. So intense is their hatred of the Light, so fierce, so ceaseless, so relentless their persecution of the kingdom of God, that, if that kingdom were but a human institution, it would have perished centuries ago.

From the beginning the world, knowing well that the foundation must first be shattered, has struck at the Rock on which that kingdom was built, on which it stands today.

But every blow has been parried from above. Herod the king casts Peter into prison, bound in chains. Down comes the angel of God, blazing white, from the Eternal Presence, breaks the chains, flings open the gate. Peter is free, Herod struck dead.

The Church of God marches on.

The kingdom grows, reaches the heart of the pagan Roman Empire, challenging the proud Caesars, challenging their gods! Its members are flung to wild beasts or burnt alive. They die smiling, upheld by some strange power, the name of a Galilean peasant on their lips. Their Popes are martyred one by one. But still the kingdom grows. The lusts and obscenities of paganism would strangle her in foul embrace, yet quail before the radiant purity of Christ's Bride, slink from God's beauty shining in her eyes. A Caesar is converted. The Roman Empire dies—and emerges in the Catholic Church of Christ. The Caesar yields his throne to Peter. "Thou hast conquered, Galilean!"

The Church of God marches on.

Down from the North sweep the armies of the Huns, led by the mighty Attila—resistless, unconquered, to the gates of Rome. They surge about the Rock. Attila the mighty is met by the mightier Leo. The torrent recedes. Attila lies dead.

The Church of God marches on.

From the South comes the cry of Mohammed—the proud boast of the sword. On the Rock the sword is snapped.

Blind and Clumsy.

And so we watch the efforts of the world all down the centuries, a world blinded by its own antagonism, unable even

to bend the Catholic Church to its will, let alone destroy it, too blind to learn the lesson of Canossa; for there, at least, in the person of Henry IV., humiliated and in tears, it kissed the feet of Peter—Canossa, where Calvary was avenged.

We watch the world's clumsy endeavours to capture the Church of God for its own ends. We watch the Church eluding it, as spirit eludes matter, smiling at such attempts. See Napoleon strutting before Pius VII, a crowned emperor alternately raging at and flattering a Pope. "Lend the spiritual power of your Church to the power of my empire." The Pope looks at him and replies, "You comedian."

Or witness the revolutionaries of 1870 destroying the temporal power of the Church to strike down her spiritual power—Garibaldi, Crispi, Gambetta, Cadorna. The Church picks up the gauntlet and flings back in their faces the dogma of Papal infallibility!

She marches on unconquered and unconquerable—unconquered. by the world, unconquered by the flesh and the devil.

Grim Enemies.

For the devil not merely engineers the world and its hatred; he also undermines by means of human passions. Time and again in the past the lusts of men have warred against the Bride of Christ, from without and even from within.

But for the lusts of Luther and Henry VIII. and their followers it is questionable whether the tragedy of the Reformation would ever have come about. Their lusts were certainly its occasion. The first Protestants were bad Catholics—apostate traitors to the sanctity of the Mother who bore them.

There have been times when the flesh has almost seemed to prevail. See Gregory VII. fighting the immorality that threatened to swamp the Bark of Peter. See him dying, an outcast from his own Rome, and crying: "I have loved justice and hated iniquity; therefore I die in exile."

Satan has ever scourged the Church with the lusts of the flesh, and he ever will—relying on the frailty of our human nature. But does he think thereby to soil the virgin purity of the Bride of Christ? From the beginning until the end she remains intact and inviolable, consecrated to His Father by the Son of God.

So much for the world and the flesh.

Behind them, and employing them all down the ages, stand the powers of darkness, malignant in their irrevocable hatred of the Catholic Church. Our warfare, St. Paul declares, is not so much against "flesh and blood" as against "principalities and powers, against the rulers of the world of this darkness."

It would seem in these latter days that Satan and his evil angels are preparing a further scheme, in spite of all their failures in the past. The steady growth of spiritism, of occultism, of freemasonry; and, above all, of Godless humanitarianism, all point to an increased activity on the part of the powers of evil.

A Mock Church.

Why do the adherents of these movements so continually stress two words. Those words are Light and Man (with a big M). The word Light means the Light of Nature, as opposed to the Light of Christ; Reason as opposed to Revelation. The word Man means Humanity, as opposed to God. Do these movements stand for something that is forming against the Church of God?

We speak of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ, a framework, a supernatural organism living by the life of Christ. Is it beyond the genius of Satan to build to himself a parallel kind of framework, an antithesis to the Mystical Body of Christ? There is a carefully planned framework to be found in freemasonry—a supreme pontiff, a hierarchy, a temple, ceremonial worship, degrees of initiation, festivals, a creed. This planned framework is an antithesis to God's plan for His Church. It is a deliberate plan of worship. It is naturalism as opposed to supernaturalism.

Freemasonry.

Comte, the founder of humanitarianism, some ninety years ago put forward such a scheme himself. His idea, propagated by the headers of rationalism, has now infiltrated into the minds of millions—the idea of a system in which

humanity is to occupy the place that God occupies in the Catholic Church. In freemasonry we find the framework ready for its realisation. Remember, freemasonry is our deadly enemy. It is freemasonry in Mexico, in France, and, I believe, in Russia, too.

We can no longer dismiss the humanitarian scheme as a chimera. It is something which is beginning to actualise in our very midst. Modern science is being prostituted in its service. Modern thought, as expressed in almost all de-Christianising movements of the day, is everywhere converging towards that one idea—humanity as the supreme object of attention and devotion: Man alone matters, The great god Man is growing beneath our eyes.

One instinctively recalls St. Paul's reference to the coming "Man of sin . . . who opposeth and is lifted up above all that is called God . . . showing himself as if he were God."

Satan is no fool. "You shall be as gods" proved highly seductive in the Garden of Eden. It may prove equally seductive again. The Kingdom of Man, so widely urged today as the only means of achieving human happiness on earth, is the most alluring alternative to the Kingdom of God. I am not prophesying. I am suggesting. And I speak as "one less wise."

If the Kingdom of Man is achieved, it will fail. It will procure neither man's happiness nor the downfall of the Kingdom of God.

Will the world never perceive that there is something in the Catholic Church which it can never conquer, that her existence today is a fact for which no human or natural causes can account, that every earthly kingdom has crashed beneath what she has withstood, that she survives what only a divine kingdom could survive, that her continued presence in the world is an abiding miracle of God, and that the Providence which keeps her will keep her to the end?

But if the future does hold in store some such satanic empire of neo-paganism for the ousting of the Catholic Church, then we may, indeed, expect a persecution comparable with that of pagan Rome. Satan has succeeded so far in turning nations against the Church. He will not rest until he turns the world against us. If he does that he will fail in his battle with the Church.

Let world-wide martyrdom come! Then once more we shall die smiling, with the name of a Galilean peasant on our lips, and the Church of God will march on until the day dawns and the shadows of earth flee away.

Nihil obstat:
J. DONOVAN
Censor Deputatus.

Imprimatur.
✠ D. MANNIX,
Archiepiscopus Melbournensis
