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THE TITLE "CATHOLIC" AND THE ROMAN CHURCH

BY M. A. R. TUKER



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**THE TITLE "CATHOLIC"
AND THE ROMAN CHURCH¹**

By M. A. R. TUKER

WHEN the complete order of the coronation service of Edward VII. was published, *The Church Times* lifted up its voice against the omission of the description "Catholic Faith" for the religion which the king swears to maintain. The actual words had been unfamiliar to the generations of Englishmen who have grown up since the Tractarian movement: if they had forgotten "what manner of men they were," their memories had not been so short as St. James's "hearer of the word," for neither the royal oath nor the "crisis in the Church" had recently held up a glass to them. In April, 1902, the Protestant bishops of Ireland at their synod claimed the title "Catholic" for the Anglican Church; while on the other hand Cardinal Vaughan had discussed the question whether Catholics could properly be styled "Roman Catholics." The question raised in these three cases is one which enjoys a perennial popular interest

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without being at the same time hackneyed. It is not hackneyed because it has never yet been disentangled from the nicknaming which presided at its birth, which has done much to save it from being approached in any but a superficial manner. I propose not to enter on controversial or theological ground—the inquiry as to which Church is most primitive, most "Catholic," how much added definitions in the Roman Church have altered its character—but to extricate the inquiry, if possible, from the vexatious questions of "continuity" and the nature of the doctrines which constitute, limit or determine "catholicity"; directing attention to one point only, the evolution in history of the term catholic as applied to the Christian Church. Professor Harnack has a pregnant sentence which cannot be overlooked in any future discussions: "Historically the Church of the [Petrine] Chair was the root and mother of the *one Catholic Church*," and, being only a Lutheran, he would be willing to accept the consequences freely both for Germany and England.

The earliest appellation of the Faith was "the Christian." Rome, perhaps, first drew official attention to the inalienable congregational character of its followers when the Roman Christians chose to be known to official Rome as "The Church of the Brethren"—*ecclesia fratrum*. The earliest disciples spoke of the "Holy Church"—a body in part composed of the disciples themselves, but also partly mystical, as the "Bride," the "New Jerusalem," whose counterpart was in heaven. The Gospel of "the Kingdom of God" found an echo in this insistence on the idea of the *ecclesia*, the society with the leaven in its midst. But as against the pagan world around them, whether in the

Antioch of Chrysostom or the England of Hengist, they were simply the "Christian Church." Any further appellations for the Holy Church were beaten out by the exigencies of controversy; they owed their existence to the heresies which sprang up and which nearly succeeded in suffocating the new religion. Such in especial is the origin of the two historical appellations for the Church which have superseded every other at the present day—"Catholic" and "Orthodox." From the combat with heresy in the East issued the Orthodox Church; from the same combat in the West emerged the Church Catholic. What, if any, was the difference between these two titles, or the lines of thought described and connoted by them? Just the difference which inheres in the words themselves. In the one case, importance placed on the thought, and the bond and means of unity depending on the intellectual adhesion of the individual; in the other, importance placed primarily in the notion of a universal society, and the bond and means of unity residing in the society itself. Attention called to right belief for the one, attention called to right discipline for the other. The Roman scheme of Church membership—where the elements of unity were *congregational* elements, to be seized and to operate externally—involved a conception of Church legislation akin to that put forth by the Church at Jerusalem (Acts xv. 28, 29), a mixture, that is, of essential and non-essential. One cannot imagine the historical Eastern Church at any time putting forth a decree in which theological precision and the metaphysical temper were so lacking as here. But when Augustin insisted that the Christian Pasch should be kept on the same day by the Britons and the new Anglo-Saxon converts, and that the British

priests should wear the Roman tonsure, he was not cavilling, he was faithfully representing the genius of the country whose emissary he was.

The genesis of the term and the notion *catholic* can therefore be easily traced. As signifying the Christian Church *everywhere*—"catholic" in its simple adjectival sense of universal—the term had indeed been used as early as a common rule of faith, and the notion of the Christian Church as a world-wide united body became focussed or imaginable.¹ A universal rule of interpretation, a faith believed universally, was denoted by it. But when the members of the Holy Church are first solemnly called "Catholic Christians" by Theodosius in 380, the word is pronounced with the Roman hallmark and its historical significance is already attached to it. The religion "which Peter taught to the Romans" is to be the common form of Christianity; it is professed by Damasus as representing Rome, and by Peter Bishop of Alexandria, not as Bishop of that See, but as "a man of apostolic holiness." The See of Peter guarantees the authenticity of the doctrine; Peter of Alexandria's holy life is a pledge of its Christian character. And what is this Catholic doctrine? A simple statement of the dogmas concerning the Trinity which is shared nowadays by our Nonconformists and by the non-episcopal Presbyterian Church. But the historical implication of catholicity knew no such limit; historically, then and since, *Catholic* implied a well-marked divine society in communion with the Patriarchate of the West. Its significance did not lie in a mere denial of Arianism, nor even in the notion of a "Church everywhere"; it meant something wider than the one, narrower than the other

¹ See footnote p. 12.

—the union of the Churches, the consolidation of the Churches, through the See of Rome, added to the Roman conception of the *ecclesia*. It was not some subtle emanation of true Christianity; it was adopted as the name for that Christendom which emerged from the sects as the work of the Roman Church. Antecedently to that "broadening of the Churches into Catholicity," which was accomplished by the See of Peter, the Catholic character did not exist. I do not propose to discuss whether the character thus imposed on Christendom was a fine or desirable one—whether separate local Churches without the idea of the Catholic Church would have brought Christianity to the pass which J. R. Green (no pleader for Rome) declares would have resulted had Columba been preferred before Peter in the famous dispute at York. The one point to which I seek to call attention is that catholicity does not inhere in the conception of the Christian *ecclesia*—is no *proprium* of the Christian Church—but inheres in Rome's conception of that Church, and is an acquired attribute which we owe to Rome. *Catholic* in the West and *Orthodox* in the East are historical, not inherent titles.

Let us now look at the Eastern Church. Constantinople was "New Rome," and on this ground aggregated to herself some of the privileges of the Petrine See. I think this is a truth often neglected. Constantinople, the See next in importance and honour to Rome, the mother and root of the Orthodox Church and liturgy and discipline, was not all this *quâ* pre-existing Church of the East, but *quâ* an Eastern substitute for Western Rome. Her style, her title of prerogative is not: See of Constantinople, the ancient Eastern Church, but:

See of Constantinople, *The New Rome*, and so her bishops signed the Councils of the universal Church. It is Constantinople, not Jerusalem, or Antioch, or Alexandria, which is placed by the Œcumenical Council of Constantinople (A.D. 381) next in honour to Rome. Constantinople, "the new Rome." But Constantinople and its subsidiary Sees underwent the influence of Eastern Christianity; Orthodoxy was of more importance to the metaphysical oriental than organization; metaphysical subtleties than an ordered society. The idea of its catholicity, the Roman quota, the character *Rome* had impressed on the Holy Church, was tacitly allowed to fall away, to be supplanted by the conception of Orthodoxy. The Eastern liturgies indeed call the Church "catholic" in the creed, and the word occurs twice in the liturgy of Chrysostom; but the real spontaneous description—in the liturgy and out of it—of the Holy Eastern Church, of its bishops and members, is "orthodox," and Holy Orthodox Church is its official title both among the Greeks and Russians. When the schism of the West was accomplished, the Eastern Church for all practical purposes dropped the other title, and no longer spoke of herself or required her sons to speak of her as the Catholic, or the Greek Catholic Church. The word "catholic," as employed to-day in the Eastern liturgy, is as much an antiquarian reminiscence as the word "orthodox" in our prayer "for all orthodox and catholic believers" in the Roman liturgy. Moreover all that the Eastern Church assimilated or valued in the notion of *catholicity* was exhausted for her in the word *orthodox*. So that when William Palmer went to Russia in the forties, fresh from the Tractarian movement and the insistence on the idea

of the catholicity of the Church of England, to induce the Russian priesthood to give him—an Anglican in deacon's orders—Communion, he could not find any one, hierarch or other, to set any store by the name or the idea. They were not catholic, they were orthodox, and if Anglicans wished to communicate with the Orthodox Church they must make overtures through their Patriarch the Bishop of Rome.

Sixty years ago the title "catholic" in the English Church was in much the same position as it has been in the Eastern Church since the schism with Rome. If it had not been for the use of the vernacular in Anglican formularies, and the lack of a term to denote their Church tantamount historically to the Greek "Orthodox," the style "Catholic" would have ceased to be regarded as any part of its practical or working description. But a word did exist which denoted the English religion, and this word was "Protestant": chosen by the Reformers, adopted, officially and popularly, by the English Church, this style has nothing in common with such terms as "Romanist," "Papist," and "Papisher," intended to designate Catholics. These latter were adopted as nicknames by our countrymen; they were not, they could not, pretend to be historical appellations; nor were they descriptions which the great Church indicated thereby put forth regarding herself. The use they served must have been that of suggesting to the populace that the Church from which England had separated was *not* the venerable and historic Catholic Church.

Why, one may ask, should the Church of England desire a name which the Church of the East does not claim which sleeps at the back of its consciousness as

an historical memory? The English Articles of Religion declare that all the Eastern Churches fell into error; but it is the fashion for the English Church to turn with respectful sympathy nowadays to the Greek Church. The assumption (so satisfactory to the Reformers) that every Church in Christendom had fallen into error, that the Reformed Church alone could claim to be pure, does not suit men who are looking round about them for Catholic kinsfolk. Therefore no high churchman now suggests that the Eastern Church needs reforming, and no word is raised even against that practical neglect and depreciation of the title "catholic," which in his eyes is anathema in England.

Let it not be thought that there was an original and primitive meaning of the word and the thing "catholic" which applies to a Christian Church like the Church of England, and that the historical meaning is a later description.¹ Catholicity is no nebulous entity, but a very precise and concrete historical fact; and it would be difficult to state any set of doctrines on which it depends. A Church is not entitled to a name because it broke off from a Church which possessed it, and I do not suppose that Anglicans cling to it because the Emperor Theodosius gave the Christians of his time permission to use it. For the English Church to insist on its Catholicity is for it to insist on its Romanism. "Catholic" has always been as much the badge of a great party in the West as "Orthodox" in the East, and as applied to the English Church it

¹ The rise (half conscious) of a bolder meaning for catholicity is referred to in my *Liturgy in Rome*, Part II. of the *Handbook to Christian and Ecclesiastical Rome*, pp. 317, 318, but the position of the English Church is in no way affected thereby.

means that this Church is part and parcel of the Western Patriarchate. Whether Colet would have reformed the Church, or Pole would have recognized the English Church, is of no consequence to the issue: the subsequent history of the Church in England would in either case have been entirely different to what it has been.

As we all know, among a certain party in England no one can belong simply to the English Church; he must belong to the Catholic Church, and he is, as those who study Anglican literature discover, a Catholic *tout simplement*. But a member of the Unreformed Church of history, whether in or out of England, is not a Catholic *tout simplement*. He is a *Roman Catholic*. So in Spain a man is not a Spanish Catholic, he is a Spanish Roman Catholic. In England only is he fortunate enough to be an English Catholic, *i.e.*, an unqualified Catholic. Now must there not be here some jugglery with words and things? The fiction at work is that the "Catholic Church" is in possession in England, and any other Church which seeks to gain converts "sets up altar against altar." The Catholic Church does so, and is dubbed "The Italian Mission"; the Greek Church does so, but no reference is made to the fact. On the other hand, some Umbrian schismatics are included in the diocese of Salisbury, and it would be admitted that no more flagrant instance of setting up "altar against altar" exists than the establishment of the Church of England in Ireland. This fiction, moreover, does not explain why it is that apparently the "Roman" Catholic Church functions in Austria, Spain, Italy, Belgium, and France, while "the Catholic Church" functions in England. The fact is

that by adding a mark of cadency to the historical Catholic Church of the West, the Church of England has confused the issues. She leaves it to be believed that there is a vague entity, "the Catholic Church," without habitat in time or place, of which both "Rome and England" are cadets. The "Branch" theory—that the English Church is a branch of the Catholic Church—sounds very business-like. But there has never been anywhere a branch of the Catholic Church which was not also Roman; and, above all, a branch implies organic union with the parent stem. The Russian Church is a true daughter of the Holy Orthodox Church, from which it was founded and missionised, for "how shall they preach unless they are sent?" Is the Anglican Church a daughter of the Catholic Church in communion with Rome? If not, from what Catholicity does it claim? Do the Umbrians in the Bishop of Salisbury's diocese become "Italian Catholics" or "English Catholics"? and do they thus drop all qualification because they have broken away from Rome, while the historical Church next door (say in Lombardy or Venice) is *Roman Catholic*? For be it observed that the "Roman" is here used not in the sense in which we rightly say "Greek Orthodox," "Russian Orthodox," "French Catholic," "American Catholic," but as qualifying its Catholicity. The confusion is encouraged by the gratuitous assumption that "Roman," "Greek," and "Anglican" are obvious designations of three divisions of "the Catholic Church"; although "Roman Catholic" was not the title of the unreformed Church of the West subject to the Western patriarchate before the Reformation, and "Greek Catholic" does not signify the Holy Orthodox

Church even in English Church newspapers. The "branch" theory will not serve as a note of catholicity, because the only and sole meaning of "branch" in these cases is a Church which is not in communion with either of the others.

The Döllingerites assumed the name of Old Catholics, and "Protestant Catholic" would have a somewhat similar historical significance. Or is it judged more seemly that the Catholic Church should take on a qualifying adjective every time that a "branch" determines to break off from her? The expression "English Catholic" is not only misleading on the Continent, but is indeed not infrequently used to mislead, as when members of the English Church snatch an absolution at St. Peter's in Rome by telling the priest they are "English Catholics." I know of a clergyman who induced the persons temporarily in his employ in an Italian country place to attend the "mass" he celebrated in his house. Had he explained to them that, however erroneously, this mass *all'inglese* was reputed heretical by their own lawful pastors they would certainly not have gone. I trust the "Italian Mission" in England is not capable, with all its proselytising faults, of so swelling a congregation, though it has never subscribed to the "altar against altar" theory. I myself had an experience more curious than edifying some years ago when I was spending the summer in Italy. In a small country town I met an English canon and his wife, and we had some very pleasant conversations at the *tables d'hôte*, where we were the only English people. One evening I pronounced the word "Protestant"—I remember I was quoting Mr. Wilfrid Ward. My English canon's opportunity had come—thrusting his chair away

from the table he declared he would not sit there to be called a Protestant. He and his wife thereupon left the table, and neither this grey-haired clergyman nor his grey-haired wife—hailing from a diocese associated with "high church" causes—could find it in their hearts even to salute me when we met at the next meal.

Now, when did the English Church officially notify the rest of Christendom that she had repudiated the term Protestant and blotted the word out from her formularies? (In which, be it remembered, she has never ventured to describe herself as the Anglican Catholic Church.) Until this is done, what bishop or clergyman has a right to resent an appellation which is that used by the ecclesiastical head of the English Church when he administers to his sovereign the oath "to maintain the Protestant Reformed Religion established by law," and which a late Archbishop of Canterbury (Benson) said formed part of the proper description of his Church? Is it not reasonable that there should be some distinction between the Catholic Church of history (which had a local existence and authority and voice through the centuries) and that Reformed Church, which its late head declared was "both Catholic and Protestant"? Let us suppose that in France there were to be not only Calvinists and Catholics but a "branch" off from the Catholic Church, which either refused or was refused communion with Rome. This would not be the French Catholic Church. It might conceivably be of sufficient importance, sufficiently historical, sufficiently bound up with the laws and affections of the land to be known as the *Gallican* Church. But let us suppose that in every country "branches" broke off from communion with Rome—in

such an event there might cease to be a Catholic Church at all. There might still be, let us say, a "Holy Church" (as our Apostles' creed originally ran), but there would no longer be a Catholic Church—for Catholic is a word denoting the Roman orthodoxy of Christians outside the local Roman Church. But the truth is that neither "Catholic" nor "English Catholic" would at any time denote the English Church to a majority of its members, and no body of Christians in existence to-day would concede her the title.

If this is the case with "English Catholic," what can be said for "Roman Catholic"? This can only mean Catholic in communion with Rome, and as such is not an improper, though it is a redundant title. Nevertheless there is no such historical warrant for its use as for that of the title "Protestant." As I understand Cardinal Vaughan, he thinks the description "Roman Catholic" preferable to the equivocal use of "Catholic," and I have no doubt that had "Papist" been adopted as a consequence of the rise of an anti-papal party, say in the third century, to designate Catholics in communion with the Pope, Christians would have been well content with it. But historically "Protestant" has the advantage of "Papist"; it was chosen by the parties so described, and it has not the offensiveness of a nickname given to offend or to imply a character not claimed by the persons so denoted. But why are we to like "Papist" as a fitting description, and you to regard "Protestant" as a malicious nickname?

In claiming that "Catholic" is as much the distinctive, appropriate and historical title of the Unreformed Church of the West, as "Orthodox" is the distinctive, appropriate and historical title of the Unreformed

Church of the East—that no other solution is conformable to history or the common usage of language—we are supported not only by Professor Harnack, who has been called the first of living Church historians, but also by the finest of English critics, Matthew Arnold; who while allowing to the Anglican communion the historic title of "Church of England," deemed the changes in the sixteenth century too far-reaching to warrant its retention of "Catholic."

Enough, I think, has been said to show not only that catholicism is the characteristic of the Roman Church—its child, its creature, the outcome and expression of its genius—but that the Roman Church and the conception of catholicity are inseparable. No Church separated from Rome has continued to prize or represent catholicity, which is still (for better or worse) the strength and marrow of the Churches of the Western patriarchate. The conception of orthodoxy—the imposing of a mental agreement—is in itself a disintegrating, not a binding principle. In any case, it was foreign to the tolerant, social, imperial and non-metaphysical Roman Church, whose quota to Christendom is hence not intensive but extensive. The sanction of Church membership in the West was at no time, as in the East, attachment to an irreformable formula, but, on the contrary, attachment to a divine society. But if the Roman Church has been non-metaphysical, she has shown a faculty for practical psychology unapproached by any other Christian Church. She instinctively understood that unity for the masses is a question of will and affections, not of intellect; that it cannot in the ultimate resort depend on a correct conception of doctrines which have never in fact been realised or comprehended; that

the people cannot commit abstract defection (or heresy), it must be concrete defection from the visible society. Rome has never treated the schismatic as standing any nearer the truth than the heretic. She assumes (as imperial Rome assumed) that no man of good will need rend the unity of Christendom. She has had, moreover, the far-seeing courage not to shrink from the logical consequence, namely, that a man may be a heretic in thought yet remain a Catholic in intention, Church membership being based not on the theological knowledge of the flock but on their presence in the fold. The plague of the heretic is not in the mistaken thought, the incorrect concept, but in the use he makes of this to destroy the unity of the divine society.

Such a system may, and undoubtedly does, tend to substitute obedience to authority for the interior and ennobling *argumenta* of faith. But there must always be men to whom the ideas which group round "*catholic*" have more power of attraction than those excited by "*orthodox*," and who are grateful to the Roman Church for making that great conception the handmaid of Western Christianity; whereby Christian unity came to signify the embracing of as many minds as possible under a common all-comprehensive formula, which threw the onus of defection on the dissentient member; and whereby it was understood that the universal notion represented by the *ecclesia* was the Ark of Unity, not the *archivium* of Orthodoxy.

At least this is the only Church system which has effected unity without courting stagnation: and it may safely be said that no body of Christians has ever so valued, so emphasized, so identified itself with this ideal of unity as the body of Christians formed by the Roman

Church and the Roman Popes. While Orthodoxy indicated the ground of unity, but was powerless to effect it, the Roman idea was to knit the world of believers in Christ in a visible, tangible society capable of effecting what it signified. Rome rejected the spiritual idea of the "other sheep" who hear Christ's voice and form one intangible flock, preferring to it the conception of the one fold—the *ovile* boldly repeated by her in John x. 16. This is the greatness—it may also be the weakness—of Catholicism; but this and nothing else is historical Catholicity.

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