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## ART. II.—THE GOSPEL AND THE INDIVIDUAL.

“WHEN you come to the individual, you have got beyond me.” So a great theologian is reported to have said in conversation with an interrogator. I cannot answer for the exact words, but they were repeated to me on good authority. In any case, they may be taken as a remark which, if not actually made, is abundantly *veri simile*; it would be characteristic and significant in many important quarters of the present religious world.

A strong drift of thought around us sets in the direction of all that is collective and corporate. It meets us everywhere in non-religious connections, social and civil. But my present concern is with it as it is felt in Christian connections. In these it is everywhere, in one phase or another. Here and there a leading teacher, numerous followed, lays a pressing insistence on collective “*humanity*” as the object of redemption, or as the organ of revelation. He sees in “*humanity*” the slowly developing manifestation of God, who penetrates and informs it with His Spirit, and whose eternal Son is its Archetype and its Sum. The word “*humanity*” sounds on perpetually through such teaching, like the theme of a fugue; our minds are impressively occupied in this school of thought by such ideas as the development of humanity, its liberation from evil, its education into advancing phases of truth and goodness. The tendency is to apply to it the whole spiritual vocabulary of salvation, from election onwards to resurrection and to the coming glory.

In other quarters (though often and again these regions of thought and exposition not only border upon each other, but overlap), with equal earnestness and eloquence, that great and sacred word the *Church* is the theme, so to speak, of the music. I may waive for the moment the question, What definition in detail is applied to the word “*Church*”? I take it now as denoting, on any theory, a community, corporate and collective. The thought of such a great complex entity fairly governs and possesses a whole theology. It meets us from every quarter and at every turn. In this teaching the *Church*, in its aggregation, is the representative of God in the world. It is, as an aggregate, the object and recipient of His salvation, and the teacher and transmitter of His message. Yet more, according to some widely-prevalent convictions: it is the sphere, or the channel, of His redeeming Life. It is the avenue to Him who is the Sanctuary. It is the way to Jesus Christ, in the order of life eternal. We may go further: it is (according to the view in question) so united mysteriously to

Him, it is so impregnated, as it were, with Him, that on the one hand we cannot, as men, touch Him except by contact with it, and on the other hand we cannot be in contact with it without touching Him.

So have I heard, with profound attention, the case stated by able and devout expounders of this theology. With all earnestness they repudiated the suggestion that certain teachings of theirs tend to give undue prominence to the Church at the risk of a diminution of the prominence of her Lord. Their contention was that so has He given Himself to her, and, as it were, lodged Himself, for the world's blessing, in her, that it is difficult to say too much of the Church, just because of the supreme glory and vital necessity of Jesus Christ. She is everything to us, because in her we have Him.

Naturally, under the power of such convictions, the whole Scriptural vocabulary of salvation (to repeat the phrase used above) tends to be applied prevalently to this great collective entity, the Church. As with the other line of ideas, so with this: the processes of grace, from the past to the coming eternity, are mainly contemplated as taking effect upon the body corporate as such. Not the soul, not the man, not the individual, but the Church is, upon the whole, the preferred and ruling object of reference.

As one important practical result, the phrases "corporate life," "corporate work," and the like, are heard among us in always more frequency and power. There is a steadily growing disposition to discredit and discountenance anything, in either life or work, that seems out of keeping with those watchwords. Religious individualism is emphatically (in theory) in disgrace, and religious collectivism in honour.

It is quite manifest that the tendencies I attempt roughly to indicate carry with them powerful elements of truth—truth of reason and truth of revelation. Individualism, if it means a real isolation of the individual into a life of self-sufficiency, self-assertion, self-will, is a profound and manifest fallacy as regards all purposes of good, alike for the individual and his surroundings. As manifestly as man was constituted not for himself but for God, so was he constituted not for himself but for others. And what conscience and consciousness suggest, Revelation affirms. The Bible almost begins with the Divine assertion that it is not good for the man, the individual, to be alone. And then it goes on, in its history of redemption, at least from Abraham onwards, to develop the magnificent idea of a *society* of men; related as a society to God; receiving as a society His teachings and His blessings; strengthening itself internally by the fellowship of its members in His presence; guarding as a society His message of grace

and hope ; and, as a society, commissioned by its glorious Head and Lord to convey that message out into the world. When the development of the idea reaches its ultimate stages, in the Epistles and the Revelation, the words seem to labour with the effort to express its greatness to the full. "Glorious things are spoken" of the Church of Christ. It, in its collective character, is "the body of the Lord," the organism for His operation. It is "the Bride" of the Lord, the object of His sacred complacency, and of the vast sacrifice of His dying love ; "nourished, and cherished," and glorified at last, by Him (see Eph. v.). "There is one body and one spirit." "You are all one, *one person* (*εἷς*), in Christ Jesus." Race, and age, and sex, and rank, all are merged, in this wonderful collectivity, in Him.

All this I, for one, would recollect with reverent care. The non-individual side of Christian life is a side vastly prominent and momentous according to the Holy Scriptures. It may be distorted, it may be travestied, but in itself it is truth. Men, even the best of men, may attempt impossible definitions of the Church ; but the Church is nevertheless a vast fact in the Divine programme. Things absolutely unpractical may be said about cohesion and unity. They may be preached as if they were Alpha and Omega, in their most external forms ; as if it was more vital to maintain or restore collectivity of management and formal obedience than to preserve or to reassert the spiritual truths which most nearly touch the personal conscience and will. Yet cohesion and unity are not only noble in principle and idea ; rightly and temperately understood, they are altogether salutary in practical effect. The dislocation and the collision of Christians *as such* cannot possibly be according to the mind of God, whether it be of Christians taken singly or of Christian communities.

In the light of such assured facts, the watchwords of "corporate life," "corporate work," "Church life and work," and the like, have a great and good work to do. They have a perpetual mission to exercise against the evils which must always cling to a thoughtless or a self-willed isolation. They warn the individual that he can never possibly live aright if he lives in mere relation to himself. Not only must his usefulness suffer gravely if he is content to work outside all constituted relation to others. His inward, his inmost, life will suffer if he allows himself to be the spiritual hermit instead of the limb of the Body.

Yet, in face of all these facts, not admitted only, but cordially affirmed, I dare to think that it is not untimeily to emphasize also the other side of things. I alluded above in passing to distortions, travesties, impossibilities sometimes

encountered when one reads or listens to the advocacy of Church life and Church work. It is assuredly so. Definitions of the Church are often offered or attempted which square neither with reason nor with Scripture. Often it is forgotten that, in the very nature of the case, in this world of the Fall, the ideal of the Church does not coincide with its actual. So St. Augustine long ago was constrained to own and to teach when the Donatist problem pressed the matter upon his thoughts. He pointed out with distinctness and decision that "not only in eternity, but now, hypocrites are not to be described as being associated with Christ, *however they may SEEM* to be in His Church . . . by reason of their temporary commingling with the true members, and their equal share with them in Sacraments" ("De Doctr. Chr.," iii. 32). Forgetting this, good men make assertions in definition of the Church which inevitably burst and give way when they are impartially compared with some of the great Scripture tests, negative and positive, of a true incorporation into our Lord. The claims made on the basis of such a definition—the outrageous Roman claims, for example, but by no means those alone—can only invite a resistance which easily runs to an opposite and really individualistic extreme. They tend to expand into a spiritual tyranny, till "the Church" becomes more or less the autocrat of conscience; and the assertion, however reverent and temperate, of conscience as against the autocracy is condemned as a sort of treason. An extreme case of this is presented in the story of Jansenism two centuries ago, when the Roman community, or more properly the Jesuit school within it, invoking the idea of the community, with its head at Rome, strove only too successfully to crush some of the noblest Christians France ever saw (Pascal among them), because they (being Roman Catholics still) asserted conscience against what was corporate. But that case represents very many others. It represents the case of Hus at Constance, and Ridley at Oxford. It represents in our day, so I venture to affirm, Count Campello in Italy, and Bishop Cabrera in Spain, and the Abbé Bourrier in France.

What has Holy Scripture to say upon the question? A great deal, assuredly. As we have seen, Scripture puts into impressive prominence the idea of the community and its life. But Scripture is never one-sided. It puts into a prominence equally impressive the idea of the individual. Let us consider in two or three directions how it does so:

1. A large part of Holy Scripture is occupied with the record of the individual's personal intercourse with the Eternal, "nothing between." To be sure, the record is there for

purposes immeasurably transcending the individual. It is there for the community, for the Church. It is a rich contribution to the fulness of the knowledge and of the life of the Body. Not seldom it is in itself of direct and pregnant importance to the history and activities of the Body. The individual communion with God of an Abraham under the Syrian sky by night, of a Moses on the Mount, of a Jeremiah in "the court of the guard," of a Paul in the hired house at Rome, of a John in Patmos, not only supplies examples of such communion to the disciples of later time; it makes link after link in the history of the redemption of the world. But, none the less, the intercourse in itself is individual, personal. The man stands face to face with his LORD, spirit to spirit, "nothing between," as really as if there were no other being extant than just God and himself. With the individual, in all possible immediateness and directness, God puts Himself into contact. It is not the individual approaching God through the agencies of the community; rather it is God approaching the community through the agency of the individual, who is spiritually filled with Him.

2. But an example to my purpose on a peculiarly impressive scale is given us in the Book of Psalms. A very large mass of the inspired poems of that truly wonderful book is just the expression (countersigned and authenticated as spiritually true by the Lord Christ Himself) of individual communion with God, "nothing between." No doubt the Psalms, for the Jewish Church, as for its glorious development, the Christian Church, had a liturgical significance and use; they passed into common worship; they became the voice of the Church to God. And no doubt many of them are entirely public and corporate, so to speak, in their form; they refer to the life of the chosen people, to Israel in its collective sins, deliverances, chastisements, blessings. But let these national Psalms be ruled out; they will leave, on any reasonable interpretation (for I hold that the expositors who can see even in Ps. li. only the voice of the penitent *nation* are, however clever, *unreasonable*), a great and impressive collection of purely individualistic Psalms. And as to the liturgical employment of these Psalms, I can only again remark that it leaves their origin just where it was. They arose, they came into being, as nothing other than the cries of an *Ego* to the Eternal, whether in individual joy and worship, or in individual penitence and woe. Look at such Psalms, taken almost at random, as xiii., xvi., xxiii., xxvii., xxxiv., xxxix., lxi., lxiii., lxxi., lxxiii., cix., cxvi., cxix., cxliii. They give us a human heart in the fulness and intensity of individual consciousness, isolated with God, and speaking its whole self out to Him, as

man speaketh with his friend; only the Friend is the King Eternal.

3. Take note, by the way, that this individualism of the Psalms is a spirit which moves with the utmost freedom amidst surroundings which might very well have led us to anticipate something else. I am old-fashioned enough to think, *malgré* a present powerful school of literary criticism, that the Law with its priests and altars was in existence, and often in considerable force and exercise, all through the ages of the Psalmists. Even the new critics will grant that it was so in the time of the latest Psalmists. And priests and altars in the Jewish Church were important things in their true place. But that place, according to the Psalter, was not between God and the individual soul in its inmost spiritual experiences of sorrow and of blessing. In the Psalter priests and altars appear, when they do appear, almost entirely as objects in the background—a landscape slightly sketched in behind the vivid personalities in the front.

4. The histories of Scripture, and the Prophets, might detain us long upon similar themes; but I hasten to the New Testament and to the developed Gospel in its glory. Here again a supremely important place is filled by the individual. True, the community is everywhere—except out of its place. In the delivery of the great Gospel doctrines, notably by St. Paul, “we,” “us,” “our” are more frequent words than “I,” “me,” “mine.” Yet none the less, alike in the words of the blessed Master and in the writings of His servants, a profound and sacred individualism has its sure place.

5. Take one example from the lips of our Lord Jesus Christ (John vi. 37): “All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me; and him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out.” Here the first limb of the saying tends in the collective direction: “All (singular, *πᾶν*) which the Father gives Me.” The Lord Jesus contemplates “the gift” here in its most abstract aspect. But the second limb shows us the same object, disintegrated into individuals: “*Him that cometh unto Me.*” One by one, man by man, soul by soul, each in its mysterious personality, those individuals “come.” And they come, not in the first instance to “join a society,” but to clasp the feet of a Person, and to receive His personal welcome of their personality into union with Himself.

6. In the missionary narratives of the Acts it is the same. Pentecost is indeed, from one great view-point, an occasion of collective and corporate experience in the highest degree; but after all it was an occasion when many thousand individuals found, each of them, that he was a sinner, guilty and imperilled, and asked concurrently, but individually,

what to do. And they were directed by St. Peter to baptism, indeed, and to a resultant collective life, but before and below it all to the ascended Jesus, "nothing between," as He stood exalted "to give repentance and remission." How individualistic is the incident of the Eunuch (Acts viii.), and that of Cornelius (Acts x.), and that of Lydia (Acts xvi.)! Above all, think of that of Saul of Tarsus—most potent of all for the community, most intensely personal of all for the experience of the man.

It is scarcely necessary to point out how profoundly individualistic is, from one all-important side, the Apostolic teaching of St. Paul. Most truly no Scripture writer has larger things to say about the Church. But these large things are all instinct with the individual. The writer himself, "the chosen vessel to bear the Name," very frequently indeed unfolds his own most individual experiences of soul on purpose to give the needed shape and point to a universal doctrine. Witness the closing paragraphs of Rom. vii., and that wonderful passage at the conclusion of Gal. ii.: "I through law died to law, that I might live to God. . . . I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but in me lives Christ: and what I now live in flesh, by faith in the Son of God I live it, who loved me, and gave Himself up for me." Remember, again, such words as "God forbid that I should glory" (Gal. v. 14); "I know whom I have believed, and I am sure that He is able to keep my deposit" (2 Tim. i. 12).

And this was the man whom unerring wisdom selected, prepared, commissioned, to be the writer of half the New Testament, the exponent of the Gospel in its most reasoned forms, the chief inspired theologian to unfold the doctrine of the Church.

The outcome of these remarks is a somewhat simple and obvious one, but not, I think, untimely. The ideas grouped around the words "corporate life" are extremely important when soundly used; I trust I have fairly acknowledged this already. But in many quarters they tend at present to exaggeration and usurpation. And in our restless age we find far and wide the anomaly, strange at first sight, but quite intelligible, of an otiose disposition in spiritual things, to "get religion done for us," one way or another. To meet this fatal incipient coma of the soul, for it is no less, it is necessary to press home afresh upon our souls the magnificent individualism of the Holy Bible. It is necessary to remind ourselves definitely and again that, whatever be the place of the Christian Church, it is not *between* the immortal soul and its eternal Maker, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. It is necessary



to warn the individual that he cannot be justified, and sanctified, and glorified, by proxy, or as one of a mass. It is necessary to call him back to the awful duty and radiant privilege of an individual communion with God, above and behind everything else—a communion to which nothing is necessary but the spirit of the man on the one side, and on the other the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Grace, “the Spirit of His Son, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.”

Long ago, in an essay by J. S. Mill in the *Westminster Review*, I read a curious comparative estimate (*à propos* of the Positive Religion) of Roman Catholicism and of Protestantism. The philosopher, “contemplating all,” had much to say of the merits of the Roman idea of religion. He looked more kindly on it, evidently, than on its rival; but he said one thing about Protestantism (may I never be ashamed of that word, any more than were the great Anglicans of the seventeenth century) which was remarkable. He said that there was a grandeur, and a profound moral importance, in the emphasis which Protestantism threw upon the thought of intercourse, face to face, between THE MAN and the Supreme Being.

Let us cherish, with a solemn love, the very idea of that intercourse. Without it, without the eternal life of the individual, what would “corporate life” be but the cold shadow of a shade?

H. C. G. MOULE.



### ART. III.—A GREAT ETHICAL TEACHER: THOUGHTS FROM THE LIFE OF DR. R. W. DALE.<sup>1</sup>

THERE are men who belong only to their own section of the Church; there are others who belong to the Church as a whole—men who have done, or are doing, a service for Christianity, the effects of which are felt far beyond the bounds of their own particular ecclesiastical organization; men whose praise is, with justice, heard in all the Churches. As a rule, these are not men whose attachment to some particular conception of Church doctrine or Church organization sits lightly upon them: to use a hackneyed modern phrase, they are not generally “undenominationalists,” they are not men whose conceptions and representations of Christian truth and Christian practice are nebulous, and possibly somewhat invertebrate. On the contrary, they are generally men who have so thoroughly lived up to the ideal of their par-

<sup>1</sup> “Life of R. W. Dale of Birmingham,” by his Son. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1898.