

The Sacramental Life

THE POWER OF SYMBOL

Many have owed their conversion to the eye and the ear, engaged by some symbolical presentment of vital truth, who would have been deaf to the most forcible appeal to the logical faculty; and this because they were men; not spirit and mind only but body and senses also; and because idealism was not adequate to their need. How solemnly and earnestly is the case presented by the apostle in describing how the human race was brought to the right knowledge of God Himself! "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of Life, that declare we unto you" [1 John 1:1]. God did not reveal Himself to abstract thought; nor is the knowledge of Him and our relation to Him derivable from abstract thought. He came among us, and was seen and heard in the visible form of that human nature in which He dwelt; now we still see Him, in the religion of Sacramentality and Symbolism, which do for us what sight and touch and hearing did for those who were near Him in the days of His flesh.

DIX, *SACRAMENTAL*, 191–92.

A WORLD INSTINCT WITH MYSTERY

An invincible faith in things unseen; a realization of the supernatural realm with its marvelous contents; a constant tending towards God, in holding out the hand for Him, feeling after Him, seeking to be where He is, sure of nothing where He is not discerned, these are the factors of the re-creation in Christ, and these are in vital harmony and accord with the system displayed under holy sacraments and symbols apt to the work of the training of the soul, the renewal of the heart. The Christian

dispensation, to judge of it from its description in the Holy Gospels and the New Testament writings, was intended to do a specific work among us. It was designed to act on the heart, to form a peculiar character, . . . and to make him very calm and strong in a strength not his by nature. . . . The result, where the system has its way untrammelled, is that, to the disciple so instructed, the whole world becomes instinct with solemn mysteries and full of things divine; life is, in its experiences, a continual lesson in the dealings of our merciful Lord with us; things about us are more than they seem to be; visible objects stand for invisibles; there are meanings in every department of nature which the natural eye cannot take in; . . . stars and flowers and mountains, rivers, lakes, the ancient hills, the wide and wandering sea, all have, in truth and reality, a voice for the soul; the year has its divisions, the day its hours, through which the mystery of redemption is continually repeated; every duty rests on a law of the God of righteousness, every action should be done to His glory, every work begun, continued, and ended in him.

DIX, *SACRAMENTAL*, 210–12.

BAPTISM AS THE STARTING POINT

First of all, holy Baptism begins Christian training. Without it, whatever other training may be given, Christian training is an impossibility. Christian training differs from all other training in this one respect, that it believes in an implanted supernatural life, which can be and must be developed. It oftentimes uses some of the same means . . . which other training uses, but it uses them to develop a new and a divine life infused into the soul by the Sacrament of the new birth. It trains the child as a member of Christ and a child of God.

DEKOVEN, *SERMONS*, 55.

BAPTISMAL HOPE

The child is baptized once for all into Christ, into His Death; he is once for all made partaker of the benefits of His Death. But during the child's whole life and being afterwards, God graciously means, and we are humbly to pray, that the child may partake of the Resurrection, i.e. of what is sometimes called the Risen Life of our Lord: that as Christ dieth no more, so the baptized may sin no more: that as Christ ascended into Heaven, so we may in heart and mind thither ascend. Thus we ask for each little one the grace of improvement: and we end with asking the grace of final

perseverance: “that finally, with the residue of Thy Holy Church, he may be an inheritor of Thine everlasting Kingdom.” Thus from the beginning we look on with hope unto the end. We stand in the strait and narrow gate, the lowly baptismal entrance into Christ’s Kingdom, and we look along the strait and narrow way, and see the glimmering, more or less clearly, of Eternal Life at the end. We look on in faith and charitable prayer, as St. Paul looked on for his Thessalonians: praying that God would “sanctify them wholly, and preserve their whole spirit and soul and body blameless unto Christ’s” awful “coming” [1 Thess 5:23]. This is our prayer, our hope is steadfast: for we know how faithful He is. He hath called us: He will do it. He for His part is most sure to hear His Church’s prayer, and to keep us in the right way.

KEBLE, *VILLAGE SERMONS*, 290.

THE SURE PLEDGE OF BAPTISM

Faith acknowledges in the little child, given back from the Font to the Church’s arms, an instance of God’s miraculous mercy in raising a soul from death to life: Faith sees in Holy Baptism a lively image of the Death and Burial of Christ, and of His rising again from the dead. To him that believeth, Holy Baptism, especially if it be done by immersion, represents our profession. . . . Just consider this for a moment. First, when you see a child christened, you see things done, which are indeed most simple in themselves, yet, taken altogether, they contain in them very many of the chief truths which we are bound to believe. The three Immersions, or Pourings, with the Threefold Holy Name, represents to us the mystery of the Trinity in Unity: the plunging of the child in the water is like the Death and Burial of Jesus Christ: his rising up again is like Christ’s Resurrection: the water represents the sanctifying Power of God’s Spirit: the ministering Priest represents Jesus Christ, God and Man, pouring that Good Spirit upon us, or, as St. John Baptist said, baptizing us with the Holy Ghost. Thus does Holy Baptism represent our profession, in respect of what we are to believe of God’s saving mercy; and no less does it represent our profession, in respect of what we are to do, that we may not forfeit that mercy. It is an outward and visible sign, both of our blessing and of our duty. It is a sure pledge, whenever we think of it, that we are dead unto sin and risen again unto righteousness: and no less is it a lesson which cannot be mistaken, how we are to lead the rest of our short lives here on earth. It represents unto us, how that we have

promised and vowed to follow the example of our Saviour Christ, and, by God's mercy, to be made like unto Him. . . .

KEBLE, *VILLAGE SERMONS*, 302–3.

NEW LIFE IN BAPTISM

God help the man who thinks lightly of that first of the two great sacraments necessary to salvation! It is no empty form, no mere sign to the world, no ceremony which one may decline or pass through without affecting his eternal hopes. On the contrary, it is a mighty agency of the Holy Ghost, always effectual to the ends for which it was instituted, and marking, in each instance, the new birthday of the Christian soul. Now among the ends served by our baptism was this: it was a call from Christ; it was our election into His kingdom; it made us, actually and from that hour, members of Christ and citizens of the New Jerusalem, the city from above. Effectually, whenever a child or any person is baptized, that is done for him which was done for Adam, when God Almighty added to all ordinary natural endowments, the supernatural gifts and graces relating to an immortality of perpetual life and light. Effectually, whenever a child or a person is baptized, his relations to the dying world are changed, and merged into a new condition: the old life is lost, taken away, hidden, buried out of sight.

DIX, *CHRIST AT THE DOOR*, 267.

THE HOLY COMMUNION

In the sacrament of the altar we are brought to the point where the natural and the supernatural come most closely together. To the eye of faith, the Christian Altar appears like a headland jutting into a vast and open sea; waves roll in from the eternal space, to strike upon the shores of time. It is a mirror of all truth, human and divine. It has a twofold aspect, being Sacrifice and Sacrament in one; it is each in turn, in complete and matchless perfection; it is the pure and unbloody Offering, the heavenly Feast. It represents the work of the world's High Priest, now going on above; it brings Him, verily and indeed, into our midst with holy gifts. It is pictorial, it is practical; a grand action is displayed and accompanied, a work of immediate necessity is carried on. As Christ stands at the mercy-seat on high, appearing before His Father as our Mediator and Redeemer, and making intercession for us, so stands the priest as His

representative, offering on earth the same oblation which Christ offers in heaven, and sending up the liturgical prayer. Christ promised to feed men with His Flesh and Blood, adding, "Whosoever eateth My Flesh and drinketh My Blood hath everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the last day" [John 6:54]. Here, in Holy Communion, He meets His faithful children for that purpose, and, under forms selected from the natural world, and hallowed and blessed for a supernatural effect, He gives them what He promised. In its double aspect, as sacrifice, as sacrament, this Rite is first in dignity, and, in power, most efficient. Nothing can be set before it, nor can care, pains, or cost be too great in realizing it for all that it is to our devotion and faith. And this, above all, must we be sure to hold, that it is not ourselves who make it what it is; that it is not our subjective act, nor the moral fitness of the recipient, which gives its reality to that sacrament, and effects the Awful Presence of the Lord therein. Our part is to wait for the Holy Ghost till He come; and, when He has blessed and sanctified the oblation, to draw near with faith, and take the Body and the Blood, feeling that God in Christ is all in all, and that it is He who giveth us the bread that feedeth unto everlasting life.

DIX, *SACRAMENTAL*, 148–50.

LESSONS IN LOVE

There are times again, when those who try to be dutiful learners in Christ's school of love, which is His Church, feel themselves, in drawing near to His Sacraments which are most especial lessons of love, more than usually lifted up with loving thankfulness, or cast down with loving contrition, in His gracious Presence. Often they have felt dull and dry, and have gone away, it may be in fear, that they had missed the blessing; but at times it has seemed otherwise, a light has shone in the dark place of their hearts; and whereas before Holy Communion all had seemed more or less dreary, after it, He Whom they had received by faith permitted them to rejoice in His holy comfort; they knew not how, but they could not doubt that it was He. They could not doubt it, when they found themselves afterwards the stronger to resist temptation, and to do good works. This love also was of God, and of God only: who can doubt it? It came not of the outward sign, but of the thing signified, i.e. Christ communicating Himself through that outward sign. If it were slighted, if we fell away, it was, in each instance, a lesson, a divine lesson, in heavenly love, thrown away. . . .

KEBLE, *SERMONS*, 230.

COMMUNION AND COMMERCE

Many of those who are most emphatic upon the Sacramental Presence of Our Lord in the Bread which is His Body and the Wine which is His Blood never seem to have thought out or pondered over the connection between that Presence and the presence of God in His whole creation. That neglect is a disaster to religion. We must be quite clear, that we go to find Him there, so that we may the better find Him everywhere; that the Sacrament leads us, not to a localization, but to a deeper sense of the Omnipresence, of God. The connection between the Sacrament and what is loosely called the “Sacramental Principle” of the universe, needs to be perceived and firmly held. He makes Himself known to us in the Breaking of Bread, that He may more truly and consciously be the honoured guest at every meal, and the most living partner in every enterprise whereby we earn our daily bread. That is why the Collection at the Sacrament becomes the Offertory, and the “alms” are one with the “oblations” —our money being united with the Bread and the Wine, that through His Presence in the Bread and Wine He may consecrate our money to be a spiritual bond of Peace throughout the world. To neglect or put in the background this essential connection is to make sacramental worship quite definitely idolatrous. If Holy Communion does not lead to honest commerce, it fails of its fruit, and “by their fruits ye shall know them” [Matt 7:16]. Commerce is communion, and it must either be Holy Communion, or a cursed counterfeit, which leads not to life but to death. Once and for all let us remember, that the sweep of the Sacrament is as wide as the world. If our faith in the real presence of our Lord in the consecrated Bread upon the altar does not really lead us to perceive His real presence in all bread—if it amounts to anything like the localization of the Presence of God—our sacramental worship has in itself the nature of sin, for sin, at its root, is the denial of the Omnipresence of God. If our love of God’s House does not consecrate for us all houses and all homes, if it tends to separate the sanctuary and the street, then our religious observances are literally blasphemous.

STUDDERT KENNEDY, *THE WICKET GATE*, 167–68.

A SACRIFICE OF THANKSGIVING

The eucharist being, as its name imports, a sacrifice of thanksgiving, the bread and wine, after they have been offered or given to God, and

blessed and sanctified by his Holy Spirit, are returned by the hand of his minister to be eaten by the faithful, . . . to denote their being at peace and in favour with God, being thus fed at his table, and eating of his food; and also to convey to the worthy receivers all the benefits and blessings of Christ's natural body and blood, which were offered and slain for their redemption.

For this reason, the eucharist is also called the communion of the body and blood of Christ; not only because, by communing together, we declare our mutual love and good will, and our unity in the church and faith of Christ; but also because, in that holy ordinance, we communicate with God through Christ the Mediator, by first offering . . . to him the sacred symbols of the body and blood of his dear Son, and then receiving them again, blessed and sanctified by his Holy Spirit, to feast upon at his table, for the refreshment of our souls; for the increase of our faith and hope; for the pardon of our sins; for the renewing of our minds in holiness, by the operation of the Holy Ghost; and for a principle of immortality to our bodies, as well as to our souls.

From this consideration, the necessity of frequently communicating in the holy eucharist evidently appears. It is the highest act of christian worship; a direct acknowledgment of God's sovereignty and dominion over us, and over all his creatures. It is the memorial of the passion and death of our dear Redeemer, made before the Almighty Father, to render him propitious to us, by pleading with him the meritorious sufferings of his beloved Son, when he made his soul an offering for sin. It is a sensible pledge of God's love to us, who, as he hath given his Son to die for us, so hath he given his precious body and blood, in the holy eucharist, to be our spiritual food and sustenance. And as the bread of this world, frequently taken, is necessary to keep the body in health and vigour, so is this bread of God, frequently received, necessary to preserve the soul in spiritual health, and keep the divine life of faith and holiness from becoming extinct in us.

SEABURY, *DISCOURSES*, 160–61.

AN EXHORTATION

To those who are customary attendants at the Lord's table, we address the exhortation: Take care that your attendance there be not merely the result of habit; let it be dictated by the powerful sentiments of duty, of gratitude, and of love to your God and Saviour. When you present your-

selves before him, and become guests at his table, let all your Christian virtues be in lively exercise. While you examine yourselves more or less minutely as circumstances admit, and resolve to resist those temptations to which you may have in some degree yielded, those sins to which you feel you are most liable, and to cherish those Christian dispositions and duties in which you are most deficient, always bear in mind that your strength in this arduous work must be from on high, and that you must come to the Lord's table as sinners, whose trust is not in your own righteousness, but in God's manifold and great mercies and grace. Let your faith be steadily fixed on the great atonement made by the offering of the body and blood which are set forth at the holy table. When you receive the memorials of the love and mercy of him who died for his enemies, sacrifice on his altar all your wrathful passions. When you commemorate the love of him who died for you, return this love by the only tribute in your power—the oblation of yourselves to his service. And realizing the inestimable blessings of pardon, of grace, and of life, which your Saviour, by the death and passion which you commemorate, hath procured for you, gratefully and joyfully participate of the symbols by which these blessings are conveyed and assured.

HOBART, *THE POSTHUMOUS WORKS*, 155–56.

THE COMMEMORATION OF THE CROSS

In the first ages of the Church, the commemoration of the Cross, in its appointed sacrament, was made, at least, on every Lord's day. Ancient piety could not be called too often to remember the death of the atoning Lamb. Ancient faith could not receive too frequently that blessed blood and body, which are the "drink indeed" and "meat indeed" of the immortal soul. And ancient charity, while it felt all its unworthiness of so great mercies, and remembered to what suffering multitudes, lying in darkness and death's shadow, these mercies of redemption were unknown, would not come empty-handed to "such a heavenly feast." Hence, at the administration of the Holy Supper, on the Holy Day, the oblations of the faithful were presented. "Upon the first day of every week," each one of them laid somewhat by itself, according as he had been prospered, putting it into the treasury [1 Cor 16:2]. The sum of all these sacred contributions was "laid at the Apostles' feet; and distribution was made to every man, according as he had need" [Acts 4:35]. While this was so, there was no lack in the Lord's treasury. In the midst of prejudice, against

every form of opposition, in spite of utmost persecution by imperial power, the Church went conquering on, till it had filled the world, and bowed the Roman eagle to the Cross.

DOANE, *LIFE AND WRITINGS* 1:451–52.

A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP

Let us all remember that our religion is the religion of a personal Saviour. It is not a system of ethics, it is not a scheme of philosophy, it is not a conclusion of science, but it is personal love to a personal living Saviour. . . . It is a personal religion, by which we can say, “He loved me, and gave Himself for me”—“The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” [Gal 2:20]. And then, in all your experiences, however deep they may be, when you enter the shadow of death, and go through the agony of the dissolution of your body—you can say: “He loved me, and gave Himself for me.” He loved me and washed me from my sins in His Blood, to Him be glory and dominion and praise henceforth and for ever, Amen.

STANTON, *LAST SERMONS*, 313.

WHERE TIME AND ETERNITY MEET

Eucharistic people take their lives, and break them, and give them, in daily fulfillment of what our Lord did and does. No need to ask what school of thought you follow or how you speculate about the manner of these things. He took His life in His own hands—this is Freedom. He broke it—this is Obedience. He gave it—this is Love. And He still does these simple acts at every altar and in every heart that will have it so; and Time and Eternity meet. The dying of the Lord Jesus and His life weave the wonderful, humble fabric of Christian discipleship.

BAYNE, *NOW IS THE ACCEPTED TIME*, 23.

THE PRAYING CHURCH

The praying Christian is also part of the praying Church, however solitary he or she may be or feel. The praying Church means not only the local community or the church of a country or a generation, but rather the Holy Catholic Church of Christ, the people of God in all places and ages. Divisions of place and time, of culture, and of our unhappy separations may hinder but they do not destroy the unity in Christ of those

who know their prayer to be in the Spirit of Christ. To say this is not to deny the solitude of individual Christians in the uniqueness in which the Creator made them. . . .

The Eucharist is the supreme encounter between God and His redeemed people, through recalling the death of Jesus. Here His people feed upon Jesus, who died and rose again, and offer themselves to the Father in union with his own perfect sacrifice.

RAMSEY, *GLORY DESCENDING*, 45.

LEARNING TO SEE CHRIST

[Another] critical question [I am sometimes asked] is this: "Should we not see Christ's presence everywhere, in the street and in the neighbour, rather than in the Host upon the altar? Are we not imprisoning him in the church?" . . .

Certainly, we must acknowledge that Christ can be encountered anywhere. But I do think that we need a focus where we encounter him face to face if we are to learn to recognize him in other places where he may be hard to discern. Most of us have far too little sensitivity to Christ in the world, and unless we get some training in sensitivity, he may elude us altogether. I could walk around Piccadilly Circus or Times Square for hours, among the garish scenes and the fevered crowds, and, left to myself, I doubt if I would ever have any sense of God or Christ in such places. But if I watch for a little hour in Christ's sacramental presence, exposed to the essence and concentrated fulness of his saving life and death and resurrection, then I hope I shall begin to acquire the kind of sensitivity that will enable me to recognize and respond to Christ in situations where his presence is not obvious.

MACQUARRIE, *PATHS IN SPIRITUALITY*, 35, 37-38.

GRACE TO DO GOOD

The great lesson which man has to learn is that of obedience and submission to God; to be ready to do every thing which God requires, and to forbear every thing which he hath forbidden. And his great duty consists in the exercise of penitence, by which he forsakes sin, and approaches as near as possible to a state of innocency. The foundation of both is faith. . . .

. . . Our very capacity of goodness of every kind we owe to the merciful interposition of our Redeemer. And, in truth, all that we can do toward our own salvation, is not to resist or counteract what God does for us by his Holy Spirit. If we think a good thought, it is by his inspiration. If we have a good wish, it is from his influence. If we do a good action, to him we owe both the intention, and the ability to perform it. "There is none good but one, that is God" [Matt 19:17]. Therefore, every thing that is good must be from God.

Hence appears the necessity of the presence of the Holy Spirit with us; and, of our doing every thing that God directs, in order to obtain it. For this purpose, his holy apostles have instituted the rite of laying on of hands, as one of the first principles of our religion, and require our compliance with it, that we may, by God's mercy, obtain the gifts and graces of his Holy Spirit, by the hands of his authorized minister, in such kind and degree, as he sees best for us. But, it is to be remembered, that in order to obtain the benefits of any ordinance, its observance must be accompanied by those dispositions of heart which are represented or signified by the ordinance. For example, baptism represents and signifies a death unto sin, as well as a new birth unto righteousness. To obtain the new birth unto righteousness, we must therefore come to baptism with true penitence for all our past sins, and with hearty resolution to live in all holiness for the time to come. To apply this to confirmation: The laying on of hands represents and signifies the dominion, protection and guidance of the Holy Spirit. We must, therefore, come to confirmation with a willing disposition to live in subjection to the Spirit of God, to abide ever under his most holy protection, and to follow his heavenly guidance in all things. The same penitence must therefore be necessary in confirmation, that is necessary in baptism; the same firm faith in the promises of God; the same renunciation of every thing that stands in opposition to him; the devil and all his works, the world with its vanities and extravagancies, and all the wicked tempers it produces, and all the evil desires and appetites of the body. It is also evident, that the ordinance requires a hearty desire to be made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and a firm belief that God will give and continue to us his heavenly grace, to preserve us pure and undefiled . . . , to strengthen our good purposes, and enable us to bring them to good effect, by living in obedience to God, to the end of our lives.

SEABURY, *DISCOURSES*, 138–40.

THE CALLING OF A CHRISTIAN

[T]he ordinance of confirmation . . . is calculated to draw . . . attention, at stated periods, to those everlasting concerns which, amidst the occupations and . . . enjoyments of life, are often forgotten or neglected. When a solemn call is made on baptized Christians to assume the engagements by which they were originally entered into covenant with God—when the momentous duties and the high privileges of their calling in Christ Jesus are presented before those who bear his name, and who have been pledged to his service—the appeal is powerfully calculated to excite their serious reflection, to withdraw their attention from the world, and to impress on them the infinite importance of an attention to the things which belong to their eternal peace.

In the solemnity of confirmation, also, those who . . . have assumed the obligations, and received a title to the privileges of their Christian adoption, are reminded of the momentous force of these obligations, and of the exalted nature of these privileges: it is calculated to impress on them their great guilt, as far as they have violated these obligations and contemned these privileges; and in this case also, of the indispensable necessity of their returning unto God, resolving no longer to live in violation of their Christian duties, and in neglect of their Christian privileges. The call, especially on the young members of Christ's fold, to assume their Christian obligations, has a tendency to awaken them to a sense of the supreme importance, above all worldly concerns, of making their Christian calling and election sure.

At the period of the administration of this ordinance, Christian parents and others must feel, in more than its usual force, their awful responsibility for the spiritual welfare of those whom Providence hath placed under their charge—these immortal beings, whose happiness or misery, through a never-ending existence, in no small degree depends on their instruction and care. And at this season also, the ministers and pastors of Christ's fold must be impressed with their accountability for the flock committed to them, and particularly for those young members of it whom they perhaps admitted into this fold at the sacred font, and whom they behold arrived at a season of life when generally the course is taken which leads through the ways of sin and sensuality to the chambers of misery, or through the paths of holiness to the glories of God's kingdom above.

It is a strong sense of this responsibility which excites the earnest solicitude, that all they who have not received the ordinance of confirmation, should embrace the present opportunity of ratifying, in that holy rite, their baptismal engagements, in order that they may have assured to them their baptismal privileges.

HOBART, *THE POSTHUMOUS WORKS*, 88–90.

SAMPLE

A Pilgrim's Journey

CHRISTMAS

Today the joy of Christmas shines in a world that is darkened by sadness. How real are the gifts of human goodness, nonetheless: they are gifts from the God of Bethlehem who is their source; for God who took human flesh in the stable is God from whose store of love humanity's gifts of love are drawn.

The stable is a symbol of Christ's poverty. The characteristic that gave him the title poor was his *simplicity*. He did without many of the things that people crave for. None did he criticise more severely than those who hankered after more and more possessions and who were preoccupied with money. The worth of a person's life, he insisted, does not consist of possessions, for piling things up does not increase worth. People matter more than things, as people have an eternal destiny. Those who do not fuss about their standard of living and their luxuries are freer to love one another, to serve one another and to enjoy one another. Christ became poor, and he chose the way of simplicity; and if we follow him he promises us riches of his own, riches of happiness and brotherhood shared with one another and with him.

How did Christ become poor? By coming to share in the limitations, frustrations, and hard realities of our human life, our pains and sorrows, and even our death. The imagery of Christ's riches and his poverty is a vivid picture of the Incarnation; but it is another thing to grasp its moral message and to live by it, the message of simplicity and self-sacrifice. Christ gave himself to us to enable us to give ourselves to one another: that is the message of Bethlehem to a world in trouble.