

MEMBERSHIP

by Rev. G. F. B. DOHERTY, B.A., Rector,
St. Luke's Church, Toronto.

ORGANIZED Christianity, if it is to maintain its life in the after-the-war world, has many grave problems to solve, none of which is of greater importance than the practical and effective realization of the corporate character of the life and worship of the Church. Without this realization burned into its conscience and engraven upon its heart there will be no effective desire for Christian unity, no sufficient reformation of the Church's internal life, no adequate Christian leadership in the healing of the world's social wounds, and no satisfying restatement of the Christian faith. Fundamental in importance it should be the goal of our hearty desires and of our intelligent activity, and should appeal to us with the more attractiveness inasmuch as its attainment rests chiefly upon the development of a point of view, and is, therefore, well within the reach of possible achievement.

We have it already in a certain degree. Wherever people go to church from a worthy motive and contribute to the Church's support, there is at least a latent sense of belonging to something bigger than they are individually, and of sharing in its privileges and responsibilities. Oftentimes this corporate sense is more than latent, and expresses itself in a pride, not always admirable, in belonging to the congregation with the largest or wealthiest membership, or with the best choir, or the most attractive young people's societies. Where such pride leads on, not only to boasting, but to loyal service, it has in it the root of the matter which needs only chastening of spirit and enlargement of vision to develop into a fruitful realization of the corporate nature of the Church.

Nevertheless, *esprit de corps* is by no means the exact equivalent of the corporate sense desired for the members of the Church. It provides an analogue, but not a parallel. The gang-spirit among boys is a powerful factor in their lives, and, rightly used in their education. But the gang-spirit is something which the boys themselves supply. It rises up in them individually as they create their organization. It does not descend upon them from above or exist independently of them; they make it and they can destroy it. Now, in the members of the Church, *esprit de corps* has its part to play, but it is not fundamental; it is based on something else, something which lies deep in the very nature of the Church, in which the members can share, which they can also impair, but which they can by no means themselves evolve or create. *Esprit de corps* existed in the twelve Apostles during our Lord's ministry as witness John's indignation: "Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbade him, because he followed not us." The corporate sense was developed at Pentecost, "they continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship in the breaking of bread and the prayers." Something happened in the meantime which constituted the difference, something which was not due to the action of the Apostles themselves.

The truth of the matter is this. The first members of the Church did not make the Church by banding themselves together; they were received into it; incorporated into it, by the descent upon them and into them of the Holy Ghost. They became members of the Church, of Christ, of one another, by sharing in the gift from above of a new spiritual life, a life which they had had neither individually nor collectively before Pentecost. It was this common possession of a communicated spiritual life which constituted their unity and made them the Body of Christ.

It is this fundamental sense of the spiritual union of the members of the Church which needs to be fostered to-day; not merely pride in and loyalty to a congregation, or a denomination, or a possible future national Church, but a sense of union and fellowship with the whole body of the members of Christ in this world and in the next.

Here we need to be careful to enlarge our conceptions sufficiently to grasp the unity of the whole. The Church is not to be identified with any one group of Christians, nor with the total number of Christians in the world at any one time. The Church is not limited to the earth, nor bound by space and time. We may think of it historically as reaching back through the ages to the first Christian Pentecost. But if we wish to realize its unity and extent at any given time, to think of it as a present fact, as a thing existent in the everlasting Now, we must look not back, but up. It rests on earth; it touches heaven—

the ladder which Jacob saw in the vision of his dream. It reaches upward to the throne of God where in the place of glory, privilege and power reigns Jesus, the God-Man, first-fruits of our race and the Church's living Head. It comprehends angels and archangels and the whole company of Heaven; it comprehends the saints at rest, yet not made perfect, who await in Paradise the coming of the Lord; it comprehends those who, with probation incomplete, yet united to Christ, comprise the membership of the Church militant here in earth. This is the unity, and nothing less, which constitutes the Body of Christ, the one Church of the Living God, the current of whose life runs not merely downward but upward, for though heaven transforms earth, yet earth still clings to heaven.

In this one Body, there is one Spirit and one Lord. Jesus is the Head, and in His Spirit all the members are united to Him and live in Him and unto Him. Growing into "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ," by the operation of the Holy Ghost, that is to say, sharing a common communicated spiritual life of privilege and of power. The members of the Church are united to one another and form "one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of Christ." Death and time and space intervene and render more difficult our apprehension and enjoyment of the privileges of fellowship. But they do not, they cannot, nullify or destroy the reality of the communion of the saints, the abiding permanence of which is founded on Him Who is the grave's conqueror and in Whom whosoever liveth and believeth shall never die.

It is not intended at the present time to dwell upon the fellowship between the saints on earth and the saints departed. Let it be declared, however, with all emphasis, that Christians lose immensely in the mystery and majesty of their faith, in the wealth and tenderness of their charity, in the breadth and depth of their vision of the Church, in the humility and invincible confidence of their daily walk with God, who do not look with love and pride to that vastly greater company of Christ's faithful ones in the waiting life beyond, and who do not remember them in their prayers. To fail in such devotion is not to avoid what some deem a doubtful or pernicious practice, but to deprive the Church on earth of the sweetly beneficent realization of its transcendent unity in its Risen and Glorified Redeemer, whereby the tears of sorrow may be transmuted into tears of joy, and, more grievous still, to open the flood-gates for an inundation of the fetid waters of spiritualism.

Unquestionably, Christians need to enlarge their vision of the height and depth of the love of God, and as unquestionably of its length and breadth. The day is past for the dominance of exclusive standards of Church membership. "The wind bloweth where it listeth." The members of Christ are not limited by the fold of any "Church," or of all "the Churches" put together. The Master's test is the only valid one. "By their fruits ye shall know them." Wherever "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, temperance" are found, there is the Spirit of God, there are the friends and disciples of the Son of Man, and there is the Catholic Church.

The objection will immediately be raised by some that such an inclusive test of Church membership is at once destructive of the visible character of the Church. Is it not rather the case that what has destroyed the visible character of the Church is the Church's own declension from the spiritual standards of her Lord? And is there any other basis than the visible evidence of the Spirit's working which affords any hope at all for the recovery of the Church's visible unity? It is precisely because such recovery is of the most urgent importance, because the world waits in impotent tragedy for the manifestation of Jesus in the fulness of His Body, that all arrogance and exclusiveness must be ruthlessly torn out of the life of the Church.

The Bible is the only infallible chart, the only unvarying compass, the only immovable pole-star by which mortals may and can safely cross the sea of life and cast anchor in the haven of eternal felicity. It speaks God's truth to man's intellect and salvation to man's soul. It has stood the test of the centuries, and against it the waves of adverse criticism have all beat in vain, and even in this the world's greatest war, nothing has brought so much comfort, strength and inspiration to "the boys of the allies" as the Word of God.

Scripture lays the foundation of a truly happy life, gives peace in prospect of death, and brings to man a knowledge of immortality.—Rev. T. H. Ibbott.

"God's in His World"

Very Rev. J. P. D. LLWYD, D.D., D.C.L.,
Dean of Nova Scotia.

THAT is a shallow philosophy which asks in face of an epidemic, as in presence of the war and the explosion, for a ready-made explanation of all the mysterious happenings in human life, and because such an explanation is not at once forthcoming, says to religion triumphantly, "Where is now thy God?" The form of the question is itself a striking evidence of its shallowness; a much more natural phrasing would be the inversion, "Where is now thy devil?" The presence and power of Evil are taken for granted as manifest facts in the experience of the world, and men find their energies toned and their characters braced through resistance to that evil.

No race ever becomes progressive which sits down and folds its hands in desperation over the moral struggle against suffering and sin. India and China are a clinching proof of this. Neither does any race rise to pre-eminence which deliberately takes evil as its standard, enthroning Force instead of Love, Cunning instead of Courage, Ruthlessness instead of Humanity, the Super-brute by mistake for the Super-man. Against such theories all rational civilization is now in arms. The truth is that one of the strongest proofs of the real presence of the Creator in His world is found in this very instinct urging men to struggle implacably against every form of wrong.

Of this thought the grandest experience within knowledge has been furnished by the Great War. Amidst all the confusion and tragedy of this appalling sorrow, we are coming in these closing days of its duration to discern the unfolding in it of a Divine purpose of good. It has meant the outpouring of millions of treasure, but it has burnt into our minds a new conviction of the supremacy of spiritual values, and it has educated us in the power to give. It has meant the sacrifice of millions of lives, but it has opened up new lights upon Death, and has added a new wealth of content to the word "Immortality." It has meant the overthrow of a social system falsely based on Rights rather than on Duties, on the Dollar-mark rather than on Conscience, but it has shown us an unseen Hand silently gathering up the broken threads and reweaving them into a new unity and into a new order of society just struggling to be born. Out of the strong has come forth sweetness, out of the eater has come forth meat.

The epidemic which has been ravaging our continent is another illustration of the same thought. When we can raise our minds above the temporary, though serious, privations of which we have been the victims—when we can forget the churchlessness which after all has taught us to realize the sweetness of worship as we had never realized it before—when we can get above the surprise of cities without schools and without pleasures—who is there who can fail to glimpse the splendour of the fight which science is waging for the good of mankind, Doctors, nurses, citizens, banded together in the common task of stamping out one of the scourges which from time to time, threaten the physical well-being of our race. It is a sublime thing—just as magnificent in its degree as the battle for the rights of man now swelling to the high-tide of success through the triumphs of our armies at the front. And the motive power, the energizing soul of it all can certainly never be Evil but Good, which is another name for God.

There is an optimism which blinks the facts of life, and is, therefore, foolish to the danger point, but this optimism is founded deep in the roots of the moral order of the world. It is the faith which alone can bring rest to the heart amidst the sadness and perplexities of our time.

It is one among the pious and valuable maxims which are ascribed to Francis de Sales, "A judicious silence is always better than truth spoken without charity." The very undertaking to instruct or censure others implies an assumption of intellectual or moral superiority. It cannot be expected, therefore, that the attempt will be well received, unless it is tempered with a heavenly spirit. "Though I speak with the tongue of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal."—T. C. Unham.