

THE IDEA OF THE CHURCH

THE QUESTION STATED.

By the Idea of the Church is to be understood the formative idea, the essential and fundamental principle of which the Church is the embodiment, that which makes the Church to be the Church, which determines its *esse*, its essential being.

This is a fundamental question in regard to which clearness and definiteness of conception are all-important. Here vagueness and uncertainty become the prolific source of error.

It is surely the duty of every teacher of theology, and of every Christian pastor, to possess and impart clear and well-defined instruction upon such a subject. *Qui bene distinguit, bene docet.* It is only by means of such clearness and accuracy in theological study that we can hope to find the unity of truth, or to mediate between conflicting opinions. So far from the tendency of such definiteness being towards a narrow and intolerant dogmatism, it is the chief means by which real comprehension and reconciliation can be achieved, and by which we can be brought into the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.

In the past, the history of Christendom has been largely moulded and controlled by false ideas of the Church. The developments of the future will, in a great measure, be determined by the conception of the Church which becomes dominant; hence the vital importance of the topic to be discussed.