

The Community of Caldey to the Bishop of Oxford

The Abbey, Isle of Caldey, near Tenby.

February 19, 1912.

To the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of Oxford.

My Lord Bishop,—We have as a Community carefully considered your last two letters, and we are agreed that we cannot conscientiously submit to the demands you make of us.

In view of your Lordship's request for the immediate surrender of Property, Liturgy, and Devotions, together with your definite refusal to give any sort of assurance of what you might further require of us, did we accept of your present wishes, we are sure that our Life as a Contemplative Community under the Benedictine Rule would be quite impossible.

The preliminaries that seem to your Lordship so obvious as to "the outside all possibilities of bargaining and concession," concern matters which are vital to our conception of the Catholic Faith; and your requirements are so decisive that we are forced to act upon what we believe to be God's Will for us.

With great respect, We are, my Lord Bishop, Your faithful servants,

(Signed) DOM AELRED CARLYLE, Abbot.

The Bishop of Oxford to the Abbot, Cuddesdon, Wheatley, Oxford.

February 22, 1913.

My dear Abbot,—I think your letter of February 19 is very much to be regretted. I would earnestly plead that you should take further time to consider, and should consult such persons as Dr. Stone, Mr. Trevelyan, and the Father Superior of Cowley. I really do not know what advice they would give you, but I feel sure there ought to be careful consultation.

Your letter implies a serious misconception. You speak of my request for immediate surrender of your property. I made no request for surrender, only for a reasonable assurance that the property was held properly in trust for a Community in communion with the See of Canterbury.

And you have taken no notice of the consideration which I wished to press upon you that the authority for some of your devotional practices is so specifically a later Roman authority as to be inconsistent with the appeal behind this authority to the earlier precedent of the Benedictine Rule as giving you the right to your independent organization. It seems to me that you are accepting and rejecting the same authority at different points, and that cannot be a satisfactory basis on which to stand. Also I cannot understand at all what you mean by saying that your acceding to my wishes would render your "life as a Contemplative Community under the Benedictine Rule impossible." Would you also let me know whether there is any minority in each of the four classes of signatories to your letter who take a different view from that expressed?

I have been told that there was a Trust Deed published in Pax which I should probably find satisfactory and adequate. Will you send me the number of Pax containing this Trust Deed?

You will understand that this letter is a request to you to withdraw your final reply and make it the subject of serious reconsideration. I do pray you may be guided right.

Yours truly in Christ, (Signed) C. OXON

The Abbot to the Bishop of Oxford, The Abbey, Isle of Caldey, near Tenby.

February 22, 1913.

My dear Lord Bishop,—When I read the last three letters of our correspondence to the Community, we all felt that we were face to face with an extremely grave situation. It was a grievous disappointment to every one that you felt it right to treat the matters that are more important to us than anything else in the world in so unconciliatory a manner. At the same time we felt that what you asked of us was the outcome of careful consideration; and we are grateful for your clearly expressed opinion which has been the means of revealing God's Will to the Community.

The whole question narrowed itself down in our minds to that of Authority. All the way through the history of the past fifteen years Authority has been of paramount importance in the growth of our Community Life—which we knew to be impossible without it.

We have appealed to the Authority of the English Church as represented by you, acting upon the wish of the Archbishop of Canterbury. We have submitted an account of our Doctrine and Practice honestly for your decision as an official Teacher of the English Church. We have told you, without any sort of evasion, exactly what to us are matters of the first importance; and we have done this for the purpose of obtaining what has become necessary to the existence of our Life and status as a Community in the appointment of a Visitor whom we could trust to help us to be faithful to our Rule and Observance in the Vocation God has given us.

The appointment of Visitor was rightly made a sine qua non by the Archbishop of Canterbury in the regularizing of our status in the Church of England; and every other consideration was put on one side till we had complied with his request. My Licence as a Priest, which I asked for in 1911, was refused. The offer

of Ordination for two of our Monks I was forbidden to accept. Our Rules, Constitution and the Practices of our Devotional life were asked for without any reference to me as to what I might consider to be our special needs as a Contemplative Community. When I begged you to visit Caldey yourself, to see something of the actual working of our Life, you replied that the first stages of the negotiations could be conducted in writing. I gladly placed everything at your disposal for examination, and I answered faithfully all the questions that were asked. When I came to see you at Wheatley last March I told you just what we did at Caldey, and you agreed with me then that the Practices of the Devotional Life, which had grown up in the course of years, were to be gently and considerably dealt with.

And the result of it all has been a cold formal demand, beginning with a request for the legal security of our Property to the Church of England, and some preliminary requirements that cut away at once the very centre of our Liturgical and Devotional Life. You wrote in no sort of tentative way, but as if you knew perfectly well what you were doing, and you left me no single point of appeal. Then, when the Community had delivered itself tied and bound into your hands and had promised to give you what would practically amount to unconditional submission, you wrote that there would be "a number of other matters that would need careful discrimination; that your first list could not be called exclusive, and that you would have to bear in mind on one hand the general principle of policy, and on the other the exceptional position of our Community." Our special spiritual needs do not seem to have deserved any consideration; and upon the chief points you did not give me any chance of discussion. You "thought it was not worth while going on until those preliminary points were taken for granted."

You must pardon me, my Lord Bishop, if I write strongly. I have not been working heart and soul for so many years at what I firmly believe to be my Vocation; and God has not helped me through countless difficulties for me to find it easy when I am asked practically to deny, what I have always believed and taught openly, because I felt that with all the anomalies of the Church of England, her formularies were patient of a wide interpretation, and that, her boasted Comprehensiveness—holding so many divergent opinions under a common denomination—could find a real place, if only a small one, for a body of men who gave themselves entirely to God in the Life of Prayer under the Rule of Saint Benedict.

The needs of the Contemplative Vocation are quite special. They are not in the least like those of an ordinary Anglican parish, and they fundamentally differ from those of an Active Community. As a Community we have always known perfectly well what we believed; our Faith was no new thing, there was never any secret made of it, and never any willful disobedience.

In accepting a more definite Authority than that granted us in the first place by Archbishop Temple, we knew of course that some necessity for modification would arise, and that possibly we should be asked to give up certain things. To all reasonable demands we were prepared to submit; but how could we be prepared in any sort of way for the manner in which you have thought it necessary to treat us? When I began this Foundation I felt that the peculiar needs of the Contemplative Life could only be met upon the traditional lines of the present practice of the great Benedictine Order as it exists throughout the world to-day. Interesting as academical questions may be to students, men who have practical work to do (and in our case it was a real pioneer work) must study the conditions of life as they are; and especially is this true where one is dealing with men so intimately as one must in the organization of a Religious Community.

It is not the gathering of men together, the adoption of a Rule or Habit, or even the formulation of high ideals, that constitute the chief difficulty of Community Life. The difficulty lies, first of all, in the acceptance of the right men, of the men who are truly called, and the keeping them together in what is at once the freedom and the bondage of a Corporate Life. It is this which constitutes the essential work of a Religious Foundation.

There is all the difference between a Club and a Religious Community. The former has only to deal with external conduct and rules are easily made and changed; but a Community is a vital organism, and one is dealing at every point with souls, and with those forces, spiritual and psychological which govern the Interior Life. The living growth towards God, and the complexities of life and conduct, are the primary and essential things that have to be reckoned with. Among these the Doctrine and Practice are not merely external observances that can be lightly changed or given up; they are literally the lives of spiritual life in a House like this, and even your preliminary demands, were they complied with, would throw the whole system into confusion. Please pardon me if I mention matters that are quite well known to you. I do so only to give you our point of view.

It seems to us that the circumstances do not admit of argument or

of delay. We are anxious to avoid anything like rashness or hurry, but your letters leave us no hope that delay would be in the least useful. We cannot bargain about what matters of principle if not of actual Faith. The points at issue between us are to us matters of pure conviction. We cannot say that we will not accept you as Visitor, but will try to remain as we are. This would be perfectly impossible, not only on the grounds I have stated above, but because we see clearly what we must do.

Our conclusion is that we are thrown back upon the "strictly Papal basis of Authority," and your dealings with us show us plainly that our hopes and aspirations have failed, at least so far as the Church of England is concerned. On the one hand we cannot possibly give up what we believe; and on the other, we cannot as honest men continue to hold and to practise what we have been asked authoritatively to surrender, and remain in a Church while holding opinions; and continuing practices which have been forbidden by its official Teachers.

From this we have no reason to draw any general conclusion for other people. But it is evidently our own duty to turn from the Authority to which we cannot conscientiously submit, to the Church where the Doctrines we believe are taught authoritatively as matters of Faith.

In this great crisis through which as a Community we are passing there is little or no difference of opinion; upon the main question there is none at all—i. e., it is impossible to submit to your requirements. Apart from this, there is the question of personal conviction. It is an individual responsibility. I myself have decided that it would be wrong for me to remain where I am; and I have ceased to minister at the altar. Each individual has come to his own conclusion in his own way, and our decision is no corporate act except in the sense that what we do as a Community.

Our Community of Nuns at Saint Bride's, of whom I am Visitor, belong to our Congregation and keep the same Rule and Observance. They have had the facts laid before them, and in their own Chapter have decided to take the same step. Thus it is that both the Communities of Caldey and Saint Bride's have determined to ask admission to the Roman Church.

Up to this moment I have taken no sort of action, and there have been no negotiations whatsoever with any Roman Catholic. When this letter to you is finished, and I have written a note to the Archbishop of Canterbury, I am going to invite Dom Bede Camm, O.S.B., who has not the least idea of what has been taking place, to come to Caldey to give us his help and advice. I am asking Dom Bede Camm as one who is a convert himself and a Benedictine; but I have never seen him. I feel sure there will be misunderstanding upon this point, so that I wish to state emphatically that Dom Bede will be the first Catholic I have approached on the subject. We have made no plans of any sort, and there is no idea of making terms with the Roman Authorities. It is just absolute and unconditional submission for us; such submission that we could not give to you because of the conditions you laid down which were contrary to our Faith and conscience. Everything in the future we leave to the good Providence of God. This only is certain, that we can no longer remain in the Church of England.

In your book "Orders and Unity," you devote a special chapter to the "Peril of Drifting," and you ask the English Churchman to take a clearer view of his position. You say there are certain doctrines which cannot be tested by an appeal to Scripture, and that such appeal is beyond question a specific principle of the English Church, as reformed.

In Chapter 7, pp. 225-7, you write that "those who believe the Doctrines of Purgatory and the Invocation of Saints are allowing themselves to drift; there is no sign of the question being adequately faced. The exigencies of spiritual convenience are quite overmastering the obligation of any clear appeal to principle."

In our own case it is to the principle of Authority that we appeal; and we shall make our submission to the Roman Church because we have come to believe that there can be no organized and stable form of Catholic life outside the Communion of that See from which our English forefathers were torn away. Our present action is a protest against the "policy of drift." We cannot go on as a mere matter of expediency, and we dare not play with what has become clear to us. We have faced the question, and having done so, we must neglect mere spiritual convenience, and do what we are compelled to do with a single eye to God's Glory and the fulfillment of His Will.

I know you feel strongly yourself about these things, and I am sure you cannot blame us for doing what we believe to be right. We do not in the least desire to influence other people by our action, but, of course, I know there will be a good deal of heart-searching among our friends, and perhaps some indignant protests.

It seems to be often counted a great crime for a man to follow his conscience when it calls him into the fold of the Roman Church.

I wish to act honestly and straightforwardly, and I cannot make any controversial self-defence. I feel that it will be only right, however, to print some of these letters for

those who wish to know the facts. They are not private letters, and I shall print them without any comment of my own, so that people may draw their own conclusions.

I wish to say that in regard to the property of our Community, I will ask the solicitor who has had the whole of our business in his hands for the last eight years to wait upon you at your convenience and give you all the facts. He will tell you exactly how we stand in regard to our obligations to the outside world. Mr. Robert Cornwall, of the firm of Messrs. Oldman, Cornwall, & Wood Roberts, 3, Hartcourt Buildings, Temple, London, E.C., is our solicitor, and I will instruct him to answer any questions you may choose to ask.

To all the kind friends who have watched our work with loving interest and prayers, I am most grateful. No slight part of the pain and the stress of the change is in passing away from them to new spiritual surroundings. I wish to assure you most earnestly that in all business and money matters I should not think of taking any unfair advantage. You shall be fully informed of the state of our affairs, and in doubtful matters I will gladly adopt any method you may suggest that is right and just to those concerned.

In connection with our present action, people will at once think of our decision arrived at last year only say that our present circumstances are totally different. One of the guiding principles of our life as a Community has been to take no step until it was evidently right. In every case we have been shown what to do by the force of outside circumstances quite apart from ourselves; and in every case when we have been true to this principle and have refused to follow impulse or expediency, we have been guided rightly. Last year it was quite clear to us that we should be wrong to make any change. There was no sufficient evidence of God's will for us, and so we made our decision, and were prepared to remain in the Church of England. For the reasons which I have stated at length we now find that the whole aspect of our life has changed, and so we are no longer in doubt as to what we must do.

From the beginning of my correspondence with the Archbishop of Canterbury, I can see now that the matter has been out of my hands, and I had only to follow step by step to this present conclusion.

I do thank you most gratefully, my Lord Bishop, for all your kind trouble, and the desire I know you have had to help us. We can feel nothing but grateful for the guidance that has been given us; and while the uprooting must mean much personal sorrow, I am sure we can never regret that God has led us into the wider and fuller life of the Catholic and Roman Church. We cannot go back upon our own history, nor can we deny any of the gifts of grace that God has given us in the past; but we have now come to a time of quiet waiting to gather fuller strength and to learn the further revelation of His will. Conscious of this we can face the future, whatever it may hold for us, with real hope and confidence; and I commend myself and my dear Brethren to you, asking that you will not think hardly of us, but pray that God will give us grace and strength to be faithful to what we truly believe to be His Divine Will.

With my respectful regards, Believe me, my Lord Bishop, Your faithful servant in Christ, (Signed) DOM AELRED, O. S. B. Abbot.

The Abbot to the Archbishop of Canterbury, The Abbey, Isle of Caldey, Nr. Tenby.

February 22, 1913.

My Lord Archbishop,—I am writing to tell your Grace that the negotiations between Bishop Gore and our Community about the office of Visitor have been broken off, and that as the result of His Lordship's preliminary requirements, which he has placed outside "all possibilities of bargaining and concession," we find ourselves, as a Community, obliged to ask admission to the Roman Catholic Church.

For the sake of our friends, it will be necessary to have some copies of this correspondence privately printed. There can be no objection to this, as none of the letters are private, and I do not propose to make any comment upon them in my own defence. It is only fair and right that our friends should be able to draw their own conclusions by having the facts placed before them.

With great respect, Believe me, my Lord Archbishop, Your faithful servant in Christ, (Signed) DOM AELRED, O. S. B. Abbot.

MORALS OF MOTION PICTURES

It is well to call the attention of Catholic readers to the immense patronage given at the present time to the moving picture shows. It is estimated that some 12,000,000 people attend them daily in the cities, towns and villages of this country. They are sure to do either much good or much harm. In the first place it seems imperative on the part of the civil authorities to do away with the small, unsafe and ill-ventilated moving picture theatres. Then, too, the films exhibited ought to be more severely censored.

The Editor of America has the following timely paragraph on the subject: "It is a pity that a matter of such vital importance to the morals of a

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community as is the proper control of these amusement halls should remain so long unsettled. In European cities measures seem to be taken to remedy the evils of the film theatre. In Berlin, for instance, the police are to force cinematograph managers to introduce well-censored shows for children only, and it will be unlawful to admit any child under sixteen to any other moving picture performance. The harm that is done, especi-

ally to children, by the exhibition of films depicting the commission of crime has been dwelt on before in these columns. Indeed readers of the daily papers must have remarked how often youthful culprits are reported to have received their first lessons in wrongdoing at the moving picture show. Yet if properly managed and controlled, what a power for good these places could be made to exert! Suppose the scenes represented should consist chiefly of the high achievements of Christian heroes, contemporary events of world-wide interest, or deeds from history that are ennobling and uplifting. That the public would take kindly to the change seems to be proved by the interest with which throngs of beholders recently viewed here and in other cities, a film showing the Holy Father walking in the Vatican gardens and another that reproduces scenes from the Eucharistic Congress at Montreal.

In many of the first-class shows educational subjects on ornithology, zoology and the like are developed in the films. Historical subjects, too come in for a share of attention. Altogether there is an improvement along these lines, but much more could be done. The force of moral sentiment in the community ought to bring the theatrical managers to an understanding of their duty.



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