

THE ELEVEN GREAT PRINCIPLES OF THE POLISH NATIONAL CATHOLIC CHURCH

By The Most Reverend Francis Hodur

I

SPIRITUAL COMMUNION OF CHRIST WITH HIS BELIEVERS

Christ our Lord established the Church for this purpose: that His believers might carry on the work begun by Him, the work of human salvation. The apostles and disciples, as well as their successors, were to prepare and lead humanity into the Kingdom of God; assured that if they fulfilled their task, He would be with them, for He had promised them saying: “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them.” (Matt 18:20) “And lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.” (Matt 28:20).

This presence of His, however, He made conditional. Christ would be with His disciples if they would gather together and work in His name, for His purposes, according to the plan indicated by Him.

He said to them: “You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden under foot by men.” (Matt 5:13)

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. (Matt 5:16)

“But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brethren. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven.” (Matt 23:8,9)

Therefore, if the members of the National Church will live according to these teachings of the Divine Master, and will propagate the democratic principles of Christ, they may be assured of His presence, help and cooperation. If we gather in common prayer, tasks and efforts; if we will work and struggle for His holy Cause; He, our Master, Leader and Saviour, will sustain us. For our work is His work; our toil, His toil; the suffering, tears, persecution and the final triumph of His ideal, that is, of a Divine Society, are His suffering, tears, persecution and the victory of a common ideal.

“If you continue in My word, you are truly My disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” (John 8:31,32)

II

THE NATIONAL CHURCH AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD ON EARTH

The most important task and mission of Jesus Christ, according to His own declaration and the words of His disciples, as recorded in the Gospels and documents of the first two centuries of our era – was the proclaiming and establishing of the Kingdom of God on earth. From the moment He returned from the wilderness where He had endured trials for 40 days and nights, and said to the multitudes, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,” (Matt 4:17), until the time when, outstretched upon the cross, He whispered with His last breath, “It is finished,” our Nazarene Master served the great purpose of preparing humanity for the Kingdom of God on earth.

The Apostles and their immediate successors took up this appointed task, and for its sake suffered and died the death of martyrs; but later generations forgot it, and became entangled in a system of Church politics directed from the Vatican. Official Christendom devoted itself to the unraveling of theological problems, to the building of magnificent cathedrals of stone, brick, gold and silver, and in curtailing human thought and freedom, serving the kings, lords and potentates of the world in general and forgot about the building of a regenerated living society, the Kingdom of God on earth.

For this reason, there arose among the Polish immigrants in America, the Polish National Catholic Church, in order to remind the world, and especially the Polish people, of that immortal and indispensable idea of organizing a Divine Society founded on love, heroic courage, cooperation, righteousness and brotherhood. "Repent ye: for the Kingdom of Christ has come nigh to us."

Repent that you have wasted so much time, talents, strength of soul and body, on useless enterprises, struggle, exploitation, mutual deception, treachery, trafficking in the holiest feeling and ideals.

Arise and join the ranks, begin a new period of your own life, that of the Polish people and of all humanity. Go forth, and may all that the Eternal Wisdom has decreed, be fulfilled in you.

III

SALVATION, THE CONDITION OF ENTERING THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Religion is the living bond uniting man with God; it is the most powerful, most noble and holy sentiment of the human heart and the highest degree of human intellect. It arises in the mystery of the soul, reveals itself through faith, unbounded trust and good social deeds.

No one should, therefore, debase, ridicule, or traffic in religion, or use it for his own personal gain. Whoever does this, exposes himself to the dreadful consequences, rejection by God and humanity. History brands none so severely as those who traffic in God, virtue, faith and the sacraments; brands them as blasphemers, perjurers, sacrilegious, and destroyers of that which is sacred.

"Woe, shepherds of Israel," cried the great Israelite prophet to all those who abuse religion by using it to serve their low, base and selfish purposes, "who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fatlings; but you do not feed the sheep. The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the crippled you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd; and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered, they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill; my sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth with none to search or seek for them. Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: As I live, says the Lord God, because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild beasts, since there was no shepherd; and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep; therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: thus says the Lord God, behold, I am against the shepherds; and I will require my sheep at their hand, and put a stop to their feeding the sheep; no longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them." (Ezekiel 34:2-10)

Were not these prophetic words fulfilled in the course of human history, on the priests of Egypt, Judea and Rome? Might they not likewise be fulfilled on the Polish priests if they turn not from their course of disloyalty toward God? The same causes bring the same results. The same hand which wrote on the wall of the Babylon palace Mene, Tekel, Upharsin may likewise write down in Warsaw, Cracow, Poznan, Lwow, Lodz, Vilna and Czestochowa. "Woe."

IV THE RELIGION OF CHRIST

The leading of man into the Kingdom of God, that perfect state of human society for which mankind yearns and toward which it constantly aspires, is called, in the language of religion, a saving work or salvation. According to the teaching of Christ our Lord, the Kingdom of Heaven is the state of a people being united with God in boundless love and completely devoted to Him; living and working in cooperation with Him. In order to attain this state, man must go through a prolonged process of inward changes, he must become spiritually regenerated and above all, free himself from sin and its consequences.

Sin is misunderstanding of the being and purpose of God on the part of the individual, the nation, and even all of humanity. The results of this lack of knowledge of God within oneself and the denial of Him, the source of all life, is for man simply fatal, crushing. Left to himself in his own spiritual and moral life, sinful man not only fails to develop and progress, but on the contrary, regresses and becomes spiritually dwarfed. For a time he vegetates and then deteriorates, wastes away; and would surely perish if not for the help of the Father Creator who does not desire the death of a sinner, but rather that he be converted and live.

God accomplishes this through Jesus Christ. The saving work of the Divine Mediator depends on this: that He reveals to man His primary and ultimate goal – eternal happiness; that God in His Divine compassion and righteousness will bind anew the severed ties between him and the Creator and will renew again the life-giving inner moral relationship. Man is a social being, not only in the sense that he lives with others similar to himself in a union of causation and must cooperate with them for the common good if he were to profit by it; but also in a higher and larger sense, that he is dependent on the First Cause of all life, on the Supreme Organizer of the Universe; being joined to Him by spiritual and moral ties, which are the determining factors of his conscious existence, his degree of development and the final goal toward which he aspires.

A man may not with impunity isolate himself from nature, from family, people, nation, state, Church or God. Every such deviation brings about fatal and terrible consequences; above all, it severs the relationship with God. This produces a spiritual desert in man which makes him unproductive and discourages all that we call beautiful, moral, creative and the spiritual life of man; and fills him with the opposite impulses, a brutish, low and base life. Borne away on the whirlpool of bestial and inert living, man wallows lower and lower, soiling and polluting himself in the depths of shameless and evil doings; 'til he descends into an abyss, at the bottom of which awaits him either the complete decay of his humanity, despair, suicide, heinous crime or else something more dire: hell; Gehenna.

And then Christ saves him from extinction.

Awakens in him a sense of awe and loathing; sorrow for his wasted life; longing for that which is better and holier. He shows him God's Divine mercy and righteousness, reveals to him his wretched heart; so that from it would flow its filth, poison, misery, despair and a ray of hope enter in – the Grace of God, united with repentance, confession and resolve.

With the hand of a Great Physician and Most Loving Friend, Christ binds up the wounds of the rescued man and restores him to the Church, family and nation; but above all, restores him to his own self and to God. He helps him to be saved forever.

For since the greatest privilege of man is salvation, so God's holiest right is to assist man in attaining it.

V THE CHURCH

The Church is an organized body of free religious people who strive with the help of their organization, to achieve life's highest purpose. Every religious act must evolve from man's free will; it must not yield in any way whatsoever to external compulsion. Neither religion nor the Church as its exponent, should be servants of political parties, governments or tools of the potentates of this world for combating the free aspirations of man or a nation towards liberty; but on the contrary, they are to strengthen men's spiritual powers, assist them in life's struggle – in fulfilling their mission nationally and to humanity as a whole.

VI THE GREAT SACRAMENT OF THE NATIONAL CHURCH

A great Sacrament of Christ's – National Church – as set forth in the ideals of its Divine Founder, is the preaching and hearing of the Word of God. God addressed mankind most plainly through Jesus Christ. When, therefore, a priest of the National Church takes from the treasury of Eternal Light, Strength and Life; when he repeats the Gospel of the Saviour in the self same spirit as the great Mediator; when he interprets, simplifies, extends and sounds its depth, according to the needs of the time, he is fulfilling the highest duty attainable by man, for he is proclaiming the will of God, the laws which are eternal, holy and creative. Likewise those who hear the Word of God worthily, with confidence and sincerity, are united with the Lord God, are coworkers with Him. Through such an act they become reborn; are strengthened in their resolves; are prepared for nay eventually and are God's heirs of the Universe.

This power of the Word of God was proclaimed by Christ the Lord in these sayings: "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believed Him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. Truly, truly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live." (John 5:24-25)

VII THE QUESTION OF ETERNAL PUNISHMENT

We cannot conceive that God created man out of sheer caprice, nor selfishness, (as various theological systems, drawn up according to the model of present day political and social relations, interpret the matter) nor for the purpose of delivering him to the devils for them to abuse and treat him cruelly by physical and spiritual torment and torture; now would He destroy, being to naught and erase His own work, the child of His mind, love and power, but He created man that he should live his own life according to his Creator's image. Therefore man thinks and acts, yearns to possess more and more of the sum total of light, truth, love, creative energy and

happiness. To attain these Divine purposes man has been given the capacity, the means and a period of time sufficiently long for him to reach the appointed goal. In the aim of this endeavor, the Lord God leaves man with a free will so that his acts may have a moral value, that he may of his own self, think, feel, act, save himself.

God did not create man perfect, but relatively weak; yet He infused man's being with a spark of longing for perfection; a sort of germ of eternal life, impulse, creative power; which brings it to pass that man goes on through the centuries, from stage to stage, continually climbing higher, developing and approaching perfection both as an individual and as the human species. Since man is not omniscient nor all powerful and does not know fully the laws that govern his physical and spiritual nature, he often deviates from the sure path of life; he goes astray, struggles, falls then rises with sorrow, relives the whole immensity of his physical, moral and spiritual experiences, until cleansed through these sufferings and struggles, through these creative thoughts, through toil and yearning, he enters upon the way of partial liberation and then in due time, that of a freer, more perfected existence, until at last he becomes united with the goal of his life – God.

Some people attain this goal sooner, even in this temporal life, others later; some in a higher others in a lower degree, depending on the manner in which they make use of the Divine gifts of will, intellect, inspiration and of the meditations of Jesus Christ and His Church.

In Holy Scripture and especially in the Books of the New Testament, we find numerous accounts which confirm the above optimistic view concerning the gradual development and final salvation of individual man and of the whole human race.

Expressions such as: eternal fire, undying worm, fiery place, depths of hell, place of torment, outer darkness where there shall be wailing and the gnashing of teeth, a lake burning with fire full of brimstone and pitch and similar phrases, are expressive illustrations, having the purpose of depicting the greatness of guilt and punishment for sinners; but were not meant to indicate hell in the Roman Catholic sense of the term. Such as eternal hell as taught by the Roman Catholic Church was not known either by the Pagan people, the Jewish synagogue nor the Christians of the first centuries and it was not until the Fourth General Lateran Council held in the year 1215 AD that it was finally decided that “the wicked receive with the devil eternal punishment; and the good with Christ, eternal glory.” (Deuz. In 429 Cap. Firmitr)

Christ our Lord, speaking to the Jewish people, made use of their language, employing phrases and illustrations familiar to them that He might appeal to their imagination, understanding and feelings. Thus, in order to point out to these people the greatness of sin and its punishment, by choosing an example of this sort, He compares that punishment to Gehenna, that is, that place on the outskirts of Jerusalem, where in former times sacrifices had been made to the Syrian god Moloch; it was later used for burning the city refuse, so that over it rose continually black clouds of smoke mingled with fiery red flames and from it issued fetid and suffocating fumes; so that it was a place of horror and oppressiveness.

The Greek adjective “aionios” used by the Evangelists with the word Gehenna, does not mean everlasting, but long lasting, i.e., lasting through a certain time, through a future age, a future time. So when the Lord Jesus presented the consequences of transgression, He did not say that they would everlasting for ages and ages; but He wished to emphasize that those consequences would undoubtedly befall sinners in the future and that they would be of a severe and grave nature.

His teaching concerning the salvation of all humanity is confined in the following texts of Holy Scripture: “Now is the judgment of the this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast

out; and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.” (John 12:31-32. “And all flesh, shall see the salvation of God.” (Luke 3:6)

“Whom (Jesus) heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old.” (Acts 3:21)

“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at His coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For He must reign until He has put His enemies under His feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For God has put all things in subjection under His feet. But when it say, all things are put in subjection under Him, it is plain that He is excepted who put all things under Him. When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subjected to Him Who put all things under Him, that God may be everything to everyone. (1 Cor. 15:22-28)

VIII NATIONS, AS ONE GREAT FAMILY

Nations are members of one great family of God on earth, therefore, it is not right for one nation to rob another nation of land, their political, religious and social freedom, their right to create a native culture; as it is not right for one man to rob another of his property, his good name, freedom of conscience, and the pursuit of happiness, insofar as that pursuit does not interfere with the common good. The right to live and develop is the highest of rights.

IX KINGDOM OF GOD AND THE FEDERATION OF NATIONS

The Kingdom, or Society of God, for which Jesus Christ laid the foundations, is to be a federation of all free nations of the earth, imbued with one great ideal of brotherhood, cooperation and justice. The fulfillment of one’s obligations toward God, nation, government, family, oneself and toward individual members of society is the best regulator within that living mechanism called man, or collective humanity.

X RELIGIOUS RITES IN THE POLISH LANGUAGE

All religious rites in the Polish Church and Polish home should be conducted in the Polish language; since they are the outward signs of the relation of the Polish soul and Polish people to God. Christ prayer to God, His Father, in Syro-Chaldean (Aramaic), that is, in the language of His own people; He ministered in this tongue the Holy rite at the Last Supper and in the last moment of the most dreadful tragedy that ever took place on this earthly sphere; He cried out to God in the tongue of His own people, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?”

Why then should Polish priests, followers of Jesus Christ the Lawgiver, show disdain for the marvelous Polish language, the language of a great immortal people and mediate between a Polish person and God in the alien Latin tongue, the language of a dead people?

(From the context of number 10, we conclude that in 1923 Bishop Hodur was concerned with the Polish language as the language of the people of the Church. However, the Tenth General Synod held in July 1958 at Chicago, Illinois decreed that, parishes may institute the practice of

having a Mass in English in addition to the Polish. The English Mass was introduced in 1961 and is practiced throughout the Church.)

XI

THE OWNERSHIP OF CHURCH PROPERTY

The owners and controllers of National Church property are the Polish people, those who build, maintain and believe in this Church. The bishops and priests are its guardians with the consent of the people.

The first National Church was established in America in the City of Scranton, Penna., in the year 1897, supported on one side by God's Gospel proclaimed to the world by Jesus Christ, and on the other by Polish working people thirsting for truth and righteousness.

The above principles comprise in themselves the substance of God's Revelation given to man through the prophets, through Jesus Christ our Lord and His disciples. These are sufficient for a knowledge of the way of God and the obligations of religion and salvation, for the individual soul and for the whole nation.