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Rev. Dr. Owen B. McGuire

Continuity in the Abbey and in the Chair of St. Augustine

In the issue of Dec. 3, I made some remarks on an editorial that had appeared in the New York Times under the caption, "Thanksgiving in the Abbey." I said that the writer of that article "intended to be serious and profoundly historical" in explaining the meaning of the religious function in that famous scene, but I added, "Yet, I am wondering what the Dean and Chapter of Westminster would think of the editorial where it says, 'For the first time this Cathedral, older than the Church of England, was the scene of an American service.'"

Before my article had appeared in print, the answer came in a letter to the Times. It did not come from the Dean and Chapter, but it did undoubtedly say what Dean and Chapter would have said had they seen the editorial. The letter came from the Protestant Episcopal Bishop of Albany, N. Y., the Rt. Rev. G. Ashton Oldham.

"NOTHING NASTY"
 A friend in Rochester, a Catholic layman, has written to thank me for my remarks on the Thanksgiving function in the Abbey, and referring to Bishop Oldham's letter asks, "Have you seen that nasty letter on the subject in the Times?" I had read the letter but there is nothing nasty about it. The Episcopalian clergy and Bishops are not accustomed to do anything nasty. They are highly educated and courteous gentlemen. They never descend to abuse of their fellow Christians.

Numerically they are in this country one of the smallest religious denominations. According to an article appearing lately in the magazine Time, west of the Mississippi they constitute but one-half of one per cent of the entire population, in the whole country but one and a half per cent. But their importance in the American scene is very much greater than their number alone would indicate. Episcopalianism is here the religion of high society, of "the best families," and the oldest.

One proof of that you will find on the social page of the New York Times on any day of the week. You will find there that about one-half of the marriages in high society take place in an Episcopal Church. Also, many families, old and new, in that higher bracket, have become Episcopalian through their ancestors had no use for Bishops of any kind.

All the families of the Roosevelt name were originally of the Dutch reformed Church. "Teddy" was still a member while he was president. The little versatile Mayor of New York and his wife now attend service at St. John the Divine, though that was not the religion of either originally.

Yes, the Protestant Episcopal Church is a very important element in the American scene. Hence for our own sake—and I hope for theirs also—we should try to understand them, and as far as possible to sympathize with them.

OTHER ERROR
 The caption under which the Times put Bishop Oldham's letter was misleading and evasive. "Westminster is not a Cathedral." The Bishop did correct that error in the editorial. But if that had been the only error, the Bishop would have probably considered it not worthy of notice, much less protest.

"The second error," wrote Bishop Oldham, "is more serious and less understandable, that Westminster Abbey is older than the Church of England. Since the Church of England built the Abbey as well as the scores of ancient Cathedrals of the land, I fail to see how the buildings can be older than their builder."

"Any reader of the account of the recent enthronement of the Archbishop of Canterbury will realize that when he sat in St. Augustine's chair it was but a symbol of the unbroken succession and continuity of Ecclesia Anglicana

That expresses the theory of a school of Anglicans who claim that the actual Church of England is the continuation, without break in the Reformation, of the Church founded in England by St. Augustine and his fellow monks from Rome and which continued as the Church of the English people for nearly a thousand years, a Church in no way different from the other national Churches on the Continent, the same in its obedience to Rome, in its doctrines, in its sacraments, in its doctrine especially of the Holy Eucharist and the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

QUESTIONS THEORY
 To Catholics this theory of "continuity" must appear unintelligible. For what is a Church? What makes a Church? What is a Church for? Is it or is it not to teach a body of doctrines, a form of worship, a manner of life? That the Church of St. Augustine continued for nearly a thousand years to teach the English people those doctrines to which I have just referred, no student of history will deny.

When in the Reformation the Church of England rejected all those doctrines, how could it continue to be the Church of St. Augustine? Because it is now in possession of the ancient Cathedral? Because the Archbishop of Canterbury was enthroned in the old Cathedral there? And the actual Church of England did reject and denounce those doctrines.

I am away from my library and have not a copy of the Book of Common Prayer and Homilies. But you will find there in a passage where the Reformers not only denounced and rejected those doctrines but expressed their amazement and regret that the English people had been "steeped in idolatry and superstition for a thousand years."

That argument from the material possession of the Cathedral reminds me of a controversy that appeared some years ago in an Irish magazine. The controversy was between an Episcopal minister of Dublin and a Catholic layman. "We," said the clergyman, "are the Church of Ireland. We have all the ancient Cathedrals of Ireland." To which the layman replied, "Benedict and you have the Cathedrals, and the world knows now you got them."

PUT IN NUTSHELL
 The Times editorial spoke of "the mighty ghosts of Westminster." If the shade of St. Augustine had waivered down the aisle at Canterbury on the day the new Archbishop was enthroned does Bishop Oldham think he would find himself perfectly at home? Would he not ask if the Papal Bulls had been read? Had His Grace sworn fealty to the Holy See? What is this ceremony you have instead of the Mass, etc. Bishop Oldham assumes too much when he says "any reader of the account of the enthronement at Canterbury would realize—the continuity. Augustine Birrel, a very learned man, and Protestant, put the whole controversy in a nutshell when he wrote, "It is the Mass that matters."

The Episcopal diocese of Albany seems to have a tradition—I know not whether it is "unbroken"—of this theory of "continuity." About the turn of the century the incumbent of that See was a Dr. Doane whose brother, who had become a Catholic, was then Vicar General of the diocese of Newark, N. J. Bishop Doane was a strenuous advocate of the theory. But his argument for it was different from those of Bishop Oldham. The school to which he belonged saw the force of the arguments, to which I have just referred, to upset the unbroken continuity of the Ecclesia Anglicana. To them the Church of England was not a continuation of the Church founded by St. Augustine, but the Church

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Army Camp Christmas Rites

(Catholic Christmas Supplement)

Some of the interesting facts made public by the War Department regarding the observance of Christmas in the military establishments last year show:

That more than 480 new camp chapels built by the Quartermaster Corps were used for the first time for Christmas services.

That all festivities—entertainments, dances, parties, etc.—were timed at all camps so as not to conflict with the religious services scheduled at the various reservations.

That thousands upon thousands of men were spending Christmas away from home for the first time.

That a million and a half pounds of turkey were prepared by the Army cooks for Christmas dinner.

That "Santa Claus," seeking entrance to Fort Harrison, had to be finger-printed before he was issued a pass.