
Some Special Divine Interventions on Behalf of the Church

Today is a time of great trial for the Faith. The Church is in what we see as a deep winter, but which very many think to be a dying. A large proportion of Catholics are declaring that the doctrines of Catholicism have to be re-defined in order to make them suit the modern mind. And each and every one of those folk is perfectly winning to undertake that task. Ultra-progressive theologians have proposed that every doctrine should be subject to destructive criticism as a way of determining what was good in it. Then the parts shown to be defective would be made good by new buildings. In other words you blow down the city for the purpose of finding out what should be re-built and in order to leave a vacant field for building. This might possess five per cent of sense as applied to an earthly city. As applied to the city of the Faith, it is a reckless insanity. It would mean in fact that the Faith of the people is to be destroyed for the purpose

of a future re-building of that faith. I repeat, I shout out: madness! As if it was easy to re-build a destroyed faith! It is terrible that such folly as that can be found in those who are teachers.

While the innovators have not succeeded in shaking down everything, they have certainly produced a menacing situation and many are found yielding to depression in regard to it. Depression is not a good stimulant towards remedy, especially in spiritual things for it is almost an opposite to faith. We must put the question to ourselves: What exactly is the power of depressed faith?

It is a source of happiness to see that the Legion stands up so well in that storm against the Faith. The big reason for this is the Legion's devotion to Mary who is the Torch of Faith and who destroys all heresies. Another reason would be the Legion's constant prayer for Faith. The Legion Prayer is a prayer for Faith. One is emboldened to hope that the Legion is destined to play a key part in the supporting of the Church through the crisis of this spiritual winter and into a glorious spring. But of course we must likewise act strongly and bravely.

Sometimes things are so bad in a campaign that it is necessary to retire behind fortifications, to await reinforcements, and to restore our courage. When Napoleon drove Wellington out of Spain and Portugal, the Duke took refuge behind the lines of Torres Vedras near Lisbon, that is with his back to the sea. There he rebuilt his army and after a while sallied forth to victory.

But there is no need for the Church to do that – which would be almost equivalent to retiring into the Catacombs as of old. We are not back in the days of the Roman Empire, nor are we living in the present-day China! We have our full power of action and we must use it. I think

that the Legion is just continuing to do that, undeterred by the surrounding perils.

However, it is important that we muster to our side all the aids possible. In addition to the working of our system to the full and the perfecting of all our spiritual resources, we must also strengthen our Faith on which ultimately everything depends. I have referred above to the fact that we are not in the grip of an approaching death but in a winter. Out of that winter the Church is destined to emerge not only intact but as in the spring of nature, that is to a renewal of life. It will have cast off much of its decayed substance and it will be bursting with expansion and efflorescence. Another proof will be afforded of the truth of those monumental words: 'I will be with you all days even unto the consummation of the world.'

No matter what storm is permitted to assail the barque of Peter, no matter how long the Lord may appear to sleep, the moment will come when he will arise and bid the tempest to be still.

In order to exemplify that and as well to make more vivid to ourselves that ever-present divine protection, I am going to take a couple of moments in history where powerful attempts were made to falsify the Church and where things looked as bad as could be. Human recourse seemed to be unavailing. Then God intervened in a dramatic way, and in spite of the greatest power on earth asserted the truth and put down the false. Though I only take that couple of instances, it is not out of any poverty of material. For the story of the Church abounds in like remarkable events. Where human capacity has been reduced to helplessness, a display of the divine might enters in to re-adjust the balance. It is reasonable to

suppose that where the Church has always been brought through its winter into a fair spring, it will happen again with no less degree of certainty than the similar events of nature accomplish themselves.

My first episode concerns the Temple of Jerusalem. Speaking one day to the Benedicta (curia) Reunion, I discussed King Solomon. Necessarily I dwelt on his greatest achievement; that is the building of the Temple. It was one of the wonders of the world. For sheer magnificence it could not be exceeded. It is said that in its construction and embellishment silver rated only as one of the baser metals.

The Temple housed the central ceremonial of the Chosen People: the Sacrifice of the Old Law which prefigured that of Calvary and of the Mass. Obviously the Sacrifice of Christ would at once render empty and meaningless the Sacrifice of the Temple. Thereby it would make obsolete the Temple itself – except that it was converted to Catholic use which was not destined to be the case.

Looking forward to that future date from about the year 534 before Christ, the Prophet Daniel foretold that not only would the Temple be abandoned by God but that it would be completely destroyed. Here are his words: 'Then after sixty-two weeks Christ shall be slain and the people that shall deny him shall not be his. And the people with their leader that shall come shall destroy the City and the Sanctuary' (Dn 9:26). This prophesy was re-affirmed by Our Lord himself in words of infinite sorrow. Here is the relevant text from St Matthew (24:1-2): 'The disciples came to Jesus to show him the buildings of the Temple. And Jesus said to them: Do you see all these things? Amen I say unto you: There shall not be left one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down.'

Those prophecies were accomplished when Vespasian first and then Titus (AD 70) took and utterly destroyed Jerusalem and laid the Temple waste.

There we have a key position. According to the Christians the New Law and a new order have supplanted the Old which is never to be renewed. As part of it the Jews were scattered over the whole earth and deprived of their central ceremony, the sacrifice. Talking before on this subject, I have suggested that it was strange that the Jews had not reproduced the sacrifice in their subsequent history, although at times great multitudes of them lived together in the one place, a fact which would seem to call for the renewal of their worship. Neither did they seek to re-build the Temple either then or when their national life was re-established in Palestine. One explanation of the latter which has been given is that the site lay in the Arab part of Jerusalem. But surely it was not necessary that a new Temple should be built on the exact site of the old? In any case all Jerusalem is now in possession of the Jews. Will they attempt to re-build the Temple? I think that they will not.

Now I have to return to my original theme, which concerns an astounding effort to do that very thing: Re-build the Temple on its old site. This enterprise proceeded from a most unexpected quarter, none other than the Roman Emperor Julian, named the Apostate.

A word about this extraordinary personage will be of interest. He was the nephew of Constantine the Great who turned the Roman Empire to Christianity. Julian was educated as a Christian but had no taste for it. His whole attraction lay to the old pagan culture and philosophy. He formally apostatised from the Faith. He supplanted his cousin Constantius as Emperor. Then on the eve of

a great battle between the two cousins, Constantius died and Julian became undisputed Emperor. That was in the year 361.

Julian entered on his reign as an avowed and enthusiastic pagan. The restoration of the pagan worship was to be the great aim and controlling principle of his government. He viciously attacked and persecuted Christianity. As part of his systematic plan for overturning Christianity, he determined to re-build the Temple at Jerusalem. In this he afforded fine example of the fact that error is always inconsistent. Because in reality he hated the Jewish religion as much as he hated Christianity, but he saw in the re-building of the Temple a means of falsifying Christianity. He considered that the re-constitution of Judaism with all its ceremonial in the Temple, would give the lie to the prophets and to Jesus himself who had insisted that the Temple would not rise again. Julian laughed at these prophecies, calling them ravings and the canting gossip of old women. So in the year 636 he stepped into the shoes of Solomon and aimed to restore the Temple in all its magnificence. This constituted a double danger to the Church. In the first place, it had in particular view the falsifying of the prophecies and of Our Lord's words. Secondly, it represented the first step towards open conflict with the Christians, and one step of that kind inevitably leads on to another. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* believes that his attitude would have been succeeded by one of drastic persecution and then by civil war.

In these circumstances, the whole world looked on at his amazing experiment with a painful curiosity. The Christians declared that he would not be able to fulfil his intentions; that Our Lord and the prophets would have their way. Nevertheless they must have been in an agony

and viewing with trepidation Julian's vast preparations for the re-building.

Julian turned this operation into an Empire project of the first order. Immense sums were provided from the Exchequer. Alypius, a close friend of Julian, was set over the work; he was a most competent organiser. The Jews were worked up to a pitch of frantic enthusiasm in regard to the restoration. They aided with a vast collection of materials and a host of workmen. The result of all these advantages was that the work was undertaken in the spirit of a crusade. The enthusiasm was unbounded. It is said that the very spades were made of silver in order to re-produce the atmosphere of Solomon's Temple. Women and children aided and the earth was removed in expensive containers, and even in silk mantles.

Let us try to imagine that dramatic setting. For all their faith the Christians must have felt themselves reduced to the depths. All human recourse had failed them. The whole power of the Empire seemed to be mobilised against them. What happened?

What I recount is attested to by every authority including Julian himself. I follow in the main the account given by Ammianus Marcellinus, the authentic historian of the reign, who was a friend, admirer and companion in arms of Julian, a man of affairs, learned, candid, impartial, according to all estimates of his character.

That enthusiastic host of workers, egged on by the supreme authority, entered upon their labours. Both sexes and all ranks took part. They swarmed in on the ruins, cleared away the rubbish and laid bare the old foundations.

Then suddenly Heaven declared itself. I quote from Cardinal Newman's description:

The work was interrupted by a violent whirlwind, says Theodoret, which scattered about vast quantities of lime, sand and other loose materials collected for the building. A storm of thunder and lightning followed; fire fell, says Socrates; and the workmen's tools, the spades, the axes and the saws were melted down. Then came an earthquake, which threw up the stones of the old foundations of the Temple, says Socrates; filled up the excavations, says Theodoret, which had been made for the new foundations; and, as Rufinus adds, threw down the buildings in the neighbourhood, and especially the public porticos, in which were numbers of the Jews who had been aiding the undertaking, and who were buried in the ruins. When the earthquake ceased, the workmen returned to their work; but from the recesses which had been laid open by the earthquake, balls of fire burst out, says Ammianus; and that began again and again, so often as they renewed the attempt. The fiery mass, says Rufinus, ranged up and down the streets for hours; and St Gregory says that when some fled to a neighbouring church for safety, the fire met them at the door, and forced them back with the loss either of life or their extremities. At length the commotion ceased; a calm succeeded; and, as St Gregory adds, in the sky appeared a luminous cross surrounded by a circle. Nay, upon the garments and upon the bodies of the persons present crosses were impressed, says St Gregory; which were luminous by night, says Rufinus; and at other times of a dark colour, says Theodoret; and would not wash out, adds Socrates. In consequence, the attempt was abandoned.²

2 John Henry Newman, *Essays on Miracles*, Essay II, 5, §7, 334.

Jesus and his prophets had the last word. The Emperor Julian himself writes most peculiarly about that event, admitting that he had failed and talking in a raving sort of way about the destructive properties of fire. But that did not finish the tale of Julian's failure; in the same year, on 26 June, 363, he was mortally wounded in battle. We know the legend to the effect that as he lay upon the ground after receiving his wound, he cried out: 'Thou hast conquered, O Galilean.' Indeed so utterly had the Galilean conquered that the final effect of Julian's attempt was that even the stones of the old foundations of the Temple were uprooted, so that the prophecies were made to apply even to them.

My second episode concerns even a more perilous position. The greatest heresy in the history of the Catholic Church was that of Arianism. Arius was a priest of Alexandria who taught that the Son was not the equal of the Father, not true God, therein denying the doctrine of the Trinity. Arius taught that Our Lord was merely a creature, much more perfect than other creatures, who was used by God. In other words he placed Jesus where we place Mary. This heresy spread throughout the Catholic world and at times seemed to be triumphant. The great figure raised up by God to oppose Arianism was St Athanasius, and it was formally condemned at the Council of Nicaea in AD 325. But that condemnation did not finish it, for it entered on a period of immense prosperity which lasted some six hundred years.

Indeed the year after Nicaea provided the very peak of peril. Because in that year Constantine, the Roman Emperor, was won over by the adherents of Arianism and gave orders that Arius was to be received back into the Church. Whatever that must have looked to the people

of the time, it would to us possess an awful aspect. It is evident that to reverse the condemnation of the council, and to re-introduce Arius into the Church without any recantation by him of his doctrine, would really involve the destruction of the Church. It would be the same as if Luther and Calvin were to have been taken back on their own terms, for that very same thing did menace in the case of Arius.

Constantine summoned Arius to Constantinople, the new capital of the Empire which had been inaugurated in the year 330 and dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary. He required the Bishop of that See, St Alexander who was then 97 years of age, to restore Arius to the bosom of the Church.

The bishop was utterly dismayed, seeing only too clearly the implications of such an act. Destructive on the one hand would be such a condoning of heresy. Then on the other hand what would be the consequences of defying the Emperor? The favour of the Emperor at that time seemed to be pivotal to Christianity. Not only had he relieved it from its grievous condition of persecution but he had turned the Empire into a means of propagation of religion. To lose him at such a time appeared to be equal to the pulling of the foundations from under a building, so that the prospect was quite appalling. How was such an impasse to be resolved?

A certain Sunday was appointed for the receiving of Arius back into the Church. In the week which preceded that day, the bishop and his people betook themselves to prayer and fasting. Alexander shut himself up in the church and devoted day and night to supplication. Then on the Saturday he was summoned before Constantine and ordered to comply with the Emperor's wish. Alexander

refused whereupon Constantine flew into a furious rage. Alexander departed from his presence in a state of mind which can well be imagined.

He fell on his face before the altar and implored Our Lord to deliver the Church from the danger and disgrace which threatened it. The following is the formal petition which he spoke in agony and which is transmitted to us by Macarius who heard it and by St Athanasius: 'If Arius communicates tomorrow, then let thy servant depart and destroy not the righteous with the wicked. But if thou wilt spare it, have respect unto the words of the Eusebians and give not thy heritage unto ruin and reproach. Take Arius away, lest if he enter into the Church his heresy seem to enter with him and henceforth religion be counted as irreligion.'

This prayer was offered about 3 p.m. on the Saturday. On that very evening Arius was walking in the great Square of Constantinople when he suddenly became ill. Going indoors, he was overtaken by the fate of Judas. In other words he burst open and his entrails were diffused. The building in which that happened became a record of it to future times. The historian Socrates tells us that it 'rendered the manner of Arius' death ever memorable, because all passers-by pointed the finger at it.

All of that is pure history and completely authenticated. It all took place in the presence of the highest and hostile power which was awed by it and altered its policy. The Church was saved from having to complicate itself with heresy, that is to say it was saved from destruction. The situation seemed to be beyond hope and beyond solution, but God declared himself, supplying the solution and affording glowing hope to the infant Church.

The incurable unbeliever, Edward Gibbon, says that the occurrence either represented a complete miracle or else

was done by the administration of poison. You will see how completely he grants that the event took place in the form attributed to it. With regard to his typical and unworthy suggestion that poison was at work, it is to be noted that everything took place in an Arian city and court and in the face of powerful and quick-sighted adversaries. That suggestion was never then made and would in fact have been a complete impossibility; one might as well claim that Judas owed his fate to poison also.

In connection with this reluctance to believe anything which tells in favour of religion and which is willing to believe the greatest absurdity which is alleged against religion, let me quote some words from a current personality, Malcolm Muggeridge: 'Towards any kind of scientific mumbo-jumbo we display a credulity which must be the envy of African witch doctors. While we shy away with scorn from the account of the Creation in the Book of Genesis, we are probably ready to assent to any rigmarole by a Professor Hoyle about how matter came to be, provided it is dished up in the requisite jargon and associated, however obliquely, with what we conceive to be facts.'

As I myself have always been contending, if we do not receive religion, we will soon be found in the grip of superstition. If we reject the miraculous, we will inevitably be found declaring the absurd.

Those two episodes which I have recounted stand there to reinforce our confidence. Perhaps the Church in the present crisis is not in as great danger as in those times which I have been describing and therefore it may be allowed to work through under its own steam. But we can be sure of it that if the peril were as great as in those other times, and if all human aid were to be lacking, then God

would once again declare himself in unmistakable signs and restore the position of the Church.

I must not leave you without drawing a moral from the foregoing on the subject of Our Blessed Lady.

The most important administrative act of the Roman Empire after it became Christian was the transfer of its capital from Rome to Constantinople and its solemn inauguration in the year 330. It is supremely significant that the new capital was then dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. It sheds revealing light on her role in the primitive Church, the Church of the Catacombs from which it had just emerged. The anti-Marians have ordinarily contended that what they call Mariolatry began after the Council of Ephesus in 431. That itself is early enough, goodness knows! But here, a whole century earlier, there is conclusive, absolute proof of what the first Christians thought of her. She is shown as receiving from Church and State the identical sort of veneration which the most Catholic people would give her today.