

FACTS ABOUT THE LIBERAL CATHOLIC CHURCH

OPEN COMMUNION

The Liberal Catholic Church came into being in order that people who insist upon complete freedom of belief in their search for truth could have free access to the traditional Catholic Sacraments without having to give even lip service to creeds or dogmas to which they could, not honestly and wholeheartedly subscribe. It was the only church having the valid Apostolic Succession of Holy Orders, and therefore dispensing valid Catholic Sacraments, which welcomed to Holy Communion all reverent people of whatever denomination or religion-or of none.

PHILOSOPHY

The Liberal Catholic Church makes no specific demands as to belief on the part of any of its members - simply a willingness to worship together with the use of a common Liturgy in a spirit of brotherhood. This does not imply that the Church has no philosophy which it holds to be true. It has a definite doctrine -which it teaches, but it does not insist on the acceptance of its philosophy, feeling that since it is true, all men will one day come to see its truth and order their lives thereby. We hold that "a truth is not a truth for a man, nor revelation until he sees it to be true for himself." Candidates for the Priesthood are selected from among men who have, of their own study and intuition, arrived at a general acceptance of its philosophy as expressed in its official Summary of Doctrine. This philosophy postulates the existence of God manifesting as the creative Trinity; of man sharing the divine life and nature and therefore himself eternal destined to attain a glorious state of godlike perfection. Man evolves through repeated earthly lives of experience (reincarnation) under the perfect divine law of absolute justice (karma) whereby each individual inevitably reaps the fruit of all his thoughts, feelings and actions, good or bad, life

after life. Death is followed by a time of readjustment during which the soul frees itself from any attachment to evil and then reaps the reward of its good deeds in a heaven of happiness. Realizing at length the need for more earthly experience in order to evolve further towards its goal of perfection, the soul reincarnates. Its new body and life circumstances reflect both what it has earned and what it has learned in preceding lives.

RELIGIOUS OUTLOOK

We hold that Christ established the Christian Religion, not to condemn earlier religions as erroneous, but to give a new, impetus to evolving humanity, in particular to inculcate a greater realization of human brotherhood and mutual responsibility. He established His sacramental system in order that through it He might be able to give fuller, and more direct personal help and inspiration to mankind. We feel that He wants the widest use to be made of His gifts <-> hence our open Communion. We feel also that through the celebration of the Eucharist in a spirit of joy and gladness, with wholehearted participation by priest and congregation aided by the Angel Hosts, a tremendous wave of quickening and spiritualizing inspiration can be spread abroad over the whole community. Believing that this aspect of the Eucharist is one which the Lord wishes emphasized for His wider work, we have made it one of the primary purposes of our Liberal Catholic worship.

THE HOLY EUCHARIST

To this end the Liturgy of the Eucharist was revised to eliminate all expressions of fear, of supposed divine wrath, all ideas of God contrary to the loving Father taught by Jesus. Our service is one of joy, of hope and gladness, expressed by priest and people in a highly congregational form of worship. We maintain that transubstantiation is a fact; that in the act of Consecration the natural inner life or substance of the bread and wine is swept aside and replaced by the living vitality of Christ Himself- though the outward physical matter of

bread and wine, remains unchanged. This Christ Life present in the Host enters each communicant, quickening his spiritual nature and making him for the time being a shining spiritual sun among men. Wherever the Blessed Sacrament is reserved, that radiance continues to shine over the world around, and may be called upon for help and blessing by n anyone. Many feel this influence when entering a church where the Host is reserved.

INNER GUIDANCE

The formation of this Church from its inception, the revision of its Liturgy, and redevelopment of its doctrine as to the nature of the Sacraments, were guided by careful clairvoyant study of the inner working of the Catholic Religion. Certain Theosophists- notably C. W. Leadbeater- had developed their latent powers of extrasensory perception and had been highly trained in their use while in India, -where such faculties have been known and studied for ages. The use of these faculties disclosed the realities underlying the practices of the Catholic Church and enabled scientific revision of the Eucharistic Rite to be undertaken, so as to produce a far more efficacious use of its potential in the service of God and man. The use of these faculties also confirmed the validity of the Liberal Catholic philosophy as expressed in the Churches "Summary of Doctrine."

The findings of the first investigators have been confirmed and elaborated by other trained clairvoyant researchers up to the present time. (References should be made to the monumental work, The Science of the Sacraments by Bishop Leadbeater, noted in the appended bibliography.)

CHURCH GOVERNMENT

The government of the Church is hierarchical, but it is a government by the consent of the governed. Supreme authority in matters spiritual rests with the whole body of bishops acting as a college, known as the General Episcopal Synod. This includes the

administration of the Sacraments, the promulgation of Liturgy and Ritual, Statement of Principles and Summary of Doctrine, and also the Canon Law. As far as practical all in matter of business, finance and property are placed in the hands of elected representatives of the membership. The Synod operates under the chairmanship of its elected Presiding Bishop whose actions are always subject to its approval. New bishop are selected and consecrated by the Synod. Appointments of bishops to Provincial or Diocesan authority are made by the Synod with the approval of the subordinate clergy. Appointment of clergy to a parish is by mutual agreement between the parish and the responsible bishop. The Synod is the final court of appeal in all matters concerning the Church and its clergy.

HISTORY

Established in England in 1916 through a reorganization of the former Old Catholic Church in Great Britain, the new movement quickly spread to other countries, and in 1918 adopted its distinctive name, THE LIBERAL CATHOLIC CHURCH. Its Episcopal succession is derived from the Old Catholic Church of Holland through Archbishop Arnold Harris Mathew and his Auxiliary, Bishop Frederick Samuel Willoughby, the latter having been elected and consecrated "to safeguard the Succession." Archbishop Mathew ordained a number of Theosophists to the Priesthood, knowing that they were Theosophists and knowing about their philosophy. They had built up a congregation in London which was at that (1915) the only congregation of the Old Catholic movement in England. In an about-face the Archbishop suddenly demanded that they all withdraw from membership in the Theosophical Society, and when they demurred at this breach of agreement, he bowed out and declared the whole movement "terminated."

This left them free to act as they should deem best, but without a bishop. Bishop Willoughby, who had been elected from among their number by their votes (though not a Theosophist), and from whom Archbishop Mathew had since

parted company, passed on the Apostolic Succession to them by consecrating James Ingall Wedgwood to the Episcopate as Presiding Bishop of the now autonomous body, in London on February 13, 1916. He in turn consecrated Charles Webster Leadbeater to the Episcopate in Sydney, Australia in July of that year, and the Church rapidly spread over the world, being active in over 40 countries with more than 15 languages, continuing to grow in all of them. (All services are in the language of the people). Although Theosophists played a major role in establishing this Church, the Church itself has no connection with the Theosophical Society or with any other philosophical school of thought. Clergy and members are free in such matters. All clergy are self-supporting, receiving no financial remuneration for their work. They are free to marry if they wish.

Nowhere is the Church large as yet, but it is steadily growing. The United States of America has its complements of bishops, priests, incorporated parishes as well as unincorporated missions, various churches, church centers and private oratories. The Church in the USA is incorporated in the State of Maryland as "The Liberal Catholic Church, Province of the United States of America," but its Provincial Headquarters is now in Ojai, California.

The world headquarters of the Church is maintained in London, England, where its archives are kept and where the official international journal, The Liberal Catholic, has been published for over 50 years under the direction of the Presiding Bishop.

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