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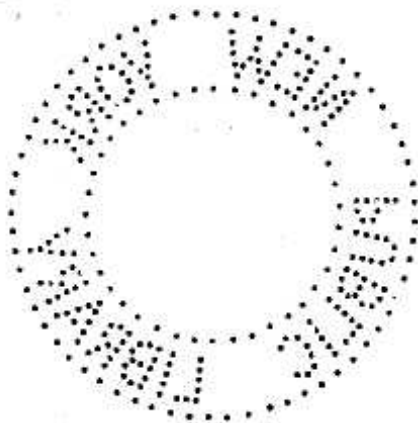
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THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH.

TO OUR VENERABLE BRETHREN THE PATRIARCHS, PRIMATES,
ARCHBISHOPS, BISHOPS, AND OTHER ORDINARIES IN PEACE
AND COMMUNION WITH THE APOSTOLIC SEE

LEO XIII.

VENERABLE BRETHREN, HEALTH AND BLESSING.

1. It is sufficiently well known unto you that no small share of Our thoughts and of Our care is devoted to Our endeavour to bring back to the fold, placed under the guardianship of Jesus Christ, the Chief Pastor of souls, sheep that have strayed. Bent upon this, We have thought it most conducive to this salutary end and purpose to describe the exemplar and, as it were, the lineaments of the Church. Amongst these the most worthy of our chief consideration is *Unity*. This the Divine Author impressed on it as a lasting sign of truth and of unconquerable strength. The essential beauty and comeliness of the Church ought greatly to influence the minds of those who consider it. Nor is it improbable that ignorance may be dispelled by the consideration; that false ideas and prejudices may be dissipated from the minds chiefly of those who find themselves in error without fault of theirs; and that even a love for the Church may be stirred up in the souls of men, like unto that charity wherewith Christ loved and united Himself to that spouse redeemed by His precious blood. *Christ loved the Church, and delivered Himself up for it.**

If those about to come back to their most loving Mother (not yet fully known, or culpably abandoned) should perceive that their return involves, not indeed the shedding of their blood (at which price nevertheless the Church was bought by *Jesus Christ*), but some lesser trouble and labour, let them

* Eph. v. 25.

clearly understand that this burden has been laid on them not by the will of man but by the will and command of God. They may thus, by the help of heavenly grace, realise and feel the truth of the divine saying: *My yoke is sweet and My burden light.**

Wherefore, having put all Our hope in the *Father of lights*, from whom *cometh every best gift and every perfect gift* †—from Him, namely, who alone *gives the increase* ‡—We earnestly pray that He will graciously grant Us the power of bringing conviction home to the minds of men.

Human
Co-operation.

2. Although God can do by His own power all that is effected by created natures, nevertheless in the counsels of His loving Providence He has preferred to help men by the instrumentality of men. And, as in the natural order He does not usually give full perfection except by means of man's work and action, so also He makes use of human aid for that which lies beyond the limits of nature, that is to say, for the sanctification and salvation of souls. But it is obvious that nothing can be communicated amongst men save by means of external things which the senses can perceive. For this reason the Son of God assumed human nature—*who being in the form of God . . . emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of man*§—and thus living on earth He taught His doctrine and gave His laws, conversing with men.

The Church
always Visible.

3. And, since it was necessary that His divine mission should be perpetuated to the end of time, He took to Himself Disciples, trained by Himself, and made them partakers of His own authority. And, when He had invoked upon them from Heaven the *Spirit of Truth*, He bade them go through the whole world and faithfully preach to all nations what He had taught and what He had commanded, so that by the profession of His doctrine and the observance of His laws the

* *Math. xi. 30.* † *James i. 17.* ‡ *1 Cor. iii. 6.* § *Philipp. ii. 6-7.*

human race might attain to holiness on earth and never-ending happiness in Heaven. In this wise, and on this principle, the Church was begotten. If we consider the chief end of this Church and the proximate efficient causes of salvation, it is undoubtedly *spiritual*; but in regard to those who constitute it, and to the things which lead to these spiritual gifts, it is *external* and necessarily visible. The Apostles received a mission to teach by visible and audible signs, and they discharged their mission only by words and acts which certainly appealed to the senses. So that their voices falling upon the ears of those who heard them begot faith in souls—*Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.** And faith itself—that is, assent given to the first and supreme truth—though residing essentially in the intellect, must be manifested by outward profession—for *with the heart we believe unto justice, but with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.†* In the same way in man, nothing is more internal than heavenly grace which begets sanctity, but the ordinary and chief means of obtaining grace are external: that is to say, the sacraments which are administered by men specially chosen for that purpose, by means of certain ordinances.

Jesus Christ commanded His Apostles and their successors to the end of time to teach and rule the nations. He ordered the nations to accept their teaching and obey their authority. But this correlation of rights and duties in the Christian commonwealth not only could not have been made permanent, but could not even have been initiated except through the senses, which are of all things the messengers and interpreters.

For this reason the Church is so often called in Holy Writ a *body*, and even *the body of Christ*—*Now you are the body of Christ‡*—and precisely because it is a body is the Church visible; and because it is the body of Christ is it *living and energizing*, because by the infusion of His power Christ guards

* *Rom. x. 17.*

† *Rom. x. 10.*

‡ *1 Cor. xii. 27.*