

CATHOLIC UNITY

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Catholic Unity by Henry M. Mason

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P R E F A C E.

THE following pages are the condensed result of the study of many years, and no little reflection upon that course of study. I write no new things. I write under allegiance to the Church of the United States of North America, as she is herself under allegiance to the Church Catholic. Than the former, I believe there is on earth no purer or more incorrupted branch of the latter. I was nurtured at her breast—I have been fed with spiritual food at her hand—and at the last hour I hope to repose my faithful soul in her bosom.

But, neither is her own, nor that of the Church of England, the position of the Catholic Church. To the Catholic Church alone, so long as the promise that the gates of hell shall not prevail against her, remains, does it belong of indefectible necessity, never to propose a damnable error for a saving truth, nor to pronounce a saving truth as a damnable error. It is among the characteristics of our own particular Church, that, disclaiming to assume the prerogatives of the Church Catholic, she has never, even under circumstances the most trying, considered as iden-

tified with the Church of England, refused communion with other particular Churches, retaining their obedience to the truth and order of the Church Catholic.

If then, the principles laid down in the following tract be true, as I hold them to be unassailably true, the condition of the Christian world appears clearly defined. Our own Church, with that of England, and the numerous Churches of the East, including the Russian, are not in a state of heresy, because fully recognising the Catholic creed; are not in a state of schism, because, beside being under the sacerdotal institution of our Lord, they have not formally and officially refused each other's communion, though they have made additional municipal articles of faith of their own. The Bishop of Rome, with his adherents, are not heretical, for the same reason, nor fundamentally schismatical, because possessed of the same sacerdotal institution; but are yet schismatical in the sense of refusing communion with other churches possessed of the elements of truth and order. Of the promiscuous mass of Christians called Protestants, some are heretical and others not so, according as they do or do not embrace the Catholic creed; but all are fundamentally schismatical when defective in that order of the gospel established by our Lord as the foundation of his Church's unity. Whether the Church of Rome proper and its dependencies, have for ever barred the way to reducing the dogmas of the particular Council of Trent, to the rank of municipal laws, or

whether those dogmas be susceptible of a less obnoxious and culpable interpretation than is found in practice, I will not undertake to determine. If the answer to these inquiries be unfavourable, then are the hopes of a reunion among Christian Churches, as remote from fulfilment, as they were three hundred years ago. To a consummation so devoutly to be wished as that union, let me be allowed to say, that I consider the jealousy of power on the part of the Bishop of Rome, in other words the papal supremacy, as the chief, if not the only obstacle. For example, no Roman thinks it any sin to worship God without an image, or to pray in a tongue understood, or to forbear, at least in public, and in some places, the invocation of the saints, and the adoration of the host, or to give the cup to the laity. Nay, in England, they came without scruple to our churches till they were afterwards forbid by a bull from the Pope. What hinders then?—But if thoughts of the plan upon which, without the compromise of truth, (a compromise more fatal than schism itself,) the union of Christian Churches might be effected, have crossed the imagination of a comparatively retired student, he is not ignorant of the restraints imposed on the expression of those thoughts, by the brevity of a preface, and the circumstances of the times. This at least may be claimed, that the views of Catholicity here presented, secure for our own branch of the Catholic Church, a position which would make her the centre of that union to which the eyes of all good men, and true of heart, must anxiously turn.

In conclusion, I would deprecate the suspicion of a want of Christian charity, from any thing which may appear on the following pages. If heresy and schism are sins, it is necessary to speak of them as sins, and meritorious of the displeasure of God. But it is one thing to pronounce condemnation on sin, and another on the sinner. The former is due from every man to truth, the latter is the prerogative alone of God, who alone can know whether the sin be wilful or not, although a state of schism must necessarily be a state of sin. To be in the communion, moreover, of the Catholic Church, and to be a member of the Catholic Church, are two very distinct things. They are in the communion of the Church, who are united in the profession of her faith and participation of her sacraments through the ministry and government of her lawful pastors. But the members of the Catholic Church, are all those, who, with a sincere heart, seek true religion, and are in an unfeigned disposition to embrace the truth whenever they find it. Salvation is predicable of the latter, but the causes which have kept us from the former, must be such as will be allowed before God.

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What is known to us of God, has been conveyed solely by his own revelation. If our senses are the only medium through which the mind naturally obtains its ideas, our knowledge of a being that can be no object of sense, must be of supernatural origin. From this source, and this only, his direct communication, we learn that he is, and as a truth no less sublime and concerning to the interests of man, that he is, though in a Trinity of Persons, yet in a Unity of Essence. But the operations of God, whether in his works of nature or those of grace, shadow forth and are types of his own existence. The harmonious movements of the universe, heard in the music of the spheres, the concord of those laws which he has ordained for the government of his rational creatures, and the combined workings of those august attributes which centre and shed their halo around the cross of the crucified, speak the nature of God, and are eloquent of the Unity of his Essence. When, therefore, in the most illustrious display which he has made of himself in this, or, let us not doubt, in any other part of his creation, he devises the plan

and arranges the process of man's redemption, when in the mysterious order of his providence, he ordains the foundation of a new and spiritual empire upon earth, wherein should be gathered together in one, the children of God that were scattered abroad; what marvel is it, that on this empire he should impress the character of his own being, that he should institute, as the law of its establishment, that its component parts should be one, though in a distant and inappreciable diversity; even as the Son, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, are one. To express the unity of this empire of God on earth, this kingdom of heaven among men, the metaphors and variations of human language are well-nigh exhausted on the pages of Holy Writ. Do we refer to the typical representations of the Mosaic law? *The paschal lamb is to be eaten in one house.* Does the voice of prophecy utter forth its mysterious language? *My dove, my undefiled is but one.* Or, speak the inspired oracles concerning Christ and his Church, after the incarnation of its adorable head? *It is one fold under one shepherd. It is a building fitly framed together. It is a spiritual house reared upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone. It is the city of the living God. It is one body in Christ, of which, by their union with him, the various parts are members one of another.*

The unity of the Christian Church is a topic fertile of the deepest interest; concerning to the faithful of all time; and surely not unmeet the attention