

Catholic Unity

by Ian Paisley

The unity of Rome is a false unity based on submission to the Pope, while the unity of Protestant churches is based on a shared faith and reference to the authority of the Holy Scriptures.

Scripture: John 17:20, Romans 15:5, 1 Corinthians 1:10, Ephesians 4:3, Colossians 3:14

Topics: "Church Unity", "Protestant Reformation"

Description

Ian Paisley delivers a sermon critiquing the notion of Catholic Unity, emphasizing the lack of truth in the unity boasted by the Roman Catholic Church. He contrasts the external appearance of unity in Catholicism with the true unity found in the Church of Christ, highlighting the discord and inconsistencies within Popish teachings. Paisley defends Protestantism, pointing out the unity found in submission to the authority of the Holy Scriptures, as opposed to the unity in submission to the Pope in Roman Catholicism. He concludes by urging for a unity based on brotherly love and Christian fellowship, rather than uniformity of opinion.

Transcript

WE hear much in these times of Catholic Unity, which has in it a good deal to captivate and charm minds of a certain order, as appears from the recent productions of the English Tractarians. There is nevertheless, perhaps, no subject on which there has been more language used with less truth.

The unity of which Rome boasts is a fiction, a mere imagination. It is true, there is an external appearance of unity; there is the Pope, the head and centre of what is termed Catholic Christendom, the appointer and ruler of the Popish Episcopate, the judge in appeals of all causes from all countries. There is, to a very large extent, in all that is essentially wrong, a corresponding unity: a unity in mummary and superstition; a unity of unintelligent devotion; a unity in the preposterous use of a dead language in the presence of a living people; a union in regard to these things, and many more--all evil--there is, but there is no union in that which essentially constitutes the union of the Church of Christ.

It has been demonstrated a hundred times, on a variety of matters, on which the utmost unity is pretended, there is nothing but discord amongst both Popish writers and speakers. Nor is this wonderful; the wonder, indeed, would be were it otherwise; truth is one and the same, but error is manifold and variable.

When a body of honest witnesses, all competent, come together before a court of law to bear their testimony to any given point, that testimony is always substantially one, and the little differences which may creep into their evidence are among the best, the most satisfactory and the most pleasing proofs of their integrity. Thus it was with the writers of the four Gospels; their slight discrepancies are the highest proofs that can be given of their integrity, showing there was no collusion among them that each was independent, and honestly delivered the thoughts which were within him without reference to what might be said by others.

Popery has affected to triumph over the diversity of sect and opinion amongst Protestants, but without just cause; forasmuch as, with seeming diversity, there is real agreement as to the one faith, the one Lord, and the one baptism. Nothing can be more erroneous than to consider the divers sects and denominations of Christians which obtain in Protestant Christendom as the subjects of so many religions.

This conclusion may suit malignity to draw, but it is at variance with truth. In England, for example, the Established Church, and the bulk of Dissenters which have sprung from it, all hold the same fundamental principles. There is a measure of unity between English Churchmen and Independents, Baptists, Methodists, Moravians, Presbyterians, and others, of which Papists seem to have no conception, or if they understand, they conceal their knowledge, and declare the thing not as it is actually but as they would have it to be. The Articles of the English Church not only represent substantially, and with great clearness and beauty, the common faith of the mighty mass of Evangelical Churches in England and Ireland, but on the Continent, and in America, and all over the world.

A celebrated Romish bishop published what he was pleased to call "Variations of Protestant Churches," a work which supplies, perhaps, a larger amount of misquotation, misstatement, perversion, and mutilation than any other work on any other subject, to be found in any living language. But that celebrated polemic seemed to forget that this was a game that two could play at, and the result was to bring forth Edgar's "Variations of Popery," a work which repays him in his own coin, but upon principles of truth, fairness, and honour, in a manner for which few of the Popish prelates were, perhaps, prepared. That work cuts up Popery root and branch, not only showing the incoherence of what is not true, and the impossibility of building it up into a consistent system, but the inconsistency of its facts with sound principles, and of the whole with the Word of God.

There has nowhere been produced a more damaging defence of Protestantism, and assault on Popery, since it literally demolishes the whole of the mighty Papal fabric.

On the subject of this unity we cannot enlarge, suffice it to say, that there is no boast so unfounded as that of the Romish Church to unity. Protestants, on the contrary, have their head, not on earth but in heaven, where they find a unity in the glorious person and offices of Him who was their Prophet, Priest, and King; a unity in the lessons which He left for their instruction, and which have been embodied by his servants in the Gospel; a unity in all the Apostolic writings; a unity in the effects everywhere produced by the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus, and the presence of the Spirit of God; a unity in peace, love, hope, joy, consecration, gratitude, and devotion.

On this subject we have some excellent thoughts in the celebrated work of Rev. Hobart Seymour, "Evenings with the Romanists." That very enlightened gentleman has borne an invaluable testimony to things he saw and heard at Rome. The following comprises a volume in itself: --

"Twenty-seven years have passed away since these conversations, of which the foregoing was a very small portion, were held. Since then I have seen no reason to change my opinions or to depart from my position. On the other hand, I have visited many lands, and have been a not inattentive observer of the working of the Church of Rome, both in the city of the Church, in Rome herself, and in almost every country in Europe."

"That opportunity for observation through many successive years has strengthened my views, and I feel more strongly than ever, that of all the churches of Christendom, the very last that ought to speak of diversities or divisions, is the Church of Rome. It is her boast and pride that she admits and sanctions almost every diversity of doctrine, and of discipline, provided there be unity in submission to the Supreme Pontiff of Rome. I have myself witnessed in the church of the Propaganda Fide in Rome during the season of the Epiphany, no less than five different churches, as the Greek, the Armenian, the Nestorian, the Syriac, the Coptic, as well as the Roman, all celebrating the Lord's Supper, at different altars, and in different ways. The ceremonies were different. The manner of service was different. The forms of worship were different. The languages were different. In short, I have never seen or observed so great a dissimilitude between the Lord's Supper in the Lutheran-the Evangelical, the Episcopalian, the Presbyterian, the non-conforming churches of the Protestant communion, as I have seen and observed among those sections of Eastern churches that are joined in the communion of the Roman Church. I have witnessed seven different forms-seven different liturgies-seven different languages-and seven different modes of celebrating the Lord's Supper, all in the church of St. Andrea della Valle in Rome. I have witnessed all the Greek rites in a Greek church-I have seen all the Armenian rites in an Armenian church in that city. Every diversity of doctrine, and liturgy and discipline, and language, is allowed and formally sanctioned, provided only all parties observe the one point of unity -submission to the supreme Pontiffs of Rome. So far is that carried, that in the Concordats or Articles of Agreement with Rome, there are special clauses reserving to whole countries the right to have their own liturgy and rites, and language, in preference to that of the Romish Church."

Touching the diversities of which the Romanists have made so much, Mr. Seymour refers to the following conversation with a Jesuit: --

"After some further conversation on his own experience as to such sources of difference, I asked-

"Is it not a fact that the differences between the various Protestant Churches are not on articles of faith, but principally upon mere points of discipline? That one church is governed by bishops and is called Episcopalian-that another is ruled by a Presbytery, and is thence styled Presbyterian-that a third is founded on the principles of the freedom of the particular church from the authority of any other, and is on that account called Independent; that one church prefers an authorized liturgy-that another chooses a liturgy of her own selection-that a third adopts a settled arrangement of extemporaneous prayer-that one has deacons to regulate its services -that another has churchwardens to attend to its affairs-that a third is carried on without either one or the other; that one church adopts a formal catechismal instruction-that a second prefers a Sunday school system-that a third has no system at all; that one church prefers administering baptism to infants-that another decides for baptizing adults that one adopts open-air preaching and class-meetings, and assemblies in barns and out-houses-that another prefers a more formal and regulated system of public service; that one church adopts a black dress for its officiating ministers-that another prefers a white surplice-that a third will have neither one nor the other: these surely are all matters of discipline-all mere trifles that have nothing to do with articles of faith. And yet these, and such things as these, are the only, or at least the principal points of separation between the various

Protestants among us."

He said, laughing, that although it seemed very absurd, yet it was very true. These were not articles of faith; they were merely matters of discipline. "But are there not also," he asked, "some differences on articles of faith?"

"I said- No. And then added, that when we speak of Articles of Faith, we mean the Articles of our creeds. Now, our several sects, Church of England, Church of Scotland, Independents, Methodists, Baptists, and generally all the Protestant Churches, hold each and all the Articles contained in the Creeds. There may be shades of difference as to the explanation of words and things, but they are all agreed in the main. My full conviction is that there is as close and compact a union of doctrine in the Protestant Church as in the several churches constituting the body of the Roman Church; while in matters of discipline, it was no easy matter to determine in which the greatest variety was found to exist. The great and plain truth seems to be this-Romanists have their differences about what their Church says, but they agree to refer all to the decision of the Papal See. There is their point of unity. Protestants have their differences among themselves about what the Holy Scriptures say, but they are all agreed to refer all to the authority of the Holy Scriptures. There is their point of unity."

"He was very much struck with this statement; he seemed fully to take it in. It seemed to satisfy the feeling that was at work in his inner mind. He expressed himself very strongly."

Mr. Seymour further expands and enforces his views in the following address to the Jesuit. After some discussions which naturally led to it, he said: -

"Let it be always remembered, I said, I that union is not a necessary sign of spiritual life, as disunion is not a necessary evidence of spiritual death. If we enter a church or chapel, and observe the congregation, we are sure to find that however their hearts may be united, yet their minds, habits of thought, and reflection create certain diversities and shades of opinion. There may be union on all that is great and important, though there are diversities on matters of lesser moment. Their very diversities of judgment are a sign of mental activity and of real life. They are not dead. If then, we enter the churchyard, and sit beneath the shady cypress and the dark yew, and tread lightly the graves of the departed, there is found no disunion and no diversity there. There is no collision of mind or of feeling. All is peaceful, quiet, calm. This very unity is an evidence of the absence of all real life. They are truly dead, and all the life that is there, is that of the loathsome worm of the grave. And so in spiritual things. There is a union which is a sign of spiritual death, for it argues the absence of all intelligent activity and mental life. And there is a division, which is an evidence of spiritual life, for it proves the existence of mental thought and active intelligence. Among the mummies of Egypt, there are no religious differences, for all are dead. In the catacombs of Rome there is the most perfect union, for all are lifeless. Even among the children of the world, thoughtless, reckless as they are, there are no religious disputes, for all are spiritually dead. There are no varieties of opinion among a gallery of marble statues, for a perfect unbroken unity is evidence of death and not of life. The only true unity which is worth having, and which is quite consistent with diversity of sentiment, is the union of holy brotherhood-the union of the children of Christ the union of Christian heart with Christian heart, and the union of both in Jesus Christ, where, knowing that a perfect unity of opinion is no more possible than a perfect similarity of face, and knowing that there may be an agreement on great things, agreeing to bear and forbear, with differences on little things, the hearts of Christians may be united in brotherly love and sympathy, each with the other, and all seek and find the bond of union in Him, who is " the corner-stone in whom all the building, fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are

builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." Eph. II. 20-22.

And this is the union of the Protestant Churches, or at least this ought to be their union. In the Church of Rome herself, we find an illustration, for she has within her bosom Jesuits, and Jansenists, and Dominicans, and Franciscans, and Augustinians, and Benedictines, and Carmelites, and innumerable other orders or sects, all differing in outward manner, all differing in their rules of life, all differing in their opinions on some particulars, especially having all different practices-superstitious practices, as I think-prevalent among them, and yet they have all this bond of union in the Pope.

Whatever be their differences, and sometimes they hate, and vilify, and intrigue against one another, acting with the most hateful jealousy and malignant rivalry; yet do they all find a bond of union in the Pope. It is thus, too, that the several Protestant Churches, with their diversities of forms and sentiments, too often also acting as enemies or rivals to each other, yet find their bond of union in Jesus Christ."

So much for the Popish figment of Unity of which she makes so much, and which has led astray so many people of education, position, and high pretensions in English society. All such conversions but serve to show how much ignorance may be found in ceiled houses. People ambitious to distinguish themselves by independence of thought, dart away from the beaten track of their benighted fathers and their vulgar contemporaries; they foolishly believe that different politics constitute different religions, and that mere circumstantial differences of creed constitute vital differences of faith, all which they affect to deem so many proofs of error in the matter of Protestantism.

As a cure for all this, they lift up their eyes to the City on the Seven Hills, and fix them on the "Man of Sin;" and, having found in him a unity, they prostrate themselves before the "Beast," and think they have attained to an incalculable blessing, when they have merely proved false to Scripture, to reason, and to common sense! We trust the foregoing testimonies of Mr. Seymour will not be thrown away upon them, and that our labour in this matter, now more than ordinarily important as it respects the British people, will not be without beneficial effects.

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