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# THE ONE CHURCH

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## THE ONE CHURCH

MOST REV. JOHN S. VAUGHAN, D.D.

*Text:* "Now the God of patience and of comfort grant you to be of one mind and one towards another, according to Jesus Christ; that with one mind and with one mouth you may glorify God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

When we look around and consider the many millions of Christians in all parts of the world we cannot help being struck by their extraordinary variety. The religion taught by our Blessed Lord was one and indivisible. He did not found different religions, as one might establish different forms of government, to suit the different characters and peculiarities of different nations and peoples. He nowhere speaks of His "Churches"; it is always of His Church, in the singular number. There is no trace of National Churches, such as we now find, but all were to be united into one indivisible body, so that all might "with one mind and with one mouth glorify God and the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ."

### THE FIRST PROOF—The Church Must Be One Because It Is True

The Church of God must be true, because God Himself is the Sovereign Truth. But, if it be true, then it must be one. Truth is essentially the same in all places, and in absolute agreement with itself. There is nothing of the chameleon about it. It does not alter to suit the peculiarities and the idiosyncrasies of this nation or of that. In Christ's reply to Pilate we have the most solemn and the most public declaration of His mission: "For this was I born," He says, "and for this came I into the world, viz., that I should bear witness to the truth."

Now, two Churches teaching irreconcilable doctrines cannot by any possibility be "bearing witness to the truth." One at least must be bearing witness to a lie. If, in place of two contradictory churches, there be two hundred or more, it still remains indisputable that only one of the number can be teaching the whole truth, as set forth by Jesus Christ. For, whatever may be said of other churches, founded by Luther, Calvin, Henry and Elizabeth,

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This succinct, clear proof of the Unicity of the Catholic Church was written about fifty years ago by the noted English prelate, John S. Vaughan. It lacks none of its force in being presented today; in fact the passage of the years only confirms the timeliness of the message in any age. Certain polemical passages characteristic of his day have been deleted. In no wise does this deletion materially affect the continuity or force of his argument.

etc., Christ's Church is the "Pillar and ground of Truth." (I Tim. iii.15) It is on account of this obvious necessity, that St. Paul, inspired by the Holy Ghost, assures us that there is but "one Lord, one Faith, and one Baptism." There are many erroneous Faiths in the world today, but to imagine two or more different yet equally true Faiths is as absurd as to imagine two or more true Gods. Truth—real Truth—must lead to unity. For, as truth is the selfsame all the world over, all who accept it will be in complete agreement with it, and with one another. Why are all men, without exception, in absolute unity as regards the multiplication table? Simply, because they all possess and accept the selfsame truth, viz., that twice two are four, and the rest. So soon as one Church differs from another, or any one dogma, one of them has departed from the Truth. Error has crept in and divisions have arisen.

### **SECOND PROOF—Christ Commanded His Apostles To Teach One and the Selfsame Doctrine to the Whole World**

Not only did Christ bear testimony to the truth Himself, but He chose out certain trustworthy men, named Apostles, and commanded them to teach this same truth to the entire world. "And Jesus spake to them saying: All Authority has been given unto Me, in heaven and earth. Go ye, therefore, and make disciples of all nations (catholicity in place), baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you (catholicity in doctrine), and lo! I am with you, even unto the end of the world" (catholicity in time).

Thus, in obedience to the express command of God-made man, we find the Apostles teaching and instructing the people. They taught, not their own views, nor their own pet theories, but "all things whatsoever (i.e. God) I have commanded." In short, they taught others what God taught them. The question is: Were these doctrines true or false? They must be infallibly true, since they came from God. But, if true, they must be ever the same, both in time and in place, and with one nation as with another, and "to the end of the world."

Man, when left to himself, is liable to error. Even the Apostles might easily have gone astray, had they been abandoned to their own devices. But God guaranteed them the continuous and divine assistance of His own guiding presence, as well as that of His Holy Spirit. Harken to His words. After commanding His Apostles to teach, He at once dispels any doubts from their minds, on the plea of their natural inability and human frailty, by the assurance: "Lo! I am with you." So long as He, the Infinite Truth, remains with them, to guide and to enlighten them, they cannot possibly

go astray, or make any mistake in the deliverance of their message. But His divine presence was promised to the very end. Not only, therefore, to the Apostles themselves, but to all who should succeed them, "even unto the end of the world." If Christ's promise was to be accomplished, then it is perfectly evident that it was not limited to the twelve Apostles, since their lives did not outrun the natural span.

### **THIRD PROOF—Because the Holy Ghost, the Spirit Of Truth, Remains With the Teaching Church Forever**

Before Our Lord ascended into Heaven, He made a solemn promise to His Apostles. He said: "Ye shall receive power when the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth." Since God has constituted the Apostles witnesses, they could be witnesses of truth only; and their testimony might always be relied upon, for the simple reason that they were acting, not in virtue of their own unaided strength, but in virtue of the irresistible power of the Holy Ghost according to the words: "Ye shall receive power when the Holy Ghost is come upon you." The same truth is stated still more explicitly and clearly by the beloved Disciple in his Gospel (xiv. 26): "The Comforter, even the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send you in My name, shall teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." If that, dear brethren, does not mean *infallibility*, then I know not what it can mean. In another place (John xiv. 16) Christ says: "I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Comforter." To what purpose? Why, "That He may be with you forever, even the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive."

Now surely if Christ promised to remain with the teachers of His Church, and with their successors, and if He furthermore declared that He would send also the Holy Spirit to abide with them forever, then there can be but one Church, viz.: the Church which possesses the Divine Spirit of Truth, according to the promises. For the "Spirit of Truth" cannot contradict Himself.

### **FOURTH PROOF—Because God Has Made Eternal Damnation The Penalty Of Disbelief In The Specific Message**

It is solely because God is with His Church, and because He Himself protects her from so much as the bare possibility of error that mankind is justly bound, under the most awful sanction, to accept her teaching. Observe there is no latitude allowed, no freedom of choice, no private judgment accorded to the multitudes addressed by the Apostles. Men and women were commanded to listen and accept. They were to find Salvation by embracing the

definite teaching proposed to them authoritatively by the divinely commissioned teachers. This was taken to be such an essential condition of Salvation that any one whosoever refused to accept the Doctrine, was to be rigorously cut off and to be consigned to hell's fires. "He that believeth and is baptised, shall be saved," declares the Incarnate Son of God, "but he that believeth not, shall be damned." So that nothing less than eternal torments await those who (wilfully and deliberately and knowingly of course) reject what the Apostles and their successors teach, now and in the future, yea, even to the end of time. Why this awful threat? Why so appalling a sanction? Well, of course, because such persons are refusing to believe, not fallible man, but God; not a mere creature, but the Creator, even though He speak by the lips of His creature. This is clearly enough expressed by Jesus Christ when He said to the Teachers, whom He had appointed: "He that heareth you heareth Me, and he that despiseth you despiseth Me," making no distinction between them and Himself on this point. What Church is it that still continues to teach in this authoritative manner? There is but one Church that so much as claims to be the infallible and unerring mouthpiece of Christ, and that is the Church Catholic or Universal; or what all men recognize as "The Roman Catholic Church."

#### **FIFTH PROOF—Because Christ Prayed That His Church Might Be One**

Christ is God, therefore to pray is with Him the same thing as to effect. Since then He prayed, "Holy Father, keep them in Thy name, whom Thou hast given Me, that they may be ONE, even as WE are ONE." (John xvii:11) It follows that His true adherents must, in truth, be one. For He prayed not only for His Apostles, but for all who would listen to their teaching. "Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe in Me, through their word; that they *may all be one*, even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee. That they also may be ONE in Us." If the Unity subsisting among the true followers of Christ is to resemble the unity that obtains between the Father and the Son, it must above all things include unity of Faith and of doctrine, which denotes unity of spiritual truth. So much is clearly indicated by the very terms of the prayer of our Lord, just given, wherein He expressly says: "Sanctify them in truth."

#### **SIXTH PROOF—Because Christ Made Unity the Great Mark or Characteristic by which His Church Was To Be Distinguished from All Others**

It is a fact of great significance that Christ prayed not only that His Church might be one. He did more. He decreed that this oneness should be so striking, so visible, and so readily recognized that it might serve as a guide to all sincere inquirers. It

was to be more. It was to be so wonderful and so admirable and so unique as to afford proof of the divine character of His mission. In all ages unity was destined by God to mark off His Church from every other, and to impress men with a sense of its authenticity. This Unity was to be the guarantee of its genuineness through the ages, not only to the student and to the historian, but to the man in the street, and to the common wayfarer, if he would only set aside prejudice and the influence of early training and tradition, and just open his eyes and look around for himself. "That the world might know that thou didst send me." In short, He asks that His Church might display such a note of unity that the world itself would feel compelled to exclaim: "Digitus Dei est hic"; the finger of God is here! Hence we are not surprised that the Catholic Church, though so vast, though so extended, and though consisting of men and women of every nation, race, color and tongue, is yet so essentially one that the startling fact cannot be explained on purely natural grounds. It presents such a spectacle to the world that any honest enquirer, who takes the trouble to examine it impartially, will be led to exclaim: "It is a work divine. It must have been founded by One who alone can guard and guide and hold together in peace and harmony such a vast number of wholly heterogeneous elements." "The glory which Thou hast given Me I have given them", says our Lord. Then, as if to lay further emphasis on the statement, He continues to petition, "*that they may be perfected into one, that the world may know that Thou didst send Me, and lovest them even as Thou lovest Me.*" (John xvii. 22:23).

#### **SEVENTH PROOF—Founded On The Symbols Under Which Christ Refers To His Church**

That the divine Founder of Christianity intended a real, close and organic union between the various members of His Church is abundantly established by the very figures and symbols which He makes use of in describing it. He speaks of it sometimes as (1) a House, sometimes as (2) a City, and again as (3) a Kingdom. Each of these figures clearly suggests the idea of unity and compactness. Each is one, whole, made up of many parts, all of which are intimately correlated. A House, a City and a Kingdom! Each is a single complete entity. There is no antagonism nor want of harmony between their parts. For if there were they would not endure. This is explicitly enunciated by our Lord Himself who warns us (as though in view of the divisions existing among the various sects) that "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand." (Matt. xii. 25.) A kingdom, though it may consist of many provinces, and many states, is nevertheless bound together into unity, inas-

much as all its inhabitants are subject to the same laws, governed by the same legislative assembly, and placed under one and the same head, ruler or king. So, too, though the Church of God consists of many countries, yet all are united under one supreme Head, submit to one sovereign authority, and accept the same doctrine, and "With one mind, and with one mouth glorify God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

**EIGHTH PROOF—Because Christ Spoke of His Church as (1) A Flock Under One Shepherd, as (2) a Vine, as (3) a Tree, and (4) as a Living Body**

If we pass to other illustrations and figures made use of by our Lord, the case grows still stronger. He likens His Church to a Flock or Fold under one pastor; to a vine, in which every part is united; to a Tree, in which every limb and branch draws its life and nourishment from the same trunk or stem, and to a Living Body, which possesses, perhaps, a more perfect organic unity than any other.

Let us consider the Church under the figure of a Tree. Christ says: "The Kingdom of Heaven (which is the Church) is like unto a grain of mustard seed, which a man (Christ Himself, the Man-God) took and sowed in a field (the field is the world), which is indeed the least of all seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than all herbs and becometh a Tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof." (Matt. xiii. 31.)

In the case of a seed recently planted we contemplate small beginnings; a simple bud, a stem, a leaf; but as it grows, and by virtue of the great principles of life with which God has endowed it, it becomes more complicated. It puts forth numerous leaves, twigs and spreading branches in all directions, and in greater and greater abundance. Yet, observe, however many and however varied are the parts of a tree, all are intimately united and bound together. Every part shares in the one common life. The selfsame vivifying sap courses along from one extremity to the other. Not only is this unity of the most intimate kind, but it is absolutely essential. So essential indeed that if a single branch detaches itself from the parent stem, it forthwith perishes, and if even a single leaf loses its hold and flutters to the ground, it immediately withers and dies.

Which of the many churches now in existence corresponds to this description? Where is such Unity as this to be found save in the Catholic Church? Let us apply the figure. If the Church is a tree, then our Blessed Lord is the root and foundation; His Vicar, the Sovereign Pontiff, is the single trunk or stem. The Bishops throughout the world are the great limbs; the priests and pastors are the lesser branches or twigs, and the faithful are the innumerable leaves. Thus, as even the most distant leaf on the topmost branch is in



connection with the massive trunk that supports the whole structure and draws its life and nourishment from it, so each and every individual member of the Church is in connection with the infallible Vicar of Christ, from whom he draws the spiritual sap of divine truth. Take a Catholic living, let us say, in India or Canada, or New Zealand or anywhere else you please. If a practical member of the Church of God he will be in communion with his parish priest; the priest will be in communion with his duly appointed Bishop; and the Bishop will be in direct communication with the Pope at Rome.

And just as the sap rises in the trunk of a tree and passes through the immense limbs and so on through the lesser branches till it reaches the furthestmost leaves, imparting to them vigor, freshness and life, so the pure doctrine of Christ, carefully protected from error by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, issuing from the lips of the visible Head of the Church, passes on to the Bishops and is from them conveyed to the priests of their respective dioceses, and finally preached by them to the faithful throughout the world.

Thus it is evident that Jesus Christ by establishing His Church on Peter and his successors, while safeguarding them from error, has knit the whole Church together, and every member composing it, in a Unity corresponding in almost every respect to the unity that obtains in the case of a shrub or a tree. All Catholics believe the same truths, because all are taught by one and the same supreme authority. All are absolutely one in Faith and in Doctrine, because all are conscious of the foundation (Peter) on which they stand, and because all recognize the Voice of God in the voice of Peter. "Upon this rock I will build my Church." "Who heareth you, heareth Me." Though many other arguments might be adduced, perhaps enough has been said to prove that Christ determined that His Church should be one, and that all His followers should be united in the same Faith and in the same Doctrine. But if He really wished this Unity to exist, and in such a striking form as to be a mark or character visible and conspicuous to all, it is quite certain that He must have established some principle of cohesion, some bond of union which should be at once simple in its application and efficacious in its results.

Now there are but two principles in possession. The one is the Protestant one, viz.—an infallible Bible alone. The other is the Catholic one, viz.—an infallible and living Teacher or Head, namely the Pope. Now it is quite certain that Christ knew what He was about. It is unthinkable that He, who decreed that His Church should be ONE, should have chosen a means wholly inadequate for the purpose. The Bible alone has been tried as a bond of unity for over three hundred years by Protestant churches. It has been proved, and

found wanting. So, far from being a bond of unity, the Bible alone, interpreted by each man for himself, has proved a principle of division and disintegration. It separates and divides and breaks men up into hundreds of quarrelling sects. A leading article in that great representative Protestant London paper, "The Times", informs us that: "England alone is reputed to contain some seven hundred sects, each of whom proves a whole system of theology and morals from the Bible." (See "Times" of Jan. 13, 1884.) Such is the verdict of history.

On the other hand, the Principle of Unity which obtains in the Catholic Church draws all her members together and unites them in the closest possible harmony. Though the Catholic Church is vaster than all Protestant churches taken together, and though she counts among her children people of every race and language, and color, and civilization, yet she contrives to keep them all absolutely one in Doctrine and in Faith. Our Lord promised that this would be so in order that the world might be able to distinguish His Church from all others. His promise has been most faithfully kept. She is conspicuously and manifestly one; and the world itself is bound to acknowledge this Unity, even though it is too proud and too self-willed to accept the logical consequences and to acknowledge her authority and to place itself in obedience to her.

I will not at this late hour delay you by producing many illustrations of this fact. But I will conclude by setting before you at all events just one instance. It shall be in the form of a quotation from the "London Times" at the time of the Vatican Council in the year 1870. This is how that great Protestant journal sums up the situation in its leading article: "Seven hundred Bishops, more or less, representing all Christendom, were seen gathering around one altar and one throne partaking of the same divine mysteries, and rendering homage by turns to the same spiritual authority and power. As they put on their mitres or took them off, and as they came to the steps of the altar, or to the foot of the same spiritual Father, it was impossible not to feel the unity and the power of the Church which they represented." (See issue of December 16, 1870).

The decrees passed by this General Council were cheerfully accepted by between two and three hundreds of millions of Catholics scattered throughout the world. The mere handful of dissidents in Germany served only to render the general unanimity the more striking and conspicuous. Thus every member of the world-wide Church of God continued now, as before, "with one mind and with one mouth to glorify God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."



**PRAY**

**that all  
may be one**