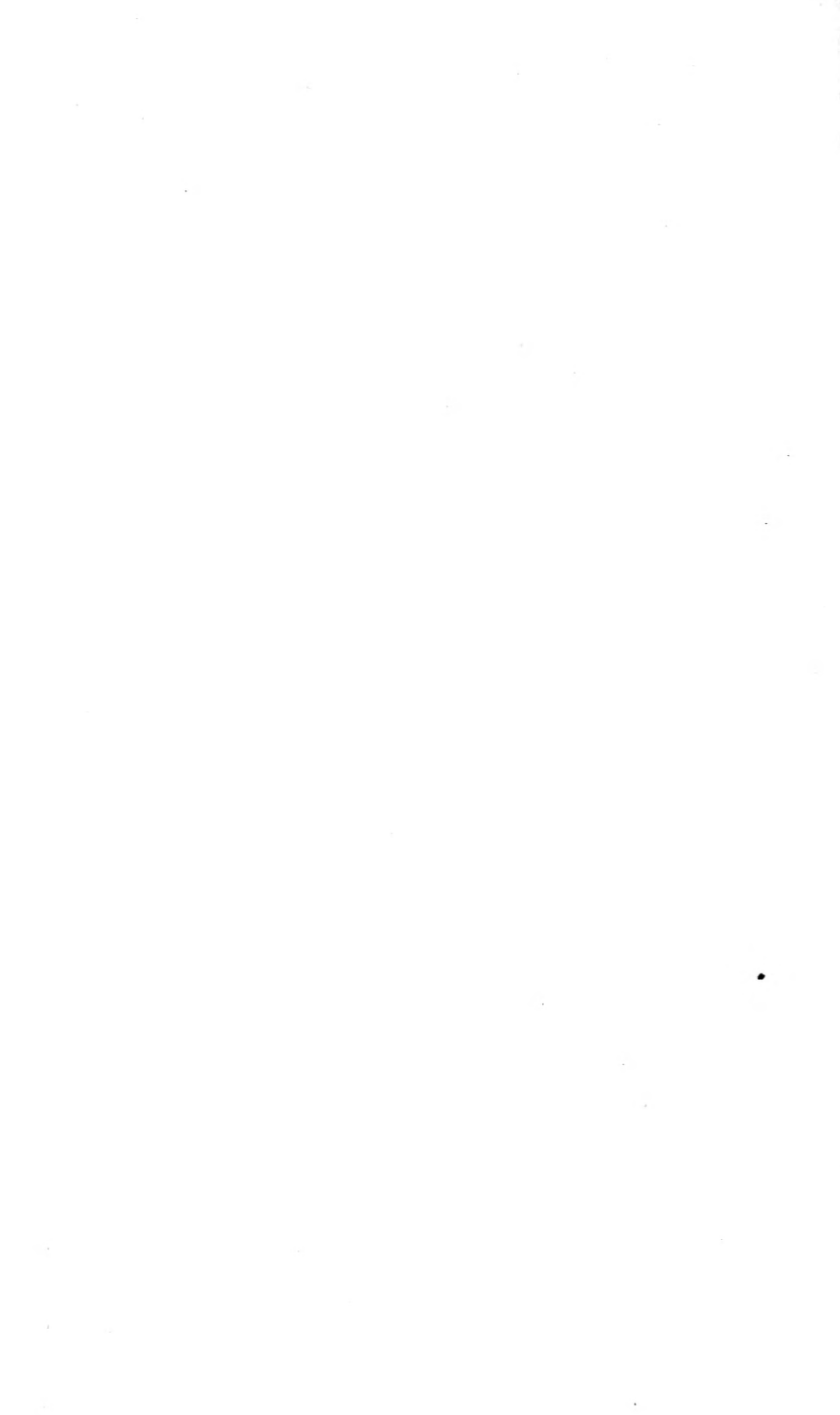


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No. 2.] TRACTS ON CATHOLIC UNITY. [Price 2d.

By Members of the Church of England.



An Essay to procure Catholic Communion upon Catholic Principles.

(Reprinted from Deacon's "Complete Collection of Devotions," 1734.)

[IN putting forth a reprint of this valuable Tract, the present Editors expressly disclaim committing themselves to every sentiment or point of argument contained in it, or to more than the general principle implied in the endeavour to reconcile differences on Catholic grounds. Nor, since it is now put forth solely for *religious*, not for *literary*, purposes, has it been thought necessary to authenticate its history beyond the following statement of a correspondent, well acquainted with the writings of the period of its publication, to whom the Editors had referred for information on the subject. "The only entry I can find among my Nonjuring documents respecting the authorship of the 'Essay to procure Catholic Communion upon Catholic Principles,' appended to Deacon's Collection of Devotions, is one from Peter Hall's *Fragmenta Liturgica*, Vol. I., p. xlii., where the Essay is attributed to Dr. Brett. I possess a MS. list of about forty Works and Tracts published by Dr. Brett; but this Essay is not included in it. This is owing, probably, to its having been published anonymously in 'The Complete Collection of Devotions,' in the compilation of which, it is thought Deacon had the assistance of Brett, Gadderer, Lawrence, and Campbell."]

"I HAVE been at great pains," says Vincentius Lirinensis, "and often made it my particular business to consult very many persons of the highest rank for piety and learning, about a certain general rule to distinguish the true Catholic Faith from the depravations of Heresy ;

and after repeated enquiries, the sum of all their answers amounted to this, That if I or any other Christian would discover the artifice of growing heretics, and keep out of their snares, and continue perfectly sound in the right faith, the way by God's grace is to secure it upon these two foundations: First, upon the authority of Holy Scripture; and after that, upon the tradition of the Catholic Church. But here, perhaps, a man may ask this question, Since the Canon of the Scripture is complete, and more than sufficient in every respect, what need is there for adding the sense of the Catholic Church to such a perfect rule? To which question I answer, That there is good reason for such addition; because the Sacred Scriptures having a sublime sense, all understandings cannot reach it alike; but one expounds the Divine Oracles after this manner, and another after that, insomuch that there are almost as many opinions about the true meaning as there are expositors. For instance, Novatianus interprets one way, Photinus another, Sabellius another, Donatus another, Arius another, Eunomius, Macedonius another, Apollinaris, Priscillianus another, Jovinianus, Pelagius, Celestius another, and in fine Nestorius another. And therefore, under so great difficulties, in such a perplexity of various error, I hold it extremely necessary to apply the sense of the Catholic Church to the Scriptures, as a rule to a line, and as the clue to conduct us in this labyrinth of opinions. And for us who are in the bosom of the Catholic Church, it ought to be our first and principal care to choose such doctrines as we find to have been believed in all places, at all times, and by all the faithful. For there is nothing truly and properly Catholic (as the word sufficiently declares) but what truly and fully comprehends all these. And we are thus Catholic when we follow Universality, Antiquity, and unanimous Consent. But we follow Universality when we profess that only to be the true faith, which is professed by the Church all the world over; in like manner we are followers of Antiquity, when we religiously adhere to that sense of Scripture which manifestly obtained among the Holy Fathers our predecessors; and lastly, we follow Consent, when we embrace the definitions and opinions of almost all, if not all, the bishops and teachers in the Ancient Church."

This is called very commonly the Golden Rule of Vincentius Lirinensis, and without dispute is a most excellent rule, and the surest guide for a Christian to follow. And there is certainly as much reason for us to be guided by this rule now, or rather greater than in the time of Vincentius. For as we are now almost 1300 years further distant

from the Apostolical age than the Church was in the days of Vincentius, we may reasonably suppose the Church in general to have further deviated from Primitive purity. The language also in which the Scriptures of the New Testament were written, which was in those days a living language and the vulgar tongue to a great part of the Christian Church, is now become a dead language and no longer vulgar in any part of the world; consequently the understanding of it cannot be obtained without great labour and difficulty, and only the learned can attain it. Also the customs and manners of the age, to which the Scriptures of the New Testament frequently allude, are less known and understood than they were in the Primitive times; and yet, without the knowledge of those customs, interpreters must and will be at a loss in their expositions. And whoever undertakes to expound the Scriptures, without a competent knowledge of the language wherein they were originally written, and of the customs to which they frequently allude, must in many particulars be misled himself, and mislead his followers. And as we are now further removed from the fountain head than Christians were in the time of Vincentius, we are much more liable to mistakes, in taking upon us to interpret the Scriptures without the assistance of the Primitive Fathers, than those who lived in his days. Therefore, if this was an excellent rule then, it is rather more so now. And as to variety of opinions, it is most certain they are not fewer now than they were then. The Romanist interprets the Scripture one way, the Lutheran another, the Calvinist another, and the Church of England another; to which may be added the lesser sects of Antipædobaptists, Quakers, Muggletonians, Socinians, Arians. &c., who all expound the same Scriptures a different way. They all pretend to make the Holy Scriptures their principal rule; but then they require you should understand them in such a sense as they are pleased to put upon them.

What, therefore, shall a sincere honest Christian do in this case? Can a better rule be thought of to come to the knowledge of the truth, than this laid down by Vincentius? Undoubtedly there cannot. All parties seem to be agreed that it is so. The four chief and most considerable, both for number and learning, that is the Romanist, Lutheran, Calvinist, and Church of England, have declared this to be the rule they will adhere to, or at least which they are well disposed to follow. And for the rest, who are inconsiderable for number with respect to the others, though I cannot say they have any of them as a body acting in community declared for this rule, yet they can hardly any of them

bear to hear, that the Primitive Church believed not as they do. They are sensible, that if their doctrines should appear to be entirely new, utterly unknown to those who lived near to the Apostolical age when the New Testament was written, and therefore could not but know what the Apostles taught and practised, it must raise a great prejudice against them and their opinions, and all impartial persons who duly consider the matter, must judge them to be in the wrong. However, I shall not trouble myself to make any proposition to these numerous little sects. If an union could be procured between those great bodies of Christians in this part of the world, and settled upon Catholic principles, that is the Church of Rome, the Lutherans, the Calvinists, and the Church of England, I am persuaded all these little sects would fall and moulder away in a short time. Nor can a better method be found for uniting them, than this golden rule of Vincentius Lirinensis; and if they would but all stand by their own authentic declarations, they must and would be guided by this rule.

To begin with the Church of Rome: she has declared, in the council of Trent (Sess. 4.) that “no man whatsoever shall interpret the Scriptures in things relating to faith and doctrine, by trusting to their own light, according to their particular sense,—or explain it contrary to the unanimous consent of the Fathers.” And again, in the creed of Pope Pius IV. (Art. 14.) every priest is obliged to declare and say, “I do receive the Holy Scriptures in the same sense that Holy Mother Church doth, and always hath; neither will I receive and interpret them otherwise than according to the unanimous consent of the Fathers.”

In the year 1533 the Protestants of Germany, who were then all Lutherans, meeting together at Smalcald, where they protested against any council that should be called by the pope, or over which the pope should have any influence, do in their remonstrance, which they unanimously presented to the emperor Charles V. at that time, declare their readiness to submit to the decrees of the truly Ancient Church, saying,* “That they refused not to submit to the decrees of the councils of an elder age, which were agreeable to the Sacred Scriptures; but that the councils of later years, which had given greater authority than is meet to the decrees of men and to the pope, were very different from those ancient ones.” Chemnitzius, a learned Lutheran, and scholar to Philip Melancthon, the bosom friend to Luther himself, in his Examen of the

Council of Trent, when he comes to make his remarks on the decree I have here cited from that council, testifies and says,* “I give a public testimony for our Churches, how reverently we esteem the consent of antiquity, the testimony of the ancients, and the confession and examples of the Ancient Church.—We confess that we dissent from those who invent opinions, which have no testimonies from any age of the Church.—We believe, also, that no new doctrine is to be received which is contrary to all antiquity.” These words of Chemnizius I cannot take as the opinion of a private man, for he delivers them not as his private opinion, but testifies this to be the opinion or doctrine of the Churches to which he belonged. And when we consider who he was, that he was a man of eminent learning, bred up at the feet of Melancthon, one of the principal Lutheran Reformers, who drew up the Apology for the Augustan Confession, we cannot doubt of his knowledge of the principles on which the Lutherans founded their Reformation, consequently could not be deceived in the testimony, which he here gives concerning their regard to Primitive Antiquity; neither durst he, at the time he wrote, and on such an occasion, have given this testimony, if it had not been true.

In the Confession of Faith of the French Reformed (Art. 6.) having given an account of their stedfast adherence to the doctrine of the Trinity, they add, “We allow of that which those four ancient councils have determined, and we detest all sects and heresies condemned by those holy ancient doctors St. Athanasius, St. Hilary, St. Cyril, and St. Ambrose.” It appears, from Quick’s Synodicon in Gallia Reformata, that Calvin, Beza, and the Genevan brethren, were entirely of the same communion with the French Reformed, and that Beza in particular was moderator in their synod of Rochel, 1571. Consequently the Genevans, as well as the French, subscribe and embrace this Confession. And the synod of Vitré, 1583, as I have it from the same author,† testifies that the churches of the low countries had received and subscribed the same Confession; so that I conceive this may be called, The Confession of Faith of all the Calvinistical Communion, wherein they allow what has been taught by the first four general councils, and the ancient doctors St. Athanasius, St. Hilary, St. Cyril, and St. Ambrose. If it be said that it appears, from the article of which these words are a part, that they only allow these councils and

* Vol. i., page 339, 340, edit. Francofurt, 1576.

† Quick’s Synodicon, page 143.

these doctors as far as they have determined or taught concerning the Trinity, but not as to other matters; I answer, that however that might be their meaning as to what they say concerning the four councils, it cannot be the meaning of the words which are applied to those ancient doctors. For there they do not only declare their detestation of those sects and heresies which taught false doctrine concerning the Trinity, but of "all sects and heresies condemned by those holy doctors." So that if those holy doctors have condemned any sects and heresies, which were not erroneous in any article concerning the Trinity, as they certainly have done, then those sects and heresies stand also condemned by this Confession, otherwise they cannot detest all; consequently this Confession obliges those who subscribe it, that is all the Calvinists, to follow and adhere to these holy and ancient doctors in all matters of religion, for they have chosen them for their guides in all matters relating to religion; otherwise they do not show that detestation to all sects and heretics condemned by these doctors, as they so solemnly profess to do. And M. l'Arroque, a very learned man amongst the French Reformed, says,* "I make no question but a belief agreed upon by all Christians, at all times, and universally received at all times in all climates of the Christian world, is Catholic, Orthodox, and by consequence worthy to be retained in the Church, as an Apostolical truth." I cannot indeed say, that he testifies this to be the opinion of all those of his communion, as Chemnizius does for the Lutherans; however, as he was a man of learning, a zealous champion for his own communion, and highly esteemed by them, I hope his authority may be of weight.

The kirk of Scotland, which was also formed upon Calvin's platform, as appears from Knox's history,† addressed the Queen Regent, A. D. 1557, desiring "That the ecclesiastical state might be reformed according to the rules and precepts of the New Testament, the writings of the ancient fathers, and the godly approved laws of Justinian the emperor." And, A. D. 1560, as the same author‡ tells us, they proposed the same to the Parliament, as that which they would abide by: "The word of God, the practices of the Apostles, and the sincerity of the Primitive Church."

The Church of England, in her canons,¶ 1571, says, "Preachers shall in the first place take heed that they never teach anything in a

* History of the Eucharist, pages 195, 196.

† Page 131, 4to. edition.

‡ History of the Eucharist, page 261.

¶ Page 237, as published by Bishop Sparrow, 4th edit. 1684.

sermon, which they would have to be religiously observed and believed by the people, but what is agreeable to the doctrine of the Old and New Testament, and which the Catholic fathers and ancient bishops have collected from that very doctrine." Also, in the first part of the sermon or homily concerning the Sacrament, she teaches that, "Before all things this we must be sure of especially, that this Supper be done and ministered, as our Lord and Saviour did and commanded to be done, as his holy Apostles used it, and the good fathers in the Primitive Church frequented it." Also, in the 30th canon, where the lawful use of the cross in baptism is explained, (which is one of the canons made in the year 1603, the latest canons by which the Church of England is guided and directed) she declares and says, "So far was it from the purpose of the Church of England to forsake the Churches of Italy, France, Spain, Germany, or other such-like Churches, in all things which they held and practised, that (as the Apology of the Church of England confesseth) it doth with reverence retain those ceremonies, which do neither endamage the Church of God, nor offend the minds of sober men; and only departed from them in those points, wherein they were fallen both from themselves in their ancient integrity, and from the Apostolical Churches which were their first founders." As this canon refers us to the Apology of the Church of England, which was written by Bishop Jewel, it plainly gives the stamp of its authority to that book, at least to so much of it as concerns the purpose of the Church of England not to depart from the doctrine and practice of the ancient Apostolical Churches. Therefore, what is contained in that book agreeable to this declaration, may justly be urged as the doctrine of the Church of England, authentically declared to be so in the preceding canon. This Apology* says, "O immortal God! Then Christ himself, and his Apostles, and so many fathers were altogether in an error! Then Origen, Ambrose, Augustin, Chrysostom, Gelasius, Theodoret, were betrayers of the Catholic faith! Then such a consent of so many bishops was nothing else but a conspiracy of heretics! Or what was then commended in them, is now condemned in us! And what in them was Catholic, that now, the minds of men being only changed, is of a sudden become schismatical! Or what formerly was true, now forthwith, because it displeases them, shall be false!" Again, † "This one thing they cannot say, That we have departed either from the Word of God, or from the Apostles of Christ, or from the primitive Church; but we

* Pages 62, 63, edit. Francofurt, 1617.

† Jewel's Apology, page 103.

have always thought the primitive Church of Christ and of his Apostles, and of the holy fathers, to be Catholic; nor do we scruple to call it the ark of Noah, the bride of Christ, the pillar and ground of truth, or to place the assurance of our salvation upon it." Again,* "They say, you were of us, but are now become apostates, and have departed from us. We have, indeed, departed from them, and give God thanks for it, and greatly rejoice at it. But we have not departed from the primitive Church, from the Apostles, and from Christ." Once more.† "We are come as near as possibly we could to the Church of the Apostles, and of the ancient Catholic bishops and fathers, which we know to have been yet undefiled, and (as Tertullian says) an uncorrupt virgin, as yet polluted with no idolatry, nor with any great or public error. Neither have we only reformed our doctrine, but also our Sacraments, and our forms of common prayers, agreeable to their rites and institutions; and after the example of Christ and almost all godly men, we have restored religion, which had been shamefully depraved and neglected by them, to what it was in the beginning."

This Apology, though written only by a private bishop, was (as has been observed) received and owned by the Church of England in a full convocation, and by her canon declared and acknowledged to be The Apology of the Church of England; therefore, what is written in this Apology, is not to be esteemed the sense or opinion of a private person, or of one single bishop, but of the Church of England herself, authentically declared to be so. It appears, also, from the epistle of Peter Martyr prefixed to it, that it was received and highly approved by Bullinger, Gualter, Wolphius, and other divines at Zurich, one of the most considerable of the Calvinistical cantons in Switzerland. It was also very soon, as bishop Jewel himself tells Harding, translated into the French, Italian, Dutch, and Spanish tongues, and sent into France, Flanders, Germany, Spain, Poland, Hungary, Denmark, Sweden, Scotland, Italy, Naples, and Rome itself. So that it seems to have been a book received and admired by all that were called Protestants, of what nation or language soever, and was looked upon as an Apology, not for the Church of England only, but for all Protestants in general; consequently, not only the Church of England, but all Protestants did believe the Church for some ages after Christ and his Apostles to have continued pure and undefiled with any great or public error, and that to the time of Ambrose, Augustin, Chrysostom,

* Page 155.

† Pages 192, 193.

Gelasius, and Theodoret, that is till about the middle of the fifth century at least, she continued an uncorrupt virgin; that so long the doctrine, and Sacraments, and forms of common prayer were agreeable to what was taught and practised by the apostles. However, besides their approbation of this Apology, they have all, as has been shewed, approved the doctrine of it by their own public and authentic declarations.

The Church of Rome, indeed, has given no encomium of this Apology, nor testified any approbation of it, but rather opposed and condemned it, and several of that communion have been employed to write answers to it. However, this Apology in making such an appeal to the fathers of the first four or five centuries, and acknowledging religion to have been pure and undefiled during that time, plainly allows that part of the canon of the council of Trent, that the Scriptures are not to be explained contrary to the unanimous consent of the fathers. And the Church of England has evidently taught the same, though in other words, when she requires her preachers to teach only what is agreeable to the doctrine of the Old and New Testament, and which the Catholic fathers and ancient bishops have collected from that very doctrine; nor do the Lutherans much differ from it, when they declare that they are ready to submit to the ancient councils, and acknowledge those decrees to be agreeable to the Scriptures. And the like may be said of the Calvinists, when they declare that they detest all sects and heresies condemned by those holy and ancient doctors, St. Athanasius, St. Hilary, St. Cyril, and St. Ambrose, that is, the most eminent fathers of the fourth century; consequently, they must acknowledge the Church to which those fathers belonged, and whose communion they lived in, to have been pure and undefiled, as Bishop Jewel in his Apology teaches. And the kirk of Scotland has clearly acknowledged the Church to have been thus undefiled, as low as to the reign of the Emperor Justinian, that is, as late as the sixth century; for they desire the Church “may be reformed according to the godly laws of Justinian the emperor.”

Indeed, as Dr. Wall observes in his preface to his History of Infant Baptism, “There is no man that does really slight this argument; though those that have no skill in it, or do suspect that it will go against their side, will make as if they did. And therefore you shall see both on the one side and on the other, those men who for a flourish do pretend they lay small stress on it, as having proof enough from Scripture, yet take all the pains possible to bring this argument to bear

on their side, and that so zealously, that they often do it unfairly. There is no Christian that loves to hear or admit that all the ancient Churches practised otherwise than he does in a controverted matter."

Since all parties then seem to be agreed in the rule by which they are to be guided, that is, the Holy Scriptures as interpreted by the doctrine and practice of the Primitive Church, how comes it to pass that there should be such a great difference amongst Christians in so many material points? That the Church of Rome, the Lutherans, the Calvinists, and the Church of England (not to mention many other lesser parties) should form different communions, and be so opposite the one to the other? The reason undoubtedly must be, that some, or it may be all, have departed from their rule. And indeed every one of these accuses the other of having done so. All Protestants, and the Church of England in particular, charge the Church of Rome and those Churches in her communion, with having fallen both from themselves in their ancient integrity, and from the apostolical Churches which were their first founders. The Church of Rome, on the other hand, charges the Church of England, and all other Protestant communions, with revolting not only from her, but also from the truly ancient Catholic and apostolic Church, and setting up a new Church or communion very different from it. And perhaps there may be some just grounds for this charge on both sides. But I shall not enter into that dispute; my design is to reconcile differences, not to widen them; and therefore I shall not bring any particular charge of error against any of these communions. I shall only say in general, that it is certain all cannot be right; but which communion is right or which is wrong, or whether something may not be amiss in all, I desire to be excused from asserting, and shall only shew how I conceive a Catholic union among Christians upon Catholic principles must be effected, if ever it should please God to give means and opportunity for it.

Let every communion but suppose it is possible that they may have erred from this rule, which they pretend to be guided by, and appoint a committee of their most learned men, who, without regard to anything already settled, shall examine the fathers and councils, and ecclesiastical historians for the first four or five centuries. Let them give a faithful account of the faith then professed, the doctrine then taught, the forms of administering the Sacraments, and the other parts of religious worship then used, the several orders of the clergy by which the Church was everywhere governed; and in short, what was the doctrine, practice, and constitution of the Catholic Church then dis-

persed through as many nations as it is at this day. When such a faithful account of this matter has been drawn up, then let them make a fair and impartial comparison between the constitution of the ancient Church and their own, and examine where they agree, and wherein they differ ; and if they do find any material difference, let it be immediately rectified. And if the Church of Rome, the Lutherans, the Calvinists, and the Church of England, would each of them fairly and impartially proceed in this manner, and try and rectify their several communions by this rule, which they all profess to follow, it must bring them all to an union, and they would all be of one communion, in the same manner as the Catholic Church was for those centuries, during which, it is acknowledged on all hands, that doctrine and religion were most pure. For if all would embrace the doctrines and usages of the Church, as taught and practised in the primitive times, without any material additions or defalcations, there could then be no difference between one Church and another, except in matters perfectly indifferent, and such as could make no breach or division.

But the main obstruction to an union of Christians upon these Catholic principles is, that whatever party shall make alterations in their present form, either of government or worship, which some of these, if not all, must certainly do in order to procure such an union, and to make their church agreeable to the Primitive ; it will be at least a tacit confession, that they have hitherto been in the wrong in some material points. If the Church of Rome should alter anything determined by the council of Trent, she must give up her infallibility. On the other hand, the Lutherans, the Calvinists, and the Church of England, cannot alter their Confessions of Faith, Articles, or Liturgies, in any material points, but it will be a reflection on their first Reformers, and also on themselves who have so strictly required subscription to those Confessions, Articles, and Liturgies, and have already declared them to be agreeable to the doctrine and practice of the Primitive Church, as well as the Holy Scriptures. However, as the Lutherans, Calvinists, and Church of England, do all confess that the Church is fallible, and that as the Church of England teaches in her 21st article, general councils may err, and sometimes have erred, therefore much more may the councils of one province, kingdom, or nation, be liable to err ; it would not be so great a reflection upon any of them, if upon a due examination and review of their doctrine and worship they should find that they have been mistaken, even in some material points, as it would be for the Church of Rome (which pre-

tends to infallibility) if she should find herself mistaken. And certainly it is much more for the reputation of a Church, which owns herself to be fallible, to rectify any mistake she shall be discovered to be guilty of, rather than to persist in it, and to maintain against the clearest evidence that she is not mistaken.

And as for the Church of Rome, if she have any regard to the authority of Vincentius Lirinensis, or indeed to her own rule settled at the council of Trent, she must grant it to be possible for the whole present Church to err. For if the whole present Church cannot err, what occasion have we to enquire into the unanimous consent of the fathers? It is sufficient for us to hearken to the voice of the present Church, without regard either to Scriptures or fathers. And Vincentius plainly supposes it possible for the whole present Church to be corrupted, saying, "What if some new error should infect not only a small part, but be ready to spread itself at the same time over the whole Church? Then we must be sure to cleave close to antiquity." And a little after he observes, that it was once so in fact, saying, "When the Arian heresy had not only spread its poison over a small part of Christendom, but had in a manner infected the whole Christian world, and almost all the bishops of the Latin Church (not excepting Pope Liberius, then bishop of Rome, who subscribed to that heresy) partly by fraud and partly by force, had gone into the delusion." Now, what has been, may be again; and if the pope and the whole Latin Church did once fall into heresy, it is not impossible but they may fall so again. Therefore it is no unreasonable request to desire, that the Church of Rome would again review her doctrine and forms of worship, and permit them to be tried by the test of antiquity.

But it may be said, what occasion is there for such a review? The Church of Rome revised all her doctrines and forms of worship in the council of Trent, and found them, as that council determined, to be all agreeable to Scripture and antiquity. The Lutherans, Calvinists, and Church of England, did the same about the same time, when they severally set about reforming themselves. What occasion, therefore, for any further review? Besides, the Lutherans, Calvinists, and Church of England, have all of them had several synods since, wherein they have reviewed, altered, or at least explained several things at first settled; and must they be always altering and explaining? I answer, as to the decrees of the council of Trent, and the several confessions and articles and forms of worship drawn up by the several Reformers, they were all drawn up at a time when the Church of Rome and the

Reformers had exasperated each other to a very high degree ; when the Reformers had driven the monks from their cells, and the bishops from their flocks ; when they would give the Church of Rome no better title than Babylon, and the chief bishop of that church Antichrist and the Scarlet Whore : and though they did not put such names in their confessions and forms of prayer, yet the chief of the Reformers made no scruple to call the Church of Rome Babylon, and the beast with seven heads and ten horns, and to style the pope Antichrist and the Whore of Babylon. On the other side, writers of the Church of Rome called the Reformers not only Schismatics, but Heretics, and treated them as such, by burning and massacring them in a most shameful manner, wherever they had power to do it. And on the other side, the Reformers, where they had the power, made and executed severe laws against them, and put many of them to death. So that when the council of Trent sat, and the several Reformers made their reformatations, the feud was so great both on the one side and the other, that more care seems to have been taken to condemn what each party thought to be wrong in their opposites, than to consider and establish what was right for themselves. And though they all declared for the doctrine of the Scriptures and the primitive fathers, as has been shewn, yet it is certain some of them never did well consult the fathers, but rather adhered to their own interpretations of Scripture, whether agreeable to the unanimous consent of the fathers or not ; otherwise there must have been a much nearer agreement betwixt them. But whether it is the Church of Rome, the Lutherans, the Calvinists, or the Church of England, that has deviated most from the rule of Vincentius Lirinensis, from the rule which they have all pretended to follow, is what I think it not proper for me to say ; neither shall I pretend to determine, whether any one of them has exactly followed this rule. It is not improbable, but the feuds between the Church of Rome and the Reformers being carried to so great a height, they might all of them, in opposition to each other, deviate from that rule which they pretended to be guided by. It is certain, they have in their controversial writings mutually accused each other of having done so. But it is to be hoped that, upon a more impartial review to be taken in this matter by the learned of all sides, without regard to any matters settled by the council of Trent or by the first Reformers, but purely founded on the Scriptures, as interpreted by the practice of the Church, and the unanimous consent of the fathers of the first three or

four centuries, a Catholic communion of all Christians might be obtained upon Catholic principles.

It is also to be considered, that when the Reformation was first made, and when the council of Trent sat, the writings of the fathers had not been fully examined, neither could be. The art of printing was but newly invented, and many writings of the fathers and decrees of the primitive councils were then undiscovered; many spurious pieces also were put upon the world as the genuine writings of the fathers, which upon a fuller examination appear evidently to have been of a later age. The works of several of those most ancient fathers, who were disciples to some of the apostles, were unknown and undiscovered, as the epistles of St. Clement, St. Barnabas, St. Ignatius, St. Polycarp, and the Pastor of St. Hermas, who all wrote either before the death of St. John the apostle, or in a few years after; and the writings of all the other fathers then printed were very imperfect and incorrect; several of their genuine works had not appeared, and some which were not theirs were published under their names. But now a more diligent search having been made into all, both public and private libraries, variety of manuscripts collated, all the proper methods of true criticism employed; many writings of the fathers, which were thought to have been lost have been recovered, the genuine distinguished from the spurious, the true reading in some dubious places discovered, and in a word, we have now much better means of inquiring into the true doctrine and practice of the ancient church, and to know in what points the Catholic fathers were unanimous and consentient, than either the council of Trent or the first Reformers had, which alone might, I think, be a just inducement to all parties to make a review of their present constitutions, and to try them by this rule, whereto all have testified their agreement. And as the council of Trent and the first Reformers had not such opportunities of discovering the true sense of the fathers, for want of many of their works since recovered, and because the genuine works were not then separated from the spurious, it will not be so great a reflection on them, if they shall be found to have been mistaken, and to have deviated from their rule in many particulars, because in a great measure they wanted the means to make a right use of it, which by God's blessing we have now. And therefore I conceive it may be a shame to us, if having the means of following this rule more perfectly, we shall yet forbear to do it, since all parties have so evidently declared it to be the rule we ought to follow and be guided by.

I am sensible that Reconcilers, though very great and worthy men, such as Cassander and Grotius, and others, have generally had the misfortune to be condemned by all parties; and if the same should be my fate, I should not be much surprised at it. But then they have been more particular in their methods of reconciling than I have been. They have taken upon them to shew what one party ought to grant to the other: I have done nothing of this kind; I have only shown the rule, by which all pretend to be guided, and desired all to examine impartially, whether they have or have not deviated from their own rule; and only desired them, if they shall find that they have deviated from their rule, that they would return to it again. I have not charged any one communion particularly with having deviated from it; I have only said, that the difference between them is a demonstration that some, if not all of them, have departed from their rule; but whether it be the Church of Rome, or the Church of England, or the Lutheran, or the Calvinist who has thus departed, I pretend not to say. It is possible one of them may be right; but which that one is I do not determine: and it is possible all may be wrong; but I do not say that they are so. It is certain, if any one of these is right, the other three must be wrong, where they differ materially from it: but which I think to be right, or which in my opinion comes nearest to the right, I have not here said, or shall say; being resolved, as far as I am able, to give cause of offence to no party, as I think but becomes one, whose earnest desire is to procure a Catholic communion of all Christians upon true Catholic principles, without partiality to any side; and therefore, as they all pretend to be guided by the same rule, that is, the Scriptures as interpreted by the unanimous consent of the fathers, I only desire that all would examine their own doctrine, church-government, and worship by this rule; and if it shall be found, upon such examination, that they have departed from it, then to correct every such deviation. And as there are better means now for such an examination, than our forefathers had at the time of the Reformation, it is to be hoped that such a proposal may not be thought unreasonable; and as no party is condemned by it, so I may hope that no party can justly take offence at it.

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