

The Unity of the Church

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Roman Catholic · Late Medieval · Treatise

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INTRODUCTION

Composed in 1413 during his exile from Prague, this treatise sharpened the argument that would carry its author to the stake at Constance two years later: that the church is the body of the predestined under Christ its sole head, not the visible hierarchy claiming to rule in his name. Drawing heavily on Wyclif while pressing the ecclesiology in a more pastoral direction, Hus dismantles the identification of the church with the Roman curia and its officers, distinguishing the true church from the merely nominal congregation of the reprobate. The reformers of the following century would recognize their own convictions here, often more clearly than they cared to admit. Expect close scholastic reasoning turned to polemical ends — a man building his case carefully, knowing what it will cost him.

As every earthly pilgrim ought faithfully to believe the holy catholic church just as he ought to love Jesus Christ, the Lord, the bridegroom of that church, and also the church herself, his bride; but as he does not love this, his spiritual mother, except he also know her by faith — therefore ought he to learn to know her by faith, and thus to honor her as his chief mother.

Therefore, in order to reach a proper knowledge of her, it is to be noted, (i) That the church signifies the house of God, constituted for the very purpose that in it the people may worship its God, as it is written, I Cor. n : 22 : "Have ye not houses to eat and to drink in?" Or, to speak with Augustine: "Do you despise the church of God, the house of prayer?" (2) The church signifies the ministers belonging to the house of God. Thus the clerics belonging to one material church call themselves the church. But according to the Greeks, a church — ecclesia — is a congregation — congregatio — held together under one rule, as Aristotle teaches, Polit. 2 : 7 l, when he says: "All have part in the church." In view of this meaning, therefore, the congregation of all men is called the church — ecclesia. This appears in Matt. 25 : 31-33, which says: "When the Son of Man shall come in his glory and all his angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory and before him shall be congregated all nations." What a great congregation of all men under the rule of Christ the king that will be ! Because, however, the whole of that congregation is not the holy church it is added, "and he will separate them, the one from the other, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats."

From this it is evident that there is one church — ecclesia — of the sheep and another of the goats, one church of the righteous and another of the reprobate — *præsciti*. Likewise the church of the righteous

is on the one hand catholic, that is, universal, which is not a part of anything else. Of this I am now treating. On the other hand, it is particular, a part with other parts, as the Saviour said, Matt. 18 : 20: "Where two or three are congregated together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." From this it follows that two righteous persons congregated together in Christ's name constitute, with Christ as the head, a particular holy church, and likewise three or four and so on to the whole number of the predestinate without admixture. In this sense the term church is often used in Scripture, as when the apostle says, I Cor. 1:1: "To the church which is in Corinth, to the sanctified in Jesus Christ." Likewise Acts 20 : 28: "Take heed to yourselves and to the whole flock in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops, to feed the church which he hath purchased with his own blood." And in this sense, all the righteous now living under Christ's rule in the city of Prague, and more particularly the predestinate, are the holy church of Prague, and the same is true of other particular churches of saints of which Ecclesiasticus 24 : 2, speaks: "In the congregations — ecclesiis — of the Most High shall she [wisdom] open her mouth," and also 31 : n: "All the congregation of the saints shall declare his alms." 1

But the holy catholic — that is, universal — church is the totality of the predestinate — omnium predestinatorum universitas — or all the predestinate,2 present, past, and future. This definition follows St. Augustine on John, C. Recur. 32 : 4 [Friedberg, 1 : n 26], who shows how it is that one and the same church of the predestinate, starting at the beginning of the world, runs on to the apostles, and thence to the day of judgment. For Augustine says: "The church which brought forth Abel, Enoch, Noah and Abraham, also brought forth Moses, and at a later time the prophets before the Lord's advent and she, which brought forth these, also brought forth the apostles and our martyrs and all good Christians. For she has brought forth all who have been born and lived at different periods, but they have all been comprised in a company of one people. And the citizens of this city have experienced the toils of this pilgrimage. Some are experiencing them now, and some will be experiencing them, even to the end of the world." How clearly that holy man shows what the holy catholic church is ! And, in the same place and in a similar way, he speaks of the church of the wicked. This, he says, "brought forth Cain, Ham, Ishmael, and Esau, and also Dathan and other like persons of that people. And she, which brought forth these, also brought forth Judas, the false apostles, Simon Magus, and other pseudo-Christians, down to these days — all obstinately hardened in fleshly lusts, whether they are mixed together in a union or are clearly distinguished the one from the other." So much, Augustine.

From this statement it appears that the holy universal church is one, the church which is the totality of the predestinate, including all, from the first righteous man to the last one to be saved in the future. And it includes all who are to be saved who make up the number, in respect to the filling up of which number all the saints slain under the altar had the divine assurance that they should wait for a time until the number should be filled up of their fellow servants and brethren, Rev. 6 : 9-1 1. For the omniscient God, who has given to all things their weight, measure and number, has foredetermined how many shall ultimately be saved. Therefore, the universal church is also Christ's bride about whom the Canticles speak, and about whom Isaiah, 61 : 10, "as a bridegroom decked with a crown, and as a bride adorned with jewels." She is the one dove of which Christ said: "My dove is one, my excellent one," Canticles 6 : 9.2 She is also the strong woman whose maidens are clothed with double garments, Prov. 21:2. She is the queen, of whom the Psalmist says: "The queen stands at thy right hand in vestments of gold "

[Psalms 45 : 9]. This is Jerusalem, our mother, the temple of the Lord, the kingdom of heaven and the city of the Great King; and this whole church, as Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 41 [Nic. Fathers, 3 : 255, 256], says, "is to be understood not only of that part which sojourns here, praising God from the rising to the setting of the sun, and which, after its old captivity, is singing the new song, but also of that part in heaven which, continuing true to the purpose for which it was constituted, has always been loyal to God, and has never felt misery from any fall. This part among the holy angels remains blessed and, as it behooves it to do, helps the part sojourning upon the earth, because she who is to be one by the companionship of eternity is now also one by the bond of love. And this whole church was constituted to worship God. Therefore, neither the whole nor any part of it wishes to be worshipped as God." So far, Augustine.

This is the holy catholic church which Christians profess immediately after professing their faith in the Holy Spirit. First, because, as Augustine says,² she is the highest creature, the Canticles to her praise. Albertus Magnus, in his elaborate panegyric of Mary, dwells again and again upon its passages, devoting no less than two hundred and forty pages to the words, "a garden shut up is my sister my bnde, Cant. 4 : 12. Alanus ab Insulis speaks of the Canticles as referring to the church, but in the highest spiritual sense to Mary, and another of the saner Schoolmen, Rupert of Deutz, fills his commentary on the Canticles with the most tropical language.

«The reference is to the Apostles' Creed, "I believe in the holy catholic church which is preceded by the confession of God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Also the Nicene creed. See Schaff, *Creeds*, 2 : 57 sq With regard to the intercession of the saints in heaven and on earth, the council of trent, XXV, says: 'That the saints who reign together with Christ offer up their own prayers to God for men, and it is good and useful suppliantly to invoke them, and to have recourse to their prayers and help for obtaining beneand Savbur " 3&m ^TM1' °Uf Wh° is 0Ur Only Redeem«

_ 2 In the *Enchiridion* , as quoted above. Augustine makes a similar statement in his sermon to catechumens, Nic. Fathers, 3 : 375.

therefore she is placed immediately after the Trinity, which is uncreate, and second, because she is bound to Christ in a never-ending matrimony, and by the love of the Holy Spirit. And third, because, the Trinity being once acknowledged, it is proper that it should have her as a temple in which to dwell. Therefore Augustine, as above [*Enchiridion*, 41] concludes: "That God dwells in his temple — not only the Holy Spirit, but the Father likewise, and also the Son. And of his body — by virtue of which he is made head of the church of God which is among men, in order that in all things he might have the pre-eminence — the Son said : ' Destroy this temple and in three days I will build it up again' " [John 2:21]. From these words of Augustine we deduce (1) that the universal church is one, praising God from the beginning of the world to the end ;

(2) that the holy angels are a part of the holy catholic church;

(3) that the part of the church called pilgrim or militant is helped by the church triumphant; (4) that the church triumphant and the church militant are bound together by the bond of love; (5) that the whole

church and every part of it are to worship God, and that neither she nor any part of it wishes to be worshipped as God.

From all this the conclusion follows, that the faithful ought not to believe in the church, for she is not God, but the house of God, as Augustine in his Exposition of the Creed says,¹ but they should believe that the catholic church is the bride of the Lord Jesus Christ— bride, I say, chaste, incorrupt, and never capable of being corrupted. For St. Cyprian, the bishop and glorious martyr, 24 : i, C. Loquitur [Friedberg, 1 : 971, de Unitate Eccles., 5; Ante-Nic. Fathers, 5 : 423], says: "The church is one, which is spread abroad far and wide by the increase of her fruitfulness." And he adds: "nevertheless the head is one, the origin is one, and one is the copious mother of fruitfulness. The bride of Christ cannot be defiled. She is incorrupt and chaste. She knows one house and guards with chaste modesty the sanctity of one couch." ² The holy church is also the husbandman's vineyard, of which Gregory in his Homilies [Migne, 76 : 1154] says: "Our Maker has a vineyard, namely the universal church, which starts from righteous Abel and goes down to the last elect person who shall yet be born in the end of the world, which bears as many saints "as the vineyard sends forth branches." Of the church St. Remigius also says in his Homily Quadragesima on the text: "'The men of Nineveh shall rise up in judgment with this generation and condemn it.' The holy church is made up of two parts, those who have not sinned and those who have ceased to sin." St. Isidore also, in speaking of the church, de Summo Bono, 14 [Migne, 83 : 572] ⁴ says: "The holy church is called catholic for the reason that it is universally distributed over all the world." Augustine and Ambrose likewise in their canticle, Praising God, say: "The holy church throughout all the world doth acknowledge Thee." ¹ And Ambrose, 24 : 1 [Friedberg, 1 : 976] speaks thus of her: "What house is more worthy of the entrance of apostolic preaching than is the holy church ? Or who else is to be preferred above all others than Christ, who was accustomed to wash the feet of his guests and did not suffer any whom he received into his house to dwell there with soiled steps, that is, works?" And, speaking of this church, Pope Pelagius, 24 : 1, C. Schisma [Friedberg 1 : 980,] ² cites Augustine as saying, "There cannot be two churches," and then adds: "Truly, as it has often been said, there can be only one church, the church which is Christ's body, which cannot be divided into two or more bodies." Jerome also says of the church, ancient authors, classic and ecclesiastical, on a large variety of subjects: medicine, law, the Bible, grammar, warfare, etc. See Brehaut, An Encyclopedist of the Dark Ages, New York, 1912. Isidore was one of the very first to write a treatise designed to convince the Jews, de fide catholica c. Jttdaos. The high church fraud, the pseudo-Isidorian Decretals, which appeared about 853, was for centuries ascribed to Isidore. In the chapter quoted by Huss Isidore says, "The holy catholic church tolerates with patience in herself those who live QL but casts out from herself those who believe ill," and again, " They are heretics who, leaving the church of God, have chosen private societies, that is, they have hewn out broken cisterns for themselves."

de Pcen., Dist. 1 : C. Eccl. [Friedberg 1 : 11 79]: "The church of Christ has no spot or wrinkle or anything of that sort, but he who is a sinner or is soiled with any filth cannot be said to be of Christ's church." This holy universal church is Christ's mystical body, as the apostle says, Eph. 1 : 22: "He gave himself to be the head over all the church, which is his body." Again he said, Col. 1 : 18, "He is the head of the body, which is the church," and again, Col. 1 : 24, "For his body's sake, which is the church," and Eph. 5 : 23, " Christ is the head of the church and himself is the Saviour of his body," and further on: "Christ loved the church and gave himself for it that he might sanctify it, washing it with the washing of water in the word of life that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or anything of that kind, but that it should be holy and without spot."

Upon this text the holy doctors lean, as when Augustine says, *de doctrina Christi* [3 : 37, Nic. Fathers, 2 : 573]: "Christ is the head of the church, which is his body destined in the future to be with him in his kingdom and unending glory." Gregory, *Moralia*, 35 : 9 [Migne, 76 : 762] says: "Because Christ and the church are one, the head and the body are one person." And on Ezekiel, homily 15, he says: "The church is one substance with Christ, its head." And Bernard on the Canticles, homily 12 [Migne, 183 : 831]: "The church is Christ's body, more dear than the body he gave over to death." 1 And Paschasius, *de sacra. corporis Christi* [Migne, 120 : 1284] 2 says: "Even as it is found in the Scriptures — the church of Christ, or the bride of God, is truly called Christ's body, truly because the general church of Christ is his body and Christ is called the head and all the elect are called members. From these members the one body of the church is brought unto a perfect man and the measure of the fulness of Christ. But the body of Christ, that is, the bride of God, is called in law the church. This is according to the apostle's words: 'And they twain shall be one flesh.' This, he says, is a great sacrament in Christ and the church. For, if Christ and the church are one flesh, then certainly there is one body, one head, one bridegroom, but different elect persons, members the one of the other." So far, Paschasius.

These quotations from the saints show that the holy catholic church is the number of all the predestinate and Christ's mystical body — Christ being himself the head — and the bride of Christ, whom he of his great love redeemed with his blood that he might at last possess her as glorious, not having wrinkle of mortal sin or spot of venial sin, or anything else defiling her, but that she might be holy and without spot, perpetually embracing Christ, the bridegroom.

"Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood." Paschasius was a monk and then, 844-851, abbot of the convent of Corbie, nearer Amiens. His tract was written 831 and sent to Charles the Bald 844. His doctrine was opposed by the monk Ratramnus, and others. The next controversy over the Lord's Supper was led by Berengar, d. 1088. Transubstantiation was made a dogma of the church at the fourth Lateran council, 1215. Wyclif denied it, declaring that transubstantiation would involve transaccidentation. Huss was also charged with denying the doctrine, but emphatically repudiated the charge. Ratramnus's work was put on the Index by the council of Trent.

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