

The One Universal Church Divided into Three Parts

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Reformed · Late Medieval · Treatise

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INTRODUCTION

Written in the last years before his execution at Constance in 1415, this fragment from Hus's ecclesiology sets out the doctrine that would harden into the charges against him: the church defined not by its visible hierarchy but by the number of the predestinate, distributed across earth, purgatory, and heaven. The image of the eucharistic host broken into three parts — one soaked in the chalice, two held in the priest's hands — carries the whole argument, binding sacramental practice to a vision of the church that would later be taken up by the Bohemian Brethren and, through them, the wider Reformation. Readers will find something closer to a schoolman's careful diagram than a polemic, though the polemical edge is sharpened precisely by the calm of the exposition. Best approached slowly, with attention to how much doctrinal weight Hus loads onto a single liturgical gesture.

It having been said what the holy universal church is — that she is only one just as the number of all the predestinate is one, and also that she is distributed in her members throughout all the world — it must be known that this holy universal church is tripartite, that is, divided into the church triumphant, militant and dormient.

The church militant is the number of the predestinate now on its pilgrimage to the heavenly country, and is called militant because it wages Christ's warfare against the flesh, the world and the devil.

The church dormient is the number of the predestinate suffering in purgatory. It is called dormient because being there she does not enjoy the blessedness which in the present life through God's prevenient and assisting grace she merited that she might get her reward in the heavenly country after the satisfaction made in purgatory.

The church triumphant consists of the blessed at rest in the heavenly country who kept up Christ's warfare against Satan and have finally triumphed. There will, however, be one great church on the day of judgment, made up of all these. And as a symbol of these three parts the doctors say the sacrament of the eucharist is broken into three parts. The first part, the part immersed in the liquid sacrament, they say, signifies the church triumphant which is absorbed and inebriated with the dipping of the divine essence, as says the head of the church, Cant. 5:1, making merry with his friends and companions:

"Let us be drunken, my beloved," [drink abundantly, Rev. Vers.]. But the two other parts in the hand of the Lord and to be purged through the merit of the church are set forth by those two parts which the priest holds in his hands, the greater, being laid down, signifies the militant church and the lesser, resting upon it, signifies the church waiting in purgatory. For this church in purgatory depends upon the sufferings of the church militant. And for these two parts we pour out our double prayers to the Lamb, who is the head of the church, that he may have mercy upon us. But as for the third part, to whose dwelling-place and rest we look forward, we pray that the same Lamb of the threefold nature may at last give us peace. For this reason, Christ in his state of humiliation visited three places of the church, (1) the navel of our habitable world, dwelling thirty-three years in Judea and Jerusalem; (2) the limbus, in which the Fathers were purified, by bringing out a fragment of his church in the spirit, and (3) ascending to heaven he led captivity captive, which, after his triumph, he crowned by placing it at God's right hand. This, therefore, is the threefold division of this one universal or catholic church, although, however, there are particular churches.

he drinks. The priest holds the two larger parts so that the smaller of the two lies upon the other. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa*, 3 : 84 [Migne, 3 : 851], mentions the custom of dropping a fragment into the cup.

But this universal church is a virgin, the bride of Christ — who is a virgin — from whom as from a true mother we are spiritually born. A virgin, I say, all beautiful and in whom there is no spot [Cant. 4 : 7.], "having neither spot nor wrinkle" [Eph. 5 : 27], holy and immaculate, and so most chaste even as she is in the heavenly country. Nevertheless by fornicating with the adulterant devil and with many of his children she is partially corrupted by wrong-doing. However, she is never received as the bride to be embraced, beatifically at the right hand and in the bed of the bridegroom, until she has become a pure virgin, altogether without wrinkle. For Christ is the bridegroom of virginity, who, as he lives forever, can not allow the bride to desert him and fornicate spiritually. Thus it is said of the multitude of the heavenly denizens that they are virgins and follow the Lamb wheresoever he goeth [Rev. 14 : 4]. But in the very first moment of the world Christ was predestinated to be the bridegroom of the church, and by establishing the angels [in glory] he gave a dowry to one part of the bride. And so also by establishing righteous Abel and other saints, up to the time of the incarnation, the church remained continually in her espousals. At the incarnation he made his second marriage by creating to be a queen a part of the whole church, which by a certain fitness is called the Christian church. For then our leader and legislator familiarly addressed his bride, as the apostle says, Heb. 1. By assuming human nature he put on our armor and as a giant overcame the enemies of the church and taught how a part of the church, as a jealous bride, ought to follow him.

Therefore, the whole of Christian doctrine is involved in that prayer of the church in which we pray the bridegroom, by his coming into the flesh, that he may teach us to despise earthly things and love heavenly things — to despise, that is, to subordinate, terrestrial things in our affections and to love Christ the bridegroom above all things.

Hence, it is evident that the universal holy church is Christ's one and only bride, the virgin to be in the end most chaste, whom the Son of God bound to himself in matrimony out of eternal love and by the grace of adoption, and the church we firmly believe, saying with the Creed, "I believe one holy catholic

church," and about which the word is added in the second Creed, " and apostolic [church]." It is called apostolic for the reason that the apostles are full participants of this same mother church, which is fully purified in the Spirit, and which they themselves planted with the teaching and blood of Christ; and by whose teaching (i.e., of the apostles) and authority their vicars now rule the young bride, who seeks only the bridegroom of the church. So runs the Decretal 24 [Friedberg, 1 : 968] where pope Leo says: "Peter's authority has its seat wherever its just sentence is carried." For Peter himself dwells in heaven, seeing and looking after what God binds and looses. Hence Boniface VIII, Extravagante, says: "We are bound with living faith to believe and hold that the holy catholic and apostolic church is one."

The unity of the catholic church consists in the unity of predestination, inasmuch as her separate members are one by predestination and in the unity of blessedness, and inasmuch as her separate sons are finally united in bliss. For, in the present time, her unity consists in the unity of faith and the Christian virtues and in the unity of love, even as

Augustine draws forth in expounding John 17:21, "that they all may be one," and in his letter to Dardanus,¹ where he expounds the text "it is expedient that one man die for the people" [John 18 : 14]. " Caiaphas," Augustine says: "prophesied that God would gather together in one his children" [John 11 : 52], that is, not in one material locality; " but he has gathered them together into one spirit and one body, whose only head is Christ." To this unity the apostle refers, Eph. 4:3: " endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all." Nor is it to be doubted that without this union, as indicated before, is there any salvation.

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