

Religious Bulletin

January 16, 1929

Why Church Unity?

New York, January 14 - The union of the Presbyterian, Methodist Episcopal, and Protestant Episcopal churches, bringing into one religious group a total church membership put at more than eight million, was recommended today in a resolution adopted unanimously by the presbytery of New York. The resolution will go to the general assembly with a proposal that it meet advances of the other two churches for union "with the utmost hospitality and to do all in their power to bring to pass this much to be desired reunion of evangelical churches." -- The Chicago Tribune Press Service.

What's wrong with this picture? Nothing in particular. Some people may find incongruity in a union for religious purposes of a group which believes in seven Sacraments with another which denies four of them. They needn't be surprised at that when they find within the one group called the Protestant Episcopal Church admissions varying from seven Sacraments to three or to none at all, according to the individual's adherence to the High, Low, or Broad Church, or one of the branches of these.

The Presbyterians, the Methodists, and the Episcopalians have one fundamental principle in common -- and they share it with all other Protestant groups: private interpretation of the Bible, their sole Rule of Faith. With that for a starting point it is a bit hazardous to speak of creeds. A Protestant who calls another Protestant a heretic is on dangerous ground: he believes in private interpretation for himself but not for the other fellow.

If, then, they have a common ground on which to unite, why shouldn't they unite? Would it hinder the end they have set themselves to accomplish? Would it make it impossible for them to use common means to attain that end? Common means would seem to be precluded by the principle of private interpretation carried to its logical conclusion -- now as well as in any future coalition that might come.

The nub of the matter is this: Protestantism has no charter to define and limit its action. No Protestant ever saw Christ, talked with Him, or received from Him any commission to do anything. Its authority is human authority, growing out of the will and power of the individual associates of any group. Consequently, it can do anything it pleases and still be Protestantism, so long as it holds to private interpretation.

The Catholic Church, on the other hand, has a very definite charter. Christ said: "Upon this rock I will build My Church... Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound also in heaven..." "Feed My lambs, feed My sheep;" "Going therefore teach all nations, whatsoever I have commanded you. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be condemned;" "Behold I am with you all days even to the consummation of the world;" "Whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven;" "Do this for a commemoration of Me."

Christ said these things to the Apostles, and through them to the Bishops of the Catholic Church, who, with the priests, carry on the work Christ gave them to do -- of saving the world by the application of the merits of His Redemption. It is to this unity that the world must return if it is to take full part in the work of Christ.

On Friday we begin the Church Unity Octave, which is a devotion of the Universal Church. It was begun by a religious community of Anglicans, or Episcopalians, who later found their way into the True Church. During the eight days we pray for the conversion of the world. Hand in the names of the friends and relatives for whom you wish the grace of Faith. Offer Holy Communion and pray daily for conversions. Thus you do your part in the work commissioned to the Catholic Church by her Divine Founder. It is a beautiful work of charity, and a work without which your life is selfish, incomplete.