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THE REUNION OF CHRISTENDOM.

[From London Catholic Times.]

Last evening the Catholic Truth Society Conference was opened in the Public Hall, at Preston. 5000 people being present. The Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, Dr. Vaughan, presided. Cardinal Vaughan, who had selected as the subject for his opening address "The Reunion of Christendom," observed that one of the happiest signs of the times was the growing desire for the reunion of Christendom. This noble aspiration manifested itself outside the Church in societies at home and conferences abroad. It witnessed to a state of dissatisfaction with the religious divisions which covered England, and it recognized, at least in some degree, the incalculable evils which sprang from the sin of schism. The pressure of grace and the Catholic instinct carried the minds of some still further. No movement towards the reunion of Christendom was to be found among the French, the German, or the Scandinavian Protestants. A Divine grace had been poured out over England for which they could not be too deeply thankful. There were some among the promoters of reunion who thrust aside as intolerable all idea of communion with the Catholic Church. Now any proposal for the reunion of Christendom, which did not include the Apostolic See and the 240,000,000 of Christians in communion with it, would be self-refuted and meaningless, for there could be no reunion of Christendom with more than half the Christian world left out. (Hear, hear.) It was said that the Catholic Church was intolerant and uncompromising. She certainly could not accept reunion on a basis of common formularies or creeds while each one was left to give to doctrines expressed in them his own meaning and interpretation. Unity of this sort the Catholic Church repudiated as dishonest and mechanical. Secondly, she could not accept reunion based upon an exclusive belief in the historical Christ, human and Divine. The unity must be based upon Christ as a living Divine Teacher, and it must be one of true discipleship. Thirdly, the Catholic Church could not accept reunion or communion were it even to unite the whole human race on the condition of change, or modification, or compromise in her own Divine constitution, the charter of which was drawn up by her Divine Founder. But the Church was free, for the sake of some greater good, to admit changes and modifications in her discipline and in legislation which concerned times and circumstances. Nor would she hesitate again to make concessions, as she did in times past for the sake of some great good, could they be shown to surpass in value adhesion to the points of discipline to be relaxed. No question of reunion could be seriously entertained without a recognition of the principle and the fact of the unity of the Catholic Church. Our Divine Lord before He went out to supper offered up publicly, within hearing of His Apostles, a prayer to His Eternal Father. The prayer was that a visible mark of unity should distinguish His Church. The unity of the Catholic Church was visible and tangible, and there was nothing like it in the world, for it was neither geographical nor racial, but a

standing miracle before the eyes of men. Contrast this with Anglicanism. The Church of England had failed to maintain unity in spite of the enormous influence of wealth, the prestige of social station, and in spite of most generous recourse to fines, imprisonments, tortures, and executions. And now, as one of their own Bishops had declared, Anglicans were more widely separated in doctrine from one another within their own Church than they were separated from the Nonconformists who were without. He would beseech those Anglican friends who boasted of their continuity of doctrine of the old Church of England, and who professed to desire reunion, to take into serious consideration the teaching of our Anglo-Saxon forefathers as to the vital necessity of union with Rome. What, then, were the prospects of reunion? There could be only two bases of reunion so far as doctrine and authority were concerned—(1) compromise, that was, federation and mutual recognition; (2) submission, that was individual or corporate absorption. The first was inconsistent with the Divine constitution of the Church; there remained only the second. Their hopes of a gradual submission by an ever-increasing number of Anglicans rested on the following evident facts:—1. The growing realization of the Catholic, and therefore of the non-national, character of the Church of Christ and the increasing distrust of national limitations in the idea of religion. 2. The growing appreciation of Catholic doctrines and devout practices, and a sensible diminution of the difficulties and prejudices that have hitherto obscured them. Their hopes also rested upon the growing acquaintance of the people with the past history of the Catholic Church, the opening up of its records, the increasing fairness of writers and readers, the dropping away of ancient prejudices, and the constant growth of an open mind as one generation handed down its experience to another. (Cheers.)

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