

The Catholic.

Quod semper; quod ubique; quod ab omnibus

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EXTRACT FROM AMICABLE DISCUSSION.

ON UNITY.

SIR,

I YIELD to your solicitation, and since you require it, I will discuss, successively, the different articles upon which we differ; and in the first place, with your permission, I shall commence by casting together with you, a general glance upon the spectacle that religion presents in your country. Long did I witness it with sorrow; a thousand times did I groan in spirit, whilst residing amongst you. and now, in my state of separation from you, I am still equally afflicted with dismay and pity, so often as I consider, what you were, and what you are.

From the establishment of Christianity in your country, to the period, when, for the first time, mention was made of a reformation; your happy ancestors had known but one faith, one altar, and one religion. Bound from without to all the churches of the world, they were within themselves strictly united together: they resorted to the same temples and assembled around the same altars. Under the direction of the same pastors, they heard the same doctrine and participated in the same sacraments. They all were brethren, all members of the same body of Jesus Christ. The name of a dissenter was not so much as known amongst them. The sweetness of harmony, and the peace of uniformity reigned in families, in cities, in districts, in the whole empire. At the voice of the reformation every thing changed its appearance. What do we behold from the time of Elizabeth? She had flattered herself, in the pride of her wisdom, and from the granu conceptions of her ministers, that by separating her subjects from the catholic world, she should mould them into her reformation, and invariably bend them to her law, and that her spiritual supremacy would become as extensive as her temporal dominion. And behold! in spite of all her efforts, she could not draw to her belief the inhabitants of a single county, no, not of a single town or village. Her reformation has ever produced new succeeding sects, and affords no glimpse of hope that it will ever reach the term of its lamentable fecundity. From it have already sprung the presbyterians, the independents, the puritans, the socinians, the quakers, the anabaptists, the moravian brethren, the new-jerusalemites, the latitudinarians, the swarms of methodists, &c. Whilst the civil law admirably maintains its dominion over all your people without distinction, preserves peace and or-

der throughout society, the evangelical law is abandoned to systems, to opinions, nay, even to the fanaticism of any individual who chooses to erect himself into an expounder and preacher of the gospel, and who possesses talent enough to gain a hearing and procure an audience. Every where, altar is raised against altar: every where; by the side of the established Church are to be found rival churches, dissenting chapels, temples, strangers to one another, domestic meetings, where, at the same hours, worship is celebrated with different forms and ceremonies, the gospel explained in different ways, and doctrine expounded in different and contrary senses. In fine, since the thorough change produced by Elizabeth, religion, in your country, presents a confused medley of every sect and every form of worship; a perfect chaos of doctrines, in which each one plunges and tosses, dogmatizing and declaiming as fancy or feeling directs. Men no longer know, whom to listen to, what to believe, or what to do.

All that we have to do, is to ask ourselves, whether our divine legislator came to give his Church different forms and appearances, to be subject to variation according to the caprice or taste of men; to give to his doctrine and dogmas various and opposite significations: or rather, whether he has not assigned to his church a fixed constitution, and to his words an appropriate meaning. Whether he has not imprinted on the system of his revelation whether taken collectively or in detail, that character of simplicity and unity, which is so remarkable in all the works of God, and which constitutes their excellence and beauty, *omnis pulchritudinis forma unitas*. We are now arrived at a question so decisively important, that I feel myself bound to spend some time in developing the proofs, that, in my opinion, demonstrate the necessity of acknowledging and preserving unity and government and faith. I shall, in the first place, consult reason; for it will teach us that the dogma of unity is so conformable with, and so analogous to the spirit of revelation, as to appear inseparably conjoined with its establishment. I shall then open the scriptures, and they will shew us the precept delivered by Jesus Christ to his apostles, in the clearest, the most forcible, and most peremptory terms: and, in conclusion, I shall interrogate the illustrious ages of the Church, ages so justly revered by protestants for purity of doctrine, and they will inform us that unity is the life and soul of christianity, as schism is poison and death to it.

I. Reason of itself can sufficiently conceive that unity must attach to the plan and spirit of our revelation. In fact, what was the condition of the

world with respect to it at the coming of our Saviour? You need not be informed. If you except the people who preserved the deposit of the sacred truths, all the others, being delivered up to the corruption of their hearts and the darkness of their understanding, had lost sight of the Creator. Incapable of comprehending how one single being could preside over all, they had filled the world with imaginary Gods, produced the most fantastical forms of worship, at one time offering their incense and their prayers to the planets that roll over our heads; at another prostituting them to the productions that spring under our feet, to the vilest animals and the most shameful passions: and in this multitude of temples that covered the earth, the God who created them had not one single altar, unless the one which Athens had erected to the unknown God.

Such was the deplorable condition of human nature, when there appeared in Judea an extraordinary personage, distinguished from other men by a character peculiar to himself, incomparable and divine: announcing to the Jews, that the time fixed, for the abrogation of their ceremonial law was arrived, and to the nations that they were all called to the knowledge of the true God. From the time that he came down from heaven to introduce among mankind a system of doctrine, reason could no longer admit that he could be indifferent to the various ways, in which this his system would be understood, or that the most opposite interpretations could be equally agreeable to him. It could not admit that it should enter into the spirit and economy of his mission, to replace the multiplied idolatrous societies and superstitious worships, by a variety of separate sects, of incoherent and opposite communions; it could not admit that it was his will there should prevail in his church almost as general a confusion of ideas as prevailed under the empire of blinded reason, and that there should be no better understanding amongst us in the bosom of the true religion than there was in paganism. Where there exists an opposition of dogmas and a contrariety of opinions, there necessarily is error: and it would be absurd to suppose God indiscriminately favorable to falsehood and truth. Reason, on the contrary, tells us, that the God of all truth, in communicating himself to man, could reveal but one doctrine, and establish but one spiritual government, it being a fact that a difference in government produces more or less a difference in doctrine.

Reason tells us, he must have been desirous that his dogmas and precepts, whatever they were, should be adopted just as he had taught them; that