

Can Both Churches Be True?

By Unknown

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"Well, Mary, I'm not satisfied," said a respectable-looking young tradesman to his wife, as he was walking home one Sunday evening from the Anglican church where they had been together. "I don't see how there can be two faiths and two Churches, when the Apostle tells us there is but 'one faith, one hope, and one baptism,' and that Our Lord Himself said He had founded His Church on a rock, and the gates of Hell should not prevail against it."

"But, Ralph," replied Mary, gently, "don't you recollect Mr. Andrews telling us that though all this was very true, we might be quite content, because we were a branch of this one true Church?"

"That's all very fine talking, my dear," answered her husband, "but if it be a branch, why are we not allowed to go to the parent tree? Whereas you know very well he blew us all up in the pulpit last week for going to see that procession of the Blessed Sacrament in the Catholic chapel, and said it was being 'unfaithful to our mother the dear Church of England,' and all the rest of it."

"But Mr. Lewis told me the other day, Ralph, that when he went abroad with his master, Mr. Andrews said he might go to the Catholic church as much as ever he pleased; and so he did."

"Yes," replied Ralph, "he was telling me all about it the other day, and he and I agreed there was no sense at all in Mr. Andrews saying that. It's making the truth just a matter of geography! Why, if it's wrong in England, it ought to be just as wrong in France or Italy. Don't you see that too?"

"Well, yes, I couldn't make it out," answered Mary, "but then Mrs. Wills, she tried to explain it to me in this way: that here the Church of England was the established religion, and so it was schism to leave it; but there the Catholic is the established Church."

"But if that's the case," replied Ralph, "we're all in schism — because this Church of England was only established three hundred years ago to please Henry VIII.; a bad man, as I have heard people say, who first wrote a book to defend the true Church, and then turned against it because the Pope wouldn't let him put away his lawful wife and marry another. And so he set up this new Church, and made himself the head of it, and put to death everybody who stuck to the old faith and wouldn't come into his new-fangled notions. Give me the old faith again, I say, and not the imitation of it!"

Mary walked on, looking rather sad and grave. She felt, it is true, much in the same way as her husband; but she was of a timid, shrinking nature, and she dreaded very much the idea of taking any step which would separate them from their old friends and from the clergyman whom they loved, and would probably injure their business besides. So, unconsciously perhaps, she always tried to shut her eyes to the truth, and to put the subject from her. This evening, however, she seemed to be fated not to be left in peace; for on reaching home, they found an old friend who had come from the country to see her husband; and this man was himself of an old Catholic family. He had taken a great interest in the young couple, and had shown them substantial kindnesses in many ways; so that his arrival was hailed with pleasure by both husband and wife.

"Why, if you're not the very man I was just thinking of, and longing to see!" exclaimed Ralph, warmly shaking his friend's hand. "Sit down here by the fire, and Mary will get us our supper, and we can have a good talk."

"What, on the old subject?" asked Mr. Richards, — "the difference between the two Churches?"

"Yes," replied Ralph. "My wife and I get more puzzled every day. Our parson here is a very good man, and says he is a Catholic; but yet he don't obey the Catholic Church. And then he tells us we are a branch of it, and that I can't believe, because we're cut off from the main stem."

"And a branch that's cut off must be a dead branch, mustn't it?" answered Mr. Richards, "because it's got no sap and no life."

"But surely, sir," exclaimed Mary, "it would be a wrong thing to leave the Church of our baptism because we fancy we should like another better."

"Stop a bit, Mary. In what were you baptized? What does your creed say you believe in?"

"In One Holy Catholic Church," replied Mary, instinctively folding her hands as she had been used to do when she said her Catechism.

"Very well: then you see that you weren't baptized into that 'One Holy Catholic Church,' not into the Church of England; and so if the Church of England does not hold the same doctrines as the Catholic Church, your very baptism, it appears to me, binds you to leave it. It is a dream to call a communion 'Catholic' when you cannot appeal to any clear statements of Catholic doctrine in its formularies, nor interpret these ambiguous formularies by the received and living Catholic sense, whether past or present."

"But don't you believe we are Catholics, then?" said Mary, timidly; "Anglo-Catholics, I mean? That's what Mr. Andrews says he is, and we too."

"And thinks so, I've no doubt," replied Mr. Richards, drily. "Every sect of heretics has done the same from the beginning, as St. Augustine tells us. But if he and you be all 'Catholics,' as you say, why don't you join the Catholic Church? St. Cyprian says: 'God is One, and the Church One, and the Chair One, founded by the Lord's word upon a rock. There shall be one flock. How, then, can he who is not of the number of the flock be reckoned in the flock?' And again, 'The Spouse of Christ is His Church. She owns but one Home; she keeps us for God.'"

"But," persisted Mary, "Mr. Andrews is a very learned man, I've heard people say; and I'm sure he's a very good man. Why, he gives everything away that he's got! and he so mortifies himself he hardly ever eats anything, his servant tells me, but carries off his dinner day after day to some sick person. Surely, if a religion is to be judged by its fruits, his must be the right one!"

Mr. Richards smiled at Mary's warm praise of the minister, and still more at her conclusion. Then, gently taking her hand, he said:

"Listen to me, my dear child. I have no doubt whatever that Mr. Andrews is a very good and holy man, but that is no proof that he is right. The very best man I ever knew, almost, was a Unitarian; but that did not blind me to the fact that he was in the wrong. Mr. Andrews has been brought up to believe in the Church of England and to consider himself a priest in that Church, and he acts up to that belief. But we know that he is in error. We know that what is called the 'Church of England' is no Church at all, and that his priesthood is no priesthood at all. For to be a priest you must be

rightly ordained, and ordination is invalid in the Anglican Church. I won't enter into all the proofs now; but I will tell you one thing which will show you the mind of the real Catholic or Universal Church on this matter. Ordination is a sacrament with us; and it is one of those sacraments which cannot be repeated without the sin of sacrilege. Yet no convert Anglican clergyman, from Cardinal Newman downwards, has ever been received into the Catholic priesthood without going through all the forms of ordination as if he were a mere layman. This proves to you that the Catholic Church does not for a moment admit the possible validity of Anglican orders.

"Therefore, see how poor Mr. Andrews stands. He is a member of a communion which has wilfully separated itself from the centre of unity, which is the rock of Peter.

"He has been ordained by men who have no power to confer that grace; and therefore he, in his turn, cannot consecrate the elements, or give absolution, or perform, in fact, any priestly function.

"So now you see why I speak and feel so strongly about it. All these things which he does in his Church are simply shams. Mind, I don't say he does them thinking they are shams; but that does not prevent my words being true; and he is so good a man, that I firmly believe the day will come when he will have the grace given him to see the truth, and then he will have as great a horror of his present imitations as we have."

Ralph had listened with the deepest attention to Mr. Richards' conversation with his wife and at the conclusion said: "Well, I've quite made up my mind. What you have just said settles the question for me. I'll go and see the Catholic priest to-morrow. He comes every Monday to some Sisters of Charity who are doing a wonderful work down in our neighbourhood, and they say he is a very learned man himself, besides being so kind, and good, and patient with people like us; so I'll go to-morrow night. Will you come too, Mary?"

A squeeze of the hand was her reply. She felt the step they were about to take very keenly; but in her heart she was convinced that her husband was right.

The following evening found them both kneeling in the Sisters' little chapel; and after some quiet instruction from the Superior, and a more lengthened interview with the good priest, both pronounced their abjuration and were admitted into the fold of the One Holy Catholic and Roman Church.
