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IS THERE SALVATION OUTSIDE THE CHURCH?

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AMONG the many doctrines taught by the Catholic Church there is hardly one which has given, and which continues to give, such offense to non-Catholics as the doctrine of what has been termed "exclusive salvation." When our separated brethren examine our formularies, when, for instance, they read in the Athanasian Creed, "Nisi quisque fideliter firmiterque crederit fidem catholicam, salvus esse non poterit"—"Unless one faithfully and firmly believes the Catholic faith he cannot be saved"—or when they consider the formal and authoritative declaration, "Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus"—*i. e.*, "Out of the Church there is no salvation"—they are annoyed and indignant. To reserve salvation exclusively to members of the Catholic Church, and to say that none shall enter heaven except such as acknowledge the jurisdiction of the Pope, they take to be a most arrogant and unwarrantable assumption. In fact they do not hesitate to describe such a doctrine as harsh, cruel and unjust. A Church that can teach it, they argue, must indeed be bigoted and intolerant, as well as narrow and exclusive. As for themselves, they profess much broader views. Indeed they boast with seeming charity—but a charity which outrages sound reason and makes truth a veritable fool—that "all religions are good," and that "men may be saved as readily in one sect as

in another," and that the various divergent forms of Christianity are to be considered as various routes, not perhaps all equally secure or direct, but still all leading to one and the same supernatural end, appointed by God; that, in fine, "Romanists," Anglicans, Methodists and Salvationists, and others, may each travel to heaven very comfortably in their own way.

They grow indignant when they hear the Catholic Church stoutly denying that any persons can by any possibility be on the right and divinely appointed path, but such as follow her guidance and listen to her voice, and they have no hesitation in describing such a doctrine as revoltingly harsh and uncharitable.

Now, without altogether denying the impeachment, it may here be remarked, in parenthesis, that because a statement *appears hard to us*, it does not necessarily and at once follow that it is untrue. Truth is sometimes hard. When, for example, wandering along the border of a precipice, it is hard, yes, very hard, to be hurled to the bottom, and dashed to pieces on the rocks below, merely for taking just one little step, quite inadvertently, over the edge! Yet that such an agonizing death may be the penalty of one incautions step is none the less true for all that. So, again, it is "hard" that a whole train full of passengers should be pounded to a jelly, just because the pointsman is sleepy and tired, and forgets to change the points when the express is rushing by; but however "hard" this may be, nevertheless its "hardness" in no way affects its truth.

The question we have to inquire into is not whether a doctrine, in our judgment, is hard or unkind or unfair, but simply whether it is true; whether, that is to say, it is a doctrine actually propounded by Jesus Christ or no.

For bear this well in mind. The Catholic Church on earth is but the agent of God. However great and indisputable her authority, she has no authority apart from Him. She teaches nothing of herself. She does not and cannot initiate any doctrine. She does but

bear witness to the truths already enunciated by Christ. Her office is to explain His utterances, to interpret His words, to unravel their hidden sense and to develop and unfold more and more explicitly, as centuries wear on, the sublime and momentous truth which they contain. It does not lie within her competence to relax, or modify, or alter at will, or in any way to tamper with or to interfere with the laws and regulations and dogmas laid down by God. She is but the living and infallible witness to the truth; its divinely appointed guardian, custodian and defender—a witness which can never fail and which all the powers of hell combined can never corrupt or bribe or silence or destroy. “The gates of hell shall not prevail against her.” For the rest she is wholly dependent upon Him, and her voice is nothing and can be nothing but the echo of His. “Who heareth you, heareth Me” (Luke x., 16).

Hence it follows: If she teaches that out of the Church of God there is no salvation, it is simply and solely because such is the clear and most explicit declaration of the Infinite God Himself. That this is indeed His teaching is at once made manifest by a reference to the Bible. Thus, when Our Lord despatched His apostles over the earth, He made use of these remarkable words: “Go ye into the whole world and preach the Gospel.” Observe, He did not say “any” Gospel; nor “a” Gospel; nor “your own” Gospel; but “*the*” Gospel (τὸ εὐαγγέλιον): that is to say, *the Gospel* that I have delivered to you; the particular and specific body of truths that I have committed to your keeping; just that and no other. Yes, Go, and announce these dogmas to every creature, and “he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but *he that believeth not shall be condemned.*” Or, according to the Anglican translation of 1611, “he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark xvi., 16).

Weigh well the forces of these words: “He that believeth not.” What is “to believe?” It is to accept and embrace, on the authority of Christ, the doctrine He reveals. It does not mean to construct a creed for

ourselves. There is no permission given us here to take the Bible and to pick and choose a religion to suit our own circumstances or character under the guidance of our own feeble and blundering human reason. No, quite the reverse.

We are distinctly commanded to surrender all personal opinions, to set aside altogether our private judgment, and to be "taught of God." We are ordered to submit to a divinely constituted authority, and to accept as certain those specific truths which Christ taught first, which the apostles taught after Him, and which the Church of God teaches today, and will continue to teach to the end of the world, with the same authority as Himself, and to humble ourselves "as little children," in order to enter the Kingdom of God, which is the Church. If all obeyed this command and embraced this teaching, then all would be united, all would agree, and there would be no divisions, no sects, no churches—only one Church. If some do *not* agree, it proves that some have not accepted the words of God, Now, not to accept the doctrines, and not to belong to the Church is precisely one and the same thing. Hence, to say, as the Catholic religion says, viz., "Out of the Church there is no salvation," is exactly the same thing as to say what Christ Himself says, viz., "Who believeth not shall be condemned."

On this point, as upon all others, the Church teaches nothing more and nothing less than what Christ teaches. The only difference between them is that Christ, while expressing identically the same truth, expresses it in a far more emphatic and energetic way. One statement is no harder than the other. Why? Because both are exactly the same, though expressed in different words.

Some persons have endeavored to evade the difficulty by throwing doubt upon the authenticity of the text; and would excise it from the Gospel. But even were this possible, which it is not, nothing would be gained, for the equivalent doctrine is contained in many another passage of Holy Writ. Thus, in the

eighteenth chapter of St. Matthew, we find Christ insisting upon the authority of the Church, which He clearly declares none may gainsay or deny, or oppose without peril to his salvation. He tells us that if men quarrel and differ the case is to be referred to the Church. "Tell the Church," is our Lord's express command. And for what purpose? Is it that each may continue to hold his own opinion? No. It is that the Church may pronounce upon and settle the difference; that she may decide the point at issue, once for all, and so heal up the breach. And so soon as she has pronounced her decision the disputants are bound to hear her voice and abide by it. "Bound?" Yes, bound, in the strictest sense of the word, for, "If he will not hear the Church, let him be to thee as the heathen and the publican" (Matt. xviii., 17). Not to hear the Church, not to conform to her doctrine, is a mark of reprobation. In fact, Our Lord expresses Himself far more strongly on this point than the Church herself, for He tells us that he who will not hear the Church is not to be considered a Christian at all; he is to be classed among heathens and publicans, and is therefore, according to Christ's own judgment, outside the pale of salvation. Again, let me ask, what is all this but to express, in another way, that "out of the Church there is no salvation?"

In the tenth chapter of St. Matthew we have the same doctrine set before us again in a somewhat different form. The Evangelist describes how Christ sent the twelve apostles to preach the Gospel and to establish His spiritual kingdom. It was not a mere invitation which men might accept or reject as they pleased. No; it was a solemn command, the rejection of which carried with it eternal reprobation. "Whosoever shall not receive you, *nor hear your words*, going forth out of that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet" (Matt. x., 14). And what consequences were to follow? When the messenger of God had shaken off the dust and departed, was each left in peace to exercise his own private judgment? Was each allowed to

set up a Church for himself, such as was done later on in the sixteenth century, *e. g.*, an Anglican Establishment in England, a Lutheran Church in Germany, etc.? Was each still free to select his own religion and to turn a deaf ear to the Divine Teacher? Nothing of the kind. Those who did not take the doctrine *as it was given to them*, and who refused to obey the authority established by Christ, were to be most severely dealt with. They were to be punished and condemned. Were all sects to be regarded as so many different roads, every one of which led to the same kingdom? Far from it. "Amen, I say to you," cried out the Son of God; "it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment than for that city" (Matt. x., 15). That is to say, the very worst carnal excesses and moral crimes will not be so severely and so fiercely punished as infidelity, heresy and schism. Nothing could express more emphatically than this that "outside the Church there is no salvation." If the Catholic Church be indeed the Church of God, if she teach with the authority of the apostles, then the above words apply to her, and we may truly declare, in the language of Christ, that "it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment" than for the city or country or the individual that refuses to receive the Catholic Church and to hear her words.

What we have demonstrated from Scripture may be deduced also from the intrinsic nature of truth; and certainly the most obstinate will admit that Jesus Christ taught neither errors, nor falsehoods, nor fables, but the truth. "For this was I born, and for this am I come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth (John xviii., 37).

Now truth is one, so essentially and absolutely one, that it is a metaphysical impossibility that there should be two *true* Churches teaching opposite or contradictory doctrines. This principle is of universal application, and is as true in the natural order as in the supernatural order. Take some simple and obvious illustra-

tion. Thus: if it be really true that "twice two are equal to four," then any person, however exalted and respectable and wise, who teaches me that twice two are equal to three or to five, or to three and a half, or to anything else whatsoever but just exactly four, must necessarily, and from the very nature of the case, be teaching what is false and erroneous. And what holds good of a single truth holds good equally of a series of truths. Hence it follows that if a series of doctrines taught by the Catholic Church be true, then it is wholly impossible to have or even to conceive, either in England or anywhere else, a second true Church teaching other doctrines irreconcilable with the first. They must be mutually exclusive. And if even two true yet opposite Churches is an impossibility, of course ten or fifteen or a hundred such Churches must be a yet greater impossibility. Hence, out of the two or three hundred Churches or forms of religion actually existing in this land, all except one must be propounding false doctrines and propagating lies. So soon as we admit that the Catholic Church is dispensing the truth revealed by God we are bound and constrained not only by faith, but by reason also—yes, by the very rigor of logic—to declare that every single one of the hundreds of Churches differing from her is dispensing what is false and pernicious and contrary to truth and that each of such Churches is *more or less in error*, according as it is *more opposed to her, or less opposed*.

People cry "Bigotry!" But, pardon me, there is no bigotry in this. It is very sad, but we cannot help it. We cannot alter facts! It could not be otherwise. It is a logical necessity, rooted in the very nature of things. If twice two make four no power on earth can ever cause them to make anything else. They will make four in spite of us. They will make four in Europe and out of Europe, in this world and the next. And precisely the same necessity extends equally to spiritual things. The Holy Spirit, speaking through the lips of St. Paul, announces—"One Lord, one Faith, one Baptism."

Why does he say "*one Faith?*" Because he is talking of *true faith!* and it is no more possible to conceive *two true faiths* or *two true Churches* than it is to conceive two true Gods. Two true irreconcilable Churches are just as repugnant as two true Gods.

There may be many false Churches and many false faiths as there may be and have been many false gods, but to suppose more than one *true Church* is quite as absurd as to suppose more than one *true God*.

This may seem a truism. Nevertheless, in this country of mushroom sects, in this land where every variety of religion unfurls its flag and flourishes, it seems of importance to insist again and again upon the great central fact that ought to be patent to the meanest capacity, viz., there is and can be one only true Church of God.

"Harsh!" "Unkind!" "Unfriendly!" are exclamations heard when it is pointed out that the Church refuses absolutely to recognize any one of the many religious persuasions around her; but, really, some of our friends seem to forget the plain fact that one cannot make contradictory doctrines nor contradictory Churches true by merely wishing it! Talk of kindness! Talk of good-will! Why, all the kindness, all the good-will in the world can never make black white or darkness light. We are compelled to recognize things as they are. Truth is one. Consequently the Church, which is the very "pillar and ground of truth," must also be one, and no second Church can be acknowledged as sharing in her prerogative.

But people complain that "the Church of Rome is so exclusive and so narrow, rigid and unyielding." Quite so; but then so is the multiplication table. What, exclusive? OF COURSE she is exclusive. Indeed it stands to reason that if she be indeed true she *must* be exclusive. Exclusiveness is a note and characteristic of truth. There is nothing in the whole universe of being so exclusive. This is unavoidable and necessary. Truth is truth, and what deflects from it or differs from it, even though it be but by a hair's-breadth, is

simply not true, but false. Hence there is no denying the fact that any one who wilfully and deliberately and with his eyes open rejects the message that God sends to him by the mouth of His one and only Church, resists God and refuses to surrender his reason to God, is consequently guilty of a great crime, and so stands condemned: "Who believeth not, shall be condemned." This is the declaration not of man, but of God; we do but paraphrase it when we affirm "Out of the Church there is no salvation."

Then we are going to affirm that every man who is not in visible communion with the Catholic and Roman Church is to be eternally and irrevocably lost? No. Far from it. We should never dream of making such a statement. And why? Because there is just one, though only one, circumstance that may excuse a man from submitting to her authority. That one circumstance is a sincere and honest conviction that her authority is but a usurpation; in other words, a genuine inability to recognize the Church's claims.

In order to explain this more clearly, we may here remark that there is no more common, and no more prolific source of mistake and confusion, than the habit of fixing one's attention upon one special statement of Holy Scripture, to the exclusion of every other. To isolate one particular passage of the Bible, or one particular doctrine of the Church, and to consider it in itself alone; instead of confronting and balancing it with other passages and other doctrines, emanating from the same authority, is a fruitful cause of error. To avoid committing such a blunder, we will compare this doctrine of exclusive salvation with another doctrine, which will greatly help to soften its apparent asperity, and to reconcile us to its truth.

Thus, if our religion infallibly declares that, "Out of the Church there is no salvation," she also declares, *just as infallibly*, that "No one can possibly be lost, *except through his own fault.*" Both these statements are absolutely true, and equally true. They both rest upon one and the same authority, and possess an

equal value. Consequently it is absolutely requisite so to interpret the first statement that it may not, in any way, conflict or contradict or be out of harmony with the second statement.

“Out of the Catholic Church there is no salvation.” True. But are we, then, to conclude that every one who, through no fault of his own, is not visibly a member of the Catholic Church, is hopelessly reprobate? No. This cannot be, for the simple reason that “no one can be lost except by his own fault.” If, therefore, it is *not* through his own fault that he is outside the visible pale of *Catholic unity*, he is not held responsible. Hence the only meaning we can attach to the above doctrines, when taken together, is that any person who is outside the visible Body of the Church, and who remains out through his own fault, will be lost; this supposes that he recognizes the Church to be indeed the true Church of God, and the mystical Body of Christ, and her authority to be the authority of God Himself. If, however, a non-Catholic, through no personal fault, fails to recognize her claims; if he quite honestly and conscientiously persuades himself that she is a sink of iniquity, and the “Scarlet Lady,” and so forth—then this ignorance may excuse him. This is no imaginary case; nor is it even a rare case. Indeed, there are no doubt a great many who are thus blinded. Of them our Lord will say at the last day, what He said of the Jews who crucified Him, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke, xxiii., 34).

Inability to recognize the truth can alone excuse them; and this really will excuse them, provided they are sincere and act according to their consciences, even though their consciences may be erroneous. In order, however, that this excuse may avail, it is requisite that they be so disposed that did they know the Catholic Church to be the Infallible Church founded by Christ, they would enter its fold, however much it might cost them. Persons in these dispositions in sober truth already belong to the soul of the Church.

No one in such dispositions will be condemned *for want of faith*. If such a person be condemned, it will be for other sins, and not for being outside the visible unity of the Catholic Church. This doctrine is very clearly pointed out by Pope Pius IX., of blessed memory, in his Encyclical, "*Quanto Conficiamur*," wherein he teaches that:

"Those who are in invincible ignorance of our most holy religion, and who, carefully observing the natural law and its precepts which have been engraved by God on the hearts of all men, and who, being ready to obey God, actually lead a good and upright life, can, by the help of divine light and grace, attain life eternal." This is the teaching of all theologians, and it is consonant not only with our sense of justice, but with the ordinary doctrine concerning sin in general, of which, after all, heresy is but a particular variety.

Before the guilt of sin is imputed to anybody three conditions must be realized. The first has to do with the person's intellect, the second has to do with his will and the third has to do with the act itself. With regard to his intellect, there must be sufficient knowledge. With regard to his will, there must be freedom and full consent; and with regard to the act itself there must be a serious and grave violation of God's law.

We will illustrate these principles by an example, and then apply them to the case of a conscientious non-Catholic. Thus, let us suppose a sportsman is shooting tigers in the jungle. He is moving carefully along, when all at once he hears a crackling of the branches, and detects something stirring in the under-wood. At once he aims and shoots at what he takes to be a wild beast; when lo! to his horror he finds he has killed a man! He has shot dead a native. Now observe; he has most undeniably broken the letter of the law; for he has killed an innocent man. He has been guilty of material murder. Yet he is not held guilty by the judge and before the law. And why? Because he *did not know* it to be a man. He acted in ignorance. Observe; he aimed and shot quite de-

liberately. Nay, more. He not only caused, but he fully *intended* to cause death. True. Then what frees him from blame? Ignorance. He thought he was slaying a beast, and all the while he was slaying a fellow-creature. His want of knowledge is his only defense, but it is enough. That alone will suffice to save him from capital punishment.

If instead of the crime of murder we substitute what is, *in itself*, a far worse crime, viz., the crime of heresy, we may apply the same principle.

The Catholic Church is the infallible messenger of Christ; she has been established by divine authority, to teach all men. God has ordered every human being to obey her voice, and to accept her doctrine, under pain of eternal death. Nothing can excuse a man who refuses to obey God; but he who rejects her teaching, does refuse to obey God, for it is God who commands him to hear His Church as Himself. Nothing can excuse him but ignorance of her claims; just as nothing can excuse his shooting an innocent man, except ignorance of the fact that it is an innocent man. But if a person simply cannot get himself to believe that the Catholic Church is the Church of God at all; if he cannot persuade himself that she is "the pillar of truth;" if, on the contrary, he honestly fancies her to have nothing but a usurped authority, then, though he abuses and disobeys and opposes her, and rejects her teaching, his ignorance may still excuse him even in the eyes of the Sovereign Judge Himself.

Nor is the above supposition by any means an impossible one. Take the case of a child born of non-Catholic parents, brought up from the earliest infancy (as tens of thousands of children are) to believe that the "Church of Rome" is the "Beast of Revelations," "drunk with the blood of the martyrs" and a veritable sink of iniquity. Suppose it is carefully trained to connect Catholicity with every species of crime, and perfidy, and horror and abomination, and grows up fully believing that Catholics worship images, and purchase permission to commit sin, and that they exalt the

Blessed Virgin above God, and would (if only they had the power) imprison, torture and burn all those who differ from them, and so forth. May not such a child, even when he has grown to man's estate, be excused if he hates the Church which he ought to love, and which he probably would indeed love were he better acquainted with her? Is not such a person, in regard to the Catholic Church, very much in the position of the hunter of whom we have spoken, in regard to the unfortunate man whom he shoots under the impression that he is shooting a wild beast? A typical Protestant, or other non-Catholic, brought up in the traditions of his own sect, is not really acquainted with the *true* Catholic Church. He *thinks* he is, but such is by no means the case. We must be careful here to distinguish between two totally different things. The *one* is the divinely established Church, the Bride of Christ, the Pillar and ground of Truth, and the *other* is the grotesque, ill-formed, false and most repulsive caricature of the Church, drawn by her bitterest enemies.

Now, what is it that nine out of ten of our separated brethren abuse, denunciate and condemn? It is not the Church at all; no, it is but the distorted and hideous caricature of her—the creation of malice, of suspicion and of hate. The opposition of men such as these is directed, not against the true Church, with which indeed they are not even distantly acquainted, but against the false and libellous misrepresentation of the Church which they, through the force of misrepresentation and tradition, take to be the Church.

The mind of youth is most impressionable; it is "as wax to receive, and as marble to retain." It would indeed be hard to exaggerate the influence of early education, so strongly directed against the Catholic Church. Add to this strong prejudice, deliberate misinterpretation, the hostile tradition of over three hundred years, and we shall easily understand how even some of our bitterest enemies may be in good faith; and may honestly come to persuade themselves that the Catholic Church has no claims upon them. Thus,

while remaining outside the true fold, they may be acting up to their consciences, and therefore be held excused by the Just Judge. Even clever and talented men may be under the influence of the delusion for years. Consider such intellectual giants as Cardinals Newman and Manning—men whom we all know; men whose sincerity, moral integrity and honesty are above suspicion—and then recall to mind the number of years that were needed for even such as these to struggle against their prejudices and to grope their way through all the obscurities and misrepresentations erected by a hostile world between them and the true Church. Their early training and Anglican education and their Protestant friends, relations and surroundings had left deep impressions upon their minds not to be worn away and obliterated save by many a long year of toil and trouble, and prayer, and effort, and anxiety. If, then, men so truthful and honest and so highly endowed intellectually needed forty years to find their way into the Church of God, may we not reasonably conclude that there must be a very considerable number indeed with less abilities who never find their way into the Church at all, yet who are equally honest and sincere, and who may yet be saved, by reason of their good faith and upright intentions?

We will sum up the whole teaching of the Church in the following four propositions:

Firstly. It is strictly true to say that there is no greater misfortune than to be living outside the pale of the Catholic and Roman Church—whether it be through a man's own personal fault or not.

Secondly. A man who deliberately remains outside the pale of the said Catholic Church through his own fault (such as through pride or wilful ignorance, or through fear or loss of goods or of friends, or gross neglect or indifference), will most certainly be lost should he continue in this state to the end.

Thirdly. He who is out of visible unity with the Catholic Church, through *invincible* ignorance, and

from no fault of his own, will be excused from the formal guilt of heresy; so that, though he may be condemned for other offenses, *that sin*, at all events, will not be laid to his charge.

Fourthly. Though we assert, without any doubt, that Protestants may be saved, and though we are quite ready to allow even that a great many actually are saved, owing to their excusable inability to recognize the truth, yet there is one thing of which we are still more certain, and that is that, though a Protestant may be saved, it will not be by means of his Protestantism, but in spite of it; in fact, in the very teeth of it. Protestantism, *as such*, has no saving power. Though it may, perhaps, seem a strange thing to say, it is nevertheless undoubtedly true that *a Protestant who is saved, is saved, not in so far as he is a Protestant, but simply in so far as he is a Catholic.*

Suffer me to explain. The Catholic Church existed for fifteen hundred years before Protestantism. At the period of the so-called Reformation many left the Catholic Church to become Anglicans, Lutherans, Calvinists, etc. But in leaving they carried away with them a considerable number of important Catholic doctrines. Now, it is precisely these doctrines that will save them; just these, and no others.

For instance. A Protestant believes in the existence of God. He believes in His goodness, His justice and His mercy; he believes in the Incarnation and acknowledges Christ to be his God and his Saviour; he also trusts in the merits of Christ and in the use of earnest prayer and in the advantages of a humble and contrite heart, and of sorrow for sin. Where did he get these doctrines from? From the Catholic and Roman Church. Every single one of these doctrines is essentially Catholic. All of them had been taught, for hundreds of years in every Catholic school in Christendom, before Protestantism arose to work confusion in our ranks. In fact they are purely Catholic doctrines, and, as such, they may be the means of

supernatural grace and eternal glory to those who yield to their influence.

But the genuine and distinctly Protestant doctrines can save nobody. On the contrary, they can but hinder and impede salvation. What do I mean by "genuine Protestant doctrines?" Well, I mean not the doctrines which Protestants have received from us, and which because they come from us are Catholic, but I mean the doctrines that are *exclusively* Protestant—the doctrines, in fact, which differentiate the Protestant from the Catholic. For instance, the doctrine that the Mass is a blasphemous fable; that the Successor of St. Peter is not the head of Christ's Church; that the Pope has no prerogative of infallibility; that there are not seven Sacraments, but only two; that Christ is not substantially present in the Blessed Sacrament, and that confession is not necessary, and Our Lady not immaculate. All these, and a great many more, are distinctly and genuinely Protestant tenets. None of these doctrines can save anybody, since they are not merely without efficacy, but utterly false and pernicious. Hence, as I have already remarked, Protestants who are saved, are saved in so far as they are Catholics. The good, honest, sincere, God-fearing Protestants, of whom there are no doubt many, will obtain eternal life; but this will be not in the least degree on account of their Protestantism, but in spite of it, and solely in virtue of the Catholic doctrines which (fortunately for themselves) they have retained, when they went out from the only true and infallible Church of God, whose centre is at Rome, but whose circumference is the world.



