

In fact the first General Council of all, held at Nicaea in the year 325, was summoned by the Emperor Constantine in order to secure unity. The great arch that stands by the Colosseum, surrounded by the frenzy of Roman traffic, and depicting the drowning of Maxentius' troops and proclaiming that Constantine defeated him "by the prompting of the deity" (meaning the sun-god), is a memorial of the divided Church that the Emperor sought to reunite. Efforts to restore Christian unity thus may easily be traced back to the end of the third century. The next stage is to examine the state of the Church from (say) the heyday of Irenaeus until the end of the third century, to see if the undivided Church appears there. Beyond that, finally, there lies the Church of the New Testament period, which the dream of unity and the ecumenical vision might expect to find an inspiring source. If the differences between Christians, and Christian traditions, at that original stage, turn out to be as deep as the differences that it seems easy to trace in the subsequent history of the Church, one is surely faced with questions about the nature and the extent of *any* Christian unity.

Wedding in Solentiname

JOHN LYONS

After a quick breakfast, the long wooden table is cleared and wiped clean, ready to receive the corpse of the victim, a poor ignorant innocent. Little light enters the musty kitchen where all the meals are taken together. Through the side door near the orange tree, heavy with fruit (like a Christmas tree with the bulbs switched off) dark, agitated shadows can be seen. The early morning sun is just beginning to draw out a thin sweat. A band of young *campesinos*, brandishing various tools of destruction, like conspirators planning their attack on a hated dictator. Suddenly with a cheer they break up and head off in search of the appointed offering. There is a pagan gleam in their eyes, a wild joy as the pig with its front trotters tied together, is dragged by its hind legs through the grass to the execution spot. The string is then removed as a jeering circle is formed around the creature, a large meat knife catching the morning light, an axe, someone with a small revolver. Meanwhile the wood collected earlier has been piled up to make a fire, the flames of which are now licking upwards, crackling; and a huge bowl containing oil is placed over the fire in preparation for the *chicharrón* to be fried. The pig watches these pro-

ceedings with unease and while the boys are lost in their own excitement it spies a gap and makes a bolt for freedom, heading downhill and through a hole in the fence. The fence, however, is no guarantee of political immunity; the boys chase after it, one grabbing its tail and a fierce struggle ensues (amid panic stricken squeals) to get the pig back through the hole in the fence. The revolver is placed by its head, fired and echoes in a shout of glee from the boys which dies almost as rapidly as the pig's legs give way: it is all over. The throat is cut to collect the blood for *morcillas*, the skin removed and cut into short, thin strips to be fried. The atmosphere of festivity continues; way down below the slope, the gentle lake waters roll in lapping the western bay of the island, the heavy padding of the *quetzal* is heard, and other birds singing out their hearts, the breeze ruffles the flowers of the *malinche* tree, the long, lethargic leaves of the plantain heave up and down in a long, deep breath. Nature takes its course peacefully, unheeding the activity round the fallen animal now being divided in pieces, the chop chop of the axe hacking through the bones.

At 5.30 in the afternoon the piece of rail that serves as a bell is rung vigorously, calling everyone on the island to the *casa comunal* to witness the marriage of Laureano and Elena. The *casa comunal* is the general meeting place of the community, a place for relaxation where some of the boys might come to play the guitar and sing or to read one of the books from the vast selection covering most of the walls, each section neatly ordered in topics, works on Marx, on North American poetry (many books on Ezra Pound), on theology and so forth: it is also the scene of the occasional weekday Mass. There is a set of shelves set aside for medicines, for the insomniac, for eye, ear and stomach complaints, together with some rather dated looking manuals of elementary diagnosis, generally a persuasive invitation to stay healthy. Elsewhere spaces on the walls are filled with a few of the primitivist paintings produced by some of the *campesinos*: bright tropical greens, reds and blues; brown-skinned figures, variegated birds, Ernesto in front of his hut amid the green plantains, studying two paintings that have been brought to him for his opinion, others like children's treasure maps with aerial views of islands decorated with people, animals and houses stuck on like tokens; some of the work a fine, intricate embroidery of colours.

The bride and groom are seated on a mat against the wall; behind them they have a sort of backcloth, a large compass indicating the cardinal points. Both are dressed simply in jeans and a white top and looking slightly embarrassed at the attention of the thirty or so people who have come to share their moment of self exchange. Laureano has asked Ernesto to proceed with a simple Mass among the intimacy of the members of the community and

those who work with them, before the arrival of the rest of the guests from the surrounding islands. He is in his early twenties, light bushy, curly hair; his permanent boyish grin recalls his joking ways, returning from San Carlos after the weekly shopping trip, deliberately driving the boat fast against the waves so that the water would wash over the prow where William and Alejandro were sitting. Elena is shorter, with long black hair framing another broad smile but she has a more serious look in her dark eyes.

It is hot and sticky and rather dark in the room: there are children walking around and talking, while the attention of the adults (some on chairs, most squatting on the floor) is focussed on the couple. Ernesto says a few opening words; one or two people still drifting in, perhaps not having noticed the time as they sat in their canoe or small boat waiting for the big fish to bite. But Ernesto continues, seemingly in a world of his own, oblivious to the disturbances around him, surrounded by these fishermen, wood-carvers, cultivators of the land.

Laureano reads a passage from an epistle of St Paul: a man who loves his wife loves himself ... he feeds and takes care ... just as Christ does the church.... "For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother, and unite with his wife, and the two will become one flesh". Laureano is nervous. Elena reads with more confidence, her words clear and fresh: submit yourselves to one another, because of your reverence for Christ.... Ernesto reminds us that the man and woman celebrate this sacrament of mutual exchange, not the priest, and he gives them each a few lines to read on tiny pieces of white paper. Laureano is one of the key members of the community and until now he has been sharing the same hut as Ernesto; now with his bride he will be going to live on another island though he will return here daily to work. Before reading his declaration he feels he has to explain his intentions and searches for the right words. He is not marrying, he says, to separate himself from his brothers and sisters of the community; he feels that man and woman together are stronger in life and as a couple will be able to offer more to the community than they could manage singly. Many people's eyes betray their emotions hearing these words.

He reads: "I, Laureano, want you, Elena, to be my wife, to accept me as your husband and I promise to love you and be faithful to you all the days of my life."

Elena replies: "I, Elena, want you, Laureano, to be my husband, to accept me as your wife and I promise to love you and to be faithful to you all the days of my life."

They are now married, says Ernesto. His words come as a jolt, several people distracted by the noise of the children, or simply lost in their own thoughts could easily have missed the crucial words. Ernesto prays that all humanity will learn from this lesson

of love that God has given us, this mirror of God's love for man, this love that led Him to give His son up to death to redeem all of us. He prays that mankind will learn to accept Christ as the husband, that the revolution will bring its bride, the church militant, to this fulfilling union. He then reads a short prayer that reiterates his own words. Behind his slight figure is a long table, and behind this on the wall there is a pyrographed representation of the Last Supper, the work of one of the community. In the picture, Christ and the apostles are dressed in the simple clothes of their day: Ernesto is wearing blue jeans, a white cotton *campesino* shirt (his daily clothes), all are dressed simply.

A loaf of home-made bread is broken up into pieces and wine poured into the chalice. Ernesto raises the basket of bread and repeats Christ's words: similarly with the wine: "Do this in memory of me!" We join hands in a large, irregular circle, the children still restless, a little baby banging her plastic bottle against a chair, others talking together; we pray to God in the words that Christ showed us, praying for the justice of God to be accepted as the measure of justice among men, for the fruits of this earth to be distributed fairly, satisfying all our needs, for the spirit of love and tolerance of our brothers to become a reality in our lives, we pray to be freed of selfishness and greed, to be guided honestly through this life. Bread is then passed around until each person has a piece in his hand: "This is the Lamb of God who takes away the self-centredness in the world". We eat and then one by one drink from the chalice. The Mass closes with Ernesto sharing God's blessing amongst us.

Everyone hurries to congratulate Laureano and Elena who are bursting with joy. Rum is offered, food (raw fish in vinegar, *chicharrón*), more people arrive on the island. The party begins. In various forms the pig slaughtered earlier that day is served up. There is more rum; a record player is set up on the verandah and even the most reserved find a partner and lose themselves in the freest of dances, thankfully cooled by a light breeze. Ernesto wanders chatting from group to group clutching his cup of rum. Laureano and Elena are electrified with happiness. The wooden floorboards creak under the heavy steps of the dancers.

The blue waters of Solentiname have faded now in the darkness, the sky is clear, full of stars. In the darkness of Nicaragua Solentiname shines.

A NOTE ON ERNESTO CARDENAL

Ernesto Cardenal, Latin America's most outstanding committed poet today, was born in Granada, Nicaragua in 1925 into a wealthy Conservative family. He studied in Mexico and at Columbia University, New York, followed by eight months in Spain where he rejected formal study, dissipating his days in bars, seeking some intensity in life. He was passionately in love many times during these years, as recorded in his early collection of *Epigrams*. Returning to Nicaragua he joined a Christian Democrat group which in 1954 conspired to seize the dictator, Somoza, in his palace and take power. The plot failed and most of the leaders were captured, tortured and murdered (events described in the final section of a long poem, *Zero Hour*, now a classic in Latin America). In 1956 Somoza was assassinated, only to be replaced by his more brutal sons. Yet in the same year Cardenal felt a strong religious vocation. The focus of his passion turned from human love to a deep love of God, (cf. his prose meditations, *Love*, Search Press).

Admiration for the writings of Thomas Merton led him to the Trappists in Kentucky; and on arrival at Gethsemani Abbey he discovered Merton was to be his Novice Master. He learned from Merton that the contemplative should concern himself very much with the problems of the world. Merton's spiritual direction consisted of discussions of poetry and politics; and he also imparted his misgivings about the medieval apparatus of Trappist life. Cardenal abandoned the novitiate after two years through ill-health and Merton encouraged him to set up a more open contemplative community in Nicaragua. Cardenal continued his studies for the priesthood with Benedictines in Cuernavaca and later at La Ceja seminary in Colombia.

Ordained in 1965 in Nicaragua, he set up a Christian commune with two companions from La Ceja on the island of Mancarrón in the archipelago of Solentiname, near the southern edge of the Gran Lago of Nicaragua. But for his death Merton was to have joined them for a time as spiritual director. They began living a monastic poverty and ministered to the poor of the surrounding islands, eventually taking in some of the young people to the community. In discussions of the Gospel with the peasants they began to draw out the revolutionary potential of the 'good news'; they declared themselves socialists and had contact with local guerilla forces.

Still rooted in the immediate circumstances of Central American under-development, the inspiration of Cardenal's poetry now thrives on Teilhard de Chardin's ideas on evolution, a general grasp of the utopian aspects of Marx, and the example of the Cuban revolution which he first visited in 1970. Well grounded in the theology of liberation his attitude of non-violence has given way

reluctantly to acceptance of the revolutionary cause of the oppressed Third World as a just war.

At dawn on 13th October of last year, a group of young people from his community joined forces with the Sandinista guerrilla movement; they attempted to capture as hostages a number of officers from the Guardia Nacional and some local politicians from the dictator's party. There were three other attacks in other parts of Nicaragua simultaneously, aiming to provoke a popular uprising against the government. Their plan in San Carlos failed and they were forced to open fire when attacked by the Guardia Nacional, after having urged them to surrender the police barracks and save bloodshed. They managed to take the barracks and could have set it alight but out of consideration for the wounded police decided not to. When reinforcements of police arrived the guerillas fled, some being taken prisoner, and at least two dead in action. The young people wore religious medals and their aim was to see tyranny replaced by a just democracy.

For political reasons the dictatorship in Nicaragua has been bolstered by the United States, and American weapons are being used for widespread police brutality and repression within the country. Somoza's family controls ninety per cent of investment in Nicaragua and his personal fortune is an estimated six hundred million dollars: his family has been in power for the past forty years; he has two children in mental hospitals in the U.S.A., another daughter exiled in London after her boy-friend, a member of the guerillas, was tortured and expelled from Nicaragua on the orders of her father.

Cardenal knew of the assault and was aware that he stood to lose the community which he had built up over the past twelve years (a centre for primitivist painting and artefacts known internationally). He, along with many others, is now in exile and his church and what remained of the other buildings were occupied by the Guardia Nacional. There is an order out for the capture of Cardenal in his own country. He declared recently his affiliation with the Sandinistas, and called this fight for a new and just society "a priestly struggle", quoting Camilo Torres.