

theological dialogue, more adapted to the better spirit of conciliation that exists today between all sincere believers that Jesus Christ is Lord, Son of God and Saviour. We Catholics do not, by these methods, compromise our position. To do that would be against the whole idea of eirenic theology. For eirenic theology desires, not to suppress or hide anything we believe to be of the essence of Catholicism, but rather to reveal everything that we hold to all enquirers, so that they may be led to understand it as sympathetically as we do ourselves. We do not wish to tell them they have the whole of Catholic doctrine already. It is obvious they could not be Protestants if they had. But we can at least show them that often enough the doctrines which they value most are looked upon by ourselves as authentic Catholicism, and that they are deprived of something that belongs to the same world of faith, when they stop short of Catholicism *tout court*, in all its implications.



UNITY AND DISUNITY TODAY¹

HENRY ST JOHN, O.P.

EDUCATED Catholics today are at least dimly aware that considerable changes are taking place among Protestants in regard to the problems set by Christian disunity. It is doubtful, however, whether the majority, even of educated Catholics, know just how considerable these changes are; still less do they envisage them as important. In this paper I propose to outline some of the facts concerning these changes and to attempt to interpret their significance for us.

From the time of the Reformation in the sixteenth century, constant fragmentation became a commonplace and accepted condition of Protestantism. On the continent, from the first, the two great movements initiated by Luther and Calvin were antagonistic, and in due course each produced its sub-divisions. Here in Britain Scottish Presbyterianism suffered, in the course of its history, at least a threefold fission, and the Elizabethan

¹ The substance of a paper read at the Regional Conference of the Newman Association, Cheltenham, November 9th, 1957.

settlement of Anglicanism produced a number of non-conformist bodies, Baptists, Congregationalists and Methodists; and these in turn soon began to sub-divide. In the new world, from the first days of colonization, these divisions sowed themselves and the process of proliferation continued. By the end of the nineteenth century the United States of America was said to contain between three and four hundred Protestant sects.

Then, during the first decades of the twentieth century, came a startling and relatively sudden change. There emerged among non-Catholic Christians, in every country, an intense desire for the healing of the disastrous divisions among Christians. Today this desire has grown into the world-wide movement called Ecumenical, the object of which is by prayer, study and work to bring about the healing of those divisions. The Ecumenical Movement dates its beginnings, as such, from a great Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh in 1910. The delegates, missionaries from all over the world, realized, very vividly, the fact that the spread of Christianity was terribly hindered because Christians were divided and quarrelling among themselves. Out of the Edinburgh Conference arose two separate but related movements, called 'Life and Work' and 'Faith and Order' respectively. The first set itself to plan ways and means by which Christians could by-pass their doctrinal differences, and work together to convert the world on the basis of the things they agreed about. The second went deeper. It sought by friendly discussion to probe into the doctrinal differences, to understand exactly what those who differed from each other believed, and so to remove prejudice and misunderstanding and thus prepare the ground and plant the seed of a unity that only God could bring to fruition.

The two movements, between the wars, organized themselves in great world conferences, and, after the second world war, these were combined into a permanent organization known as the World Council of Churches, which met at Amsterdam in 1948. The latest meeting of this body was in 1954 at Evanston in the U.S.A. To Evanston went delegates from one hundred and sixty-three separate organized religious bodies or Churches. These came from forty-eight different countries, in all parts of the world. They represented for the most part the Churches which sprang from the Reformation schisms, though there were among them also members of the Orthodox Churches, and other ancient

Churches of the East. The movement that brought them together represents an extraordinary phenomenon, a spontaneous outburst of intense desire for Christian unity, taking shape in a corporate movement comprising almost the whole of that part of Christendom lying outside the visible unity of the Catholic Church.

As a result of this movement the twentieth century has in fact seen the actual accomplishment of an unparalleled achievement of corporate and organic union among Protestants. Between 1910 and 1954 no less than thirty-four different mergers or reunions, resulting in fully organic union between hitherto separated Churches, have taken place. The number of Churches in each merger varies from two to eleven, and they are located in every part of the world. Amongst the best known, to us here in England, are the union of the Scottish Presbyterian Churches, and the famous and controversial Church of South India scheme. We cannot dismiss these events as insignificant when we remember that the basis of all these mergers, in spite of their doctrinal deficiencies, is recognition and acceptance of the central Christian affirmation that Jesus Christ is God and Saviour, the only hope of the world.

What then is the significance of the Ecumenical Movement for Catholics? Can we contribute anything to make it effective in drawing our separated brethren into the existing unity of the one, true Church? To answer that question we must examine certain considerations of a theological nature, which underlie the problem of Catholic unity in relation to Christians who are dissident from it. We must then go on to consider what guidance the authority of the Church has given us in this matter. The first consideration is this: the Ecumenical Movement has developed what may be called a new technique of approach to the things that divide Christians from each other. It is a technique of understanding and sympathy, of avoiding controversy of the win-a-victory kind. Its emphasis is upon the search for truth, above all things, in whatever those who are separated from us hold; the sincere attempt, without the slightest compromise on what we hold essential, to understand what they believe and why they believe it; to see from their point of view. All that is best in this technique is well summed up in the words of a well-known Anglican writer and theologian:

"The separations between Christians have in our day assumed

fearful proportions; we are split by schisms into various denominations. and within the denominations there are groups and parties at variance with one another. Yet God has made us one; and the unity which he has made lies deeper than the divisions we have made.

“Therefore all controversy between Christians needs to start from the unity which God has made. The right way of controversy between Christians starts from the realization that our opponent in the controversy is our brother. I must treat my opponent as my brother in Christ. I must try to understand what are the things which the Lord has taught him and his friends, what is the way by which he has led them. His ways of worship, his ways of thinking, are different from those which I have learnt. I must try to get him to tell me. I must not do all the talking. I must try to learn what is the background to his strange views, and the questions to which he thinks that those views are the answer. Perhaps, if I am patient, he will give me the opportunity to express my views, in answer to his questions.

“The wrong way of controversy is unhappily all too familiar. I set out to demonstrate that I am right and he is wrong. In doing so, I state what I take to be his position; and this in itself is a most irritating thing to do, for I know how I feel when others do it to me. I prove that he is wrong; but if I seem to have won the argument, I have really lost it, for I have sent him away determined to think up all the counter-arguments which he failed to express adequately when he was arguing with me. In the discussion I have stood before him not as a brother in Christ, but as a rival and as an opponent; I have not come within range of his real convictions, the things which to his mind are self-evidently true. When he says at the end, “Here you and I differ”, those words mark the fact that I have done no good, but only harm.

“This wrong method of controversy breathes the very spirit which divides us into parties, sects, and denominations. It embodies in itself the very essence of sectarianism, when we (whoever “we” are) think that we, of our group or party, possess the whole truth, have answers to all questions, and say of ourselves, “we at least have nothing to learn” or “see how right we were”.

“Yet there is a ground of Unity deeper than all our differences. It consists in the fact that Christ died on the cross for the salvation

of all mankind. The ground of Unity is the Son of God. And because the truth of God is greater than my understanding of it, I must not speak as if I or my people were capable of grasping and expressing the whole truth, and I must endeavour to save my opponent from taking up a similar false position. The wrong way of controversy has the evil effect of making it impossible for those who ought to be learning from one another to do so. The right way of controversy does make it possible for the differences of view to be analysed, for misunderstandings on both sides to be cleared up, and for both sides to learn from one another. The aim of it is to seek that unity in which those who confess God's holy name come to agree in the truth of his holy Word, and live in unity and godly love.²

That quotation vividly portrays the technique of approach which manifests the ecumenical spirit, and we Catholics can make every word of it our own. We are often credited with the claim that we possess the whole truth, and we should be very careful to make clear to non-Catholics the only sense in which we do so. As individuals and groups we do not, and cannot, possess the whole truth. Only Christ, in his Church as a whole, does that. The members of his Church, as individuals or as groups, carry his truth in earthen vessels, and must never be guilty of saying or implying, 'We at least have nothing to learn'. And we must never forget how much of the truth any one of our separated brethren may possess and be living, in the corporate life of his own religious allegiance. On that truth, wherever it is found, we must begin by building, in our approaches to our separated brethren.

Its foundation is the grace and faith they can and do possess. When schism has cut off a portion of the true Church from visible and structural unity, and made that portion a schismatic body separated from the true Church, the individuals so separated are not *ipso facto* cut off from the grace of Christ in his Mystical Body the Church. Though visibly and corporately in schism from it, they may still be united with its inner life in virtue of their good faith, and provided no grievous sin has deprived them of it. This is so primarily on account of their baptism, if it has been validly conferred. This sacrament unites them by sanctifying

² *Fundamentalism and the Church of God*. By Gabriel Hebert, S.S.M. (S.C.M. Press, 1957. pp. 14-15.)

grace, by faith, hope and charity and the gifts of the Holy Ghost, with the inner life of the Church.³ In the case of the Eastern Orthodox Church, which though in schism has retained intact an authentic and valid hierarchy and sacraments, the membership of its adherents, though it cuts them off from the communion and authority of the true Church, yet retains them in the full range of sacramental grace.⁴

The precise purpose of the validity of sacraments is that, in their proper performance, we have sure guarantees of the gifts of grace God gives us, but we have no right to dogmatize about what God does, apart from his own guarantees, on behalf of those who, through no fault of their own, have lost them or do not use them. What Christ our Lord, by the power of the Holy Spirit, is doing among our separated brethren; how far and in what way Christian ordinances and ministries, used in good faith and genuine obedience to Christ, may be, by God's special disposition, occasions of grace, though invalid by the standards Christ has set for his Church, these are questions the answers to which we do not know. God is not tied to the ordinances he has commanded for our good, though we are bound to obey them. That is the essence and purpose of validity. We can only guess what he does in men's souls outside the sphere of his own ordinances; and our guesses will be based on the fruits of the Spirit we see accompanying these usages. As we hold that Christian bodies separated from Catholic unity can preserve sacraments, and therefore sacramental grace, and that grace can also be mediated to their members by God apart from his sacraments, so we believe that they can preserve truth; not the whole truth of God's revelation, that is preserved in its completeness only within the visible communion of the divine society, the Church. But often large portions of truth; the word of God in Scripture, the creeds and even parts of the ancient Catholic tradition by which, within the Church, the Scriptures are interpreted.

Admittedly for them, however, this interpretation of God's

- 3 In the same way membership of a schismatic body is often instrumental in the reception of the sacrament of matrimony, since it can be received apart from a validly ordained ministry.
- 4 An exception to this statement might be the possible absence, among the Orthodox, of the jurisdiction necessary for the valid administration of the sacrament of penance. Upon this question however there does not appear to be unanimity among the theologians.

Word written is partial, imperfect and sometimes erroneous. They are cut off from the visible structure and organic society of the Church and cannot share its guarantee of the fullness of life and truth to be found only within its unity. We may not deny them the grace of God, nor the possession of some at least of his truth, often of a great deal. We must acknowledge that our sins and failings in the past have been, in part at least, responsible for the divisions of Christendom, and that today those sins and failings still contribute to the maintenance of its divided state. But loyalty to the truth, as it is in Christ, compels us to be adamant in insisting that if and when by God's grace the unity of all Christians comes about, it can only be by the drawing of all who are now in separation into the already existing, divinely constituted unity of the Catholic and Roman Church.

The drawing power which will effect this is the drawing power of truth. And the exercise of this power must be based upon sincere effort on our part to give the fullest value possible to every element of truth already possessed by our separated brethren, and by consistently doing this to lead them to a realization of what has been hitherto lacking to them. Yet how often we do the opposite. Only the other day I read, in a Catholic periodical of high standing and no small achievement, the unqualified statement that the religion of the Church of England is a 'man-made' religion. Without several qualifications that statement is three-quarters false. The faith of an Anglican can be and often is a divinely given gift, conveyed by the divinely ordained sacrament of Baptism. He believes in the authority of Scripture, divinely inspired by the Holy Ghost. Of course as an institution the Church of England is man-created; of course as an interpreter of God's Word to men its authority is human and fallible, and of course in consequence the faith of Anglicans is, as we hold, deficient in content. But on the other hand it can be and often is deep and strong in its intensity; the lives of many Anglicans are lives of great goodness and even holiness derived from union with Christ by grace. The fullness of truth we so much desire for them will not be brought home to them by a one-sided propaganda which belittles or obscures these truths.

What guidance does the authority of the Church give us as to our attitude to the Ecumenical Movement and to what extent can Catholics participate in it or make its methods their own?

From the first the Catholic Church has refused to take any official part in Ecumenical organization. The Protestant bodies that do so all hold that the Church is a divided entity and that its visible unity lies in the future. To sit with them in Ecumenical Conference, as one among many, each claiming to be a part of Christ's Church, would be, on the Church's part, an equivalent admission of their claim, whatever verbal protestation to the contrary it might make. At the least the risk of this would be very great. The Eastern Orthodox Church, which itself claims to be the only and true Church of Christ, has accepted representation in the World Council of Churches, but only at no little risk of the gradual compromising of its claim, and at the cost of having constantly to dissociate itself from official ecumenical language, which takes a divisible Church for granted.

With regard to the nature of the Ecumenical Movement itself, there are elements in it that are radically hostile to the inclusion of the Catholic Church at all in the unity they envisage. They would like to turn the World Council and its organization into a kind of Protestant Vatican. There are also wide elements in the movement which, without going to such lengths, hold unity in faith, except on what they look upon as fundamental, to be of quite secondary importance, and questions of polity and organization as irrelevant. It is natural that they are unable to see any place for Rome in a future united Church. But there is also a considerable and increasing element in the Ecumenical Movement, especially in the Faith and Order section of it, which recognizes that the only unity which is in accordance with Christ's will is unity which has belief as its basis. This element tends to insist that it is impossible to leave the Church of Rome out of account in any fruitful work for the unity of Christians.

Much has already been done under the influence of this latter group in promoting, by the ecumenical technique, an exploration into the nature of the biblical revelation, as interpreted by historic Christendom. This involves the study of Patristics, Liturgy and Christian origins in the light of the tradition of the primitive Church of historic Christendom in East and West. These studies are beginning to familiarize world Protestantism with the ideas and presuppositions of a theology distinctively Catholic in type. Resulting from them are what may be called *catholicizing* movements, comparable to the Anglo-Catholic movement within

Anglicanism; these are growing up, both in the evangelical Churches on the continent, Lutheran and Calvinist, and within English-speaking Presbyterianism and the Free Churches in England and America. It is movements of this kind, in the direction of a Catholic sacramentalism and way of life within World Protestantism, that have enlisted increasing interest, during the past twenty years, on the part of the authorities in Rome, and have led to the establishment of officially approved societies such as the *Unitas Association*, for the special study of things ecumenical, with its headquarters in Rome and its quarterly review published in three languages.

A landmark in the growth of this interest on the part of the Holy See was the issue in December 1949, by the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office, of an Instruction to all Local Ordinaries on the Ecumenical Movement. This document⁵ shows the Holy See as firmly opposed to official participation in ecumenical organization, yet favouring the adoption by Catholics of the ecumenical technique of approach to non-Catholics. It calls this 'reunion' work (the word reunion being in inverted commas), and implicitly distinguishes it from normal convert-making by the cautions and precautions with which the Bishops are urged to safeguard it. Yet the Instruction emphatically affirms that this 'reunion' work is a particular charge and duty of the Church and that all Bishops should make it a special object of their care and attention, giving it prudent encouragement and direction. Provision is made for the setting up of an ecumenical centre in each diocese and the appointment of priests expert in things ecumenical to organize it. Suitable teaching for the faithful is called for in pastoral letters about these questions and the steps being taken in regard to them, together with the Church's safeguarding precautions and the reasons underlying them. The Instruction ends by reiterating, that this 'excellent work of reunion' should daily assume a more significant place within the Church's pastoral care, and every Catholic should pray earnestly for its progress.

It is evident from this that by 'reunion' work the Holy See envisages something new, a technique of approach to non-Catholics on a wide scale, not yet, however, in extensive use. The Catholic Church by its very nature and claim must have

⁵ Latin text, A.A.S.; Vol. XLII, No. XVI. English translation, *Tablet*, March 4th, 1950.

conversion as the ultimate objective of its whole apostolate. The technique of 'reunion' work differs however from the immediate work of convert-making, and the difference lies in the method of approach. The immediate work of convert-making is direct and personal. It seeks to bring about the conversion of the individual in whom the ground is in part already prepared. The technique of 'reunion' work is indirect in its approach; it seeks to prepare the ground for conversion by cultivating it within the corporate organization of the non-Catholic Churches themselves; to produce in them a different attitude of mind towards the Catholic Church. This new attitude will be the groundwork out of which the fullness of truth will emerge in God's good time. Convert-making therefore and 'reunion' work are complementary. In 'reunion' work one's eyes are not immediately fixed on convert-making; only at long range. The immediate objective is the creation of this new attitude of mind in non-Catholics by a change of attitude in the minds of Catholics themselves. The removal of misconceptions on both sides, not only about doctrine, but about the cultural dress, the ethos and atmosphere, the idiom of thought which surrounds the living of truth in everyday life, and its expression and formulation both in language and action. And the means by which this is to be done is to seek the truth, first of all, in the other man's mind, to appreciate it and build upon it. This gradual creation of a new attitude of mind is a most necessary preparation of soil, in which the seed of faith can grow. The lack of such preparation seems to be the main reason why the seed of faith in the true Church so often fails to fructify in the religious world around us, and why so many non-Catholics of undoubted good will altogether fail to receive it.

The Holy See has given us a lead under the authority of our diocesan Bishops. The field for this apostolate is immense. It could be tackled at two distinct levels simultaneously. First, at the strictly theological level, by small meetings of trained Catholic and non-Catholic theologians, three or four on either side in round table conferences. They would be concerned to go down to the theological and historical roots of our differences. For this special training is needed, the production in our seminaries and the theological schools of the Religious Orders, of theologians who have learned the language and thought-forms of their opposite numbers, and can translate our Catholic scholastic idiom

into words and ideas that go home to the minds and hearts of the non-Catholic biblical theologians. The second level at which this ecumenical problem could be tackled is at the university student level; and this needs training too. It could be done on the working lines of the Catholic Evidence Guild, where theologically competent instructors give courses to students who can thus qualify as speakers. The instructions would be in a theology, at a level less deep than that of the theological schools, which is integrated into the ideas and thought-forms familiar to non-Catholic Christians of different allegiances. In this way Catholics and non-Catholics might learn to exchange ideas and in the process to prepare the ground for the growth of understanding and unity in the true faith. This together with constant and urgent prayer for the unity of all Christians is work in which we can all share, priests and laity alike.

If we are meant to see the hand of God in this great movement towards Christian unity, and surely we are, then we must also be convinced that God's will must be carried out by the co-operation of us his human agents. Our responsibility under God for the future is very great indeed.



THE PILGRIM CHURCH¹

TWO years ago we considered the necessity of the one Church and saw it as alone the way which leads to blessedness. Last year we developed the idea to further conclusions, discussing the missionary task of the Catholic Church and of Catholics among other Christians. And in both sermons I pointed out more than once that for all the Catholic Church's unique position, we should not overlook its earthly configuration and human imperfection, and on that account the proper attitude for Catholics in present-day ecumenical discussions is one of humility, penance and a readiness to learn.

Today we will focus our attention on this, and consider the

¹ On January 17th, 1957, on the occasion of the Unity Octave, the then Bishop of Würzburg, Julius Döpfner, newly appointed to the See of Berlin, preached on the Church in history; what is permanent in her and what transient; matters which are often not clearly understood by non-Catholic Christians, who thus take offence where there is no need to. The sermon appeared in *Herder—Korrespondenz* March, 1957 and is translated by Ruth M. Bethell.