

WORKING FOR UNITY

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THE unity which Christ gave to men in his Church appears to be lost, and must again be found. That theme, repeated by Christians almost everywhere, reveals a longing which he is going to satisfy according to the extent we allow it to grow within us. Every Christian worth the name must pray, nowadays, for reconciliation with all others who are still separated from them—not, it should be remembered, in spite of their loyalty to the same Master, but, so they are convinced, because of it.

Such prayer, and whatever work we may have to do to supplement it, springs not from any human feelings of urgency in the face of the present political situation, nor even from a desire for greater effectiveness in missionary work, nor from impatience at the unreality of life in a divided Christian community. Prayer for unity is a normal part of our imitation of Christ. It is more than that; it is part of our share in his life. He prayed, and prays in us, to his Father and ours, that all may be one. That is why we pray, Catholic and Orthodox, Anglican and Free Churchman alike; and that is why the modern 'ecumenical movement' is part of the lives of us all.

Because Catholics believe and proclaim that the unity of the Church has always been a fact, and that it is to be identified with the unity which they themselves enjoy, people have presumed that this movement leaves us unconcerned, and that we remain pharisaically unmoved by the passionate desire for unity which stirs so many of those of other loyalties. 'The Roman Catholic Church', said the Archbishop of Canterbury in Canada last year, 'has yet to learn the meaning of Christian fellowship.' What an indictment, if it were true. Those who know the Catholic Church from inside can say, knowing and admitting their own personal weakness, that the privilege which Catholics believe themselves to enjoy is not taken as a permission to rest idly and safely in security. It is understood as a responsibility; Christ prayed that through unity men might be led to believe, and through those whom he calls to that unity his prayer is to be answered.

What appears to so many other Christians as hard intransigent pride is really nothing other than the response which the Catholic is compelled to make to his experience of the world he lives in. He has found the Church, and the more he learns of other Christianities, the more he is forced to point to their incompleteness when compared with the reality which he knows. His behaviour would indeed be inhuman if it were not controlled by this conviction; and those who wish to understand the Church must admit at least the possibility that the Catholic's beliefs rest on submission to fact, and not on self-deception.

After all, a unity of the sort which the Catholic claims as his own is exactly what one finds if one looks to see what the Bible has promised us. The union of our minds and hearts with Christ brings knowledge of him as God and Man united in one Person, and those who share that knowledge and union must themselves be united. Our interior knowledge of Christ must be matched by what he reveals of himself in the world around us; and if we cannot believe in the real unity of his Body, the Church, or if, believing, we cannot find such a unity, then something is lacking in our knowledge of him. To live in this world separated from his Church is to cut oneself off from Christ; and to claim full knowledge of him when one does not believe in and live in a Church which is clearly one in every way, human and divine, natural and supernatural, is to reveal an incompleteness of experience which the Catholic must, if he has any charity in his soul, constantly try to make clear.

Christian unity is not reached by agreements about the way the Church is organized and what it is to believe; we find it by following Christ and by doing his will. Christians will be united to the extent to which they are prepared to abandon themselves to him; their disunity is the sign of their disloyalty. For that reason, the movement towards unity amongst those who realize they have not at present found it must be a movement of individuals. Those who hope for some steady evolution by distinct, organized groups towards unity are mistaking the end towards which they are moving as well as the way Christ deals with his followers. Those who delay, hoping to 'bring their sheaves with them', are like the men who excused themselves from the wedding feast. Those who wish to 'work for unity' where they are may overlook the fact that God has already done all that is necessary for our unity in

him, and that our 'work' can consist only in the acceptance and use of his gift.

Christ is our reconciler; all thought about re-union must start from there. He will bring us together, if we will let him; it is our own obstinacy, not any failure of his love and power, which holds us apart. There are men who believe they can serve him best by making others groups of men their enemies. Some Catholics come perilously near to that in their attitude towards Communists; and where Christians fight among themselves over Christ himself, they have turned aside altogether from truth and charity. Protest must be made when such pamphlets appear as the censorious, ill-informed *Infallible Fallacies*, nor can it be denied that Catholic reactions to this attack were sometimes almost equally unworthy. Such stirrings of denominational feeling represent a refusal to think in terms of reconciliation; and when we hear a leading Congregationalist minister say that unity is needed in England because of the growing influence of Rome we must wonder how deep, spiritually, the ecumenical movement has really gone. Similarly, 'Weeks of Prayer for Christian Unity' can easily become—indeed have become, here and there—merely occasions for manifesting party solidarity, whether it is the World's Evangelical Alliance, with their week in January, the Anglo-Catholic societies, which keep the Octave in their own special way, or those Catholics who treat it as simply an occasion for praying for conversions. Prayer at such times which is not directed towards union with God through Jesus Christ, offered in the conviction that he will break down the barriers between Catholic and Protestant if we will let him—such prayer is turned against God, for it asks him to confirm us in our prejudices, to let us remain comfortably where we are, instead of going out in search of those from whom, humanly speaking, we are most divided.

But great numbers of men and women are today praying for unity, who have a complete readiness to do anything, to leave behind, if it becomes clear to them that they must, everything they most cherish, if by such means unity can be found. Humbled and encouraged, every Catholic aware of their example must be forced to seek ever closer dependence on his Master. In response to God, and in response to the prayers of those whom he must say have not yet the full faith, he must also seek to know them and their ways of thought and prayer. They have loved the Bible, and

they have loved our own masters of the spiritual life, too much for us not to be drawn closer to them by a study of their devotional tradition. No priest, and no layman called to this work, should be ignorant of Taylor and Law, Wesley, Baxter and Fox. Catholics should even now be undertaking an evaluation of the whole tradition of those separated from us, in the effort to establish how much of it must remain alive in the English Catholicism of the future. It will be, of course, in its fulness, the Catholicism for which the recusants suffered and the martyrs died; but may it not include also certain positive elements from the traditions of those who, though cut off from us by misunderstanding and prejudice, have yet been faithful to the central truths of Christianity, elements that emphasize parts of our own Catholic heritage which have to some extent become latent and hidden from view? In the years to come, it is increasingly going to be the responsibility of English Catholics to guard and foster every good and true element in the English Christian tradition, whether it is we ourselves or whether it is others who have had to emphasize and express them in the past. When we honour the martyrs, in the Tyburn Walk or at any other time, we must pray with them for those who saw them die and to whom it was not given to follow the same road—pray, too, for those who look on at our celebrations today, that the truth already in their minds will grow, until they can understand the martyrs and honour them with us.

If we do these things, we shall have a right, I think, to ask certain things of non-Catholics. When they raise objections to Catholic political action, we must ask that they examine a little more closely the motives that inspire it. It is sometimes necessary for Catholics to resist the state, for there are times when the state, however well-intentioned, is blind to the claims of Christ. Those Protestant and liberally-minded Christians who are pleased to hear of any attack on the Catholic Church, wherever it comes from, can hardly be said to have thought very deeply about Christ's claims on human society. We may legitimately ask those who are most friendly to us in the Anglican and Free Churches, and who want to do something for unity, to speak up more readily when ill-informed criticisms are heard.

Dislike of Rome's political activity has, of course, a long history; like Dr Micklem, John Wesley could be appreciative of our spiritual writers, while regarding us as potential traitors. We

are faced here with what amounts to a poisoning of the imagination, something which rational argument is powerless to deal with. Rome is something dark and evasive, subtle, insinuating, shunning the light of day, thriving on secrecy and concealment; it is not fanciful to suggest that it will be our novelists, poets and artists, not our theologians or philosophers, who will be best equipped to wipe away that corrosive stain. Catholicism, pushed underground for so long, now works like a repression in the unconscious of the English mind. Unfortunately, some modern Catholic writing is calculated to thicken the gloom and dirt which seems to lie so heavily upon us; nor will the state of many a parish church, either inside or out, serve to purify the Protestant imagination.

While we are realizing how large a measure of Catholic truth lies in the Caroline divines and Wesleyan hymns, it would be good to find that Protestants were equally absorbed in recusant history or the spirituality of Challoner and Ullathorne. It would be pleasant to read Philip Hughes on the positive contribution of the non-conformist tradition, and Norman Sykes or Gordon Rupp in appreciation of the Jesuits. That will come one day. Meanwhile, our hope for unity must lie not in movements or organizations but in the constant effort to express in the life of the Church the fulness of Christ which, by faith, we can discern there.



NOTE: The authors of the two following articles are members of Anglican religious communities. They give a gracious and generous recognition of work done by Catholics towards unity among Christians.—*Editor*.