

We also find passages in this 'gospel' which are referred to by Christian writers as belonging to other collections of 'sayings' current and evidently extremely influential in the very early days of the Church, but now unfortunately lost to us. Notable among these is the *Gospel of the Hebrews*. Among its surviving fragments are several quite fantastic passages, as for instance one in which the archangel Michael turns into the Virgin Mary and bears Christ. But one or two of the sayings seem to reflect a more orthodox, and possibly earlier theology. Now if our 'gospel' can be shown to contain sayings of the same type, or sayings which recur independently in the *Gospel of the Hebrews*, then it will be possible to establish an important link with extra-canonical traditions of our Lord's teaching which reach back to before A.D. 150. This would, of course, bring us to a point almost within the life-time of the youngest of our Lord's disciples, and here the possibility of recovering some of the lost extra-canonical teaching becomes a serious one. It is this sort of possibility which is now being explored, but it is still far too soon to say what conclusions can be drawn, when the subsequent accretions are pared away, and the nucleus of early tradition which this Gospel seems to contain finally stands revealed.

In conclusion may I take this opportunity of refuting most emphatically the false and deplorable suggestions of certain journalists, to the effect that Christians are likely to be disturbed in their beliefs either by the Nag-Hammadi discoveries or by those of Qumran. On the contrary, true Christians welcome them with the utmost joy, as precious sources of truth given by the gracious God of all truth, natural and revealed alike.

A COLLECTION FOR UNITY

Oscar Cullmann's 'Proposal for Realizing Solidarity'

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IN January 1957 Professor Oscar Cullmann was invited to lecture in Zurich on the subject, 'Primitive Christendom and The Ecumenical Problem'.¹ Referring to the collection made by the early Gentile Christians for the Jewish Christians, he proposed that the separated Christians of today make a reciprocal collection at

¹ The lecture is included in *Catholics and Protestants: A Proposal for Realizing Christian Solidarity*. By Oscar Cullmann (Lutterworth Press, 4s. 6d.).

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least once a year, as an expression of brotherhood. In a later article, Professor Cullmann defined the significance and the form of this collection more narrowly, and answered objections. We would like to reproduce his thoughts here and to assess their value.

For over fifty years Catholics and non-Catholics have been praying during the same octave every year for unity in faith. This is a promising sign, and we would not be far wrong if we saw here the basic fact and the supreme form of the movement towards re-union. Further, we note as novelty that theological work, which formerly accentuated differences, is now in many respects leading scholars back together along various directions. Thus, for example, for some twenty or thirty years there has been a lively and fruitful exchange in Biblical studies between Catholic and non-Catholic exegetes. Even in the sphere of systematic theology there have been many changes. Without applauding every attempt to seek a rapprochement in content and method, we must not underestimate the value of this tendency, first to reach agreement on several points, and then to make possible a non-polemical, even friendly conversation on the points which still divide. Cullmann is not content with this. He is not one of those writers who identifies ecumenical activity with discussions between various non-Catholic groups within the World Council of Churches. For him, separation from the Church of Rome is a more serious and more fundamental concern. And in his book, *Catholics and Protestants*, it is with reference to this that he poses the question: 'How can we make that solidarity, which has existed for years amongst theologians, visible and effective amongst the ranks of the faithful?' He calls us from prayer and academic work to activity in Christian brotherhood and love.

Cullmann's proposal arose from his New Testament study; but he is well aware that the New Testament situation is quite different from that which prevails today. In the primitive Church there may have been *tendencies* to schism; but these did not lead to schism, and the tendency itself was regarded as 'incompatible with the will of Christ'. The contemporary separation of Christians cannot possibly, therefore, be understood to express the fullness of life in Christ. From the standpoint of the New Testament no one can resign himself to the contemporary situation. Nor does Cullmann belong to those who trace the problem of disunity back to early Christian times and then assert that the unity willed by Christ did not exist even in the apostles' time.

Concerning the early collection for the Jewish congregation, on this precise point, too, Cullmann stresses that at best there could only be an analogy with a reciprocal collection between Catholics

and Protestants. At that time the Jewish and Gentile Christians were opposed—mainly about circumcision—but today, the divergence is over the way of regarding the essential nature of the Church. The significant thing about the early collection was that it not only supplied material aid to the poor of Jerusalem but, even more, that it acquired, according to St Paul, a deep theological meaning *in respect of the unity* of the Church. It had an ecumenical character.

Because of the difference in the situation 'the collection as I propose we should have it', writes Cullmann, 'must have a more modest aim than that made by the early Church'. Between Catholics and Protestants unity has been lost. The collection cannot express a non-existent unity. Cullmann preserves a commendable respect for unity. His project is not a disguised deception, seeking—as was fashionable in the twenties—to bypass doctrinal difference by the way of 'love'. For him, truth and doctrine stand supreme. Theological work is to proceed alongside the collection.

In spite of lack of unity, Catholics and Protestants do have much in common, and so the collection is intended to express *solidarity*—something less than unity and yet based upon specifically Christian values. *In the absence of unity*, Cullmann means his collection to be a *pointer to unity*. Needy Christians are to benefit, but the aid is to cut across confessional boundaries. This has a double significance: first, joy that love is overflowing; and then, sorrow that it cannot be spent within the unity willed by Christ. And this double symbol must finally count as an expression of the desire for unity.

Who are the beneficiaries to be? Protestants of the Catholic collection, and vice versa. Cullmann never once speaks of a collection between 'separated Churches' and between 'separated Christians'. To approve the collection does not imply an admission of the other side's point of view about the nature of the Church.

The application of the collection is correspondingly limited. It is not for Protestants or Catholics as such, but for 'the poor amongst Protestants or Catholics'. The administration of the collections is not to be directly controlled by Church authorities but must be undertaken with their approval and, if possible, at their recommendation.

Cullmann suggests that the collection be made once a year in connection with the Unity Octave and that the amounts collected should not be published in order to avoid any danger of rivalry.

What is the use of such a limited and materially modest scheme? Cullmann considers the cause of better inter-confessional understanding so important that even the smallest advance is vital. It is not the material consequences of the collection which are important

but its being the symbol of an 'outstretched hand', and 'an open door'.

Christian solidarity, which is the real concern of Cullmann's proposal, should not be limited to a single yearly symbolic expression. It must rule as the constant attitude between the separated brethren. How much inhibiting prejudice would be dispelled if this attitude prevailed. As Cullmann says so rightly, the 'diplomatic method' is totally unsuited to the solving of the ecumenical problem. An act of love based upon the New Testament would embody a quite new spirit.

Cullmann's proposed collection would provide the essentials for creating a relaxed environment and so the conditions for fruitful discussion. It would also win prestige and power for the prayer for unity; but the first and immediate goal is and remains—solidarity, Christian brotherhood in spite of separation.

We are sure that it will not be taken amiss if in conclusion we comment on those passages wherein Cullmann speaks of the ultimate cleavage between Catholics and Protestants.

According to Cullmann, the weight of the controversy lies in ecclesiology. Catholics and Protestants differ over the nature of the Church; more particularly, over the essential element in the unity of the Church. And here too, according to Cullmann, we should look for the real origin of schism. This is enlightening to this extent, that as long as division about unity persists, no re-union is possible. The distinguishing feature of Cullmann's argument is, however, that he connects old difficulties with new points of view. Twice in the book under review he puts the whole problem into telling sentences; both times in the form of a vision of the economy of salvation.

The first aphorism runs thus: 'It is a deep conviction of faith for Protestants that in spite of the Resurrection and Ascension, the eschatological tension between present and future, between the "already fulfilled" and "what is not yet finished", is never released at any point in the human organism of the Church; and that for this reason, there is infallibility in it as little as there is actual sinlessness, although the Body of Christ represents the highest thing there is upon earth.' Cullmann contrasts with this the statement: 'For every believing Catholic it is a fundamental certainty of faith that in his Church that which I call the eschatological tension between present and future, between already fulfilled and not yet finished, has already been partially released, above all in the infallible teaching office; and that according to the will of Christ himself, the unity of the Church is guaranteed only through the Papacy, and, in consequence, can only be realized by the submission

of all Christians—even Protestants—to the Pope.’ Obviously we cannot here go into all the highly complicated questions of the apostolate, the hierarchy, the office of teaching in the Church and its infallibility. We will permit ourselves merely to define briefly our attitude to the formal problem of ‘eschatological tension’.

If Cullmann had written that in his opinion the ‘eschatological tension’ becomes released in the Catholic view, his objection would have been easier to understand. But because he says that ‘for every believing Catholic it is a fundamental certainty of faith that in his Church . . . the eschatological tension between present and future . . . has already been partially released, above all in the infallible teaching office . . .’ we must raise a twofold protest. First of all, we know of no resolution of the scriptural ‘eschatological tension’ finding expression in the Catholic understanding of faith. Every Catholic is convinced—it is a dogma of faith in fact—that the function of all ecclesiastical authority confines itself to the ‘between time’ alone—to the time of waiting for the coming again of Christ; and consequently, that it mirrors the tension of this whole period. Secondly, there can be no real relaxation either of the ‘dialectic’ between past and future.

‘Already fulfilled’ signifies that the between time is past, that Revelation reached its zenith and conclusion with Christ and the apostles; ‘not yet finished’ signifies that truth is only grasped by faith, that vision and the final manifestation of Revelation is still to come. Objectively, Revelation is completed, ‘I have made known all to you . . .’ (John xv, 15). Subjectively, our experience awaits fulfilment, it is ‘in glimpses’ (I Cor. xiii, 9). Between the two, however, there is a place for a normative teaching office in the Church, which makes present the substance of what was once revealed (in the remote past) and so provides hope (in what is still to come) with a solid foundation. If the teaching office were purely directive and, out of deference to human fallibility, never defined precisely the content of the Revelation which is to be believed, this would mean that the Church is not fully in possession of the revealed truth. On Scriptural grounds this is inconceivable to us in face of the sovereignty of Jesus Christ over his Church and the related gift of the Holy Spirit to his people. The true tension between past and future is thus bound up with the doctrine of a sacramentally—i.e. symbolically—filled present. In any case, the tension is all the more acute if the Church not only points back to Scripture but also, in the name of Scripture and following Christ’s commission, announces the promises of Scripture to us, thus preparing us for Christ’s return. Clearly, this has all been expressed far too briefly, but it is meant to

prove, at least in outline, that the Catholic conception of the teaching office in the Church does not at all contradict the perspective of the history of redemption which Cullmann derives from Scripture; and that therefore, the first aphorism, formally regarded, expresses no separating antithesis to our viewpoint.

The second point at which Cullmann speaks of thorough-going divergence between the Catholic and Protestant viewpoints concerns the external, visible centre of the Church. The precise question is, 'Whether, after the disappearance of the primitive Church of Jerusalem, the centre of the Church had to continue to be joined to a particular see which had been designated by Christ in connection with the succession of Peter'. On this Cullmann says that 'Catholics and Protestants are radically separated'. If we understand correctly, Cullmann assumes that the Protestant point of view must presuppose that Peter received from Christ supreme authority to govern in the Church, and that this authority was then transferred by Peter to the aboriginal mother Church of Jerusalem, to be finally extinguished along with the disappearance of this ancient congregation. Contrasted with this we have the Catholic doctrine according to which Peter's authority was transferred to the bishops of Rome.

Because the whole question is so complicated and it is so difficult to define the antithesis accurately, we must be content with a few loose connected suggestions. First, the primitive Jerusalem congregation certainly became a single definite bishopric. We cannot ascertain from Scripture whether Christ made any declaration connected with the succession of Peter, concerning the mode of succession. (The divine right of succession does not presuppose a direct divine designation of the place of succession.) Even for Jerusalem not a single definite passage of Scripture can be adduced. A qualitative superiority over other congregations may not be deduced from sheer *de facto* precedence. Rome is not entirely absent from the New Testament perspective, for the compiler of the Acts of the Apostles means to show clearly in his book how the Gospel of Christ shifted from one centre in Jerusalem to another at Rome. The abrupt ending of the Acts also gives food for thought—especially if taken along with I Clem. 5, 1-6, 2. Finally it must be stated that the succession of Peter is tied to the See of Rome only *de facto* and not *de jure*; that a breaking away from the particular location of Rome in order to preserve the succession is conceivable; that the succession itself, however, rests upon more solid theological considerations, for the Primacy was certainly not founded as a thing apart from the apostolic office of the 'twelve'. But the decisive thing lies in the spiritual emphasis of the words which Jesus addressed to Peter.

How could the apostle have divested himself of the mission which he had received directly from Christ and have handed it over to another apostle or congregation? The transmission to Peter, attested by Mark, Luke and John, carries more weight than the description of certain transitory circumstances which we find in the Acts of the Apostles. Besides all this we would only say that the extinction of Peter's precedence over the Jerusalem congregation appears much more problematic to us than the whole question of the succession of the Primacy. That Cullmann expresses the difficulty in such a way may well show—and we are grateful for it—that the question of the biblical-historical foundation for the continuation of the Petrine office may not be passed over—in spite of basically differing opinions—as something settled in advance.

Although we are not able to see that which divides Catholics and Protestants as Cullmann does, we are grateful to him for his unified presentation of the central problem. All too frequently the ecumenical discussion loses itself in almost endless points of detail. Greater intellectual effort and thoroughness certainly would not harm the friendliness of the discussion. Quite the opposite: courage to face logical consequences, and frankness before every problem, belong together to the scientific expression of that solidarity whose manifestation in active love we so earnestly desire.

ECUMENICAL SURVEY

OUR Holy Father the Pope has himself said, not very long ago, that to start the Church's drive for unity by discussions and debates would achieve nothing. He was evidently thinking of the Conciliar discussions in which, as some at that time hoped, dissident representatives would take part. Since this is his judgment, the Pope has decreed that the coming Council is to be a domestic affair, aimed at setting our own house in order first, since, as His Holiness has also said, the primary and daily task for Catholics in the pursuit of Christian unity is to seek and perfect all things within ourselves that lead to it, and to dispel the things that divide.

We should not, I think, be wrong in interpreting this pregnant saying to mean that truth unites and error divides; and that unless we *diligently* seek the truth we shall not find its fullness. For truth grows towards fullness in us in proportion to our recognition of it wherever it is to be found; *omne verum a quocunque dicatur a Spiritu Sancto est*. When we fail to recognize truth through our lack of diligence, which is indeed a lack of love, our failure creates the error of misunderstanding, and misunderstanding divides. We are putting obstacles to the work of the Holy Spirit who will lead us into all truth.