

*Father Henry St John, O.P., an observer-delegate at the National Faith and Order Conference held in Nottingham University, September 12 to 19, under the auspices of the British Council of Churches, writes:*

To this Conference, the first of its kind, came delegates and visitors drawn from the Christian Churches and communities (the Salvation Army was present in force), of Britain, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Eire; about five hundred and fifty in number, clerical and lay, men and women, Anglican, Free Church and Presbyterian, with a small group of Orthodox from Manchester, London and Glasgow, and a sprinkling of Friends, Pentecostalists and Moravians. Six Roman Catholic observer-delegates and two or three Catholic Press representatives were there, and the former were cordially invited to take part freely in discussion at every level. Dr Oliver Tomkins, Bishop of Bristol, was our kindly and highly skilled Conference chairman.

The general theme of the Conference was 'One Church renewed for Mission', and this was divided for consideration into five sections of a hundred members each, under the subject-headings, 'Faith', 'Worship', 'Membership', 'Ministry', and 'Mission'. Each section was divided into five sub-sections, with appropriate divisions of the section subject for each. Discussion (two or three hours a day) began here. Each sub-section drew up and submitted its contribution to the section report, which was discussed and amended in the larger meeting. The section reports were then presented, discussed and adopted in the plenary session, which, apart from occasional lectures, began its meeting towards the end of the week. The finished report thus resulting will appear in print.

There was daily worship in the Great Hall morning and evening, and an impressive and crowded opening service at Southwell Minster, to which the public were admitted and at which the Archbishop of Canterbury preached. After morning worship each day, Father Paul Verghese gave a bible-study session. This remarkable Indian priest, of the Syrian Orthodox Church, deeply impressed everyone present by his studies of the Church as Christ's Body. They attracted at once by their complete and spontaneous sincerity, their penetrating insight, combining scholarship with depth of contemplation and the wholeness of their Catholicity. The large auditory was visibly touched by all that this good priest had to give.

One's impressions of this Conference must necessarily be given, as it were, from the ground floor; from the point of view of one's own sub-section and the one topic with which it dealt in depth. We attended our section meetings and the plenary sessions; in the latter we heard, criticized and finally approved all five section reports. One sensed constantly, in a general way, the faith and the urgency of the Conference as a whole and its remarkable faithfulness to the ecumenical principle of speaking the truth in charity, but one had intimate, particular and continuous experience of these

things in the twice daily discussions of one's own sub-section. They were telling and radical.

In my own sub-section, numbering twenty, I was the only Catholic. We had the Archbishop of Wales, Principal Harold Roberts, Dr Neville Davidson (ex-Moderator of the Church of Scotland), Professor Barr of Glasgow, the Dean of Salisbury and Father Paul Verghese; representatives also of all the other allegiances, including a Lutheran and one of the Taizé Brethren. Our main subject was the relation of the ministry of Christ the Lord, and particularly the relation of the minister at the Lord's Supper to the High Priesthood of Christ. This of course at once brought in the sacrificial element in that rite. Here it was quite noticeable that most of the churches are divided, on sacramental doctrine, horizontally, within themselves, rather than vertically, one Church from another. There are not a few Protestants, apart from Anglo-Catholics, who come well within distance of St Thomas and Trent regarding the eucharistic sacrifice. There are others who react strongly against it.

There was much divergence over words among us; 'Eucharist', 'Lord's Supper', 'celebrant', 'minister', each of which has its particular overtones. But we managed to hammer out some notable lines of agreement and common ground, once the evocative words had been dealt with, by expulsion, at section and plenary level. What remained was a Catholic tendency expressed with Protestant nomenclature.

One came away from Nottingham exhilarated by the atmosphere of prayer, by the charity combined with plain-speaking and the friendly relations in which it all took place. There is great hope for the future observable in the slow but marked convergence of corporate movement towards unity, especially in the direction of sacramental doctrine.

**NOTE.** *Unity Begins at Home*, the report of the first British Conference on Faith and Order, Nottingham 1964, has just been published by the Student Christian Movement Press (3s. 6d.)

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