

OREMUS PRO INVICEM

A. M. ALLCHIN¹

NOTHING could be plainer than the fact that the problems of Christian disunity do not press very heavily on the great majority of English Christians. For some the whole idea that separated Christians might ever come together again in the unity of the faith seems so impossible and visionary as to be discounted altogether. For others the present situation has come to be thought of as normal, and even perhaps intended by God, and is no longer seen as a cause of sorrow or scandal; either they regard the questions which separate Christians as of no real importance, or else they think of Christians separated from themselves as so far gone in error, as to be no longer in any real sense brethren in Christ. The juxtaposition in one district of Holy Trinity, St Thérèse of Lisieux, the Methodist Church and a Free Gospel Hall has become such an accepted part of the English scene that people have quite forgotten that there is anything abnormal about it. The congregations that worship in the different buildings are hardly aware of one another's existence.

Of course this was not always so. The Church of England since the Reformation has a record in its dealings with 'non-conformists' of every kind which still exercises a baneful influence on English life. As recently as fifty years ago Anglicans and Free Church men were locked in bitter controversy over such questions as disestablishment and the Education Acts. This rivalry has at last given place to some measure of mutual recognition and friendship. Certainly among Church leaders and still more among theologians there has been a considerable amount of genuine co-operation. The decline in active membership which has affected all the members of the Free Church Federal Council, as it has the Church of England, during the last fifty years has tended to bring these bodies together, at least in self-defence; and evidently there is a feeling in some quarters that the Church of England and the English Free Churches will in course of time inevitably drift into some sort of pan-Protestant federation if only to pool resources and economize financially.

¹ A. M. Allchin is an Anglican and Curate of St Mary Abbots, Kensington.

The attitudes which have been suggested so far all have one thing in common; they lack faith in God. They assume either that our divisions are such that nothing can ever alter them, or that they are of such a character as to be overcome simply by changing social conditions. And indeed as long as we look at Christian disunity simply in human terms it must appear to offer us either problems which are totally insoluble, or problems which can be solved by human ingenuity when occasion demands it. It is evident that before we can make any real progress we must transpose the whole question on to a completely different plane. This is not a human problem, facing us with certain difficulties to be thought out. It is a mystery which we have to live through. Christian unity cannot be based on human convenience, or human agreements. It can only be based upon what God has done and is doing in Christ, drawing men together into the visible and organic unity of the Spirit, which is the Church.

It has been necessary to say this much because it must sometimes be difficult for Roman Catholics to believe that those who do not hold so precise a doctrine of the visible unity of the Church as they do, ever advance at all beyond the stage of human convenience, and begin to aspire towards unity in truth. But in fact if there were moments in the early development of the ecumenical movement when purely human optimism played a large part in drawing men together, it has become more and more clear in the last twenty-five years that both work and prayer for Christian unity can only be sustained if they grow out of belief in God, and in his will for his Church. As one writer puts it: 'The ecumenical movement will always remain a mystery to anyone who does not see that repentance is the driving force behind it, that it is a movement for amendment of life.' The separations which exist between those who by faith and baptism have entered into Christ, are a blasphemy against the Lord himself, who prayed that all might be one, and who died and rose again to gather into one, those who were scattered abroad. The unity of the Church is of God's making, not ours. It is his gift which we must receive by faith and repentance.

When we come to ask what exactly non-Roman Catholic Christians in this country do about prayer for Christian unity, we must recognize that prayer and belief go inseparably together, and we shall find that different forms of prayer reflect different

attitudes to the matter in question. It is in a way typical of our present divisions that there are three separate weeks of prayer observed each January in England, all concerned from different points of view with problems of Christian unity. To the present writer it seems that the two older observances express partial insights into the mystery of our divisions, while the most recent offers us the fullest and deepest possibilities. We seem to be able to trace an advance from prayer based partially on human presuppositions and desires, to prayer which is more fully grounded and rooted in the will and the prayer of Christ.

The oldest of the three, and perhaps still the most widely observed, is the Universal Week of Prayer, organized by the World Evangelical Alliance, a body which was founded in 1846. The object of the week is 'to encircle the world with prayer at the beginning of each new year' and 'to bring together Christians of all denominations who hold the reformed and evangelical faith', and it calls for united prayer for the evangelization of the world. It must be pointed out that the week is not devoted primarily to the question of Christian unity, nor are its aims expressed in a way which is acceptable to those who believe that God wills the visible unity of his Church. The members of the Evangelical Alliance believe themselves united already in the only unity which is necessary, that of the true and invisible Church. The existing external divisions of Christians are accepted, and the Alliance makes no attempt to overcome them; what it does, is to help evangelical Christians to realize their inner unity of purpose.

It is obvious that the convictions of those who support this week, that is to say a large number of evangelical Anglicans and Free Church men, differ widely from the beliefs of all those who look for the visible unity of the Church, whether like the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox they hold that that visible organic unity has not been broken, or whether like the majority of supporters of the World Council of Churches they believe that the visible unity of the Church, though broken or at least impaired, is willed by God. But we must surely believe that God can and does accept serious and earnest prayer despite the inadequacies of those who make it. How could any of us pray, if this were not so? It is, too, a universal Christian experience that God is wont to give more than we can ever ask or think, and it certainly seems in this case that he has received the great volume of prayer made in

the last century with these intentions, and granted results which would sometimes have surprised those who prayed. The practical and missionary co-operation brought about among evangelical Christians by bodies like the W.E.A. and the Y.M.C.A. was without doubt one of the great influences in preparing the way for the work of the ecumenical movement. John Mott, one of the most influential founders of the World Council of Churches, was the spiritual son of Moody, the Billy Graham of the nineteenth century. It is humanly speaking a great paradox that a movement which is passionately concerned for theological deepening, for the organic unity of the Church, for the intellectual renewal of Christendom, should in part have sprung from the evangelistic preaching of a man whose one overriding concern was the love of God and the conversion of souls; though in the economy of the Holy Spirit these things are perhaps not so strange and could be paralleled from earlier periods of Christian history.

To move to the second of the three weeks of prayer observed in England, is to pass from one extreme of the non-Roman Catholic ecclesiastical spectrum to the other. The Church Unity Octave founded in 1908 by two Anglican clergymen, one of whom later became a Roman Catholic and the founder of the Society of the Atonement, is observed between January 18th and 25th. The basis of this Octave of prayer is explicitly for reunion under the jurisdiction of the See of Peter, and for this reason its appeal even among Anglo-Catholics has always been limited to those who, while accepting all the teaching of the contemporary Roman Catholic Church, still remain in communion with Canterbury. The presuppositions which lie behind this observance must seem strange alike to Roman Catholics and Protestants, but in a sense they represent, though in an extreme and exaggerated form, a point of view common to all the followers of the Oxford Movement. From the days of the Tracts themselves until the present, prayer for unity has always been a first concern among Anglo-Catholics. Their whole position, claiming on the one hand an essential unity with Rome and Constantinople, aware on the other of the isolation of the English Church, has always forced upon them the scandal of disunity and for over a century prayer for the unity of the Church has been made without ceasing, among them. It is impossible to measure and weigh prayer and spiritual sacrifice, but it is becoming steadily more

evident how great has been the effect of the Anglo-Catholic movement on the Church of England as a whole, in the deepening of the spiritual life, in the renewal of the Religious Communities, in a more acute sense of the demands of Christian unity. And here it must be remarked that the special devotion to prayer for unity which has been present for over a century in the Anglican Religious Communities, has become even more marked during the last thirty years, and especially among the contemplatives.

The restrictions of outlook marking the Church Unity Octave are evident, for it appeals only to those who can already accept the fullness of the Papal claims. And in some measure it reflects an attitude which has been not uncommon among Anglo-Catholics, whether 'papalist' or not, an attitude which tends to turn its back upon Protestantism and attempts to disclaim any responsibility for it, or kinship with it. Such an attitude has never been universal, and it is again paradoxical that the World Council of Churches, which can on one side trace back its ancestry to Moody, can on the other look back with gratitude to Keble and Pusey. For it is through the influence of the Oxford Movement that the Church of England has been able to recover something of its understanding of the sacraments, of tradition, and of the spiritual life; and it is these things which have made it possible for Anglicanism to play so crucial a part in the whole movement towards Christian unity.

But the Church Unity Octave is not now widely observed, for it has, for the most part, been swallowed up by another observance, kept at the same time, but animated by a vision at once deeper and more universal. It is from the Roman Catholic Church that we who are not Roman Catholics have learnt the true secret of prayer for Christian unity. It is from those Roman Catholic scholars who have given such careful and sympathetic attention to the thought and implications of the ecumenical movement that we who are caught up in it have received some of our deepest insights into its nature. Above all, it is from the vision and holiness of a simple French priest, the Abbé Paul Couturier, that we have received the ideas which underlie the Universal Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

This is not the place to expound the spirituality of the Abbé, already familiar to readers of this journal. It is enough to recall the formula which he discovered, that we must pray that unity may

come as Christ wills, and in the way and at the time in which he wills it, and to remember his insistence that we must all pray for the sanctification of our separated brethren, so that all may draw nearer to their common Lord and in so doing nearer to one another. Perhaps deepest of all is the insight that all our prayer must be made 'in the prayer of Christ', that we must allow Christ to pray in us, and that as we do so, we shall discover that imperfect measure of unity which is already given us. I think perhaps that the profound impact which the Abbé has made both in his lifetime and since on Christians of other communions than his own has not yet been fully recognized by Roman Catholics in this country, and that where it has been recognized his influence has sometimes been mistrusted. It has been feared either that the Abbé was disingenuous, or else that he has been misunderstood. I certainly do not claim that the nuances of his thought have always been fully appreciated, but one of the things which impressed people most, and which made him so immediately trustworthy, was his absolute loyalty to the teaching and magisterium of his own Church. It was the conjunction of universal charity and understanding with absolute fidelity to truth, the two fused together at a white heat of devotion to God, which astonished and rejoiced his separated brethren.

For some years the Week of Prayer has been organized in England by a Council made up of the Superiors of the Anglican men's Communities, and more recently a consultative Conference has been formed which brings together Anglican, Nonconformist and Roman Catholic representatives to pool information and to arrange for a co-ordinated observance of the Week. The organization of the week continues to be animated by the ideals of the Abbé, and the basis of prayer remains the same, but a greater variety of literature is being brought out appealing to a larger number of people. The co-operation of the British Council of Churches and the Conference of Missionary Societies ensures a wide distribution of its leaflets and prayer-cards which are produced in very large numbers.

Throughout the country the observance of the Week of Prayer is growing, not only in centres like London and the university towns, but also in quite small country towns, as for instance Spalding. The arrangements vary from place to place, but in general there is a large public meeting at which Roman Catholic,

Free Church, Anglican and sometimes Eastern Orthodox speakers explain the meaning of prayer for unity, and there are also a number of services in churches and chapels, at which prayer for unity is made. In a number of universities the Week is being very fully observed with meetings for prayer on each day of the week. In a growing number of Anglican churches, the daily intentions of the Week will be remembered each day at the altar, as the priest prays 'that all those who do confess thy holy Name, may agree in the truth of thy holy word, and live in unity and godly love'.

But of course it is not only during January that we pray for Christian unity. The quotation just made reminds us that prayer for unity is made at every celebration of the Holy Communion according to the Book of Common Prayer, as it is at every Mass celebrated according to the Roman rite. How far, at the parochial level, much will be done to deepen and encourage this prayer will depend to a large extent on the local clergy and ministers. In some districts very much has been done, in others very little. But who save God can judge where true prayer is made? In many ways these activities are easier to arrange on an extra-parochial basis, as in such remarkable events as the pilgrimages of unity made to Assisi and Rome, and the Anglican-Orthodox-Presbyterian pilgrimage to Iona. This last enterprise was a predominantly student venture, and as has been already mentioned it is at Universities that some of the most active groups are to be found. In Oxford for instance there has been since the war at least one group with a continuous tradition of prayer and sacrifice for Christian unity. Oxford Cathedral too has been a centre of prayer for unity, mainly through the activity of one person who has kept the hours of 12 to 3 daily in prayer for unity there during the last three years. This particular work of prayer is no longer continuing in Oxford, but it has already drawn together extremely diverse groups of Christians, encouraged the use of other Anglican Cathedrals as centres of prayer for unity, and revealed the existence of a number of quiet and unexpected centres of prayer. Prayer is by its very nature hidden, and it is given to God alone to know all that is done. What can be published, and what may be most helpful of all in conveying the spirit in which prayer is made, are certain of the texts and prayers much used among Anglicans and Free Church men. I have refrained purposely

from giving prayers which will already be familiar to those who read this journal.

'O God of peace, who through thy Son Jesus Christ didst set forth one faith for the salvation of mankind: Send thy grace and heavenly blessing upon all Christian people who are striving to draw nearer to thee and to each other, in the unity of the Spirit and in the bond of peace. Give us penitence for our divisions, wisdom to know thy truth, courage to do thy will, love which shall break down the barriers of prejudice and pride, and an unswerving loyalty to thy Holy Name. Unite us all in thee as thou, O Father, with thy Son and Holy Spirit, art one God, world without end.'

'Let us pray with our Lord the prayer he prayed on the night before he died on the Cross.

Sanctify us in thy truth—unite us not in expediency or compromise, but in truth, God's truth, not human ingenuity.

Keep us in thy Name—true to the revelation of thyself in Jesus Christ.

Keep us from the evil one—who loves to divide, who is so clever at disguising our partisanship.

Make us one—with the unity within thine own Being, a deep mysterious unity surpassing anything we know.

That the world may believe—lest the conversion of the world and the salvation of men be hindered and delayed, *Make us one.*

'Vouchsafe we beseech thee, Almighty God, to grant to the whole Christian people unity, peace and true concord, both visible and invisible.'

And finally some words of Archbishop William Temple, from his very well-known commentary on St John's Gospel:

'The way to the union of Christendom does not lie through committee rooms. . . . It lies through personal union with the Lord so deep and real as to be comparable with his union with the Father. . . . *And the glory which thou hast given to me I have given to them. . . .* The purposes and consequences of that gift of glory is that the unity of the Godhead may be reproduced in them—in us—that they may be one as we are one. The possibility of this, which seems so unattainable, is grounded in the position and work of Christ as the perfect Mediator—I in them and thou in me . . . and this unity is, after all, the fulfilment of their own destiny: *that they may be perfected into one.* That fellowship of

love is the end for which we were created, and for which our nature as God fashioned it is designed.'

We began from the evident indifference of most of our fellow countrymen to the question of Christian unity, and from what may be called 'the newspapers' point of view', either that Christian unity is impossible, or else that it is something easily achieved, once the dogmas have been cleared out of the way. We have arrived, as reflection on this subject in the end must, at the seventeenth chapter of St John. We have passed from schemes of prayer for Christian unity based on our ideas of how it should be brought about, to the humble petition that our Lord in his immeasurable goodness will deign to unite our feeble requests to his one great high priestly prayer. We have thought to discern, in this latter way, a method by which not only Anglicans and Free Churchmen, but rather all who profess and call themselves Christians may, without disloyalty to him who is the truth, be drawn more fully into the unity for which the holy and undivided Trinity has made us.



MAY WE PRAY FOR THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH?¹

C. J. DUMONT, O.P.

THE most recent Papal documents dealing with the problem of Christian unity are very careful to remind us of what the Catholic doctrine on the subject of the Church and its unity is. The fear is expressed in them, in several places, lest an anxiety to promote Christian unity, commendable doubtless but not sufficiently clear-sighted, should lead in the minds of some to a certain playing down of the essential teaching of the Church in this matter. We have in mind some expressions now current that these documents quite evidently avoid for fear that their use might lead to a dangerous confusion in the minds of their readers. It will be useful, therefore, with a view to securing complete fidelity to the full meaning of these documents, to examine here one of these expressions, in order to settle accurately, with exact theological terminology, in what sense and context

¹ A translation of Chapter I, Part II, of *Les Voies de l'Unité Chrétienne*. Cerf 1954.