

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

DEAR FATHER EDITOR,

May I, without impertinence, thank you heartily for your admirable and informative *Christian Unity* number?

But it is somewhat disturbing to find disseminated in your pages the idea that the Abbé Couturier inaugurated or inspired 'another observance' distinct from, and almost in opposition to, the already existing Church Unity Octave. (Mr Allchin's belief that the latter 'is not now widely observed' surely calls for correction?) I have not been able to discover the evidence on which this allegation—which is also to be found in literature supplied by the English promoters of the Week of Prayer—is based. But I am bound to think that it may, doubtless unintentionally, do a grave injustice to the memory of the good abbé, and is likely to prove highly injurious to the cause of unprejudiced and united prayer for which he laboured.

His 'absolute loyalty to the teaching and magisterium of his own Church' is recognized. This means that it was for him a matter of faith that the reunion of Christians was something that could be no merely human enterprise, but could only be the work of God and his Christ in his Church, and therefore to be sought from God in prayer. It was also a matter of faith that God and his Christ had already given the Petrine primacy and the Chair of unity, even though that gift was not by all received. But—and this was his great and unique contribution—he pointed out that non-acceptance of the primacy should be no obstacle to Christians to beseech 'in Christ' the unity which God alone could give, and that it should be sought by all from the Source and the Power from which alone it could come. This could surely not be—in his mind or in ours—to 'swallow up' the Church Unity Octave, with its supposed 'restrictions of outlook', in 'another observance . . . animated by a vision at once deeper and more universal'? On the contrary, it was to pursue the very aims of the Octave and to extend *its* observance, while recognizing the restrictions in explicitness which it must inevitably have for non-Catholics if they were to join in it with sincerity and open-mindedness. And, since they were at least no less involved in the divisions of Christendom than the Catholics and Papalists to

whom the Octave was already familiar, he believed it was urgent that they should do so. He urged upon us all (so far as I can discover) not a different vision from that of the Octave, but to pray in accordance with the vision that had been granted us in our several traditions: a vision which, though less detailed, should be basically identical with that which animates the Octave: namely, the accomplishment of the Lord's will in the Lord's way.

It seems hardly credible that the abbé should have wished this fragmentation of our observances for unity itself into different 'Octaves' and 'Weeks' with different and mutually exclusive aims. Had he in fact wished to found a different observance, he would hardly have chosen the identical dates, and 'mistrust' of his influence might well be justified. While we welcome all the efforts which our Anglican and Free Church brethren are making to promote the 'Week' or 'Octave' (it matters little which it is called) for their own people in their own way, we should ask them to recognize that, to the extent that they are presenting it as something essentially different from the Church Unity Octave, they may, however unintentionally, foster that very spirit of schism which it is its purpose to overcome. For while we recognize that it is impossible for them to pray sincerely for all the explicit 'intentions' of the Octave approved by the Holy See, we may ask them to recognize that our participation in a distinct Week of Prayer which positively excludes them is no less impossible. It must be for us the very negation of 'prayer in Christ' for the accomplishment of his will alone. Such a lamentable outcome—which, I fear, is inevitable if not soon halted—would surely be a veritable frustration of the dearest intentions and earnest desires of the Abbé Couturier.

Yours, etc.

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