

BLACKFRIARS

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CHRISTIANS AT ONE.

'In the general Body I am, I hope, in oneness of charity with all mine even Christians. For in this oneness standeth the life of all mankind that shall be saved.' The increased longing for this ideal, here given in the words of Mother Julian of Norwich, provides us today with the most encouraging omen for the future. If we look to the plans for reconstruction, for social order, for democracy and religion, for comfort, leisure and peace, we are shown a gloomy picture of declining civilization, of a steady progress to slavery and sterility. But here in the oneness, or rather in the dynamic wish for oneness, among Christians we are shown a glimpse of a new light, of the new life which will rise from the disintegrating corpse of the machine age. Everywhere prayers are offered that the followers of Christ may be at one. The first month of the year has become the special season for this prayer, beginning at Rome with the celebration of the Epiphany Octave and rising to a climax with the Church Unity Octave and the Week of Prayer all over the world, when the January feasts of Peter and of Paul are linked by this incessant prayer, 'that they may be one.' We, therefore, welcome

in this issue an account of the Week of Prayer, which runs parallel to the Unity Octave, from an Anglican, The Reverend H. R. T. Brandreth. This is one of the many lights that signal the message of hope, if not for this new year of 1945, at least for a near and a new future. As the oppressive corruption weighs men down in despair so proportionately will the flame of unity spring higher to praise the Lord God through Christ his Son. The rising will not be cataclysmic; it will not lift the world of 1945 out of the morass; but it will come gradually to renew the face of the earth.

The Catholic will naturally be driven by this desire for oneness to convince his neighbours that it is to be found in the One Catholic Church whose earthly centre is Rome, but whose unity embraces the globe. As evil increases the Catholic will make his own Langland's words :

Come into the unity of Holy Church and hold yourselves within it . .
 And let us cry to all the commune that they come into unity
 And abide there and do battle against Belial's children,

But the Catholic must carefully discern the nature of his eagerness for unity. There is a type of proselytiser who regards the Church as the 'side' for which he is playing. His task is to catch as many members of the other side as he can, to bring victory and triumph to the Church of his election. He will boast of the number of converts as though they were so much fuel gathered to keep the Church at high pressure. Every Catholic should, of course, have a profound reverence and devotion for the Church even as a social organisation in the world, in all its external manifestations. But if he identifies himself with this organisation in such a way as to regard it as a thing apart, he is probably making an abstraction which becomes an extension of himself. He falls into the error of pharisaic idealism and identifies 'the cause' with himself and his own interests. The making of converts then becomes a point of honour; it is up to him to exhibit his scalps to show his own worth. Such is the false proselytism of the man-eater.

There is another power which impels the good Catholic to draw men into unity, to make their submission to Rome. In place of the abstract ideal which becomes a 'side' he sees persons. He sees first the Person of Christ, and Christ in his Church bringing with him all good things from the heavenly Father. He loves that Person, he loves the Church with all her spiritual gifts. He sees, too, and loves uncounted numbers of persons who lack this supreme possession. He sees how the needs of such men can be supplied, their wounds healed, by this one thing alone; he sees that the blind

searching of these persons is groping only for the Church. Who could stand by indifferently, saying they might take it or leave it, that it was there if they wanted it, but was not to be thrust upon them? The apostle longs with all his powers to make converts—for the converts' sake. Where there is only one side there is no opposition; here there is merely emptiness over against the fullness of joy. This zeal for the salvation of those who sit in darkness has been the motive power in all true evangelisation, from the supreme work of the Apostle of our souls, down through the world-wide mission of his twelve to the least act of kindness a Catholic shows to a non-Catholic. It springs from love of persons, not from attachment to personal ideals.

The scalp-hunting activities of some Catholics are naturally blamed by those whose allegiance lies elsewhere. If these however are living in personal relationship with Christ and with Christians they will not blame true apostolic zeal, even though they consider it misguided. A Catholic finds himself impelled by Christian charity to draw the non-Catholic into the Church. His least act of kindness will in fact have the general apostolic motive behind it. It is not a scheming double-dealing to entertain a remote intention of converting people to the Faith through all his prayers and good works. If the good works spring from a genuine love of the persons he assists, the desire for communion is part of that love. It may be hard for the non-Catholic to bear, but it should not be hard to understand. It is a necessary consequence of division among honest and devoted Christians.

The Catholic, however, must take care that his zeal does not carry him into a false conception of oneness. The desire for unity will easily lead to a desire for uniformity; whereas the Catholic Church has never demanded an act of uniformity from her children. The union is a universal one, a catholic one. It embraces every form of integral Christianity, all temperaments and moods, all races and nations, all that is good in local custom and character. A Catholic, then, does not desire to see the particular form of Catholicism in which he lives imposed on all and sundry without modification. He is as ready to admit the Eastern form of Catholicity as the Western; he will not be surprised to find Chinese Catholics differing in many customs from his own. The Creed remains unaltered; but it has to be translated into the Chinese tongue. At the same time we should not be too anxious to learn Chinese in order to understand the Creed we already know in our own language, still less should we seek in the pagan customs and creeds of China the living streams of true Catholicism when we live at the source,

We can in fact discern three trends in the almost instinctive desire for uniformity as distinct from unity. There are first of all these Catholics who wish to make every individual, from the Australasian pigmy to the Archbishop of Canterbury, accept an Italianate form of Roman Catholicism—tin flowers, flutey tenors and all. They tend to confuse Roman Catholicism with the way in which Catholicism happens to be lived and practised in Rome. The Australasian pigmy will not necessarily be able to appreciate Gounod's *Ave Maria*—fiddle + harmonium—as a background to the Nuptial Mass, such as may be experienced in almost any church in Rome. His ancient nuptial ceremonies will have to be related to the essentials of the Roman Catholic sacrament of holy matrimony if he is to become an Australasian Catholic.

On the other hand there are many who fall so much in love with forms of Catholicism not their own that they seem to make these the standard of their uniformity. A modern passion for things Eastern in religious thought and practice has much of this spirit. It is true, as we are often reminded, that there is much to be learnt from Oriental Catholicism; but the fact remains that this differs from the Western Catholicism insofar as it has grown up among the Eastern peoples. The Western form is our way, suited to our history and temperament. Diabolical though our Western Activism may be, we cannot as a type praise God by alternatively carrying out an infinitely elaborate and exuberant liturgy and sitting motionless with our eyes fixed on a point. There is room for a Western and practical form of Christianity, and on the whole we shall profit more by trying to comprehend its meaning more fully, than by running away from it in favour of some other.

The third trend to uniformity is perhaps the commonest and the most dangerous. This seeks to remove all mystery from the dogma of the One Universal Church of Christ by filling it full to the brim with every human being who happens to possess an element of goodness in his will. This universal optimism refuses to face the evil of divided Christendom. Misunderstanding Mother Julian, it says that all manner of things shall be, or rather are, well for all, no matter how divided in creed and religious practice. This trend is well illustrated by a recent 'mystical' book¹ by an Anglican of deep and stirring perception. There is much to commend the book for its refreshing recognition of the silence of the work of God, its telling criticism of activism, and its praiseworthy purpose of seeking

¹ *Those Things which Cannot Be Shaken*, by Maisie Spens, with Forewords by Canon Eric Abbott and E. I. Watkin. (Hodder and Stoughton, 7s. 6d.).

oneness among the fundamentals of Christian life. To this end the work is provided with two forewords, one by an Anglican Canon, the other by a Catholic philosopher. In spite of all the admirable points in the book, it remains true that the forewords and the text create the impression of an inner uniformity of spirit among all those of good will, a uniformity which transcends any differences of creed, allegiance or worship. The authoress insists on a oneness in communion of praise in the Mystical Body which is 'a body of Christians of all denominations agreed to praise and pray in union . . . each praying in his own church and in its way—so that no difficulties could arise on the thorny matter of exterior *communicatio in sacris*.' The Catholic philosopher should have here been on his guard; but he encourages this smashing of the mystery of the Body. 'Below our divisions,' he says, 'there exists already a communion of praise, a community of souls sharing the praise of the Praying Christ, the Total Christ Head and members.' He should have taken care how he expressed these half truths; but he goes on to say that a Christianity experienced and thus viewed from within is the only guarantee of the survival of doctrines which otherwise appear empty formulas. 'Such an interior and therefore organic vision of Christian truth is presented in these chapters.' And he is reminded constantly of Mother Julian.

The great theme of Mother Julian's *Revelations* lies in the contrast between her optimistic vision of the all-embracing nature of God's love and her unwavering fidelity to the teaching Church, which *is* Christ and which insists that God is wroth with sinners, that sin and hell are terrible realities. Her anguish in this paradox is extreme, but it only serves to thrust her deeper and deeper into the mystery, which she recognises precisely as a mystery. She does not remove the mystery or try to show some backstair emergency exit where one may escape the terrors of this 'exterior *communicatio in sacris*,' where there might be found in all the warring sects a single *Sacrum* and a single *communicatio*. Her optimism is based on the Unity, the Uniqueness of God, not on the uniformity of men of 'good will.' These uniformists, on the contrary, would finally remove the mystery of the Church and her unity by saying that in the all-important order of the spirit there extends a great oneness of men far beyond the confines of any single 'exterior' Church.

Union in the Praying Christ is indeed demanded, but the Prayer of Christ is never separate from his Agony. Prayer must always be wedded to Penance. Certainly the authoress of this book does insist with great effect on the praying of Christ's Agony as well as of his Transfiguration, and she says many necessary and profound

things about the Gethsemane and Calvary of our own lives. But she has failed to see that the At-one-ing of all Christians, for which she so genuinely yearns, depends upon the most heart-piercing at-onement, the bitterest of penance. For men do not fall into oneness quite naturally, as by some spiritual magnetism. A great act of conformity, rather than an unconscious emergence of uniformity, requires harsh suffering as the subject is moulded into shape by authority, as he submits to the combined action of the exterior and interior elements of religion. Even in simple human relations it is not easy to be at one; they demand frequent sacrifices lest temperaments, prejudices and idiosyncrasies set people at variance. The process of 'oneing' implies atonement. ROMA is the necessary counterpart of AMOR.

This principle applies to all three categories of uniformists. Those who think of the Praying Christ as indifferent to methods of doctrine, devotion and discipline, must learn to atone for the divisions of Christendom by accepting the *mystery* of the 'external' teaching Church with her 'external' sacraments, in the same way as Mother Julian atoned in her unshaken faith. Those who wish to spread an Oriental form of Catholicism over the West must sacrifice first of all their exotic idealism; in seeking to distinguish between essentials and non-essentials, they must be ready to accept their own state and condition in a generous act of submission to the will of God in the present moment and in the immediate circumstances. Finally, the Catholics who so easily assume an air of self-complacent omniscience regarding matters of religion, must become the most humble penitents of all, atoning for their own obtuseness in not recognising the importance, the worth, the fraternal challenge of their 'separated brethren.' It is true that many Catholics appear to be without sympathy for, or understanding of, those outside the Church. The devil of self-satisfaction can only be cast out by prayer to which penance is an essential counterpart. For all, the basic penance is submission to authority, the acceptance of a norm other than self. People are unwilling to submit to Rome partly because they are unwilling to atone, to do penance.

It is useless for them to repeat a few ejaculations during the Unity Octave or the Week of Prayer unless they are ready to follow this up with a Lent which will bring them into conformity with the broken body of Christ on the Cross. The breaking of their own bodies will alone restore wholeness to the Mystical Body of Christ—'oneing' by atonement.

THE EDITOR.