

Together

40p

in

Christ



Vol 4 No 14 April 1986

MAIN CONTENTS

Page	1	Editorial	
	2	A Sermon from Stones	Sidney M Ratcliff
	5	Introducing Orthodoxy	David Carter
	10	The Bishops' Response to BEM	
	12	Fire From Heaven	Margaret Harvey
	15	Lyon '85 . . . Flashlights	Sr Barbara Noreen CSMV

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We thank all our contributors for the richness of the material they have produced for us, also our subscribers for constant support and prayers.

YOUR SUBSCRIPTION ALWAYS WELCOME!

OFFICERS OF THE AREA ECUMENICAL COMMISSION

The Rt Rev. C. J. Henderson, Very Rev. Canon W. Clements

Sister Rosemary, (Secretary)

Mr. S.M. Ratcliff,

NEWS :

The S E Area Commission would like to record deep gratitude to Sister Catherine who has been its zealous, efficient and delightful secretary for several years.

Sister Catherine who is now studying for final exams, will be moving from the Convent at Orpington later this year to take up new duties.

She has contributed several articles to Together in Christ for which we are most grateful.

Sister hopes to be able to continue in ecumenical work in some way in the future. We pray for God's blessing on her and on all her work.

We look forward to welcoming Sister Rosemary O'Shea who has been elected as the Commission's new secretary.

UNLESS YOU BECOME LIKE LITTLE CHILDREN

"Jot down your ideas about God" was the request made to a group of young people. One young teenager wrote:

Holy. Not human. Father of Jesus. Lives in heaven and everywhere else. He or she is worshipped. He or she cannot be proved to be true.

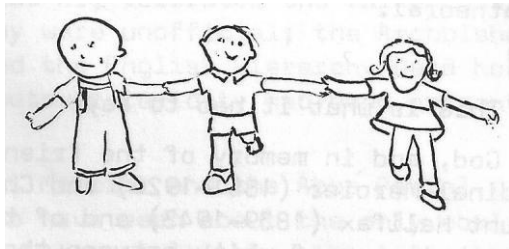
The response of a seven year old girl was:

Wonderful. Good. Kind. Loving. Gentle. Marvolus. Peacemaker.

The Lent 86 course is giving an opportunity to a million people to think more deeply about God, about why Jesus came, and about the mission and nature of the Church. The answers on questionnaires should be the personal views of people before any group discussion. Following the interaction of minds expressing diverse views in groups, of listening to speakers on radio or cassette, or to those who phone in, there may be new insights gained and influences operating which affect the original views.

It all shows the need for continued and fervent prayer. We pray in the "Not Strangers but Pilgrims" prayer that the Holy Spirit may guide us in mission and service to the world. We pray that He will lead us into a closer unity so that the mission may be more effectively carried out, so that the world may believe.

Yet in all the study and discussion, we need to have the basic unity in approaching God as little children, in deep humility and trust, for He is to us indeed, a loving, marvolus, peace-making Father and only by becoming more truly His children can we grow in His family likeness



and His family unity.

MAY THE EASTER JOY, PEACE AND POWER OF THE RISEN
LORD JESUS BE WITH YOU ALL
A SERMON FROM STONES



History is enshrined in the cathedrals of Europe, and the older the building, the more of history it manifests. But the stories that the buildings, appointments, adornments, furnishings, etc. usually tell are of a long by-gone age.

Now York Minster is very old. I last visited York over 40 years ago, and much has happened to its Minster during those four decades, including extensive work on the foundations yielding discoveries which took its stories back to the Anglo-Saxon and even the Roman age.

But what I want to relate to you now is not ancient or medieval history but a modern story which the Minster put before me on my recent visit.

The pamphlet *A Walk Round York Minster* is a must for anyone wanting to roam around under their own steam, and I took advantage of it. Under the heading "The east end of the Minster", among the items listed is: 9: The High Altar. A memorial to the 2nd Viscount Halifax.

Now, why did that name ring a bell? The next item reminded me:

10: A tablet commemorating conversations between Roman Catholics and Anglicans on Church Unity.

That was it; I remembered that there was a Lord Halifax involved in an attempt to persuade Rome to accept the validity of Anglican Orders. The outcome of this attempt was, however, the Bull *Apostolicae Curae* of Leo XIII, issued in 1896. It seemed to me that conversations which resulted in a Papal judgement that Anglican Orders were completely null and void were not all that conducive to the erection of a commemorative plaque in an Anglican Cathedral. No 10 I had to see! And see it I did. This is what it had to say:

"In thanksgiving to God, and in memory of the friendship of Desire Joseph, Cardinal Mercier (1851-1926) and Charles Lindley, 2nd Viscount Halifax (1839-1943) and of those who worked with them in the cause of unity between the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches in the Malines Conversations 1921—26. This plaque was presented to York Minster by the Archdeacon of Malines, Brussels in 1969.

I had always considered myself to be a reasonably well-informed Roman Catholic, but these "Malines Conversations" were new to me. It seemed as though the Viscount had, at the ripe age of 82 had another go 30 years after

his first disappointment over the Anglican Orders issue, and as there had been no review of the earlier verdict, it looked as though he had received yet another body blow.

My ecumenical interest was aroused. Why had I not heard of these Malines Conversations?

When I got home I tried to pursue my search for enlightenment, but none of any books of reference I had mentioned them. Even my CTS pamphlets (usually a very rewarding source of information) were silent on the subject. So it was off to the library and the Catholic Encyclopaedia. (Shortly afterwards I was referred to *One In Christ 1984-2*, and to this publication and to the article Malines Conversations in the Catholic Encyclopaedia that I owe all that I know about the Conversations and about Charles Lindley Wood, 2nd Viscount Halifax).

It seems that there was a series of 5 unofficial discussions between Anglicans and Roman Catholics at Malines, Belgium, between December 1921 and October 1926. The delegations were led by Viscount Halifax and Cardinal Mercier respectively.

Before the Anglican Orders verdict, Halifax had struck up a deep friendship with the Abbé Portal, a very ecumenically minded French priest, and of the inception of the Conversations the Encyclopaedia says: "The moving spirits were Halifax and Portal, encouraged by a declaration of the 6th Lambeth Conference that the Anglican Bishops were prepared, in return for the recognition of their ministries, to accept from other churches a form of commission or recognition. Halifax approached Mercier who agreed to the talks."

The Pope (Pius XI) tolerated the talks initially, although he made it clear that they were unofficial; the Archbishop of Canterbury was less than keen and the English Hierarchy were hostile, which hostility in turn cooled whatever tepidity had been present in Rome's first reaction.

When Cardinal Mercier and the Abbé Portal died in 1926, Viscount Halifax appears to have been about the only soul with any enthusiasm for the project. Not surprisingly, the talks ended then.

In an encyclical *Mortalium Animos* issued in 1928, the Pope did not mention the Malines Conversations, but he placed restrictions on Catholic participation in such matters, with the explanation:

"It is clear, Venerable Brothers, why this Apostolic See has never permitted its subjects to take part in the congress of non-Catholics. The union of Christians cannot be fostered otherwise than by promoting the return of the dissidents to the one true Church of Christ, which in the past, they so unfortunately abandoned...."

It is no wonder, therefore, why, so far as I can see, that Roman Catholic historians have treated the Whole affair as a non-event.

In the light of what is happening today, however, one can see the fruits of the project at Malines, coupled with other contributory factors, burgeoning ecumenism is not a forbidden exercise, but a Christian obligation; Vatican II, ARCIC I, ARCIC II, Lima with its BEM would have rejoiced the hearts of the participants in the Malines

Conversations. But that would have been prophetic - the plaque in the Cathedral is commemorative and I had missed the whole point of its story.

It commemorates a friendship, a friendship between a Roman Catholic cardinal from Belgium and an Anglican aristocrat from Yorkshire. A friendship between two men who shared with their One Lord a vision - a vision of Church unity and who laboured hard against impossible odds to make the vision a reality.

That friendship was the inspiration for the special relationship which now exists between the "particular" church at York and that at Malines, a sort of "twinning" arrangement in which each shares some part of the life of the other.

There was another story the Minster wanted to tell me, and I nearly missed it. In my eagerness to see exhibit 10, I did not think much about No 9. After all, a high altar in a major cathedral is no mean memorial. It is fitting, however, for a man whose piety and charity impressed, among many others, his king (Edward VII); whose sanctity earned him a commemorative day in the calendar of the Archdiocese of York (January 19, the anniversary of his death in 1934) and whose whole life could prompt one of his employees of long standing to say of his rich master:

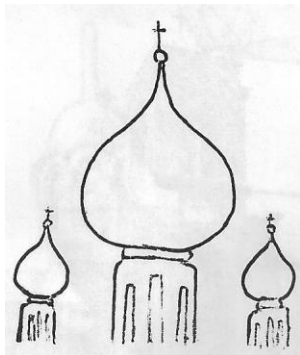
"Talk about a camel going through the eye of a needle, the second Viscount could have ridden the camel through and still not touched the sides."

But such a one deserves a whole feature to himself.

Sidney M Ratcliff

INTRODUCING ORTHODOXY

It is quite possible that the closing years of this century will see the appearance of a major new force on the British ecumenical scene, the Orthodox churches.



Already there are reputed to be about 100,000 Orthodox in this country, the majority of whom belong to the Greek jurisdiction under Archbishop Methodios, though there are significant Russian and Serbian communities, the latter under the leadership of the well-known Metropolitan Antony Bloom, who is,

perhaps as a result of his spiritual writings and teaching, the best known Orthodox leader in this country.

However, the impact of the Orthodox on the British ecumenical scene is still limited for many reasons. Most of the Orthodox, especially in the Greek church, are relatively recent immigrants, often with little fluency in the English language. Many of the clergy who serve them are also immigrants. There are few Orthodox theologians in this country who are equipped to enter into dialogue with their Western counterparts.

For obvious reasons, most Orthodox live in the inner city areas of the great conurbations and there are few Orthodox and fewer Orthodox parishes in suburban areas and small towns. However, the situation is already changing. Within recent years, hundreds of native British converts, mostly, but not exclusively, of Anglican or Roman Catholic origin, have entered the Orthodox church, not a few of whom (Bishop Kallistos Ware being the most obvious example) are capable theologians, keen to share their spiritual and ecumenical vision with other British Christians.

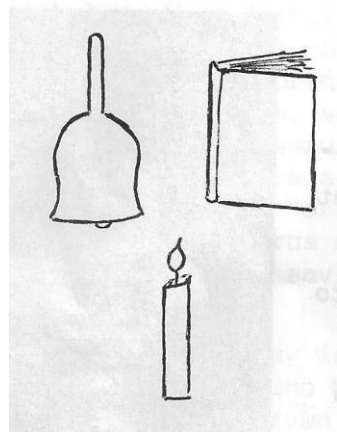
Who are the Orthodox? The Orthodox church is the second largest church in Christendom, with over a hundred million members. In Greece it is the officially established and numerically overwhelmingly dominant church. In Russia it was for nearly a thousand years the official church. It is the dominant church in several Balkan countries. There are important Orthodox communities in the Middle East, and now, as a result of the twentieth century dispersion (partly, but not wholly, related to the events of the Russian revolution) several million Orthodox in North America and Western Europe.



The Orthodox church claims, every bit as much as Rome, to be the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church of the Creeds, from which all other churches, Catholic, Protestant, and Oriental Orthodox* alike are separated. It claims, with much justice, to have preserved the tradition of the early Church in its purest form, as opposed to Catholics and Protestants, who, it would often claim, have distorted the tradition of the early church and departed from its ways of thinking. It shows great reverence alike for Scripture and the teaching of the early Fathers, especially respecting the great trio of St Basil, St Gregory the Theologian and St John Chrysostom, contemporaries at the turn of the fifth century. It is above all a church linked by *sobornost* (a Russian word meaning togetherness or

fellowship), togetherness in the collegiality of bishops, togetherness in the common royal priesthood of the faithful, togetherness in the communion of the saints, living and dead, togetherness and participation, above all, in the Holy Spirit, who gives us both our unity and our diversity. Orthodoxy sees itself as separated in sorrow from Catholics and Protestants, who have alike departed from the tradition of the early church. The Roman church has erred in its doctrine of the Double Procession of the Holy Ghost (the Orthodox in the Creed, say that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, but omit the words "from the Son", which are, incontrovertibly, a later Western addition to the Creed). has also erred in elevating the Pope from a position of primacy of honour, which the Orthodox concede to him, to a position of universal jurisdiction which, they claim, is contrary to Scripture and to early Tradition. The twelfth century Orthodox theologian, Nicetas of Nicomedia, argued that Rome "has separated herself from us by her own deeds, when through pride she assumed a monarchy that does not belong to her office."

have erred by denying the necessity of the Apostolic Succession and by failing to read Scripture in the light of the interpretation of the Fathers. For the Orthodox, the Universal Church is a communion of individual churches, each gathered around its own Bishop. Only the whole episcopate, acting collegially in an ecumenical council (of which the Orthodox recognise seven that occurred before the schism of East and West) can define dogma, and even then they do not teach independently, but in accordance with the witness of the faithful. Like the Anglican Communion, each separate national church is independent under its own Patriarch or metropolitan. The Greek and Russian churches, for example, do not interfere in each other's internal affairs. The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople exercises a primacy of honour, but in no way exercises any jurisdiction remotely analogous to that of the Pope in the Roman Catholic church.



The heart of Orthodoxy, however, is not to be found in ecclesial structures, but in prayer, worship and asceticism. Many Orthodox tend to feel that these essentials of the Christian life have been watered down by Catholics and Protestants alike. Fasting, for example, has tended to become nominal in the West; a matter of, perhaps, "giving up sweets for Lent", whereas for the serious Orthodox, layman as well as religious, it is a matter, to quote Bishop Kallistos, of a "severe physical and spiritual effort" in Lent,

when, on most days, only one meal is allowed. meat and dairy products are proscribed throughout, and on certain days in Holy Week there is a complete fast. Worship too, is demanding. The ordinary liturgy (when Orthodox speak of the Liturgy they always mean the Mass) always takes over an hour. The daily offices, which Orthodox laity are always encouraged to attend, especially in Lent, are much longer than their Western counterparts. Great Vespers in Lent takes an hour and three quarters, though it is a tribute to the qualities of Orthodox worship that the Western participant is often less aware of the passage of time than he might be in a service of similar length in his own church!

Monasticism plays an important part in Orthodox life. All bishops are monastic clergy. more importantly, the monastic ideal is not seen as a rare vocation for a few choice souls, but as an ideal towards which even laymen living in the world should approximate as far as is practicable within their situation. The great French Orthodox theologian, Paul Evdokimov, talks of "interiorised monasticism" and Orthodox have constantly laid before them the Pauline injunction "Pray without ceasing."

Orthodox take their Christianity with a depth and a seriousness that constitute a constant challenge to the Western Christian, whose business and secular life can so often result in the marginalisation of his religion. Perhaps this depth of commitment is due to the fact that Orthodoxy has enjoyed few periods of freedom from persecution and that for most Orthodox their religion has always been costly. In the first three centuries they of course suffered from Caesar; from the seventh to the nineteenth centuries many, at times most, Orthodox lived under Islam; today most Orthodox live in Communist countries.

Martyrs are not for them the remotely heroic figures that they often are for us ;all too often they are contemporaries. Those who are prepared to sacrifice position and even perhaps freedom and life for Christ will naturally yield up other things to him. There is however, a pleasing lack of legalism about their asceticism. I remember reading years ago of an Orthodox theologian at an ecumenical conference who chided some of his Reformed colleagues for the use of the traditional Calvinist phrase "the ethics of servant-hood. He maintained that Christians are not God's servants but his sons, who, as such, follow gladly and freely in the way of Christ.



It is well known that the Orthodox place great emphasis on worship. According to an ancient tradition, the tenth century Grand Duke of Kiev decided to embrace Orthodoxy when his ambassador to Byzantium reported that such was the splendour of the Liturgy that they did not know whether they were on earth or in heaven. Certainly the Liturgy is always celebrated with great splendour, contrasting with the simplicity of much Western worship.

It is important to understand the architectural setting of Orthodox worship. The altar is separated from the main body of the church by a screen called the *iconostasis*, bearing the holy pictures or icons that are at the heart of Orthodox religious art and which depict the saints and Christ. In the centre of the *iconostasis* is a pair of doors through which at certain key points of the service the celebrant passes, most notably when he comes to communicate the people. The movement of priest from sanctuary to nave and back again symbolises the link between heaven and earth established by the saving life, death and resurrection of Christ, and experienced in worship by the living church (represented in the congregation) and the saints of the Church Triumphant, depicted in the icons on the *iconostasis* and elsewhere in the church.

To Orthodox, worship is the earthly heaven; it is the life of earth lifted up to heaven and the life of heaven already eschatologically anticipated amongst us, pre-eminently in the Eucharist. This is an emphasis common alike to Methodism and Orthodoxy. Orthodox could, I think, sing with Charles Wesley in his eucharist hymn:

"We need not now go up to heaven
To bring the long sought Saviour down.
Thou art to all already given
Thou dost even now Thy banquet crown,
To every faithful soul appear
And show Thy real presence here."

One certainly has a strong sense, on entering any Orthodox service, of entering into local, temporal reflection of an unending, eternal process of praise. The ecumenical experience of any Western Christian should certainly include an experience of Orthodox worship.

A few other features of Orthodox worship should be mentioned; usually few people communicate at any one Liturgy, but they may include babes in arms, since Orthodox children are baptised and chrismated (confirmed) in one composite rite, and are hence accounted from the start full members of the church. All services are sung, but no instrumental music is used, since the human voice alone is deemed worthy to praise God. "Detachable" hymns as opposed to "office" hymns are unknown. Most Orthodox festival services

contain words of penetrating beauty that encapsulate the glory of God's triune and saving activity. We take one example from the Good Friday service:

"Today is hanged upon the tree
He who hangs the earth in the midst of the waters.
A crown of thorns crowns Him who is King of angels
He is wrapped about with the purple of mockery
Who wraps the heaven in clouds."

Space precludes me from writing of many other significant aspects of Orthodox life. It has been a great privilege for me, a Methodist, to give Roman Catholics a very basic and no doubt far from adequate introduction to the life of a sister church from which we have so much to learn. The Orthodox themselves stress that their church can only be properly understood by participating in its worship, and a "must" for anyone who wants to know Orthodoxy is to attend the Liturgy. Much of course can be learnt about any church by studying the lives and teachings of its saints, and Orthodoxy is no exception to this rule, having produced a legion of saints, of whom perhaps the easiest to study are the more recent Russian ones such as the eighteenth century St Seraphim of Sarov and St Tikhon of Zadonsk, the nineteenth century parish priest, Fr John of Kronstadt, and twentieth century Mother Maria Skobtsova, martyred in a concentration camp. The best introductory books on Orthodoxy are Bishop Kallistos Ware's *The Orthodox Church*, which concentrates on history and basic theology, and *The Orthodox Way*, which deals with theology and prayer. Both these are paperbacks. Bishop Kallistos and Mother Mary have also produced English translations of two key service books, *The Festal Menaion* and the *Lenten Triodion*, containing services for the major feasts and Lent respectively.

'The fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius' is a society that does invaluable work in promoting understanding between Western and Eastern Christians. It deserves strong support from all churches and is keen to welcome Roman Catholic members.

A specifically Catholic society, concerned with the Eastern churches, Uniate as well as Orthodox, is the Society Of St John Chrysostom, from whom I have received much encouragement in my work. Finally, if any of you are interested in Orthodox-Methodist relations, I should like to commend the pioneering work of my friend Mr Brian Frost, Local Preacher, *Living in Tension Between East and West*.

Oriental Orthodox* Certain churches in the Middle East, commonly called Oriental Orthodox of which the largest and best known is the venerable Coptic Church of Egypt, are not in communion with those churches commonly called Chalcedonian Orthodox, who are the subject of this article.

The schism between them and the rest of the church occurred in the fifth century and related to the exact definition of the "two persons" of Christ, i.e. the divine and human natures. many Chalcedonian Orthodox consider that the differences in these disputes were really rather trivial and feel very close to the Oriental Orthodox who share much of the Orthodox ethos I have been describing.

D.C.

(David Carter is Methodist observer on the S W Area Ecumenical Commission; he is also a Local Preacher with duties corresponding to some extent With those of a Permanent Deacon.

The illustration on p. 6 is of the Serbian Orthodox church of St Prince Lazar, Bournville, Birmingham. Ed.)

THE BISHOPS' RESPONSE TO BEM

The difference between a pessimist and an optimist has been described thus: "A pessimist looks at his glass and sees that it is half empty: an optimist looks at his glass and sees that it is half full We met both outlooks in our study days and discussions on the Lima document we call BEM ("They don't go nearly far enough on ..." "I see we are partially agreed on...").

In the response to the document which our Hierarchy were asked to make they have taken the optimistic, positive line. There is no quibbling over minutiae:

"It would be inappropriate, and it is not our purpose to argue about particular sentences or phrases... Unease with particular phrases can generally be tracked down to differences about basic theological orientation ..."

but cracks have neither been papered over nor have they been made into impassable gulfs:

"But for the sake of completeness we now mention some of the more obvious issues needing further work."

During our own local discussions (and I am sure this applies elsewhere), probably the major talking point was the nature of a Sacrament and the Sacramental nature of Baptism, Eucharist and ministry. The Bishops concluded that:

"There is the problem which underlies much of the work of BEM, i.e. that of a lack of a coherent sacramental theology. It is because of this that so much difficulty has been encountered in dealing

with some of the issues; for example, of faith and baptism and of eucharist and the church. This is perhaps to be expected, given the wide spectrum of theological viewpoint in those compiling the document, but it is an area for further study."

Another problem area we met related to the part played by tradition in supporting the authority and magisterium of the Catholic Church. In connection with Ministry, our Hierarchy said:

"Insofar as there is difficulty and ambiguity in the statement's account of ministry it is because of the unresolved background issues to do with tradition, authority and the church. Perhaps one of the important results of Lima will have been to make plain the importance of those questions for the resolution of other matters."

They go on to say:

"These points are not meant in any way to depreciate the real degree of convergence that Lima has realised."

The Bishops realise that there is a long way to go and a lot of work to be done before the Faith and Order Committee's long term aim of producing *Towards the Common Expression of the Apostolic Faith Today* is realised:

".....the churches have a great deal of work to do, both within their own communities and in the ecumenical field. We wish to comm.it ourselves fully to this work and to say that the Lima statement has created a new context for it."

The response radiates HOPE!

FIRE FROM HEAVEN

The Catholic people of our area have recently been visited with fire from Heaven. They haven't all realised it yet, but it has happened. Let me explain.

Our town is so small that though we have two city-centre Catholic churches (call them St Aidan's and St Giles') you can walk one to the other in ten minutes. But proximity does not mean that they are alike.

St Aidan's is about 150 years old, the heart of For an old a tiny recusant area, small (parish about 300), light and beautiful. For a tiny parish, partly composed of cradle Catholics born within its boundaries, it has advanced quite a long way since Vatican II. It has absorbed liturgical change, developed readers, special ministers, a choir, a liturgy committee and a parish council. Much of this was due to a liturgically-minded parish priest

just after the Council, who forced us into modernity. Some of us hated it then, but most like it now very much.

St Giles is different. Built about 1870 for the Irish navvies working on the railway, it is larger, dark, long and narrow with a side aisle from which the high altar is very hard to see. The difference can be gathered from the fact that some of us who hated change took refuge with them and some of them joined us. They seem to have no readers and are said to be just developing a choir. It is even rumoured that they have no parish council. All this may be false, but it is believed in our parish.

Or rather it was believed. .

Over a year ago, out of the blue, the Bishop wrote to us. Very soon, he said, the dwindling supply of ageing priests would cause a crisis. We might have noticed (we had) that whereas ten years ago we had two priests (they have tasks apart from the parish) now we had only one, very overworked. Furthermore, the house and church were old and dilapidated. We'd noticed that too. Our priest kept getting bronchitis and more often than not the central heating in the church broke down on Sunday. The bishop suggested a rationalisation: close our church, sell the house, amalgamate with St Giles and all worship together there. Would we, asked the Bishop, pray and think hard about this, remembering that if we disagreed we must consider how we were to raise €60,000 for repairs.

Our (new) parish priest, having made it plain that he backed the scheme (in fact, suspicious parishioners even thought he put the bishop up to it) called us together about a week before Christmas to discuss the question.

At 7.30 p.m. the People of God assembled in the freezing church (the heating, of course, was off again), about 50 of us, an unheard of turnout for a perishing winter night. There was also the Parish Priest, the Dean and a financial Monsignor with a list of figures, bearing, some of us thought, an uncomfortable resemblance to Archbishop Marcinkus. We listened to the statistics, we heard the Monsignor present the Bishop's case, we waited patiently for "them" (it felt like that) to have their say, and then the fun really began.

I have seldom attended a livelier meeting, made even more animated because some of us were not very expert with the microphone and had to be given friendly help from the floor ("stand further back, man Jim.") The tone was immediately set by Geordie. Elderly, he had come with his sister, arm-in-arm carefully over the icy pavement.

Unwrapping many scarves, removing his cap, he approached the microphone with suspicion and a huge sheaf of papers. He cleared his throat, the microphone roared and he was off. Having pointed out that the City Council would almost certainly list our church, so the Bishop couldn't close

it anyway (with powerful hints that Geordie had Influence •••), he asked, meaningfully, why we seemed so poor? Where was all the money contributed by the likes of him all those years? This momentary vision of an episcopal slush fund was a novel one, there were intakes of breath and anguished cries. He had lots of facts, painfully garnered, his delivery was ponderous, his local accent powerful and he kept forgetting to address the microphone or losing his place in his notes. Chilling rapidly, the People of God began to get restive. Voices called "We've got the message, Geordie •• Ye can stop now" and other hints at length had to be noticed by the Dean. Geordie stood down. Others followed. most were hostile, interestingly many hostile to the Bishop. Dr Czczmi, a special minister, became so guttural with passion that English and temper vanished together and he came near to accusing our Father in God of a sinister plot. His Lordship had asked for our advice, but of course we all knew ("Hear! hear! we shouted, stamping our numbed feet) that the decision had already been taken. Monsignor Marcinkus protested feebly nobody listened. The Dean mopped his brow. Only one parishioner had the courage to suggest that there were perhaps wider issues before us. Were we perhaps too complacent? Nobody listened to that either.

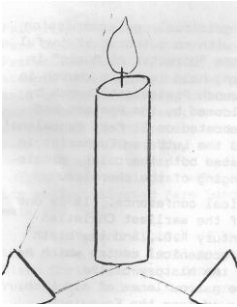
In the end we set up a committee which produced a good alternative Plan. The Bishop disliked it but clearly his scheme had failed, at least. for now. The parish is at present happily devoted: repairing its (listed) building, new priestly help has been found and the new heating actually works.

I was left thinking ruefully that the whole episode most painfully revealed our limitations. Our Shepherds do not know how to consult us sensitively and the sheep are so unused to being consulted that they cannot believe in it when it happens. Besides, though nobody said it aloud at the meeting, we suspected that the scheme involved a new parish priest in the person of Father Fuddy-Duddy from St Giles, where, it was said, they were so backward that they didn't even have a proper consultation meeting. I thought gloomily that if this is our standard there is no hope at all for ecumenism.

But that was before the fire from heaven.

One afternoon a few months after these stirring events an arsonist set fire to St Giles' and burned it down. Some of us thought at first it was a judgment on the Bishop; some of them thought it was us. But ever since then they have been using the local Anglican church on Sundays, with great success, and rumour has it that Father Fuddy-Duddy has been converted to ecumenism. I think it was the Holy Spirit, though I have to admit that, because of the insurance, not even He can rebuild St Giles' suitably for modern liturgy. Or perhaps there is a hint that we should all start to use the Anglican church?

LYON '85. . . FLASHLIGHTS



Cloudless blue skies, brilliant sunshine, mountains and wooded hills, the cool shade of trees, laughter, song and dance are some of the pictures which float into my mind as I look back to the International Fellowship Conference at Lyon in July 1985. The warmth and joy of fellowship too, cutting across national and religious barriers. How we talked . . . in groups round coffee machines, over cold drinks and ice-cream on the verandas, in the garden, waiting for coaches in the courtyard and last, but definitely not least, in the rather cramped dining room, over the excellent meals provided by La Maison St Joseph, the conference centre at Francheville where we stayed. Can you imagine about two hundred and eighty seven people sitting down to a meal carrying out animated conversation at the tops of their voices in six different languages? New friendships were made, old ones renewed.

The light was passed from the Chairman of the British Region to the Chairman of the French Region at the opening service, and the Conference was under way. It is amazing how much was packed into one week lectures, the liturgies of four Christian traditions, the daily meditation under the trees, the early morning prayer groups, the all-night vigil for peace, workshop groups, outings into Lyon and beyond, "meditation and music", "Come and Sing", an evening of prayerful song, dance and mime, and a light-hearted entertainment presented by the younger folk.

The over-all theme was "Account for the hope that is in you." The inspiring, moving, thought - provoking lectures were discussed in workshop groups. Another group met to share their experiences of the healing ministry, to be followed up by a well supported, deeply prayerful service of healing and wholeness. The early morning "quiet time" catered for a variety of needs . . . guided silent meditation; spontaneous shared prayer; breathing, relaxation and prayer; music and meditation; an hour's solitude for personal prayer, or perhaps a good "lie-in."

An important feature of IEF Conferences is the participation in the liturgies of the Churches represented. For many the highlight was the Saturday evening Mass in the Roman Catholic cathedral of St John, presided over by the Archbishop of Lyon, who graciously gave permission for Eucharistic hospitality. The Mass ended with an outburst of joyful song, led by

Père Yves Marion, the "Director of Music" in IEF. The liturgy of the French Reformed Church, held in their church in Lyon (formerly a bank and presented to the French Protestant Church by Napoleon), was more sober. We were warmly welcomed by the Pastors and the congregation. The Anglican rite was celebrated on St Mary Magdalenes day in the parish church of Francheville, and the Lutheran Eucharist in one of the chapels in the Centre. I appreciated both the quiet, simple dignity of this service and the beautiful singing of the chorales.

Lyon is a perfect setting for an ecumenical conference. It is one of the oldest cities in Europe, the centre of the earliest Christian Church in Gaul, dating back to the second century A.D., and the birth place of the Abbé Couturier. A visit to the ecumenical centre which he founded, to see an interesting exhibition of the history of the Ecumenical movement; a brief stroll round the narrow lanes of old Lyon, with a visit to the cathedral; Mont Blanc viewed from the Fourvière, once the temple of the Celtic God of the rising sun, later a Roman Acropolis, and now a meteorological observatory; the moving and challenging celebration of the martyrs, past and present, with song and dramatic readings from the Letter of Eusebius, which took place in the arena where Pothinus and Irenaeus, the first two bishops of Lyon were martyred, as were countless others, including the slave girl Blandina and Ponticus, a lad of fifteen. All these gave us a taste of the spiritual and cultural heritage of this ancient city, which has today become one of the great industrial centres of France.

The day's outing to Taizé and the Abbaye des Dombes was the highlight for me, with six hours drive through the French countryside, a glimpse of the Benedictine Abbey of Cluny from the coach and, above all, the privilege of sharing for a short time in the unique spiritual and ecumenical experience of Taizé, with its message of reconciliation, forgiveness and trust; its atmosphere of prayer and contemplation, simplicity and loving service emanating from the hidden life of the Brothers; the profound silence, alternated with Scripture readings and meditative song of the midday office; and the joyful fellowship of thousands of pilgrims, mainly young adults, drawn from countries in all five continents, with a variety of religious background and experience.

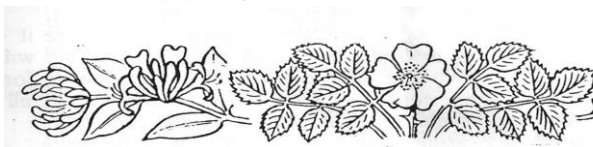
They come in search of meaning and purpose to life, and, captivated by the Taizé vision of unity in Christ, many stay on to help with hospitality. The quiet, regular, enclosed life of the Cistercian monks of Notre Dame des Dombes, and the monastic Office of Vespers (sung in French so that all could participate) was a contrast to the "Christian fairground" atmosphere of Taizé. The Abbaye des Dombes was chosen by Abbé Couturier for his ecumenical group of Roman Catholic priests and Protestant pastors, which

still meets for theological discussion, steeped in an atmosphere of prayer. Monastic hospitality included a talk on the Monastery, deliciously refreshing French syrups in the garden under the trees, a visit to the archives of Père Couturier, and a visit to the monastery shop where they sold honey, jam and home-made sweets. When the Abbey was founded over a hundred years ago, the monks had two urgent tasks; to reclaim swamped land and to evangelise the neighbouring villages. The beauty of the surrounding countryside, with its well-cultivated farm lands and orchards is a tribute to their hard work and zeal.

The "grand finale" of the Conference was a "Gospel night" which took place in the local parish church. It was a celebration of the Risen Christ in song, dance, mime, Scripture texts and poetry led by Yves Marion and his music group.

My chief impression is one of light shining in darkness . . . spotlight, psychedelic lights, candlelight and the twinkling coloured night lights which were placed on the altar by members of the congregation alongside an icon of Christ in Glory. Coloured candles were passed from one to the other with the words: "The Light of Christ" after the reading of the Beatitudes. The Paschal candle was passed on from the president of the French region to the representative of the Dutch region in anticipation of next year's conference. Then came a dramatic moment when all the church lights were switched on, the "mimers" joined hands and danced round the church, inviting the rest to "come and dance for the Lord." Gradually the chain grew as more and more threw away their inhibitions and joined in, winding round the church, outside and in, again, singing the praises of the risen Christ. Somehow it all came to an end and "goodbyes" were said, for some had to catch the night train and others were leaving by plane at the crack of dawn.

What of permanent value has remained, when the excitement of the whole has become a thing of the past? For myself, it is the fresh vision of our unity in Christ given by nearly three hundred people of different religious background from seven or more countries, living and sharing together for a week in every aspect of the Christian life, including the fun. Perhaps this could be said of every IEF conference. The particular value of Lyon for me has been the challenge of the witness of the martyrs to the hope which lies in us all; the desire to carry forward the vision and work of Père Couturier, and the inspiration and hope for the future of our world aroused by our brief encounter with so many young folk from "all corners of the earth, who



gather together year by year to receive and pass on the message of Taize. Next year the conference will be held at Bovendonk, in the Netherlands, when the participants will explore the roots of our Christian faith in Judaism.