

Together in Christ 50p



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Material for publication and all correspondence to be sent to the Editor: Mrs Una Ratcliffe.

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Officers of the Commissions:

The Rt Rev C J Henderson

S E Area:

V. Rev. Can. W Clements (Chair) Sister Elizabeth (Sec)

S W Area;

Miss Celia Blackden (Chair) Miss M O'Shaughnessy (Sec)

Kent Area:

Norman J Lee (Chair) Mrs Dorothy Morris (Sec)

EDITORIAL

Our New Year ecumenical resolution must surely be the will to make the "move from co-operation to commitment" in our relations with other Christians, and to encourage others to do the same. The **will** to move is emphasised, recalling the question posed by the late and much-loved Canon Dennis Corbishley: "Do we really want unity at all?" The Canon quoted Dr Coggan's words: "we must use the past as a springboard and not as a sofa" and pointed out that we must resist the temptation to remain comfortably as we are, remembering Christ's prayer in John 17, in which He made the "daring comparison" of the unity of His followers with that of the Trinity. (Together in Christ, No 16 Oct 1986, p5)

Reflecting on the tremendous experience of Swanwick (one Bishop called it a miracle) makes one realise how much the will to be united was present. Cardinal Hume, at the Mass at which he was the chief celebrant, spoke movingly of the sense of unity felt among the 330 of us, of differing Christian traditions, as we worshipped together. That sense of unity prevailed in the regular periods of worship at Swanwick - Eucharistic celebrations, worship prepared by young people, morning and evening prayer, lunchtime meditations and silence, and the powerful "healing of memories" which later evoked witnesses of ecumenical healing, we were aware of the love of the Holy Spirit upon us, binding us together. Yet, knowing that the unity willed by Christ is not complete, we feel pain at the lack of fullness, a pain which intensifies our will, prompting us to pray and work more earnestly, for as St. Paul says: "it is God, for His own loving purpose, who puts both the Will and the action into you." (Phil 2:13)

The Swanwick Conference began its work in groups of 10 or 12 people. Your Editor had the privilege and joy of being in a group with Cardinal Hume, and of being its scribe; we were the only two Catholics in it, the others being of other Christian traditions, mainly ministers. It was in that small group that mention was made of stages on the road to unity being summed up in five words all beginning With the letter "c" namely competition, co-existence, co-operation, commitment and communion. (you may come across slight variants of these terms). Later in the week, the Cardinal, in his inspired intervention, advocated the move from cooperation to commitment, and affirmed the final ecumenical aim of full communion. The prolonged applause which greeted the Cardinal's words expressed deep gratitude for his leadership and also the will to move which was in our hearts.

We hope that our readers will read and be encouraged by the Swanwick Report and the material published In this bulletin, where shared worship, small groups, local ecumenism, as well as theological dialogue and new instruments are seen as having enormous value In the Inter-Church process in which we are no longer strangers but pilgrims together.

NO LONGER STRANGERS - PILGRIMS

The beginning of September saw a historic gathering at Swanwick in Derbyshire when over 330 representatives of the main churches in Britain and Ireland came together for the final conference in the Inter-Church Process known as - "Not Strangers, but Pilgrims."

The Process has been under-way over the past three years and 33 denominations have been involved. One of its essential parts was the Lent '86 course for local churches and local radio which produced one of the three main publications of the Process: *Views From the Pews*. This, together with *Reflections: How churches see their life and mission* and *Observations on the church from Britain and abroad* (published by the British Council of Churches and the Catholic Truth Society) provided valuable insights about the churches today, their concerns and inspirations.

In March this year there were three major national conferences in Nottingham, Bangor and St Andrews which produced reports from which the Swanwick Conference started.

Considerable emphasis has rightly been given by the national press to the tremendous step forward made by the agreement of all those present to move from a situation of co—operation to one of commitment to each other, the words being those of Cardinal Hume. This opened the way to the consideration of a new ecumenical instrument (a clumsy expression but a way of not pre-judging issues by calling it a "council") for Britain and Ireland which will replace the present British Council of Churches. It will have full Roman Catholic participation.

There will also be an English "instrument", one of whose functions will be to co-ordinate and support ecumenical bodies at intermediate level in their servicing and care of all forms of local ecumenical activity. "Intermediate level" means County Sponsoring Bodies or Ecumenical Councils such as exist, for example, in West Yorkshire, Manchester and Bristol.

The main emphasis is in fact on local ecumenism. Throughout the conference it was clearly recognised that the local level is the one where our attention should be focussed and where as much support and encouragement as possible should be given. It is the patient work of countless individuals over many years which created the climate that has enabled the recent moves.

I believe Swanwick has helped by establishing some basic principles of how to work which could be equally well applied at local level and which could re-vitalise our whole ecumenical approach.

The first is in regard to authority. The traditional model of a council of churches is one where representatives from participating churches come together to form a body which can then sponsor joint activity. The difficulty is one which we must all know about: the council of churches arranges something and about 5% of all churches support it. We blame lack of interest or lack of publicity. In fact, the

problem may lie one step further back: it has just not entered into the core-life of our separate churches. To invest authority - executive authority - in a representative body begs rather too many questions about church authority for all denominations. It often means that the council can only attempt rather bland activity that no-one will mind. But if we take the authority structures of our churches seriously, e.g. church meetings (for Methodists): the vicar and his Parochial Church Council (for Anglicans); the parish priest, hopefully with a parish council (for Roman Catholics); then major items would need to be agreed by such bodies before being implemented. If this principle were agreed, and people were careful to bring all appropriate matters back to their churches, where in turn they would be given proper space on the agendas, then it may be that both clergy and people would have more confidence in a local council and give it more support.

A second principle is that it was seen as utterly essential that church leaders should meet regularly and build up relationships. This applies to every level of ecumenical life, and paves the way to covenanted relationships of churches at all levels.

Occasional large gatherings for social or other events were seen to be very important for a developing sense of being of one family, but it was the shared worship at Swanwick which contributed as much as anything else to the progress made.

A further important principle was that task forces should be set up to do specific forms of Christian work. These could be temporary or permanent according to the task, but the people on them would be drawn from all the churches according to their (the people's) expertise. One council of churches would simply not be expected to do everything! It could even be that one church would take over a particular piece of work on behalf of all, with the knowledge and agreement of all. This is not reverting to denominationalism, it is a realistic appreciation and use of existing resources. We should not then be asking people if they were "Interested in Ecumenism". We should be asking for interest and support in specific areas of the church's total apostolate, asking merely that they be prepared to work with other Christians. The council of churches becomes a small co-ordinating body enabling the churches themselves to work together in areas concern common to all.

Nobody imagines that such a shift of emphasis solves all the problems. many have perhaps tried these ideas anyway and discovered the snags, or even the value of them. But more support at the national level at the British and Irish level, established on firm principles, must eventually ease difficulties at local level.

The tasks identified for special attention at the conference were fairly predictable: social care of all forms, work for justice, especially racial justice: education, links overseas etc... What was new was the explicit priority of evangelism, bringing Christ to the world. We are called to witness that "God was

in Christ reconciling the world to Himself" and this is our primary task in a country largely unbelieving, yet crying out for help and meaning to life.

Coupled with this was the need for further joint study and exploration of Scripture in order to grow in understanding of our faith.

A full report of the Conference will be available in December, but the "Swanwick Declaration" was adopted by acclaim and personally signed by those present. This should now be available in our local churches.

Marion Morgan

Executive Secretary Greater Bristol Ecumenical Council

INDUCTION OF NEW ANGLICAN VICAR (*Parish of St Anne and All Saints, S Lambeth*)

On Sunday, 22 November, the Reverend Christopher Moody, M.A., was installed and inducted as Vicar of the parish of St Anne and All Saints, South Lambeth, by the Bishop of Kingston.

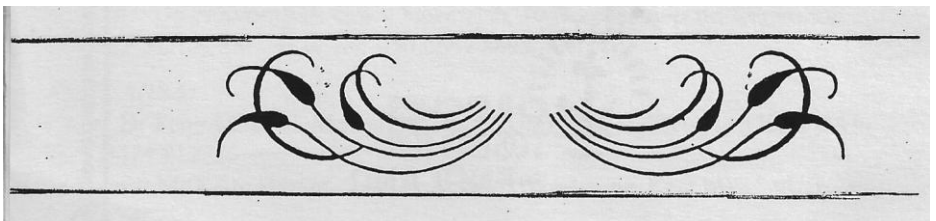
Vicars of St Anne's parish have for a long time been members of the Larkhall Clergy Fraternal which meets for prayer and breakfast at Father Luke Verhees' Church (St Francis de Sales) on Wednesday mornings, and for this reason it was decided that members of the Diocesan Ecumenical Commission and Local Ecumenical Group should attend the ceremony.

On behalf of St Francis' R C Church we welcomed Rev Christopher and his family to the area and wished them every joy and blessing here.

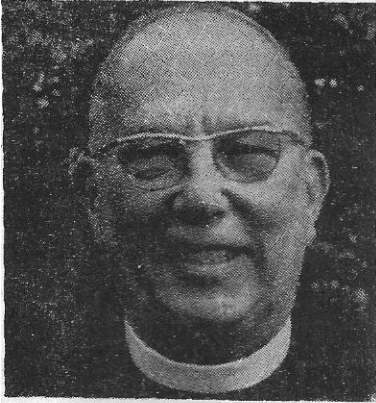
After the ceremony, we were invited into the adjoining Parish Hall for a delicious buffet supper at which we were able to meet the clergy and parishioners of St Anne's on this happy occasion.

Sr Elizabeth Vignale

Secretary S E Area Ecumenical Commission.



ECUMENICAL RELATIONS --



Canon Clements

identify the different stages of progress in ecumenical relations, bearing in mind that each stage in my own "Rake's Progress" is where some of my fellow-countrymen, of all denominations, now are. The stages in ecumenical growth have been identified by one writer as:

CONFRONTATION
COMPETITION
CO-EXISTENCE
CO-OPERATION
COVENANT
COMMITMENT
COMMUNION

These are not, of course, watertight divisions; one shades off gradually into the next. We rarely change our attitudes suddenly. We need time to think and to adjust ourselves to experience.

The "Twopenny Rush"

As a small Catholic boy, my first contact with other Christians was when I attended the weekly "Twopenny Rush" at the local Methodist Central Hall. This was a Saturday afternoon session of silent films, accompanied by a pianist who could sometimes not be heard above the din, as we cheered the "good 'uns" and booed the "baddies". The Minister tried to keep order, and before the programme began he would lead us in saying the Lord's Prayer together. We little Catholics sat bolt upright while the rest bowed their heads. Wild horses would not have induced us to join with these other children in prayer. Why not? I believed, and had been, taught, that the Catholic Church was the one True Church founded by

The Local Situation.

Method

To understand the local ecumenical situation in England today, you need to know the history of our divisions. It is useless to say, as so many people say: "I don't know what all the fuss is about. I can't see why we don't just come together." To them I would reply: "You should know." The divisions are inherited and deep-rooted. They will not just go away. They must be identified and faced and resolved. I thought that the best way to do this in a short paper would be by way of anecdote; to record my own experience over the years, trying to

Jesus Christ. To pray with other Christians was a sort of betrayal of my faith,. Many my friends were "non-Catholics", and I knew them as good, honest people who loved God and sought to do his will. I knew little of their particular beliefs, and had no desire to learn them. I was proud of being a Catholic, conscious of my identity, with a great feeling of belonging to a closely united world wide Church, with roots deep in the history of my own country. Yet we were a minority, persecuted in the recent past, still misunderstood and subject to positive discrimination.

Holidays

Sometimes, on holiday, we stayed with Methodist friends. We never went to Church with them, but walked to Mass in the little country town four miles away. Mass was celebrated in a little green corrugated hut, not far from the ancient Anglican Parish Church. I have a vivid memory of walking along the dusty road, hearing the lovely peal of bells from the 500 year old belfry and thinking: "That's where I should be going to Mass. By rights, that Church belongs to us.

"RC's. Fall Out"

During the war I served in the Royal Navy. We had our own Catholic Chaplains, but they were few and far between. Often, after the parade called "Divisions", there would be a religious service or prayers, led by a Chaplain or by the Commanding Officer. Before prayers began, there would always be the order: "RC's. fall out" and I would find myself on the edge of the quarter-deck with my fellow Catholics, and a sprinkling of Jews and atheists!

Seminary Life

During my six years at the Seminary, training for the priesthood, there was no contact with theological colleges of other denominations, as there now is. In our study of theology, the text-books presented Protestants and Liberal Theologians as "adversaries" to be refuted. The Church possessed the fullness of truth. On the other hand we were taught to think, to question everything, to start from first principles and to take nothing for granted in our philosophical training.

My First Parish

As a young priest I was willing to join the local "Clergy Fraternal" in which local ministers of various denominations met for coffee and theological discussion together. One day I was invited to join with them in silent prayer together in the local Anglican Church before our meeting. I refused to do so, on the grounds that it would cause scandal (in the theological sense) to my people, by seeming to suggest that one religion was as good as another. I was quite clear in my own mind that these good men, my friends, were not priests. I knew the arguments, published in Catholic Truth Society pamphlets, against the validity of Anglican

Orders. To me, the thirty-nine articles were clear enough in their rejection of the Mass, of the Primacy of the Holy See, of the Seven Sacraments and of Prayer for the Dead. Like most of my colleagues in the Catholic priesthood, and like most of the laity too, at that time, I was complacent, firm and uncompromising - a very un-ecumenical bird

My Second Parish

Time passed, and I moved to another parish. One day, as I came down the steps from my presbytery, I bumped into the new local Anglican curate who had just popped into my Church to pray before the Blessed Sacrament. We got talking, and, before long, I was at the local vicarage for tea, feeling rather "daring" and wondering whether the Bishop would approve.

Then one day, to my surprise, I was asked by my Bishop to preach in another Anglican Church not far away - the first Catholic priest to preach there since the Reformation - so the vicar told his people. At about this time the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council were producing the decree "De Ecumenismo", so the Holy Spirit was at work both locally and universally!

But we were slow to answer. At this time in England there was no "reciprocity"; neither Catholic priests nor Catholic people were ready yet to listen in their Churches to fellow Christians speaking of their beliefs. Those fellow Christians, usually called "Protestants", of course, welcome to come to Mass, though not to receive Communion. "Who knows?", we thought. "Perhaps they will receive the gift of faith."

My Third Parish

Soon after my arrival in my third parish in 1967, a young Methodist minister called to bid me welcome. I invited him in for coffee. From this tentative beginning there came, over the next three years, a growing involvement of Catholics in the local ecumenical scene. I suggested the "First ever" meeting involving local Catholics should be held on "neutral" ground, but that our fellow Christians were more generous and suggested the Catholic Parish Hall. The parish priest reluctantly agreed, but said: "Don't expect me to be there." From that first meeting relations improved rapidly; we attended one another's services regularly, we met for discussions, we formed a Clergy Fraternal and a Local Council of Churches; we arranged "Weekends Away" together. We made deep and lasting friendships and were sincere and frank with each other, "speaking the truth in charity".

My Fourth Parish

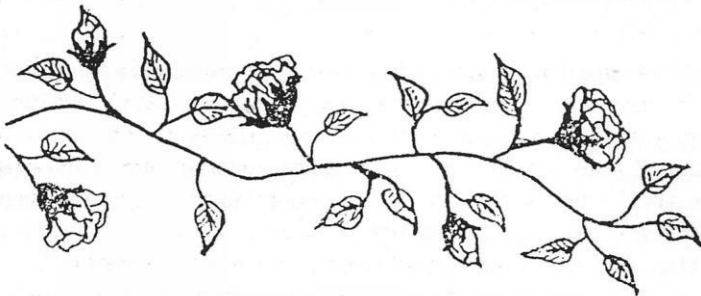
In 1970 I was appointed Administrator of the Cathedral. A few months later I went off to Rome for the ceremony of the Canonisation of the Forty martyrs of England and Wales. It is hard to express adequately what Rome means to

Catholics; harder to still say what that ceremony meant to English and Welsh Catholics. There were ten thousand of us in St. Peter's on that day. We stood in that mighty basilica, built over the spot where St. Peter, first Bishop of Rome, lies buried, and we listened to his direct successor, Pope Paul VI, solemnly reading the names of courageous men and women, monks, friars, priests and lay folk, who gave their lives for the faith in the centuries of persecution of the Catholic Church in England and Wales. They died for their belief in the Sacrifice of the Mass, Devotion to our Lady and the Saints, and the Primacy of the Holy See.

Some people feared that this solemn act of canonisation would sour relations with other Churches, but those fears were put at rest by the words of Pope Paul "There will be no seeking to lessen the legitimate prestige and the worthy patrimony of piety and usage proper to the Anglican Church when the Roman Catholic Church - this humble "servant of the servants of God" - is able to embrace her ever beloved Sister in the one authentic communion of the family of Christ. (A.A.S. 62 (1970) p. 183). Those words of Paul VI, at that time, chosen and deliberate, were a great encouragement to English ecumenists. I found in my new parish an existing Clergy Fraternal and a local Council of Churches which gradually expanded to include Catholics, Anglicans, Baptists, the Salvation Army, the United Reformed Church, Methodists and two independent Black Churches. We were all happy to meet socially, to discuss and pray together. Our activities included joint courses of lectures, lunch-time discussions, all-night vigils of prayer, weekends away, and regular visits to each-others' Churches for worship. As Cathedral Administrator I had five assistant priests, and I inherited an authoritarian, though benign, form of government. Gradually we evolved into a team, sharing responsibility. I took on more pastoral work, and the other priests shared my administrative burden. We were learning co-responsibility by doing it. This stood me in good stead in my next appointment.

(Canon) Bill Clements

(To be concluded in the next issue - Ed.)



THE HOLY EUCHARIST - Observations from a convert.

I joined the Church of Rome about 30 years ago, there were several reasons why I took this step, one being historical.

During my early years in the Church of England, the faith in which I was initially baptised and reared, it would be true to say that I became fully integrated into the High Church tradition, and was, for a number of years a Sunday School teacher.

Looking back on those days, one of the most lovely experiences which I can recall was the great beauty of the Anglican liturgy, particularly with reference to the "prayer of humble access" and then at the reception of the sacred elements by the communicants.

I do not pride myself on having an extraordinary memory, but the words which the Anglican priest said during the celebration of the Eucharist at the prayer of humble access I have remembered all my life, and I quote from memory:

"We do not presume to come to this Thy Table, O most merciful Father, trusting in our righteousness, but in Thy manifold and great mercy. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs unto Thy table, but Thou art the same Lord whose property is always to have mercy. Grant us, therefore, O most gracious Lord, so to eat the Flesh of Thy dear Son, Jesus Christ and to drink His Blood, that our sinful bodies may be made clean by His Body and our souls washed through His most precious Blood, that we may ever more dwell in Him and He in us."

Then, at the reception of the sacred Host at the altar rails, the following words said to each communicant by the Anglican priest:

"The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ which was given for you, preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life. Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for you and feed on Him in your heart by faith and thanksgiving."

Then similar words were said to each communicant when the chalice was brought round.

One may well ask, what is the point which I am trying to make? I will try to explain. The Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church have respectively through their teachings stated what actually happens during the Holy Eucharist to the sacred elements, but to me, an ordinary layman, it is rather beyond my understanding. All I know is that when I used to receive Holy Communion in the Anglican Church, I really believed that I was receiving our Lord's sacred Body and Blood, because of those profound words which were said

at that lovely prayer of humble access, and more so perhaps from the words said to me by the priest on receiving the sacred Host.

So at last I come to the point, and that point is this, that surely the lovely prayer of humble access sums up all that Roman Catholics believe and are taught about the Holy Eucharist as well? If I might be so bold as to suggest to our Roman Catholic Bishops and others engaged in the Anglican/Roman Catholic dialogue on this issue to please have a closer look at the Anglican liturgy, especially at the prayer quoted. They might then find that they are not really so far apart as they think about these deep issues.

In conclusion, I would like to say that as a keen ecumenical contact in my own parish, it always makes me feel rather sad on the occasions when I attend the Anglican Church, that I am not allowed officially to receive Holy Communion. This is because of the rules of our Roman Catholic Church. Furthermore, I know that the Good Lord is present in the Anglican sacred elements to the fervent believer, because of my past experience. When one reflects on the words of Holy Scripture, or the phraseology of our favourite hymns and prayers, the right words spoken in prayer or liturgy have a power all of their own. and can perhaps surpass even things we profess to believe if those words simply convey the Truth.

Desmond Edwards

St Gregory's R C Church Earlsfield.

WHAT ARCIC I SAYS:

The Final Report of the Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission No. I is currently with our respective Churches for final consideration. In the Statement on Eucharistic Doctrine, for which "agreement on essential points of eucharistic doctrine" was claimed, we read:

"Communion with Christ in the eucharist presupposes His true presence, effectually signified by the bread and wine which, in this mystery, become His Body and Blood. *

There is a footnote to this sentence (*):

"The word *transubstantiation* is commonly used in The Roman Catholic Church to indicate that God acting in the eucharist effects a change in the inner reality of the elements. The term should be seen as affirming the **fact** of Christ's presence and of the mysterious and radical change which takes place. In contemporary Roman Catholic theology it is not understood as explaining how the change takes place." * The Final Report; Eucharistic Doctrine; III (6)

A BAPTIST TALKS ABOUT BAPTISM

Many people think that Baptists are Christians who have peculiar ideas of their own about Baptism. That is not strictly true for much of what Baptists believe about Baptism would be held by other Christians. But we are going too fast. Our starting point needs to be the Baptist understanding of what the Church is. It is because of our doctrine of the Church that we hold certain views about Baptism.

In 1926, when the Baptist Union made its reply to the Lambeth Appeal, it expressed our doctrine of the Church thus :

"We believe in the Catholic Church as the holy society of believers in our Lord Jesus Christ, which he founded, of which he is the only Head, and in which he dwells by his Spirit."

For our present discussion the important words in that statement are: in that are: "... the holy society of believers in our Lord Jesus Christ ..." Because we hold the Church to be a community of Christian believers, it naturally follows that entry to that community (which most Christians hold to be by Baptism) is for believers only. Baptism, therefore, must be Believers' Baptism.

This view of the Church and therefore our understanding of Baptism are held because of our doctrine of the supremacy of Scripture. All Baptists would say that if a doctrine is not based on the Bible and can not be substantiated by the Bible it must be rejected.

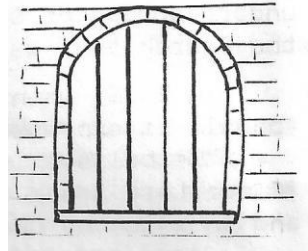
In Acts chapter 2, the Christian BELIEVERS were together when the Holy Spirit came upon them and in the strength of that Spirit went and preached to the crowds that had assembled for Pentecost. As a result of that preaching many more turned from their sins (repented) and BELIEVED the Good News that Peter and the other Apostles were proclaiming. These BELIEVERS were baptized and added to the Church.

In the story of the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch we find much the same happening Acts 8: 26 ff. Upon hearing and understanding the Word of God (he understood because Philip explained the scripture passage to him), the Ethiopian BELIEVED in Christ and was baptized. There is an interesting point in verse 37. This verse is not in the oldest manuscripts and scholars are generally agreed that it does not form part of Luke's original story. Following the preaching they had reached some water and the Ethiopian asked what was to prevent him being baptized. Then comes the verse in question : "And Philip said, 'if you believe with all your heart you may.' And he replied, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God'". It's insertion at a later date reflects the practice of the Church

that Baptism could not take place without confession of faith. In other words the norm was BELIEVERS' Baptism.

Another important passage is in Acts 16, the conversion of the Philippian jailer. After the earthquake and the opening of the prison doors, the jailer is about to kill himself thinking that the prisoners have escaped and

he will be held responsible. Paul assures him that they are still there. The jailer is obviously impressed and seeks to know the way of salvation in Christ : "What must I do to be saved?" The answer is quite straightforward : "Believe In the Lord Jesus Christ." moreover this is a truth and a promise which is for more than just the jailer. It be the same for the members of his family. If they BELIEVE they will



be saved. Notice that Baptism has not yet been mentioned. But now it is. After further preaching - explaining the word of God as Philip had done to the Ethiopian - to the whole family they all BELIEVED and were baptized. A correct exegesis of this passage requires us to see that belief and salvation are bound together. It is on the basis of belief that those who are saved are baptized. Belief, Salvation and Baptism belong together.

It is only fair to acknowledge that this passage has been used to give authority to infant Baptism on the grounds of the whole household being baptized. But it is an argument from silence. There is no mention of infants, but there is mention of those who BELIEVED (presumably whatever their age) being baptized. Baptists hold to BELIEVERS' BAPTISM not Adult Baptism.

I have spoken at some length about these passages for they contain what Baptists hold to be the true understanding and practice of Baptism. Baptism is about the forgiveness of sins, union with Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit. These come only from God, but without human response there can be no real result of God's action. There must be repentance if there is to be forgiveness; there must be faith if there is to be union with Christ; there must be hearing and believing the gospel if there is to be life in the Spirit. In a Baptist church following the proclamation of the gospel when a person responds to the truth of Christ and the claims of Christ in repentance and faith and comes to know what it is to live in union with Christ through the working of the Holy Spirit, then he is baptized and becomes a member of the Church - that "holy society of believers in our Lord Jesus Christ."

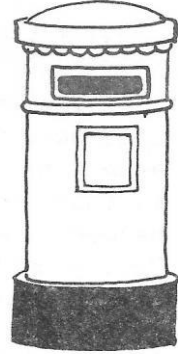
Rev John Tattersall B.A.

TO THE EDITOR

Madam,

Devotion to Mary

Whilst not entirely on Michael Edser's wavelength, (Redemptoris Mater — a Candid Reaction, *Together in Christ* October 1987) I have considerable sympathy with the points he makes, particularly that in regard to the lack of clear guidelines concerning devotion to Mary. The Catholic Church promotes and fosters such devotion on the basis that: "...these devotions cause her Son to be rightly known, loved and glorified, and all His commands observed." (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church; part IV*) The Council Fathers go on to warn theologians and preachers of the Divine Word against "the falsity of exaggeration on the one hand and the excess of narrow-mindedness on the other." (ibid) This leaves the field open for a very wide divergence of practice; I mean, the views of Mr Edser and those of, say, a devotee of St Louis de Montfort are poles apart. Each of these views may well be valid for their holder, but which of them, or what compromise between them should we look for in a united Church?



As concerns doctrine relating to Mary, by which I mean those revealed truths contained in the Deposit of Faith which require the assent of faith (however high or low they may stand in the hierarchy of truths), we have the assurance that only the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption, to which must be added the corollary to the proposition that Jesus is God, that Mary is properly to be called the Mother of God, are involved. But in the matter of devotion there can be no such corresponding assurances. A personal revelation or experience or understanding may well be binding on the individual involved, but others are free to accept or reject those revelations, experiences or understandings as their (informed) consciences allow, although rejection in some cases could well be temerarious.

The warning quoted above continues with an exhortation to: "painstakingly guard against any word or deed which could lead separated brethren or anyone else, into error regarding the true doctrine of the Church." This is, of course, rather difficult if we do not know "the true doctrine of the Church."

In my experience, the major objections raised to the more extreme expressions of Marian devotion stem from a weight being given to selected (and sometimes obscure) Scriptural texts which is not consonant with other, and more explicit, texts. It is in this area, I think, the "falsity of exaggeration" is most likely to occur.

Some conclusions drawn from the report of the Marriage Feast at Cana (Jn 2:1-12) are a fruitful source here. I will quote one from *The Catechism Simply Explained* by Canon Cafferata; applying the implications of Cana to intercession by Mary: "We must not forget she was His real mother. It is a mother's place to command more than to ask. Heaven does not destroy the relationship between mother and son, between Mary and Jesus." (Q 166) Could one not be forgiven for concluding from this that it is Mary's will that is done on earth rather than that of Our Father?

On the other hand, the "excess of narrow-mindedness" appears in expressions more deprecatory to Jesus Himself than His mother. For example, to diminish Mary's title of "Mother of God" is tantamount to diminishing the truly divine status of Jesus.

What then, is the answer to the question posed in the opening paragraph above?

I think it is wrong to try to forecast what the ultimately united Church will be like, or any specific detail relating to it. To do so would mean that one would be working towards the fulfilment of his own predictions rather than remaining open to follow the Holy Spirit in the direction in which He is leading the Church. We have seen, however, that a very wide variety of practice is currently permissible in the Catholic Church, why should not our united Church continue to tolerate legitimate variations, however widely varied, in devotion to Our Lady?

Mr Edser's letter has drawn attention to the tensions existing in the Catholic Church concerning devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Vatican II was aware of these tensions: "Let the faithful remember, moreover, that true devotion consists neither in fruitless and passing emotion, nor in certain vain credulity." (ibid) Amen to that.

Yours sincerely,

Sidney Ratcliff.

THE TENTH INTERNATIONAL PATRISTIC CONFERENCE,
Oxford. 24-29 August 1987.

I was fortunate to be one of about 800 people who gathered in Oxford for this Conference. They came from every continent; some spoke little English, but this was no drawback for the lectures were given in French and German as well as English, as was fitting for such a world-wide gathering.

They must have represented nearly every Christian denomination, a more ecumenical meeting it would be difficult to imagine. This was our common ground, each one was fully committed to Christ, each felt it well worth while to

devote considerable time to the study of the Church in late antiquity. During those few days Oxford was for us a city of Christianity.

It is a great honour to be asked to give the inaugural address to the entire membership assembled in the Sheldonian Theatre on the Monday evening. This time it fell to an American, Dr F R L Brown, Professor of history in Princeton University, whose subject was: "*Society and the Body; the social Meaning of Asceticism in Late Antiquity.*"

Dr Brown emphasised the importance of studying not only what the Fathers did with their minds, but also what they did with their bodies. They freely chose to withdraw from society, they freely chose to practice fasting and celibacy because they realised the value of their bodies in the service of Christ. The human body is Christ's agent and His dwelling place on this earth and will be taken up to heaven at the end of time. Could it be that the effect of such a life would be not only to stimulate spiritual and mental development but also to some extent, manifest physically something of what the risen body Will then be like?

Any member of the Conference can offer a paper on any subject concerned with Patristics, though it may not be possible to accept them all. Speakers often use a thesis they have done for an exam or a book they have written as the basis for their address.

Morning sessions, 9.10-12.50 with a break in the middle, were largely occupied in shorter lectures called "communications". These lasted 20 minutes, were given in the Examination Schools, and there was a choice of 15 going on at the same time.

Ancient manuscripts intrigue me, so I particularly enjoyed a communication given by Dr G O Simms, formerly Anglican Archbishop of Dublin on "*Recent Reflections on the Books of Durrow and Kells.*" These are manuscript illuminated copies of the Gospels in Latin and date from about the 6th century; both are now kept at Trinity College, Dublin.

The Book of Kells is considered the most elaborately executed manuscript of so early a date now in existence. Until recently it had been impossible to print copies of it, but an American firm are now undertaking to do this, at 10,000 dollars each!

The early afternoon was free, then at 4.15 we had "major themes", lectures lasting about an hour, followed by discussion. Again there was a wide choice, 14 each day; there were themes on the various Fathers, on women in the early Church and on the inter-relation of faith and philosophy.

There were three early evening lectures each day followed by a break for dinner. The one occasion when we all gathered together daily was at the Sheldonian theatre for the late evening lecture.

To be part of such an assembly, to be a member of the People of God was encouraging and stimulating; it was Christianity in action.

We were together in Christ.

Sr Mary Clare OSB Fernham.

OUR GOD REIGNS

At first, some members of our Parish Liturgy Committee (at St. Thomas More's, Bostall Park) were a little dubious when it was suggested that we have an ecumenical service on November 22 as a celebration of Christ the King and the 85 martyrs to be beatified by the Pope on that day. Was this not a specifically Catholic event which might not appeal to other Christians or be misinterpreted by them?

However, when it was pointed out that there would be ecumenical overtones at the beatification ceremony in Rome, and that both Cardinal Hume and Archbishop Runcie had stressed the aspects of ecumenism and reconciliation, our Committee became enthusiastic. Our Parish Priest said he would write to invite the local clergy and their flock, and also invite a special preacher. A suitable service would be prepared.

Needless to say, much prayer went into the preparation of the event, which certainly bore fruit. I think it is fair to say that a normal afternoon service with Benediction and dedication to Christ the King, would have drawn about 30 people; yet on this occasion over 250 turned up on that November afternoon. Such a phenomenal attendance must have been the work of the Holy Spirit. And it was ecumenical; it was a joy to have the presence and participation of other Christians.

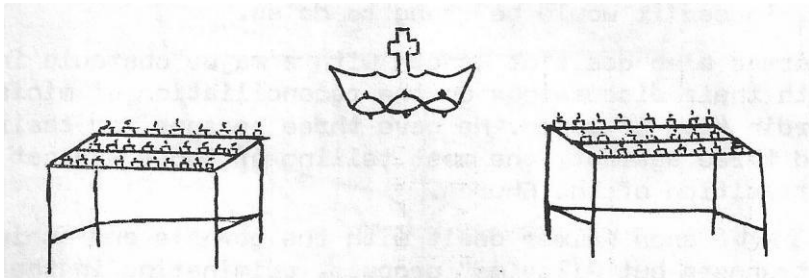
About 4 weeks before the event, a list was put up in the porch bearing the names of the 85 martyrs. Parishioners were invited to enter their own name against that of one of the martyrs whom they would be prepared to represent. There was a suggestion that they might care to choose one with their own Christian name or surname, and this idea was eagerly taken up. The list was filled up and candles prepared with the name of a martyr on them, ready for collection in the porch on arrival.

The service, specially composed for the event, began with beautiful prayers, readings, a lovely litany of praise and hymns, with the theme title "Our God Reigns". Our visiting preacher, Fr Aidan from St Peter's Dulwich, gave an inspiring address on the theme of martyrs and of Christian unity. We became aware of the martyrs being very close to us - not only by their names - but also in their ordinary way of life. Their heroic witness to Christ touched us deeply.

After the homily, we had a procession around the Church and porch following the lighting of all the candles from the Paschal Candle. The martyrs' candles were finally placed by their representatives on sconces before the altar while they invoked the martyr in prayer. It was all most moving. As for the singing - it was tremendous as we acclaimed our God who reigns, Christ our King, the power of the Spirit and all the saints.

After the service - the traditional refreshments. Here again, the Holy Spirit must have helped out as the caterers had to cope with nearly double the number they expected!

A final peep into the Church after 5 p.m. when it was empty and in darkness. Yet the martyrs' candles were still burning before the altar, and there was a beautiful atmosphere of stillness and peace - that peace which "surpasses ail understanding" and which binds us all together in Christian unity.



Unity Day --- 10.10.1987

"Remember the rock from which you were hewn."

With this quotation, Bishop Murphy-O'Connor of Arundel & Brighton, opened the day before a capacity audience in the hail of St Thomas More's church Bostall Park. His brief was to deal with matters ARCIC, while that of the second speaker, Canon Palmer, Home Secretary of the Church of England Synod Board for unity and mission, was to deal with the momentous Swanwick Conference.

All of us, the Bishop continued, Catholic, Anglican and Free Church has been hewn from the rock of our several traditions, and to dip one's feet in the water of ecumenism would be a departure from orthodoxy; however, in view of such a declaration from Vatican II as: "Whatever is wrought by the grace of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of our separated brethren can contribute to our own edification", he felt that the more we pursued the path of ecumenism in faith, hope and love, the more orthodox we became.

After speaking of the achievements of ARCIC I and of ARCIC II to date, he outlined the future programme for his Commission. They had been greatly encouraged during their last meeting in Rome by the Pope paying them a visit and having lunch with them.

The Bishop went on to detail the three enemies of ecumenism:

1. Suspicion of each other: there was a great need for the healing of memories. It was necessary to bear in mind the profound injunction of Vatican II: "...there can be no ecumenism worthy of the name without change of heart..."

2. Inertia: where people were willing to pray and work together, the Holy Spirit worked with them and through them. Where people would do nothing, there was no way in which the Holy Spirit could act.

3. Impatience: it should be borne in mind that we were seeking a unity of faith, hope and love. We could not overlook what differences of faith there existed, indeed it would be wrong to do so.

Bishop Cormac also dealt at length with a major obstacle in connection with their discussions on the reconciliation of ministries, that of the ordination of women. He gave three reasons for their ordination and three against, the most telling of those against being the constant tradition of the Church.

For his part, Canon Palmer dealt with the genesis and achievements of the "Not Strangers but Pilgrims" process, culminating in the Swanwick Conference, and also dealt with the practical issue of moving from a situation of cooperation to one of commitment. Much of what he said has been dealt with elsewhere in this issue.

The Canon invited Bishop Henderson, Father Jackson and Mrs Una Ratcliff, who had all been at the Conference to give their own impressions of the event. All four agreed that the predominant factors in the achievements of the Conference culminating in the Final Declaration were the sharing of each other's worship and the discussions in small groups.

Perhaps the day can be summed by two comments:

Father Andrew of the Community of St Peter wrote: "It was hard for me to drag myself away. But I did go away filled with much joy and new hope. Thank you for all this, with prayer all things are possible! We must hang on to that.

The second is from the Blackheath parish magazine: "The four of us who went together from Blackheath felt this was an extraordinary day, packed with goodwill, courtesy and love."

