

LEO XIII ON REUNION

THE publication of this collection of Papal pronouncements and correspondence¹ relating to the union of Christendom **could** not have been better timed. The explosion of 'Father Jerome's' squib has alone been sufficient to blow away whatever cobwebs may have been thought to have gathered round *Satis Cognitum* and *Apostolicae Curae*. The new Anglican endeavour towards understanding with Christians on the Continent through the pages of *Œcumenica* **makes** the reappearance of Leo XIII's utterances about the A.P.U.C. and Pius XI's *Mortalium Animos* singularly opportune.

Quite apart from the authority which belongs to these documents, an authority which establishes them permanently as the basis of **every** Catholic endeavour to forward the union of Christendom, they possess an intrinsic quality which puts them in a place which is unique in the literature of reunion. It is nothing less than a burning passion for the cause of Christian unity which flames up in Pope Leo's Encyclical *Praeclara Gratulationis* and his moving letter to the English People *Amantissima Voluntatis*. Despite the formal language of pontifical documents, which reads so stiffly in translation, it is difficult to find a parallel in the writings of Catholic or non-Catholic reunionists to the warmth of Pope Leo's appeals.

The reason is not far to seek. For Leo XIII the unity of Christendom was a matter not merely of expediency, however urgent. though nobody realized better than he did, as pages of *Praeclara Gratulationis* show, how urgent was the need for unity in the face of modern conditions. Nor was it merely a matter of sentiment however noble, nor of an idealism however admirable. Nor yet even a matter of

¹ *Rome and Reunion: A Collection of Papal Pronouncements*. Edited by E. C. Messenger, Ph.D. (Burns, Oates & Washbourne; 3/6.)

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a more perfect conformity to the ideals and desires of Christ. He saw Christian unity, not as an ideal or a desideratum, but as an absolute, unconditional necessity; an integral and inseparable constitutive of the divine economy of Redemption which consequently imposed an inexorable moral obligation.

It was in the *Satis Cognitum* that he outlined the doctrine of Christian unity. Discussion on reunion has too often been rendered nugatory because Christian unity has been considered on too low a level, as a matter of the unification of external organization only. The inner meaning of the *Una Sancta* has not been understood.

Satis Cognitum lifts the whole question to a higher plane and penetrates into the inward Mystery of the Church's unity. The unity of the Church is not visible only, not only—nor even chiefly—the perceptible unity of a human society or of a federation of such societies. It is a mystical Oneness, a divine Mystery which is inconspicuous except to supernatural Faith, an incorporation into the Body of Christ—the sole Mediator of God and men. It is a Oneness which initiates us into the very oneness of the Godhead—That *they* all *may be one, as thou, Father, in me, and I in thee* (John xvii, 21). It is, in the fullest sense. Atonement; not an adventitious luxury, but the very essence of Christianity.

Father Hermann Dieckmann's splendid treatise *De Ecclesia* (in which is reproduced the entirety of the Latin text of *Satis Cognitum*) has drawn attention to the fact that a one-sided apologetic has tended to obscure the essential supernatural character of the four mystic qualities of Oneness, Holiness, Catholicity and Apostolicity by over-stressing their external manifestation in perceptible 'signs' or 'notes.' Leo XIII recalls us from the paths into which the Protestant controversy had deflected us to the all-important teaching of the Fathers and Councils and of the New Testament itself.

Yet, he insists, just because Christian unity means incorporation into the Mystical Body of Christ, the invisible, visible God-Man who is subject both to Faith and sense-

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perception, it **must** itself be both invisible and visible and hence perfectly adapted to the psycho-physical entity which is man. The unity of the Church is indeed the unity of Charity, but there can be no fullness of inward Charity when there is external division. 'Those,' he writes, 'who arbitrarily conjure up and picture to themselves a hidden and invisible Church are in grievous and dangerous error: as also are those who regard the Church as a merely human institution which possesses a certain discipline and external rites but is without the perennial communication of the gifts of divine grace, and without all that which testifies by constant **and** undoubted **signs** to the existence of that life which is drawn from God. It is assuredly **as** impossible that the Church of Jesus Christ can be merely the one or the other **as** that man should be a body alone or a soul alone. The connection and union of both elements is as absolutely necessary to the true Church as the intimate union of the soul and body is to human nature. The Church is not something dead: it is the Body of Christ endowed with supernatural life. **As** Christ, the Head and Esemplar, is not constituted solely by His visible human nature nor solely by His invisible **divine** Nature, hut is one, from and in both'natures, visible and invisible; so the mystical Body of Christ is the **true** Church only because its visible parts draw life and power from the supernatural gifts and other things whence spring their very nature and essence.'

Oneness, therefore, at once internal and external, is of the **very** essence of the Church; an ever-present and indefectible fact, not an aspiration. Reunion is consequently not the re-assembling of a divided Body, which is of its nature indivisible, but the integration of separated members into the one organism. *No* preconceived ideal can determine **a** basis for reunion : it is a question not of realizing an ideal but of facing and accepting facts. 'We must investigate, not how the Church might possibly be one, but how He **who** founded it willed that it should be one.'

Leo XIII was Consequently compelled to forbid the **par**ticipation of Catholics in the Association for Promoting the Unity of Christendom, not because it promoted the unity

of Christendom, but because it hindered it by presupposing a conception of unity, based on the Branch Theory, other than that which Christ had ordained. For similar reasons Pius XI forbade participation in the conference of Lausanne. While unstinting in their admiration for the lofty motives which inspired these enterprises, the Vicars of Christ could be party to the effecting of no union other and less than that which Christ, the Head of the Church, had Himself established.

But it is the manner no less than the matter of Pope Leo's pronouncements which compels study and attention. In this, too, they should serve as our models. Sternly dogmatic indeed they are; constant and firm in their reiteration of the Primacy of Peter. Here is no watering-down of Catholic dogma, no glossing over of differences or obscuring of issues. Yet, precisely because they display so profound an understanding of the implications of Catholic teaching, they adopt an attitude of reconciliation, a spirit of sweetness and of ardent charity which is still too rare and which comes only from a firm and understanding faith.

Leo XIII fully understood the necessity of the 'psychological approach to Faith.' He knew well that, as a recent BLACKFRIARS contributor has said, 'Religion is not only dogma, it is dogma wrapped in a complicated setting of a thousand intertwining loyalties, emotions, memories, prejudices.' In a little-known letter to the 'Most Illustrious and Right Reverend Lords' the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, in which he expresses disappointment at the hostile reception which the inevitable *Apostolicae Curae* had received in England, he takes full account of the 'prejudiced opinions, one-sided studies, the training of the mind from childhood, and lastly the very love of the institutions of one's country which seem to receive added dignity from the greatness of the race.' His every utterance was constructed on the principle that differences alone should not be stressed, but that the non-Catholic reader's mind must be led gently from truths which he accepted to their necessary conclusion in truths which he did not. He invites them, not to controversy, but to sincere and constant

prayer, to unprejudiced contemplation of the mystery of unity, confident that its inherent beauty would compel them to pay the heavy price which he well knew its attainment involved.

It was precisely because he was *fortis in re* that he was spontaneously *suavis in modo*. It was no mere empty courtesy or blind sentimentality that prompted his constant and unstinting admiration for non-Catholic virtues and good works. There is even an implied rebuke to Catholic nations in his praise for the Victorian Englishman's 'observance of Sunday and respect for the Holy Scriptures.' There is nothing niggardly or reluctant in his recognition of 'the splendid qualities, moral virtues and Catholic traditions which still flourish among' Anglican and Nonconformist Englishmen, and their 'zeal in promoting religion.' This is not politeness or formality; it is a realism begotten of the same passion for truth which prompted his firmness on points of dogma and his deep penetration of their inner meaning. That less worthy, less understanding attitude, which has given all too much reason to foreign theologians to question the competence of English Catholics to handle the problem of Anglicanism, is the outcome not of too much but of too little Theology. Whatever mistakes were made at Malines, it cannot well be said that his trusted Desiré Mercier had misunderstood the spirit of Leo XIII.

Yet neither can it be said that the situation with regard to corporate reunion has as yet materially changed since Leo wrote, as Newman had written before him, that the hope of it 'holds out a vain expectation' and 'leads the minds of non-Catholics away from the Faith.' Indeed the 'Synthetic Theology' of *Œcumenica* seems to indicate a step away from rather than towards the Catholic conception of unity. Perhaps it is well for the present that the 'Price of unity' should remain high, involving all the individual agony and surrender, the overcoming of ingrained tastes and prejudices and the wrenching of life-long loyalties. What is cheaply priced is cheaply prized, and the God-given initiation into the fullness of Catholic unity merits unstinting sacrifice.

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It is the paradox of Catholicism, due to its very Catholicity, **that the more** it is itself the more contacts it finds **with** those outside, the more it tends to assimilate them into itself. Not by a policy of give-and-take, of compromise, of refusal to face facts, pleasant or unpleasant, is the way to **true** unity to be found; but contrariwise by a fuller realization of the implications and application of Catholic dogma **and** the more intense living of the full richness of Catholic life. Not our Catholicism but our sub-Catholicism is the obstacle to reunion; not our dogma **so** much as our failure to see its depths and breadths; not our liturgical worship but our lack of it. This last point is, perhaps, of the greatest immediate importance, and will serve to illustrate the general principle. It is by our worship, more than by anything else, that we are known. To the average Englishman, who knows only the splendid traditions of congregational worship which have been preserved in the Anglican and Free Churches, the normal public worship of English Catholics is not so much distasteful as unintelligible. In few countries has the liturgical movement made so little headway; though it is indeed beginning to influence our sanctuaries and choirs it is seldom understood that the nave is the centre of liturgical reform. How great an obstacle this presents to conversion, how bitter a trial for the devout convert, was vividly described by Fr. Maturin in his *The Price of Unity*.

The way to understanding, and so to unity, with our non-Catholic fellow countrymen is to be found in the fuller development of the potentialities of our own Catholic life and faith. Though corporate reunion be still far beyond the horizon of practical politics, arid though initiation into Catholic unity must still involve the heavy price of individual sacrifice and heroism, we shall have gained many of the advantages and avoided many of the disadvantages of an 'Anglican Union Church' when our own Latin Church in England more obviously merits those sacrifices and is more obviously fit for heroes to live in.

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