

COMMENTARY

CHRISTIAN UNITY. The cause of Christian unity has so generally been confused with the politics of the Ecumenical movement that Catholics, standing apart as they must from that movement's practical assumptions, have sometimes seemed unenthusiastic in their public support for the annual week of prayer for the Unity of the Church from January 18 to 25. The origins of the Church Unity Octave are by this sufficiently well-known, and its encouragement in Rome each year by the Pope should have removed any doubt of its official approval. It is therefore a matter for gratitude that the celebration of the Octave this month in Westminster Cathedral, with special sermons each evening and ending with High Mass in the presence of the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, should give a central and authoritative expression to the prayers of English Catholics.

In a world so tragically divided as our own, such a week of prayer, observed by Christians of widely different allegiance, takes on an urgent meaning. However divergent may be their understanding of what 'unity' must ultimately involve, the fact of their prayer, of their common acknowledgment that the will of Christ is that all men be one in him, is ground for hope. Indeed, the development of the Ecumenical movement itself has increasingly revealed a withdrawal from the easy optimism which supposes that adjustments of polity and the agreement to resolve doctrinal differences in an unspecified 'unity of spirit' can bring separation to an end. The inheritance of centuries of suspicion cannot be discarded so easily, and the sort of tolerance that evades serious differences by a desire to please can achieve no lasting understanding. The need first of all is to create the spiritual climate in which mutual understanding can grow, and Catholics for whom the unity of the Church is the foundation of their faith, have a special responsibility in joining their prayers to all who call themselves Christians that the will of Christ that 'all may be one' shall be achieved.