Comment

January has gradually come to be the month of unity. And the search for unity has come to be focused more and more on inter-communion, sometimes in rather a dramatic way. Only recently the Pope again criticized recent instances of inter-communion and inter-celebration between Catholics and non-Catholics (*The Tablet*, 23rd November, 1968). Yet a Presbyterian girl had been allowed to take communion at her marriage Mass in Assisi, and the non-Catholic observers at Medellin were able to communicate at the closing Mass of the conference of bishops. Apart from anything else, therefore, the question naturally arises why sharing of communion should have been officially allowed in such cases, but disavowed in Paris in June of last year, at the height of the uprising, and at Uppsala later. It is not sufficient to say that there was authority in one case where there was not in the other. The point is why authority decided one way in one case and another way in the other. There must be a principle implicit somewhere.

We might begin with the essential insight of Père Jerome Hamer, O.P.: 'The Eucharist and the Church cannot be dissociated, for the simple reason that this sacrament is the center of the whole life of the Church. . . . I should go so far as to say that the Church is the Eucharist extended in time and space, while the Eucharist is the Church condensed in a given moment and place. . . . Is not ecclesiastical communion, with all that it comprises, correlative to Eucharistic communion?' (*America*, 1st June, 1968, at p. 735.)

This, however, is merely to transfer the problem, for the whole nature of the Church is now in question. It is in this way that the Report of the Archbishops' Commission on Intercommunion (published in May, 1968) was able to sum up broadly three approaches to this central issue of sharing communion. The first represents the classical theory that the unity of the Church is visibly created in the baptism of its members, visibly preserved by adherence to the local bishop, and visibly renewed in the Eucharist, and the second represents the Reformed insight into the existing unity of all Christians in Christ, as sealed by common baptism and publicly displayed by a common profession of evangelical faith. Nor can it be said smugly that the Roman Catholic Church is any more exempt from such uncertainty. Her self-understanding cannot but change as her understanding of her relationship with other Christian bodies changes, and of this change the most striking single evidence is the way in which

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Pope Paul came to refer to *communiones christianae* and even to *ecclesiae* where Pope John had referred only to *fratres separati*—a change duly taken up in the *Decree on Ecumenicism* (v. §§ 3, 4, 19, title to Chap. III). This change comes perhaps most sharply, if subtly, to expression in the final paragraph of the *Decree*: 'Their ecumenical activity must not be other than fully and sincerely Catholic, that is, loyal to the truth we have received from the apostles and Fathers, and in harmony with the faith which the Catholic Church has always professed, *and at the same time* tending toward that fulness with which our Lord wants his body to be endowed in the course of time' (italics supplied).

What is crucial here is what Fr Frans Jozef van Beeck, S.J. (in the essay referred to in Fr Allchin's article this month) has called a change from a historical and retrospective to an eschatological and prospective viewpoint: 'But ever since the Catholic Church has become more consciously aware of its own pilgrim state, not excluding the level of unity as willed and promised by Christ, . . . it has also become more alive to the good faith of other Christian communities, which—like itself . . . —are also on their way to unity. The essential unity of the Church . . . has also, and pre-eminently, come to be viewed as Christ's eschatological gift to his perfect community. It is for this unity that the churches have to prepare themselves by a growth toward vital, not necessarily uniform, unity among themselves' (pp. 159-160).

It is this decisive shift in our way of looking at things that seems to be the inner explanation of all the uncertainty on the Church's part about her own nature and her relationship with other ecclesial communities. It also explains the third approach outlined in the Archbishops' commission. As always, we are in a tension between past and future, but now, for various reasons, the past of each one of us is especially under the judgment of the future and so subject to revision. Since the Church can no longer be seen merely as something already made, but also as something in the making; since, in particular, 'even . . . the formulation of doctrine' (*Decree*, § 6) is in this way subject to revision, the *expressions* and reformulations of the act of faith become much more provisional. And this in turn must mean that unity can no longer be sought and tested so easily in such formulations but rather in the act of faith that lies behind them and/or in the way of working together towards a more adequate expression. Our situation seems therefore to be one whose inner intelligibility is so well expressed in a phrase ascribed to Wittgenstein: he spoke of his own endeavour being to 'resolve crystals back into their mother liquid'. Does this, however, mean that all is fluidity, that there is no structure, that anything goes? Even the metaphor of the crystals would suggest not, for crystals possess structure.

It is at this point that another classical way of looking at the Church would seem to become particularly relevant. The great

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seventh-century Greek theologian, St Maximus the Confessor, suggested what may be called a concentric view of the Church: the world is to the Church as the nave of a church is to its sanctuary and as man's body is to his spirit. The Church is in the world and the sanctuary in the nave, he said, like Ezechiel's wheel within a wheel. Now St Maximus seems here to have tumbled upon something in the nature of a pre-ordained harmony. For is there not here the vision that also inspired the structure of the stationing of the tribes of Israel round the priestly tribe of Levi (Numbers 2ff), and the building of the temple of Solomon, radiating as it did outwards from the Holy of Holies through the nave and the vestibule and so through the Court of the Gentiles into the world at large (1 Kings 6ff)? A pattern which has been recaptured through the apparent accidents of organizational response to pressure in the setting up of the three post-conciliar commissions for unity with other Christians, for non-Christian believers and for non-believers (and which is represented, incidentally, in the way in which the articles this month are set out . . .).

Now the point of invoking this way of looking at the Church's essential structure here is to suggest that in principle it does justice to the witness of both the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches on the one hand and the Reformed churches on the other: where the former testify to the possibility of the institutional anticipation of the Church's fulness of union here below, the latter testify to the charismatic unpredictability of Christ's grace. And at the same time it carries with it the corollary that all churches and communities must be prepared to change. For if there is indeed an implicit order of inter-relationship between the various ecclesial communities in the manner suggested by the insight of St Maximus, then the re-finding of the true relationship between all must involve the adjustment of each. Thus there is here both a principle and a process. The principle is that every level is both respected and transformed in the process of being integrated into the larger totality, and the process is the actual business of this mutual adjustment. And what is being suggested here is that inter-communion must be seen as part of such a process, and to be commanded by the principle which envisages it.

If this is in any way true, however, then it also follows that every application of the principle must be a matter of prudential judgment, keeping in mind both poles of the truth, namely, respect for the achievement of the past and readiness to re-shape for the future. Nor are such judgments for the hierarchy only. The classical principle of St Cyprian, 'the bishop is in the Church and the Church is in the bishop', cuts two ways. On the one hand it points to the self-contradiction involved in any underground church refusing to remain in contact with the official Church. On the other hand, it can

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'validating goal' which is within the 'dialectically self-referential totalization' to which a Marxist is committed is acute, whether Christianity enters into it or not. Without such 'validating goal', what is the point?

This account has touched on some aspects of an immensely complex book no line of which is boring. The *Slant* position is in perpetual movement; it is, like Mr Cunningham's Christian 'project', *en train de se faire*. As an account of the present position of the most significant single movement in English theology, this book is indispensable.

It seems sad that Mr Middleton's account, which is not *en train* for anywhere, is likely to reach far more people, who may then feel justified in dismissing *Slant*, in spite of Mr Middleton's genuine insights (his passages on the 'nomadic' nature of faith spring to mind), as essentially trivial.

A glossary of philosophic terms in the next edition of *Adam* might redress the balance.

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point the way to a possible institutionalization of the 'pushing power of the Church', in the manner in which the Dutch bishops indicated earlier last year in their directives about 'mixed marriages'. By stating openly that they would systematically seek from Rome all dispensations foreseen by current canon law and that they would themselves give permission for sharing communion at mixed marriages, subject to three conditions (*I.C.I.*, 1st and 15th April, 1968), they acknowledged the state of transition in which we live and gave an example of co-operation between the institutional and the charismatic elements in the Church which might well be followed.

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