

UNITY WORK IN HOLLAND¹

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IN Holland there came a turn in the tide of the relationships between the Churches as early as the end of the first world war, though this war itself, unlike the later one, had but little influence on the religious climate in Holland. In the winter of 1919 the Dominicans of Zwolle started giving 'conferences for non-Catholics' in which they consciously abandoned the polemic tone for a quiet and objective explanation of the Catholic faith. On the Catholic side this was the first swallow which did not indeed make a summer, but at least announced it. Looking at it now it is easier to understand that the spiritual climate still had to change considerably before the age-old process of ossification in polemics and apologetics could be reversed.

In Holland, if anywhere in the world, one has to reckon with non-theological factors in the relations of churches and confessions. In some way or other it is the result of both the Dutch character and Dutch history combined that the average town or village north of the great rivers (the part of the country where many denominations live together) not only has Catholic or Protestant churches, but also a Catholic and Protestant grouping in local government (as in the second Chamber of the States General there is a Catholic People's Party as well as three political parties of Protestant denomination) and further in each case a separate Catholic and Protestant school, a Catholic and Protestant trade union, a Catholic and Protestant hospital, a Catholic and Protestant sports club and so on almost *ad infinitum*. In this respect Holland's social and religious pattern is like the bird's-eye view of Holland one gets from an aeroplane; bits of pasture land neatly divided by ditches and fences. But this means that the fatal division of Christians in this country has penetrated even social life and therefore has become so deeply rooted as to be liable at

¹ Father Kreykamp belongs to the Dutch Dominican province. He is the editor of *De Bazuin* ('The Trumpet'), a Dutch Catholic weekly for the preaching of the faith ('Weekblad voor geloofsverkundiging'). While Holland has no Catholic publication devoted specifically and solely to the ecumenical movement, *De Bazuin* probably carries more articles concerning this subject than any other Dutch Catholic periodical. The present article is translated from the Dutch by Mark Schoof, O.P., and Theodore Derckx, O.P.

every turn to hinder the betterment of relationships. It is easy to imagine how many chances there are here for mutual distrust, struggles for power and to maintain rights and achievements laboriously won. The name 'Roman Catholic' not only evokes the idea of a certain religious conviction, but also something more or less like 'narrow-minded', 'underdeveloped' and 'un-Dutch'. Not only has the Protestant translation of the Bible a different spelling for the names of the prophets (e.g. Zefanja—Sofonias), but in daily conversation there are also little differences in speech which will almost certainly betray the Protestant or the Catholic. Even in matters of national dress, so attractive to foreigners, there are differences. In Zeeland the Protestant women wear a circular head-dress, the Catholics a rectangular one.

In a personal talk Père Yves Congar, O.P., expressed his opinion that it was by no means by chance that Holland did not adopt Lutheranism but Calvinism. Not only historical factors but also the typical radicalism and need for outspoken consistency are responsible for this development. When poking fun at himself a Dutchman sometimes calls himself an *animal theologizans*. No people on earth, I think, spends so much time and energy on discussions and conversations about religious affairs, at work in factories and offices, in the train, everywhere. Compared with other countries of the western world religion is taken very seriously in Holland, a fact that can hardly escape the visitor from abroad. If elsewhere in Europe one is led to think that the interest in religion is waning, this surely does not apply in the same degree to Holland.

Until the second world war the situation in Holland was characterized by so-called isolation. Each kept to his own corner. There was hardly any effort to get to know each other, and in consequence people knew each other only superficially and at a distance. All that was known was traditional uncritical tales, formulas and caricatures. Such figments, usually to one's own advantage and detrimental to the other's, took the place of the knowledge that could have been gained by personal contact and that would have changed fundamentally many of the existing views.

Just because the divisions among Christians had such a strong bearing on society the danger was great that one would resign oneself to it as being an ancient unchangeable inheritance.

'That is how things are', and 'After all we can't ever change it' might become one's attitude. It was mainly by way of love, only to a lesser extent in other ways, that Protestants could come to the Catholic Church. The number of Catholics going over to some Protestant Church remained low. By far the majority of Catholics breaking with the Church come to a no-man's land which a much greater number of former Protestants have already reached. At the moment this category almost certainly comprises a fourth of the total population, which a hundred years ago was still two-thirds Protestant and one-third Catholic.

To a great extent the second world war fundamentally altered the situation in Holland. Under the pressure of the occupation the solid walls of the age-old ghetto crumbled. Catholics and Protestants learned to know and appreciate each other in the common fight against injustice and the struggle for the recovery of freedom. On both sides there have been discoveries. Each felt shame at having for so many years invariably distorted the others' beliefs. Each felt joy in the genuine Christian faith of the other. At length there arose anxiety about the division, which came to be seen no longer as an inevitable situation but as the great scandal which we must try to take away.

Especially in the first years after 1945 it was plain that people no longer wanted to keep up the trench-warfare of past centuries. They wished to come nearer to one another, partly because we are citizens of one country, partly because as Christians we are not *only* divided, but also united in many important respects. On the Catholic side converts like Professor W. van de Pol and Professor Cornelia de Vogel by their publications greatly helped Catholics to open their eyes to the positive content of the Reformation, which till then they had seen one-sidedly as a 'protest against Rome'. Influences of a theoretical and practical kind played their part so that polemical and dully-reasoned (in this sense 'rationalistic') apologetics largely disappeared and gave way to personal witness. 'We should preach the faith as a medieval cathedral does it' is a striking phrase of Dr N. van Doornik, M.S.C. Quite rightly the pre-war 'apologetic society of St Peter Canisius' was rebaptized to 'St Willibrord Society'. There is significance in the very choice of St Willibrord, the Anglo-Saxon monk-bishop who in the course of the eighth century preached the Christian faith in the then still-pagan Low Countries. Through greater

openness to the Ecumenical Movement which was developing abroad, in English-speaking countries, in France and Germany, the spiritual climate in Holland changed till a truly ecumenical colloquy was no longer unthinkable.

The Ecumenical Movement had begun. Catholic and Protestant professors and theologians now meet at high level. Regular discussions are being held between the professors and students of the Protestant theological university at Kampen and those of the Dominican priory at Zwolle, at which a side-meeting of 'Rome' and 'Reformation' on the playing-fields is not at all despised. The contact between Catholic priests and laymen and Protestant ministers and theologians takes many forms. Such, for instance, as that between university students. Catholics are invited to give introductory talks to Protestant audiences and vice-versa. Summing up, I should say: Everywhere this contact has started and is growing. I should certainly mention the 'Dutch Contact Centre'. From its start (1946) this organization gathers Catholics, Protestants and non-Christians together in national and local meetings and provides them with the opportunity, as it is said in its official publication, 'to examine closely each other's points of view, often known only from secondary sources, and so enable them the better to understand each other'.

The Ecumenical Movement shows activity in a series of important publications. Shortly after the liberation the Protestant professor Dr G. C. Berkouwer published his book, *Conflict with Rome*, upon which followed a joint response some years later by a group of Catholic theologians with the title: *Grace and Church*. An important Protestant periodical *Wending* published a 'Catholicism-number' in 1948, to which Catholic quarters have variously responded. In 1950 there appeared even an official 'pastoral letter of the General synod of the Dutch Reformed Church about Roman Catholicism', which has been discussed in various Catholic organs and received a proper reply in the 'Answer to the Pastoral Letter', compiled by five professors of the Catholic university of Nijmegen. In the meantime studies have appeared in which Protestant and Catholic theologians equally have the floor. Light is thrown upon a question from both Protestant and Catholic sides. So for instance in the volume *Content of Faith and Confession of Faith* and notably in Elsevier's *Encyclopedie van het Christendom*, on which, though it appeared in

two separate volumes, one Catholic and one Protestant, Catholic and Protestant specialists worked together in a fruitful manner. A characteristic example of this contact is also the study of *The Situation of the Protestants in Spain*, written by Dr H. van der Linde (Protestant) and Dr Fr Thijssen (Catholic). The erection of a special chair in 'The Phenomenology of Protestantism' at the Catholic university of Nijmegen deserves special mention. Already two Catholic theologians have graduated with a thesis about currents and movements in the Dutch Reformed Church; just as conversely at the Free University (Protestant) of Amsterdam Protestant theologians have graduated with theses about doctrine and life in the Catholic Church.

The climate of the Ecumenical Movement in Holland must be judged friendly. The exchange of thought may at times become excited but without lessening right understanding. Mutually we realize that our vision of each other's position has been very insufficient. We have thought with too little subtlety. When we talk about what unites us we discover again and again how many deficiencies there are in fact in our understanding of these points of unity.

The themes of the discussions are first of all the great realities of the Incarnation, the Church, Grace, the nature of Man, not forgetting the ministry, about which a small group within the Dutch Reformed Church has begun to think in a somewhat 'High Church' manner; but others keep their distance on this point. The discussions about 'women in the ministry' in Protestant circles on the one hand and the commemoration of the restoration of the hierarchy on the other, together with the influence of Anglican publications, have fixed the attention on the ministry. Delicate themes like Mariology and Papacy come up for discussion, too. Some light has been thrown on these questions, but they still remain the most difficult points in the discussions, here as in anywhere in the world. The latest methods of literary criticism have given to questions concerning Scripture and Tradition a quite different aspect.

Yet the interest in the talks (and publications) lies often mainly in the social-political field. The question of the toleration shown by Catholics has occupied minds from the start, both because of the situation of the Protestants in Spain and on the ground of the results of the last census in 1947 with its prediction of the growth

of the Catholic population in Holland, which caused a stir because of the high birthrate. Events of all sorts on the social-political level revive again and again the distrust of the Catholic Church, which is held to be out for political power, distrustful of civil freedom and hostile to real democracy. Discussion about these things, if one is led back to the Inquisition, the *Syllabus Errorum* of Pius IX etc. becomes very heavy going. Unfortunately it cannot be denied that the publication of *Humani Generis*, the proclamation of the dogma of Mary's Assumption, the events concerning the priest workers in 1953-54 and the mandate of the bishops of Holland, in which Catholics are very strongly discouraged from becoming members of the (socialistic) 'Labour Party', each in its own way has created a less favourable climate for the Ecumenical Movement. From Protestant quarters synodal publications concerning marriage (in which the use of contraceptives is allowed), discussions about women as ministers and the tendency of many Protestants to opt for democratic socialism have underlined the existing differences.

But the Ecumenical Movement continues in spite of all major and minor obstacles and finds some response in the broader need for the solidarity of modern man. At present the climate is less favourable than it was during the first years after the war; moreover there is some faint-hearted falling back on dated points of view, but nonetheless the movement itself stays alive, and reports of co-operation between Catholics and Protestants, such as were not thought possible only a few years ago, keep turning up.

In conclusion we may note two factors that are, for Catholics, important for the growth of the Ecumenical Movement:

(1) The strongly-growing interest in Liturgy and the Bible and, connected with it, the renovation of theology and preaching, and the longing for re-union, which having been aroused, can no longer be kept out. (Even the interest in the Eastern Churches is growing; the interest in Israel, though, is limited to small groups.)

(2) The contact with the world of the Reformation not only brings about a greater awareness of, and a deeper reflection on, our own religious conviction but contributes also to a healthy critique inside the Church. If Protestants are so tenacious of the conviction that the Catholic Church is an institution of power-politics, intolerant and not democratic, do we not give ground for this

tragic misunderstanding? For example, is our way of speaking in this regard sufficiently justified?

The Catholics of North Europe and North America realize better what is at stake than those of South Europe and South America. They apprehend more clearly also what a fight it will be and what sacrifices will have to be made in order to overcome the division between Christians, which are, both in our own country as in the whole of Europe and the world, such a big stumbling-block to non-Christians in their path to the Redeemer of the world and his Church. 'That they all may be one, that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.' The fulfilment of this prayer is put in our hands also, as a heavy responsibility.



UNITY WORK IN ENGLAND

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I HAVE been asked by the Editor of THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT to write on achievement and prospects in ecumenical work by Catholics in England, and to relate my article specially to what is being done and what could be done in this respect in our universities. To write upon what has already been achieved in this direction would entail the making of a catalogue of individual lectures and talks, of discussion meetings mostly on a small scale, and perhaps of one or two series of theological conversations held over a period of years between Catholic and Anglican scholars. A few books also, in English, on things ecumenical could be added to this catalogue.¹ There is however no movement in England which puts into practice the principles for which the Roman organization *Unitas*, set up by the Holy See after the war, stands.² There is nothing comparable to the *Una Sancta* movement in Germany,³ or to the 'Istina' centre in France, presided over by Père C. J. Dumont, o.p.⁴

1 A list of them will be found in the 'Comment' on another page of this issue.

2 Its journal in three languages with this title is published quarterly. The English edition is obtainable from Duckett, 140 Strand, W.C.2.

3 Its journal under that name contains interesting inter-confessional articles as between Catholics and Lutherans, published by Kyrios-Verlag, Meitingen-bei-Augsburg.

4 Publishing a quarterly of that name in French and a monthly bulletin of things ecumenical. *Istina*, 25 Boulevard D'Auteuil, Boulogne-sur-Seine (Seine).