

THE WEEK OF UNIVERSAL PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY¹

THE week of prayer for the reunion of Christians reminds us that all baptized people, at present divided from each other, are called to be one.

Throughout the world, from Protestant as well as Catholic, from Orthodox as well as Anglican, will rise the prayer of all who know how painful and how evil are the divisions among Christians.

Nine centuries have passed since the greater part of the Christian East separated from Rome. It is over four hundred years since the Reformation.

And the mass of hundreds of millions of Catholic, Protestant, Anglican and Orthodox believers live to a greater or less degree in a state of indifference to each other.

About 2,400 millions are living on the earth, half in Asia. Nominally, about 400 million are Catholic; 200 million are Orthodox; 175 million are Protestant; and 50 million are Anglican. More than 800 million Christians, deeply divided amongst themselves with non-Christians numbering 1,600 million. As a result of these divisions the voice of the supreme teaching authority of the one, true Church, the Catholic Church, is often lost or obscured to the outsider by a chorus of other discordant voices each claiming to speak in Christ's name.

Some of the effects of these divisions:

- (1) Rivalries, differences at least, sometimes conflicts, in the preaching of the Gospel in pagan lands; and so, among the peoples of those lands, concern, confusion, uncertainty.
- (2) The confusion of non-believers in so-called Christian countries, and anguish for those who seek truth.
- (3) The weakening in the world of the vital spiritual force of Christianity.
- (4) Parochialism, and discord, in the work of Christ entrusted to us.
- (5) A lack of the true visible adoration of the Trinity by

¹ Translated and adapted from the French of a pamphlet by Père Michalon.

baptized Christians as a united whole.

If you were asked: What is a Protestant? or an Anglican? or a Catholic?—wouldn't you be inclined to reply by pointing to whatever displeased you, or was at any rate a root of disension?

You do not know them!

How then can you value and love them?

This is one of our great failures, this silent acceptance of the greatest divorce in Christian history. It would seem that in effect baptized Christians have abandoned hope of being reconciled to each other in Unity.

Is our charity so withered that Christ's prayer on the eve of Holy Thursday does not move us? *That they all may be one, as thou, Father, in me and I in thee; that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.*

Perhaps we have made of Christian Unity a problem to be solved; probably one more interesting than others, but a problem merely to be discussed . . . because it is contemporary, because it has become mixed with aims which very often are worldly.

Perhaps we have thought that unity would be achieved by the efforts of intellectuals, or by goodwill.

If so we have failed to comprehend the Mystery of the Church.

The Unity of Christians is a Grace

We are confronted by a mystery which demands an attitude of humility towards oneself, towards our brothers, towards Christ.

If we are to attempt the problems involved it is essential that we be quickened by the spirit of Christ, who alone will bring us to the depth and the fullness of the mystery of his Church.

When we have really felt the wound of our divisions; when we have truly recognized our own failings; when we have prayed constantly and in our hearts for ourselves as Christ's followers, as for all our Christian brethren. . .

Then only will God allow, in the clarifying light of a faith more fully lived, the bonds to be made more and more perfect between those who are brothers in Christ.

The faithful of all Christian communities are beginning to understand that the attainment of Christian Unity depends upon the depth of their faith; the integrity of their life; their love of one another; and upon their prayer in the Prayer of Christ.

Because of this rising of the Spirit we are now seeing the beginning of a phenomenon without parallel in the history of Christianity:

From all Christian groups rises the intercession of great spiritual energies, separate but with the same inspiration, all bent upon this one common and deep distress, the separation of Christians, and upon this one intense will:

The achievement of the visible unity of the Kingdom of God, in the form which Christ wills, and by the means he approves.

How then can the union of all Christians fail to be realized at last in the full content of the One God, since the movement proceeds from the action of hearts moved towards the same Lord, Jesus Christ?

It will not be unity won by bargaining, based on a minimum of common belief. It will be that Unity for which Christ prayed, and eternally prays. For any other would be a betrayal of Truth, a betrayal all Christians turn from in dread.

One day in this slow coming to maturity God will set the seal of fulfilment. The circumstances, the means, the time, we cannot know. His will is mysterious.

Only prayer sets us at the heart of this mystery. Only prayer places each one in Christ where we will not deny him. Only prayer stirs the fire of charity to make it so blazing a light that the individual is consumed in the Unity of Christ.

Reunited before the Cross, all Christians hear the silent prayer formed by Jesus throughout time to his Father, that prayer for Unity said at the Last Supper:

That they all may be one, as thou, Father, in me and I in thee; that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. (John 17, 21.)

They understand that Christ's supplication requires all Christians fully to unite themselves in the prayer of Christ.

Their prayer will be vain and pharisaical if all alike they do not begin by asking pardon of Christ for all the calumny, injustice, scandal, violence, and mortal persecution they have done in the past to each other, and still do today.

And this prayer for pardon will be insincere, if it is not prefaced by the humble request of each for the pardon of the others, before Christ crucified for the Redemption of all.

PRAYERS

The general intention of the Week of Universal Prayer is 'The Unity of all Christians, in the form desired by Christ for his Church'. In addition to the usual daily intentions for particular groups of Christians throughout the world, it is necessary to pray for a true knowledge of the evil of our divisions, and for the sanctification of Missions.

(1) *So long as the divisions of Christians do not weigh heavily upon us, so long as they do not open in us a wound of which the pain is part of the pain suffered by Christ on account of sin, Christian Unity is for us only an intellectual problem. We have yet to make the first step into the mystery of the Prayer for Unity.*

It is not possible truly to pray and to work for the Unity of Christians until the wound of disunity has been deeply suffered. The grace to be sought first is that of a spiritual comprehension of the agony of our divisions.

(2) *The missionary work of the Church and her Unity are closely related. If Christians have sown their divisions among the peoples they lead to Christ, they have a duty to pray that these 'young churches' may not be scandalized in their acceptance of the Gospel.*

By praying for the spiritual perfection of these missions we admit our responsibility to them, while affirming their need of Unity.

A Prayer for Unity

Lord Jesus, who the night before dying for us prayed that all your disciples might be one, as are you in your Father and your Father in you, let us suffer and understand the agonizing treachery of our disunity.

Give us honesty to recognize, and courage to put aside, our indifference and our mutual mistrust and hostility.

Grant that we be reconciled in the prayer of your Being, so that from our hearts and lips will rise unceasingly your prayer, which must win from the Father that unity of Christians which you desire, by the means you approve.

May we find in you, who are perfect Charity, the way which leads to Unity in conformity to your Love and to your Truth.
Amen.

Prayers from the Liturgies

May all be one, as you Father in me and I in you; and may they be one in us, that the world may believe it is you who sent me.

V. I say unto thee, thou art Peter,

R. And upon this rock I will build my Church.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, who said to your apostles: Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you, take account not of my sins but of the faith of your Church. Grant to it peace and unity according to your will, O God who lives and reigns for ever.
Amen. *(The Roman Missal.)*

O God the Father, Goodness surpassing all goodness, Beauty surpassing all beauty, in you are peace and content and concord: reconcile your servants separated from each other by dissensions, and bring us to that unity in love which should be the sign of our likeness to your sublime nature.

You who transcend all, unite us all in the free concord of the spirit, so that, held together by the power of charity and of love, we shall become in spirit one, in that peace which is yours and which sets all things at rest, in the grace, the mercy, and the compassion of your beloved Son.

(Jacobite liturgy of St Denis.)

Lord, who have inspired these prayers said in common and with one voice, and who have promised to answer the prayers of those who in your name pray together, fulfil the desires of your servants in that way which is best, obtaining for them a comprehension of your truth in this life, and granting them in the next the grace of eternal life.

(Liturgy of St John Chrysostom.)

O God who are love, you have given through your beloved Son this new command, that we shall love each other as you have loved us, poor though we are, undeserving and lost: as you have loved us, even to the giving up of your Son for our salvation and life.

We ask you, Lord, grant that throughout our time upon earth our hearts may forgive ill-will, and that our consciences may be just and our thoughts true. And grant us strength of spirit to love all men, our brothers. *Amen.* *(Coptic Liturgy of St Cyril.)*

We beseech you, Lord, watch over your Church, holy, universal and apostolic, which has spread from one end to the other

of the earth. To this Church which you have made to grow in the life of the blood of Christ your Son, give peace. Make this, your mystical body, to live till the consummation of time.

(*Liturgy of St Basil.*)

Almighty and everlasting God, who by thy holy Apostle hast taught us to make prayers, and supplications, and to give thanks, for all men; we humbly beseech thee most mercifully to receive these our prayers, which we offer unto thy Divine Majesty; beseeching thee to inspire continually the Universal Church with the Spirit of Truth, Unity, and Concord. And grant that all they that do confess thy Holy Name may agree in the Truth of thy Holy Word, and live in unity, and godly love, for Jesus Christ's sake, our only Mediator and Advocate. *Amen.*¹

Invocations

I. 'Still other sheep I have who are not of this fold; them also I will bring, and they will hear my voice.'

For the slight notice we have taken of these words of your divine heart . . . *Lord, we ask pardon of you.*

For our controversies, marked often by mockery, by hardness of heart, or by misrepresentation of our fellow-Christians, and for our stubbornness and harsh judgment . . . *Lord, we ask, etc.*

For all the acts of violence against our fellow-Christians, of which today or in the past we have been guilty . . . *Lord, we ask, etc.*

For all our pride and smugness in our relations with our fellow-Christians throughout the centuries, and for all our misunderstanding of them . . . *Lord, we ask, etc.*

For our bad example, which has hindered, reduced, or prevented the action of grace within the souls of our fellow-Christians . . . *Lord, we ask, etc.*

For our neglect of frequent, fervent, and fraternal prayer for them . . . *Lord, we ask, etc.*

II. Beyond frontiers of language, race, and nation . . . *Christ, unite us.*

Beyond our ignorance, our prejudices, and our instinctive antagonisms . . . *Christ, unite us.*

¹ This prayer has been included from the Anglican Book of Common Prayer for the sake of Anglicans and others who may wish to use it.

Beyond our barriers, both intellectual and spiritual . . . *Christ, unite us.*

III. O God, that your glory may be greater . . . *Gather all Christians in Christ.*

O God, that goodness and truth may prevail . . . *Gather, etc.*

O God, that there may be but one flock and one shepherd . . . *Gather, etc.*

O God, that the pride of Satan and his devils may be confounded . . . *Gather, etc.*

O God, that at last peace may reign in this world . . . *Gather, etc.*

O God, that joy may be perfected in the heart of your Son . . . *Gather, etc.*

Copies of this article for those who wish to make use of the prayers may be obtained from Margaret Harvey, Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford. Price sixpence.



REVIEWS

JOHN HENRY CARDINAL NEWMAN: PENSÉES SUR L'ÉGLISE. Traduction française par A. Roucou-Barthélémy. (Editions du Cerf; n.p.)

This book is No. 30 of the series *Unam sanctam*, designed to present the Catholic doctrine of the Church in an eirenic fashion. For readers of French, it makes a valuable contribution to the understanding of the Church's teaching about herself and also of Newman's mind and its development. It is partly based on a German work, Kardinal J. H. Newman, *Die Kirche*, compiled by O. Karrer on a very large scale. Mme A. Roucou-Barthélémy has made a smaller selection, though even so this is a book of four hundred pages. Only a small proportion of the texts are not easily available to English readers; for them, its value lies in bringing together passages scattered over many different works.

The extracts are given under five heads. The first part deals with the general doctrine of the Church. Much of it was already held by Newman as an Anglican and was the inspiration of his Oxford period. His defence of the Papacy, however, belongs to the periods of his conversion and of the Vatican Council. His hesitations and misgivings regarding infallibility are not passed over, any more than his final complete acceptance of the definition. Part Two is concerned with the place of the Church in world history. Thanks to his familiarity