STEPS TO CHRISTIAN UNITY

The crucial issues of Christian Unity discussed by 24 outstanding ecumenical leaders

ALBERT CARDINAL MEYER
FRANKLIN H. LITTELL
ROBERT McAFEE BROWN
HANS KÜNG
KARL BARTH
YVES CONGAR
BERNARD C. PAWLEY
MAX THURIAN
EMILE-JOSEPH DESMEDT
FRED PIERCE CORSON
RICHARD CARDINAL CUSHING
MARTIN E. MARTY
KARL RAHNER
JOHN COGLEY
GREGORY BAUM
AUGUSTIN CARDINAL BEA

STEPS TO CHRISTIAN UNITY

Edited by John A. O'Brien

'Yet not for these only do I pray, but for those also who through their word are to believe in me, that all may be one, even as thou, Father, in me and I in thee; that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that thou has sent me.'

JOHN 17 : 20 1

COLLINS · St James's Place, London, 1965

Contents

Getting the most out of this book *page* 9

A NEW ERA *John A. O'Brien* 15

THE SCANDAL OF A DIVIDED CHRISTENDOM
Albert Cardinal Meyer 27

A NEW LOOK AT THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY
Franklin H. Littell 39

NINE STEPS TO UNITY *Robert McAfee Brown* 57

BROTHERLY APPROACH FROM BOTH SIDES
Hans Küng 72

PROSPECTS FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY
Karl Barth 83

CONQUERING OUR ENMITIES *Yves Congar* 95

AN ANGLICAN VIEWS THE COUNCIL
Bernard C. Pawley 107

WALKING TOGETHER TO CHRIST
Max Thurian 127

TOLERANCE, FREEDOM, AND ECUMENISM
Emile-Joseph De Smedt 145

UNITY IN OUR TIME *Fred Pierce Corson* 166

GRASS-ROOTS STEPS TO UNITY
Richard Cardinal Cushing 183

CONTENTS

PATTERNS OF PROTESTANT THOUGHT
Martin E. Marty page 199

CLEARING THE WAY TO CHRISTIAN UNITY
Karl Rahner 213

JOURNEY INTO ECUMENICITY *Douglas Horton* 223

TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR THE ECUMENICAL AGE *John Cogley* 241

DRAWING CLOSER TOGETHER *Gregory Baum* 267

LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE
Augustin Cardinal Bea 283

AN EXCHANGE BETWEEN POPE PAUL VI AND THE OBSERVER-DELEGATES AT VATICAN COUNCIL II 289

WE HAVE MADE SOME PROGRESS
K. E. Skydsgaard 289

LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER *Pope Paul VI* 292

ECUMENICAL VOICES AT MONTREAL 296

A SPIRITUAL DISCOVERY
W. A. Visser 't Hooft 296

THE WALLS ARE CRUMBLING
Athenagoras of Elaia 298

THE FELLOWSHIP OF CHRIST
George Johnston 300

WE ARE BROTHERS *Paul-Emile Cardinal Léger* 302

UNITED IN A COMMON PRAYER *Pope Paul VI* 304

PUTTING ECUMENISM INTO PRACTICE
John A. O'Brien 306

Karl Barth

(Interviewed by Tanneguy de Quénétain)

Among the most distinguished names among Protestant theologians is that of Dr. Karl Barth, who is regarded by many as the founder of a distinctive school of Protestant theological thought. Born on May 10, 1886, in Basle, Switzerland, he is the son of a New Testament scholar of the Swiss Reformed Church who gave up his pastorate to teach theology at a seminary in Basle. Barth studied at the Universities of Bern, Tübingen, Berlin, and Marburg, having among his teachers two of the outstanding exponents of liberal Protestant theology, Adolf von Harnack at Berlin and Wilhelm Herrmann at Marburg.

After being ordained by his father in 1908 in the Reformed Church in Bern, Barth served for some years in pastoral work. In 1919 he published his book, *Römerbrief*, a commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Romans, in which he rejected the liberal theology of his former teachers. In his book Barth restored to theology the view of God as supreme, transcendent, and divine. He also emphasized the sinfulness of man, which he felt liberals had neglected in overemphasizing the goodness and dignity of man.

The book attracted wide attention both from his critics and from his advocates and disciples. In 1921 Barth became Professor of Reformed Theology at the University of Göttingen, and in 1925 took the chair of theology at the University of Münster. His great work, *Church Dogmatics*, consisting of twelve large volumes, has been widely heralded as the Protestant counterpart of the *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas Aquinas. A vehement opponent of Nazism, Barth was dismissed in 1935 from his post at Bonn and

accepted a professorship of theology created especially for him at the University of Basle.

He remained in this position until his retirement in the spring of 1962. In April of that year, Barth made his first visit to the United States and gave a series of lectures at the University of Chicago and at Princeton Theological Seminary. He received a D.D. degree from the University of Chicago, and the citation accompanying it states: 'Barth's concern was to reassert the centrality of God over and against the centrality of man in the method and message of theology. He has devoted a lifetime of research, writing and teaching to this concern.' His lectures at both institutions were attended by thousands of people, many of whom travelled considerable distances to hear him.

A short, blue-eyed, grey-haired man, Barth is genial, sympathetic, patient, and has a nice sense of humour. He married Nelly Hoffman, a violinist, and they are the parents of four children. For many years he has been interested in the ecumenical movement, and that interest is vividly reflected in his interview, marked by both warmth and candour.

Prospects for Christian unity

In your opinion, is the problem of bringing the churches together the paramount problem of Christians today?

It is certainly one of the great problems which we ought to face squarely, and it is also something of a scandal. The division of the church is one of those scandals which a Christian cannot brook, like war, for instance. One cannot resign oneself to war, even though one is aware that there have always been wars up to now, and there may be others. But, having said that, the fact remains that the unity of the church does exist, but on an invisible and spiritual plane.

All those who have faith in Christ, who hearken to the Word of God as it has been handed down to us in the Scriptures, are members of this invisible church. And my own aim has always been to teach an ecumenical theology, which refuses to be confined within the narrow compartments of a particular faith. I am, of course, of the Reformed tradition. But I believe, as did Calvin, that there is only one sole master of the church and of the world. Consequently it is not Calvin whom I strive to obey, but Christ.

It is, of course, true that the church's invisible unity ought not to be contradicted by visible divisions. So all our efforts ought to be directed towards facilitating the realization of a visible unity. I do not know when this will be achieved. But I know for a certainty that it will be achieved, since, at the end of time, Christ will return again; and in him the church will find her visible unity.

Do you think that any step backward in this ecumenical movement could in present circumstances, when much of the world is busy building an atheistic civilization, deal a terrible blow to the Christian cause?

Of course not. Every epoch believes itself to be crucial to the destiny of humanity. As for the question of atheism I am by no means convinced that this age of ours is any worse than those periods that are officially labelled Christian. In the Middle Ages, for instance, it was above all the outer forms of civilization which conveyed an impression of being Christian.

Christianity at that time was an official institution. But one had only to look behind the façade at the way the kings and nobles and priests were living, and the grotesque superstitions to which the common people were a prey, in order to realize that the essence of the message of the Gospels was understood and obeyed by very few. There are two sorts of atheism: practising atheism and doctrinal atheism (Nietzsche's kind or Sartre's).

On balance, I find the first kind a great deal more pernicious than the second, in that it can be masked by an official Christianity. Look at the German Christian-Democratic Party. What real relation can there be between Adenauer's politics and Christianity? Doctrinal atheism at least has the advantage of being the sincere expression of the practising atheism of a lot of people who call themselves 'Christians.' It is, in fact, a superior phenomenon insofar as it testifies to a heart-searching, authentic metaphysical anguish; it also obliges us who are Christians to take the Word of God more seriously.

It has been said that Protestantism is better adapted to the world of today than Catholicism. Calvin showed himself to be more indulgent about things like interest-bearing loans and the possession of wordly goods than St. Thomas Aquinas, and in so doing prepared the ground for the rise of capitalism and an industrial civilization. How do you feel about this?

That is certainly not the aspect of Calvin that I like best, because that side of things leads to confusing the

interests of the banker with those of the Christian, and putting one's soul in a safe.

In the same way, the parallel between Protestantism and democracy has several times been pointed out: a parallel arising from the fact that, in comparison to the Catholic Church, we enjoy greater freedom of thought, and that the organization of our churches has a much more democratic approach. This parallel has its validity, but only up to a certain point; and that point is crucial.

In fact, Western democracy is much less the offspring of the Gospel than of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. It is founded on a natural philosophy, according to which it is Nature that has created all men equal; and it is in order to pay respect to Nature that this equality has to be respected in our social contract. But from the Christian point of view, the equality of men is not a fact of Nature but a free gift from God, a grace which enables them to become equals in Jesus Christ. The two points of view are not at all alike.

In your view, what is the greatest obstacle to reconciliation between the Reformed Churches all over the world and the Catholic Church?

I think the greatest obstacle could well be a very small word which the Roman Church tacks on to the end of every one of our propositions. This very small word 'and.' When we say Jesus, the Catholics say Jesus *and* Mary. We seek to obey only our sole Lord—Christ. The Catholics obey Christ *and* his earthly vicar, that is to say the Pope. We believe that the Christian is saved by the merits of Jesus Christ; but the Catholics add: *and* by his own merits, that is to say, his good works. We think that the only source of Revelation is the Scriptures; the Catholics add: *and* Tradition. We say that knowledge of God comes from faith in his word, as it is expressed in Scripture. The Catholics add: *and* from Reason.

Here, in fact, one finds oneself in the midst of the fundamental problem of the relationship between grace and freedom, as far as man's salvation is concerned. In this respect, it seems to us that the Roman Church puts too

much emphasis on the possibilities open to the sinner and not enough on the omnipotence of God. There is something about the Catholic conception of free will which seems to us to diminish the majesty of God and the gift of grace which He makes to us in order that we may attain our salvation.

It is clear that this great problem is at the root of our theological preoccupations. But from the point of view of the faithful as a whole the most visible demarcation line between the two churches is undoubtedly the worship of the Virgin. If a Catholic child happens to go into a Protestant church he is immediately struck by the absence of a statue of the Madonna. We are extremely sensitive about this question, and have come to the conclusion that the exultation of the Virgin, that is to say of a person, has been taken much too far by Rome. We dread the thought that the Catholic Church may one day elevate to a dogma its conception of Mary as Co-redemptress.

And then, too, the forms of worship are very, very different. When I attend a Catholic High Mass I ask myself: why all this pomp? Just imagine St. Paul coming back among us and taking part in a pontifical ceremony in St. Peter's. What would he make of it? I myself prefer a simpler and more concentrated form of worship. A Catholic Mass rather puts me in mind of a play staged in a foreign tongue.

Of course, in all this there is an element of personal taste. I have listened to some Catholic preachers who gave excellent sermons. Then again, I have heard others who confined themselves to questions of public morals. . . . This sort of thing happens just as often in our own church. And, when a Protestant pastor's sermon is bad, then the result is even more disastrous because, for us, it is the preaching of the Word of God which constitutes the very centre of worship, whereas in the case of the Catholics it is the sacrament of the Eucharist.

Which of these two forms of worship do you think approximates most closely to the form of worship practised by the primitive church?

Neither of them. Catholic worship is too flowery, too overdone, whereas ours, because it has tried to purify itself, now smacks of the synagogue. One might say that the great temptation for Protestantism is Judaism, whereas the great temptation for the Catholic Church would be paganism.

Recently I met a Catholic priest in Bavaria who had had his church reconstructed along novel and extraordinarily interesting lines (with the approval of his bishop, of course). The altar is, naturally, in the middle, but is shaped like a large table. It does not carry the tabernacle, which is placed upon a smaller altar to the right of the high altar, and it faces the pulpit, which is placed on the right side of the high altar.

On the pulpit there is inscribed a quotation from the Epistle to the Corinthians, which reminds the faithful that 'the foundation of the church is the Word of God.' Thus a new balance has been established, in visual terms, between the role of preaching and the role of the sacrament. Besides, the faithful communicate at the same table as the priest. So the communal aspect of worship, an essential part of Christian belief, is thus considerably stressed. Naturally the priest says Mass facing his flock.

I would be happy to see the Council encourage the general adoption of this pattern. In the traditional Mass, in which the priest turns his back on his flock, one is rather too apt to feel that he is a sort of privileged delegate, whose function is to pray to God in the name of the community, whereas he should be praying to God in company with the community. I have no idea what decisions the Fathers of the Council will take in liturgical matters, but I do hope that they will decide on a greater use of everyday language during the service—to do away with the impression of being 'a play staged in a foreign tongue.'

Finally, I feel it would be a good thing if one could re-establish Communion as something for everyone, instead of simply reserving it for the priest. Why should the priest alone have the right to Communion in both kinds, that is,

wine and bread? There is something there that has a taste of ecclesiastical privilege, and I find it disagreeable.

The so-called 'Roman intolerance' has often been severely condemned. Do you find the charge still justified after all these centuries?

Things have certainly improved since the sixteenth century. But one has to recognize that there is still a natural tendency towards intolerance in the Roman Catholic Church. When the latter is in a weak or minority position in any given country, then she advocates tolerance. But when she is in the majority, she does not set nearly so much store by it. Although a law against it is at present in the making, there is a small Protestant community in Spain which is subjected to all sorts of vexatious persecution.

They are not allowed to have a bell-tower on their churches; when a Spanish Protestant does his military service he is forced to march off to Mass every Sunday with his Catholic comrades; if he fails to genuflect at the same time as the others, he is punished. That is intolerance in its most naked form. Even if we admit that it is we who are the heretics, and that it is up to the Roman Church to combat this error, all the same, it is not by using police methods that one should seek to overthrow the devil, but by appealing to the Holy Spirit.

Which do you think are the most hopeful avenues of approach to the ultimate reconciliation of the churches? One often has the impression from the outside that all this is a vast and vain quarrel about mere words.

It may be a quarrel about words, but those words are important because they define certain basic choices in our conception of Christianity. I do not see how one can ever evade the theological issues. One cannot just exclaim, 'Come on! Let's all march forward together!' if one does not know where one is going or how to get there.

The whole problem resides in knowing how far it may be possible for both sides to reach agreement as to the sense and meaning which should be given to that little word 'and,' of which I was talking earlier. For the moment we

are not in agreement, but I do not deny the possibility of agreement. For, after all, the Reformed Churches, even if they do put Scripture above Tradition, do not deny the importance of Tradition as an aid to the interpretation of Scripture. They do not deny the responsibility of man himself for the accomplishment of his own salvation. They do not deny the benefit that sacraments confer as signs of grace. But they do not value these things as highly as the Catholic Church does.

However, many things may change. The Catholic Church itself admits of change, not only as far as the forms of worship are concerned—they have undergone considerable changes over the centuries—but also on the theological plane. At the same time, no Catholic theologian can admit that all the forms are fit subjects for change—dogma, for example. This concept of the magistracy of the church reaches its culminating point in the doctrine of papal infallibility, which, in its existing form, is unacceptable to Protestants.

But happily the Catholic Church, even if it is unable to go into reverse on a question of dogma, is nevertheless able to modify the interpretation of a dogma. And this is a sphere in which Catholic theologians are extraordinarily able. Here is an example: only ten years ago I was convinced that, between the Protestant and Catholic views on justification by faith (and by good works, for the Catholics), an impenetrable wall was in process of building. Then one of my Catholic friends, the eminent theologian Hans Küng, wrote a work in which he affirmed that, on the problem of justification, there was no conflict between the theories of the Protestant Karl Barth and the decisions of the Council of Trent.

It is true that, in my conception of faith, I insist on the necessity for an active faith, which has a direct effect upon works. But I believe that I have remained faithful to the true conception of the Reformed Churches, to which, in my view, the Fathers of the Council of Trent were rigidly opposed. Well anyhow, it seems that I was mistaken, and

that, without my realizing it, we are really in agreement. Hans Küng certainly understood my own thesis perfectly, and I dare to think—though I am not too sure—that he also understands perfectly the thesis of the Fathers of Trent.

Do you consider that Catholics and Protestants are closer to or farther away from each other than they were a century ago?

Infinitely closer; there is no comparison. And this in spite of the proclamation of the dogma of the Assumption, which made such a bad impression in our church. For nowadays both sides are getting to know each other and look upon each other as being on the same level, whereas in the old days we hardly knew each other at all. At the start of this century, when I was a theological student, there was no question of my reading a book by a contemporary Catholic. To read such works was, for Protestants, simply unthinkable. And in the same way, Catholics who for the most part knew us only from reading works refuting our beliefs, received a very strange image of the Reformed Churches.

Today, however, the 'iron curtain' has been raised, and I find myself quite at home when I am working with certain Catholic theologians. I even wrote a preface to Hans Küng's book, and the book received the *imprimatur*. I embarked on that book rather as Noah embarked on the Ark, with a dove in my hand, and I awaited the deluge. But, so far, there has been none. In other words, reconciliation depends essentially on knowing. The more we learn to know each other, the better we shall understand that though there is only one Christian faith, there are several different and quite valid ways of expressing it.

In the event of the churches being reconciled, what would be Catholicism's most valuable contribution to Protestantism, and vice versa?

The great trump card held by the Roman Catholic Church is the overwhelming impression of solidity and continuity that she gives—even if that continuity may be open to question. With us, there is an invisible continuity,

but it is one that makes much less impact, owing to the fact that Protestantism is divided into many different confessions; and also because, with us, few questions are ever completely closed. The majority of Protestants who have gone over to Catholicism have been in search of rest and of that intellectual and spiritual security than can be provided by a church which is solidly organized and has a strong hierarchy. On the other hand, Protestantism attracts people who are hungry for movement and freedom.

In truth, both conceptions are necessary because they are complementary to each other. There can be no movement except in relation to stability, and vice versa. But I am opposed to conversions, to moves from one church to another. In the first place, converts tend to become insufferable zealots; they either become ultra-Catholics or ultra-Protestants. And then these conversions constitute a denial of the invisible unity of the church, a denial which is very much to be deplored. I believe myself that everyone should stay where he is, and attempt to probe more deeply the message of the Gospels. It is only in such a way that a true reconciliation will eventually take place.

Do you feel that the decisions of the Council are necessarily encouraging to the idea of the reconciliation of the churches?

It is obviously impossible to give any clear-cut answer to that. I am not the Pope, and the Pope has not asked my opinion. The organization and the conduct of this Council are closely linked to the personality of John XXIII, and he alone knows what he wishes to do. Still, having said that, I must say that I do not believe that Vatican Council II has, like Vatican Council I, put more distance than before between Catholics and Protestants. I doubt whether there will be any spectacular move towards reconciliation, but at least there will be certain reforms in matters of detail which will head in the direction of reconciliation.

Moreover, the way in which Protestant observers have been taking part in the Council is a very remarkable thing in itself, for a start. They attend all the sessions, not only of the plenary assemblies, but also of the working com-

missions. And after each session they are invited to give their views to the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity. Through this oblique approach, they become involved, in a certain sense, in indirect discussion with the Fathers of the Council.

Pope John XXIII has just added the name of St. Joseph to the prayers of the Canon of the Mass. Does this decision not run the risk of greatly annoying Protestants?

It does not annoy me. Since Rome admits the intercession of the saints, why should St. Joseph be kept to one side? Personally, I like St. Joseph very much. I was talking about this recently to an American Jesuit. I am just as much in favour of the development of 'Josephology' as I am opposed to the development of 'Mariology.' For Joseph, in my view, has played in relation to Christ just the kind of supporting role which the church ought to be playing.

The Roman Church, I know, prefers to compare its own role to the more glorious role of Mary. The church brings to the world the message of the Gospels in the same sort of way that Mary gave us Christ. But the comparison is not a true one. The church is incapable of giving birth to the Redeemer, but she can and should serve him with a humble and unobtrusive zeal. This, precisely, was the role of Joseph, who was always very discreet and left all the glory to Jesus.