

OUR UNITY IN FAITH

This essay intends to explain the real objective unity that exists already among all Christians who believe in Christ, Son of God made man to be our Savior. This basic unity, explained here by our common personal commitment to Christ, is in a sense more significant and important than are common agreements that follow on discussions of particular points of doctrine.

A twofold conclusion from this suggestion regarding ecumenical dialogue should be pointed out at the outset. First, a certain devaluation and relativization of ecumenical discussions and agreements. This would not mean that the differences at the level of articulation and formulation are devalued to the extent that most of the ecumenical activity today becomes unimportant. No, this activity remains absolutely necessary to clear away the obstacles to unity that follow from these differences and are not taken away by our basic unity in faith. The latter is lived by way of inner commitment of the person to Christ and does not of necessity find expression on the level of conceptual formulation.

Secondly, our basic unity in commitment to Christ, God-man and Savior, should be an incentive to speed up ecumenical discussion and agreement about the way of expressing various aspects of this unity. The already existing unity should inspire confidence regarding the meaning and outcome of our ecumenical discussions. The differences on the level of formulation of what we believe and live by are more keenly felt as obstacles to unity when we are deeply aware of our unity in what gives shape and value to our Christian life.

It is in this context that this analysis and explanation of our basic unity in faith-commitment to Christ should be understood.

STATE OF THE QUESTION

Ecumenically-minded Christians who work and pray for the unity of all followers of Christ, for "the unity we seek," are already one in faith, despite doctrinal and theological differences and a diversity of beliefs and practices. This is what Catholics today actually hold, implicitly, when they take for granted, as they rightly do after the views of Vatican II's Decree on Ecumenism,¹ that non-Catholic Christians who are in good faith about their confessional allegiance (more often than not a matter of inheritance rather than of free personal choice) and are in

¹ Cf. *Unitatis redintegratio* 1: the movement for unity among non-Catholics who "have felt the impulse of grace" is "fostered by the grace of the Holy Spirit." Cf. also *Lumen gentium* 15: "The Holy Spirit by His gifts and graces is at work in them [other Christians] with His sanctifying power."

earnest about their Christian life, actually live in grace. If they live up to their Christian faith and follow the light of faith and the guidance of their conscience, they are sharing in the grace-life of the Body of Christ. In fact, grace-life includes (shall we say ontologically?) the infused gifts or theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. But if they do possess these God-given powers to believe, hope, and love, after the manner of all children of God, they cannot, one should think, live by these hidden powers without revealing their transforming dynamism on the psychological level. This is a consideration which deserves closer reflection.

In what sense can it be said, and shown on Catholic principles, that Christians who work and pray for Christian unity actually have already a communion or unity of faith, and some awareness of this unity which is the connatural psychological expression of their grace-life, lived in faith, hope, and love? It is the purpose of this paper to outline the present ecumenical situation and the implications of our Catholic evaluation of it, so as to arouse a deeper awareness of the unity we have already achieved. This should be an answer to the opinion, voiced now and then, here and there, that ecumenism has reached a stalemate.

After first recalling three ecumenical facts, well known but perhaps not always evaluated properly, and three important principles on faith and belief enunciated and followed in practice by Vatican II, we should be able to show the basic substantial unity in faith by which we already live and perhaps get a clearer view and more accurate indication of the direction in which our ecumenical efforts should be guided, the common efforts of Catholics and non-Catholics. The import of these reflections should be clear to all those who hold, rightly, that our Christian unity, the goal of the ecumenical movement, should be based on unity in faith. Pluralism in faith is incompatible with unity of Christian life—a unity, we should hasten to add, without uniformity, i.e., allowing for a diversity of doctrinal and theological formulations of the faith.

THREE ECUMENICAL FACTS OF TODAY

A first well-known fact is the surprising agreement shown in the *joint declarations of doctrinal mixed commissions*, international especially, between Anglicans and Catholics, Lutherans and Catholics, Reformed and Catholics. Regarding the Eucharist, it has been possible to state in mutually acceptable formulations for Catholics and Anglicans (less so for Lutherans), in a spirit of search for truth and not for ambiguity, the two essential points regarding the Eucharistic mystery: the Eucharist as sacrifice, memorial, and re-presentation (or making present) of the one unrepeatable sacrifice of the one and everlasting covenant, the paschal mystery of Christ's passion, death, and resurrection; and the real presence of the risen Christ in the consecrated bread and wine

changed, by the words of institution and the action of the Holy Spirit, into the body and blood of Christ.² Is it rash to suggest that the remaining differences in stress and formulation of some aspects of the doctrine of faith rank second in importance and, as will be said presently, are already resolved implicitly or in principle in the very acceptance of the two dogmas of the Eucharistic mystery? Something similar, though less definite than for the Eucharist, could be shown regarding the joint declarations on ministries and on authority in the Church.³

A second fact, well known too but understood in varying senses, is the *ecumenical impatience of the young*. In several countries in the West, common interdenominational Eucharistic celebrations are taking place without heeding the warning of the Church and the churches. Unwilling to wait for the final outcome of the dialogue, the young wish to live their unity in faith in the sacrament of unity without being stopped by varying understandings of the Eucharistic mystery: the substance of this faith and understanding being the same, they do not mind the differences in accidental and secondary points of doctrine. They seek one common celebration of the Eucharist, one in the common faith and multiform in its theological interpretations. The latter are no longer considered an obstacle to living their unity in a common Eucharist.⁴

A third fact, less publicized, yet in no way unimportant, is the *massive declaration of our common faith* in the mystery of Christ, next to the remaining differences between the Christian confessions on less central truths. The volume I have in mind is the result of the joint work of a team of eighteen Catholic and eighteen Protestant theologians; it is edited by J. Feiner and L. Vischer, the English edition with the title *The Common Catechism: A Christian Book of Faith*.⁵ The area and importance of agreement are far more considerable than the various points of remaining dissent. Could it be said that the global affirmation of our common faith is so substantial that it could well be considered as including in a vital, not yet thematic manner, the core of the solution of the remaining differences?

These three ecumenical facts are symptoms and expressions of an already existing unity in faith. They should allow us to substantiate this

² Cf. J. Putz, S.J., and P. De Letter, S.J., "Eucharistic Convergences," *Clergy Monthly* 36 (1972) 461-70.

³ Cf. J. Dupuis, S.J., "Towards a Convergence of Ministries," *ibid.* 37 (1973) 337-53, 391-400; "Authority in the Church," *Vidyajyoti* [former *Clergy Monthly*] 41 (1977) 129-39.

⁴ The (Roman) Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity (SPCU) has repeatedly expressed its disapproval of "wild" (*sauvages*) common Eucharists; cf. its "Instruction Concerning Cases When Other Christians May Be Admitted to Eucharistic Communion in a Catholic Church," *Clergy Monthly* 36 (1972) 348-49.

⁵ The original German edition, *Neues Glaubensbuch: Der gemeine christliche Glaube*, ed. J. Feiner and L. Vischer (Freiburg, 1973), was reviewed in *Clergy Monthly* 38 (1974) 314-19, the English edition in *Vidyajyoti* 39 (1975) 470.

unity more definitely, both from the teaching of Vatican II concerning faith as it is applied in the postconciliar practice of the magisterium, and from the essential and existential coherence of the Christian creed to be considered below.

THREE DOCTRINAL PRINCIPLES FROM VATICAN II

A first doctrinal principle concerning our unity in faith is given in the teaching of Vatican II on *faith as personal commitment* to Christ, a commitment of the whole person—mind, will, heart—to the mystery of Christ.⁶ This commitment, which has a primacy of importance above all conceptual formulations that seek to express or describe the mystery, does in fact require a human global expression of the mystery of Christ which may be reduced to this: Son of God made man to be our Redeemer. We know to whom we commit ourselves: one who is not just a man but God made man. The commitment to Christ is a vital affirmation of the mystery of Christ: it is not in need of a detailed formulation of its contents. It contains in a vital, nonthematized manner the sum total of conceptual expressions needed or helpful for the genuineness of our commitment.⁷ The explication of these implied statements may be helpful, up to a point, for a deeper commitment, provided it aims at a vital understanding and firmer acceptance of the whole mystery of Christ and does not overstress logical technicalities and conceptual subtleties; the latter may give some human intellectual clarity, more superficial perhaps than helpful towards a deeper and firmer religious acceptance.⁸

A second principle concerning the unity of faith follows from the general *pastoral approach* of Vatican II,⁹ based on the biblical theology of the Church (cf. *Lumen gentium*, especially the first two chapters)

⁶ Cf. *Dei verbum* 5, and P. De Letter, S.J., "Faith after Vatican II," *Clergy Monthly* 31 (1967) 401-10.

⁷ The basic intellectual assent included in the personal commitment to Christ is faith in him as "Son of God made man to be our Savior." This global assent includes all that various particular statements seek to express, because of their coherence, essential and existential, as partial expressions of the basic act of faith. The mixed working group RCC-WCC holds as summary of our common faith (in its fourth official report to the 5th Assembly of the WCC at Nairobi, Nov. 23-Dec. 19, 1975): "Christ truly God and truly man, the Lord, through him and in him alone we are saved"; cf. *Documentation catholique* 73 (1976) 160.

⁸ Is it not a fact of Christian experience that an exact and fairly complete theoretical knowledge of the faith and its detailed teaching does not automatically or necessarily entail a more genuine living of the faith? The cleverest theologians are not necessarily the best Christians or the best witnesses to Christ.

⁹ This pastoral approach, as is well known, was explicitly requested of the Council by John XXIII, and Paul VI has kept faithfully to this intention. Its most telling expression is no doubt *Gaudium et spes*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.

which should largely replace the traditional juridical-dogmatic approach marked by the stress on obligations and detailed formulations in fixed terms of the elements of the Christian mystery. The post-Vatican II magisterium of the Church has followed and is following the example set by the Council.¹⁰ This change in approach, pastoral rather than "dogmatic," does not mean a setting aside of teaching, but only a change in the manner of teaching.

Actually, in keeping with what was just said of faith as commitment of the person, a pastoral teaching aims at "living the faith" and not only at an intellectual assent to what the faith teaches. It supposes an essential minimum of intellectual assent, but it does not stop at that: it intends above all to bring believers to live by the faith, as a test of the genuineness of their personal commitment.¹¹

Hence follows a sort of "devaluation" (up to a point) of definite statements of particular truths included in the mystery of Christ; pastoral teaching is satisfied with a common-language or biblical formulation rather than seeking technical "esoteric" terms and concepts, as the former juridical-dogmatic approach was bent on proposing.¹² A vital approach to the mystery with reverence for what it stands for—which is what the pastoral approach seeks—finds little nourishment in ever more numerous and more detailed statements. It is rather its global acceptance by way of enlightened religious inclination or connaturality that makes for living by the faith. This global vital acceptance includes all that is involved in the mystery of Christ; it is a vital acceptance of whatever proposition may be needed in the concrete circumstances of time and place.

A third doctrinal principle follows from the combination of the first two and is implied in their acceptance. It means to say that there is an *essential and existential coherence* between all the particular statements implied in the global acceptance of the mystery of Christ.¹³ A believer who lives by his personal commitment to Christ and is aware of his intellectual acceptance of Christ as Son of God made man to be Redeemer, implicitly, by a vital, nonthematic implication, accepts all

¹⁰ Proof of this are the many "apostolic exhortations," pastoral in tone and character, which the present Pope has taken as the new ordinary channel of his pastoral teaching for the whole Church, replacing the more doctrinally presented encyclicals.

¹¹ In a pastoral approach the intent of the teaching naturally is "living by the faith," and not just belief, which alone is not sufficient for salvation. Faith without good works does not save a believer.

¹² Yet doctrine and its correct presentation or formulation remain necessary, though coming in second place. Incorrect doctrine is liable to mar the genuineness of the commitment of faith.

¹³ The reason for this coherence, essential regarding doctrine, existential regarding its human and historical expression, should be evident. There is nothing arbitrary or useless in the creed of which Christ is the summit and summary. The faith is one, just as Christ is one.

the particular conceptual formulations needed and helpful, in different times and different places, to make the acceptance of Christ and commitment to him more genuine. This is exactly what the intrinsic coherence of the mystery of Christ, Word of God incarnate and Redeemer, means; all that particular statements seek to express is what is essentially or existentially connected with this mystery. It is to be expected that historically, with changing situations of time and culture, various elements of the riches of Christ gradually come to a clearer explicit awareness, even in more than one correct way of expression.

On the basis of these principles and in the context of the above-mentioned ecumenical facts, it should be possible now to point to the basic unity in faith that is alive in the various Christian confessions. What unites them even now is more basic than what divides them, their differences. After showing this, a question will remain: What is the meaning of the differences in the context of the vital unity of all believers in Christ, Son of God made man for the salvation of the world?

BASIC UNITY OF FAITH IN DIFFERENT CHRISTIAN CONFESSIONS

The doctrinal principles just stated, premises for a fruitful understanding of the situation of Christian faith in the various Christian confessions, lead to an all-important conclusion: because of the involvement of the whole person in Christian faith, a Christian stakes the very meaning of life in his commitment to and faith in Christ. The intellectual assent to Christ which gives the basic understanding of this commitment includes an implicit and nonthematic acceptance of all the particular doctrinal elements that are given in the faith in Christ, Son of God made man to redeem mankind.¹⁴ Christ is the Savior of all who stake their life on him. Their commitment makes no distinction between essential (or central) and secondary (or peripheral) points of doctrine. It, as it were, takes in the whole mass. Believers in Christ in this sense, whatever be their confession or denomination, accept explicitly or implicitly the whole of the Christian-Catholic creed. This explicit or implicit common Christian faith need not exclude different theological approaches or formulations, a plurality of theologies within the unity of faith. This is true within the Catholic Church. It is equally so in the communion of the various Christian confessions.¹⁵

¹⁴ Note here the phrase "doctrinal elements," i.e., such affirmations or concepts as are part of the doctrinal expression or dogmatic formulation of the faith. These should be distinguished from what is merely theological explanation. It is natural and a fact of history that various Christian denominations have different theologies about points of doctrine which they hold in common.

¹⁵ Only those Christian confessions are considered here which genuinely seek to live by a commitment to Christ as Son of God made man for our salvation. There may be denominations that call themselves Christian but do not accept Christ in the traditional meaning of the name as proposed, e.g., in the first two chapters of *Lumen gentium* and in the opening chapter of *Ad gentes*.

This implicit global acceptance by all Christians of the whole of the Christian faith holds an important corollary. It is a fact that genuinely Christian denominations actually refuse or deny or ignore some points of doctrine which the Catholic Church considers as part of the faith. They do so while holding on to their global assent to the mystery of Christ. If it is correct to say that they implicitly or nonthematically accept the whole of the creed while explicitly denying one or other point of it, then this discrepancy between their implicit faith and the explicit denial of some expressions of it raises the question as to which of the two intentions prevails: global assent to Christ or acceptance of him, or refusal of one or other point of doctrine.

If we suppose that genuine Christians, whatever be their confessional allegiance, do accept the whole of the Christian message or faith in their very commitment to Christ, and that this is the normal thing, then we must conclude that the implicit acceptance of the whole mystery of Christ is an implicit or vital affirmation that prevails over the explicit or thematical denial of some particular point of doctrine.¹⁶

This important theological conclusion does not usher anything new into the contemporary understanding and situation of our common Christian faith. It is current teaching, common in moral or practical theology, that of two incompatible intentions, present in a person about to act, the prevailing intention annuls the other. The point to be made in each case is: Which of the two intentions or volitions is the prevailing one? This is exactly the case in the situation of a Christian believer in which there is a contradiction or incompatibility between his global acceptance of the whole mystery of Christ and his explicit refusal or denial of a point of doctrine included in what he accepts in his commitment to Christ. The contradiction appears and exists between his implicit and explicit intention regarding a point of doctrine. The prevalence of the implicit intention (included in the global acceptance of the mystery of Christ) over the explicit refusal of the same point of doctrine is the immediate sequel to one's genuine commitment to Christ.

Given the considerable practical import of this conclusion by way of relativization of the doctrinal (and not only theological) differences between the Christian confessions, its context and premises should be once more clearly stated. It is taken for granted (after all that was said above) that living by the mystery of Christ is more important for life (including eternal life) and more necessary for our Christian faith in its

¹⁶ K. Rahner made a similar use of this reasoning in his transcendental method of theology, which analyses the conditions of possibility of a given point of doctrine or theology. He did so in particular in his teaching on anonymous Christians. Already fifty years ago it was applied by P. Claeys-Bouuaert, S. J., in a study on apparent atheists, "Tous les athées sont-ils coupables?" *Nouvelle revue théologique* 48 (1921) 169-95.

actual living than the formulation of particular truths in definite statements which are necessary and helpful up to a point. It is equally taken for granted that the commitment of the whole person to Christ in faith *is* identical with the global acceptance of faith in an intellectual assent or yes to Christ and to all that he stands for with regard to our Christian salvation: the intellectual assent is necessary for faith as commitment to be a human, deliberate act. And it may be repeated again that in the prevalent pastoral approach to teaching and preaching the Christian message, the personal commitment to Christ is considered (till proof to the contrary is forthcoming) as substantially and essentially the same in all Christian confessions, allowance being made for a pluralism in formulating points of doctrine.¹⁷

The immediate corollary to this "optimistic" view of Christian faith in all truly Christian denominations may sound surprising, almost too good to be true: it is a thorough relativization of the doctrinal (and not only theological) differences between the various Christian confessions. The differences are much less grave than they look. The actual deep unity of faith common to all Christians should enable them to see and accept that, whatever be their particular confession, their particular family inheritance has not the importance, doctrinal and religious, which their attachment to their denominational tradition may give it. Should we, then, ask them all, including Catholics, to realize the actual detachment from their confessional particularities which is already included in their commitment to Christ and their acceptance without reservation of the mystery of Christ?¹⁸

OUR DOCTRINAL DIFFERENCES

Here a number of questions arise at once. What is the meaning of our present separation and divisions? What value have our theological and phraseological differences? What is the real import of our differences on particular points of doctrine? What is the real meaning and intention of

¹⁷ Let us recall that what we are after here is to make out, on Catholic principles, what unity of faith already exists between the various Christian confessions. The latter phrase is meant here in the sense of the Christian churches whose faith is a commitment to Christ, Son of God made man to be our Saviour. Without giving any names, I note that there may be (and are) confessions that call themselves Christian but see in Christ not much more than an exceptional human leader, after the fashion of Gandhiji.

¹⁸ Here is a clear allusion to the actual "sacrifice" that is to be asked from all Christian confessions, including the Catholic Church, if they ever wish to be given the gift of Christian unity, a gift from God. It is the sacrifice, partial at any rate, and if necessary total, of some cherished element of the family tradition in their confession. Let it be said at once that here the great obstacle or difficulty is likely to be more of an emotional than of an intellectual nature. For Catholics after Vatican II, a number of "sacrifices" have been asked already to open them to a sympathetic and understanding approach to their non-Catholic separated brethren.

our search for a more convergent expression of our unity in the common confession of our Christian faith?

The answer to each of these questions, in the light of what was said above on our basic unity in faith, can be little more than a brief, mainly negative, evaluation. The meaning of our present separation and divisions is not, in the first place, a matter of doctrine and faith, given the basic unity of our faith in Christ both as commitment of the person and as assent of the mind to the mystery of Christ, God-man and Savior. It is rather historical considerations, differences that have sprung from history and are less doctrinal than sociological, that divide us, differences that are more emotional than intellectual, developed as they have been over centuries of separation that were lived in anything but an ecumenical spirit, that suggest the meaning and explanation of the disunity of Christians and their division in many churches or ecclesial communities.¹⁹

As to the differences on particular points of doctrine, these too could and should, as it were, be swallowed up in the affirmation of our basic unity and identity in our common commitment to Christ and the common acceptance of what he means for all Christians as Son of God made man to be the Savior of mankind. Particular points of doctrine accepted by some Christian churches and not by others may be on the fringe of the central core of Christian faith as assent to the mystery of Christ. These leave our basic unity in faith intact. If they are less peripheral and of a nature to infringe the commitment to Christ and the assent to his divine-human mystery, then those who explicitly accept a doctrine incompatible with faith in Christ but hold on to their commitment and their dogmatic acceptance of Christ, God-man and Savior, may well reject implicitly in this very commitment and dogmatic faith in Christ what they explicitly deny.²⁰ In this situation, however, an effort should be made to gain some insight into the incompatibility of this doctrinal refusal with the basic acceptance of Christ, and into the need of changing their stand on the particular point of doctrine. An explicit dissent on a doctrinal point is liable to harm their commitment to and faith in Christ.

Little need be said about theological and phraseological differences which do not touch the doctrine of the faith; they are no obstacle to unity of faith in Christ.²¹ They may, even if their variety proves to be the

¹⁹ Let it be recalled that we reason here on "Catholic principles," particularly the teaching of Vatican II on faith in *Dei verbum* 5. The answer to the first question could be summed up as follows: our present separation is more historical/sociological than doctrinal/theological.

²⁰ Cf. n. 16 above. Ecumenical mixed commissions could provide some insight into the reasonableness of a stand different from one's own.

²¹ Cf. the document of the Vatican International Theological Commission on "Unity of Faith and Theological Pluralism"; text in *Clergy Monthly* 38 (1974) 461-63.

result of richness rather than of poverty in a theological situation, be enriching for both sides. There is, however, another aspect to these differences in theological formulation, namely, the consequent differences in their practical expressions in the liturgical and spiritual traditions of the churches. These would have to be considered, and perhaps be welcomed, in their rich variety. A legitimate attachment to such historical traditions, in liturgy and spirituality, need not be set aside to permit search for a uniform expression of views and ways of official and personal spirituality.

The last question concerns the basic *raison d'être* of ecumenical doctrinal dialogue between the Christian confessions, and so deserves more than a casual or perfunctory answer.

DOCTRINAL AND THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE

One of the three ecumenical facts considered at the outset of this essay involves the joint ecumenical discussion groups and the surprising results of their common reflection and discussion: statements of agreement on the substantial unity of our common faith and on the relative unimportance of the remaining and persisting diversities in formulating secondary points of doctrine.²² What is the meaning of these convergences for our unity in faith? What is the intent and import of these statements of agreed doctrines? Are they meant to, and do they in fact, help us, Catholics, Anglicans, Lutherans, Reformed, to grow in unity of faith? In what way do they (not only) make us realize our doctrinal and theological agreements—doctrinal agreements being evidently the more important, theological agreements less necessary? May it even happen that a plurality of formulations of the same doctrine helps for a better realization of our agreement in doctrine? Do these agreements advance and deepen our unity in faith?

One definite result of these agreed statements is evidently a better understanding of the different manners in which we formulate an identical faith, with at times notable differences in stress on various aspects. By its very existence a deeper insight into or understanding of a particular mystery should advance us in the assent to the basic mystery that is Christ, God-man and Savior.²³ Does it also help to make the commitment of the whole person to Christ more genuine and total?

Perhaps we should answer: not necessarily. The total commitment of the person to Christ, our acceptance of him with our whole person—mind, heart, will—is not automatically measured by our insight into the doctrinal formulation expressing one or other aspect of the mystery of

²² Cf. nn. 2 and 3 above.

²³ As explained above, a global intellectual assent to the mystery of Christ (summed up in God-man and Redeemer) is presupposed in the commitment of the person, which is not a blind but a motivated religious surrender.

Christ. Faith is not a mere matter of intellect, vision, or affirmation. We are not only brain, nor are brainy persons necessarily men and women of strong and deep convictions, — rather the opposite, perhaps. Particularly in a commitment of the person where the very meaning of life is at stake, heart and will, love and determination are no less, rather more, decisive than seeing eye to eye in the doctrinal formulation of the mystery of Christ.²⁴

Does this mean that ecumenical dialogue and ecumenical understanding are not the primary agent of progress in unity of faith? Does it relativize or reduce the importance of the ecumenical dialogue and its results in ecumenical agreements? Probably. And fortunately, no doubt. This would only show that growth in our unity in faith need not be the privilege of experts; it can also be shared by the many Christians who partly see for themselves and partly trust the insight of experts (which is the sensible thing to do even in current human affairs).²⁵ The deeper theological reason, however, for the restricted importance of agreed statements of the faith is that, in our unity of faith, more essential and substantial is the commitment of the person to Christ; and in this commitment the role played by the light and love and grace of the Spirit of Christ is decisive.²⁶ Should we then say that the persuasive force of these common statements lies more in removing cognitional obstacles to our surrender of faith than in determining the commitment? Even so, clearing away obstacles to our unity in faith and its agreed expression is not less necessary and helpful, not to say indispensable, to growth in our unity of faith.

CONCLUSION

The above analysis of our present-day unity of faith in our different confessions and churches may look rather disappointing. What are the practical results by way of expressing our growth in unity of faith? Is the way now open to act on our existing unity in Eucharistic faith, in our faith in the ministry and authority willed by Christ for his Church? Will or can our churches now decide to allow interconfessional Eucharistic celebrations despite some differences of views on one or other aspect of the Eucharistic mystery? Has the time come, when will the time come,

²⁴ Everyone knows that our love influences our manner of seeing things (as through colored glasses). St Thomas said it in a well-known adage: "Qualis est unusquisque secundum appetitum, tales res videntur ei."

²⁵ The simple faithful believe what their appointed pastor teaches in the name of the Church. They partly understand what it is all about and partly give credit to the insight of the pastor, who knows and understands.

²⁶ Faith is a God-given gift of grace, a gift to understand more by way of inclination or connaturality than by conceptual reasoning. Without this "inclination" given by grace we could not believe.

for a realization of the visible unity of our churches, after the pattern suggested in the happy formula of Bishop Butler taken up by Paul VI, "united, not absorbed,"²⁷ unity without uniformity? When will steps be taken for our reunion in the one Church of Christ?

One element for an answer to this practical question should be clear: there is no need to wait till all doctrinal differences are thrashed out. There is something to be said for the ecumenical impatience of the young generation. Theological discussions—endless, some will sigh—are not the chief nor the altogether indispensable way to unity in faith and life. Our living together may itself widen and deepen our togetherness in faith.²⁸

Another important lesson can be learned here and should be obvious to all believers in Christ and in his desire for unity of all his followers. Prayer for unity and the spiritual means to implore from God-in-Christ the gift of unity for the one Church of Christ is the indispensable means and contribution all of us should make towards the realization of Christ's own prayer: that we all may be one, in him!²⁹

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²⁷ Cf. *Tablet*, March 7, 1970, 220 f.; also *Clergy Monthly* 35 (1971) 22.

²⁸ This essay was completed when Fr. John Coventry's book *Christian Truth* (London, 1975) became available. The section on "Unity in Faith" (11–16), while viewing the problem from a different and more concrete and practical angle, strikingly confirms what we have tried to say here. He sums up "the criteria for unity in faith" under three heads: "that agreement on central doctrinal formulation which is felt to constitute the essential gospel to the world; a common involvement, in response to God's love, in worship of Him and in service of man; an acceptance of such diversity and emphasis in these areas of doctrine, worship and mission as the experience of unity is able to sustain. Orthodoxy, orthopraxy, catholicity" (16).

²⁹ Cf. *Unitatis redintegratio* 8, on spiritual ecumenism.