

Growing Together : A Proposed Enquiry.

by Canon W.A. Purdy

SECTION I

1. I am sure that several gentle sighs of resignation ascended when members read their programmes and remarked the bill of fare for Sunday morning, September 5th.

The phrase "Growing Together" (however much we may be committed to the idea) is one of the many which are beginning to fall a little wearily on the ear. This is certainly not because we have squeezed every drop of meaning out of it - rather because we have used it too often without bothering to find out whether it has any meaning at all.

2. Is it a mere metaphor from biology? If not, what real vital processes do we suppose it to involve? Without getting bogged down in linguistic subtleties we can make the elementary point that it does not mean growing contentedly for ever side by side; it does mean we progress towards organic unity by means of processes which arise out of the existing reality of our separate lives, yet tend by some alchemy to become one process increasingly nourishing one life rather than two, without destroying the original sources of life which were distinct (I am not of course forgetting those partial bonds of unity we have often remarked on).

3. I take it that when we say we want to be "united not absorbed", we are thinking of the terminus of a progress something like this; I am sure that this terminus was the sort of thing of which the planning committee was challenging the Bishop of Ripon to give us a sketch. My aim is more modest but I think not less important - to direct attention to the process, and even that from a single, perhaps only preparatory point of view. If the process of growing together is to be a vital one in any but a purely metaphorical sense it is going to affect and involve the lives of Christians, or their Christian lives - i. e. those human activities which they carry out in faithfulness to their witness and commitment to Christ, in correspondence with the grace of Christ mediated to them through the Church.

4. The point from which we started, and beyond which it is not clear that everybody everywhere has yet advanced, is that this faithfulness and this correspondence are self-enclosed - achievable in, even exhausted in a loyalty more or less fierce and defensive, if not intolerant, to our own "denomination". Until quite recently it did not include, except for a tiny minority, any sense of responsibility for searching for or trying to recover Christian Unity. In the Roman Catholic Church at least, the tiny minority was less rather than more likely to include bishops. Less rather than more, because other Christians tended to be regarded primarily as a threat to denominational integrity (whether as heretics or as inveterate proselytizers or both) and hence it was a main duty of the shepherd to protect his flock against these dangers. That this is not fanciful is clear enough from the history of the Malines conversations, and much more recently from, say, the Holy Office monitum of 1949.

5. Perhaps the drafters of the Vatican II decree on ecumenism were thinking of the need of a change of this deep-rooted attitude when they began their second chapter, on "The Practice of Ecumenism" with these words:

"The concern for restoring unity involves the whole Church, faithful and clergy alike. It extends to everyone, according to the talent of each, whether it be exercised in daily christian living, or in theological and historical studies. This concern itself already reveals to some extent the bond of brotherhood existing among all Christians and it leads towards full and perfect unity, in accordance with what God in His kindness wills".

One may think it a sufficiently remarkable conversion that, in 1964, all the Roman Catholic bishops of the world except about half-a-dozen signed this statement, and then wonder in the light of subsequent experience how profound and general the conversion was.

6. It was thought worth while to include in the Venice document on Church and Ministry the following:

"A primary responsibility of ministering to the people of God is promoting unity. In his great prayer for unity, the Lord prayed first for the apostles. The responsibility of the ordained ministry in the two Churches for promoting unity can only be fulfilled when bishops with their clergy take the lead in the search for ways and means of healing the divisions which afflict the people of God".

(The drafting subcommission had in fact wished the passage worded even more strongly). This reflected the disappointment many of us felt at the reception - in many, perhaps most places - of the practical proposals first made at Gazzada. It was comforting to see that the Anglican Consultative Council at Limuru chose these words from Venice to quote in its report on "Unity and Ecumenical Affairs", seeing "wider recognition" of their truth as "the key to steady growth in these matters" (The Time is Now, p. 7). The present writer has necessarily had some experience in various parts of the world of tactful enquiry or exhortation about this pastoral action: the reply is too often a rather defensive one which ends in a list of ecumenical tea-parties the pastor (greater or lesser) has attended, or at best an account of the stirring events of the Week of Prayer for Unity.

SECTION II

7. The present paper takes its origin from a discussion the writer had with five Roman Catholic national ecumenical officers last November. We found it easy to agree that a valuable, perhaps indispensable preparation for "taking the lead in the search for ways and means of healing . . . divisions" would be to know a good deal more about the nature and extent of the divisions - about how they really affect various kinds of people who live on either side of the divide. Complementary to this of course would be more knowledge of what the same varieties of people feel (or do

not feel) about prospects of union - what kind of union they would welcome or not welcome, and so on.

8. In February I had the opportunity to offer the idea for consideration to the South African National Anglican/R. C. Commission whose meeting I was privileged to attend. They not only gave me a sympathetic hearing then, but at the next meeting (May 1971) devoted a seminar to the subject. A minute of this will be found as an appendix to the present paper, and I mention it here in order to draw attention to its Point 4:

"It was felt that the study itself would help to change the relationships between the Churches".

If it did not we might question its ecumenical value.

9. Certainly one motive of the study would be dissatisfaction with the present state of our knowledge. Either we give the impression, in discussion about unity, of assessing ourselves as the Church, and assuming that what satisfies us will satisfy "our people" and that what does not satisfy us is of little interest; or we indulge the pastoral habit of bold, unscientific generalization: "Anglicans could never be brought to accept this" or "R. C. s would fight to the death for that". Even when such generalizations are not patently of an interested kind (as they will be in proportion as we retain defensive moods in dialogue) they are of a level which would be laughed at in any other field of enquiry. It is perhaps part of our defensiveness that we are unwilling to consult or even observe the laity to an extent that would provide ground for more serious generalizations.

10. In other fields other than the ecumenical, Anglicans, in England at least, have a much better record than RC's for commissioning serious examination of church problems. (This is to some degree made easier by the "establishment" situation). Such things as the Paul report, The Chadwick Report and what I suppose we must now call the Root Report are impressive witnesses to this. It is hard to see why similar work cannot be done, and even harder to see why it should not be done, in the field of Anglican/RC relations. I hope no one will consider it sufficient reply to say that our commission is doing it.

11. We might think that our theological candour if not absolute, is impressive: can we say as much of our honesty and freedom from window dressing about the realities of church life? I think we would get different answers to this question from, say, bishops, pastors, ecumenical commission members, specialized ministers - but would any of the answers be very favourable?

12. Religious sociologists admit that their work suffers from shortage of data which empirical studies alone can provide. We may be critical of many of the assumptions that at present seem to lie behind work in this field, but our criticism would have more weight if we were ready to cooperate in using methods which have thought and experiment behind them.

We may be justified in our clerical confidence that we know best what we want to find out, but we may equally know nothing of how to set about looking - nothing of what questions should be put to what people in what ways.

13. Method of course has an important bearing on whether enquiry results only in compiling tables, etc. or whether it has itself an effect on the relationships it is examining, as the South African Commission hopes. Stock responses may be illuminating to the enquirer in some circumstances, but he will also want to dig deeper, to elicit the kind of reflection, revision of attitudes, increased self-criticism, repentance which are implied in saying that change of heart and renewal are essential to ecumenism. (Of this more later).

SECTION III

14. With such thoughts in mind a small group recently met in Rome, at the invitation of Dr. H. Smythe, to discuss what might be done:

Professor Doob	Director of African Studies and Director of the Faculty of Psychology and Social Science, Yale University.
Fr. Emile Pin, SJ	Director of Religious Sociology, Gregorian University
Mr. Ned Bayne	Director of Centre for Mediterranean Studies, American Field Universities.
Dr. H. Smythe.	
Canon Purdy.	

One was immediately struck by the modesty and the realism of the "experts". A few random questions were put of the sort that people charged with such a task as the Malta Report gave to ARCIC might want to ask:

1. What does Church membership mean to you?
2. What does Church authority do to you?
3. What would a) increase and b) lessen the importance of the Church in your eyes?
4. Which of your judgements does religion influence?
5. Which parts of your life do you think religion should be affecting?
6. What does your faith (allegiance) commit you to?
7. What forces in modern life do you regard as (actual or potential) allies of the Church, and what as inimical?
8. What do you think are the chief obstacles to Anglican/RC unity?

15. At the same time some categories of persons were suggested to whom such questions might be put - differentiated by age, status, etc. The "experts" (who modestly disclaimed the title) conceded the interest and importance of these random questions, but (as expected) they doubted the value of putting them directly in this form. It would be possible to design a questionnaire that would "reveal" little difference between Anglicans and

Roman Catholics, but would mean no more than that the people asked were unaware of the differences or unable to grasp their real nature and importance. The questionnaire method is in fact decreasingly used and its limitations clearly recognized, i. e. in its conventional form.

Both experts agreed with the suggestion about the importance of critical pastoral judgements - which allow for the fact that people of certain sorts or in certain situations tend to say what they think the clergy want to hear or what ministers to a temporary emotional state (births, marriages, ordinations, crises, funerals). Nor are the clergy exempt from asking the people who will give comfortable answers.

e 16. There are tried methods of avoiding these pitfalls, though perfection is not claimed for them. Fr. Pin described a procedure of which he has some experience. Interviewers are provided with a "guide" consisting of very open questions which may lead the interviewees to talk for as much as 2 hours. This may be applied to 50 or 60 persons. It is simply a way of determining the mind and limits of the field of enquiry. In such an interview analysis may show that such explicit things, as, say, Church membership may not have been mentioned. Out of this sort of material it is possible to frame a questionnaire which people will know how to employ.

Fr. Pin also spoke of the part played by institutions or persons other than the Church and clergy who help in communicating religion but who do not, as churchmen do, communicate it as the chief value. This is especially the case in "establishment" or quasi - establishment situations.

17. Professor Doob has experience of a type of research which he believes would yield results in our field. He has been concerned with bringing different Africans, traditionally in deep conflict, to live together (in the mountains of North Italy) so that the roots of conflict could be studied and the possibilities of reconciliation reviewed and tested. This in our own area would be a kind of prolonged retreat, but concerned with an ecumenical problem rather than (directly) with the wrestlings of the individual soul. Some of our existing centres, like Wood Hall, might be brought to interest themselves in this idea.

18. There seems no doubt that expert interest could be engaged. It is not necessarily a bad thing to have limited resources (funds) since this may induce a more careful and critical choice of projects and methods. (Some examples of immediate prospects will be mentioned later).

19. Odd things are said by religious sociologists about ecumenism. At least we should be concerned about showing whether they are justified.

We ought to know more, more exactly, about the complex, perhaps explosive material we are handling when we set out to bring two Churches (not two sets of ideas) together. Is it true, for example, that ecumenism is less well supported by lay experience than by clerical aspiration, as Bryan Wilson argues, or is there more in the opposite view, typical of the U.S. National Catholic Reporter outlook, that the laity are pining for generous developments that the clergy hold back from?

20. Is ecumenism just a morale-booster for the profession (the minister) as he sees his influence in society narrowing and waning? Is he leading where the laity may no longer be relied on to maintain interest in following, or is he absorbed in problems that the laity no longer worry about? How far does the social and religious history of, say, USA and England determine (and diversify) their attitudes to ecumenism?

21. "The ecumenical tendency illustrates the extreme weakness of religious commitment and belief, since much more markedly than for organizations which have purely instrumental ends, amalgamation implies surrender of principles or their attenuation". (B. Wilson, Religion in Secular Society, p. 152-3).

Having raised our hands in horror at this, we should show convincingly that it is wrong. Similarly with the contention (ibid. 34-5 and 108) that ecumenical impulses are among several "new responses" or defence mechanisms mounted for professional survival.

22. Professor Doob believes that a "two-pronged" attack on our problem would be the right way. The two prongs he calls "description" and "dynamics". By means of the first (through surveys of large samples and deeper interviews of smaller samples) we would hope (and he believes it possible) to find out not only professed beliefs, attitudes, feelings, loyalties, but whether or not these are identical with the corresponding realities. Sophisticated techniques now available make it possible to assess these factors in relation to demographic factors such as age, sex, ethnic group, socio-economic status, etc.

23. This kind of information would be a necessary background to research into the "dynamics of interaction". This would require experiments such as that referred to above (No. 17). In these, the people brought together "may be able (a) to acquire - through informal guidance but mostly through their own initiative - skill in communicating with one another, and (b) to try to work through new and possibly creative solutions to their own problems". If such research were successful it would yield, (Prof. Doob cautiously says) "important hints" for the solution of the future problems of making a reality of union. Both "prongs" of this attack, he concluded, "might possibly uncover not merely ways to bring together the peoples of the two Churches but also - much, much more important, I think - very

concrete suggestions as to how the religious and ethical principles of both faiths could play a more significant role than they now do in guiding us all through the miseries in which we are, alas, so deeply submerged".

24. A U.S. Jesuit, Fr. Schallert, of the San Francisco Institute of Socio-Religious Research, recently explained to the Archbishop of Canterbury his plan to do a five-year pilot study of Anglican and Roman Catholic clergy in England and U.S.A.. At the moment of writing he is to submit a detailed proposal to Dr. Leslie Paul who will then report to the Archbishop. He has also been invited, on the responsibility of the planning committee, to attend our Windsor meeting as a consultant, though it is not yet known whether he will be able to do this.

SECTION IV

25. It becomes increasingly clear that the prospect of some worldwide organic union of the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion (who live side by side in some 90-odd different states) may prove to be too remote for the impatience of some of the lukewarmness of others. Those places where the impulse to union is, or is thought to be, strong will have to set an example in assessing truly the possibilities "in their own situation". The rest will follow in proportion as they see the pastoral responsibility of the search for unity outweighing the obstacles, however formidable.

26. An enquiry such as that proposed here would not rest on the assumption that reunion would be a mere consequence of consensus or popular feeling, paying insufficient regard to the relations of faith and order between the two Churches. But it would assume (a) that it is Churches that are to be organically united, not theological commissions or even episcopal benches or bureaucrats (b) that it is already a matter of experience that schemes which ignore this run into difficulties and (c) that experience (including our own) shows that theological differences are themselves complicated by other factors which need to be brought to light. These factors may arise from and affect the internal relations of one party to the dialogue as much as the relations between the two parties.

27. Your planning committee suggests that a small sub-commission be instructed to devote most of its time at Windsor to discussing and developing this general proposal and working towards more detailed proposals. Some encouragement might perhaps be drawn from words addressed by Paul VI recently to the Italian Episcopal Conference:

"..... We can also find natural sources of apostolic fortitude nearer to internal reflection and human experience - the study of the relations arising between us, our ministry and contemporary man. It is what everybody is doing - searching out the phenomenology of modern life. This is changing, or perhaps becoming better known. We know this, but not vividly enough. The mobility, the new awareness, can be disconcerting, terrifying or at least intimidating. But we must look it in the face. There is a 'new duty' to emerge from habit (I do not say from tradition), from empiricism, from custom-bound formalism. Pastoral love will make us "know the sheep", show us how to make right use of the new sciences, see the new possibilities. To love is to discover, to love is to find out ways of coming close. A 'new trust' ought to give strength to our ministry - a trust in men... who are often better than they appear".

APPENDIX

Minute from South African Anglican/Roman Catholic Commission's meeting of May 1971.

At the February 1971 meeting of the Anglican/Roman Catholic Commission of South Africa, Canon Purdy suggested that the study of inter-communion should be related to a broad study of common opinion on Anglican-Roman Catholic relations.

Accordingly a seminar was held at the May 1971 meeting of the Commission on the possibility of a sociological study of this subject. As a result of this the S. A. Commission decided unanimously to recommend to the International Commission that such a survey be undertaken.

Preliminary enquiries made from South Africa have indicated that the International Federation of Socio-Religious Research Institutes (FERIES) might be able to handle such a project.

We wish to draw particular attention to the following points from our discussions:

- 1) The survey could be done in single regions at different times, or in a number of regions simultaneously, (for example, in all those regions which already have a Unity Commission at work) or on a world basis to include all areas in which Anglicans and Roman Catholics are found together in great numbers.
- 2) The survey ought to take equal account of prejudice against as well as goodwill towards unity. It also should consider the possible bearing of social stratifications on attitudes towards unity proposals, and if conducted on a world wide basis, should be done in such a way as to make it possible to abstract from the total results, data for different regions.
- 3) It is assumed that the study will focus on so-called non-theological factors, though hard and fast distinction will not be possible.

4) It was felt that the study itself would help change the relationship between the Churches.

5) It is possible that the Ecumenical Research Unit in South Africa might attempt a small scale preliminary study of an intuitive sample of parishes in South Africa.

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