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THE SPIRIT OF UNITY

THE EDITOR

WHEN it was proposed to repeat the series of daily lectures at Blackfriars, Oxford, during the Unity Octave of 1950, the decree from the Holy Office on the œcumenical movement published during March had not been thought of, nor had *The Times* correspondence on *Catholicism Today* yet appeared. But those who read the following papers, which comprise all but one of the lectures finally delivered at Blackfriars in that January 'Octave', will realise how *The Times* correspondence prepared the way for, and gave point and unity to the series. Moreover they can hardly avoid noticing how aptly

the lectures conform to the spirit of the decree of the Holy Office; they may, indeed, be taken as an extended commentary of that important document.

It is true that the decree was heralded by an unwise blare of trumpets in the popular press, so that when it did appear in English at the end of February many non-Catholics were disappointed, having been led to expect some 'concessions' which the Church could never give. Nevertheless, members of the Church of England have been able to recognise the true meaning and the value of the Vatican document. The Archbishop of Canterbury himself showed a clear understanding of its import when he discussed it as a 'timely' and 'encouraging' direction to Catholics on what can be done in co-operation with non-Catholics in face of the increasing peril of Christian civilisation. *The Church Times* gave the document a warm welcome without mistaking its significance: 'The Roman Catholic ordinaries, to whom the document is addressed, are instructed to take a positive interest in movements towards reunion, not only to keep close watch upon them, but "prudently to foster and to guide them"'. At the same time the instructions make it absolutely clear that Roman Catholics are in no way to compromise the doctrinal position and claims of their Church.' The document has indeed cleared the air in many directions, but of particular importance is its encouragement of private theological discussions between Catholic theologians and others. The Archbishop of Canterbury points out how the way is re-opened for the type of social co-operation between Catholics and non-Catholics which was so successful during the war and which in the present 'cold war', when we seem to hover on the brink of some vast calamity, is still more necessary. But now, in a far clearer manner, it is possible to probe further into the recesses of the Christian way of life where the mysteries of faith are bound to give rise to Christian social action. This may only be conducted unofficially and in private, for many obvious reasons, but it is just this type of discussion which is clearly set forth in the papers below as the one hope of gaining a true and growing understanding between Christians in face of the common peril. And although the Church of England is most understanding and most aware of the need for a return to unity in Christ, it must not be forgotten that there are millions of Christians and non-believers neither Catholic nor Anglican who stand

in urgent need of this union in the body of Christ. For this reason the present series of lectures casts its net wide to include the great numbers who have fallen away altogether from Christianity and who rely on some vague trust in science or communism to bring them happiness and fulfilment. It includes also the very important Eastern churches out of communion with the Holy See as well as the Nonconformists and those 'pan-Christians' who trust in an amorphous unity of spirit. As a whole it should provide an excellent basis for the discussions envisaged by the Vatican decree.

But most important of all is the presence of charity, the burning love of God, in which all co-operation must take place. Catholics in this country suffer from a lack of contact with their fellow Christians outside the Church due to the erection of psychological barriers and misunderstandings which can only be broken down by charity. We do not mean the love of Christ without a definite dogma to support it, which leads to great misunderstandings and a vague good-will which will achieve nothing. But granted the desire for an understanding of the Christian dogmas taught by Christ through his Church, we must insist on the love which springs from knowledge of the Saviour. Without true charity the contemplated discussions would lead to vain disputations, just as the lack of love leads so often to disdain for other people outside the Church and an intransigence which seeks to bolster itself on truth but which rests mainly on self-importance and the absence of desire for the salvation of the neighbour. Charity based on faith alone can destroy all the barriers to unity, for unity is in actual fact the unity of love, mind and will, identified with the mind and will of God. Towards that we must all strive, and for putting it into effect now is the acceptable time when the whole world looks to the Church to save modern man.