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Notes & Comment

A Tribute to Augustin Cardinal Bea

WILLIAM H. QUASHA

In an age when man is beset by dissent, fragmentation, doubt and disillusionment, it is uplifting to meet a man who exudes faith and holiness and who exemplifies all that is embodied in the Christian ideal.

Augustin Cardinal Bea was gracious, understanding and patient. He granted me my first audience on January 31, 1963, with full knowledge that I had come to Rome for the purpose of endeavoring to establish harmony between the Roman Catholic Church and the Free Masons in the Philippines.

From the moment I walked into his office I knew I had found a friend. The spirit of communion was immediate. By the end of the hour's conversation I realized I had met a truly holy man. Our first discussion, which was in the presence of His Excellency, Benigno Toda, Sr., who was then Philippine Ambassador to the Holy See, and of Father S. Schmidt, the Secretary to His Eminence, was completely harmonious. As I left his study he put his arm around me and spoke in a very encouraging manner. I was exhilarated as Ambassador Toda and I left the comfortable office of His Eminence. As I departed, my thoughts returned to my first visit to the Vatican in 1959 when, through the kind offices of H. E. Jose Ma. Delgado, I was introduced to the Office of the Secretariat of State. That meeting by contrast had been very formal indeed and did not at that time seem to indicate that one could be too hopeful.

My second meeting with His Eminence was on June 6, 1966. All who were present at the first meeting were again present at this meeting. Once again we spent about an hour together. Our third and last meeting was on May 21, 1968. At this last meeting, which took

place only a few months before he died, His Eminence graciously, when he learned that my wife was with me, invited her to join us. Once again, we spent an hour together. Although he was 87, his mind was clear and his personality was strong and bright. Never for an instant did he ever make the slightest utterance which would not accord with the spirit of brotherhood.

After the death of Cardinal Bea, Father Schmidt sent me a lovely commemorative of His Eminence's life and works. And so, when I was invited to be a speaker at the Scottish Rite luncheon on April 19, 1969, I chose to use that occasion to make a speech of tribute to Cardinal Bea whom I shall always regard as the personification of the spirit of Christian unity.

Augustin Cardinal Bea was born at Riedbohringen (Baden, Germany) on May 28, 1881, the only son of the carpenter Charles Bea and his wife Mary (née Merk). After schooling at Sasbach, Constance and Rastat and two years of theological study at Freiburg University, he joined the Jesuits in 1902. Towards the end of his religious training he was ordained priest (1912). From 1917 to 1921 he was professor of Old Testament exegesis and prefect of studies at the college of the Order at Valkenburg, Holland. From 1921 to 1924 he was provincial of the newly-erected South German province of his Order. From 1924 until the end of his life he worked in Rome, chiefly as professor at the Biblical Institute, of which he was rector for nineteen years (1930-49). During this time he was consultor to many of the departments of the Church's central government, and from 1945-58 he was Pope Pius XII's confessor. Created cardinal by John XXIII on December 14, 1959, he became best known for his activity as President of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity (1960-68): for his lectures, for his work in the Council (which was at a number of points decisive) and finally for a series of published works dealing with the problem of unity and with other conciliar themes. He died, after a short illness, on November 16th, 1968, and on the 21st he was buried in the parish church of his native village, Riedbohringen.

Long before his name became a by-word among Christians as the symbol of hope for Christian unity, Cardinal Bea was well known to and highly regarded by theologians in Europe, both Catholic and Protestant. He was a member of the Vatican Council Biblical Commission and once Rector of the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome. At the request of some of his fellow bishops at the Council he wrote a book entitled *The Study Of The Synoptic Gospels*.¹ The purpose of this book was to deal with certain biblical studies in recent years which had been known as "Form Criticism". *Form Criticism* uses a literary approach to study the metaphors, figures of speech and other

¹ Published by Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1965.

literary conventions used in the Gospels, and, by placing them in their historical context, attempts to prove that the Gospels are not the inspired word of God but are in reality borrowings from literary and religious traditions of the times in which they were written. Form Criticism claims also that the apostles and evangelists were concerned not with historical accuracy for its own sake but only with moral and religious meaning. Cardinal Bea in this book shows the historical truth of the Synoptic Gospels and demonstrates that they cannot be disproved by methods of Form Criticism but rather that these methods can be used to great advantage by scholars despite the difficulties raised by the apparent discrepancies between one Gospel and another. He establishes clearly how the use of literary criticism is compatible with a belief in divine inspiration. In his foreword to this excellent book, Cardinal Bea shows concern for what he calls "our Separated Brethren" and expresses the hope that "this book will also be of interest to our brothers who do not belong to the Roman Catholic Church — especially now when Christian confessions are mutually seeking to know each other better."

When Pope John XXIII announced his desire to hold an Ecumenical Council on 25 January 1959 and when on Whitsunday, 1960, along with other groups of experts charged with the immediate preparations, he set up a Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity², describing this as, "a special sign of esteem and affection for separated Christians" and appointed as President of the Secretariat Augustin Cardinal Bea, a great landmark was established. Up to this point the Cardinal had been regarded as a Bible Scholar and as a lecturer. He was also a spiritual leader because he had had the confidence of the last two Popes.

For those who doubt that aged men are useful, it is well to remember that at the time of this appointment as Head of the Secretariat, the Cardinal was 78. It is well worth thinking about that although Cardinal Bea had never held a position of high authority and responsibility for an interfaith movement, he undertook his task with the same spirit of dedication in which he had lived his entire life.

According to Archbishop Gerald P. O'Hara, the Apostolic Delegate in Great Britain who wrote the Introduction to the volume *The Unity Of Christians*³, "Cardinal Bea responded with an astonishing Indian Summer of ecumenical activity. Large audiences in the main cities of Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Austria and France have listened to him. The English Television screen has shown him several times. Leaders and thinkers from all the Christian bodies have either met him

² Henceforth referred to as the "Secretariat".

³ Augustin Cardinal Bea; published by Herder & Herder, New York, 1963.

or corresponded with him. He has published articles which have been translated into every language. All the time he has guided the work of his team of experts in the Secretariat as they prepared draft proposals for the Vatican Council. After long hours of discussion, his mind remains fresh and adventurous, his winning smile encourages the speaker wrestling with new ideas in the Latin tongue. His own Latin is simple and supple. He keeps the debate easily and good-humouredly under control, never making an otiose intervention, never missing a chance to give the discussion a keener edge."

Augustin Cardinal Bea was not previously involved in diplomatic activities. For example, he was never part of the Office of the Secretariat of the State. Consequently, he did not bring to his position as President of the Secretariat for Christian Unity an aura of one who is skilled in diplomacy. On the contrary, he had met scholars in the arena of commentary on the meaning of Christianity. His work, *The Study Of The Synoptic Gospels*,⁴ covered such subjects as The Historicity of the Synoptic Gospels from a Human Point of View and The Historical Character of the Synoptic Gospels Considered as Inspired Writings. In this book he was appealing to the minds of students calling upon them to "exploit all the real advances of Biblical science which diligence...has produced." We see then a man whose entire approach to the problem of Christian unity is that of a mind and conscience fully aware of the fundamentals of Christian doctrine, one who is motivated by the spirit of the apostolic letter *Vigilantiae* and the words of Pope Leo XIII, "care should be had that the keen strife of debate should never exceed the bounds of mutual charity."

Any discourse with Cardinal Bea at once would be an exercise upon the sound foundation of the fundamentals of Christian doctrine with ideas transmitted between the parties to the discourse in such manner as to be a search for truth through the medium of mutual understanding. How inspiring this is to men who realize that the world can no longer bear strife and the struggle for supremacy as a means for creating the conditions of unity! It is like saying to two fighting children, "I will teach you to love each other if I have to beat you to death in order that you may learn to love each other." In other words, if one is going to persuade, one must not use force. If one wants to create the conditions of love, one must love. If one wants to create the conditions of understanding, one must be willing to understand. And most important, one must be capable of understanding. In my view, these were the attitudes and the mentality of Cardinal Bea.

⁴ Originally published as *La Storicità dei Vangeli* (Brescia, Morcelliana, 1964). Translated into English and published in 1965 by Geoffrey Chapman, Ltd., London.

In his book, *The Way To Unity After The Councils*,⁵ Cardinal Bea quoted Pope John XXIII in his speech to the Vatican Council's first session:

We have begun to know you a little better, and not only as representatives of your respective Churches; through you we have made contact with Christian Communities who live, pray and act in the name of Christ, and with other systems of religious doctrine and thought, in fact, let us boldly say, with Christian treasures of great value. . . . Far from arousing in us a feeling of jealousy, this knowledge increases our sense of common brotherhood and our desire to restore the perfect communion of all people which Christ wished to establish. . . . We have acknowledged certain failings and certain commonly held opinions which were not just; we have asked for forgiveness for these, of God and of you; we have traced the non-Christian origin of these failings, and for our own part we have resolved to transform them into purposes and opinions worthy of Christ's teaching. We renounce all polemics based on prejudice which may offend our brothers, and all considerations of vanity and prestige; we shall rather seek to bear in mind the repeated exhortations of the Apostle over whose tomb we have met this evening, when he urged his flock to put away all 'quarrelling, jealousy, anger, selfishness, gossip, conceit and disorder' (2 Corinthians 12:20). We wish to re-establish human, serene, benevolent and trustful relations.⁶

Cardinal Bea then said, "Mutual affection has fostered the desire for mutual approach." Then he quoted Pope John XXIII again:

You know, my brothers, that our Ecumenical Council has made various steps towards a closer approach; this is seen in the esteem shown to you by the Council Fathers and their gratitude for your valuable assistance, and also in the effort made by all to avoid any expression that might be considered lacking in respect for you. Great spiritual joy was occasioned by seeing your group of élite associated with the religious ceremonies of the Council, and great pains were taken in the formulation of expressions of doctrine and discipline intended to smooth away all obstacles and open the way to a clearer understanding and appreciation of the Christian religious inheritance which you preserve and develop. The Roman Catholic Church, as you see, has shown her desire to understand you and to be understood by you; she has pronounced no anathemas but only invitations. She has set no limits to her

⁵ Published by Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1967.

⁶ *The Way To Unity After The Councils*, pp. 13-14.

patient waiting, just as she has set no limits to her loving offer to continue this precious dialogue.⁷

Cardinal Bea then said, "All this may seem very obvious and natural now, but it is a fact that for centuries Christians have not shown or practised this charity—so that it seemed almost as if they had forgotten it. To have re-acquired this is a great grace which the Lord has now bestowed on his Church by means of this Council, and for which we can never be sufficiently grateful, especially because this brotherly atmosphere has now spread to all Christian people. In fact, thanks to the keen interest taken in the Council, fostered and maintained by modern means of communication, what happened in the Council not only found an echo beyond the Council Hall but, in various parts of the world, has had a great influence on the mutual relations of Christians belonging to the various Churches of Confessions. In this way God has used the Council to create and widely diffuse among Christians this atmosphere of brotherly love."

In a book entitled, *Peace Among Christians*⁸ written by Cardinal Bea and Dr. Willem A. Visser't Hooft, Cardinal Bea first quoting from Psalm 133, 1, "Behold, how good and pleasant when brothers dwell in unity!" said, "We have discovered deep happiness in the feeling that we are brothers in Christ, and this, above and beyond that which separates us from one another, and in spite of such separations. We have also come to know how advantageous it is for all of us to meet fraternally in love of truth and in humility of love. But, as fruit of Christ's mercy, and consequently as a pure gift of God, this experience imposes heavy and imperious duties on us. I could almost say that it creates a new calling which is a modification of our traditional calling towards Christ, what I would like to describe as the ecumenical calling to dedicate ourselves to realizing the unity of the Church as desired and invoked by Christ, and as absolutely demanded by God. St. Paul's exhortation therefore applies to all of us: 'I therefore...beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called' (Eph. 4, 1). In other words, we ought to live as our ecumenical vocation demands we live."⁹

Again Cardinal Bea is quoted in *Peace Among Christians*^{*}, "For the name 'Brothers in Christ' summarizes the deepest meaning of that which is common to us all as a consequence of the holy baptism on which our roots and foundations in love, and therefore in Christ, are based. The name 'Brothers in Christ' also summarizes the spirit

⁷ *The Way To Unity After The Council*, p. 14.

⁸ Published by Herder and Herder, Inc., New York. 1967.

⁹ *Peace Among Christians*, p. 51.

* In his "Farewell to the Observer Delegates" at the Vatican Council.

in which we must meet one another and wish to meet one another, whatever faith or creed we might belong to. Finally, this name expresses our goal: We want to be brothers in Christ to the fullest extent, and we therefore want to be wholly one in the manner in which He wants us to be one."¹⁰

In his "Address at the Ecumenical Center in Geneva" the Cardinal said, "Thus, let us not look upon each other with distrust or with a critical mind, but rather in the spirit of emulation in love and good work."¹¹

In an interview with a member of the Protestant Press Service, Cardinal Bea is quoted as saying, "It has become a matter of course that theological discussions, important as they may be, are no longer considered the sole means of promoting unity. In addition to this possibility there is a whole series of other methods by which the ecumenical attitude may be demonstrated and expressed. We have only to think of prayer, of mutual respect and love, of the true Christian life, of cooperation, and of concerted action in various practical areas. These methods are of no less importance, and also entail valuable and often indispensable preparation of a more remote nature, for the creation of the only appropriate atmosphere for discussion, which is an atmosphere of mutual trust, understanding, and love."¹²

In an interview with a Greek journalist on the problems concerning the differences between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, Cardinal Bea, in response to this question, "Do the current tendencies towards unity and cooperation between the churches imply significant changes within the pale of these churches (infallibility, supremacy of the pope, etc.?)" said in part, "... there is one prerequisite for deepening my Church's faith and traditions, for further penetration into ultimately revealed truth, in order to perceive its essence and all of its demands more clearly. We must also know how to distinguish between those elements which are permanent, necessary, and therefore important, and those which are relative and contingent, and which, good as they might be, do not make the same demands on all people, and can therefore vary... The Catholic Church has begun to make this effort. Every church must make it. Moreover, many facets of it can be carried out in cooperation. All too often we regard such contacts and dialogue as if they constituted a debate on controversial issues. But this is only one aspect of the story. There is another aspect, too, a more fruitful one: we must join forces, examine one

¹⁰ *Peace Among Christians*, p. 121.

¹¹ *Peace Among Christians*, p. 126.

¹² *Peace Among Christians*, pp. 128-129.

another in order to magnify all that we have in common, or almost all that we have in common, and recognize its meaning."¹³

His last book, *Ecumenism In Focus*¹⁴ gives the story of the movement towards Christian Unity.¹⁵ In this book Cardinal Bea quotes His Holiness Paul VI as saying, "It is our duty to see the Church adopt in its life a new way of feeling, of willing, of showing itself to the world; make her discover the beauty of the Spirit in every direction; in thought, word, prayer, educational methods, art and canon law."¹⁶

Again in the same message from Bethlehem he quotes the Holy Father as looking forward to Christian Unity as the "happy day."

In commenting on the Holy Father's remarks in his message, Cardinal Bea writes, "The human person has a dignity which commands respect, and the work of the Spirit demands an even deeper respect as the activity of God himself. If this respect and reverence is inspired by charity, they will adopt all the feelings proper to love. We are already aware of another aspect of charity, that of displaying as far as possible the unity which already exists among Christian brothers. The Pope insisted on it in his address to the Catholic hierarchy, and it carries a particular significance. He expressed his deep joy on particular occasions when he found this unity evident in the Holy Land, in the Holy City—the various sects working together to restore the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The Pope made particular mention of it when greeting the Patriarch Benedictos: 'To the heart of a Christian this sanctuary is the most precious in the world. It is highly symbolic that, despite the influence of history with its numerous difficulties, Christians who are painfully separated should work together to restore this temple which they built in unity, and which fell into ruin because of their division.'¹⁷ These words of the Holy Father and of Cardinal Bea are inspiring to Masons who preach the doctrine of brotherly love and charity and who pride themselves in building their temples in the hearts of men and among nations.

¹³ *Peace Among Christians*, pp. 147-148.

¹⁴ Published by Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1969.

¹⁵ Philippine students will be interested to note that Cardinal Bea commented favorably on the work of Charles Brent, Episcopal Bishop of New York who, when he was Bishop of the Philippines, attended a meeting in Edinburgh of the World Conference of Bishops and performed some of the basic work in Christian Unity which had been started as far back as 1878.

¹⁶ *Ecumenism In Focus*, pp. 113-114.

¹⁷ *Ecumenism In Focus*, p. 115.

Since my meetings in the Vatican, there has been an entirely new atmosphere existing in the Philippines between Roman Catholics and Free Masons. This is very heartening for, as I wrote in an article entitled "Free Masonry and the Roman Catholic Church" in 1954, I can see no sound basis for disagreement between these two institutions because there is no basic conflict between Roman Catholic doctrine and Free Masonry.

Free Masonry is not a religion but its members consist only of men who believe in God. It is a fraternity of men who have provided charity towards mankind. Essentially, the Roman Catholic Church professes the same belief and doctrine.

Cardinal Bea exhorted all with whom he had contact to remember that we are all brethren and that our concern must be for the welfare of each other.

Mankind is indebted to Cardinal Bea for he pointed out, "The armaments race and the threat of atomic bombs increase the general yearning and the urgent need to build the unity in freedom of the human family in truth, justice and charity."

We cannot ignore the note of urgency with which Cardinal Bea spoke to us. The conclusion is inevitable. All of us have a duty to see to it that Cardinal Bea's efforts which were in a large measure responsible for the success of efforts towards Christian Unity are pursued with vigor and determination.