



Spanish Steps In Ecumenism

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In the epilogue of his truly monumental work, **Historia de los Heterodoxes Espanoles**, written in 1882, the litterateur Marcelino Menéndez-Pelayo peals forth in praise of his native Spain:

Spain, evangelizer of half the globe; Spain, hammer of heretics, light of Trent, sword of Rome, cradle of St. Ignatius . . . ; this is our grandeur and our unity; we have no other. On the day when it comes to be lost Spain will return to the regionalism of the Arevacos [primitive Castilian tribes], of the Vectones [indigenes of Roman Lusitania] or of the Kings of Taifas [medieval Moslem princes in Andalusia].¹

I have chosen this snippet to open my brief survey of steps towards ecumenism in Spain not because of the "triumphalism" or "romantic nationalism" of which, indeed, it smacks, but rather to remind my readers at the outset of the way in which a sense of the sacred pervades the Spanish mentality.

Obviously any sure steps taken in Spain towards ecumenism must be Spanish steps. Now the history of Spain is, as has been stated almost *ad nauseam*, the story of a struggle for unity, religious as well as civil. What unites has come to be considered civilized; what divides, barbaric. But Spaniards do not live in a closed world, suspicious of all things foreign. The Spanish mentality is at once intense and cautious, lofty and meticulous. Everything new and fresh, whether it comes from the Council hall in Rome or from the back streets of Liverpool, has its enthusiasts and its detractors in Spain. Spanish ecumenism is but another manifestation of an ardent

¹ M. Menéndez Pelayo, *Historia de los Heterodoxes Españoles* (Madrid, B.A.C., 1956, Tom. II, p. 1194.

loyalty to Rome. And this loyalty makes possible now in our day a new approach, the opening of new vistas.

In this article I shall try to show, on the basis of my own experience and that of my friends and Dominican brethren, something of what is happening in Spain today in the ecumenical field. It is by no means the whole story. I have purposely left aside the whole question of religious liberty as such. The same holds true for the bigger, over-all question of relations between Church and State. What I do hope will become clear, however, is that real and dynamic steps are being taken in Spain in the direction of wholesome ecumenical dialogue. The Church in Spain *is* being renewed, despite the lack of fanfare this renewal meets in a traditionally hostile foreign press.

Avila

My first contacts with the trend towards ecumenism in Spain took place in this city of St. Teresa, a saint very much concerned with the scandal of the division of Christendom in her own day. The editor of our studentate review, *Oriente*, asked me late in 1964 to write something on life in an Anglican parish for his number 56 which was to have a section devoted to ecumenism. In the course of my work with him I came to find out that a series of questionnaires had been addressed to various well-known ecumenists. Answers of varying length were received from M. J-P. Dubois-Dumée, Père Pierre Michalon, S.S., Père Maurice Villain, S.M., our French Dominican Fathers Dumont, Congar, Hamer and Chery and the Spanish ecumenist, Don José Sánchez-Vaquero. Thus, some fifty-three pages of the review, which finally appeared in February of 1965, were devoted to ecumenism.

Meanwhile, the President of our Pontifical Institute, Fr. Claudio García, was busy making plans for the January Unity Octave. He arranged for a hall in the city of Avila where nightly talks would be held, various Dominicans presenting various aspects of the history and life of the principal segments of separated Christianity. Although our propaganda was extensive the turnout at the first session was great even beyond our hopes, and after the following night's conference we were forced to move to a larger hall, that

of the *Casa de Sindicatos*, where I gave the third talk in the form of a paper on Anglicanism. Over three hundred Abulenses attended. The conferences which followed on subsequent nights were equally packed and great enthusiasm was shown. The evening Mass of the final day saw a goodly crowd in the Church of Santo Tomé.

The diocesan seminary also showed great interest in the Octave and its ecumenical implications. I was invited there to give a resumé of my talk in the city and received a warm reception from an audience full of thoughtful questions.

Groups of the Pax Christi Movement from Madrid and Avila met in joint session in Avila on the last Sunday in January. The sessions of this movement are day-long hikes in which the members, in great part university students, divide up into groups of five or six and discuss a given topic during the morning's hike. In the afternoon, a "General Chapter" is held to compare notes and draw conclusions. The topic of the session I attended was ecumenism and a great many ideas of varying worth were tossed about very freely. The summary of the results was much aided by the interventions of Fr. Pedro Sansegundo, Professor of New Testament Exegesis in our Dominican faculty. The meeting closed with an evening Mass featuring a homily directed towards the ecumenical approach.

In Holy Week, Fr. M-J. Le Guillou came from the Centre Istina in Boulogne-sur-Seine near Paris to give his fellow Dominicans a *cursillo* of four lectures on ecumenism with special emphasis on the theological concepts of "mission" and "communion" and an exposition of modern Greek and Russian theology. His lectures were tape recorded, and the substance of the first appears together with an interview of Père Le Guillou in *Oriente* (number 57). The interest of his hearers, many of whom gave evidence of scant knowledge of French, was much in evidence both by their attention to the resúmes given in Castilian after each conference and by the pertinence of the questions which they asked him.

In all this I think something of the spontaneous interest of the Spanish clergy and people in things ecumenical can be gauged. It is not merely that ecumenism is new; rather, there is a heartfelt feeling for the tragedy of disunity—a sentiment which better than any other, as it appears to me, serves as a starting point in the

slow process of orientation, contact and dialogue which should, when and as God wills it, lead to unity.

Salamanca

During the academic year 1962-63, Don José Sánchez-Vaquero, priest of the Diocese of Salamanca and Professor of Oriental Theology, Patrology and the History of Dogmas in the Pontifical University there, was laying the foundations of the *Centro Ecumenico Juan XXIII* of which he is now director. The first event of note in this centre's history was the First National Session for Ecumenical Initiation, held from the 14th to the 17th of April in 1963. The principal speaker was the French Sulpician, Père Pierre Michalon, who is a member of the Council's Secretariat for Unity and Director of the late Abbé Couturier's Centre Unité Chrétienne in Lyons. Père Michalon had come to Spain previously as early as 1959 at the invitation of a group of forward-looking bishops, and thus had already begun a series of warm contacts with Spaniards, both Catholic and Protestant. In his conferences in Salamanca in 1963 he insisted on the necessity of ecumenical overtures based on the fact of One Baptism, the will of Our Lord in His High Priestly Prayer and the vital needs of the Church in our day.² He stressed the point that ecumenism is a vocation, a call of God, which in its historic setting obliges Catholics to adopt an attitude in line with the needs of the Church, working positively to see the good in all Christian groups and to help their members see it, too, as part of our common patrimony. Other speakers at this first session were Padre Salvador de les Borges, Capuchin Franciscan, who emphasized the need for mutual comprehension between Catholics and others in dialogue; Don Manuel Useros Carretero, Professor of Canon Law in the Pontifical University, who gave a history of the ecumenical movement; and the prominent ecclesiastical writer, Don Lamberto de Echevarría who spoke on Christian Unity and Media of Social Communications. Don Josá Sánchez-Vaquero presented the thorny question of the Oriental theology of the Holy Ghost.

Subsequently, owing to the large number—about one hundred—

² These remarks on the 1963 Session are based on P. Sansegundo, "Ecumenismo," *Studium*, III (Madrid-Avila, 1963), pp. 367-376.

and extremely varied formation and background of the participants, it was decided to divide the Sessions of the centre into conferences of two types: initiation in ecumenism, with fairly basic lectures on various Christian groups and current Catholic approaches to unity; and studies in ecumenical theology, intended primarily for professors of theology and active ecumenists who could profit from a more profoundly scientific treatment of a single phase of the proposed ecumenical dialogue. To date there have been five Sessions in Ecumenical Initiation and two annual Study Conferences, these latter held in the Easter Weeks of 1964 and 1965.

In 1964 the principal speaker at the Study Conference was Père Maurice Villain of the Society of Mary, whose discipleship and biography of Abbé Couturier and whose ecumenical writings and efforts are world famous.³ He made the following practical suggestions to would-be ecumenists in Spain: that we exite an "ecumenical restlessness" in our seminary professors, especially those who teach Scripture and Dogma; that Chairs of Ecumenism, Oriental Theology and Protestant Theology be erected in our diocesan seminaries and that the students therein be offered biblical and patristic seminars; that all that smacks of renewal be given an ecumenical slant; that the Salamancan centre be provided with an adequate ecumenical library; that we encourage more direct contact with Spanish separated brethren; that provincial and parochial centres be founded and linked to Salamanca. Writing to *Oriente* a year later, Père Villain added to these suggestions his hope that we shall not turn ecumenism into a "fad" but, rather, that we work slowly and circumspectly, broadening our horizons by trips abroad and by inviting representatives of the Orthodox, Protestant and Anglican worlds to address us in Spain.

I had the pleasure of accompanying Père Le Guillou to Salamanca last Easter and of sitting at his feet with some forty-odd professors and students during his eleven lectures which constituted the bulk of the second Study Conference. Not only did Père Le Guillou introduce us to contemporary Orthodox thought—Lossky, Kanotis and Afanasiev were particularly emphasized—but he gave us much to mull over from the byways of the history of

³ I have abstracted the notes from this conference from *Oriente*, no. 56 (Avila, 1965), pp. 47-49, 81.

East-West relations. Collegiality, communion, Christology, Mariology, the theology of the Eucharist and the theology of the Holy Ghost were all presented in new (or rather old) light, straight out of the East. Other speakers included the editor of the English language edition of *Herder Correspondence* and the Canon Theologian of the Chapter of Castellón de la Plana.

While the work of the *Centro Juan XXIII*, which is mainly conducted at the Maronite College in Salamanca, is still in its more or less initial stage, it has already brought hundreds of Spaniards—clergy, religious and laymen—into contact with ecumenical thought.

Barcelona

The Centro Ecumenico de Barcelona, established somewhat later than the centre in Salamanca, is unique in that its direction is the result of joint Protestant-Catholic collaboration. It has published since October of 1964 some twelve monthly *Circulares*, mimeographed bulletins of ten to twenty pages featuring short notices of local and world wide efforts in the ecumenical camp as drawn from Spanish and foreign sources. The first number contained a bibliography of forty-seven fairly standard works on ecumenism then available in Spanish or Catalan. The issue of religious liberty was a recurring theme. Contacts with Taiza and the World Council of Churches in Geneva as well as with various French centres are much in evidence. Reunions at the Barcelona centre are frequent, often featuring direct attempts at dialogue or guest speakers from various Christian groups. This year a series of monthly talks will be presented by members of each of the eight Christian denominations present in Barcelona.

Two of the members of the Barcelona centre, both laymen, have written full-length books on ecumenism: Don José Disumbila, a Catholic, is author of *El Ecumenismo en España* (Barcelona, 1964); and Don Juan Estruch, a Reformed Episcopalian, has written *Ecumenismo, actitud espiritual* (Barcelona, 1965). The latter book is especially noteworthy as a personal contribution of a Spanish Protestant to the ecumenical dialogue. It is far from being a professional treatise in theology and it is not without pages which could offend pious eyes. Still, it is a book crammed with facts about

the actual state of things in Spain from a Spanish Protestant's point of view, and I have drawn upon it freely in the paragraphs that follow.

One of the services the Barcelona centre has rendered to the ecumenical movement in Spain is the publication of the following statistics concerning membership in Christian bodies of Protestant confession:

Plymouth Brethren	6,000
Baptist Evangelical Union	5,400
Federation of Evangelical Churches	3,100
Spanish Evangelical Church	3,800
Reformed Episcopal Church	1,000
Seventh Day Adventists	5,200
Pentecostal Evangelical Churches	3,500
Independent Evangelical Churches	2,000
TOTAL	30,000

The total population of Spain is about 30,000,000. According to the survey quoted Protestant services are held in 450 places in Spain, 320 of these being public chapels, 105 private houses. 60 per cent of the chapels are open with official permission, 30 per cent are tolerated, 10 percent are illegal.

Among Spanish Protestants themselves a new attitude of ecumenical endeavour is at last asserting itself. Much bitterness, inevitably, remains and both Catholics and Protestants of the "old school" (which is neither very old nor very scholarly) still turn their pulpits into soap boxes for haranguing the imaginary "opposition". In some places the radical sects still cause trouble with their importunate proselytizing. In the popular mentality "Protestant" still equals "heretic," and thus the lumping together of Jehovah's Witnesses and Episcopalians persists. But the "respectable" Protestants, chiefly the Spanish Evangelical Church (a merger of Presbyterians and Methodists) and the small Reformed Episcopal Church (in communion with Canterbury but not an integral part of the Anglican Communion) are doing much not only to show that one can be a loyal Spaniard and remain a Protestant but that they themselves deplore the scandal of the separation of Christians. And the Barcelona centre seems to be drawing even radical Protestants,

such as the traditionally hostile Baptists, towards a more conciliatory position.

Et Alibi Aliorum

Through Spain the Church Unity Octave in January is the focal point for popular ecumenism. The rather "pro-Uniate" intentions for that week as set forth by its founder, Fr. Paul James Francis, S.A., are in many places being substituted with Abbè Couturier's more palatable form.

In Madrid the hierarchy has not only authorized the mutual participation of Catholics and Protestants in this week but the Ordinary and his Auxiliary have taken active part, as has the Reformed Episcopal Bishop, Don Santos M. Molina, together with the President of the Spanish Evangelical Church, Don Benito Corvillon.

The Spanish hierarchy is represented on the Secretariat for Christian Unity by the Bishop of Zaragoza and many of its members have taken a personal interest in ecumenism. Worthy of especial mention are His Eminence, José Maria Cardinal Bueno y Monreal, Archbishop of Seville, and Don Enrique Tarancon, Archbishop of Oviedo. The seminaries, too, reflect a growing interest. The Conciliar seminary in Barcelona has gone so far as to invite a Protestant pastor to give public lectures. In Madrid the seminary now has a Professor of Protestant Theology in the person of Don Manuel Gesteira Garza. Brothers of Taizé have appeared on national television broadcasts. And local Protestant clergymen have been called upon to speak in radio programs from San Sebastian and elsewhere. At the time of the death of Pope John XXIII many Spanish Protestants wrote letters and articles in various periodicals expressing their sorrow and their admiration.

The work of true ecumenism is done not only in centres and lecture rooms, however, nor is it limited to more or less publicized contacts between Catholics and those separated from us. The work of ecumenism is an apostolate of prayer, too. Thus, of particular interest is the movement *A la Unidad por Maria* which has as its centre the strictly enclosed, contemplative monastery of Second Order Dominican Nuns in Calereuga, a sleepy little village in the

Province of Burgos where St. Dominic was born. The movement is simply one of prayer for unity. Its "membership" extends far beyond the Pyrenees: in England alone four groups are associated with it—three religious communities and a well-known Marian shrine.

Finally, I should like to mention the work of Father Morillo of the Society of Jesus and his Oriental Centre in Madrid. There he maintains a shrine of prayer before the Icon of Our Lady of Vladimir and publishes three journals: *Oriente Europeo*, *Re-Union* and *Oriente Cristiano*. Father Morillo has done much to promote understanding of the barely-known Churches of the East among thinking Spaniards.

From all that has been said I hope it will be evident that in Spain there *is* interest in things ecumenical. Steps have been and are being taken in the direction of dialogue. They are Spanish steps. In Spain, effectively, there is no plurality of religious confessions. But, precisely because of its providential "objectivity", Spanish Catholicism will without doubt have much to offer the postconciliar Catholic world in the way of meaningful, practical interpretation of the Second Vatican Council. For the Church today lives not only in "diaspora"; it lives, too,—and no less dynamically—in that land of coasts and castles, peaks and wide horizons where it has been firmly entrenched since the subapostolic age.