

Our Father (Russian Lit.) OUR FATHER.

RS 264

"I pray that they may all be one. O Father! May they be in us, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they be one, so that the world will believe that you sent me" (Jn 17<sup>21</sup>) — These words of Our Lord, recorded in St John's gospel, are repeated year after year now in many interdenominational meetings and prayer services throughout the world, during this week of prayer for Christian unity. But I wonder do they convey the same sense of urgency they did some years ago, for Catholics at least. Concern and enthusiasm for Christian unity seemed to blossom during the 2nd Vatican Council, where the assembled bishops felt strongly that this movement was very clearly the work and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The ground, of course, had been prepared beforehand in the quiet work and deep study of a number of theologians and others, away from the glare of publicity. The man who did come into the limelight, during and after the Council, was Cardinal Bea, who headed the new Vatican Secretariat for Christian Unity. Since Bea's death, the pace of general Catholic interest in the ecumenical movement seems to me at least, to have slackened — or perhaps it's just that the publicity has died down. All the same, there does seem to be a slowness in the filtering down to the ordinary level of the faithful, of the vision and concern shared by the bishops at the Council. This is understandable, especially as there was really no great <sup>general</sup> interest in ecumenism before Pope John's day, or no great understanding of what it would involve, even when it did come up at the Council. There may well be other reasons for it too, but I think it's ~~probable~~ that not one significant

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priest in H.K. who's a delegate for the forthcoming Convention of our diocese has chosen Ecumenism as his first or second choice of subject among the 10 subjects the delegates have been asked to give their preferential interest for. Among Catholic schools in H.K. there isn't one which could give any definite figures for the number of Christians, apart from Catholics, among their pupils, when they were asked this question recently. I don't say this proves anything; but it would seem to be some indication that in HK we're not as conscious as perhaps we shd. be that we have more in common with our fellow-Christians, through our faith and devotion to Christ Our Lord, than with the majority of our fellow-citizens who are not Christians of any kind. Of course there have been significant developments, like the recent agreement between the Apostleship of the Sea and the Mission to Seafarers to work together; and there are a number of projects on which joint Christian action is and has been taken. Still, the force and importance of Our Lord's prayer for all who, through His Apostles, wd. believe in Him needs to sink deeply into all our hearts. We soon tire of words and talk: can it be said that we also tire of the Word of God? This depends on how lively our faith and love really are — it depends on how much we really pray, with minds and hearts open to hear and understand the Word of God. Certainly, there are many difficulties even in co-operation on common tasks between Christians of different traditions — faith and trust are needed: but we do have a bond (despite differences) in our common faith in God — His revealing of Himself: Most Christian churches use the same kind of profession of faith, the Creed — let's listen to it prayerfully now, in Old Slavonic, as it's sung in the

Lit. Mus.  
Russ. Coll.  
RS 264(1<sup>3</sup>)

Russian orthodox Liturgy: MUSIC - PRAYERS

If, as I was just now suggesting, the first flush of enthusiastic excitement about ecumenism (that awful word for the movement towards Christian unity) has indeed worn off, most of us are nevertheless aware that there has been a change of atmosphere. We know that there are countless rivers, on all levels, some small, some very important, going on continuously throughout the world towards ending the scandal of divided Christian witness. In HK, where we are a small minority, this sid. is of special concern to all of us. The 'new' climate, of openness and close contact and co-operation with other Christians, our different attitude from say, 15 yrs. ago, has to be fostered and grow in depth. For you and me personally, this is a matter of prayer and of our personal relationships with our fellow-Christians and with Christ who is our common brother. But while a unity of spirit between us grows, it would be ultimately unhelpful to give way to a merely human impatience, to let hope, faith or clarity grow dull in any relaxation of concern for the unity for which Christ prayed, or to minimize the very real differences which have and do keep us as separated brethren. Few would ever admit they were guilty on these scores — and this is another reason why we have to continue to pray, however much more closely we may be cooperating, and working and thinking together among ourselves. In the end, the unity of His Church is God's own work: our prayer shd. be so transforming us and all who call themselves Christians — for whom we pray, that we learn to know, love & understand Him so well that He can carry out His purposes through us.