

I have been remembering two remarkable men: both bishops, one Roman Catholic and the other Anglican: two spiritual giants, who wept at the shattering of a dream.

One of them died 60 years ago, on 9th June 1963: he was Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, better known to history as Pope John XXIII, once described by a protestant friend as 'that man of so large a heart'. He brought the Roman Catholic Church in from the cold, one might say. He initiated the Second Vatican Council in 1962 and invited to it a number of non-Catholic observers. One of its themes was reform, and another was unity: 'Recognizing clearly the scandal of the separations existing between us who are all Christians, we are in quest of a visible unity. It and it alone can render possible an outburst of mission capable of bringing the glad news of the gospel to every person in the world.'

The new Pope said, 'We will not put history on trial. We will not try to establish who was right and who was wrong. Responsibilities lie on both sides. All we shall say is, Let us unite! Let us put an end to disagreements!' Sadly, John did not live to see the end of the Council, and though his successor was also ecumenically minded, John's dream that the churches would put aside their differences and draw closer together was not realised before his death. Brother Roger, a Swiss Reformed Pastor and founder of the ecumenical Taizé community in Burgundy, once saw the Pope weep 'because his intentions had been distorted'; because of the opposition of fellow Catholics, and the lack of response from the Protestants he had invited... 'A prophet had been rejected, ears had been blocked. Thenceforth ecumenism would sink into a way of parallelism, different denominations follow their separate ways. In a state of simple passive co-existence, and no more.'

My second spiritual giant was Archbishop Michael Ramsey, whom I had the pleasure of meeting in 1973, though my lasting image of him still is as one of the assisting bishops at the Queen's coronation in 1953. He was not only a fine scholar, but also a fine pastor, as Pope John had been. Both men were world church leaders, yet neither stood on ceremony. In an age when archbishops were still addressed as dukes, Michael Ramsey much preferred to be addressed as simply 'bishop'. Like Pope John, he was deeply ecumenical and committed to church unity. And like Pope John, he wept. He wept at the failure of the proposed union of the Church of England and the Methodist Church. The Church of South India had united Anglicans, Methodists and Presbyterians; it was an exciting development, and a promise of hope. Now Methodists were prepared to sacrifice their identity as a separate denomination for the sake of the gospel. It was to be a merger of two equal partners. There was dissent, of course, but most of us were ready for it, as were most Anglicans. But the measure was frustrated by a shameful collaboration between two extreme and opposite wings of that church, the Anglo-Catholics and the Evangelicals. And Michael Ramsey's heart was broken.

Two holy men, each with a dream that the prayer of Jesus, that his followers 'may become completely one...so that the world may know that you have sent me' (John 17.23) would be realised in their lifetime. Though it was not to be, it is largely because of the faith of Pope John XXIII that the relationship between Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Methodists and others are so warm. It is largely because of Michael Ramsey's faith that the Methodist Church and the Church of England are in a covenant relationship today (even though it may at times be

forgotten). God has always used men and women of vision to bring about his purposes. We are nearer that dream than ever before: let us never lose the desire that the church will one day be one, and never judge others who bear the name of Christ, however different they may be from us. We are one in Christ. Pray that the day will come when we are seen to be one.

Blessings,

Peter

Events

Cranleigh Arts Centre, 1 July to 29 July

The Spitfire: A celebration of one of the most iconic aircraft of all time

This exciting exhibition portrays the Spitfire across a wide variety of 2D and 3D mediums. For more information, visit [Celebrate the Spitfire](#).

The Cheese and Chilli Festival, Shalford Park- 15/16 July

The Cheese and Chilli Festival is the only show in the UK which celebrates both Cheese and Chilli within a festival setting. For more information, visit [The Cheese and Chilli Festival](#)