

**The Unity of Christians:
The Vision of Paul Couturier**

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XII

Paul Couturier and the Monastery of Amay-Chevetogne

Dom Thaddée Barnas OSB

It is well known that Paul Couturier's stay at Amay in July 1932 was a turning point in his spiritual journey and the beginning of his ecumenical vocation. The monastic community of Amay at that moment was doing its best to strike a difficult balance between its founding insights and the struggle for its survival. A long series of crises in the course of the 1920s had led to the resignation of the prior and founder, Dom Lambert Beauduin (1873-1960), who, on April 24th 1932 had just begun his long exile at En Calcat, far from his homeland and the monastery he had founded. Eighteen months earlier, the most serious crisis of its existence, had come close to putting an end to the existence of the monastery of Amay.

The community that Paul Couturier met in the summer of 1932 was torn between their passion for ecumenism and their concern to reassure a number of powerful personalities among the ecclesiastical authorities, who were highly distrustful of it.

How did all this come about, and how did Couturier react to the situation he found?

The founder of Amay-Chevetogne, Dom Lambert Beauduin was born Octave Beauduin in a middle class family of the peculiarly Belgian tradition of being both Catholic and liberal. He was ordained a priest for the diocese of Liège in 1897 and, from 1899 to 1906, he had been a member of the *Aumôniers du Travail*, or 'chaplains to labourers', a community of priests who ministered to young factory workers. In October 1906, at the age of thirty-three, Beauduin entered the Benedictine Abbey of Mont-César at Louvain, and was given the monastic name of Lambert.

As a young monk, he discovered the importance of the liturgy as the 'official prayer of the Church'. That discovery led him to the conviction that the liturgy was much more than the 'official prayer' of a rather abstract 'Church', and far more than a playground for historians and archaeologists. Deeply rooted in the Bible and in the collective experience of the community of believers, the Liturgy had to become once again the basis of the prayer life and spirituality of all Christians. Father Lambert was especially concerned with freeing Catholic piety from the sentimentality of 'popular devotions' – which he considered to be devoid of any depth – and to draw it back to the biblical richness of the liturgy. At the Congress of Catholic Works in September 1909, he launched the Liturgical Movement, which he led, with the help of a team of confrères at Mont-César, until the start of World War I.

After the First World War, Beauduin was sent to Rome to teach the theology at the Sant'Anselmo College. It was there that he first came to know the Christian East, thanks to meetings with a series of oriental scholars, bishops and lay people. And it was a kind of 'love at first sight'. Dom Lambert discovered in the Christian East an expression of Christianity which was very close to its biblical and patristic roots, a form of Christianity whose liturgical splendour was both the source and the expression of the 'piety' of the faithful. Father Lambert grew more and more convinced that the Christian West had to learn from Eastern Christianity, in order to become aware of its own roots, and to become more fully itself. Little by little, Beauduin realised that the unity of all the Christians was a priority imperative if the Christian Church was ever really to go back to its source. The idea of a monastic foundation dedicated to drawing Christians together slowly took shape in his mind.

It was through the intervention of an influential Jesuit, Father Michel d'Herbigny, that Beauduin submitted a memorandum to Pope Pius XI, suggesting that a monastery be founded for the work of Christian Unity. His memorandum was to form the basis of the papal letter *Equidem Verba*, of 21st March 1924, addressed by Pius XI to the Benedictine Abbot Primate, Fidelis von Stotzingen. The letter insists on the fact that Benedictine monks are particularly qualified for working with the East, because of their sensitivity to the tradition of the Fathers of the Church, and to the monastic Fathers; the Benedictine emphasis on the liturgy was yet another area for exploring their affinity with the Christian East.

But a number of important changes had been made to Beauduin's initial scheme, before the final draft of *Equidem Verba* was made public, and the papal letter turned out to be not quite

what Dom Lambert had had in mind. Somewhere along the way, the aim of the new monastery was not to be Christian Unity in general, but only Catholic relations with Russia. The shift in emphasis was the work of an influential churchman who had his own plans for the new monastery. We shall have more to say about him in a moment.

Father Lambert's contacts with Eastern Christianity had also given him a number of ideas for monastic reform in the West, and he hoped to put them into practice in the new foundation. There is no scope to go into them in any detail here, but we can briefly mention a few of them. In the first place, monastic superiors were no longer to use the *pontificalia*, – mitres, coats of arms, and ritual 'privileges' proper to bishops and prelates. There would no longer be two classes of monks – choir monks and lay brothers – but monks ordained to a ministry and non-ordained monks would have equal rights and duties in the monastery and in its government. And the liturgical offices would respect the *veritas horarum* (i.e. they would be recited at their authentic time of day, without Matins & Lauds being anticipated the previous evening, or the Paschal Vigil in broad daylight on Holy Saturday afternoon). All of these points were first introduced in Amay, and in recent decades they have been widely adopted throughout the Western monastic family.

Another important element in Beauduin's monastic reform was his insistence on the *lectio divina*, the daily reading of the Bible by all the monks. Of course, 'spiritual reading' occupied an important part in the monastic tradition of Saint Benedict, but by the end of the nineteenth century it had long since been reduced to pious reading of nearly any kind but the Bible. Father Lambert wanted each monk to commit himself *sub gravi* to a minimum of half an hour a day of Bible reading. 'It is impossible to have a reliable world vision', he wrote, 'if we are not faithful readers of Holy Writ. You have to start reading Genesis and keep going up to the end of Revelation. That is the only way to contemplate the great panorama drawn by the Spirit for us to understand the mysteries [of salvation]. If we want to come to understand that fulness, we have to be penetrated by Holy Scripture' (1).

After the publication of *Equidem Verba*, Dom Lambert Beauduin wrote a commentary on it entitled, *A Monastic Work for Church Unity*. It was meant as a basic charter for the spirit in which his monastery was to work. The 'Monks of Unity' were to be strongly attached to the Catholic Roman Church and have a spirit of great loyalty towards her; they were to be well acquainted with the Eastern Christian world, through the liturgy, through the study of the

Church Fathers, and of Eastern Christian cultures; they were to make people aware of the way Eastern Christians think, and foster an understanding and liking for it; they were above all to be true monks, faithful to the search of God in the monastic tradition; finally, they were to be filled with a universal, catholic and ecumenical spirit, far from the narrowness of nationalism, and transcending all ethnic divisions ('catholic spirit'). Their commitment was to be embodied in prayer, in work for reconciliation as well as in study and living contacts with eastern Christians, especially with eastern monasticism. The text of *A Monastic Work for Church Unity* was to be the main basis for Couturier's meditations and reflections during his stay at Amay.

But there was some ambiguity on the real aim of the foundation, from the time of the publication of *Equidem verba* (March 1924), up to the moment when the first monks began the common life in a former Carmelite convent at Amay (end 1925). Some understood the goal to be multiplying 'individual conversions', while others emphasised slowly bringing the different confessional families together by prayer and dialogue. This basic ambiguity was to make room for an attempt to draw Amay into a vast project of Catholic mission towards Russia – to the detriment of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The architect of this project was Father Michel d'Herbigny, SJ (1880-1957). He had taken an interest in Russia at the suggestion of the famous historian of the relations between the Russia and the Holy See, Father Paul Pierling, SJ. Before World War I, as a young Jesuit scholastic, d'Herbigny learned Russian, and began to contemplate various strategies for the conversion of Russia to Catholicism. Having become a very influential personality in the Roman Curia under Pius XI, he set about reviving the Catholic hierarchy in Russia. After an exploratory trip to Russia in October 1925, with a false identity and under the protection of the French foreign service, he managed to convince Pius XI to make him a bishop and then to give him full authority to choose and secretly consecrate a number of bishops in Russia. On his way to Russia for his second trip, he was consecrated bishop by the Papal Nuncio in Berlin, Eugenio Pacelli (later to become Pius XII), in March 1926 under cover of strictest secrecy. During his stay in Russia, he consecrated three bishops there. On his third and last journey to Russia in September 1926, he managed to consecrate still a fourth Catholic bishop.

Having reached his primary goal, d'Herbigny became somewhat imprudent, and even went so far as to celebrate a pontifical mass at the Catholic Church in Moscow, thus revealing to the

security agents present at every functioning place of worship that he was indeed a Catholic bishop. His lack of caution lost him the trust and the protection of the French Foreign Ministry, which had covered him until then.

D'Herbigny saw the Catholics of Russia basically as competitors for the Orthodox. History would later demonstrate how tragic this conception was, not only for relations between the two Churches, but even for the very survival of Christianity in Russia during the Communist era. The Catholic Church in Russia was in fact a church of foreigners in a country of Orthodox tradition. The Catholic Church would certainly have done better to be loyal and compassionate towards the suffering Orthodox Church in its time of humiliation and persecution. Surely that would have been a more genuinely Christian attitude to take! It would certainly have enhanced her credibility and her moral authority? We must, no doubt, evaluate d'Herbigny's point of view in the context of the pre-ecumenical mentality of the time. But even then, it is devastating to think of this squandered opportunity of showing solidarity and Christian charity towards a persecuted Sister Church.

Imagining that the Russian Orthodox Church was 'moribund', d'Herbigny was sure that this 'passing madness of Bolshevism' would soon go away, and Russia would 'open up' and convert to Catholicism. For this to happen, he had to train missionaries to 'harvest' Russian believers, whom he expected to fall into the hands of the Vatican like a ripe fruit. Obviously, it would be a major asset to have a team of Catholic monks, ready and waiting to take part in this missionary struggle against the Orthodox Church. By the time the Monks of Amay began their community life in late 1925, they were already under pressure to enter into d'Herbigny's 'army of missionaries' against the Russian Orthodox Church.

As of 1926, Amay began publishing the journal *Irénikon*, which, from the start, drew the attention of its readers not only to Russia, nor even to the Christian East alone, but to the whole field of what was slowly coming to be called 'ecumenism'. From the first issues on, articles appeared on Anglo-Orthodox relations, on the 'High Church' movement in Germany, on the Conference on Faith and Order in Lausanne (1927), etc.

And when, in 1928, Pius XI issued his encyclical *Mortalium animos* in which he condemned the emerging ecumenical movement and 'false irenism', *Irénikon* published the encyclical in Latin and in French, with a commentary written by Father Lambert, who tried rather

audaciously to demonstrate that Amay and *Irénikon* did not promote 'false' irenism but, on the contrary, 'true' irenism.

This kind of joyful freedom drew the ire of some influential churchmen, who did their best to put an end to it. When the time came for the monastery to be made into an independent priory in 1927, the decree from Rome specified that Amay was to concentrate *solely* on the work of 'the return of Russia to the unity of the Church'. To make matters worse, one of the monks of Amay decided to join the Orthodox Church, drawing bitter recriminations from Rome on the young community. An Apostolic Visitor, Dom Maur Etcheverry, was dispatched to Belgium, and the 'process of normalization' began. The *Pro Russia* Commission repeatedly demanded that the monastery take on an exclusively Russian orientation, and this resulted in Dom Lambert Beauduin's submitting his resignation as prior. After a pause of several months during which it was supposed that the matter was closed, the Commission unexpectedly announced that it had accepted the resignation. In January 1931, Dom Etcheverry resumed his Apostolic Visitation at Amay, with clear instructions from d'Herbigny to put an end to all the ecumenical goings-on. He told the monks, 'The Holy See does not consider the work of Amay to be Church Unity in general. It considers Amay to be destined exclusively for training Benedictine monks for founding centres of monastic life in Russia'. The monks who were not willing to submit to the 'Russification' of Amay were forced to leave the community at once ('before the bell for Vespers')!

Dom Lambert was tried and condemned for his 'errors' by a kind of makeshift Roman tribunal, but it was never made clear just what those 'errors' were. He was sentenced to an exile which was to last twenty years. It was only in 1950 that he was allowed to return to his foundation, which had moved to Chevetogne in 1939.

Beauduin's biographers, Loonbeek and Mortiau, came to the conclusion that the main reason for Beauduin's disgrace was his winning personality:

'He had the gift of making friends. Not that he ever had the slightest intention of enticing anyone to accept his way of thinking! But his enthusiasm for the work to be done, his communicative human warmth, his need to create bonds and to deepen fellowship with his acquaintances, the extraordinary ease with which he made contact with young people, gave him some kind of power which he never knowingly abused,

but which the authorities would take very badly when his ideas differed from theirs.’
(2)

Beauduin did indeed upset a good many received notions, like a prophet well ahead of his time. Some liturgical scholars felt up-staged by Beauduin’s pastoral approach to liturgy. His total rejection of proselytism directly contradicted established Roman Catholic policy, in places such as England, for example. His esteem for ‘schismatics’ made him all the more suspect in many Catholic circles. Dom Golenvaux put into words what others were to say of Beauduin with rather more tact than he: ‘The mischief this man has done from a monastic point of view is quite incalculable’ (3).

Bishop d’Herbigny was relieved of all his duties in Rome in 1933, and the pressures in view of forcing Amay into his ‘Russian mission’ immediately decreased. Four years later, d’Herbigny was stripped of all marks of his episcopal dignity. He was forbidden to appear in public, to correspond with persons other than his close relatives, and was not even permitted to write his own memoirs (he did so nevertheless). He had suddenly become a kind of non-person. The real reasons for his downfall will not be known with any certainty until the full archives of the reign of Pius XI are opened to historians (4). While the Monks of Amay were understandably relieved that Bishop d’Herbigny no longer held power over them, none of them would rejoice in his ultimate and total humiliation.

Less than a year and half before Paul Couturier’s visit, in January 1931, the Apostolic Visitor, Abbot Maur Etcheverry had tried, in the name of the Holy See, to forbid the community to pursue any activity having as its goal general Christian Unity. Yet the work continued. In February 1931, Rome was considering suppressing the monastery of Amay. The founder, as we have seen, had just been exiled. The new prior, who functioned as *pro-prior* from the departure of Dom Lambert in 1928, was Dom Théodore Belpaire (1882-1968), a man of extreme discretion and of a prudence that has at times been called excessive. He had been chosen by Lambert Beauduin himself for his wisdom but, with time, he was found to be a bit distrustful towards the founder (5).

For his part, Dom Lambert, in a letter to Dom Pierre Dumont, tried to defend himself against the false accusations which had been brought against him. To do so, he felt he had ‘mercilessly to combat the policy of Father Prior [Dom Belpaire] to remain silent concerning

my case', he wrote. 'It would be to disown me morally as founder, if by silence in such circumstances, Amay were to agree to my condemnation' (6).

To make matters worse, the death of Cardinal Mercier in 1926, who had been a friend and staunch supporter of Beauduin and Amay, deprived both of an influential church leader who could have intervened in their favour.

Such was the atmosphere of struggle for survival, and for the survival of ideals, which reigned at Amay when Paul Couturier came to make his month-long retreat. It is remarkable that in this moment of crisis, of apparent submissiveness to Bishop d'Herbigny's designs, that Paul Couturier was able at all to grasp the fundamental insights of the foundation and to make them his own.

On July 16th 1932, Paul Couturier arrived at the monastery of Amay for a stay of one month. It was M. François Paris who had suggested that Couturier should make the acquaintance of the young community. Paris had collaborated actively in establishing the monastery at Amay, and had also taken an interest in Couturier's work to help Russian émigrés.

During his stay, as we have noted above, Couturier read and reflected on Beauduin's booklet *A Monastic Work for Church Unity* as well as on several others of his writings. They made such a deep impression on him, that he decided then and there to commit himself to ecumenical work. He was to recall this in a letter to Dom Ildefonse Dirks, on May 29th 1939:

'I can't forget that it was in your room, as you were showing me your posters for the Prayer Octave, that the idea sprang up in my soul to bring the Prayer Octave to Lyons. That was the starting point. Doesn't this sort of spiritual affinity give me some kind of filial right to your special prayers, so that you will continue to care for that which you – or Providence itself – has sown in the furrow of my humble life?' (7)

It is also well known that the first meeting between Couturier and the young Dominican Yves Congar took place during that stay at Amay in 1932. Congar stopped over at Amay on his way to a study trip to Germany (the monastery at Amay was located at a short walking distance from a station on the main railway line from Paris to Cologne). Unfortunately, the two great churchmen, who were both to contribute so richly to the emerging ecumenical

movement, just did not seem to get on at all with each other. The intellectual Congar had serious doubts about Couturier's 'old fashioned' philosophy, and Couturier's spiritual outlook made him just a bit dubious of the very cerebral approach that was Congar's.

Congar recalled the meeting a half century later:

'It was in a lime-tree alley, I think, that we met, Paul Couturier and I. My intellectual outlook was rather different from his. But we talked about the Church and Christian Unity. It was only much later that I learned, in reading Maurice Villain's book, that it was then and there that Couturier, already committed to fraternal and spiritually helping Russian emigrants, had discovered his full ecumenical vocation' (8).

As for Beauduin, he too had some doubts about Congar. In 1937 he confided to Couturier his rather summary judgment of Congar and the Dominicans: 'Despite his good will,' he writes,

'he lacks something. I think it must be "sympathy" in the Pauline and profound sense of the word. Cardinal Mercier used to talk about that sentiment with incomparable high-mindedness. Without this disposition of the soul, one simply cannot understand or sympathise fully with our "Separated Brethren". Just between us, I think that Dominicans have undergone some kind of professional deformation, or else they seem to have contracted the original sin of "Thomism" that makes it hard for them really to enter into the Apostolate of Christian Unity. I have no doubt that Father Congar is making a big effort to adapt. And since he, unlike so many others, enjoys a great deal of freedom of movement in this domain, we really ought to take advantage of it' (9).

Indeed, in spite of his own genius, Beauduin did at times make some serious mistakes of judgment! As for Couturier, he was in the long run to invite Congar to Lyons in 1939 for the Prayer Week for Unity, and a new friendship began between them based on a mutual deep esteem.

A year after his visit to Belgium, Couturier was received as an Oblate of the Priory of Amay. He announces this 'oblature' to Dom Belpaire in a letter dated 17th August 1933:

‘My Very Dear Father,

I write you as a son, since I now belong to the Priory of Amay *tamquam oblatus*. Thanks to your having delegated [the right to receive my profession], although I am far from the family, I have become one of its children. I had been hoping to make my profession as a secular Oblate on Assumption Day, but this did not prove possible. In the woods, far from the village, it was on Sunday 13th that I came down to Saint-Ours. After hearing my confession, the good and aged *curé*, received me as an Oblate in his lovely little church, which was quite empty at the time. I imagined that I could feel the great Benedictine peace at that moment. I am henceforth associated to all your joys, pains, prayers, merits and works. Here, I will pray, far away from all of you, and I will endeavour to take my inspiration from the spirit of Amay, with no prejudice to my new family, like a child far away in the French hinterlands of Lyon. As my Oblate name, I have chosen Benedict, the Patriarch of Monks, and Irenæus. The latter was not a Benedictine, but he had the Benedictine spirit. He is also the patron saint of the Russian chapel in Lyons and of the company of priests of the diocese to whom I belong; finally, Irenæus is the Orient come to Lyons, it is peace, it is *Irénikon*, it is Amay’ (10).

Enthusiasm overflows in this text, which reflects the freshness of the discovery of a new vocation which he intends to put into practice. He would set out adapting and making concrete in his own context some of the basic insights of Amay.

Loonbeek and Mortiau underline the fact that Couturier’s well-known aphorism, ‘the visible Unity of the Church which Christ wills, as He wills it and when he wills it’ (11), probably takes its inspiration from text by Lambert Beauduin that Couturier almost certainly read during his stay at Amay: ‘Union will return by the grace of God when He wills it’. Beauduin uses the expression in commenting on the greetings sent by Pope Leo XIII to the Eucharistic Congress of Jerusalem in 1893. Beauduin makes his own the two tools of bringing Christians together advocated by Leo XIII: learning and the charity, in order to ‘prove’ that his own ‘psychological method’ is in full accord with papal teaching. Couturier takes over the idea, and makes it a spiritual postulate, free from any particular method or teaching. It opens the way for Christians to pray together for unity without preconceived ideas about the form, conditions and dateline that that Unity will take.

Couturier soon set about spreading news of Amay's insights, outlook and activities. He corresponded with several of the monks, invited them, often in spite of the nigh proverbial prudence of Father Prior Belpaire, to take part in the Prayer Octave at Lyon. He tried to interest people in subscribing to *Irénikon*, had the journal displayed in bookshops, and did his best to get the monks of Amay to allow him to dispose of unsold copies in order to distribute them to his friends and prospective subscribers.

In a letter dated 27th April 1935, he suggests to Dom Clément Lialine that he publish in *Irénikon* an article by his friend Serge Bolshakoff. Bolshakoff was an extraordinary and somewhat eccentric young Russian, full of enthusiasm for interchurch friendships and projects. Couturier wanted the article published in French in the hope of supporting his bid to obtain the support of the Synod of Russian Orthodox Bishops Abroad for the Prayer Octave for Christian Unity.

'I am well aware of the gravity of what I am asking. The article cannot be published without the consent of your Primate, Dom Etcheverry (12), but you will understand why it is so important. As you know, I am in contact with the Abbot of Nashdom, Dom Martin Collar, elected on January 29th last, and who has dedicated his Abbey to the work for Christian Unity. [Nashdom] is a kind of Anglican Benedictine Amay. Well, thanks to Mr. Bolshakoff, [Dom Collar] has just invited twenty Orthodox personalities: bishops, archimandrites and such, to take part in the next Octave. He wrote me that he hopes to check the advances of Canon Douglas'.

(J. A. Douglas, of the 'Council on Foreign Relations' of the Church of England had the confidence of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Cosmo Gordon Lang, and had done a great deal for the bringing together between Anglicans and Orthodox, but he was considered too 'anti-Roman' by Dom Collar.)

'[The article] will be published in the journal *Anglican Catholic Reunion*, in a French Catholic journal, and, I hope, in an Orthodox journal ... I didn't want to ask the hospitality of *Irénikon* in order to avoid compromising you'.

Couturier was aware that Bolshakoff's eccentricity had made him something of a problem for a number of his ecumenical contacts, including some of the monks of Amay.

‘You know all the problems that he has been having recently with Catholics. It has not been easy to convince him to overcome his reluctance [to return to them]. He had been intending to concentrate on collaboration with Anglicans. Publishing his article would be a kind of compensation for his “martyrdom”, at least for those who are aware of it...’ (13)

Couturier had to wait a long time for an answer. Dom Lialine scrawled in the margin of the letter, ‘I was away’. Bolshakoff's article was published in *Irénikon* only a year later, in the issue of September 1936 (14), after a long death notice, also written by Bolshakoff, on Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky), deceased on the previous August 11th. Yet Bolshakoff was able to announce the much hoped for support of Synod of Karlovtsi for his Orthodox Confraternity of Saint Benedict, but the following year Archbishop Tykhon (Liashin) (†1945) of Berlin was forced to withdraw from the presidency of the confraternity and to give up episcopal office, because of rampant criticism within his own Church.

Couturier's sensitivity to the difficulties of Amay did not prevent him from expressing criticism when he thought it appropriate. In 1937, Amay reissued the booklet *A Monastic Work* with a number of appendices including an article by Lambert Beauduin published in *Irénikon* in 1930, entitled ‘Our work for Christian Unity’. The article had appeared at the request of Bishop d'Herbigny who wanted the journal to clarify its position on a few criticisms that had been addressed to him, namely that the journal recognises other churches as churches or branches of the Church. D'Herbigny was probably relieved to read the first pages of the article. One reads, for example, ‘proselytism is an obligation for those who possess the truth’. But the article goes on to distance itself from that statement and to condemn the policy of individual conversions (proselytism): ‘Let us state clearly that such a policy, however legitimate it may be, is foreign to the mind of the Monks of Unity’. The booklet is a 1937 reprint of an article published in 1930, and a great deal had happened in the meantime. Couturier acknowledges receipt of the booklet in a letter addressed to Dom Belpaire on June 11th 1937, but he protests at the use of the word ‘proselytism’ taken to mean a form of ‘apostolate’. ‘“Proselytism”,’ he writes, ‘in France at least, has a heavily pejorative connotation. And it sounds trite.’ Couturier was certainly aware of Beauduin's inflexible opposition to proselytism. He must have known the article ‘Unity and conversions’, published by Beauduin in *Irénikon* in 1928. But that does not stop him from protesting against the

reprinting in June 1937 of the sentence allowing that proselytism could claim certain legitimacy, even if the rest of the text was to deny it (15). After all, d'Herbigny, who had demanded the 'clarification', was not only in retirement since 1933, but from April 1937 he was completely banned from speaking in public. Why print a sentence so blatantly in contradiction with everything Amay stood for?

Paul Couturier became a faithful friend of Amay at a time when Amay was most in need of friends. With his special combination of boldness and modesty, he was able to accomplish an enormous contribution to 'preparing hearts and minds' for visible unity, at a time when Amay was more engaged in prudently trying to reassure the triumphalist Roman Catholic 'old guard'. He went far in making Christians aware of the urgency of seeking unity.

Paul Couturier understood above all that the foremost vocation of his beloved Amay was to be a monastery, a place of listening to the Word of God, a place of praise, a place of intercession, a place where one had to go straight to the goal, skipping over the meanness of cultural and national peculiarities, overcoming confessional disparities, and looking only to the *unum necessarium*, the only thing necessary.

The wish he expressed in a letter to Dom Clément Lialine in 1934 strikes an important chord for the monks of Chevetogne today:

'I pray faithfully for the monastery', he wrote. 'It must become a brilliant focus of spiritual and intellectual life. Only if its members are holy monks all beaming with divine love, to whom one can come and warm one's soul, be it Latin or Russian, chilled by the vicissitudes of daily life. It must also be, but only secondarily, a place where one can find the knowledge to clarify, to bring peace and to unite. It is only if Amay is rich in saints and scholars – in saints who are scholars, and in scholars who are saints – only then Amay will be able fully to take up its very important task.'

In the last months of Paul Couturier's life, Dom Thomas Becquet, who had taken part in the Lyon Prayer Octave in the 1930s and was now prior of Chevetogne, went back to Lyon in order to bring him the good wishes of the community of Amay-Chevetogne, to which he was bound by twenty years of friendship, by a common ideal and a complementary vocation.

Dom Thaddée Barnas is himself one of the Monks of Unity. A deacon in the Byzantine rite of the double monastery at Chevetogne, he is the editor of Irénikon, and also the custodian of a great archive of Paul Couturier's papers and letters. This paper was given at the colloquium at Brugge in June 2003. (16)

Notes

1. Retreat at Cormeilles, 1944
2. Raymond Loonbeek & Jacques Mortiau, *Un pionnier: Dom Lambert Beauduin (1873-1960). Liturgie et unité des chrétiens*, (Coll. Université de Louvain. Recueil de Travaux d'Histoire et de Philologie, 7^e série, fascicules 12-13). Louvain-la-Neuve, Collège Érasme/Chevetogne, Éditions de Chevetogne, 2001. 2 vols., pp. 1074-1075.
3. Dom Célestin Golenvaux (1879-1952), Fourth Abbot of Maredsous (1923-1952). Golenvaux to von Stotzingen, Maredsous, 6 April 1932, ASAn, XIV, 86.
4. Cf. Leon Tretjakewitsch, *Bishop Michel d'Herbigny SJ and Russia. A pre-ecumenical approach to Christian Unity*, Würzburg, 1990, *Das östliche Christentum* Neue Folge, Band 39.
5. Cf. Loonbeek & Mortiau, *op. cit.*, pp. 1168-1169.
6. Letter from Lambert Beauduin to Pierre Dumont, En Calcat, 16 August 1932, quoted in Loonbeek & Mortiau, *op. cit.*, pp. 1092-1093.
7. Paul Couturier to Ildefonse Dirks, Whitsundtide (29 May) 1939.
8. Yves Congar, *L'essentiel, c'est d'avoir une vie*, in *Unité des chrétiens*, no. 43, July 1981, p. 20.
9. Lambert Beauduin to Paul Couturier, Cormeilles-en-Parisis, 23 June 1937, ADO, carton no. 64, dossier no. 12, quoted in Loonbeek & Mortiau, *op. cit.*, p. 1162.
10. Couturier to Belpaire, 17 August 1933, quoted in Maurice Villain, *L'Abbé Paul Couturier, Apôtre de l'unité chrétienne*, Tournai-Paris, Casterman, 1957, p. 43.
11. Cf. Loonbeek & Mortiau, *op. cit.*, p. 1157 ; the phrase is found in *Irénikon*, t. 1, November 1926, p. 357.
12. Dom Etcheverry was actually not the Abbot Primate, but the Abbot Visitor.
13. Paul Couturier to Clément Lialine, 31 July 1934.
14. *Irénikon*, t.13 (1936) pp. 577-581.
15. Paul Couturier to Théodore Belpaire, 11 June 1937.
16. A fuller version was delivered by the author at the November 2002 interconfessional academic colloquium, *L'oecuménisme spirituel de Paul Couturier aux défis actuels*, convened by the Catholic University of Lyon's Theology Faculty, the Centre St Irénée and the Centre Unité Chrétienne jointly. It is reproduced in *Irénikon*, t. 75, 2002.4, under the title *L'Abbé Paul Couturier et le monastère d'Amay-Chevetogne*.