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Old Fold or One Flock

John Moorman

In St. John, 10:16 Jesus is reported to have said:

‘And I have other sheep which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd’ (RSV).

In the Greek the word for *fold* is *aulē*, and the word for *flock* is *poimnē*, and the two words signify two quite different things. A fold is an enclosure, built of stone, wood or corrugated iron; while a flock is a group of living creatures, in this case sheep.

In translating this verse some scholars have made a curious mistake. Jerome, in the Vulgate, gives the word *ovile* (a sheepfold) for both the Greek words, so that the last few words read ‘one fold, one shepherd’ (*unum ovile et unus pastor*). Curiously enough, several of the early English translators made the same mistake. Wycliff has ‘o fold and o schepherde’ and the Authorised Version followed in his footsteps with ‘one fold, and one shepherd’. On the other hand, Luther saw what was meant by the Greek and put it as ‘eine Herde und ein Hirte’, while Tyndale has ‘won flocke and won shepheard’. Among modern translations the Jerusalem Bible says ‘there will be only one flock and one shepherd’, though, in a footnote, it gives ‘one fold’ as a variant, perhaps out of respect to the Vulgate. All other modern versions which I have consulted (with the exception of Ronald Knox) are correct in using the word ‘flock’ for the Greek word *poimne*.

There can, I think, be no doubt that ‘one flock’ is the correct version. The whole passage is concerned with the relationship between the shepherd and the sheep which belong to him. They recognise him when they see him. They know his voice. They will follow him when he calls to them. The fold is merely a building into which he puts his sheep from time to time. They do not live in it. They do not necessarily use only one fold. They are temporarily put into it for protection, but do not normally stay in it for any length of time, as they must, of necessity, ‘go in and out and find pasture’.

It is curious that the Vulgate and the AV both make this simple mistake. Perhaps they thought it didn’t matter. But, ecumenically, it matters

a good deal; for the idea of 'one fold' suggests 'one Church', so that those who are outside it should come in, whereas 'one flock' suggests a relationship between Christ and those who follow him, regardless of what fold they happen to be in.

In Roman Catholic literature the phrase 'one fold' is almost invariably used, partly because it corresponds with the Vulgate, and partly because it provides scriptural support for the beliefs which they have always held. In the Encyclical Letter known as 'Ad Petri Cathedram' (1959) John XXIII quotes Christ's prayer 'that they may all be one' (John 17:21) which he links with John 10:16: 'there will be one fold and one shepherd'. Unity, therefore is not just a question of the relationship of the sheep to the shepherd (i.e. being all members of the same flock); it demands, also, that all the sheep shall be gathered together in one fold. From this Pope John takes up the theme of which his predecessor Pope Pius made so much in his encyclical 'Mystici Corporis' (1943) where he turns to those who, being separated from 'the one organism of the Body of Jesus Christ' are living in 'a state in which they cannot be secure of their own personal salvation' and begs them to come inside. 'With open arms We await them' he said, 'not as strangers but as those who are coming to their own Father's house'. John XXIII saw the question of Christian unity in the same light. It was simply a question of coming back to one fold. 'We cherish the hope for your return' he said, adding, like his predecessor, 'When we lovingly invite you to the unity of the church we are inviting you not to the home of a stranger, but to your own, your Father's house'.

John XXIII, though a good and kind man, was not what we should call ecumenically-minded'. It is clear that he saw the way to Christian unity as nothing more nor less than a return to the one and only Church of those who had, at some stage, left it. Cut off from the ordinary life of the world at the age of eleven, he had had very little chance of learning what people, outside the small circle in which he lived, either thought or did. Life within the Holy Roman Church meant everything to him; and he could not understand how other Christians found it possible to live, apparently quite contentedly, outside it. Indeed, his conception of these unfortunate beings, who were now known as 'separated brethren' was a very strange one. When acting as Papal Representative in Istanbul in 1939 he wrote in his Journal: 'Very little is left in this land of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. Debris and seeds. But innumerable souls to be won for Christ, lost in this weltering mass of Moslems, Jews and Orthodox'. If he seriously thought that members of the Orthodox Churches of the East were not really Christians, then it is no wonder if he could see unity only in terms of a return to the fold.

Churchman

If we turn from Pope John to Cardinal Bea we find a true ecumenist, a man who tried to understand the problems of Christian unity, and who was, it is thought, responsible for persuading Pope John to set up a Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity and to invite Observers to the Second Vatican Council.

In his essay on 'The Catholic Attitude towards the Problem [of Christian Unity]', originally written for *La Civiltà Cattolica*, and published in his book *The Unity of Christians*, Bea does his best to explain to his Roman Catholic readers what he thought was the right approach to unity. He was wise enough to know that the Johannine appeals to 'come home' were not going to do much good, and he would have been deeply shocked, though possibly not surprised, if had known what his master had written about the Orthodox Christians of the East. Nevertheless, Bea himself obviously still thought in terms of the 'one fold'. In this book of essays he quotes the phrase 'one fold, one shepherd' several times, and on page 47 he writes: 'It is not easy for one of our separated brethren to find the way to the flock of Christ', implying that those not in communion with the See of Rome were not only outside the right fold, but not even members of the a flock.

That was in 1961; and when Vatican II met in the following year, there was considerable interest in how the bishops would handle the question of Christian unity. Would they stick firmly to the 'one-fold' approach, and so think of union as merely a question of those outside coming in? Or would they adopt the 'one-flock' approach, and, by accepting the idea that the flock is composed of all those who follow Christ, work for better relations with those from whom they were separated? A careful look at the Constitutions and Decrees of the Council – or, better still, a seat in the 'Observers' Box' while these documents were being debated – leads one to the conclusion that there was here a notable change from the question of membership (in or out) to that of relationship. What caused this was two facts: one that there were a good many bishops in St. Peter's who really wanted the Roman Catholic Church to enter into the field of ecumenical dialogue and action; the other that there were thirty or forty observers watching them carefully and ready to criticise any language which seemed to them inconsistent with the teaching of Christ and out of keeping with modern ecumenical axioms.

The documents of Vatican II show that the Council was aware of the fact that the followers of Christ can be more accurately described as a 'flock' than as a 'fold', for they are careful to point out that a unity already exists among the faithful, especially among those who have received the

sacrament of Baptism. This is clearly 'flock-language', for a shepherd may have members of his flock in various folds, but they all bear what a Yorkshire shepherd would call his 'spot'. (Is this, incidentally, what is referred to in Deut. 32:5, AV?) In paragraph 15 of the Constitution on the Church we read: 'The Church recognises that in many ways she is linked with those who, being baptised, are honoured with the name of Christian, though they do not profess the faith in its entirety or do not preserve unity of communion with the successor of Peter'. Again, in paragraph 3 of the Decree on Ecumenism we read: 'Men who believe in Christ, and have been properly baptised, are brought into a certain, though imperfect communion with the Catholic Church'; and in the preceding paragraph it speaks of Christ who, through the Holy Spirit, 'has called and gathered together the people of the New Covenant who comprise the Church (*qui est ecclesia*) into a unity of faith, hope and charity'.

If it is true that there is here a change of emphasis from the idea of a fold to the idea of a flock, and that we are beginning to think in terms not of membership but of relationship, then I think there is some hope of progress in our ecumenical dialogue, especially where the Roman Catholic Church is concerned. So long as people think of the church as a fold, with walls which can be high and doors which can be shut, then there is not much to be done except to urge those outside to come in. But if we begin to adopt the idea of a flock — not all members of which are necessarily in the same fold — then we enter into the realm of relationship, of communion, which may at present be partial, imperfect or incomplete, but which can grow if we have the will to nourish it.