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# The BAPTIST QUARTERLY

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## EDITORIAL

As most readers should know, *To Be A Pilgrim* is the title of the biography of the late Dr Ernest Payne, by Dr Morris West. That it has also, more recently but quite independently, been chosen by the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster as the title of his book on spirituality, has caused a certain amount of interested comment, even reaching the corresponding page of *The Times*. 'It is the same pilgrimage, is it not?' asks the Reverend Elsie Chamberlain. In wandering unwittingly onto Dr West's territory, Cardinal Hume at any rate has nicely made a point which ought to be of great interest to church historians and ecumenists alike. It concerns the way in which symbols and imagery - whether verbal or otherwise - which owe their provenance to a particular religious tradition, can in the

course of time and circumstance acquire validity far beyond their birthplace, and eventually be regarded as common property. Bunyan the Baptist (?) antipapist eventually provides the summary description for a Roman Catholic Cardinal's exposition of the Benedictine pattern of holiness.

This kind of phenomenon may not readily attract the attention of serious church historians. It can appear to be trivial and banal compared with matters on the level of the classic trio of 'councils, creeds and controversies'. But such small developments are vital ingredients in the larger effects. To understand them is highly important for comprehending how previously separate and even opposing traditions may come to a greater sense of affinity with each other, for human relationships in religious no less than other spheres are so often conveyed by shared idioms, figures of speech and poetry. This is part of a larger phenomenon on the ecumenical level, namely, that in addition to the 'official' scene of councils of churches, ecumenical projects and joint theological consultations, there is an unofficial, almost subterranean ecumenism at work. This cannot be engineered or planned. It simply happens, like a natural seepage from one mine-working to another. For many people today, spirituality and theology are highly eclectic affairs, with devotional styles, examples of saintliness, social ethics and so forth all being borrowed for their inherent value or seeming usefulness, with no prejudice as to their place of origin. That in turn of course leads to the possibility that language wrested from its original context may no longer bear its original meaning.

As well as a history of major figures, developments of thought, causes and communities, we therefore need histories of the usage of particular words, concepts, texts, poems, hymns, biographies - all those subtle vehicles of the spiritual life from generation to generation, which make up the religious ethos at any one time. To take but one example, while the *content* of hymns composed in any period is a significant indicator of theological trends, the actual use of hymns in the worship of different traditions may be more difficult, but as important, to trace. It is still something of a surprise when hymnologists tell us, for instance, that the hymn has continually had to fight its way in to a fully accepted place in Anglican worship this century. That it has been successful in this (although in the new services hymns are still not as integral to the liturgy as in Free Church worship) will owe something to the perceived value of the hymn itself, to increased contact with other worshipping traditions, and to the use of hymns in the media and on state religious occasions, among other things. In all, a fascinating complex of factors in the grey borderlands between religion, culture and society into which some, we hope, will dare to tread. In the meantime, we continue to wish the ventures of both Dr West and Cardinal Hume well.