

## THE CHURCH: TOWARDS A COMMON VISION

### A convergence text of the World Council of Churches Commission on Faith and Order

#### A Commentary and Appraisal

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#### Background

In 1989, the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC initiated a study intended to do for ecclesiology what the Lima statement of 1982, *Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry*, had done for those subjects.<sup>1</sup> The aim was to present a potentially commonly acceptable vision in ecclesiology which would help the churches to recognise the very considerable progress made in earlier dialogues, bilateral and multilateral, and act as a spur towards further rapprochement and consensus in those areas that remained problematic. In a very real sense the process emerged from a number of suggestions made by churches responding to BEM to the effect that more work was needed in ecclesiology in order to aid further convergence on ministry and sacraments.

The unity of the Church is both gift and calling. It is for Christians and their churches to affirm and respond to the Great Plan of the Father, which is to unite all things in Christ (Ephesians 1.9-10) by seeking, in the power of the Spirit, the unity of the Church as sign, instrument and first fruits of the Kingdom. It is for them to grow in that communion, in which they are both enfolded and enabled for service, until, as the decree *Dei Verbum* of Vatican II puts it, all the words of God are fulfilled in them.<sup>2</sup>

The Lord's Prayer is the one prayer that can be encountered in almost every Christian act of worship, even in churches that otherwise tend to shun set liturgies. Accordingly, the Report, in the first paragraph, states that 'to pray that the Lord's will be done thus necessarily requires a

1 An Historical Note at the end of the Report traces the entire process within the context of the work of Faith and Order going right back to 1927.

2 *Dei Verbum* 8.

wholehearted endeavour to embrace his will for and his gift of unity.'<sup>3</sup>

The report is divided into four main chapters entitled *God's Mission and the Unity of the Church*, *The Church of the Triune God*, *The Church Growing in Communion* and *The Church in and for the World*.

#### God's Mission and the Unity of the Church

Chapter 1 describes the Church and its mission as 'rooted in the vision of God's great design for all creation, the kingdom which was both promised by and manifested in Jesus Christ.'<sup>4</sup> It adds two important points. The first relates both Church and coming kingdom to the understanding of human nature as created in the image of God, with an inherent capacity for communion both with God and with each other. The second says the mission of the Church issues from its nature as the body of Christ, 'sharing in the ministry of Christ as Mediator between God and his creation.'<sup>5</sup> This attribution of a mediatorial role to the Church may jar with those who take a radical Protestant view in which Christ is primarily seen as being set over against his Church, often in judgement. It is, however, in accordance with the classical Reformation view, expressed by Calvin, that he cannot have God for his Father who does not have the Church for his mother. It also accords with the classical Wesleyan view of Benjamin Gregory in his teaching that all the work of Christ, except that of the atonement, continues to be carried out in the Church.<sup>6</sup> The emphasis upon the image of God is important for apologetics in that it stresses that human nature can find its final destiny and fulfilment only in truly catholic communion with its creator and through him with all those created in the same image.

#### The Church of the Triune God

Chapter 2 reminds us that the Church is called into being by the Father's giving of the Son and sending of the Spirit.<sup>7</sup> It stresses the centrality of the biblical notion of *koinonia* in all modern ecclesiology and ecumenism, adding that 'as a divinely established communion, the

3 It is striking that this comes just a year after the publication of the most recent report of the *Groupe des Dombes* on the Lord's Prayer, *Vous donc, priez ainsi* (2011)

4 *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (henceforth cited as CTCV), para 1.

5 CTCV, para 4.

6 Gregory B, *The Holy Catholic Church* (1873), p 15

7 CTCV, para 13.

Church belongs to God and does not exist for itself.<sup>8</sup> As far as the hurly-burly of everyday church life in parishes and circuits is concerned, this is the most important statement in the entire report. We need to be constantly reminded that the Church is God's and exists solely for his purposes. We seek his will for it, not our own. We are members of it by grace and not by independent right.

### The role of the Virgin Mary in the Church

It is interesting that this statement is soon followed by a paragraph reflecting on the role of the Virgin Mary in the Church. It states that 'Mary is an important example for all who seek to understand the full dimensions of life in the Christian community,' in that 'she receives and responds to the word of God' (Luke 1.26-38), she shares her joy in it with Elizabeth (Luke 1.46-55); she meditates on and strives to understand the events of the birth and childhood of Jesus (Matthew 2.13-23; Luke 2.19,41-51), seeks to comprehend the full implications of discipleship (Mark 3.31-35, Luke 18.19-20), she stands by Him at the foot of the Cross (John 19.25-7) ... and finally waits with the disciples for the gift of the Spirit and receives it with them on Pentecost (Acts 1.12-14; 2.1-4).<sup>9</sup>

The introduction of a Marian element into multilateral ecumenical ecclesiology is long overdue, particularly in view of the pioneering work done by four earlier dialogues, including our own British Catholic-Methodist Committee.<sup>10</sup> The Marian element adumbrated is fully biblical and a reminder to Protestants that their past use of scripture relating to Mary has often been deficient. It accords fully with the Marian element in the Vatican II Decree, *Lumen Gentium*.<sup>11</sup> It shows appreciation of Mary's role as model disciple without getting into the controversial territory of the Marian dogmas of 1854 and 1950.

8 CTVC, para 13.

9 CTVC, para 15. a slight summarisation of the paragraph which gives fuller detail

10 In date order, these are the American Lutheran-Catholic dialogue, *The One Mediator, the Saints and Mary* (1990), the British Catholic-Methodist dialogue, *Mary, Sign of Grace, Faith and Holiness* (1995), the Groupe des Dombes, *Marie dans le dessein de Dieu* (1997) and ARCIC, *Mary, Grace and Hope in Christ* (2005).

11 *Lumen Gentium*, chapter 8

### The Role of the Ordained Ministry

Important statements are made about the relationship between the people of God and their ordained ministers. Para 19 argues that 'the whole people of God is called to be a prophetic people,' a point also strongly affirmed in recent Catholic-Methodist dialogue.<sup>12</sup> It asserts that 'all the members of the body, ordained and lay, are inter-related members of God's priestly people,' a point on which there is now wide consensus even if that relationship is not always understood in identical terms. Para 20 adds that 'agreed statements are making it clear that the royal priesthood of the whole people of God and a special ordained ministry are both important aspects of the Church and not to be seen as mutually exclusive.' Para 29 argues that 'a pastoral ministry for the service of unity and the upholding of diversity is one of the important means given to the Church in aiding those with different gifts to be mutually acceptable to one another.'<sup>13</sup>

It will be interesting to see how this last statement can be teased out in further dialogue. It is clear from para 28 that there is a particular concern to protect the legitimately inculturated expression of the apostolic faith within each different society.<sup>14</sup> It will also be important to see how far this statement is felt to protect and foster within a united church the varying denominational traditions which that Church inherits within the confines of any one particular culture.

Next, the question of the appropriate ministerial structures for each level of Church is raised. The differences in understanding of the concept of local church are mentioned. The question of the regional dimension, between that of local and universal, is raised, an important matter for those churches, both within the episcopal and the independent traditions, which have clear theologies of the local and universal churches but some difficulty in giving an ecclesiological account of church at national, provincial or regional levels. It is perhaps a pity that more

12 *Speaking the Truth in Love* (2001), paras 29,31,45.

13 It is interesting to note that, in his ecclesiology of the local church, the late Jean-Marie Tillard argues that a key duty of the bishop is to maintain the inherited traditions of his local church. It could be argued, by extension, that it is a duty of church leaders both to witness to the particular legitimate traditions of their local churches and commend them to others, whilst at the same time being prepared to receive fresh insights from other local and particular churches.

14 para 28 'legitimate diversity is compromised whenever Christians consider their own cultural expressions as the only authentic ones.'

mention is not made of the way in which Methodism and the more *presbyterian* of the Reformed churches fit neither model but see church as interlinked at every level.<sup>15</sup>

Churches are encouraged to work further on these matters. One may add that it relates also to the question of appropriate synodical structures, which are taken for granted in Anglican and Protestant churches and which allow both lay and ordained voices to be heard.

### Trinity and Diversity

Complementing its teaching on legitimate diversity, this chapter also defines the catholicity of the Church as stemming from 'the abundant goodness of God "who desires all to be saved" (1 Timothy 2.4),' adding that 'where the whole mystery of Christ is present, there too is the Church Catholic (cf Ign, Smyrn.6) as in the celebration of the eucharist.'<sup>16</sup> This teaching closely parallels that of *Called to Love and Praise*, 'the Church is catholic because there is one universal God who has declared his love for all creation in Jesus Christ' and that of the Catholic-Methodist dialogue that the eucharist is 'the focus where the pattern of life specific to Christians is shown forth.'<sup>17</sup> The extent to which churches currently see the eucharist as the highest encapsulation, in worship of the total Trinitarian mystery, in which the faithful join with the Son in his eternal worship of the Father, needs further probing.<sup>18</sup> The most recent report of the international Roman Catholic-Methodist dialogue makes a substantial contribution to this exploration.<sup>19</sup> It is also, as Mary Tanner stresses in a recent study of Rowan Williams' ecumenical theology, central to his thinking. 'The eucharist is the place where most profoundly the fellowship of Christian believers is associated with the movement of Jesus Christ to his eternal source ... where the prayer of

15 For Methodism, this is the connexional principle which sees all churches as essentially interlinked in their sharing of the common responsibility for mission and growth in holiness. Para 32 does touch on the Presbyterian synodical system in a footnote.

16 CTCV, para 22.

17 The most recent ecclesiological statement of British Methodism (1999), *Called To Love and Praise*, para 2.4.4. *The Apostolic Tradition* (1991), para 44.

18 Vatican II, of course, regards it as the summit of worship. Many in the main Protestant traditions would agree, provided its celebration is always accompanied by the preaching of the Word.

19 *Encountering Christ the Saviour in Word and Sacrament* (2011), ch 3 and especially p 35.

Christ becomes our prayer and the life of Christ becomes our life.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, this chapter deals with the concept of Church as sacrament, still sometimes regarded with suspicion by many Protestants. It states:

Those who use the expression 'the church' as sacrament do not deny the unique 'sacramentality' of the sacraments, nor do they deny the frailty of human ministers. Those who reject this expression... do not deny that the Church is an effective sign of God's presence and action. Might this therefore be seen as a question where legitimate differences of formulation are compatible and mutually acceptable?<sup>21</sup>

Clearly, the Faith and Order Commission envisage the possibility of a differentiated and fruitful consensus.

### Growth in Communion

Chapter 3 deals with *Growth in Communion*. It begins with an analysis of the controversial question as to whether the Church is involved in systemic sin as opposed to merely being at the mercy of the fallibility and sinfulness of its individual members. Traditionally, Orthodox and Protestant churches have held diametrically opposed views on this. More recently, Cardinal Kasper has stressed the Church as *ecclesia semper purificanda*, the Church always in need of and seeking fuller purification and greater conformity to the pattern of Christ.<sup>22</sup> Rowan Williams has suggested that opposing views can be reconciled. 'The Church is simultaneously the Body of Christ that is unified because it is where Christ is but it is also a body not only wounded but wounding itself because of its dangerous proximity to the chaos that Jesus comes to disfigure.'<sup>23</sup>

Another resolution of this difference could be found in the teaching of *Dei Verbum* 8, that the Church continues to grow in understanding until all the promises of Christ are fulfilled in her. We are not yet at that state of perfection. The Church has to grow in maturity towards the final day of redemption (cf Ephesians 4.30).

20 Rowan Williams, as cited by Mary Tanner in 'The Ecumenical Theology of Rowan Williams,' *Ecclesiology* 8 (2012), p 170.

21 CTVC, para 27.

22 Kasper W, *That All may Be One* (2004), p16.

23 Williams as cited by Tanner, *Ecclesiology* 8 (2012), p 170.

The next big issue involved is just that precise issue of the Church's growth in understanding and the processes by which it is aided. Para 39 argues that 'many bilateral dialogues have acknowledged that ecclesial interpretation of the contemporary meaning of the word of God involves the faith experience of the whole people, the insights of theologians and the discernment of the ordained ministry. The challenge today is for the churches to agree on how these factors work together.'

### The Church as *koinonia*

Careful consideration of this involves the profoundest of reflections on the Church as *koinonia*, on the Church as the Church of the triune God. If, as so much modern ecclesiology stresses, the communion of the Church does indeed reflect that of the persons of the Holy Trinity, then we need to remember their pattern of eternal relationship and interdependence.<sup>24</sup> We need to make sure that we have a balanced understanding of this. Sometimes in the past, the authority of the bishop has been compared to that of the Father.<sup>25</sup>

However, we have to remember that the Father is also the one who has infinite trust in the Son, the one who places judgment into his hands (John 5.27). The relationship between the ordained ministers, the people of God and those special charisms of theological learning is one of mutual interdependence. The people of God have that anointing from the Holy Spirit whereby they know all things (1 John 2.20), that is to say they know instinctively what is the truth about the loving triune God and what is his will for Christians in their love of each other and their mission to the world. It does not, however, mean that they do not need the help of both ordained ministers and theologians in expressing their faith and applying it appropriately in changing situations.

All three communities should ideally be in a relationship of mutual learning and reception, the people of God from the ordained ministers as ministers of memory of the Tradition, the ordained leaders as ministers testifying to the faith that they discern among the faithful within their local churches, the theologians as servants of the faith both of the

24 It is worth remembering that the concept that the Church reflects, albeit in a necessarily finite way, the relationships in mutual love of the Trinity is, itself, controversial. It is however, strongly defended by Mary Tanner in her article 'Celebrating Edinburgh 1910: Reflections on Visible Unity' in *Theology* (2010), p405. and was earlier defended in the British Methodist ecclesiological statement, *Called To Love and Praise*, op cit, para 2.1.9.

25 As first of course by Ignatius of Antioch.

people of God and their pastors and as people bound to the task defined by the late Eric Mascall as *theologizandum in fide*, that is, theology as based upon the living Tradition of the Church and not upon abstract speculation.

Within this relationship there is a constant giving and receiving, a constant mutual listening. William Shrewsbury said that 'the greatest evil that can befall a church is a want of confidence between ministers and people,' a point that has been all too often proved in Church history.<sup>26</sup>

It will be important to listen to the witness of the full range of the churches on these issues, to explore the historic experience of the great ecumenical councils, but also to hear the witness of the radical free churches to the value of the church meeting, where the will of Christ is discerned under his invisible headship and to the witness of Quakers as to the way in which the sense of the meeting develops and is received.<sup>27</sup>

### Sacraments or Ordinances

Another key issue in convergence relates to the understanding of the special rites ordained by Christ as a permanent legacy.<sup>28</sup> In most churches these are called sacraments, but in some of the more radical Protestant traditions are known as ordinances, those traditions being suspicious of any concept that they automatically convey grace, particularly in the absence of any real faith on the part of the recipient.

The report argues that the gap between those who use the two terms is not unbridgeable. It states, 'most traditions which use the terms sacrament or ordinance affirm that these events are both instrumental (God uses them to bring about new reality) and expressive (of existing reality). Some emphasise one, some the other. Might not this difference be more one of emphasis than of doctrinal disagreement?'<sup>29</sup>

The churches are yet again challenged as to whether they can arrive at deeper agreement of the sacramental life of the Church. Can they agree on the number and ecclesial status of the sacraments and on who may preside at the eucharist? Finally, can there be fuller under-

26 Shrewsbury W, *A Scriptural Account of the Wesleyan Methodist Economy* (1840), p 54.

27 This last had an important influence on the adoption of a more consensus model in WCC decisions.

28 CTCV, paras 40-44.

29 CTCV, para 44.

standing between the 'sacramental' churches and Christian communities convinced that sharing the life of Christ does not require them.<sup>30</sup>

### The priestly nature of ordained ministry

Finally, in this section, the churches are reminded that it is urgent to overcome both disagreement on the priestly nature of ordained ministry and differences as to whether only men may be ordained. On the former, I wonder whether it might be possible to achieve a differentiated consensus in terms of seeing it as a special participation in the pastoral ministry of Christ the Good Shepherd.<sup>31</sup> The Protestant emphasis is upon presbyters as under-shepherds to the Great Shepherd (1 Peter 5.1-4),<sup>32</sup> the 'catholic'<sup>33</sup> upon a participation in the priesthood of Christ, but both converge in terms of the lifelong commitment and the new relationship with Christ in his Church implied in presbyteral ordination. On the question of the ordained ministry of women, further studies are needed both of Christian anthropology and of the experience of women's ministry in those churches which have it, including attention to the churches' testimony as to ways in which it has enriched their life.

The churches are also asked whether they can or cannot now reach consensus on the three fold ministry as a part of God's will for his Church and the realisation of its unity.

One has to accept that there is still a long way to go on that issue. A few Lutheran churches have agreed in recent years to receive the sign of the episcopal succession.<sup>34</sup> However, because of a mixture of opposition and apathy, recent suggestions about styles of episcopacy that British Methodism might adopt have stalled.

### Episcope and Oversight

Finally, this chapter deals with the related questions of authority and

30 Primarily the Society of Friends and the Salvation Army. I understand there is increasing discussion within the Salvation Army as to whether sacramental life should be incorporated into their tradition.

31 I have taken this approach in 'Pastoral Office or Sacrificing Priesthood,' *Bulletin of Methodist Sacramental Fellowship* 125 (1998), pp 31-48

32 The classic interpretation of this in the Wesleyan Methodist tradition is Jackson T, *Christian Presbyters, their office, duties and reward* (1850)

33 Where I use the term 'catholic' rather than simply catholic, lower or higher case, I am using it in the sense of those churches that have the historic episcopate and a generally 'high' sacramental theology and practice.

34 Most notably in North America.

*episcope/oversight*.<sup>35</sup> All authority in the Church is based on that of Christ and its exercise on the model of his self-emptying love. It 'must be distinguished from mere power.'<sup>36</sup> One misses, however, stress on authority and ministry as being for the equipping of the saints. It would have been helpful to cite the opinion of Gregory the Great that his honour was in the strength of the independent action of his brethren.<sup>37</sup> A key end of Christian authority and oversight is the equipping of those for whom the pastor is responsible with the ability to make their own responsible decisions. In such a way should a parish or circuit ministers equip their lay leaders and people, bishops or moderators their clergy, the Bishops of Rome those bishops in communion with them who share their concern for the overall welfare of the whole Church as well as their local churches.

### Authority and Holiness

Para 50 makes an important point about the authority deriving from the life of holiness, manifested in 'greater authenticity in relationship with God, with others and with creation.' This strikes me as an important pointer towards mutual recognition between churches that have problems with the ecclesial authenticity of others. It could help all our traditional, ecumenically engaged churches in their relationship with the new and emergent churches where they are able to discern in them both loyalty to the trinitarian faith and new styles of Christian discipleship that can enrich the *oikoumene*.<sup>38</sup> It could help those churches that have retained the historic episcopate in their recognition of non-episcopal churches. Equally, it can help those evangelical Protestant and Pentecostal churches which have long distrusted key aspects of the 'catholic' tradition to come to a conclusion similar to that towards which John Wesley was groping when he said of Rome in his time, 'I can cope with their superstition, even with great superstition on account of the great holiness of so many of their saints.'

35 CTVC, paras 48-57.

36 CTVC, para 50.

37 Cited in Tillard J-M, *The Bishop of Rome*, p27. It was in answer to an anxious enquiry from the Patriarch of Alexandria.

38 See *The Wisdom of John Paul II* (2001), CTS, p 103 where he speaks of such new styles of Christian discipleship. One may add that a welcome development in England is the increasing interest shown by 'new,' 'black led' and 'independent' churches in associating with the 'traditional' churches in CTE.

## Authority and Agreed Statements

Para 50 continues with an attribution of 'a certain kind of authority' to agreed ecumenical statements which 'reflect a common search for and discovery of the truth in love,' a faith which, one may add, can also enrich both traditions through the reception of complementary insights. It is, for example, to be hoped that the most recent report of the international Methodist-Roman Catholic dialogue, *Encountering Christ the Saviour in Word and Sacrament*, will enrich both communions and others.<sup>39</sup>

Para 51 stresses that the authority that Christ shares with those in ministries of leadership is not merely personal or delegated by the community but is a gift of the Spirit 'for the service (*diakonia*) of the Church in love.'<sup>40</sup> In line with a thorough going ecclesiology of *koinonia*, its exercise includes the participation of the whole community, whose sense of the faith (*sensus fidei*) contributes to the overall understanding of God's word and whose reception testifies to the authenticity of the leadership. There is a stress on the necessary collaboration of the faithful, their leaders and theological experts.

Such collaboration, one may argue, demands a deepened awareness of the Church as communion, a profound humility on the part of each of these three elements in the Church before the witness borne in any conversation by the other two. Each must remember that decisions cannot be taken or resultant teaching given without the other two being in accord.

The report states that there are differences both 'about the relative weight to be accorded to different sources of authority and as to the role of ordained ministers' in it.<sup>41</sup>

39 I understand that Bishop Christopher Hill has already said that ARCIC would have been helped in its original work on the eucharist had it had the eucharistic section of *Encountering Christ in Word and Sacrament* to hand at the time!

40 Note the similarity with the British Methodist ecclesiological statement of 1937, *The Nature of the Christian Church*, p27 which states that ministry both arises from within the Church but is also a gift of the Spirit to it.

41 CTCV, para 51 italics. These can be well illustrated from the seventh quinquennium of the Methodist-Roman Catholic dialogue, *Speaking the Truth in Love*, which is referred to in footnote 51 of the Report. In *Speaking the Truth in Love*, Methodists challenge Catholics as to whether they can give more of a role to lay folk in authority structures; Catholics ask Methodists whether they can reinforce the role of ministers within their

## The ministry of oversight

The final topic in this chapter is the ministry of oversight. It asserts that the diversity of gifts in the Church, bestowed by the Spirit, requires a ministry of co-ordination 'so that these gifts may enrich the whole Church its unity and mission.'<sup>42</sup>

All churches have some sort of ministry of *episcopate*, a point that has been as strongly stressed by some churches that lack the historic episcopate as by those that have it.<sup>43</sup> Some, particularly in the Reformed traditions, saw the new ministries that they created (in their view restored from apostolic precedent evidenced in Scripture) at the Reformation as strengthening oversight within the local churches.

The Report refers us to the consensus recorded in *Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry*, that the structure and exercise of *episcopate* should be personal, collegial and communal.<sup>44</sup> One may note that all churches fall somewhere within this spectrum but that the balance between them varies very considerably. The geographical levels at which oversight is exercised also vary.

For churches in the independent tradition, formal *episcopate* exists only at the level of the gathered congregation with a personal role being exercised by the minister, a collegial one by the deacons/ elders and a communal one by the church meeting. Independent churches may also seek wider fellowship through federations or associations, but these enjoy no binding authority as such. Despite this, such churches often have a strong sense of *koinonia* with others.<sup>45</sup> Questions can, however, be addressed to such churches as to how they see themselves as being kept within the bounds of the same apostolic faith and practice.

## *Episcopate at the universal level*

Anglican and most Protestant churches exercise *episcopate* at regional and national levels as well as the purely parochial. They can legitimately be challenged as to why they lack structures of *episcopate* at the

authority structures.

42 CTVC, para 52.

43 This, for example, has always been the argument of British Methodists, that it has never lacked effective *episcopate* through the Conference and other ministries and collegial bodies.

44 CTVC, para 52.

45 A point particularly well illustrated in Paul Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces in Baptist ecclesiology. Baptist Identity in Church and Theology* (2003).

universal level, a question which has recently become acute for the Anglican Communion. Anglican, Methodist, Lutheran and Reformed churches all combine personal, collegial and communal elements within their structures of *episcopate*. All have conciliar structures at these levels that involve both ordained ministers and layfolk, though, in those with an episcopate, the bishops have a particularly strong role. In the Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches, *episcopate* at the formal level is vested entirely in the clergy, particularly the bishops, though in some cases there are consultative bodies at local level with a degree of lay representation.

Arguably, every system of *episcopate* is necessarily imperfect within a pilgrim Church; nevertheless each can perhaps develop in a more rounded way as a result of the exchange, in dialogue, of insights as to the working, inclusiveness and effectiveness of each system. As the Report argues in para 53, the model of synodality, with every member of the Church having 'his or her place and proper responsibility' and reflecting 'the mystery of the trinitarian life of God' should be a sure guide in all our discussions on the structures and exercise of oversight.

### The Petrine ministry

The question of the Petrine ministry is raised within the context of a discussion of primacy.<sup>46</sup> Canon 34 of the *Apostolic Canons*, still the rule of practice amongst the Orthodox, makes it clear that, at regional level, there should be a primate among the bishops but that such primates should never act without consultation with and the consent of their fellow bishops.<sup>47</sup> The Report could also mention that this follows the practice at a more local level of Cyprian, who argued that he never acted without the agreement of his presbyterate.<sup>48</sup> In such a way we can see a model for *episcopate* at every level, that it is led by a minister of appropriate seniority, but that it also involves concurrent consultation with those for whom he or she is responsible. One may perhaps also add that, at every level of church life, it is those who are *the brothers and sisters* who watch over each other in faith and love, a point that

46 CTVC, paras 55-7. They conclude with the direct challenge, 'How might a ministry that fosters and promotes the unity of the Church at the universal level be exercised?' A natural response to the challenge of John Paul II in *Ut Unum Sint* (1995).

47 This has been taken up in recent Roman Catholic-Orthodox dialogue in the *Ravenna Statement* (2007).

48 A point stressed strongly by the classical Wesleyan ecclesiologist, Alfred Barrett, in his *Ministry and Polity of the Christian Church*, 1854.

was particularly emphasised within the Wesleyan ecclesiological tradition.<sup>49</sup>

Much work remains to be done on the Petrine ministry, not just on its theological rationale but also on the way in which it is to be exercised in conjunction with others. While Vatican II emphasised the concurrent responsibility for the welfare of the universal Church of both Pope and bishops, it arguably failed to reform the structures of the Roman Catholic Communion adequately so as to give bishops rather than curial administrators more influence in oversight. That there is need, in a rapidly changing and globalising world, for a universal primacy can scarcely be doubted. However, it must protect the legitimate diversity of the Church, both in terms of multiple *charisms* and ways of stating and proclaiming the one gospel.

It must recognise the truth stated at Vatican II that there may be times when previous deficiencies in formulating revealed truth need to be rectified and that this may also involve legitimising alternative expressions of the same truth.<sup>50</sup> At and after Vatican II, the Roman Catholic Church made great progress in recognising the Orthodox churches as sister churches and the Anglican and Protestant churches as confessing the core of the apostolic faith. Further progress in mutual recognition needs to be made if the Petrine ministry is to be recognised and received as capable of exercise in an appropriate manner by the other churches.

### The Church in and for the World

The final chapter, *The Church in and for the World*, repeats the initial stress on the Church as existing not for itself but for God's purpose of transforming the creation, service thus being at the core of its nature and mission. Evangelisation is one of its foremost tasks.

### The Christian attitude to other religions

Para 60 deals with the question of the Christian attitude to other religions. It records that contemporary Christians are increasingly aware of the positive values of those other religions. However, in the italicised comment following para 60, it notes that there are differences both

49 This has classically been the case with the ministerial sessions of Conferences and district synods. It also applies to the Local Preachers' meetings in British Methodism.

50 *Decree on Ecumenism*, para 6.

between the churches and within individual churches as to whether salvation, which God wills for all people, is available solely through Christ or whether it can, in ways known only to God, be otherwise mediated through the power of the Holy Spirit to those who do not believe in Christ.

It is clear that the churches need to arrive at greater agreement on these issues. We may note that they have already been the subject of considerable discussion within the World Council as well as many national ecumenical bodies, such as the Churches Together in England Theology and Unity Group and in particular churches.<sup>51</sup>

### **Moral questions need not of their nature be 'Church dividing'**

The second section of this chapter deals with the moral challenge of the gospel, noting the emergence of moral issues as major topics both for internal churchly dialogue and witness to human society. The statement is made that 'some believe that moral questions are not of their nature "Church dividing" while others are convinced that they are.'<sup>52</sup>

Sadly, one has to record that the latter is the truer statement in fact and that particular churches are also internally divided, particularly on issues of sexual ethics, quite apart from being denominationally divided on some other issues, such as birth control. Para 63 rightly points to the way moral questions are related to issues of Christian anthropology. We can say confidently that far more is required in this sphere, not just in relationship to moral issues but also to that of the ministry of women as bishops and presbyters. By the middle of the present century, it may be easier to assess the extent to which the enormous secular change in the position of women in most societies can be reliably taken into account in our thinking. Discernment on these particular issues, for which the report quite appropriately calls, is particularly difficult because of the emotional element in commitment to particular stances.

### **A voice for those who are voiceless**

Finally, there is discussion of the role of the Church in society, an aspect of particular importance both for contemporary Britain and the rest of the world. The Church 'must become a voice for those who are

51 Thus, e.g. in British Methodism, where they are touched on in the latest ecclesiological statement, *Called To Love and Praise* (1999), section 3.2, especially paras 9-16.

52 CTVC, para 63.

voiceless,' it must 'work for a juster social order' and 'must seek to overcome the causes of war.' The vital point is made that 'these are obligations on churches as much as on individual believers' and that co-operation with those of other religions and even none should also take place.<sup>53</sup>

In this situation as in many other matters, I would argue that a degree of re-reception is required.<sup>54</sup> Much of the groundwork for a consistent Christian attitude to issues of social justice was done within particular denominations in the early and middle years of the twentieth century, even though some of it now needs updating and adapting.<sup>55</sup> Special attention should also be given to the particular witness in these matters of such traditions as the Quaker and Mennonite, where there is much that they can contribute to the wider *oikoumene*.

In a world which appears largely to have accepted the inevitability of rule by market forces, the transforming and counter-cultural witness of the Gospel is needed as the Church continues to insist that the equal dignity of all people as created in the image of God and the presence of Christ even in the least of our brothers and sisters has clear implications for Christian witness and action.

### **An Enormous Challenge**

The challenge of this report to the churches is enormous. If it is really to bear fruit it will involve the biggest reception process of any ecumenical dialogue document, carried out faithfully in all the member churches and not just by specialist theologians, important as their guiding and translating role will need to be. It will have to be received and studied at every level and a way found of making its key insights and challenges understood by the ordinary faithful and not just their pastors and church leaders. National denominational ecumenical committees will need to give particular attention to the reception process. That a response from the faithful of each particular church is required follows clearly from the ecclesiology of communion developed in the statement, with its empha-

53 CTVC, para 64.

54 The concept of re-reception of truths either previously repudiated or simply ignored was a particularly valuable contribution of ARCIC in *The Gift of Authority* (1999), para 30, to the *oikoumene* at large.

55 I think particularly of the decree *Gaudium et Spes* of Vatican II and the declarations of the British Methodist Conference in 1934 and 1949 on the social order. See *The Methodist Church: Declarations of Conference on Social Questions* (1959), pp 1-37.



sis on the symphonic collaboration of church leaders, theologians and the whole body of the faithful.

### **Mutual accountability**

Further work will undoubtedly be needed on many issues, including particularly the extent of legitimate diversity in the Church and the structures of mutual accountability needed to moderate it.<sup>56</sup> It is clear that, in the main, the Anglican and Protestant churches tolerate a greater degree of diversity in theological opinion than the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches; moreover, there are tensions within many of the former as to how much diversity is legitimate within their own churches, let alone within the Church Catholic. Other vital and difficult issues include the Petrine ministry, the ordained ministry of women and a range of issues relating to sexual ethics, the last two being especially problematic in the contemporary world.

### **Official Responses**

At what would presumably be an interim point in the process leading to fuller reception, the Statement specifically asks the churches to send an official response to the Faith and Order Commission in the light of the following questions.

*To what extent does this text reflect the ecclesiological understanding of your church?*

*To what extent does this text offer a basis for the growth in unity of the churches?*

*What adaptations or renewals in the life of your church does this statement challenge your church to work for?*

*How far is your church able to form closer relationships in life and mission with those churches which can acknowledge in a positive way the account of the Church described in this statement?*

*What aspects of the life of the Church could call for further discussion and what advice can your church offer for the ongoing work by Faith and Order in the area of ecclesiology?*

The statement provides a secure ecclesiological basis for further rapprochement, dialogue and consensus for which all the partner churches

<sup>56</sup> See my article in *Theology* (Nov-Dec 1210) 'Unity in Reconciled Diversity: Cop out or Rainbow Church?'

should be grateful. Much speaking 'the truth in love' remains to be done, believing and knowing that unity in Christ is the gift and work of the Spirit, and not of ourselves.

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