

## **Towards a Broader Ecumenical Consensus.**

The current millennium has already seen a complex variety of hopes and doubts relating to the future of the Ecumenical Movement. For the first decade, some were still talking about an ecumenical winter and there were some unpromising signs, such as the hiatus in the work of ARCIC. Mercifully, this has now been resolved and a further decade of dialogue has produced a good report. Even more significant in giving new hope has been the pontificate of Pope Francis, perhaps the easiest pontificate so far with which many other Christians can identify, perceiving a Peter who like the first Peter can stand up before his brethren of all traditions and enunciate gospel essentials with the clarity that particularly characterises *Evangelii Gaudium* and *Laudato Si*. He is also a Peter who listens to and learns from his brethren as well as teaching them, as the copious citations for many bishops' conferences in both letters show!

Two recent developments have made me think particularly hard about the nature of the common vision which the full range of churches can, even at this stage of continuing lack of full communion, hold out before and to the world. One was the publication of an assessment of the performance of and prospects for the English ecumenical instrument, Churches Together in England, in 2017, carried out by the English theological think tank, *Theos*<sup>1</sup>. The other, very recent and purely personal, is my appointment as Ecumenical Officer for the Bristol District of the British Methodist Church, an appointment which necessarily forces me to think carefully about grassroots reception, a problem that exists almost everywhere, but which I must think about carefully in terms of a very particular English west country context.

Churches Together in England was formed in 1990, replacing an earlier ecumenical body. It has been led magnificently by three previous General Secretaries (two Anglican priests and one United Reformed minister) to whom due and proper praise is given in the *Theos* report. A fourth General Secretary, a Baptist minister, Paul Goodliff, took over last autumn.

Over its twenty seven years, CTE has changed enormously. In 1990, the Roman Catholic Church of England and Wales, which had not been a member of the previous ecumenical organ joined it. A few black-led churches also joined. One of its consistent key aims of CTE has been to include the full range of churches willing to co-operate in the interests of the common mission and offer them a forum in which they can get to know each other better, discuss common problems and enhance the proclamation of the gospel to England.

In 1990, there were only sixteen member churches; now there are 44. The newer members come overwhelmingly from three constituencies, the black led and Asian churches in the charismatic-Pentecostal traditions, Orthodox churches (particularly Oriental Orthodox and

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<sup>1</sup> *That they may all be one: Insights into Churches Together in England and contemporary ecumenism*, by N. Mladin, R. Fidler and B. Ryan, (2017).

including the Mar Thoma Church<sup>2</sup>, which values alike its original patristic heritage and the heritage of the Reformation as mediated by Anglican evangelical missionaries in the nineteenth century) and the 'new' churches, particularly groups with a house church origin and now organised in small connexions, such as Vineyard. These three groups broaden the total English ecumenical horizon considerably.

The Theos Report referred to above places great emphasis on the role of the CTE in brokering friendships across the spectrum<sup>3</sup>. Friendships, at every level, are essential to the ultimate success of the ecumenical movement. A great late nineteenth century Methodist, Benjamin Gregory, citing Colossians 2:2 argued that the right order in relationships is to love first, then come to understand, not just to hope that understanding will necessarily lead to love<sup>4</sup>. I believe Cardinal Mercier said something similar at the end of World War 1.

Two particularly striking points that I culled from the report are these, the first being the question to which I hope to give an answer, can we, in view of our very considerable differences, hope to have a common view of ecumenism? The second is a statement recorded from one of the interviewees in the exercise to the effect that 'the problem with ecumenism is that it is written off without ever having been properly tried'<sup>5</sup>. That may seem harsh in the light of the very valiant efforts made by so many ecumenical advocates, statesmen (and women!) within the different traditions, but the vital grain of truth is that it has tended to remain peripheral for many ministers and most layfolk in all traditions and thus not received sufficiently.

I want to suggest that it is now possible for the ecumenically engaged churches to share a broad overall consensus despite remaining differences. I take my inspiration both from the achievements of CTE and from a remarkable document issued by a group of US ecumenically committed scholars, representing the full range of traditions from Catholic and Orthodox to Pentecostal, in 2003, In *One Body through the Cross, The Princeton Proposal for Christian Unity*. In it, they unanimously upheld the ecumenical imperative, arguing that to deny it or even to be apathetic in its pursuit was seriously sinful. They accepted that there were unsolved remaining difficulties and that they themselves were not all of equal accord on the solutions, particularly in respect of ministerial order and ecclesiology. They nevertheless insisted that continued pursuit of the goal in faith and was incumbent upon us all<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> A church which proudly claims to be both eastern and reformed. It is in communion with the Church of South India.

<sup>3</sup> *Theos Report*, op cit, p.20.

<sup>4</sup> *Holy Catholic Church* (1873), p. 172

<sup>5</sup> *Theos Report*, p. 49.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*, para 1, commended the famous New Delhi proposal on the unity of all in each place and added that 'retreat from this vision is sin, which is visited on the churches in their own internal weakness and unfaithfulness'.

I have already hinted at one or two things that can give us renewed hope and I want now to look at the question under two headings, first those things on which we can already agree and which help give us the courage to tackle the remaining problems, secondly on the question of how to formulate and express a way in which these insights can be fully received by the whole people of God across the denominations.

We need to remember that we already agree on far more than divides us, a point made by one of the fathers of Vatican II who stressed that on basic creedal themes of faith in God, belief in the divinity and humanity of Our Lord and the person and work of the Holy Spirit we were not divided. That truth has since been confirmed, at least where Roman Catholic dialogue with four major western traditions, Anglican, Lutheran, Reformed and Methodist is concerned.<sup>7</sup>

Our common trinitarian faith is at the heart of our common Christian belief, practice and experience. It is the root of what the American Methodist scholar Ted Runyon calls the triple axis of Christian life, orthodoxy or true belief, orthopraxy, action in human relationships in accordance with the wisdom of Christ, mediated in his deeds and words and duly faithfully received in Christian lives and orthopathy, true Christian experience of the living God in faithful worship, alike in the daily private quiet time, in group fellowship and in public worship where we celebrate the wonderful love of God, sealed in our adoption as his sons and daughters in the Son<sup>8</sup>. The exact way in which we celebrate these things varies from tradition to tradition and, at the purely individual level, may vary much within any one overall tradition, something which has been across the ages particularly fruitful in the Roman Catholic tradition with its huge variety of religious orders with different charisms, in lay guilds and associations both pre and post- Reformation and finally not least in the opening up of some religious communities, such as the Focolare and Chemin Neuf, to non-Catholics who wish to identify with their charism and who come with the blessing of their own authorities.

Both meditation on and theological reflection on the nature and work of the Blessed Trinity are and remain a key sources for the exchange of gifts and insights and for fruitful ecclesiological reflection. They reveal to us the whole wonderful paradox of the infinite God, who has nevertheless bowed the heavens and come down to meet us in Christ whose humility is that of the humility of the God who makes space for us in creation, plumbs the depths of our alienation in Christ that he might redeem us and then sends his Holy Spirit to live in our hearts, to spread his love abroad there, to prepare us to play our part in working for the Kingdom. As we explore, in response to the gracious invitation to all the separated brethren in Vatican II's Decree on Ecumenism to 'search together into the divine mysteries', we know the joy of discovering new depths in the divine love and mercy<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Kasper, W. *Harvesting the Fruits, Aspects of Christian Faith in Ecumenical Dialogue* (2009).

<sup>8</sup> Runyon, T. *The New Creation, John Wesley's Theology Today* (1998), pp. 147-9.

<sup>9</sup> *Decree on Ecumenism*, para 11.

My second key point derives directly from the first since we now have as a result of half a century of profound common reflection on the work of the Trinity in salvation, a common basic ecclesiology of communion. We now all profess that the Church is the creation of the Blessed Trinity, based on the Father's sending of both the Son and the Spirit to draw us into ever deeper communion with Him and with each other. Our communion is the work of His gracious Son and Spirit, drawing us into that life that they share and enabling us to share fellowship with them in Him and with each other in, with and through the Son and the Spirit. We know that Christ cannot be divided and therefore we sin if we persist in division from other bodies of believers who share the same essential trinitarian faith. We know that every local Christian congregation belongs to every other such congregation, that something is wrong if ministers and people of other such congregations cannot be welcomed amongst us everywhere on a fraternal basis. I think we would now also all be agreed that the universal Church is simultaneously both a teaching and a learning Church, that we must seek and discern Christ and His will in company with each other and with each member in each local Church learning from and sharing with the others, and, at the trans-local level, the same being true of whole local churches and traditions learning from each other.

These points and others were made very vigorously by the previous Abp of Canterbury at an ecumenical conference I attended at St Alban's, England in 2003. Abp. Williams stressed that, in the farewell discourses of Jesus as recorded by St John, we see the disciples being drawn into Jesus' own relation with God the Father. 'Unity is what we call that harmonious movement into the Father which is the life of Jesus, in eternity and in time.' How staggering that privilege is, how absolutely joyfully and gladly compelling it is, the action of the merciful God calling us weak and imperfect human beings into the very heart of his life, granting us that spirit of adoption whereby we call the Father by that intimate name of Abba previously used only by Jesus<sup>10</sup>. As the Wesleyan theologian, W.B. Pope put it, our adoption corresponds with Christ's status as the eternally Beloved and our regeneration with his eternal generation from the Father<sup>11</sup>.

Williams states that unity is 'most deeply, most fundamentally what is happening in Jesus'. We enter into it when we share in mission and prayer at depth, when, despite all the surface differences, 'we see the same action at work, the same eternal prayer being prayed, the same eternal gift being given'. Unity comes through mutual recognition that the same act and gift of Jesus is being experienced in other congregations and traditions despite any more surface differences in expression.

The one thing that unites all Christians is the sheer love of Jesus, the compelling authority of his love in word and deed as the final word of God about God. We may express this differently and home in on emphasising certain aspects of our Lord's lordship but at root we

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<sup>10</sup> Williams, R. in *May they all be one...but how?* (2003), Proceedings of Conference held at St. Alban's cathedral, England, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> Pope, W.B. *Compendium of Christian Theology* (1880), vol 3, p.4.

all know that He is Alpha and Omega, beginning and end, source and goal, one with the Father, one with us

In short, the Church is a communion in Christ, a communion in the Great Shepherd to whose voice and call we are attentive. All the ministers of our many traditions are under-shepherds to that one Great Shepherd<sup>12</sup>. The major remaining problem, despite our agreement on the essence of Church as communion, is to sort out what structures are needed for that communion at all levels up to the global. This is where most of the remaining dialogue difficulties are, particularly in respect of ordained ministry but also with respect to the balance of relationship between local church however defined and the Universal Church.

We need ways of being able to recognise in each other that unity that we share, of being able to recognise the essentials of that unity in each other and from that to work out how to ensure its maintenance in mutual respect and co-operation in common mission across all our reconcilable differences.

Here we may find particular help from two sources, the reflections of an ecclesiological group set up by CTE in the early nineties and in the writings of a creative Catholic ecumenist, Fr. Peter Hocken, who has long had a tremendous interest in Pentecostalism and the charismatic movement<sup>13</sup>.

The CTE group (of which I was a member) issued a report entitled *Called To Be One* in 1995, in which it called upon its member churches to study and explain to each other the bonds of communion that they enjoyed within their particular traditions and to commend their rationales as bonds of communion for each others' consideration. This, it was hoped, would lead to mutual questing, listening and appreciation. It certainly helped me as a Methodist to understand the importance of the church meeting within the independent tradition of Baptists and Congregationalists as a place where church members in a particular congregation sought to discern the will of Christ for their particular context. Perhaps even more importantly, it helped me to realise how deep was their communion with fellow local congregations despite the lack of any presiding ministry at a higher level, such as that of a bishop or Methodist circuit superintendent<sup>14</sup>. As well as looking at instruments of communion, both personal and collegial, we also looked at the varying emphases between the partner traditions in terms of evangelism and mission.

Fr Hocken suggests that each development of each tradition has seen new light shed on something which should be a feature amongst others of what in my youth was sometimes called The Coming Great Church. Each has refreshed, even in some situations re-discovered a neglected aspect of the Christian tradition, his prime stress in his book being on the

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<sup>12</sup> 1 Peter, 5: 1-2.

<sup>13</sup> Hocken, P. *The Glory and the Shame. Reflections on the 20<sup>th</sup> Century outpouring of the Holy Spirit*, (1994).

<sup>14</sup> For a very detailed exposition of this in the history of the early English Baptists, see Fiddes, P. *Tracks and Traces. Baptist Identity in Church and Theology* (2003).

particular contemporary Pentecostal stress on the continuing charismatic activity of the Spirit. He argues that all that has been achieved within separated bodies must now be reintegrated into the whole of the Catholic and Orthodox churches<sup>15</sup>.

One may add that Methodists, in particular, have stressed the importance of local churches co-operating in the common mission in any particular country. This led to the development of the Connexional system with ministers and other resources being shared and moved about in response to confessional discernment of the priorities in mission. Churches with an 'independent' ecclesiology usually stress the duty of the local congregation, meeting under the invisible headship of Christ, to discern his will in what particular location, and act on it faithfully. That does not rule out the need in many cases for what they call 'associationalism' and co-operation in particular aspects of their work.

Overall, there is in a sense, a continuing problem affecting almost all ecclesiologies in terms of how to understand what are effective structures for communion at intermediate levels up from that of local church, whether defined as congregation, circuit or diocese. Discussion of these forms part of the current ARCIC process and the most recent report<sup>16</sup>.

I would argue that one of the creative discoveries of recent ecumenical dialogue has been to move all of us away from either an exclusive stress on the fallibility and sinfulness of the Church, strong in the original Reformation churches, or an equally exclusive stress by some Catholics and, even more, Orthodox, on the sinlessness of the Church. We increasingly accept the aptness of Cardinal Kasper's definition of the Church as *ecclesia semper purificanda*, the Church as always needing a deeper fidelity to its calling in all its members, recognising that it is still in a pilgrim state and that it is not yet at the final stage where all the promises of God will be fully realised throughout its life.

Another important development within the Ecumenical Movement has been the recognition that unity not merely allows a legitimate degree of diversity but actually *necessitates* it if we are to enable the gospel to be inculturated within different nations and even more importantly, to recognise the plethora of the gifts that the Spirit has bestowed across the oikoumene. The gift exchange, the willingness of Christians to learn from each other, is vital. Pope John Paul II stressed this. In *Ut Unum Sint*, he stresses that 'the Spirit has allowed conflicts to serve in some circumstances to make explicit certain aspects of the Christian vocation...in spite of fragmentation, which is an evil from which we need to be healed, there has resulted a kind of rich bestowal of grace which is meant to embellish the koinonia.'<sup>17</sup>

The late Pope further sets out the essentials of his ministry as he sees them, but invites the theologians and leaders of other churches to engage in fruitful dialogue on ways in which

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<sup>15</sup> Hocken, op cit, pp 158-160.

<sup>16</sup> See the report, *Together on The Way. Learning to be Church-Local, Regional, Universal* (2018) and discussion in my ET article, *Two Dialogues-One Purpose* (Dec 2018), pp 6-12.

<sup>17</sup> *Ut Unum Sint*, para 85.

the petrine ministry might develop, becoming 'a service of love recognised by all concerned'.

I would add, from the perspective of 2019, that the time is now ripe to take that challenge up. Pope Francis is acting in such a way as to make the case for a petrine ministry of global leadership and encouragement of all Christians and their churches potentially more acceptable than at any previous time. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, he has the happy knack of spelling out the essentials of gospel proclamation and action for today, in terms of the three great relationships that every Christian is called on to develop, with the Lord, with his or her human neighbours and with the rest of creation. He shows himself to be both learner and teacher, learner particularly from the conferences of his brother bishops. He reaches out to those churches that, for varying reasons might feel themselves most estranged from his own, to Pentecostals and Russian Orthodox, showing a truly petrine boldness in accord with the example given in the early chapters of Acts. Peter went up and down through Palestine, visiting the churches which were then still more or less confined to that country<sup>18</sup>. Francis goes across the globe, as, of course, did St John-Paul II.

It is important for churches to be gracious in receiving as well as generous in giving. The development of the concept of Receptive Ecumenism since its launching at a conference at Durham, England, in 2006 has led to widespread learning by churches from the good practice of others, in practical and pastoral matters and not just in the more traditional realms of theological thinking and spirituality. Some churches need to bite the bullet in being prepared to receive forms of ministry from which many of them may have recoiled in the past now that these can be seen in the light of better understanding. A much respected former theological teacher and ex-President of the British Methodist Conference, Neil Richardson, has recently challenged British Methodists both on receiving the sign of the historic episcopate, and, ultimately considering the possible value of a global ministry of unity, the one serious candidate being the petrine ministry suitably reformed in something like the manner advocated by Pope St John-Paul<sup>19</sup>.

As well as our common trinitarian doctrine, our devotion to our Lord both as saviour of each one of us but also as Christos Pantocrator and cosmic saviour, we have three other points to consider on which there is great commonality of vision. The first is the significance of the entire Christian laos, the people of God, who have their share in the priestly, prophetic and royal offices of Christ. They are called to be witnesses for him, to have a ministry of priestly intercession for each other and the world, and a role in being a Christian leaven, salt and light in the daily work and business of the world, this being a point particularly stressed in the teaching of Pope Francis. All our traditions, whatever their continuing differences on ordained ministry, realise the importance of an active laity and encourage it as particularly a

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<sup>18</sup> Acts 9:32.

<sup>19</sup> Richardson, N. 'Contemporary Ecumenism and the leadership of God. A canonical case study' in *Methodist Sacramental Fellowship Bulletin*, no 146 (2019), pp. 5-16.

necessity in our secularising world. Gone are the days when some English pre-Vatican II clergy used to define the role of the laity as simply 'pay, pray and obey'; indeed, even before Vatican II, the laity of the Catholic Church had long been active in guilds and confraternities going back to the Middle Ages, in works of compassion for the poor and in actions for social justice. Lay leaders in local congregations and parishes can play a key role in developing ecumenical contacts and exchanges.

We also have a developing common heritage of witness on issues of peace and social justice. Much of what Pope Francis has written on the priority of justice for the poor could have been written by the Free Church Public Issues Team in England; equally, I suspect the Pope would commend their trenchant statements. Though there are certainly some conservative evangelicals and Pentecostals who, at times, have been inclined to favour the 'prosperity gospel', it is interesting to note that Lutherans and Pentecostals in their dialogue have certainly seen it as heretical and contrary to the main drift of both testaments and later Christian tradition<sup>20</sup>. There are, of course, some continuing difficulties over aspects of sexual ethics, some of them threatening unity within particular traditions, but, in general, the churches are at one on the Church's call to safeguard human rights, work for peace and reconciliation between the nations and seek the elimination of poverty.

Finally, there is the common acceptance by all trinitarian Christians that our common destiny as faithful believers is eternal life in communion with the Blessed Trinity. Wesley in his sermon 'The New Creation' articulates what I would believe to be the common faith of Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants alike,

'And to crown all, there will be a deep, an intimate, an uninterrupted union with God; a constant communion with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ through the Spirit; a continual enjoyment of the Three-One God, and of all creatures in Him'<sup>21</sup>.

We may still disagree about certain aspects of eschatology, particularly about whether it may be finally universal, the nature of an intermediate state of cleansing such as purgatory for those not yet fully sanctified before entry into full bliss, and the way in which the benefits of Christ's salvation may be extended to those who have sincerely followed the light given by other religions or philosophies. We would all accept that, in this present life, there can be no full understanding of the life to come, but we can nevertheless accept that 'eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor can the heart of man conceive such wonderful things as God has prepared for those who love him'<sup>22</sup>. We are inspired by the magnificent vision of the New Creation, the new earth and the new heaven, as recorded by John in chapter 21 of the Apocalypse. We may stress different aspects of this hope and indeed should remember that the Church has always varied across time, as well as across denominations, in terms of

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<sup>20</sup> As reported in *The Window*, organ of the Anglican-Lutheran Society, no. 10, p.22

<sup>21</sup> *Wesley's Works*, Abingdon Edn, Sermon 64 (1785)

<sup>22</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:9.



the emphasis placed on such matters. Sermons on the final hope of Christians are much rarer in modern Britain than they were in Victorian times!

Fr Hocken, in a particularly important chapter, argues that prayer for the Parousia, the final victory of Christ, was central to the life of the first Christians. He argues that 'the Parousia as object of Christian hope plays an essential role in the quest for Christian unity. It is the official confession of every Christian body. All Christians pray 'Thy kingdom come. Therefore all ought to be united in the final prayer of the Scriptures, "Amen, Come Lord Jesus"<sup>23</sup>. I would add that we remember also the final invitation, 'Come, say the Spirit and the Bride' (Rev 22:17). It is no accident that some great former ecumenists formulated comparable teaching in previous generations, for example Gregory in his stress on the prophetic vision of final unity on Mount Zion, and the French scholar, Bouyer, in his stress on the marriage feast of the Lamb<sup>24</sup>.

We come now to the question of a comprehensive vision of unity that can be received throughout the Universal Church. It is the commonly recorded conviction of the ecumenically engaged churches that they must work for unity and that concern for it should be a characteristic of every one of their faithful members. That was a key principle of the fathers of Vatican II, who proclaimed that 'concern for unity pertains to the whole Church, faithful and clergy alike. It extends to everyone, according to the potential of each, whether it be exercised in daily Christian living or in theological and historical studies'<sup>25</sup>.

The Lutheran World Federation has recently issued a guide to Lutheran ecumenical commitment, which begins with the statement, 'To be Lutheran is to be ecumenical'<sup>26</sup>. Part II, on the LWF's Ecumenical Commitments, stresses first and foremost the 'variety of forms, locally and globally' of Lutheran ecumenical engagement'. It stresses the importance of the day to day problems of church members in local contexts, particularly those in mixed marriages being taken into account in the dialogues. It underlines the importance of enhancing reception, of pastoral ecumenism and commitment to ecumenical spirituality . The last includes three commitments, 'to deepen our common spiritual and liturgical life together with our ecumenical partners', to facilitate spiritual reception of ecumenical processes and to develop with ecumenical partners 'recommendations for pastoral co-operation at the parish or congregational level'.

At the local grassroots level, at least in England ( I do not have sufficient experience to speak authoritatively of the situation elsewhere, but no doubt North American readers will be able to reflect on how true what I say is to their position) ecumenism tends to come up against

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<sup>23</sup> Hocken, op cit, p. 165.

<sup>24</sup> Gregory, B , *Sermons, Addresses and Pastoral letters* (1881), pp. 99-101. Bouyer, L. *Life and Liturgy* (1956), also excellent recent study of Bouyer by B. Lesoing, *Vers la Plénitude du Christ* (2017), pp 116-7.

<sup>25</sup> Decree on Ecumenism, ch 5.

<sup>26</sup> 'The Lutheran World Federation's Commitments on the ecumenical way to ecclesial communion', as reported in *The Window* (Jan 2019). The text is now on the LWF website.

three problems. The first is a problem of apathy or self-sufficiency where people feel that their local church and wider denominational belonging take up all the energy they have, the second, particularly in smaller denominations that live close to a numerically and perhaps also wealthier and more prestigious tradition, is a fear that unity involves a take-over by a stronger partner and the resultant loss of their own tradition. The third is, quite simply, a lack of study materials at a level appropriate to layfolk with little systematic theological knowledge. I noted in a recent article that the 2018 initial report of the Baptist-Methodist international dialogue was accompanied by a very user friendly Study Guide<sup>27</sup>. I think it incumbent in the other dialogues to follow that excellent example. It is no good expecting the recent ARCIC report, excellent as it is, to be widely read by lay Anglicans and Catholics.

The first problem I mentioned needs to be addressed by the giving of a wider vision of unity and its need if the world is to be the sphere of justice and peace that God wants it to be. It needs to be stressed that the unity of Christians is not just for the sake of the Church but for the sake of God's world, to give light and hope in world where divisions are so often bitter between nations and within nations. The Church has a ministry of reconciliation, commending the reconciliation held out by God in Christ, a reconciliation that the Church is called to live out across even the most fundamental barriers. It is called to live it out precisely that 'the world might believe'. Christians are called to be 'salt and light', not just as individuals but *precisely as communities of unity from the most local level to the global*. The famous declaration of the Anglican-Reformed dialogue of 1984, that 'the Church is sent into the world as sign, instrument and first fruits of a reality that comes from beyond history-the Kingdom of God. The unity of the Church is... for the glory of God and as a sign instrument and first fruits of his purpose to reconcile all things in heaven and earth through Christ' is one on which we all need to reflect deeply<sup>28</sup>. It should not be beyond the ability of average clergymen and lay preachers to put this message effectively across to churches whose members are only too aware of the problems and fears of the world outside.

Many activist church members in all British churches are very committed to work for peace and justice, but they do not always see the pursuit of unity amongst Christians as a key element in that, even though they are certainly happy to co-operate with people of other traditions on peace and justice issues. The link needs to be seen. The world needs to be able to say, as, apparently, some said in the Early Church, 'see how these Christians love one another' and that this can still be the case despite being so different in forms of worship and spirituality because they are nevertheless one in Christ, in union with Him in His adoration of the Father and doing of the Father's will. Together, we must praise God that He has made us so different through a lavish diversity granted by the Spirit, yet also so much the same in devotion to Christ and witness and work to and for the Father's ultimate aim and plan or reconciling all things in Christ (Eph 1:10). Our unity in diversity is given by the Holy Spirit to

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<sup>27</sup> ET, (Dec 2018), p.7.

<sup>28</sup> *God's Reign and Our Unity* (1984), para 29.

sub-serve the divine plan to bring all things to their due fulfilment in the plan of the triune Lord.

It is not enough for any Christian disciple to belong simply to his or her local church and its denomination. He must long to be one with all who love Christ, of whatever tradition. Praying for working for that is a basic Christian duty and priority.

Some fears do need to be addressed. I am well aware that some of my fellow Methodists in Britain have had strong reservations about unity with the Church of England out of a fear we would just be swallowed up and the valuable traditions of Methodism be lost. My wife, as a retired minister, insists that such fears are all too understandable-the Church of England is perhaps four times stronger than English Methodism in effective membership. It has the prestige of being the historic national church.

However, these fears can be addressed where there is appropriate sensitivity and mutual reception. I remember the review of a joint Anglican-Methodist congregation in Worcester Park, a London suburb. There was a lot of joyful mutual reception. The Anglicans were happy to use the then official Methodist hymn book, they loved the annual Covenant Service and were happy to join in class meetings. The Methodists were glad of the possibility of attending holy communion more frequently, including on some week-days. It is incumbent on Larger Christian churches to take full account of the sensitivities of smaller ones. I once witnessed a beautiful example of this when I was involved in a review of local ecumenical co-operation between a very small Congregational Chapel in Coulsdon (a South London suburb) and a much larger Anglican parish. The Congregationalists could not praise too highly the sensitivity that the Anglicans had shown towards them despite their greater strength and wealth.

Such things give great cause for hope. Nevertheless, I see signs for concern in a new English stress on common co-operation in pastoral and social matters with, implicitly, the goal of organic unity being relegated to the back-burner. It is true to say that many of the new churches, the Pentecostals and black-led churches in England, do not have the same vision of organic unity as is held by Catholics, Lutherans and others. We must accept that churches new, as it were, to the Ecumenical Movement and its co-operative bodies, will take time to learn from others and discern where they might be called to move on. It is, however, clear from the *Theos* report that the newer members of CTE do have a deep appreciation of being able to belong to a wider Christian movement united in commending the same gospel, if still differing over some doctrinal and ecclesiological matters<sup>29</sup>. Patience, tact and wise perception by the 'older' churches of the particular gifts that these new member churches have to offer will play an important part in forging closer relationships. I, personally, never cease to wonder at the magnificent lavishness of the Holy Spirit in

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<sup>29</sup> *Theos report*, p. 33, 'a place at the table'.

distributing so many gifts across the entire Christian spectrum, gifts that by right belong to all of us to cherish and to share, a point enunciated by Vatican II<sup>30</sup>.

David Carter.

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<sup>30</sup> As in the *Decree on Ecumenism*, para 4, 'whatever is wrought by the grace of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the separated brethren can contribute to our own edification', a point, surely of common testimony for all of us