

A HOPEFUL ANTHROPOLOGY.

At the beginning of the new year, the International Commission for Anglican-Orthodox dialogue published its fourth report, entitled *In the Image and Likeness of God . A Hope-Filled Anthropology*.¹

This bilateral dialogue began in 1973. Its most recent previous report, *The Church of the Triune God* (2006), was devoted to ecclesiology. The present commission began work in 2009 and will continue work with the intention of following up the theological thrust of the present report with a further one devoted to its practical ethical consequences in such matters as the environment, sexuality, marriage and human interventions in the life process, covering the pre-natal stage (abortion, birth control etc), organ transplants and euthanasia.

Informal Anglican-Orthodox dialogue long predates the post 1973 formal dialogue between the two communions. The Anglican non-Jurors, who thought of themselves as the true remnant of the British Orthodox Church, issued a lengthy statement registering a considerable degree of consensus with the Orthodox². Some of the fathers of the Oxford Movement, such as William Palmer and John Mason Neale, felt closer to the Orthodox than to the contemporary Roman Catholic Church. In the early twentieth century, some (though not all) Orthodox churches recognised Anglican orders³. The interest in mutual learning has not been one sided. Some Orthodox, such as Vladimir Lossky, author of a noted study of Lancelot Andrewes, have shown considerable interest in Anglicanism.

As far as I am aware, this is the first report of an international bilateral dialogue devoted specifically to Christian anthropology, a matter which should ensure wide interest from beyond the two communions involved. The co-chairs of the Commission state that their work is ‘particularly timely, in view of the wide ranging developments in biotechnology and genetic engineering, and also in our appreciation of the human place in the Universe, whose vast extent has become apparent to us in a way far beyond the imagination of earlier generations’⁴.

One may add that the subject is also pastorally and missionally relevant in a world where so many seem assigned to permanent marginalisation, where also the significance of individuals is gauged by their wealth and economic success rather than the universally proffered vocation in Christ to attain to the full stature of His mature humanity. St Gregory of Nyssa, perhaps the most important of the early fathers in terms of development of a theology of the divine image in humanity, insisted that the power of the image bestowed on Adam included the whole of the human race to come, ‘the entire plenitude of humanity being included by the God of all in His power of foreknowledge as it

¹ Also known as *The Buffalo Report*.

² The non-jurors were high church Anglicans who refused to take the oath of allegiance to William III in England in 1689 after he had chased his father in law, James II into exile and had, with his wife Mary, been offered the ‘vacant’ throne of England. As a consequence, they were deprived of their offices in the Church of England

³ For these early links, see Istravidis, V.T. *Orthodoxy and Anglicanism* (1966). For the non-Jurors, pp 4-6, for Palmer and Neale pp 8, 10, for recognition of Anglican orders by particular Orthodox churches, pp 40-43, 60. I should add that, despite such recognition, Anglican priests wishing to become Orthodox are usually re-ordained. The recognition of Anglican orders relates more to the position which would obtain at corporate reunion, when it might be deemed unnecessary to re-ordain all Anglican clergy.

⁴ *A Hope filled Anthropology*, p. vii.

were in one body⁵. It is this that explains the famous story of St Francis, confronted as a young man by the simultaneous arrival of two customers in his shop, one wealthy, one desperately poor. Francis could not decide which to serve first precisely because he was aware that both bore equally the same divine image. His follower, Pope Francis, may well see the teaching in this report as a useful complement to his own teaching and will be grateful to Anglicans and Orthodox for having produced a report in such a beautifully accessible form that can be read with pleasure and profit well beyond the circle of ecumenical and theological experts.

The Report has, however, been preceded by a considerable amount of modern re- reception of the doctrine of the image of God in humanity in the West. One notable example was the consultation on the image of God in human nature, initiated by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland in 1996, resulting in the publication of the symposium *Growing into God- Exploring our Call to grow into God's image and likeness* in 2003⁶.

The present report contains a high proportion of quotable, even beautiful theologoumena. I found reading it a truly spiritual as well as intellectual exercise. As a Methodist, I found everything within it highly consonant with the Wesleyan theological tradition and in particular with the sung theology of Charles Wesley's hymns, where there are frequent references to the image of God and our call to grow in it⁷.

Traditionally, far less attention was given to the doctrine of the image of God in human nature in the western tradition than in the East. Many factors account for this. Some, particularly within the Reformed tradition, have seen the image as totally effaced in the Fall, appealing to such texts as 'the heart of man is above all desperately wicked'. The doctrine of total depravity has often been seen as a hallmark of Calvinism, as central to it⁸. The western theological tradition since the early Middle Ages has also been preoccupied with the question of justification whereas the East has been more concerned with *theosis* or divinisation, becoming 'gods by grace' as Orthodox theology has sometimes put it. It is not that the East fails to recognise the huge gulf between the nature of God as uncreated and that of human beings as created, but equally it balances this with the extraordinary act of the kenotic God as establishing space for creatures created in His own image, as taking a necessary risk in endowing them with free will and in also providing the means of rescue and redemption from misuse of that free will.

Some have also pointed out that direct references to the divine image in humankind are very limited⁹. That is true per se, but many other texts point to the special place of humanity in divine providence. Psalm 8, with its stress on 'dominion over the works of thy hands', is a key one. In the New Testament, the prime stress is in the renewal of the divine image in Christ, a key text being Colossians 3: 10, in which Paul talks of Christians as having put on 'the new nature, which is being

⁵ cited by David Melling in his essay in the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland symposium, *Growing into God* (as cited in the next paragraph), p. 70.

⁶ edited by Jean Mayland, containing contributions from a wide range of traditions.

⁷ Looking through a sample of Charles Wesley's hymns in his brother's first official hymn book for the Methodist people (1780) I have found four references to the image in the first thirty hymns and five in thirty hymns between no. 261 and no. 290.

⁸ Indeed as the final of five key characteristics of the Calvinist system. See e.g. Halverson, M and Cohen, A (eds) *Handbook of Christian Theology* (1960), p. 47.

⁹ Three only in direct reference, Genesis 1:26-7, 2 Peter 1:4 and James 3:9.

renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator'. The clear knowledge of humanity's divine calling and destiny, which was obscured by the darkening of the mind following the Fall, has been restored in the life, death and resurrection of Christ with those baptized into Christ having received fresh insight into all the exceeding great promises of God (2 Peter 1:4) whereby they are made anew partakers of the divine nature, called to love even as they have first been made in love and remade in the love of Christ.

We may also point to the stress on sharing in glory. The glory of God, which Moses had to veil from the people, is now freely shed abroad in the New Covenant. Jesus shares not just everything that he has heard from the Father (John 15:15) but also the eternal glory that the Father had given Him (John 17:24). Paul talks twice of the glory destined for those justified in Christ (Romans 8:30 and 2 Cor 3:18). In the latter passage, great emphasis is placed on the *present* experience of such glory.

John Wesley certainly held the view that the image had been effaced in the Fall, though through the doctrine of prevenient grace, he also argued that the Spirit of God had restored to every human being the capacity to respond to the gospel and to retrieve the image¹⁰. His doctrine of Christian perfection tended to concentrate on the moral restoration of human beings rather than the restoration of the image. His brother, Charles, came nearer to the patristic and later Orthodox concept of theosis. There are frequent references to the image of God in Charles' hymns, as for example in the final four lines of the famous four part hymn

Love, thine image, love impart

Stamp it in our face and heart

Lord we ask no other heaven

Only love to us be given¹¹.

This goes to the heart of what is meant by the image. It is supremely Love, the love common to God and man, God's gift and human response in praise and mutual service, the undistinguishing regard cast on Adam's race, receiving its response in the doing of good by each human person in Christ to all people. Both are strongly stressed in this report and in the Wesleyan spiritual tradition, the whole ethos of which can be encapsulated in Charles Wesley's line 'thy gifts we render back to Thee in ceaseless songs of praise'. Common to all three traditions, Anglicanism, Methodism and Orthodoxy is the understanding of human nature as created and called to be liturgical, celebratory in worship and in all life of the goodness of God in His creation¹².

Amongst western theological traditions, the Wesleyan places particular stress upon the divine image in human nature. The last of the great British Wesleyan theologians, W.B. Pope, stresses that human beings are created in the image of God as 'essential and indestructible...capable of

¹⁰ For a summary of Wesley on prevenient grace, see Williams, C. *John Wesley's Theology Today* (1962), pp. 39-46.

¹¹ Wesley, J (ed) *A Collection of Hymns for the use of the People Called Methodists*, (1780), no 522. The emphasis upon the realised eschatology of faithful life in Christ is reflected in the last line and, indeed, in many other verses in Charles Wesley's hymnody.

¹² For a very good exploration of these similarities, see Allchin, A.M. (ed) *We Belong to One Another- Methodist, Anglican and Orthodox essays* (1965).

Immortality...From beginning to end the holy record regards this image as un-effaced and ineffaceable and still existing in every human being¹³. As in the Orthodox tradition, Pope perceives a trinitarian structure in the image. Human beings are created in the image of the Eternal Son and the Holy Spirit breathes life into them¹⁴. When the image suffers moral distortion as a result of sinful misuse of its free will, God enables the renewal of the image after the pattern of the divine Son. 'Our adoption corresponds to His status as the eternally Beloved Son and our regeneration to His eternal generation.¹⁵ Wesleyan moral theology is essentially derived from the example of the unfailing benevolence of the Trinity, whose mercy is over all and thus calls upon those made in His image to do good unto all persons¹⁶.

The current stress on both spiritual ecumenism and receptive ecumenism should result in interest in all bilateral dialogues since much within them will be relevant far beyond the communions immediately involved. The late Pope John Paul II stressed the importance of the Church breathing with its two lungs, eastern and western¹⁷ and this report will be a stimulus to all western churches to look at the wisdom that has been primarily developed within the eastern tradition. It is worth noting that the eastern tradition, while far from ignoring the seriousness of sin, has nevertheless regarded the image of God in humanity as distorted rather than totally effaced. It has retained a sense of the wonder of human nature as created by God¹⁸.

The report begins with an introduction in which is clearly affirmed God's creation of human beings with the freedom to love both God and their fellow creatures. 'To be human is to know, love and delight in God and to share God's life as far as created beings may', it being that 'it is in praising and worshipping God that we discover who we are as human beings'¹⁹. This makes the valuable point that human beings are created as persons *for relationship* rather than as *isolated* individuals. It is their God given nature, vocation and destiny to grow and flourish in relationship with God, with their fellow human beings and with the rest of the created order²⁰. In such relationships, duly matured by the grace of Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, human beings grow more and more into reflecting the sheer goodness of God. St Gregory of Nyssa, in a remarkable passage, states that God creates out of sheer goodness and does not stint in his self-giving. Rather, he showers all the goodness that he can on human beings to the extent that the only difference between Himself and his human creations lies in the fact of human creatureliness as opposed to the uncreated divine nature. From this, of course, flows the Orthodox theologoumenon that we are 'gods by grace', a statement that might seem extreme to the western Christian mind with its stress on our being 'miserable sinners' and its equal (and of course quite proper) emphasis for the need of utter humility before God.

The command of Jesus to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect (Matt 5:48) which can seem so crushing becomes instead an encouragement to fulfil a glorious destiny when it is understood in the terms in which Gregory of Nyssa talks of God's goodness and its communication to us. The

¹³ Pope, W. B. *A Compendium of Christian Theology*, (1880), vol 1, p. 423.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.424.

¹⁵ Pope, op cit, vol 3, p.4.

¹⁶ Ps 145:9 was one of John Wesley's favourite texts.

¹⁷ Most particularly in his encyclical *Orientalis Lumen* of 1996.

¹⁸ A sense that, as I shall show, comes out particularly clearly in this report. See especially pp. 7,11.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p 3.

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 11.

traditional English translation of *teleios* as perfect compounds the problem with its implication of never making a mistake or getting anything wrong. It is relieved when we realise that the word means *having a goal* rather than *perfection* in the normal English sense. What we are called to do is reflect benevolence in all our relationships, so far as our understanding and the guidance of the Holy Spirit enable us so to do. Wesley valuably pointed out that Christian perfection is compatible with a degree of ignorance and non-culpable error in understanding²¹; indeed, one could additionally argue that it *has* to be in virtue of the distinction between the created nature of humanity and the uncreated nature of God. His knowledge and wisdom are perfect from all eternity, ours have to grow and develop as was true even of our Lord in his human nature, a point stressed both by Luke and by the author of Hebrews²². One may legitimately wonder how far in his enthusiasm for being about his heavenly Father's business at the age of twelve, our Lord may have overlooked, in a way entirely natural to a lad of that age, the feelings of Mary and Joseph at finding him missing²³. Scripture, of course, affords us no answer to that question.

The report continues, 'God has become human not only that we might share in the divine life, but also that we may become fully human'²⁴. That, of course, is the clear implication of Paul's teaching in Ephesians 4:13, that we might 'all attain to mature human nature, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.' In that development, we grow in the *wisdom* of Christ as well as His love and so become more comprehensively intelligently aware of how to live out that love of God, neighbour and creation which, as Paul says, is our logical response and thus reasonable service (Romans 12:1-2).

In the last subsection of the Introduction, the Commission cite the well-known affirmation of St Irenaeus, 'the glory of God is a man fully alive'²⁵. They stress that 'we worship in the Spirit while we actively await the fulfilment of the promises of the coming reign of God'. This sets a natural eschatological perspective not simply for the main content of the report but for all Christian life. We face the future with confidence, a confidence desperately needed in a world that so often feels itself helpless before forces that it cannot hope to control. This is why the report is right to speak of Christian anthropology as hope filled. The last word is with God and there will indeed come that restoration of all things, that apocatastasis of which Peter spoke in his sermon (Acts 3:21).

The main part of the Report is divided into three sections, dealing with, respectively, the human person within the created order, Image and Likeness and Body, Soul and Personhood: the Openness and Communion of human life in God.

The first section begins with a series of definitions of what the Christian faith understands by our existence as persons. In much modern Orthodox anthropology, the term person is used in contradistinction to the term individual, to stress the fact that human beings, as created in the image of God, can only find their true nature and its due fulfilment in relationship to the Creator and

²¹ See Williams, op cit, p. 168.

²² Luke 2:52 'Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and man' and Hebrews 2:10 with its reference to Jesus being made 'perfect through suffering.' Hebrews 5:8 also refers to Jesus 'learning obedience through suffering'.

²³ I owe this speculation which is, of course, only such to my fellow local preacher and brother in law, Professor Stephen Lea.

²⁴ *Report*, p. 4.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 7.

other human beings. Such personhood in relationship has its source and divine archetype in the relationship of the three persons within the godhead, each of whom is in kenotic relationship with the other two. The Report specifically states ‘the *perichoresis* or mutual indwelling of the three persons of the Trinity is ultimately the source of all created unity and diversity, of its interweaving and mutual interdependence, of its ever growing complexity’²⁶. The kenotic theme comes to the fore in the sub-section Person as Sacrifice in which it is stressed that ‘our capacity for interrelationship often involves ‘self emptying and self-sacrifice’, the self-sacrifice which puts the other first just as Christ always put the will of the Father and the salvation of human beings before His own will’²⁷. Human beings are called to be ‘creative co-workers with God’²⁸. This is the mystery into which Jesus initiated the disciples when he called them ‘no longer servants but friends’ (John 15:15), friends who are called to partnership across the whole range of human activity, stated memorably as follows.

‘Approaching creation in love, as a gift to ourselves and others, both individuals and societies are challenged to actions of generous self-giving, frugality and self-restraint’²⁹. The whole counsel of God to his friends in Christ can rarely have been stated so comprehensively. This demands both far reaching repentance, yet also promises the fulfilment of our natural delight in the glory of God’s creation since ‘human beings are inquisitive, probing, exploratory, delighting in diversity and in encountering new people and ideas’³⁰.

Orthodox theology, one may add, has always been fond of stating the paradoxes at the heart of Christian life and experience. The God who is so close to us is also the unknowable God described in the terms of apophatic theology. The God who demands of us a kenotically ascetic style of life is also the God who gives us delight in our world and our fellow creatures. The final subsection of this section states that human freedom is to be found in loving obedience to Christ, a truth summed up in so much of Charles Wesley’s hymnody, in such phrases as ‘His adorable will we gladly fulfil’³¹ and particularly in the hymn ‘Behold the servant of the Lord’, with its great couplet,

‘Joyful from my own works to cease

Glad to fulfil all righteousness’³².

The second section of the Report relates to Image and Likeness. The view of modern scholars that the biblical verse is simply a matter of Hebrew poetic parallelism is stressed alongside what one may regard as the inspired patristic interpretation that the image relates to the potential to reflect the divine love and the likeness to what Charles Wesley calls the ‘spirit of finished holiness’³³. Human growth comes through human acceptance of self-government through appropriation of the wisdom of God, an appropriation which needs constant repentance, prayer and reception of the sacraments. One may also at this point add an important reflection of Myrrha Lot-Borodine that this is not simply a matter of the mind (which so often has been stated by the fathers to be the key aspect of the

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 11.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 13. John 4:

²⁸ *Ibid*, p.14.

²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 14.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 11.

³¹ Wesley, J (ed) *A Collection of Hymns for the use of the People called Methodists* (1780), no 47.

³² *Ibid*, no 429.

³³ *Report*, pp. 19-20.

divine image)but of the mind or *nous* as ‘ the organ of apprehension of a charismatic knowledge-intuition, not simply a prolongation of the discursive reason’, an eastern statement of the same truth as underlies the western concept of the *sensus fidei*, the supernatural sense in the Christian mind of what is appropriate in human behaviour in the light of the divine nature and plan³⁴.

The Virgin Mary, in respect of her obedience and faith, is extolled as ‘the highest example of what it means to be human’. She is ‘the glorious and glorified pattern of grace and hope for all humankind.’³⁵

Subsection 16 deals with dominion, stewardship and creation, a dominion which is not about exploitation but about ‘self-giving service’...about ‘healing, restoring and reconciling that which is fallen through our disobedience’, bearing always in mind that the creation belongs to God. Such a relationship is not ‘static but dynamic’, that is to say it offers us the chance for genuinely creative activity enhancing and not abusing the world that God has made³⁶. We are reminded in the next section that God’s love extends to all his other creatures, that animals have ‘a beauty, playfulness and value of their own.’ A brief account follows of the remarkable relationship that some of the desert fathers had with wild animals which no longer feared them because they sensed in them the benevolence of Adam before the fall³⁷.

Two sections deal with the intimate relationship between divine and human creativity, in particular with both science and the arts³⁸. A fascinating reflection at this point relates to the way in which ‘mathematicians construct models in their own mental world, and then find that the actual world bears out their speculations³⁹.’ I will add a personal remark at this point. Hopeless as I was at Maths at school, I have since in my teaching career, noted how many of my mathematical colleagues have been people of deep Christian faith from across a very broad denominational spectrum.

At the end of this section, we are warned of the dangers of idolatry, of worshipping our own will, of putting aspects of human power or knowledge in the place of God. ‘The misuse of science can lead people away from God and can even become a god in itself’⁴⁰.

The final section of the Report deals with *Body, Soul and Personhood: the Openness and communion of Human Life in God*. Great emphasis is laid upon our embodiedness, a stress that has sometime been missing in western theology, in contrast to the eastern tradition that has always emphasised the resurrection of the body and indeed the coming transfiguration of all creation as part of the total redemptive plan of God. The close links between body and soul are stressed, the body being the necessary means of communication and expressive of the state of the soul⁴¹. The cross and

³⁴ Citation from Lot-Borodine in Louth, A. *Modern Orthodox Thinkers* (2015), p. 106. For *sensus fidei* see my article in *Ecumenical Trends*, Feb 2015, pp. 6-11.

³⁵ *Report*, pp. 22-23.

³⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 28-9.

³⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 31-3.

³⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 35-40.

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 38.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 41.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, pp. 44-45.

resurrection of Christ are paradigmatic of the destiny of those in Christ, called to the kenosis of total self-giving, but resting in the assurance of the risen life to come⁴².

Sub-section 23 touches on gender differences. The distinction is said to be 'blessed by God'⁴³. Recent Orthodox theology has given much attendance in particular to them in terms of the marriage relationship. Philip Sherrard, a prominent lay British Orthodox theologian, argues that 'the differentiation of male and female is far from a concession to human weakness but is intrinsic to human nature as such'. Everything in the relationship is a theophany in which God discloses Himself in his own image, though each partner to the other. What the man loves in the woman is the mystery that she discloses as such an icon. The same is true in reverse. 'Each thus discloses for the other that unknown being who is the sacred core of their existence and who Himself aspires to find a birthplace in the hearts of both of them'⁴⁴. A slightly coy reference is made to the issues raised in recent years by transgender people⁴⁵.

Sub-section 24 *Personhood and Community, Persons in Society and History* insists that we are 'intrinsically social beings' and that 'sociality and service are deeply attuned with our innermost being', whereas 'selfish individualism is a betrayal of our being as envisaged by God'⁴⁶. There is concurrent stress on our historical conditioning and our constant responsibility to exercise discernment in evaluating our changing cultures in order to discern what are their positive and negative elements. It is within the context of historical change that Christian tradition grows as 'a creative development of our living experience.'⁴⁷

In stating these points and emphasising 'our responsibility to past, present and future', the Report is echoing our Lord's teaching in Matt 13:52 about the scribe 'trained for the Kingdom, who draws out of his treasure what is old and new'. In speaking of our nature as essentially dialogical, inter-relational and mutually interdependent, the Report echoes the teaching of John Paul II in *Ut Unum Sint*⁴⁸.

Sub-section 25 stresses that all are called to a life in relationship, but this may sometimes involve a single state as opposed to either marriage or life in a religious community⁴⁹. Significantly, marriage is stressed as 'a celebration of the local Christian community as a whole' and the value of the resulting family is seen as both an internal and external blessing, the later in terms of hospitality and assistance to others⁵⁰. In a world of ever more frequent marital breakdown, Christians are called upon to sustain each other in faithfulness⁵¹.

The Orthodox tradition has always deeply respected monastic life as setting standards of Christian living to which Christians in the world should approximate as closely as possible in their lives.

⁴² *Ibid*, pp. 47-49.

⁴³ *Ibid*, pp. 50-51.

⁴⁴ Cited in Louth, op cit, pp. 243

⁴⁵ *Report*, p. 51.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 52-53.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p.54.

⁴⁸ *Ut Unum Sint*, para 28, 'dialogue is an essential step along the path towards human self-realisation, the self-realisation both of each individual and of every human community'.

⁴⁹ *Report*, p 55

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p.58.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 59.

Monasticism is held to 'provide a prophetic and eschatological witness to the age to come in which the state of marriage is transcended'⁵². One may add that in that age to come, we will know, even as we are now known by God and will presumably be open to the completest communion with all the saints past, present and future⁵³.

Section 28 relates to friendship, significantly calling it a thing of value in itself, often unlinked to any task or social role or function'. Friendship involves mutually faithful dependability. God is the supreme friend of all humankind, the *philanthropos* to use the Orthodox term. He can be the friend of every single person⁵⁴. In the teaching of the Wesleyan father, George Findlay, we find a dual stress on the Christus pantocrator who is also 'the son of God who loved me and gave himself for me'⁵⁵. A feature of the Report to which I have perhaps given less attention than due in this essay is its stress upon the unique nature of each person and his or her dignity and infinite value in the eyes of God, who counts the very hairs of our heads (Matt 10:30).

The last sub-sections deal with the dignity of human life at all its stages of life, each of which, including the dependent one of early childhood and the final one often of increasing dependence offers opportunities for increasing growth in the fullest sense⁵⁶. The final sub-section, *From Freedom to Glory* offers a summary of key earlier points.

'Our right use of freedom, our pilgrimage from image to likeness, our membership of the mystical Body of Christ, all point towards the completion of our human nature and the transformation of all creation on the Last Day. This is our true fulfilment, the ultimate joy of all creation, our eternal sharing in the Trinitarian life of love'⁵⁷.

This report is to be welcomed as giving us the doctrine of the divine image in humanity as a lens through which to survey the duties and privileges inherent in Christian discipleship, experience and ecclesial belonging in Christ. It can also help us to focus more clearly on the ecumenical imperative and quest for Christian Unity in the light of God's plan for the reconciliation of all things in Christ and the specific general vocation of humanity within that Plan. According to the starets Sophrony, the second great commandment of Christ, concerning love of neighbour, 're-establishes the consubstantiality of the human race, rent asunder by sin.' The human race, in the multiplicity of its vast number of hypostases, is to become one in Christ, a development that can only take place in and through His one Church⁵⁸. This reminds us that the search for unity is an integral part of our total Christian discipleship and obedience. It is not a task for specialists or experts but for every Christian as the Decree on Ecumenism of Vatican II clearly teaches⁵⁹. Through the royal priesthood of

⁵² *Ibid*, p. 61.

⁵³ In 1771, John Wesley, conducting worship in Northern Ireland, announced the text, 'there is neither marriage nor giving in marriage in heaven' (Luke 20:35). He then closed his Bible, said, 'let us pray' and for half an hour prayed silently along with the entire congregation, finally concluding this contemplation with the blessing.

⁵⁴ *Report*, pp. 65-67.

⁵⁵ Findlay, G.G. *Commentary on Ephesians* (1888), pp. 367-8.

⁵⁶ *Report*, pp. 68-70.

⁵⁷ *Report*, p. 77.

⁵⁸ Cited by Andrew Louth in his *Modern Orthodox Thinkers*, (2015), p. 311. Fr. Sophrony (1896-1993) was founder of the Orthodox monastery of Tolleshunt Knights in England.

⁵⁹ *Decree on Ecumenism*, para 5, 'concern for restoring unity pertains to the whole Church, faithful and clergy alike'.

all his faithful, Christ can restore to humanity the natural priesthood of all creation intended for it at the first creation, allowing all human beings to participate in praise of the Creator and loving stewardship of His creation.

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