

## **Koinonia: God's Gift and Calling. A report for the *whole* oikoumene.**

Early in November 2020, the report of the second international dialogue between the respective member churches of the World Alliance of Reformed churches and the Anglican Communion was released. It was entitled **Koinonia, God's Gift and Calling** and also named the *Hiroshima Report*, after the Japanese city where it held its concluding session in 2019.

The first report of the dialogue had been issued thirty six years earlier under the title of *God's Reign and our Unity* in 1984. That report had been one of the best generated within the first twenty years of international inter-confessional dialogue, as largely inspired by the Vatican II opening up of the Roman Catholic Church to ecumenism, and the resultant call in its *Decree on Ecumenism* for such encounter with the other Christian communions.

*God's Reign and our Unity* was a long, thorough and impressive document, which dealt extremely thoroughly with the relevant key issues of ecumenical debate as they had been seen at that time by the two confessional bodies. Thus, a lot was said about the about Christian unity in the wider perspective of human unity, about the need to look at evangelism, social justice and church unity not as conflicting and competing issues, but as all related to the one mission of God, and about orthodoxy and orthopraxy as necessarily linked. Much of the second part of the report was devoted to long debated issues, particularly as between Reformed and Anglicans, over the two major sacraments and the ordained ministry. A thorough account was given of the alternative forms of threefold ministry operating within the two communions, the Anglican emphasis on bishops, priests and deacons, the Reformed stress on deacons, elders and ministers of oversight over the local congregations. Lacunae were to be noted within both systems. For almost all Anglicans, the diaconate was simply a transitional ministry. Some, but far from all Reformed churches, had no diaconate and it could be noted that in some, particularly Congregationalist churches, deacons often fulfilled what was an eldership role amongst Presbyterians. The Anglican system had its ultimate roots in the three fold ministry as first clearly spelt out by Ignatius of Antioch. The Reformed saw their threefold ministry as the pre-Ignatian apostolic practice, with a collective presbytery normally performing the highest role of oversight. The contrast was a point often made in American conversations between the two traditions<sup>1</sup>.

Some practical suggestions were made as to how the two systems might become reconciled. Could moderators become bishops in presbytery, sharing aspects of their role with the other members of the presbytery? Could the Anglicans consider restoring a diaconate and considering that elders in the reformed style might be very useful leaders, locally selected from among the laity within each Anglican parish? These matters have

---

<sup>1</sup> See, for example *The Agreement between The Episcopal Church and the Presbyterian Church (USA)* (2008), available on line.

continued to be debated, especially in the US context, where it is still hoped they might be successfully resolved. However, that has yet to happen.

Two particular achievements of this first report should never be forgotten. The first, of relevance to the entire oikoumene, was the very deft ecclesiological summary, enshrined in the words of para 29 that 'the church is sent into the world as sign, instrument and first fruits of his (God's) purpose to reconcile all things in heaven and earth through Christ'. 'The church is a provisional embodiment of God's final purpose for all human beings and for all creation'<sup>2</sup>. That clarifies the role of the Church, placing it firmly in the context of God's overall gracious plan for his world<sup>3</sup>. It is in this light that all the issues of truth and its varying modes of presentation, unity, evangelism and social justice, must be seen.

The other key stress is on the necessity of baptismal unity. 'If we are as realistic as the apostolic writers are, we are already by our baptism one body, and the continued separation of our two communions is a public denial of what we are already in Christ'. Quite rightly, the present dialogue report reiterates this point<sup>4</sup>. Vatican II had already spoken of unity in baptism, but the Roman Catholic Church was increasingly to do so as two developments took place between the late eighties and the present day. On the one hand, a widespread tendency to a slight weariness with the Ecumenical Movement; on the other hand, an increasing understanding of how much differences were centred more on things which were seen, even in Roman Catholic eyes, as secondary or tertiary within the hierarchy of truths; by contrast, how great the agreement was on the core of trinitarian and christological truth<sup>5</sup>.

*God's Reign and our Unity* was thus a valuable gift to the whole oikoumene. But, as a preliminary meeting in 2011 to discuss the value of a second round of dialogue between Anglicans and Reformed was to agree, much had since moved on. In the life of both communions, there had been 'fierce internal struggles and threats of division within our respective Communions, as well as in Society at large', highlighting the fact that 'the fullness of koinonia is not always what is experienced *within* (my italics) and between churches'<sup>6</sup>.

I may add the sad continuing testimony to this from within my own tradition. It seems as though the United Methodist Church in America is moving, as a result of deep internal divisions over the legitimacy, or otherwise, of same sex unions, towards a sort of managed separation, taken in the interests of avoiding too much bitterness. The Anglican Communion

---

<sup>2</sup> *God's Reign and Our Unity*, para 30.

<sup>3</sup> Cf Ephesians 1: 3-10.

<sup>4</sup> *God's Reign and our Unity*, para 61; *Report, Koinonia as Gift and Calling*, para 7, also section B of Summary, paras 60-61, followed by Section C which specifies it as 'Gift and Calling' for the two communions, Anglican and Reformed.

<sup>5</sup> Particularly recognised by Cardinal Walter Kasper in his *Harvesting the Fruits* (2010), where he recorded and assessed the gains of the dialogues of Rome with four major western traditions, including both the Reformed and Anglicans.

<sup>6</sup> *Introduction*, p. 7.

has certainly suffered a partial breakdown of relations between the two North American churches and the rest of the Communion; there are also, of course, provinces that ordain women priests and others that don't, thus again creating a sort of partially impaired communion<sup>7</sup>.

On a more positive note, both communions recognised how much work had been done, especially since and under the influence of the fifth World Conference on Faith and Order in 1993<sup>8</sup>. Pretty well every ecumenical report since then has made reference to the concept of Church as Communion/Koinonia as have many statements by individual particular churches<sup>9</sup>. A vast scholarly literature has also been generated.

One may also mention that, during the interval between 1984 and 2011, renewed stress has been placed on spiritual ecumenism and the related concept of receptive ecumenism, advanced particularly by Professor Paul Murray of Durham. These things are not specifically mentioned in the Hiroshima Report, but they most certainly will have had some influence on all the members of the joint commission, which most certainly wishes Reformed and Anglicans to learn from each other and harvest the fruits of such closer communion.

It is clear that the Commission have produced a rather different sort of report to the very detailed one of 1984. However, it has specific merits that were perhaps lacking in its predecessor.

First, it is much shorter and more succinct. This makes one hopeful that it may be more widely read, especially by clergy in the parishes and by lay leaders, who often play key roles within local ecumenical parishes and local 'churches together' groups. Moreover, it contains much to deepen reflection on what the search for greater Christian unity means at any level and between any two or more traditions, much for meditation on what it demands in terms of empathy, mutual respect and trust, willingness to learn and receive, and, above all perhaps, the willingness to prefer others in honour and make space for them.

If I were to pick out one paragraph from the sixty five in the main text, I would select para 31 on Dialogue. It seems to me to express as well as anything I have ever read to epitomise the spirit and hope in which this should take place.

'Dialogue is a vital reality within and between Christian communities that creates a beautiful space in which we both give and receive, opening us to one another and enlarging our understanding of the way God works. Dialogue thus deepens our koinonia. None of us holds complete knowledge of God or truth, and we find reassurance and courage in the

---

<sup>7</sup> Most recently, as noted in *The Guardian* on Nov 28 2020, there are threats of Anglican Communion disciplinary action against the Episcopal Church in Scotland, consequent upon its decision to approve same-sex marriages.

<sup>8</sup> Best T. and Gassmann G. (eds) *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia*, (1994)

<sup>9</sup> Thus, see e.g. the ecclesiological statement of British Methodism, *Called to Love and Praise* (1999), section 3.1. where the concept of koinonia is discussed.

opportunity to partner with others in our seeking. Here are the fruits of koinonia: we are free to engage with each other's traditions because our posture is already one of responsiveness to the other. We seek to learn of the work of the Spirit in the other's experiences and traditions'.

I am prompted at this point to add a striking complementary additional sentence from the declaration of the English Conference of 1987 which was held as part of the *Not Strangers But Pilgrims Process* which later resulted in the reconfiguring of the central ecumenical instruments for the four countries of the British Isles.

'Unity comes alive as we learn to live in each others' traditions'<sup>10</sup>.

I also greatly esteem the whole of section C 'Healing and Wholeness', which enlarges on para 31, manifesting faith in the power of koinonia, faithfully lived out, to 'transform conflict'.

'Even extremely demanding difference and conflict have the potential to teach us more fully about koinonia precisely because they demand empathy, deep listening, patience and humility, which are also necessary for relationships to deepen and grow rather than fracture. ..In the redemptive work of Christ, koinonia disarms destructive conflict. The fullness of koinonia amidst diversity moves us beyond our fear so as to approach others with curiosity, openness and compassion.'<sup>11</sup>

Some may wonder at the confidence thus shown in the above paragraph, particularly when they consider the poisonous legacy of the sixteenth century Reformation conflicts that lasted for so long. However, the development of the Ecumenical Movement, and in particular developments since the Roman Catholic entry into it as a result of the Second Vatican Council, have shown that progress, unthinkable to earlier generations, can be made when there is 'the empathy, deep listening, patience and humility that are the gifts of koinonia.'<sup>12</sup>

At this point it is important to explain why the term koinonia is adopted as central to this report. The dialogue team assert this right at the beginning with reference to its multi-faceted meaning. It means 'communion, fellowship, sharing , participation and partnership', above all it 'refers to sharing in a reality that is greater than ourselves and our own individual needs', that reality being further defined in a list of eight key characteristics, all of which have their roots in the dynamic life and love of the triune God, alike the supreme source and the supreme pattern for those 'created in his image.'<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> See my article in *Together in Christ* (1987), journal of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Southwark.

<sup>11</sup> Report, para 32

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, para 33.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, pp. 6, 7-8, para 1, p.12. 'Koinonia has its origin in the dynamism of the life of the triune God. It overflows to us from the beautiful and holy truth of God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit-love and grace in relationship'

In short, it is a polyvalent word. It is, as a commonplace of the Ecumenical Movement states, both Gift (of God's grace) and Calling to the Church, which is summoned, in the power of the work of the paschal mystery within it and all its members and the subsequent gift of the Spirit, to respond by growing into that unity which is God's will and goal for it. The Report amplifies this by stressing that, in addition to gift and calling, there is added the expectation of eschatological fulfilment when, as Vatican II put it, 'all the words of God reach their complete fulfilment in her'<sup>14</sup>.

The main text of the Report is divided into three chapters, dealing, respectively, with 'the Foundations of Koinonia', 'Koinonia in the Church' and 'Koinonia and Mission'. The foundations are found in the creative and redeeming work of God to which both creation and Holy Scripture testify, God being presented as engaging with the world both 'in the act of creation and throughout the story of covenant and election.' The teaching of God's *Reign and Our Unity* on the Church as 'sign, instrument and first fruits of a reality that comes from beyond history-The Kingdom or reign of God' and as a 'people in pilgrimage' is reiterated. The Church is called upon to live out that reality. All creation speaks of God's glory but Scripture is also fundamental in showing how, from the very beginning, 'God is establishing a dynamic relationship with that creation, rich in its intended variety, declared to be very good and commanded to be fruitful'<sup>15</sup>. The Bible reveals this pattern...in the act of creation and throughout the story of covenant and election, God's ultimate desire being 'to widen this covenant to bring all nations towards eternal communion.'<sup>16</sup> The multi-dimensional character of koinonia in the New Testament is expressed in many Pauline texts. God calls believers to koinonia with his Son, Christ, and the Holy Spirit; the koinonia thus founded and expressed 'flows from the dynamic vibrancy of the divine koinonia into the self-giving of the Church for all creation. As the three persons of the Trinity are distinct and yet exist in perfect unity, the Church is many, yet one Body'<sup>17</sup>.

Para 11 stresses God's gift of *koinonia* as irreversible and unbreakable at the extremes of both divine self-emptying and human suffering, stressing that at the very moment it appears broken, in Christ's cry of dereliction on the cross, a new richness is unveiled', revealed in both resurrection and subsequent gift of the Spirit. 'The incarnation is the renewal of God's covenant in creation and the election of Israel, and the healing of Adam's fall'<sup>18</sup>.

Para 14 rightly underlines the fact that 'the resurrection is a forward-looking eschatological event that inaugurates the new creation and in which all future believers will ultimately be renewed and transfigured as a result of being 'in Christ'. This paragraph has ongoing

---

<sup>14</sup> Report, paras 2-3, p.7. The reference to Vatican II is my addition, as comment-it has always seemed appropriate to me to add a reference to Dei Verbum 8 in this sort of connection.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid*, para 3.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, para 5.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, para 8.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, para 12, a point particularly stressed in late nineteenth-early twentieth century Anglican theology.

relevance for the debate on the sacramentality of the Church, traditionally a key issue in dialogue between Roman Catholics and the major Reformation and post-Reformation traditions, and one certainly raised in the debate recorded in the WCC document, 'The Church Towards a Common Vision'.<sup>19</sup> The paragraph clearly shows the two partner traditions as having a very strong view, shown in its conclusion. 'As sign and servant of the coming Kingdom that Body become sacramental, as Christ is the ultimate Sacrament through whom the full riches of God's promises for the whole of creation are known and realised.'

The Report then stresses the value of another dialogue report, that of the Anglican-Orthodox Dialogue on the Church of the Triune God, which stresses that "the communion manifested in the life of the Church has the Trinitarian fellowship as its basis, model and ultimate goal"<sup>20</sup>.

Stress is then placed on the common indebtedness of both Anglicans and Reformed to the patristic era. It stresses its avoidance of any setting of creation and redemption against each other, citing, in particular Calvin's testimony to God's glory as seen so comprehensively throughout creation. It records the deep respect in which Calvin was held by both continental reformers and members of the Church of England in the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods<sup>21</sup>.

The concluding paragraph of this chapter shows both traditions as recognising 'the call in communion to engage with the whole of Scripture in its diverse patterns'. It stresses that 'drawing on Scripture, tradition and theological understanding, the Anglican and Reformed churches have much in common and share clear family likenesses'. Shortly before beginning this article, I read the collected papers of the most recent Meissen Conversations where some Anglican participants called upon their fellows to recognise how close Elizabethan and Jacobean Anglicans had been to the continental Reformed churches of the time, so much so that Anglicans had been invited to and had played an important part in the reformed Synod of Dort<sup>22</sup>. This early closeness had, however, been largely lost as a result of later seventeenth century developments and had been further intensified by the spread of anglo-catholicism in the nineteenth century. Now, however, as a result of the growing strength of evangelical Anglicanism in the late twentieth century and the developing relationship with the Evangelical Church of Germany, which has a considerable reformed component, there has been a tendency to reaffirm a reformed element in the complex modern Anglican

---

<sup>19</sup> See eg. *The Church. Towards a Common Vision*, (2012), para 44

<sup>20</sup> Report, para 15, citing *The Church of the Triune God* (2006).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, ,para 17, where I have slightly supplemented what is said, as a result of recent reading in the context of relationships between the Church of England and the evangelical Church of Germany-I shall return to the point of this in discussing future prospects at the end of this article.

<sup>22</sup> See Stephen Hampton's essay on the 1618 Reformed synod of Dort and Church of England participation in it in *Revisiting Meissen* (details below in ref 23)

identity<sup>23</sup>. I suspect that element may be further affirmed as a result of *Koinonia, God's Gift and Calling*.

The second chapter is, in my opinion, the best of what is, overall, a very high quality three. It deals with koinonia in the Church and immediately emphasises baptism as 'the foundation of our koinonia in the Church, which embodies koinonia and points to a fuller koinonia in the Kingdom of God'. Baptism inaugurates an 'eschatological and mystical relationship with Christ through the Spirit, which is a corporate form of sanctification, through which the baptised participate in the Lord's glory'. It involves liberation from the power of sin' and is 'the visible and effective sign and seal of that gracious work of the Spirit by which the Church is constituted'<sup>24</sup>.

It continues, 'thus we live in the dynamic embrace of God's eternal movement towards reconciliation.' The teaching of God's Reign and our Unity is reiterated. 'if we are as realistic about baptism as the apostolic writers are, then we are already by our baptism one body and the continued separation of our two communions is a public denial of what we are already in Christ'<sup>25</sup>.

It cannot be put more strongly than that. The baptism of each individual Christian sets as it were a compass for his or her life, orientating his or her life towards growing conformity to Christ in his death, in the sure and certain hope of eventual resurrection to eternal life in the eschatological fullness of the completed new creation. Moreover, that fulfilment can only come in the company of Christ and all who belong to him. It can only be fulfilled in completeness of *koinonia* with the entire Body of Christ in which no one can be disregarded or marginalised and in which no one can say he or she has no need of any other or others. It orientates every Christian, every local congregation, every particular church or tradition towards a common search for a catholicity and fullness which will only be complete when all are in uninterrupted koinonia and communion with the whole Christ, Head and members. We are already necessarily dedicated to that common pilgrimage and indifference towards it, let alone denial of its possibility is seriously sinful, simply indicating that we are yet, as the Authorised Version puts it in translation of Pauline teaching, 'carnally minded.'

Para 23 insists that 'the depth of this koinonia is revealed in mutual sharing, mutual recognition, mutual respect and mutual belonging, in which unique gifts of individuals and groups are to be recognised and honoured as part of a greater whole (1 Cor 12).

It continues 'Koinonia is not merely a form of Christian behaviour, but a relational way of being together in Christ', as deeply relational, one might add, as belonging to a family as the

---

<sup>23</sup> The book of the conversations has been published as Chapman, M. Nussel, F. and Grebe, M. (eds), *Revisiting the Meissen Declaration after 30 Years* (2020)

<sup>24</sup> Report, paras 20,21.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, para 22.

most basic form of necessary human association. In Christ, 'we are being shaped evermore fully from one degree of glory to another (2 Cor 3:18)'.

Fundamental to true *koinonia* is worship, particularly as focussed in the preaching of the word and the celebration of the eucharist. The liturgies of the Church express the joys, suffering and mutual support of the members of the community for each other.

*Koinonia* is also expressed in the apostolicity of the Church, expressed in Scripture and the Apostles and Nicene Creeds. The Commission rejoice in the fact that already, in many local relationships across the world, Reformed and Anglicans have been able to affirm their common belonging to the one, holy catholic and apostolic Church and their common participation in the apostolic mission<sup>26</sup>. Furthermore, they rejoice in the fact that, in the united churches of the Indian sub-continent, they are already united, moreover in company with Christians from some other communions<sup>27</sup>. In several other countries, they are still searching for ways of moving from common recognition of full apostolicity to fuller interchange of ministry<sup>28</sup>. The Commission record their gratitude for being able to have their first meeting in the context of the already united Church of South India.

Nurturing the life of *koinonia* remains a constant necessity. A key role is played by the ministry of episcopate, organised differently as between the two traditions except in the fully united churches in India. The differences are held to signify the Church's catholicity, though it has to be noted that the two traditions still stress differing forms. It is commonly accepted that the structures of both churches need common attention to ensure that they are porous to the gift of *koinonia*<sup>29</sup>. Working towards ever closer unity demands 'deep humility and self-giving that is constantly open to conversion and change'<sup>30</sup>.

Important guidance is given that churches should not 'rush to close down complex discussions or resolve every disagreement artificially' Instead, 'they need to renew their trust in the *koinonia* which is the irreversible achievement of the Paschal Mystery in the power of the Spirit'<sup>31</sup>.

An important point about unity in diversity is made here. 'In listening well to each other, we trust that seeing from a different perspective can be a way in which God speaks to us and builds up the community of the Church. One may add that this has proved very important in dialogues looking at differences previously held to be church dividing, such as those on Christology, reaching back to the fifth century and those on justification stemming from the Reformation. There is now widespread agreement that the formula of Chalcedon is not the

---

<sup>26</sup> As in the Meissen statement, the Reilly one and the agreement between the Presbyterian Church of USA and the Episcopal Church.

<sup>27</sup> With Methodists in the churches of North and South and India, also with some Baptists in the North.

<sup>28</sup> The position in France, Germany and the USA, where there are ongoing discussions..

<sup>29</sup> *Report*, para 29.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, para 29. .

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, para 30.



only way of asserting the unity of the two natures in Christ nor are the rival definitions of the Reformation and Trent the only approaches to the doctrine of justification; the original schisms need not have happened. The very next paragraph, no 30, stresses Jesus' own reaching out to those considered separate. The section then concludes with the magnificent paragraph discussed earlier<sup>32</sup>.

The final section is one which I commended earlier, on Healing and Wholeness. It begins by arguing that koinonia as a radical and primary gift of God has the power to transform conflict and teach us a vital truth, that difference and disagreement are not in opposition to the unity of the Church. We have just mentioned how that has come to apply to two notoriously formerly divisive issues. One may hope that it may come to apply to some of the divisive issues which seem irreconcilable today, especially those relating to same sex unions, which may eventually become settled as a result of further developments in the understanding of sexuality, or through a concomitant understanding that the term marriage may be confined to the lifelong partnership of a man and a woman, whilst seeing a same sex partnership as one of covenanted partnership between people of the same sex<sup>33</sup>. Para 32 argues that 'even extremely demanding difference and conflict have the potential to teach us more fully about koinonia because they demand empathy, deep listening, patience and humility, which are also necessary for relationships that grow rather than fracture. Aligning with God's reconciling ministry often requires us to ask for perspective from others and repent of the limitations of our own vision.' I think the alignment of three other communions with the original Lutheran-Catholic Declaration on Justification shows this very clearly<sup>34</sup>.

'God's reconciliatory mission means we must never close the door to the possibility of healing'; 'likewise, koinonia does not allow us to be satisfied with division or be comforted by a sense of self-righteousness if division comes.'<sup>35</sup>

Para 35 asserts the uncomfortable fact that 'division is present within and between our ecclesial bodies. Much ink has certainly been spilt discussing 'impaired communion' between churches of the same overall tradition. The IRAD dialogue prefers to talk of how koinonia has been 'variously received', also of how 'too often, we limit God's family to those who look like us, or agree with us'. I will say that all too often I have experienced this within my own British Methodist Church where changes are being suggested that some try to

---

<sup>32</sup> Viz, no 31.

<sup>33</sup> I owe this last suggestion to a Roman Catholic deacon who is a close friend.

<sup>34</sup> Viz- the signing of the Joint Declaration by the *World Methodist Council* in 2006, followed by more recent *Anglican* and *Reformed* affirmations of it; moreover, the Methodists in their recent dialogue with the Baptists agreed the Joint Declaration should be commended to the Baptist World Alliance for possible recognition.

<sup>35</sup> Report, para 34.

allege are 'just not Methodism', i.e. Methodism as they want to see it and as they want it to remain rather than Methodism, as, perhaps, it ought now to develop<sup>36</sup>.

The final two paragraphs argue that 'before they become causes of separation, conflicts can become opportunities for even deeper engagement and relationship...as we await further clarity and wisdom. The gift of *koinonia* eternally and radically reaches out, always seeking to keep people in rather than keeping them out'. Para 39 concludes the section on *koinonia* in the Church thus,

'The maiming of the Body of Christ is sinful. A festering injury to the Body of Christ can only be healed with restoration, repentance, reconciliation and the return of self-giving love, the ministry of Christ himself...We pray and work for the day when *koinonia* will be fully received as God desires, when the Church has grown into the full stature of Christ (Eph 4:13), and Christ will be all in all'. (Eph 1:23).

Para 60, in the Summary of Conclusions, makes the point that 'thanks to the abundance of God's gift, it is inappropriate and inaccurate to speak of having been 'in or out' of communion with one another'. It is interesting to note that since Vatican II the Roman Catholic Church has spoken increasingly of 'degrees of communion' with the still separated churches, even of 'almost full communion', with the Orthodox in particular<sup>37</sup>.

#### *Missional Koinonia.*

The final chapter deals with *koinonia* in mission and throws out challenges which will be found challenging to congregations of all churches, particularly in contemporary Europe and North America. It begins by reiterating the teaching of God's Reign and our Unity to the effect that 'the Church is a pilgrim people...whose goal is nothing less than to m God's Kingdom, embracing all nations and all creation...a foretaste of God's purpose "to sum up all things with Christ as Head" (Eph 1:10).

Christians are called to lives shaped by the invitation to and challenge of mission. The implications of *koinonia* are life changing because in it 'it is impossible to ignore responsibility to and for one other, a responsible communion that points to the interconnection and interrelatedness of God's creation, in which all have a part to play.<sup>38</sup>

The gift of *koinonia* is for the sake of the whole world. The Church is sign and servant of the missional life of God in the power of the Holy Spirit to celebrate life and resist and transform

---

<sup>36</sup> I witnessed this in a discussion in the Faith and Order Committee of the (British) Methodist Church in 1984 when we discussed the *Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry* report of the Faith and Order division of the WCC and our response thereto. One member said that to call for a weekly celebration of the eucharist was 'just not Methodist', ignoring, of course, the challenge.

<sup>37</sup> An important, but perhaps little noted advance, was made by the Roman Catholic International Theological Commission in 2014, when it accepted that the *sensus fidelium* is operative in the other churches.

<sup>38</sup> *Report*, para 40.

all life-destroying forces'<sup>39</sup>. This statement leads naturally on to three key emphases, first on openness to radical hospitality, then to embodying justice, finally to affirming life. Radical hospitality is particularly characterised by 'openness to receiving those who are most frequently excluded by church and wider society.' It is stressed God's hospitality also extends to all of creation, God being 'the author of this web of koinonia between and among humanity, the natural world and the whole creation'<sup>40</sup>.

Embodying justice involves seeing and embracing those most in need; however, it is not an expression of charity from the powerful to the powerless, rather it involves 'lifting up and valuing' those on the margins so that they may become 'witnessing agents of life transforming koinonia.'<sup>41</sup>

The Church has to affirm life despite its own 'frailty, woundedness, brokenness, fear and pain'. 'Life denying socio-economic and religio-political forces challenge the Church to engage in cathartic processes of repentance, remoulding and transformation.' It is called particularly to 'transcend the walls we build around ourselves'. The concluding sentence of this second section sums up. 'Missional koinonia transcends false and life restricting barriers and emphasises the oneness of God's gift, which is a foretaste of the abundant life promised for creation'<sup>42</sup>.

In the concluding section of this chapter, we encounter the nub of the huge challenge. 'missional communities are challenged to move beyond mere maintenance of their structures and institutions and to engage together in life-giving ministry and mission that the world may believe.'<sup>43</sup> One may comment that this comes at a particular time when many congregations, of all traditions, particularly in Britain and northwest Europe, not just Anglican and Reformed, are struggling to maintain buildings (sometimes over-large), congregations (often elderly and dwindling) and are finding both these about as much as they can cope with. There are, of course, points and places of hope, growth and even ardent mission to the neediest. Can these places set an inspiring example and inspire imitation elsewhere-that is perhaps the key question not just to ask, but to act upon?

In sum, this is a particularly challenging section of the dialogue report and it deserves not just to be studied in Anglican and Reformed churches, but in the other traditions as well since the challenge to mission is one to all Christ's faithful. Indeed I would hope that the entire report will be studied across the entire oikoumene so rich it is in ecumenical wisdom and comprehensiveness of vision. It is a gem both of spiritual ecumenism and practical ecumenical co-operation in service and mission.

---

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, para 42.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, para 44.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, para 48.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, paras 49-53.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, para 54.

Lest anyone think that I have read this Report uncritically, I would add one caveat. While I accept that the challenges presented in this report are acutely and desperately relevant in our present 2020 context, the two partners should not forget that there is still an unfinished agenda from the 1984 report. Though the two communions have taken considerable steps towards mutual recognition in many places, including America, Britain, France and Germany, there is still no full inter-changeability of ordained ministry except in the Indian sub-continent<sup>44</sup>. In a sense, it has been a matter of so near and yet so far. The Meissen and Reuilly agreements of the Church of England with the Evangelical Church of Germany and the French Protestant churches (now a united church), affirm mutual eucharistic hospitality and apostolic churchly reality, but still stop short of full mutual ministerial inter-changeability<sup>45</sup>.

In the light of the challenges that still remain, I think the effort to see whether the two systems of ministry can be reconciled should be resumed. Is it possible that there could be an exchange of gifts, Anglicans receiving the local eldership as a ministry of assistance to the ordained pastorate/priesthood, Reformed receiving 'bishops in presbytery' working collegially with and amongst the other ordained ministers? Above all, in the light of the challenges to mission in this report, could there be an agreed structure for a common diaconate, in which, in Britain as an example, URC community workers and permanent Anglican deacons could work together in needy communities where both are available. The renewal of a true diaconate in which deacons lead the rest of the congregational/parish community in work at the margins could be a particular gift and inspiration to others<sup>46</sup>.

I gently commend this further step whilst remembering that developments in Anglicanism from the 1620's have modified its originally reformed ethos. Reformed churches now have to deal with an Anglicanism that, in general, wants to reassert what it has in common with Roman Catholics and Orthodox as well as with reformed churches<sup>47</sup>. However, it may well be that disciplined and mutually sympathetic and empathetic listening to each other in serious dialogue may well find a solution guided by the Holy Spirit. Careful reflection on Section C of *Koinonia in the Church, Healing and Wholeness*, may help with its call for 'empathy, deep listening, patience and humility', for attending to 'who has not been included' and renunciation, and as anathematising of any temptation to say 'I have no need

---

<sup>44</sup> These agreements are cited. *Report*, p.17, ref 21.

<sup>45</sup> It is the same in the 2008 *Agreement between the Episcopal Church and the Presbyterian Church (USA)*, which can be accessed by googling the title on line. This sets out very clearly the remaining difficulty of agreement on the exact importance of and possible mutual reception of the historic episcopal succession.

<sup>46</sup> As very strongly stressed in the international Anglican-Lutheran dialogue, *To Love and Serve the Lord* (Jerusalem Report, 2013). For brief summary and comment, see my article in *One in Christ* (2013), pp. 155-162.

<sup>47</sup> See the essays by Mark Chapman, Stephen Hampton and Jonathan Gibbs (pp. 7-20, 62-77 and 145-155 in Chapman, M, Nussel, F. and Grebe, M (eds) *Revisiting the Meissen Declaration after 30 Years* (2020), the first two of which deal with the historical aspects of the transition of Anglicanism from a very close relationship to the Reformed to one stressing a more 'catholic' identity. Gibbs suggests a need to 'go back to our roots in the Reformation' and accept that there are differing patterns of episcopate and that the New Testament *as such*, witnesses to that.

of you' may be of great help in reaching the desired solution in a manner that respects the sensitivities in both communions<sup>48</sup>.

I pray so, particularly in the light of the advances recorded in this remarkable report and also in the fact that it would constitute a remarkable bridgehead between two traditions that would now face both ways, towards the more ancient Catholic and Orthodox churches and also towards the more radically Protestant churches, thus contributing much to the oikoumene beyond their own particular reconciliation.

David Carter.

(This is a fuller treatment of the second of the two documents of hope discussed in Two documents of Hope. It has been offered for publication but not yet accepted for definite publication. I include it because I believe this particular document to be of general significance for the whole oikoumene and not simply the two communions, Reformed and Anglican, immediately involved.)

---

<sup>48</sup> *Report*, paras 33, 38.