

OUR FELLOWSHIP IN THE GOSPEL

**REPORT OF THE JOINT STUDY GROUP BETWEEN THE
CHURCH OF SCOTLAND AND THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND**

The Council for Christian Unity of the Church of England

The Committee on Ecumenical Relations of the Church of Scotland

CONTENTS

- 1 Introduction: The work of the Joint Study Group
- 2 Who are we? Introducing our Churches to each other
- 3 Where do we find ourselves today? The context of our fellowship
- 4 What have we said to each other in ecumenical dialogue? Conversations between the Church of England and the Church of Scotland 1932-1966
- 5 Living out our common baptism: Being made one
- 6 Partnership in the gospel: A biblical model
- 7 Pathways to partnership: Practical steps

1 INTRODUCTION: THE WORK OF THE JOINT STUDY GROUP

Three major anniversaries have impinged on our thinking as we have been preparing this report for our two Churches. 2009 saw the 500th anniversary of the birth of the Reformer John Calvin. Events north of the Border included a joint Church of Scotland – Roman Catholic conference, hosted by the Archbishop of Glasgow, in which the Scottish Episcopal Church and the Church of England also participated. Calvin’s influence on the religious traditions of England and Wales was the theme of the ‘Calvin Colloquium’ sponsored by Churches Together in England and Churches Together in Britain and Ireland at the University of Exeter, which included participants from the Church of Scotland and the Church of England, among others.

2010 is, of course, the centenary of the Edinburgh International Missionary Conference, which is often seen as the formal start of the ecumenical movement. Edinburgh 1910 was addressed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Randall Davidson, and a future Archbishop, William Temple, served in a junior capacity at the conference: it made Temple a lifelong ecumenist. The inseparable biblical connection between mission and unity, that was the motive of Edinburgh 1910, has remained the guiding thread of the ecumenical movement. Conferences at New College, Edinburgh, and at Swanwick, Derbyshire, during 2010 are designed to explore the trajectory of unity and mission over the past century.

2010 has a double significance in Scotland: it is also the 450th anniversary of the start of the Scottish Reformation in 1560. The way that these anniversaries are being marked reveals the complex interconnectedness, the overlapping nature, of the ecumenical movement today. The aim of our report is to strengthen the connection between the Church of Scotland and the Church of England in terms of our common mission.

The Church of Scotland and the Church of England are neighbours on either side of the Border. Each of them is a distinctive expression of the Christian Church, and has its own history, traditions, ways of worship and form of governance. But, because both churches belong to the one Church of Jesus Christ, they have a good deal in common and share a number of important features. The Church of England and the Church of Scotland are good neighbours and work well together in the cause of Christ. They consult each other and exchange courtesies and are colleagues in several ecumenical structures. There is already a sense of fellowship, which both churches value, but we believe that this could be strengthened and developed. The purpose of our report is to propose that deepening of our fellowship and to make some modest but concrete suggestions about how it might be put into practice.

Our two churches are certainly different in various ways. For one thing, our systems of church government are not the same. The Church of Scotland has a Presbyterian polity with a system of church courts and an annual General Assembly, while the Church of England is both episcopal and synodical, made up of forty-four dioceses (including the Diocese in Europe), each with its bishop and its synod and with a General Synod at the national level, which is made up of bishops, clergy and laity. While the Church of Scotland has its Moderator of the General Assembly, in the Church of England the Archbishops of Canterbury and York are co-presidents of the

General Synod (though they do not generally chair the business). Our styles of worship are rather different too, though there is range of worship styles in both our churches, from the quite informal to the very liturgical. The interiors of our churches also look different, those of the Church of Scotland being somewhat plainer. We exist almost entirely in separate territories (though there are some Church of Scotland congregations in England).

But our churches also have much in common. We share the faith of the Church through the ages and confess that faith in our worship, teaching and witness. We both treasure the Scriptures as the Word of God; we read and expound them in our worship and seek to be guided by them in the way we order our church affairs. We are both territorial churches with a national mission and ministry and a commitment to bring the ministry of the word, the sacraments of the gospel, and the exercise of pastoral care to every community of the land. We are churches whose centre of gravity is in the parishes and the local community. We are both facing similar challenges in the delivery of our mission and are both influenced by the phenomenon of ‘emerging church’ and ‘fresh expressions of church’. We are both recognised in law, though in different ways: the Church of Scotland describes itself as a national Church, while the Church of England is the established Church in England.

Our histories have been intertwined for centuries, though not always in a happy way. The Church of England almost became Presbyterian at one point in its history, during the Commonwealth; and the Church of Scotland was an episcopally-ordered church on several occasions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Since those turbulent times, when passions ran high and blood was shed, our nations have lived side by side in one Kingdom. We are united through Crown and Parliament, notwithstanding the fact that recent steps towards constitutional devolution have seen the creation of a Scottish Parliament. Thanks to the ecumenical movement, a deeper mutual understanding, respect and friendship pertains between many churches, including our own. The ecumenical conversations from the 1930s to the 1960s, which we touch on later in this report, did not achieve their aim of bringing our two churches into a relationship of communion, but they did help us to understand each other better and they laid a theological foundation for closer co-operation.

Since those days, both our churches have entered various ecumenical relationships and commitments. The Church of England made the Meissen Agreement in 1991 with the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD), and the British and Irish Anglican Churches entered into the Porvoo Agreement with the Nordic and Baltic Lutheran Churches in 1996. The Reuilly Agreement between the four Anglican Churches and the French Lutheran and Reformed Churches dates from 1999. The Anglican-Methodist Covenant was signed in 2003. In Meissen, Reuilly and the Covenant, the Anglican Churches concerned recognised the reality and authenticity of the ministries of word, sacrament and oversight of churches that are not ordered in the historic episcopate.

The Church of Scotland signed the Leuenberg Agreement of 1973 and is therefore a member of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) – Leuenberg Church Fellowship, to which some of the Nordic and Baltic Lutheran Churches, together with the French Protestant Churches and the Methodist Church of Great Britain, belong. The Church of England has a regular Faith and Order consultation

with the CPCE. This network of overlapping and multi-layered ecumenical relationships provides the context for the present initiative between our two churches.

Already each church invites the other to appoint a representative to its governing body, the General Assembly and the General Synod. These representatives are made very welcome and their contributions are appreciated. For some years now there has been a bi-annual bilateral consultation, led on the Anglican side by the Archbishop of York, on a range of matters of common concern, particularly issues of public policy and mission.

Alongside this, for the past ten years, a smaller-scale faith and order consultation has taken place between appointed representatives of our two churches. This meeting began on a bi-annual basis and was intended as an opportunity to compare notes on the various faith and order issues that our churches were dealing with at the time, so that we could both understand each other better and learn from each other's work.

These conversations proved so valuable that, several years ago, we decided – with the support of our appointing bodies – to constitute ourselves slightly more formally as a joint study group, taking as our main area of study the Church as a communion. We engaged in Bible study and looked at what international theological dialogues, in which our two world bodies (the Anglican Communion and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches) had been involved, could contribute. We studied the theology of the ‘one baptism’ that we recognise in each other.

We deliberately took our cue from St Paul’s words in Philippians 1.5, ‘your fellowship in the gospel’, where Paul refers to the practical expression of the fellowship, communion or partnership (*koinonia*) that the Philippian Christians had given him in his work of spreading the gospel of Christ.¹ We recognised that there is a real, God-given degree of communion between our two churches, one grounded in our confession of the apostolic faith, in a mutually recognised common baptism and in the long-standing practice of inviting each other’s communicants to receive Holy Communion at our own eucharistic services. We noted that there are, as we have mentioned, already several useful practical expressions of that communion.

Soon we felt that we were ready to set ourselves a goal, with certain outcomes, so – once again with the blessing of our sponsoring bodies – we adopted as our goal that of strengthening and enhancing our existing ‘fellowship in the gospel’. We recognised that we needed to give that enhanced fellowship a sound theological basis and that we needed to show how it could be expressed in as many practical and realistic ways as possible. We wanted to encourage the public recognition of that strengthened and enhanced relationship by our two churches.

In the report that follows, we first ‘introduce’ the two churches to each other, then set out some key factors that have shaped the current context of our churches and their mission. We revisit the work done by the conversations between our churches, with other partners, from the 1930s to the 1960s in order to learn some lessons and to carry forward what remains helpful after half a century. We also look briefly at the significant report of the international dialogue between the World Alliance of

¹ *te koinonia humon eis to euangelion*

Reformed Churches and the Anglican Communion, *God's Reign and Our Unity* (1984). Next we look at the theological underpinning of the common baptism that brings us into the Church, the Body of Christ. Having done that, we explore more deeply the notion of fellowship, communion or partnership as it is expressed in the key New Testament Greek word *koinonia* and words related to it (cognates). Finally, we make a number of concrete suggestions, to put to our churches, about how our strengthened fellowship might be expressed in practice and widened to include other partners, especially the Scottish Episcopal Church. We hope that our report will be welcomed by the General Assembly and the General Synod and that its specific recommendations will be approved and implemented.

2 WHO ARE WE? INTRODUCING OUR CHURCHES TO EACH OTHER

THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

The Church of Scotland is present in parishes throughout Scotland and it has congregations, traditionally of expatriate Scots, in England, on mainland Europe, in Bermuda, Sri Lanka and in Jerusalem and Tiberias. Altogether it has 1,464 congregations which are grouped geographically into more than forty presbyteries. At the end of 2008 there were 1,165 charges with 969 ministers serving them. There are around 200 vacant charges at any given time. The total membership recorded on the rolls of the Church at the end of 2008 was 471,894. This does not include a large number of adherents who, particularly in the North and North West of Scotland, belong to a culture in which communicant membership tends to be taken up later in life.

Church of Scotland ministers also serve in administration, in work place, hospital, university and college, prison, and forces chaplaincies. There are 45 Auxiliary Ministers and 59 members of the Diaconate. There are around 350 Readers.

An ancient Church

The roots of the Church of Scotland go back to the missionary activity of St Ninian around 400AD and St Columba who died in 597 and is associated with the founding of Iona Abbey, an ecumenical pilgrimage centre to this day. The Scottish Church was distinctive, celebrating Easter according to the Eastern calendar until the Synod of Whitby in 664 when the western date was adopted, bringing the Church in North Britain into line with the Church in the South.

In the Middle Ages Scotland began to find its identity as a nation, something that was to lead to hundreds of years of tension with England. Under the saintly leadership of Queen Margaret (1046-1093) the Church in Scotland was reformed. It became part of the medieval Catholic Church, as opposed to the Celtic Church which dominated the northern part of the country. Mass was said in Latin rather than the multitude of Gaelic dialects spoken throughout Scotland. The Scottish Church was established with its own hierarchy. It is said that in doing this Queen Margaret was not only trying to unite the Scots, but also to bring unity between England and Scotland after years of bloody conflict. She was canonised by Pope Ambrose in 1250.

A Scottish Church

Despite the influence of Queen Margaret, hostilities continued with England and indeed with the papacy. By the early fourteenth century, the Church in Scotland had been excommunicated by the Pope in Avignon for warring with its neighbour to the South. The result was the most famous document of Scottish history. In 1320, with the support of Scottish clergy, a document was drawn up on behalf of the nobles and barons of Scotland – The Declaration of Arbroath. While it can be dismissed as merely a diplomatic letter to the Pope, justifying the continuing warfare between

Scotland and its neighbour when they should have been united in fighting in the Crusades, an examination of the text reveals the document to be the first expression of a contractual monarchy. There was no ‘divine right of kings’ in Scotland. The monarch was there by the choice of the people. This declaration of independence from England, not only sets out the relationship between the Scottish monarch and the people, it was also to give Scotland its particular self-understanding within which the relation between church and state would evolve.

A Reformed Church

By the early sixteenth century, some in Scotland were beginning to find that the doctrines, practices, abuses and superstitions of the Catholic Church together with papal authority were no longer meeting their needs. An élite within Scottish society were eager to embrace the modern world. It was a country that was fertile soil for the teachings of the Reformers, first of Martin Luther and then of John Calvin. Scotland was caught in a struggle between England and France, the one Protestant, the other Catholic, to secure marriage with the infant Queen Mary in what became called the ‘rough wooing’. While France triumphed, the intellectual élite, attracted to the thinking of the Reformers and fearing loss of independence to France, brought their influence to bear on the Scottish Parliament. In 1560 the Parliament renounced the Pope’s authority and declared the Mass illegal. John Knox was a colleague of John Calvin in Geneva and learned much from him that would be formative for the development of the Church of Scotland. He returned to Scotland in 1559 when England proved to be too hostile a prospect for him, following the publication of his book *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment² of Women*, which though written against Mary of Guise in Scotland and Mary Tudor in England greatly displeased Elizabeth I. The Reformation of the Church in Scotland began to shape itself as a Presbyterian Church influenced by the Genevan model. The Scots Confession was drawn up in a very few days by Knox and others in 1560. The First Book of Discipline (1560) was followed by the Second (1578). But it would not be until 1690 that the Revolution Settlement would finally establish the Reformed, Presbyterian Church as the Established Church of Scotland. Up to this point the Church of Scotland had retained Episcopalian and Presbyterian elements, with the emphasis falling variously on one more than on the other. Now there came into existence a separate Episcopalian Church. In the century leading up to this point, both the political and religious history of the Scottish people remained turbulent, as the ‘killing times’ put Covenanters (those who had signed the National Covenant in protest at the attempt by Charles I and Archbishop Laud to impose a new liturgy and Prayer Book on the Scottish Church) and Royalists against one another.

A Presbyterian Church

The Covenanters had, through the signing of the Solemn League and Covenant, aligned themselves with the Westminster Parliament. They sent representatives to the Westminster Assembly at which reform of the Church of England was debated. The

² ‘Regiment’ is here used in the sense of ‘rule’ which applied to both Scotland and England, both of which were governed by a Catholic Queen – Mary of Guise in Scotland and Mary Tudor in England.

Scots were disappointed that the model of Presbyterianism in Scotland which was sought for England failed to materialise. The related documents – The Directory for Public Worship, the Westminster Confession of Faith, The Form of Presbyterial Government, the Form Process and two Catechisms – continued to hold significant influence in the Scottish Church. Indeed, the Westminster Confession of Faith remains the Principal Subordinate Standard of the Church of Scotland to this day.

The Church of Scotland is shaped by a hierarchy of courts – the Kirk Session, the Presbytery, the Synod (now defunct) and the General Assembly. Until recently, each court had a Moderator, who was an ordained minister. (Nowadays a deacon or elder can be Moderator of a Church court.) Through this structure, the Church sought to provide for the spiritual needs of the people of Scotland, which included their need for education and health.

An established Church

In 1707 the Union of the Parliaments left the Church's continuing Scottish governance protected. The British sovereign was obliged to preserve Presbyterian Church government in Scotland (an obligation that is reiterated annually at the General Assembly) and the Church enjoyed exemption from civil oversight in matters of doctrine, discipline and Church government. But turbulence continued both within the Church and between the Church and the civil authorities. In the latter part of the eighteenth and into the nineteenth centuries, there was a period of secessions and disruption. The secessions in the second half of the eighteenth century were all in some way connected to patronage and the ways in which Presbyterians understood the separate jurisdictions of church and state. These fissures came to a head in the Disruption of 1843. At issue was the 'interference' by civil authorities in the appointment of a minister to a parish. Thomas Chalmers took a leading role, stating clearly that the only communication between Church and state was that the state had a duty to maintain religion, an Establishment principle along the Geneva model, as distinct from civil involvement in the governance of the Church. A series of court cases in which the civil court, the Court of Session, was deemed to have acted with powers that had never been conferred on it, led to the 'Protest' – the sending of a letter to the government setting out the objections to this usurping of the Church's 'natural authority'. The Church split over this, but the rupture was about the relation between Church and state and how the Establishment principle of separate but equal jurisdictions was being honoured by the civil authorities.

A national Church

The first decades of the twentieth century focused on the move to reunite the parties that had split in 1843. The bulk of the Free Church had now become the United Free Church through reunions with earlier secession churches. The United Free Church called for the disestablishment and disendowment of the Church of Scotland. Both churches were committed to the Reformed principle of the religious duty of the civil magistrate but the United Free Church feared a lack of spiritual independence. The problem for the United Free Church was that if the state conferred spiritual independence on the Church through legislation, as the Established Church wanted,

that implied subordination of the Church to the State. The United Free Church felt the independence should come about through autonomous action of the Church.

The negotiations came to their fulfilment in the 1921 Church of Scotland Act. Through this Act the Church of Scotland's power to determine its doctrines and purposes was recognised. It was a freedom that few other churches have; to alter its theological self-understanding from time to time without risking civil action from a discontented minority who contest a move away from a single point of revelation. The Church of Scotland has an unprecedented freedom to change enshrined within its constitution. Appended to the 1921 Act were The Declaratory Articles³ which were prepared by the Established Church and had previously been approved by the General Assemblies of both Churches. The Articles make clear the independent jurisdiction of the Church (Article III) and, while maintaining a separate, spiritual duty under God for the civil magistrate, make it clear that that duty does not impinge on the life of the Church, other than to promote its welfare (Article VI).

But the 1921 Act was not a disestablishing Act. Effective disestablishment of the Church of Scotland came about in two separate Acts of Parliament – the Church Patronage (Scotland Act) of 1874 and the Church of Scotland (Property and Endowment) Act of 1925. While vestiges of Establishment remain within the life of the Church of Scotland, there are none that seriously impinge on the Church's legal life except when major constitutional change is discussed e.g. the discussion of the Union Settlement which includes the Act of Settlement. The Church of Scotland is, however, a national church with territorial responsibility, at least for the time being. (Declaratory Article III)

An ecumenical Church

The Articles Declaratory not only state that the Church of Scotland is part of the Holy Catholic or Universal Church (Article I), they also place on the Church 'the obligation to seek and promote union with other Churches in which it finds the Word of God purely preached, the sacraments administered according to Christ's ordinance, and discipline rightly exercised; and it has the right to unite with any such Church without loss of its identity on terms which this Church finds to be consistent with these Articles' (Article VII).

From the later nineteenth century the Church of Scotland has been involved in the modern ecumenical movement. Beginning with the formation of an alliance of Presbyterian Churches (today's World Alliance of Reformed Churches and soon to become the World Communion of Reformed Churches), the Church of Scotland has been a significant player in the formation of the Scottish Churches Council (now Action for Churches Together in Scotland), the British Council of Churches (now Churches Together in Britain and Ireland), the World Council of Churches and the Conference of European Churches. It was an early signatory to the Leuenberg Concordat which brought into being the fellowship of churches now known as the Community of Protestant Church in Europe.

³ <http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/extranet/xchurchlaw/xchurchlawarticles.htm>

It has encouraged union talks with other churches in the past but has been less willing to approve proposals when they are drawn up. It continues to support the formation of Local Ecumenical Partnerships as part of its overall mission to the people of Scotland.

A Church in transition

Today many aspects of the Church's life are under discussion as the Church seeks to fulfil its mission as a national church within the changed context that is twenty-first century Scotland. Like all churches in the West it is seeking to address a post-modern, secular, multi-cultural and multi-faith society. It is seriously addressing how it can remain present and relevant in areas of profound poverty and in sparsely populated rural areas. And it does so, according to the first Article Declaratory, as part of 'the Holy Catholic or Universal Church; worshipping one God ... in the Trinity of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit ...; confessing our Lord Jesus Christ ...; glorifying in his cross and resurrection ... trusting the promised renewal and guidance of the Holy Spirit; proclaiming the forgiveness of sins ...; and labouring for the advancement of the Kingdom of God throughout the world: adhering to the Scottish Reformation; receiving the Word of God contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as its supreme rule of faith and life; and avowing the fundamental doctrines of the Catholic faith founded thereupon.'

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

The Church of England consists of the two provinces of Canterbury and York and is further divided into forty four dioceses and 13,150 parishes. It covers the whole of England, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man and there are also a few parishes in Wales and congregations and chaplaincies belonging to the Diocese in Europe in continental Europe, Morocco, Turkey and the Asian countries that used to be part of the Soviet Union.

The Church of England has over 20,000 clergy, Readers and Church Army officers in active ministry and thousands of other authorised lay ministers.

Almost half the population of England regard themselves as belonging to the Church of England with around 1.7 million people attending services each month and about one million each Sunday. Around 3 million people attend Church of England services on Christmas Day or Christmas Eve.

An ancient Church

The roots of the Church of England go back to the time of the Roman Empire when a Christian church came into existence in what was then the Roman province of Britain. The early Christian writers Tertullian and Origen mention the existence of a British church in the third century AD and in the fourth century British bishops attended a number of the great councils of the Church such as the Council of Arles in 314 and the Council of Rimini in 359. The first member of the British church whom we know

by name is St Alban, who, tradition tells us, was martyred for his faith on the spot where St Albans Abbey now stands.

The British church was a missionary church with figures such as St Illtud, St Ninian and St Patrick evangelising in Wales, Scotland and Ireland, but the invasions by the pagan Angles, Saxons and Jutes in the fifth century seem to have destroyed the organisation of the church in much of what is now England. In 597 a mission sent by Pope Gregory the Great and led by St Augustine of Canterbury landed in Kent to begin the work of converting these pagan peoples. What eventually became known as the Church of England (the *Ecclesia Anglicana* – or the English Church) was the result of a combination of three streams of Christianity, the Roman tradition of St Augustine and his successors, the remnants of the old Romano-British church and the Celtic tradition coming down from Scotland and associated with people like St Aidan and St Cuthbert.

An English Church

These three streams came together as a result of increasing mutual contact and a number of local synods, of which the Synod of Whitby in 664 has traditionally been seen as the most important. The result was an English Church, led by the two Archbishops of Canterbury and York (with the Archbishop of Canterbury being the senior), that was fully assimilated into the mainstream of the Christian Church of the west. This meant that it was influenced by the wider development of the Western Christian tradition in matters such as theology, liturgy, church architecture, and the development of monasticism. It also meant that until the Reformation in the 16th century the Church of England acknowledged the authority of the Pope.

A reformed Church

At the Reformation the Western Church became divided between those who continued to accept Papal authority and the various Protestant churches that repudiated it. The Church of England was among the churches that broke with Rome. The catalyst for this decision was the refusal of the Pope to annul the marriage of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon, but underlying this was a Tudor nationalist belief that authority over the English Church properly belonged to the English monarchy. In the reign of Henry's son Edward VI the Church of England underwent further reformation, driven by the conviction that the theology being developed by the theologians of the Protestant Reformation was more faithful to the teaching of the Bible and the Early Church than the teaching of those who continued to support the Pope.

In the reign of Mary Tudor the Church of England once again submitted to Papal authority. However, this policy was reversed when Elizabeth I came to the throne in 1558.

The religious settlement that eventually emerged in the reign of Elizabeth gave the Church of England the distinctive identity that it has retained to this day. It resulted in a Church that consciously retained a large amount of continuity with the Church of

the Patristic and Medieval periods in terms of its use of the catholic creeds, its retention of the three ancient ministerial orders of bishops, priests and deacons, its buildings and aspects of its liturgy, but which also embodied Protestant insights in its theology and in the overall shape of its liturgical practice. The way that this is often expressed is by saying that the Church of England is both ‘catholic and reformed.’

At the end of the 16th century Richard Hooker produced the classic defence of the Elizabethan settlement in his *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, a work which sought to defend the Church of England against its Puritan critics who wanted further changes to make the Church of England more like the churches of Geneva or Scotland.

The theology that developed during the Reformation period is most authoritatively expressed in the Church of England’s three ‘historic formularies,’ the *Thirty Nine Articles*, the *Book of Common Prayer* and the *1662 Ordinal*. The doctrine of the Church of England is grounded in Holy Scripture, the teaching of the Fathers and Councils of the early centuries of the Church and the witness of these formularies.

An established Church

In the 17th century continuing tensions within the Church of England over theological and liturgical issues were among the factors that led to the English Civil War. The Church was associated with the losing Royalist side and during the period of the Commonwealth from 1649-1660 its bishops were abolished and its prayer book, the Book of Common Prayer, was banned. With the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 this situation was reversed and in 1662 those clergy who could not accept this decision were forced to leave their posts. These dissenting clergy and their congregations were then persecuted until 1689 when the Toleration Act gave legal existence to those Protestant groups outside the Church of England who accepted the doctrine of the Trinity.

The settlement of 1689 has remained the basis of the constitutional position of the Church of England ever since, a constitutional position in which the Church of England has remained the established Church with a range of particular legal privileges and responsibilities, but with ever increasing religious and civil rights being granted to other Christians, those of other faiths and those professing no faith at all.

As well as being the established Church in England, the Church of England has also become the mother church of the Anglican Communion, a group of thirty eight separate churches that are in communion with the Archbishop of Canterbury and for whom he is the focus of unity.

A comprehensive Church

The history of the Church of England from the 18th century onwards has been enriched by the co-existence within it of three broad traditions, the Evangelical, the Catholic and the Liberal.

The Evangelical tradition has emphasized the significance of the Protestant aspects of the Church of England's identity, stressing the importance of the authority of Scripture, preaching, justification by faith and personal conversion.

The Catholic tradition, strengthened and reshaped from the 1830s by the Oxford movement, has emphasized the significance of the continuity between the Church of England and the Church of the Early and Medieval periods. It has stressed the importance of the visible Church and its sacraments and the belief that the ministry of bishops, priests and deacons is a sign and instrument of the Church of England's Catholic and apostolic identity.

The Liberal tradition has emphasized the importance of the use of reason in theological exploration. It has stressed the need to develop Christian belief and practice in order to respond creatively to wider advances in human knowledge and understanding and the importance of social and political action in forwarding God's kingdom.

It should be noted that these three traditions have not existed in strict isolation. Both in the case of individuals and in the case of the Church as a whole, influences from all three traditions have overlapped in a whole variety of different ways. It also needs to be noted that since the 1960's a fourth influence, the Charismatic movement, has become increasingly important. This has emphasized the importance of the Church being open to renewal through the work of the Holy Spirit. Its roots lie in Evangelicalism but it has influenced people from a variety of different traditions.

A Church committed to mission and unity

From the 18th century onwards the Church of England has also been faced with a number of challenges that it continues to face today.

There has been the challenge of responding to social changes in England such as population growth, urbanisation and the development of an increasingly multi-cultural and multi-faith society.

There has been the challenge of engaging in mission in a society that has become increasingly materialist in outlook and in which belief in God or interest in 'spiritual' matters is not seen as being linked to involvement with the life of the Church.

There has been the challenge of providing sufficient and sufficiently trained clergy and lay ministers to enable the Church of England to carry out its responsibility to provide ministry and pastoral care for every parish in the country.

There has been the challenge of trying to overcome the divisions of the past by developing closer relationships between the Church of England and other churches and trying to move with them towards the goal of full visible unity.

As this brief account has shown, the changes that have taken place in the Church of England over the centuries have been many and various. What has remained constant, however, has been the Church's commitment to the faith 'uniquely revealed in the

Holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds,' its maintenance of the traditional three fold order of ministry, and its determination to bring the grace of God to the whole nation through word and sacrament in the power of the Holy Spirit.

3 WHERE DO WE FIND OURSELVES TODAY? THE CONTEXT OF OUR FELLOWSHIP

THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

To understand where we find ourselves today, we need to look back at least half a century. Scotland in the nineteen-fifties, like England, was emerging from war. Inevitably there are similar trends to be found north of the border as in the South, though the extent to which Scotland was affected and the way in which it and the churches reacted were sometimes quite different from England. Statistical measures of decline mirror those of England. Church membership peaked in 1934 at 1,290,271 communicants and has been steadily declining since then. In 2008, 471,894 communicant members were recorded. The number of baptisms has declined from 63,968 in 1891 to 6,154 in 2008. However, in the nineteen-fifties, the Church of Scotland still held significant influence. Without a parliament of its own, the public gallery of the Church of Scotland's Assembly Hall was filled to capacity each year to hear the Report of the Church and Nation Committee. This report provided an annual reflection on the state of the nation. Quite the largest cross-section of Scottish people were able to engage in public debate on issues of political, social and ethical importance both in relation to the nation of Scotland and in response to significant international affairs. Today, while the reports of the Church and Society Council are more expertly researched and are still appreciated and sometimes publicly acknowledged by politicians and representatives of other agencies, there is little public draw to the debates themselves. The reason for this can be related both to the tendency to side-line the voice of main-stream churches in the public square in an increasingly secular society and the existence now of the Scottish Parliament as the arena for public debate in Scotland.

The political context

Scots, responding to grinding poverty, were key players in the founding of the Labour Party at the beginning of the twentieth century and Scots have remained a driving force within the Labour Movement. Consistently, a majority of Scots have voted Labour in General Elections and Scots have held senior positions in the Labour Party both in Opposition and in Government. A nadir in Scotland's political relations within the United Kingdom came in the Thatcher years when Scotland felt alienated by policies for which there was little or no Scottish support. The trialling of the Poll Tax in Scotland added insult to injury and there emerged a growing call for devolution. By the nineteen seventies there was also a growing Nationalist movement. The Scottish National Party won its first seat in Parliament in 1967, and today it forms a minority administration within the Scottish Parliament. The vote that brought them into power in 2007 was widely seen as a protest against Tony Blair's Government and its decision to take the country into war in Iraq.

Since 1946, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland has frequently considered matters of constitutional reform and while the reports have reflected changes in the socio-economic context (plans for nationalisation in 1946 and the discovery of North Sea Oil in the nineteen seventies) the position taken has been remarkably consistent. In 1946, 1947, 1948, 1949, 1955 and 1987 the General

Assembly called for a greater measure of devolution. In 1951, 1962 and 1967 there was a call for responsible control by the people of Scotland over their own affairs. There was call for ‘home rule’ in 1952 and for ‘self-government’ in 1961, 1968, 1969, 1974, 1975, 1976, 1977, 1979, 1980 and 1982. The proposed democratically elected body was variously called an elected national authority (1966), legislative assembly (1974, 1988) or Parliament (1976, 1978, 1991 and 1993).⁴ The method of election favoured was proportional representation, a modified version of which was adopted for the new Scottish Parliament.

There was throughout the years of debate a conviction that Scotland had something distinctive to contribute to the United Kingdom, and indeed the world: a distinctiveness that was being threatened by increased centralisation of power. Through the involvement of the Churches in Scotland, support for devolution was set within a wider context of concern for spiritual and moral renewal in Scottish life.

A referendum to gage support for devolution in Scotland in 1979 failed to gain the required 40% of the electorate in favour but the issue did not disappear. In 1988, a committee of prominent Scots issued a report that was entitled ‘A Claim of Right for Scotland’. This called for a Scottish Constitutional Convention to draw up proposals for the setting up of a Scottish Assembly or Parliament and to assert the right of the Scottish people to implement the scheme. The Constitutional convention came into being in 1989. The Scottish National Party and the Conservative Party took no part in it. The other mainline parties did, as did the Scottish Trades Union Congress, Regional, District and Islands Councils, the Federation of Small Businesses, ethnic minority representatives, the Scottish Women’s Forum and the main Scottish Churches. The first Scottish Parliament since 1707 was formally opened by the Queen on 1st July 1999. With the Parliament has come a growing confidence in Scotland’s distinctive contribution to the United Kingdom and to the world.

The Church of Scotland established, with the participation of other churches, a Parliamentary Office to ensure good channels of communication between the churches and the political structures. The Advisory Group has representation from a broad spectrum of churches in Scotland. The Officer supplies the churches with regular updates of the legislation being processed by the Parliament and is a channel through which representatives of the churches can make contact with Government Ministers and officials so that the voices of the churches are heard. It is strictly not a lobbying role and is now extended also to include relations with the Westminster Government.

Scotland’s industry

The socio-economic context of Scotland in the twentieth century has been greatly shaped by its industry. Throughout the first part of the century there was a great dependence on coal, iron and steel manufacture, and shipbuilding. Around the coast, the Scottish fishing fleet was large and growing ever more sophisticated. Industrial decline began in the nineteen-sixties. By 2002 there were no deep coal mines left and

⁴ The Church of Scotland, *General Assembly 1997* (Edinburgh: Pillans & Wilson Greenway, 1997), p. 11/10

relatively few surface mines. By 1992 the giant Ravenscraig steelworks in Motherwell was the last of a long line of steel work closures in Strathclyde. Shipbuilding too has all but disappeared with continued work now almost entirely for military use. Deep-sea fishing is reduced to a very small fleet, crippled by quotas and over-fishing. In place of the heavy industry came new technologies. Around the new town of Livingston there emerged Scotland's 'silicon glen'. But the new technologies turned out to be a fickle replacement for the traditional heavy industries as the effects of globalisation meant that it became cheaper to manufacture the components in other parts of the world. Aberdeen, on the other hand, grew rich through the North Sea oil industry and has become one of the most expensive places to stay in the United Kingdom. Edinburgh grew rich on banking and commerce until it was severely rocked by the banking collapse in 2008. Fish farming has brought new opportunities to rural areas. Because of its vast expanses of wilderness and long shoreline, Scotland has also become critical for the provision and development of alternative energy sources.

Throughout this time, industrial chaplaincy developed as an ecumenical ministry, bringing the care of the Church's ministry to those who often had no other connection with the Church. Accompanying workers and management through industrial dispute, providing counselling and worship in times of disaster, to walking the floors of shopping malls, the model of workplace chaplaincy has been modified over the years to better respond to the changing patterns and needs of Scotland's working community.

Leading the way on science and technology

By 1970 it was clear that advances in science and technology were not without large ethical implications. There were issues related to nuclear power and what to do with the waste. People were beginning to realise that the earth's resources were finite and would not last forever. These were deeply religious concerns about how people live their lives and how they relate to their environment. The Church needed someone who could bring scientists and theologians together so that the Church was properly informed. So began the Society, Religion and Technology Project. The Project, now a department of the Church & Society Council, has been run by the Church of Scotland but has drawn widely from other denominations for its membership. Over the years this work has been well-respected beyond Scotland. It has dealt with difficult issues going beyond nuclear power to look at renewable energy sources, cloning, stem cell research, environmental issues and climate change and also nano-technology. In all these areas the Church of Scotland has tried to deal responsibly with advances in science and technology through an honest dialogue with the principles of the Christian faith.

Scotland's economy

Scotland is a land of economic contrasts. For some the social changes of the twentieth century have brought new opportunities for education, health and wealth creation. On the other hand there are those who belong to families that have known several generations of unemployment. Glasgow has the unenviable accolade of being the

poorest city in Western Europe and one of the poorest in Europe. In one part of the city, the difference in life expectancy for a man living in neighbouring postcode areas is twenty years. Violence is endemic in some areas – both domestic violence and knife crime on the streets. Alcoholism is identified as a particular problem within Scottish culture and so now would be drug addiction. The degree of poverty and its seeming intractable nature has led the Church to address the issue on several occasions over the years. In 2009 the Church and Society Council put the spotlight on child poverty. In other years it has looked at debt, drug and alcohol addiction, unemployment, housing and homelessness. In 2002 a significant report was brought to the Assembly: ‘Sharing the Pain – Holding the Hope’⁵. It put the spotlight on the poorest communities in the country – all in cities, and most in Glasgow. It portrayed a scenario that would see a financially stretched church, with insufficient ministers serving in mainly urban, middle class parishes, in effect abandoning the poorest communities. It also pointed up the appalling standard of many of the church buildings in priority areas, many of them built in the nineteen-sixties and seventies. The report threw down a challenge to the Boards and Committees of the Church to hear the voices of the poorest and to see how they could alter their policies to support these struggling communities. The following year a joint report from all the main boards and committees acknowledged the scale of worsening poverty in Scotland. The report concluded: ‘The time for concerted action must begin. Without it, the face of the Church of Scotland in our poorest communities will simply disappear. With it, we can again be heralds of the good news of the Gospel, not just for the poorest areas, but also throughout the land. This is the challenge facing the whole Church, not just the churches in UPAs.’⁶

The Priority Areas Committee was given significant resources to enable it to make a difference. It worked, and continues to work, not only ecumenically but also in an inter faith context and in partnership with other organisations addressing the needs of Scotland’s poorest communities. Most recently it was involved in setting up a ‘Poverty Truth Commission’ in which people from the poorest communities told their stories to leading politicians and business people. The work of the Commission continues ensuring that those in poor communities have a say in what happens in their communities in an effort to eradicate the blight of poverty on so many of Scotland’s people.

Marriage and the family⁷

Along with the rest of Britain, marriages have been steadily falling since 1971 when there were 42,500 in contrast to 28,903 in 2008. Of these just under 20,000 took place in the Church of Scotland in 1971 and about 10,000 in 2008. The statistics for divorce rose from 1971 when it stood at 4,812. It reached a peak in 1985 when there were 13,365. In 2008 11,474 were recorded, a decrease on the previous two years. The Church of Scotland has permitted the remarriage of divorced people under certain conditions since 1959.

Women in Church and Society

⁵ The Church of Scotland, *The General Assembly 2002* (Edinburgh, 2002) p. 20/13

⁶ The Church of Scotland, *General Assembly 2003* (Edinburgh) p. 22/6

⁷ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/index.html>

The role of women in Scotland changed after the war, just as it did in the rest of the United Kingdom and the Western world. More women went out to work and, with the increase in marital breakdown, there has been an increase in the number of single parent families. Women have followed vocations into a wide variety of professions which had until the middle twentieth century been firmly the domain of men. The Church was no different. By 1966 the General Assembly had accepted that there was no theological reason why women could not be ordained to the eldership. In 1968 an Act was passed which stated that women could serve as ministers on the same terms and conditions as men. The issue was not primarily one of women's rights. A woman with a call to the ministry of Word and Sacrament presented herself before the Church and asked that her call be tested. Over the years the number of women elders has increased. In some Kirk Sessions women exceed the number of men. There are still some congregations who do not ordain women to the eldership, despite several clarifications by the General Assembly that the legislation was not simply permissive – you can ordain women if you like. Rather, the legislation was saying something about the way the Church of Scotland understands the nature of the Church. The percentage of women ministers has seldom risen above 30% and is currently falling. Research is being made into this phenomenon and a report is anticipated. By the fortieth anniversary of the ordination of women to the Ministry in 2008, only two had become the convener of a significant national body, the Board of National Mission (1990) and the Church and Nation Committee (1996), one woman elder had been elected as Moderator (2004) and one woman minister (2007) who was not at that time serving in a Parish.

Sexuality

The context of the debate on human sexuality is similar to that of England. The Church of Scotland too has found it very difficult to respond to the demand for gay rights both generally and in relation to the ordination of men and women in committed same sex partnerships. In 1983 the then Board of Social Responsibility brought a report which aimed to remove the worst prejudices and misunderstandings that surround homosexuality, while at the same time concluding that sexual relations inside marriage and chastity outwith was the only Christian view to take. In 1993 and 1994 the Panel on Doctrine brought reports on the Theology of Marriage. The 1993 report was uncontentious. The second part, in 1994, was very controversial in the Church and attracted a lot of media attention. It opened up the contemporary debate on cohabitation and same gender relationships. It was published in the same year as a report on human sexuality from the Board of Social Responsibility. The two reports were accompanied by resolutions that were contradictory. The General Assembly agreed to discuss the two reports and not to take decisions related to the resolutions and it asked representatives of the Panel, the Board of Social Responsibility and the then Board of Parish Education to produce study guidelines to help the Church to explore at congregational level the issues raised in the two report.

The issue had largely lain dormant since then, until the Committee on Human Sexuality brought its first report in 2007. This opened the way for a careful process of listening, again with materials to assist local conversations. It was an open-ended process and did not necessarily seek a common mind so much as an understanding

that different perspectives could be held within one church and accepted as positions held with integrity of faith. And so the matter might have rested for some time but for the case of the induction of a minister in a gay partnership to a church in Aberdeen in 2009. This raised the spectre of division within the Church of Scotland. The General Assembly appointed a Special Commission to consult with presbyteries and Kirk Sessions and to report in 2011. The Church of Scotland is not immune to the painful and deep divisions caused by Christians seeking to be faithful in a contemporary society that by and large accepts practising same gender relations as an uncontroversial reality.

Re-shaping the life and structure of the Church

By the end of the nineteen-sixties there was a growing feeling that the Church of Scotland was, to borrow a later phrase, ‘not fit for purpose’. Some were feeling that it was unable to engage adequately with a changing society. The Church and Nation Committee felt that uncoordinated initiatives were not the answer and so called for the setting up of a special commission. The Committee of Forty was formed in 1971 with the express remit ‘to interpret for the Church the purpose towards which God is calling his people in Scotland, to investigate and assess the resources of the Church in persons and property for the fulfilment of this purpose, and to make recommendations for the re-shaping of the life and structure of the Church.’⁸

By the end of the decade, the Committee was producing its final reports. It called for a new missionary response in the face of the sheer number and complexity of the issues facing society. The pace and scale of change had disrupted the layers of human life, including the way of life and the political and institutional arrangements that shaped society. No area of life was unaffected, including belief.

The Committee produced a leaflet, ‘A Church on Fire’, for study throughout the Church. It had recommendations for the proper functioning of Presbyteries, the Eldership, the General Assembly and its Committees, Part-time Ministry and Training for Ministry.

The final report came in 1978 and was produced in a popular version as ‘People with a Purpose’. The Scottish context was outlined from the birth of a Scottish identity in the thirteenth century and the struggle ever since to find a way of giving it proper political expression. It acknowledged that the political and religious impact of the Geneva model of the Reformation had been, and still was immense. The characteristic organisational form of Presbyterianism that had been fixed in 1690 had changed little since then, even though the national life of Scotland had been altered significantly by the advent of the technological society, the consequent secularisation, and a significant presence of Christians of other church traditions. By the end of the seventies the majority of people in Scotland had effectively no church connection. People were on the move. Traditional crafts had been destroyed and wealth had shifted into new hands. New opportunities were opened up but few of them provided a vision or purpose in life. In relation to faith, people now felt free to pick and choose

⁸ The Church of Scotland, *Reports to the General Assembly 1971* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Sons Ltd) p. ⁸ The Church of Scotland, *General Assembly 1997* (Edinburgh: Pillans & Wilson Greenway, 1997), p. 11/10198

what they would believe, drawing from different faiths and philosophies. Uniformity in belief and worship had disappeared.

So while Scottish people, like the rest of the Western world, had rising expectations in standards of living, the availability of consumer goods, the change in the status of women, mobility and mass means of communication on the one hand; on the other, individuals faced an enormous sense of helplessness in the face of vast political and industrial power, a purposelessness in the wake of the upsetting of traditional beliefs, a self-centredness, which compounded with all the other factors, was breeding frustration and violence.

The Committee of Forty advised the church to stop making its priority the running after nominal members and, instead, to minister to the needs of the deprived areas, the unemployed and those who had dropped out of this new, competitive world. This was the Church's mission and it was not to be denominational. A new note of self-criticism was sounded: 'Too often we in the Church of Scotland tend to give the impression that we do not need our brothers and sisters in Christ, or our brothers and sisters not yet in Christ, and that we can get on quite well without them. That is simply unchristian, and a scandal in the Body of Christ.'⁹

A ministry of service was outlined – The Ministry of All God's People together with The Ministry of Word and Sacraments. If there was any sense in which Christianity could be talked of as 'the established faith of the whole Scottish people' in this secular age, then it could not be restricted to Presbyterianism. (page 503)

The report went even further in suggesting a restructuring of the Church of Scotland. It did not seem appropriate that a Church which claimed to live by grace and to stand in the Reformation tradition should be a church structured in terms of 'courts'. This was not the kind of language to allow experiment and new life. The Church of Scotland should pay more attention to being a 'catholic' church than a 'national' church. People from other church traditions should be involved whenever there was thinking or planning about mission or any matter affecting the community at large. This renewed Church of Scotland was to be structured for mission, called to worship, still being reformed, unafraid of change and looking outward into a world of change.

So much of the language of this report has been repeated in the decades since 1978 as successive bodies have sought to address the context in which the Church is placed. For example in 1998, the then Board of National Mission organised a conference, entitled 'Christ's mission in a Changing Scotland'.

In 2005 the Church of Scotland was restructured in its central administration in order to be leaner and fitter for resourcing local congregations in their response to the changed context in which they found themselves: a society in which people still held an interest in spiritual matters but in which they did not find what they were looking for in the church.

⁹ The Church of Scotland, *Reports to the General Assembly 1978* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Sons Ltd) p. 501.

Responding to a multicultural and a multi-faith society

The Church of Scotland set about addressing the barriers to belief that had been identified through a survey in the late nineties. An Apologetics Committee was set up which continues to this day as a Committee with ecumenical membership.

From the nineteen fifties there has been a growing community of people of Asian origin, most of whom are Muslim, Sikh or Hindu. This began with migration from Pakistan and continued with the expulsion of Asians from Idi Amin's Uganda. In more recent times, a policy of dispersal of asylum seekers and refugees and the freedom of movement in an expanding European Union resulted in many more people making a home in Scotland. Immigration of large numbers of Polish people has changed the shape of the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland and priests have come from Poland to take care of this significant community. Scotland, however, has been slow to take up the issues of inter faith relations. The Moderator and Principal Clerk are part of a Faith Leaders' meeting which meets twice a year under the auspices of the Inter Faith Council. This meeting began in the wake of the September 11 bombings and was well placed to respond to the attempted bombing of Glasgow airport in 2007. In recent years the Church of Scotland has supported a part-time appointment aimed at resourcing local congregations and supporting them in feeling more confident in meeting their neighbours. In this area Scotland has been dependent on expertise in England.

Changing patterns of Ministry

Moving on from the Committee of Forty, the Church continued to search for a model of ministry that was relevant to changing times. A shortage of ministers was addressed by introducing a process of discernment prior to selection school. However, more intractable was the unwillingness of ministers to serve in parishes outside the Central Belt and the main centres of population. In 2000, a seminal report was published 'Ministers of the Gospel: a policy statement for the Board of Ministry'.

Suggestions for an appropriate model for ordained ministry included: team ministry and group practice. It required people of passion, with good interpersonal skills, who were able to work with other churches and were committed to life-long learning; people who could see the Church as a partner, not merely internally with other denominations through ecumenical co-operation, but also externally with society at large. It had become clear that ministry had to be seen in broader terms. It had to include church members who were exercising their role within the ministry of the whole people of God. The vision has still to be fulfilled. Now with the added pressure of financial constraint, difficult decisions about ministry need to be taken. As with the Church of England, there is a new readiness to explore ways in which the traditional patterns of church life and worship might be adapted. The Church of England report, *Mission Shaped Church*, has been widely studied and ideas have been shared between the two churches, particularly around 'Fresh Expressions'. Models are being sought to provide ordained ministry in places remote from the Central Belt. Proposals are anticipated that will address the shape of the regional church, an area that was left open by the 'Church Without Walls' report, and the extent to which the Church of Scotland can continue to provide a territorial ministry through Scotland.

Conclusion

There are few certainties left in our time, other than the certainty of change. As the churches wrestle with the changes that have an impact on their life and work, the Church of Scotland continues to review its role. The focus has become overwhelmingly internal. The thought that the future might be ecumenical glows only dimly: the conviction that when things get tough you do more things together, not less, has proved hard to put into practice. Instead, we do our own thing, taking into account how others have done it before us, or keeping in touch with those who are doing something similar. Sharing has become more a sharing of information than a sharing of resources. The ecumenical instruments are disempowered by a resurgent denominationalism and all, from national to international, are facing a crisis of vision. Nevertheless, what is true for England is equally true in Scotland: there is indeed a quality of mutual affection, support and exchange between Christian churches and their members that was inconceivable fifty years ago.

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

Introduction

The ecumenical work of the churches does not happen in outer space. It happens (or fails to) in earthly historical, social and geographical settings. This section, like its Scottish twin, aims to sketch some of these settings, pointing to events, documents and developments in the churches and in wider society which have had some bearing on English and Scottish ecumenism in the period from the nineteen fifties to the present day.

There are two obvious challenges to an undertaking like this. First, the context, or landscape within which the churches are set may be earthly, but it stretches as far as the eye can see in all directions: how are we to decide what to pick out, and what to omit from the sketch? And how can we accurately represent so many and varied a range of features? These are the problems of selection and expertise. Second comes a challenge more specifically related to this enterprise: are the contexts for Scottish and English ecumenism the same or different? Should there be two sections here, or one?

To respond to the second challenge first: it would be misleading to treat the two contexts of the Church of England and the Church of Scotland as one, although they have much in common. Not only is the view different from Edinburgh to that from London, but there are two sets of history, habit and usage which cannot be simply assimilated. However, in order to take account of the wide overlap between our two landscapes, there is more space accorded in this chapter, particularly in the second section, to political, social and cultural developments which affected the whole United Kingdom and therefore impacted upon both our churches. This aims to provide some of the common context for our relationship as churches.

To the first challenge, there is no adequate response. To paint on a wide canvas is to risk errors both of detail and perspective. But the attempt to do this, and in the process to explicate some of the social, political and cultural trends which have ‘made the weather’ for our ecumenical trek is important if we are to understand where we have got to, let alone where we should now be going. And this attempt, however over-ambitious, may justify itself if it enables the reader to look from new angles at the story of this particular ecumenical journey and to weigh its achievements, failures and future afresh.

The end of an era

The nineteen fifties, viewed in retrospect, look more like the end than the beginning of an era. A major climate-shift divides that decade from ours, a shift that has altered – even revolutionised - the spheres of culture, economics, politics, technology and religion. The Church of England, in those distant days, found itself largely in harmony with the prevalent political mood of benevolent bureaucracy, and with the welfare state consensus which owed so much to R.H. Tawney & William Temple. There was something approaching an Anglican hegemony in the literary world (T.S. Eliot, C.S.Lewis, Dorothy Sayers, W.H.Auden...). Schoolboys looking for a role-model could easily fix on the England cricket captain, David Sheppard, now joining the growing ranks of young men preparing for ordination. In 1954 there were 441 newly ordained clergy; the figure rose annually to reach 632 in 1962. The numbers of candidates for confirmation also increased significantly through the decade (1950: 142,294; 1960: 190,713). In the ‘Roseworth Survey’ conducted for the ‘Paul Report’ published in 1963, every house in the Roseworth housing estate was visited – a total of 3,473 families. Of these, 60.7 % identified themselves as Church of England and 0.4% as ‘Jehovah’s Witnesses or no professed belief’. A mere 18 persons (0.2%) had not been baptised – were they too young?

In respect of the established church in England, and its place in society, this ‘Indian summer’ of the sports jacket and flannel trousers, the pipe-smoker, the stay-at-home mother and the pews filled for choral matins lasted, patchily at least, into the early sixties. It was a period which Archbishop Geoffrey Fisher matched almost too exactly.

Emblematic of so much in this whole period was the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in June 1953. It almost seemed (albeit, not without some tension and anxiety) that the ‘ancient verities’ of the historic rite and the latest technology of television outside broadcasting could be harnessed to unify a whole people in a common identity, expressed in the historic monarchy and the historic faith, both re-pristinated for a new Elizabethan age.

It was not, however, a time without rebels and reformist, with whom we in later times cannot help but identify: John Collins, with his commitment to Christian Action and Disarmament, Chad Varah, who dared talk about sex and suicide, Dame Margery Perham, persistently pressing for self-government in the African colonies.

It was, most markedly, a time of ecumenical hope. The backwash of war was channelled into a strong current of Christian yearning and work for peace and

reconciliation across Europe. Communities of inter-denominational friendship and prayer sprang up locally, while internationally the dream of a world-wide Council of Churches had become, in 1948, a lively reality, with Anglican leaders (like George Bell and, later, Oliver Tomkins) close to its heart.

The war years, however, left another legacy: of debt and disrepair - for the churches as much as the nation. The fifties became an era of restoration, as resources were gradually harnessed to the rebuilding of churches and (eventually) the improvement of parsonages. The finances of the Church of England were partially reformed and the problem of clerical poverty began to be addressed. Canon Law was put in order, offering the prospect of an end to the partisan parochial guerrilla warfare which had both blighted and entertained the pre-war church. Meanwhile, the wider Anglican Communion was negotiating the transition from an English-speaking patriarchy centred on Canterbury to an extended family of provinces knit together by a common history and a family likeness in liturgy and order.

The Reports of the Lambeth Conference of 1958 exhibit a sense of measured confidence. The Committee Report on *The Family in Contemporary Society* confronts squarely the issue of 'Family Planning' and decrees that this is a proper area for 'thoughtful and prayerful Christian decision' by the parents'. 'The means of family planning,' the Report continues, 'are in large measure matters of clinical and aesthetic choice, subject to the requirement that they be admissible to the Christian conscience' (Part 2, p. 147). At the same time, the Report concludes that 'Pre-marital intercourse can never be right' and underlines 'the imperative duty of the Church to bear faithful witness to life-long monogamy as the standard of its teaching' (Part 2, pp. 152-153). The encroachments of a tide of moral change can, it seems, be managed and, where necessary, held at bay.

The same Lambeth Conference reviewed the ever-widening ecumenical scene, as it engaged the Communion. The (united) Church of South India, which had been such a difficult and divisive topic for the 1948 Conference, is now given a clean bill of health. Detailed attention is given to the plan and scheme for Church Unity in North India, Pakistan and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), and the proposal for a rite of unification of ministries in which the laying on of hands with prayer features, whereby 'God is asked to supply whatever each may need' is given warm general endorsement. The Committee reports with satisfaction the development of direct contacts with the Russian Orthodox Church – in the form of a fortnight-long conference in Moscow in 1956. With respect to the Roman Catholic Church, however, there is no promise of dialogue.

At this point in history, there was some reason for Anglicans to suppose that steps towards unity for the divided churches of the Reformation might proceed relatively straightforwardly, as each found its way to 'take episcopacy into its system' (as the Archbishop had put it in his famous Cambridge sermon of 1946). The 1957 *Report on Relations between Anglican and Presbyterian Churches* might have been seen as a natural step in that direction. Judged by contemporary standards, of course, the Church of England's approach to sister churches was naïve. From the viewpoint of partner churches, too, the idea that Anglicans could hold out episcopacy as a kind of genetic implant, which, without erasing historic identity, would enable all to be recognisably of one family, was irritatingly condescending. Both for the Church of

England and for successive partners in dialogue with her, the shadow cast by the fifties, this period of calm before the storm in which it still seemed possible to ‘make fast the bonds of peace’ from a position of strength, would be long and deep.

Liberation and loss

Even a few days’ visit to the England of the fifties would leave today’s reader and writer mentally suffocated and, at certain points, probably outraged. Among the many changes of the intervening years, one of the most salient has been the awakening of a new realm of ethical discernment: the awareness of how social order can work to exclude, diminish and even enslave groups and individuals. The relative concord of English society before 1964 (saving the racist outburst of the 1958 Notting Hill Riots), was procured by letting that sleeping dog lie. But the churches have paid a high price for this moral gain. They have been compelled to wrestle with steep numerical decline, concomitant financial crisis, the demand for rapid change in internal ordering and ethical teaching and the threat of new divisions. They have had to get used to humility and to discover how to combine it with boldness. It is, perhaps, more remarkable that the calling to church unity has met with a continuing commitment and engagement through this period, than that the commitment and engagement has been fragile.

Although it is impossible to grasp and enumerate all the changes of the nineteen-sixties and seventies, it is important to outline at least a few of them, as they are primary elements of the context for the continuing ecumenical task.

- a. *Statistical Measures of Decline.* Every available measure indicates something near collapse in the mainstream English churches from 1963 onwards. Callum Brown’s diagnosis (in *The Death of Christian Britain*, [Abingdon, Routledge 2001]) may be disputed, but the reality and suddenness of the decline he explices cannot. In the Church of England, by 1969, the ratio of confirmands per thousand had fallen by over 32% - a decline of nearly one third in the course of six years, and a decline that has continued ever since. The decline in ordinations during the same period is made the more poignant when set alongside the confident predictions set out in the *Paul Report* (quoted above) of 1963. Extrapolating from recent trends, Leslie Paul’s figures forecast a steady increase in annual numbers to reach 809 in the year 1970. The actual figures recorded annual reductions, reaching 437 in 1970 – and going on to touch bottom at 273 in 1976. The proportion of infants being baptised declined by nearly 10% between 1960 and 1970, as did the proportion of the population being married in the Church of England. Continuing reductions had the result that by 1999 the percentage of Baptisms relative to live births was little above 20% (over against 55% in 1960) and the percentage of marriages – which is to say, a proportion of a vastly reduced number, given the prevalence of co-habiting relationships outside marriage – had halved. To take a snapshot of church attendance, in Newcastle Diocese there were, in 1960, 39,977 Easter communicants and, in 1999, 15,700.

The widely influential thesis of Grace Davie (clearly articulated in *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1994)

has emphasised the unprecedented gap in post-war Britain between statistics about religious *practice* and about religious *belief*. This has lead to a re-appraisal of over-simplified diagnoses of ‘secularisation’ as the characteristic dynamic of the age. But it does not negate the experienced reality of decline within the churches.

- b. *Technological and Scientific developments.* The radio, the (black and white, or sepia) television and the land-line telephone are the items of continuity between the domestic technology of the nineteen-fifties and today. But even that modicum of continuity is misleading. Because the *personalising* of technology and communication made possible by mobile telephone and computing equipment, and the means of data and media access that have gone with this, have been midwives to new habits of life and to the re-configuring of family, group and institutional order. Thus, technical advance and cultural – even religious – change have been interwoven. In a parallel way, scientific progress – especially in medical and genetic fields – has fostered new choices for the individual (in the prevention of birth, the management or enabling of birth, the prevention or encouragement of death) and given rise to new moral questions and perplexities.
- c. *Globalisation.* Technology has also served the advance of global capitalism, an advance which has, since the end of the nineteen-eighties, been unhindered by any potent alternative economic model. Along with increasing globalisation, in markets, in tourism, in migration and in communications, two contrasting but inter-related phenomena have developed: the infiltration of local cultures by standardized products and styles ('Coca-Cola-ization', the dominance of the English language, iconic global celebrities) and the relativising of organised beliefs and value-systems. The latter has profoundly inhibited the capacity of 'open-minded' families and churches to pass on and maintain their credal and moral tenets, with the result that so-called fundamentalist groups gain ascendancy in the retention of young adherents.
- d. *Changes in Outlook.* Initially, the seismic shaking of moral foundations which occurred in the late nineteen-sixties was tagged, 'permissiveness'. In retrospect, however, the title betrays a misconception: it implies that the key change was a change in what society decided to 'permit'. But the key change was in the inability of society, or any group within society, to govern the choices of individuals. That inability was the product partly of unprecedented prosperity, giving the power of choice to people who had never known such power, partly of technological advance and partly of loss of certainty (a loss significantly effected by globalisation, above). The interests of the free market economy have been effectively served by this increase in the power of choice, by the encouragement to think that this itself represents an unequivocal moral good ('You're worth it!') and by the linking of 'life-style choices' with the acquisition of commodities. Changes in English law relating to the 'freedoms' to shop, to drink alcohol and to bet, if need be every day of the week, have also favoured the free market rather than the churches.
- e. *Social change* Three aspects – among many – of change in social patterns and behaviour merit specific mention.

- *Women in society.* The leadership of English society in the nineteen-fifties was unashamedly patriarchal. It remained normal for women to cease paid employment immediately on marrying. It seemed that the war-time advance of women in the work-place had ended in a largely un-protesting retreat. The movement for ‘women’s liberation’ and for the gaining of equal opportunities for women has been the most momentous single influence for change in English society since that time. The grasping of opportunity coincided (in Callum Brown’s thesis) with the cancelling of women’s ‘mass subscription to the discursive domain of Christianity’ and of their role as pedagogues of Christian piety in the home. It also confronted the Church of England with the uncomfortable and unavoidable reality of its own institutional male domination.
- *Marriage and the family.* The ‘firm but fair’ traditional Christian teaching of the Lambeth fathers of 1958 on sex outside marriage and on divorce and re-marriage was not proof against the massive tide of behavioural change through the following two decades. Interestingly, steep decline in marriage rates (i.e. the percentage of the unmarried population being married in a particular year) did not begin until the late nineteen-seventies. It was matched by a steep increase in the numbers of people co-habiting. These trends continued until the middle of the current decade. The statistics for divorce show a marked increase from 1960 onwards (in thousands: 1960, 26; 1970, 63; 1980, 160; 1990, 168) only levelling off, and subsequently decreasing in the current decade (200, 155; 2007, 137). The Church of England struggled with the tension between its austere tradition and the social and pastoral reality of these changes. In 1995, the somewhat controversial Report *Something to Celebrate*, recommended dropping the phrase ‘living in sin’ to describe extra-marital sexual relationships. Only in 2002 did the Church determine to confirm as a matter of policy what some clergy had already seen as a right they were at liberty to exercise – that the decision to re-marry divorced persons be taken by the parish priest. Guidelines were issued suggesting that parish clergy seek the ‘advice’ of the Bishop.
- *Homosexuality.* The discourse of human rights became increasingly accepted in the nineteen-seventies and helped to provide a common thread linking concern for the just treatment of groups seen as suffering from disadvantage. This discourse, in conjunction with the new mood of sexual liberation and the gradual emergence of the notion of a ‘rainbow’ society, in which respect for otherness tended to replace the upholding of normative social and moral traditions, allowed new claims for recognition and affirmation to be made by gay and lesbian people and to be (relatively quickly) accepted by the wider society. The Church of England supported the proposal of the Wolfenden Commission (1957) to decriminalise homosexual behaviour between consenting adults in private, which ultimately became law in 1967.

Beyond this, however, the church found itself – quite painfully-internally divided on how to respond to the demand for gay rights both in the public domain and in respect of the ordination of men and women in active homosexual relationships. The predominant view, however, was expressed in a General Synod motion proposed by Tony Higton in 1987 and echoed in the subsequent report of the House of Bishops (*Issues in Human Sexuality*, London, Church House Publishing, 1991) which affirmed that ‘Heterosexuality and homosexuality are not equally congruous with the observed order of creation or with the insights of revelation as the Church engages with these in the light of her pastoral ministry.’ The House of Bishops also decreed that the church should not reject those lay members who sincerely believe that faithful homosexual (active) relationship is right for them; the clergy, on the other hand, ‘cannot claim the liberty to enter into sexually active homophile relationships.’ A later motion in the General Synod (1997) invited the Synod, with studied ambiguity, both to commend the House of Bishops’ report *Some Issues in Human Sexuality* and to acknowledge that it was not the last word on the subject. Such difficulties as the Church of England experienced in its debates about homosexuality have since been altogether overshadowed by the overwhelming impact of contention in this area within the Anglican Communion.

- f. *The place of the Church and Faith Communities in a plural society.* The political landscape of England has changed substantially since the days of Harold McMillan. The accession of the United Kingdom to the Common Market, the advent of ‘Thatcherism’, the process of devolution and the partial reforming of the House of Lords are but four of the most notable shifts in the scenery. It may seem surprising, then, that the question of disestablishment has not figured prominently through these five decades. That is not to say that the role of the churches, and the Church of England specifically, have not been widely questioned and examined.

Two developments, in particular, have influenced public attitudes and political stances on the relationship of Church and State: the advance of secularism and the growth of migrant populations. The very word ‘secularism’, as has already been remarked, is questionable in an English context. Statistics indicate that some kinds of religious belief remain very widespread, and, even now, the tradition of non-believers enjoying choral evensong and being kindly disposed to a mild form of establishment has never altogether disappeared, in spite of Dawkins and Hitchens. Nonetheless, the patent statistical decline in adherence to the Church of England has undermined claims to represent the ‘soul of the nation’. Meanwhile, changes in law, such as the introduction of Sunday trading, have both demonstrated and increased the marginalisation of the churches in society.

At the same time, the presence of significant and very visible concentrations of (particularly) Muslim and Sikh communities, especially in cities such as Bradford, Birmingham and London, and the ethical imperative to accord equal respect to their beliefs, has generated widespread unease about the political

privileges of the Church of England. On the Church's side, any principled campaigning for disestablishment has run out of steam, partly through the concessions won from the state for self-government and for a decisive role in the appointment of bishops, and partly on account of the urgency of other priorities.

The 'Chadwick' Report on Church-State Relations (1970) made its recommendation soon after the Church of England had adopted Synodical Government (1969) – giving a more formal, structured and widely elective basis for the engagement of lay people in church governance than the old Church Assembly had allowed. The Report recommended that the General Synod, rather than parliament, should be the final court of reference in matters of worship and doctrine. It also proposed a change in the manner of selection of bishops, whereby two names were to be put forward to the Prime Minister/Crown by a committee comprised of representatives of the national and local church. The Prime Minister/Crown would retain freedom to nominate either one of those named. In 2007, under the new Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, a Green Paper on *The Governance of Britain* was published. In the Green Paper the Government reaffirmed its commitment to the establishment of the Church of England, the position of the Sovereign as Supreme Governor, and the relationship between the Church and State. It also proposed, among other things, the modification of the system of senior appointments, so that only one name should be recommended to the Prime Minister/Crown. This small step in loosening the ties between the state and church appointments was not universally welcomed in the church, being rather cautiously described (in the words of the subsequent Consultation Paper) as marking 'a further evolution in the long history of the Church's relationship with the State'.

If there has been little formal change in the constitutional position of the Church of England, this does not mean that its effectual place and influence in public life has been unchanged. On the one hand, there have been moments in which the Church has been a powerful agent in public affairs: most notably, at that period in the 1980s when there seemed to be little effective political opposition to the government of Margaret Thatcher. Archbishop Robert Runcie's sermon in St Paul's Cathedral at the service of thanksgiving for the conclusion of the Falkland's War (1982), although judiciously worded, was widely discussed and interpreted as a counterblast to 'Thatcherite jingoism'. Three years later, the publication of the report, *Faith in the City* showed a commitment by the Church to the support and regeneration of inner city areas blighted by poverty. The Report was quite properly seen as positioning the Church in opposition to the unrestrained operation of market forces, and to the view that there was 'no such thing as society'.

Aside from such headline events, however, the influence of the churches generally and the Church of England specifically has certainly diminished. One sign of this is that recent proposals for a reformed upper house of parliament have largely ignored the question of the involvement of the 'Lords Spiritual' in a future chamber. The Blair government, in its early years, made an open commitment to work in co-operation with faith communities. But it is

not clear that this commitment bore fruit in specific policy areas or projects. It has often seemed that the interest of the government is largely in the functioning of religious groups as agents of community cohesion, and this can sit uneasily with Christian concerns for mission and evangelism. Moreover, it has been clear in recent decades that the established church was in no way singled out for special treatment where the participation of faith communities was being sought.

Finally, the churches in England have been affected by a dramatic turn in the way *religion* is regarded in the media and public discourse. This has been brought about by the combination of two factors: the presence here of significant Muslim communities and places of worship, and the global association (particularly among hawkish western politicians since 9/11) of Islam with terms such as ‘terror’, ‘fanaticism’ and ‘fundamentalism’. A new breed of more aggressive secularist writers and commentators have responded to this new situation by underlining what they see as the innate irrationalism of religious conviction of any kind and the need for the state to distance itself from all religious groups.

The changing shape and direction of the Church

Since 1960, the imminent demise of the Church of England has been prophesied so frequently as to make it a stock article of the journalist’s and the preacher’s repertoire. More specifically, the suggestion has been made repeatedly that the territorial, parochial system would prove impossible to sustain as the Church weakened numerically and financially. These prophecies have often seemed well-founded and may yet be fulfilled. But the pattern of diocesan and parochial life in England remains, attenuated (by shared benefices and reduced pastoral provision) but not abandoned.

Reform in the Church has taken three main forms: governmental, liturgical and ministerial.

- The introduction of Synodical Government in 1969 went some way to meeting one requirement laid down in dialogue with Reformed and other churches, for lay participation in the courts and councils of the church to be entrenched. At the same time, the creation of the General Synod had some largely unforeseen consequences for good and ill. Its visibility engendered a stronger sense of the Church of England as a single institution, like a national corporation. It gave rise to the expectation that ‘the church’ might articulate a single view or adopt a given policy on any matter under consideration. It acted as a goldfish-bowl, in which disputes and differences could be manifested, magnified and observed.

The centralising tendency of the church’s Synodical System, with its pyramid of chambers, from Deanery Synod at the base to General Synod at the apex, has been further emphasised in the more recent round of structural reform which led to the creation of the Archbishops’ Council, a body including lay and ordained representatives by which over-arching directions and policies for

the national church can be articulated and maintained. (*Working as One Body*, The ‘Turnbull Report’ 1995)

- The Book of Common Prayer remained the only legally authorised liturgical text for the Church of England in the nineteen-fifties, although a Liturgical Commission was set up in 1955. The publication of the *Alternative Service Book* in 1980 had been preceded by a long process of liturgical exploration, especially through the authorising of successive ‘experimental’ orders for Holy Communion. Seen as a ‘supplement’ rather than a replacement for the BCP, the ASB nonetheless demonstrated a radical departure from Cranmer’s liturgies, informed by the great twentieth-century ecumenical tide of liturgical scholarship. In comparison, the successor to the ASB, *Common Worship* (2000 – 2007, in several volumes, concluding with the Ordination Services) introduced only a few deep or fundamental changes to the principal rites, but hugely increased the range of resources and permitted variations within them. It also sought to re-invigorate the language of worship.

Liturgical change in the Church of England has strengthened ecumenical solidarity among those Anglican and other Christians accustomed to written liturgies and has encouraged the ‘informal ecumenism’ whereby members of one church find themselves at home in another. Indeed, this may have been one factor in the blurring of denominational identity which has affected most churches. At the same time, the breadth of options within the newer services, and the fact that some parishes make little use of the authorised forms of service mean that there may well be less likelihood of a visitor finding a ‘family likeness’ in parish worship than ever before.

- The disastrous decline in the number of ordinands noted in relation to the period up to 1976 has been reversed more recently, largely as a result of two developments. One is the increase in the recruitment and provision of appropriate training for Non-Stipendiary, or Self-Supporting ordained ministers. The other is the ordination of women to the diaconate (1986) and to the priesthood (1992). While the first of these steps went largely un-remarked outside church circles, the second initiated a long period in which internal divisions of opinion about gender and sexuality have been the primary public feature of the national life of the Church of England, with only occasional flurries of media attention given to other matters deemed controversial enough to merit headlines. At the same time, the presence of women in the priestly ministry of the church has become accepted as normal in all but a minority of parishes. In 2006, a total of 478 candidates were ordained, of these 51% were women and 47% were stipendiary. Another significant change in the balance of ordained ministry is that the number of those receiving pensions now exceeds the number in active ministry.

The Church is always called to renewal in mission, but the urgency of that call has been felt increasingly through the last decade. The result has been a new readiness to explore ways in which the traditional patterns of church life and worship might be adapted so as to express the gospel effectively in what is, in effect, a new world.

The clearest enunciation of this readiness is in the Report, *Mission-Shaped Church* (2004). The subtitle of the Report gives its own summary of the content: ‘*church planting and fresh expressions of church in a changing context*’. As a result of the Report, the Church now makes provision, by means of ‘Bishop’s Mission Orders’ for the authorisation within the diocese of new congregations and new embodiments of the worshipping church outside the parochial system. A new category of ordained ‘pioneer ministers’ has also been authorised. Supporting these developments is the organisation ‘Fresh Expressions’ sponsored jointly by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York and the Methodist Council, and now supported also by the United Reformed Church. Fresh Expressions aims to encourage ‘new forms of church for those who are not already members of any church’. Great energy and initiative is being shown through these new vehicles for mission, even while the ecclesiological basis by which they have been validated remains under debate.

Mission (no longer as closely linked, as it once was with Unity), has displaced its tamer sister as the field for the most eager endeavour.

Summary and conclusion

The mood of post-war England gave gentle encouragement to ecumenism: the yearning to heal the wounds of war, the sense of renewed confidence in a common Christian heritage, the desire for the common life to be decently and harmoniously ordered – all these contributed to the advance of plans and conversations aimed at unity between the churches (at least the churches of the Reformation). Later, in the nineteen sixties and seventies, Anglican-Roman Catholic rapprochement seemed to become a credible prospect. English ecumenism gained energy and took on something of a radical edge, as writers prophesied a ‘New Reformation’ and Faith and Order delegates at Nottingham (1964) challenged the churches with this bold appeal:

United in our urgent desire for One Church Renewed for Mission, this Conference invites the member churches of the British Council of Churches to covenant together to work and pray for the inauguration of union by a date agreed among them. We dare to hope that this date should not be later than Easter Day 1980.

The hopes of ARCIC 1 and of Nottingham 1964 look laughably and painfully optimistic, even absurd, today. But reflection on the story of the evolving context for ecumenism since that time need not be entirely negative.

All the churches in England have had to wrestle with changes which impact upon every dimension of their life and work. The suddenness with which the certitudes of the fifties fell to pieces was devastating and might have been fatal to the maintenance of organised Christian religion. It remains a daunting and pressing question for the traditional churches in England as to whether they can remain intact and effective within the world of virtual realities and evanescent life-styles which now surrounds them. The moral and social changes of contemporary Europe have put their own challenges to the churches. As a result, the national life and image of the Church of England, has largely been dominated by its internal struggles and those of the wider Anglican Communion. These painful struggles have often seemed to drain the energy

and impair the witness of the church. But perhaps they can also be seen as the price to be paid for attempting to retain historic traditions of faith and order whilst living authentically in a changed moral order. In other words, this may be what it costs to exercise at once the arduous disciplines of synchronic and diachronic ecumenism, not only towards the sister churches but also towards the created world around us.

What, then, of the story of the ecumenical movement through these decades? Most would agree that it has fallen short of most of its stated objectives. Yet there have been significant gains. There is a quality of mutual affection, support and exchange between Christian churches and their members today which was scarcely dreamt of fifty years ago. By working together, too, ‘churches together’ have learnt how to bear credible common witness to Christian values in society. Nonetheless, in twenty-first century England it has not proved easy to raise enthusiasm for ecumenical work and the expectations of progress towards unity among the churches are modest, to say the least. Yet, on a long view, the patient pursuit of unity may be precisely the task to which the churches should apply themselves, in order to witness effectively to the gospel in a world of dizzying – and ultimately destructive – fragmentation.

4 WHAT HAVE WE SAID TO EACH OTHER IN ECUMENICAL DIALOGUE? CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND AND THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND 1932-1966

Introduction

In order to provide a historical context for the development of a partnership in the Gospel between our two churches, this section of the report gives an account of the series of bilateral and multilateral conversations in which the Church of England and the Church of Scotland took part between 1932 and 1966.

In order to complete the story, the section also contains accounts of ecumenical developments in both churches since 1966 and an account of the 1984 Anglican-Reformed report *God's Reign and Our Unity*.

A. The Conversations from 1932-1966

The background to the conversations

During the first half of the twentieth century the history of the Christian Church was marked by an unprecedented search for Christian unity. As Stephen Neill notes in *A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517-1948*: ‘all the time, in all the continents, in all the great confessions, with a persistence and passion perhaps unknown in any previous epoch, the search for closer outward fellowship and corporate unity was going on.’¹⁰ It was this wider search for Christian unity that formed the background to the conversations involving the Church of Scotland and the Church of England (together with the Scottish Episcopal Church and the Presbyterian Church of England) that took place between 1932 and 1966.

The basis for the Church of England’s involvement in these conversations was the commitment to seek the visible unity of the Church contained in Resolution 9 of the Lambeth Conference of 1920, ‘An appeal to all Christian people’, a resolution that was formally endorsed by the Church of England’s National Assembly and by the Convocations of Canterbury and York.¹¹

This appeal declared that, in order to manifest the fellowship created and sustained by Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, God’s wills the existence of the Catholic Church as ‘an outward, visible, and united society, holding one faith, having its own recognized officers, using God-given means of grace, and inspiring all its members to the world-wide service of the Kingdom of God’.¹²

¹⁰ R. Rouse and S. C. Neill (eds), *A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517-1948* (London: SPCK, 1954), p. 448.

¹¹ See G. K. A. Bell (ed.), *Documents on Christian Unity 1920-1930* (Oxford: OUP, 1930), pp. 100-103.

¹² R. Coleman (ed.), *Resolutions of the Lambeth Conferences 1867-1988* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1992), p. 46.

The appeal went on to argue that a united Church required the ‘wholehearted acceptance’ of the Holy Scriptures, the Apostles and Nicene Creeds, the two sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion and ‘a ministry acknowledged by every part of the Church as possessing not only the inward call of the Spirit, but also the commission of Christ and the authority of the whole body’.¹³

The appeal suggested that episcopate was the only way of providing this universally acknowledged form of ministry, but it also suggested that in order to achieve its introduction in an equitable fashion there might be a reciprocal commissioning of ministers by episcopal and non-episcopal churches.

The basis for the Church of Scotland’s involvement in the conversations was Article VII of the *Articles Declaratory of the Constitution of the Church of Scotland in Matters Spiritual* which that Church had adopted in 1926 with a view to facilitating the Union of the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church of Scotland, which subsequently took place in 1929:

The Church of Scotland, believing it to be the will of Christ that His disciples should be all one in the Father and in Him, that the world may believe that the Father has sent Him, recognises the obligation to seek and promote union with other Churches in which it finds the Word to be purely preached, the sacraments administered according to Christ's ordinance, and discipline rightly exercised; and it has the right to unite with any such Church without loss of its identity on terms which this Church finds to be consistent with these Articles.

The history of the conversations from 1932-1966

1932-34

Following the reunion of the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church, preliminary discussions about unity between the Church of England and the Church of Scotland began in 1931 on the basis of ‘free and unrestricted conference.’ The following year the Archbishop of Canterbury, Cosmo Lang (a Scot and the son of a Church of Scotland minister), addressed the General Assembly of the reunited church. He expressed the hope that if conferences between the Church of Scotland and the Church of England were to ‘reach some agreement on such questions of Faith and Order as each side might deem to be necessary, they can come into full communion with each other retaining their autonomy – that is to say, an unrestricted communion among their members, and an unrestricted fellowship of their ministers’.¹⁴

As a result of the Archbishop’s address, formal bilateral conversations between the Church of Scotland and the Church of England (referred to at the time as ‘conferences’) took place from 1932 to 1934, with representatives of the Scottish Episcopal Church and the Presbyterian Church of England present as observers. The report of the conversations was published in 1934 as the *Report of the Joint Committee appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury and Representatives of the*

¹³ Ibid., p. 47.

¹⁴ Quoted in S. Kesting, *The Church of Scotland in Union Talks 1954-2003* (Edinburgh: Church of Scotland, 2004), p. 2.

*Church of Scotland*¹⁵ and it was considered by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, the Convocations of the Church of England and the Bishops of the Scottish Episcopal Church.

The report declared that the ‘goal’ of the discussions was ‘an unrestricted inter-communion amongst our members and an equally unrestricted fellowship of our ministers’ (p. 124). It noted that in the course of the discussions there was very considerable agreement about the nature of the Church:

Both parties are agreed in holding that the Church, conceived as the fellowship of believers, is itself part of the gift of God to mankind in the Gospel, and that membership of it is a necessary element in full Christian discipleship. To both the Church is the Body of Christ informed by His Spirit; One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic and Evangelical; the living organism for the winning of the world and the establishment of his kingdom. (p. 124)

However, it also acknowledged that ‘Differences arise in the sphere of order and polity, and in relation to the character and function of its ministry and sacraments as thereby affected’ (p. 124). These differences involved questions of ‘grave historical and doctrinal importance, the solution of which must necessarily require long and detailed discussion’ (p. 124).

An appendix to the report contained a ‘joint statement of agreements’ consisting of a list of ‘things believed in common’ and a list of ‘things that might be undertaken in common.

The nine ‘things believed in common’ were:

1. Acceptance of ‘the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as containing the Word of God’ and as ‘furnishing the supreme standard of faith and morals’.
2. Acceptance that the Church’s faith and doctrine should be ‘set forth in acknowledged standards,’ leading to reverence for the Apostles and Nicene Creeds as ‘classical declarations of that faith and doctrine which have served to unite the Church Universal on a common basis of Scriptural truth and fact and to protect it from fundamental error’ and recognition of later formulations such as the *Thirty-nine Articles* and the *Westminster Confession of Faith* as ‘historic expressions of the Christian faith as they have severally received it’.
3. Endorsement of a statement, issued by the Lausanne Faith and Order Conference of 1927, on the nature of the gospel as ‘the Divine instrument of individual and social regeneration’.
4. Acknowledgement ‘that the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are divinely instituted as effectual signs and seals of the saving grace of God’.

¹⁵Text in G. K. A. Bell (ed.) *Documents on Christian Unity Third Series 1930-1948* (Oxford: OUP, 1948), pp. 123-132.

5. Agreement ‘that the Ministry is the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ to the Church’, that it is a ministry of the Universal Church and that ‘admission to it is through prayer and the laying on of hands by persons commissioned thereto.’
6. Agreement that the Church is grounded in the divine initiative and that it is a community of worship ‘rooted in Christ and sustained by the power of His Spirit’, and charged with a mission of witness and proclamation.
7. Acknowledgement of the necessity to ‘promote the visible unity of the Church wherever the pure Word of God is preached and the sacraments are duly administered according to Christ’s appointment’.
8. Agreement that the Church manifests its continuity ‘from age to age and throughout the world’ as ‘one Body of which Christ is the head’, and that there is comprehended within such unity a variety of ‘forms of devotion, service and thought’.
9. Recognition of ‘the sovereign right of the Lord Jesus Christ to govern human life and conduct in every sphere’. (pp. 127-9)

The six ‘things that might be undertaken in common’ were the regular exchange of pulpits, the offering of mutual eucharistic hospitality when members of either church were ‘out of reach of their own accustomed ordinances’, the invitation of delegations ‘to bring greetings and information from one Church to another, in formal Assembly’, the production of joint statements on issues of ‘public, national or international’ importance, the setting up of a Joint Advisory Council to consider practical matters relating to local relations between ‘the conferring Churches at home and abroad’ and, finally, the establishment of opportunities for joint study and public service for clergy, candidates for the ministry and laity (pp. 129-30).

At the end of the report it was proposed ‘that these conferences should for the moment be suspended – to be resumed, we trust, when in God’s providence the time shall appear opportune’ (p. 125) Owing partly to the onset of the Second World War, the conversations remained suspended until 1950.

1950-1951

In 1947 the General Assembly considered the call by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Geoffrey Fisher, in a sermon entitled ‘A step forward in church relations,’ preached in Cambridge in 1946, for a renewed effort to achieve unity between episcopal and non-episcopal churches.¹⁶ As a result, preliminary discussions took place in 1948 and 1949 and formal conversations were renewed in 1950 with representatives of the Scottish Episcopal Church and the Presbyterian Church of England once again present as observers. The report of these conversations, which endorsed the conclusions reached in the 1934 report, was published in 1951 as *A Joint Report on Relations between the Church of England and the Church of Scotland*.

¹⁶ *General Assembly Reports*, 1947, pp. 48-51.

This report endorsed the recommendations of the 1934 report and urged that the two churches should adopt both a long term and a short term policy for moving towards unity. The long term policy would involve working for the full unity of the Christian church, a unity that would involve not only ‘agreement as to the truth in Christ,’ but also full recognition and inter-changeability of ministry and ‘fullness of sacramental communion’.¹⁷ The short term policy would be to implement the practical recommendations of the 1934 report and to that end the Anglican members of the conversations recommended that the Convocations of Canterbury and York be invited to make provision for ministers of the two churches to be permitted to preach at each others services and for baptised members of the Church of Scotland to be admitted to Holy Communion in the Church of England.

The Convocations duly approved these latter recommendations¹⁸ and both the Convocations and the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland agreed that the conversations should continue with the Scottish Episcopal Church and the Presbyterian Church of England becoming full participants.

1954-1957

In 1954 the General Assembly adopted an ‘Ecumenical Statement’ outlining the approach of the Church of Scotland to ecumenical issues, and this statement provided the immediate background to the Church of Scotland’s involvement in the continuing conversations. The statement declared:

The Church of Scotland, believing in one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, and acknowledging one Baptism for the remission of sins, affirms its intention of seeking closer relations with every Church with which it stands in fundamental doctrinal agreement, but from which it is separated in matters of government and the ordering of the ministry.¹⁹

It went on to say that, in its approach to other churches, the Church of Scotland would ‘desire to look beyond the divisions of history to the ultimate fullness and unity of the Church’s life in Christ, and to affirm its readiness to consider how the contributions of all such Churches may be embraced within that unity and fullness; always, however, in agreement with the Word of God and the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith.’ It continued: ‘In such approaches the Church of Scotland would seek to join, humbly and penitently, with its sister Churches in fulfilment of Christ’s prayer that all who believe in Him might be one.’²⁰

The conversations themselves ran from 1954-1957 and resulted in the report *Relations between Anglican and Presbyterian Churches*.²¹ This report set out four ‘initial and

¹⁷ G. K. A. Bell (ed.), *Documents on Christian Unity, 1948-1957* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 82.

¹⁸ H. Riley and R. J. Graham (eds), *Acts of the Convocations of Canterbury and York 1921-1970* (London: SPCK, 1971), pp. 162-163.

¹⁹ *General Assembly Reports*, 1954, p. 67

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

²¹ *Relations between Anglican and Presbyterian Churches*, (London: SPCK, 1957).

largely tacit agreements' which it described as the 'fruits of ecumenical history in recent years' and which had animated the conversations. These were (a) unity is an essential feature of the life of the Church (b) disunity impedes the Church's mission (c) the doctrine of the Church needs to be grounded in terms that are fully christological and pneumatological and (d) the witness of the Church of South India shows that unity between Anglicans and Presbyterians is possible (pp. 3-6).

The report also listed five 'theological considerations' that would need to be taken into account in any attempt by the churches to move closer together:

1. As the body of Christ the whole Church 'participates in His threefold ministry as Prophet, Priest and King'.
2. The whole Church is the Body of Christ.
3. Ministry in the Church 'is to be interpreted as a ministry of Christ to the Church' and 'is to be exercised within the corporate priesthood of the whole Church'.
4. Within the wider ministry of the Church 'there is a specific Ministry of Word and Sacraments to which by ordination some are set apart'.
5. Our understanding of the 'unity and continuity of the Church' embraces our baptismal incorporation into 'the royal priesthood of Christ' and views the ministry of Word and Sacraments 'as means of grace in the Church'.
6. The exercise of *episcopē* is an integral part of ordained ministry (pp. 8-9) .

The report then went on to argue that the differences between Anglicans and Presbyterians with regard to the exercise of *episcopē* were not insurmountable and that the way forward towards creating two united churches in England and Scotland that would be in communion with each other would be for the two Presbyterian churches to introduce bishops into their existing Presbyterian polity whilst the Anglican churches set apart lay people for 'an office akin to the Presbyterian eldership' and allowed them to participate in the government of the Church at all levels (p. 15). According to the report, these and other 'modifications' provided a road down which the churches involved could travel towards full intercommunion and greater catholicity (p. 18) .

On the Anglican side, the Convocations of Canterbury and York voted for the conversations to continue and asked the two Archbishops to consider how best the recommendations contained in the report might be put into effect. The Scottish Episcopal Church accepted the report and expressed its willingness to move forward on that basis.

On the Presbyterian side, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of England expressed its willingness to continue the conversations, but noted four points for further consideration. The Church of Scotland sent the report to the Presbyteries for comment. These recognised an obligation to seek and promote unity, but a majority of them also put forward two key caveats. Firstly, they insisted that there

needed to be an unequivocal official Anglican recognition of Presbyterian orders and secondly they expressed the view that the overall Anglican approach to unity was based on a theory of Apostolic succession that in effect ‘denies that the Presbyterian Churches are fully members of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church’.²²

Furthermore, when the report came to General Assembly an amendment was passed to which stated that the proposals of the 1957 Report ‘imply a denial of the Catholicity of the Church of Scotland and of the validity and regularity of its ministry within the Church Catholic’. Nevertheless, it was agreed that the conversations should continue and that they should address four questions that reflected the concerns expressed by the Church of Scotland. These questions were (a) the meaning of unity as distinct from uniformity in Church order (b) the meaning of ‘validity’ as applied to ministerial orders (c) the doctrine of Holy Communion; and (d) the meaning of ‘the Apostolic Succession’ as related to all these matters.²³

1962-1966

In 1962 the conversations between the four churches resumed, this time with observers from the Church of Ireland, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, the Church in Wales and the Presbyterian Church of Wales. The agenda for the conversations was provided by the four questions identified by the Church of Scotland plus three additional issues suggested by the Church of England that were seen as arising out of, and relevant to, the discussion of the four previous questions. These issues were: the Church as a royal priesthood, the place of the laity in the Church, and the relations between Church, state and society.

The conversations, which lasted from 1962-66, took place in four regional groups made up of representatives from each of the four participating churches. Each panel considered the first six topics on the agenda, with a special group being convened to consider the topic of the relations between Church, state and society. Two general conferences of members of all the regional groups were also held.

The report of the conversations was published in 1966 as *The Anglican-Presbyterian Conversations*.²⁴ It covered the seven topics on the agenda of the conversations, but it also contained a proposal for bilateral conversations between the Church of Scotland and the Scottish Episcopal Church and between the Church of England and the Presbyterian Church of England with the aim of creating united churches in Scotland and England that would be in full communion with each other.

This proposal was particularly controversial in the Church of Scotland because the General Assembly had been assured in 1963 that the development of a plan for Church union was not on the agenda. The presentation of the proposal to the General Assembly in 1966 was therefore preceded by disagreements within the Church’s Special Committee on Anglican-Presbyterian Relations as to whether its remit

²² *General Assembly Reports*, 1959, pp. 68-80.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

²⁴ *The Anglican-Presbyterian Conversations* (Edinburgh & London: The St Andrew Press/SPCK, 1966).

allowed it to bring forward a specific proposal for unity with the Scottish Episcopal Church and ultimately with the Church of England.

B. Ecumenical developments in the Church of England and the Church of Scotland since 1966

The Church of England

Although the 1966 report had recommended continuing discussions between the Church of England and the Presbyterian Church of England with a view to establishing unity in England, both churches decided to focus their ecumenical efforts elsewhere. The Presbyterian Church of England focussed on the discussions with the Congregational Union that led to the formation of the United Reformed Church in 1972, while the Church of England focussed on a scheme for unity with the Methodist Church of Great Britain.

The Anglican-Methodist unity scheme attempted to achieve what was described as ‘organic union’ between the two churches, this being defined as ‘full communion within a single organisational fellowship’.²⁵ In order to achieve this goal it was proposed that the two churches would move together in two stages: ‘the first stage to be inaugurated by the entering of the two churches into full communion with each other, and the taking of episcopacy into the Methodist system; the second, following as soon as possible, to take the form of visible, organic union into one Church’.²⁶

The scheme received the necessary 75% majority in the Methodist Conference, but in 1972 it narrowly failed to achieve a 75% majority in the General Synod and so was unable to proceed further.

From 1978-1980 the Church of England was involved alongside the Methodist Church, the United Reformed Church, the Baptist Union, and the Moravian Church in Great Britain in the development of the multilateral *Covenanting for Unity* proposals. The intention of these proposals was to provide ‘an unambiguous way in which the ministries of all our churches may be incorporated in a new relationship within the historic ministry of the catholic Church to their mutual enrichment.’²⁷

Under the proposals, consecration to the historic episcopate by episcopal ordination and the joint ordination of presbyters according to a Common Ordinal would have become the practice in all the churches involved and their intention that this should be the case would have been sealed by the joint ordination of bishops and presbyters in the national service inaugurating the Covenant.

The *Covenanting for Unity* proposals eventually came to nothing after they failed to achieve the necessary two thirds majority in all three Houses of the Church of England’s General Synod in 1982. As in the case of the previous Anglican-Methodist unity scheme, the major reason for the failure of the Covenant proposals in the

²⁵ *Anglican-Methodist Unity – The Scheme* (London: SPCK/Epworth Press, 1968), p .6.

²⁶ Ibid., p .35.

²⁷ *Towards Visible Unity: Proposals for a Covenant* (London: Churches’ Council for Covenanting, 1980), p. 9.

Church of England was a fear amongst a number of those on the Church of England's Catholic wing that the proposals would undermine the Church of England's Catholic character by leading to the acceptance of ministers who had not been episcopally ordained.

Although the failures of the Anglican-Methodist scheme and the Covenanting for Unity proposals were major setbacks for the Church of England's ecumenical endeavours, the Church of England persisted in seeking to move towards unity with other churches and the result has been a series of bilateral and multilateral agreements from 1988 onwards with the Evangelical Church in Germany, the Nordic and Baltic Lutheran Churches, the Moravian Church in Great Britain, the French Lutheran and Reformed Churches and the Methodist Church in Great Britain.

The relationship between the Church of England and the Nordic and Baltic Lutheran churches (which also involves the other British and Irish Anglican churches) is described as being 'in communion' and involves 'common membership, a single interchangeable ministry and structures to enable the Churches to consult each other on significant matters of faith and order, life and work'.²⁸ This level of relationship has been made possible because of the existence of the historic episcopate in the Lutheran churches involved. Its absence in the other churches mentioned above has meant that the Church of England does not have interchangeability of ministry with them. However, the agreements with them have involved a mutual acknowledgement of each other's churches and ministries together with a mutual commitment to the development of a common life and common mission in pursuit of the full visible unity of the Church.

The Church of England has also been engaged in informal ecumenical conversations with the Baptist Union of Great Britain and the United Reformed Church and has regular discussions about matters of mutual interest and concern with the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales under the auspices of the English Anglican-Roman Catholic Committee (English ARC).

In addition, representatives of the Church of England have had regular discussions about issues of faith and order with representatives of the Community of Protestant Church in Europe (Leuenberg Church Fellowship) and either have been or still are engaged in a series of multilateral dialogues between the Anglican Communion and the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Churches, the Oriental Orthodox Churches, the Old Catholic Churches, the Lutheran World Federation, the Word Alliance of Reformed Churches, the Baptist World Alliance and the World Methodist Council. These multilateral dialogues have resulted in a number of important statements of ecumenical theology.

Two final ecumenical developments in the Church of England that need to be noted are the decision in 1972 to extend eucharistic hospitality to baptised and communicant members of other churches through Canon B 15a and the promulgation in 1989 of the two 'ecumenical canons', Canons B 43 and B 44. Canon B 43 permits Church of England clergy to take part in services of other churches and vice versa and also permits the use of Church of England parish churches and cathedrals by other

²⁸ *The Church of England Year Book 2006* (London: CHP, 2006), p. 426.

churches for services of joint worship or for their own services. Canon B 44 permits Church of England participation in what are now known as Local Ecumenical Partnerships, that is to say, the sharing of life, ministry and worship on a long term basis by two or more churches locally.²⁹

The Church of Scotland

Like the Church of England, the Church of Scotland did not go down the route suggested in the 1966 report. Although bilateral conversations with the Scottish Episcopal Church continued until 1974, the main focus of the Church of Scotland's ecumenical activity from 1967 onwards was multilateral conversations involving the Churches of Christ, the Methodist Church in Scotland, the Congregational Union, the Scottish Episcopal Church and the United Free Church. The Baptist Union of Scotland was also involved in these conversations for a time as a participant and then as an observer.

These multilateral conversations lasted until 1995. They resulted in a series of reports on various aspects of unity from 1969 onwards, but by the mid 1980s it was clear that, at least as far as the Church of Scotland was concerned, there was waning enthusiasm for the conversations. This was due to number of factors, a feeling that the search for unity was not particularly important, a desire for reconciled diversity rather than organic unity, and a concern that the conversations were repeating the mistakes of the earlier conversations with the Church of England and the Scottish Episcopal Church by attempting the impossible task of combining the episcopal and Presbyterian patterns of ministry and Church government.

By the early 1990s it was clear that a new way forward for ecumenism in Scotland was needed and by 1995 it was agreed that they way forward lay though the developing work of Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS) and through participation in a new Scottish Church Initiative for Union (SCIFU) suggested by the Scottish Episcopal Church.

The churches that took part in SCIFU were the Church of Scotland, the Scottish Episcopal Church, the United Reformed Church and the Methodist Church in Scotland. The intention of the initiative was to ensure a continued dialogue with local people, feeding in reactions. The talks revisited ideas from early on in the Multilateral Church Conversation – e.g. what became known as maxi-parishes that would allow congregations of different traditions to retain their distinctiveness within the unity of one Church. There was detailed work done on the ministry of the bishop and the relationship between the bishop and the councils of the church. There was no attempt to use any other name than ‘bishop’ on the basis that people would see a bishop whatever name was given to a personal ministry of oversight beyond parish level. The Scottish Episcopal Church gave an assurance that the recognition of ministry that was permitted in Local Ecumenical Partnerships would be made universal across the participating churches at the point where there was a clear commitment to union.

²⁹ For details of these Canons see M. Davie, *A Guide to the Church of England* (London: Mowbray, 2008), pp. 186-192.

The final report was presented in 2003. The report set out six recommendations. It called on the four churches:

1. **to affirm** their commitment to the goal of visible unity
2. **to welcome** the theological principles of the SCIFU report, which are an expression of that commitment
3. **to approve** the SCIFU proposal in general as an appropriate model for pursuing full visible unity in Scotland, recognising that there are many stages in the process
4. **to initiate** consultation throughout the life of the four churches, and not excluding other churches, in order to share resources and integrate structures, grasping opportunities arising from the many changes currently occurring in all of them
5. **to promote and facilitate** the piloting of the model locally and more widely where relations between any of the participating churches are sufficiently developed
6. **to continue** the search for full visible unity through a new group appointed by the four churches with the remit to complete the unfinished business of the SCIFU proposal and prepare a Basis and Plan of Union.³⁰

These proposals were endorsed by the Scottish Synods of the United Reformed Churches and the Methodist Churches, but were rejected by a very large majority in the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, with concerns being expressed that the argument being put forward that they confused Christian unity with a form of Church union that failed to leave room for appropriate diversity between different Christian traditions.

At its meeting in 2004, the General Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church also expressed reservations about the SCIFU proposals and it voted against continuing the SCIFU process with the remaining partners, but it did agree to seek ways forward with other churches, particularly the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church in ways that did not exclude other churches.

Since 2004, the EMU (Episcopal, Methodist and United Reformed Church) talks have proceeded tentatively and have recently resulted in an act of mutual acknowledgement and commitment. The General Assembly, on the other hand, has ensured that attention has been firmly refocused on the possibility of closer co-operation, and even the possibility of union, with other Presbyterian Churches in Scotland. A Covenant has been signed with the United Free Church and talks have been started with the Free Church of Scotland although these are currently suspended because of concerns on the side of the Free Church about the Church of Scotland's policy in regard to homosexuality.

In addition to the ecumenical development just noted, from 1997 onwards the Church of Scotland has also been engaged in a dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church in

³⁰ Reports to the General Assembly, 2003, 27/23-24.

Scotland on Faith and Order matters, a dialogue which has resulted in the publication in 2007 of the joint study document *Baptism: Catholic and Reformed*.³¹

Members of the Church of Scotland have also been involved in the international dialogues that have taken place between the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and other Christian traditions, including the Anglican-Reformed international Commission that produced the 1984 report *God's Reign and Our Unity* (GROU).³²

C. God's Reign and Our Unity

God's Reign and Our Unity is the suggestive title of the 1984 report of the Anglican-Reformed international commission. The purpose of the commission, which included participants from the Church of Scotland and the Church of England, was to review Anglican-Reformed relations in the light of the ecumenical progress marked by the involvement of both traditions in the development of the wider ecumenical movement and of United Churches in North and South India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, and in view of the setbacks caused by the failure of movements towards Anglican-Reformed unity in Africa, Canada, Australasia and England. The aim of the report was to 'go behind the historical and traditional problems which have divided us since Reformation times and to put our quest for unity in new perspectives'. The commission sought to do this by 'enquiring into the relationship between the Church and the Kingdom of God, the priority of grace, the trinitarian and christological basis of ministry and the mission of the Church' (p. v).

This report has been widely drawn on by many subsequent ecumenical agreements. It provides resources for ecumenical theology in four key areas: the nature of the Church and its call to unity, the sacraments, the ministry, and the nature of a visibly united church.

The report makes six points about the nature of the Church. The Grace of God is the origin of the Church and, as such, the origin of the imperative towards unity. The Church is called to be the 'sign, instrument and first fruits of a unity that comes beyond history – the Kingdom, or reign of God' (p. 19). As the sign, instrument and foretaste of the kingdom, the Church is the provisional embodiment of God's ultimate purpose for humanity and the whole created order. Evangelism, social justice and Church unity are all necessary aspects of the mission to which the Church is called. Just as evangelism, social justice and Church unity belong together in the life of the Church, so do orthodoxy and right practice. Lastly, the Church constantly has to find new ways of expressing the faith.

On the sacraments the report makes four points about baptism and five points about the Eucharist. Concerning baptism, it declares that baptism with water and the Spirit is our sharing in the baptism of Christ, that it is inseparable from faith and repentance, that it is the start of a life of developing discipleship and that has practical consequences in terms of our understanding of the unity of the Church and our calling

³¹ The Joint Commission on Doctrine of the Church of Scotland and the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland, *Baptism: Catholic and Reformed*, 2007.

³² *God's Reign and Our Unity* (London & Edinburgh: SPCK/St Andrew's Press, 1984).

to ‘affirm in word and practice the full, equal and God-given humanity of every person’ (p. 39).

Concerning the Eucharist, it states that the preaching of the word and the celebration of the sacrament belong together; that the presence of Christ is ‘associated with the outward, visible elements of bread and wine’ and is also ‘an inward invisible presence received in the heart through faith’ (p. 42); that at the Eucharist the Church offers itself through Christ to the Father in a sacrifice of thanksgiving; that the Eucharist unites us with all other members of the body of Christ and summons us to live in love and charity with our neighbours and that the Eucharist is given to us to sustain us as we engage in Christ’s mission in the world and its purpose is therefore fulfilled ‘when the communicants go into the world to their daily tasks as his servants and as witnesses of the kingdom of God’ (p. 40).

On the ministry the report makes nine points. The Church and all its ministries have their source in the action of Father in sending the Son into the world anointed by the Spirit to announce and embody God’s blessed reign over all humankind and all creation’ (p. 46). Ministerial leadership in the Church involves ‘following Jesus in the way of the cross so that others in turn may be enabled to follow in the same way’ (p. 48). It is right to call Christian ministers ‘priests’ because they build up the royal and prophetic priesthood of all the faithful through word, sacrament, prayer and pastoral guidance. Ordination is an act of prayer accompanied by a sacramental sign that specifies the one for whom prayer is made and gives them authority to act on behalf of the universal Church. It is important that there are unambiguously acknowledged ordinations in historic succession. As a general rule, ordained ministers ought to preside at the Eucharist. All ministry needs to have a personal, collegial and communal character. Underneath the differences between the Anglican and Reformed traditions there is a common threefold pattern of ministry involving ‘existence within each local church of ‘a chief pastor who works with a body of colleagues and a staff of helpers or assistants to forward the work of Christ in the world’ (p. 58). Lastly, both the Anglican and Reformed traditions should be open to the renewal of other forms of ministry outside the threefold pattern, particularly the ministries referred to in the New Testament by the terms ‘prophets’ and ‘evangelists.’

Finally, the report makes three points about the nature of a visibly united Church. It needs to consist of united local Christian communities. These should be of a size that makes it possible for them to view themselves as a single eucharistic fellowship, small enough to avoid loss of coherence and yet large enough to avoid a homogeneity that encourages division within the wider local community. Lastly, if the Anglican and Reformed traditions are to come together, the Reformed side would need to accept bishops-in-presbytery, Anglicans would have to introduce elders, and provision would need to be made in united churches for regular congregational meetings and opportunities for the entire membership ‘to choose representatives to act on its behalf in the governance of the congregation and of the wider Church’ (p. 76).

God’s Reign and Our Unity has never been the subject of a formal process of reception in either the Anglican Communion or the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, but it has proved to be a valuable resource to which subsequent ecumenical conversations, including the conversations leading to this report, have frequently wanted to return.

Conclusion

The conversations between the Church of England and the Church of Scotland have helped to form our present ecumenical context and there may be lessons that we can learn from them. However, it has not been the intention of the present round of conversations to try to put back the clock by revamping earlier proposals for unity. We need to start from where we are now and consequently our report does not make any proposals for structural change, but encourages our churches to work together in mission, study and witness on the basis of the extensive theological agreement that clearly we already have.

5 LIVING OUT OUR COMMON BAPTISM: BEING MADE ONE

Being made one

Baptism is the making of the Church. On this, our communions are agreed: ‘Baptism, by which Christ incorporates us into his life, death and resurrection, is … in the strictest sense, constitutive of the Church. It is not simply one of the Church’s practices. It is an event in which God, by engaging us to himself, opens to us the life of faith and builds the Church’.³³ We shall endeavour to keep this fundamental truth in view throughout what follows. No contradiction is intended with the notion that the Eucharist is the making of the Church.³⁴ Baptism initiates our incorporation into Christ, and points us towards the Eucharist. It makes us one with Christ, and thereby with one another in Christ (Galatians 3.27-8; 1 Corinthians 12.12-13). Where eucharistic unity is lacking, baptismal unity is not yet fulfilled, but it is not undone.

There are varying ways within and between our communions of expressing the efficacy and sacramental nature of baptism, but we agree that at our baptism, God, in Christ, does something to us.³⁵ In affirming that our baptism never needs repeating,

³³ The Report of the Anglican-Reformed International commission (1981-84), ‘God’s Reign and Our Unity’ Sect. 54 (d). This agreement holds despite elements of the view within each of our communions that baptism, as a mark of the Church, is indicative rather than constitutive of the Church. For discussion of this view amongst the Reformers, see Susan K. Wood, *One Baptism: Ecumenical Dimensions of the Doctrine of Baptism* (Collegeville; Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2009), pp. 194-7, and Paul Avis, *The Church in the Theology of the Reformers* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981; reprinted Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002) ch. 7.

³⁴ As famously proclaimed by Henri de Lubac, *Méditation sur l’église*, 3rd edn (Paris: Aubier, 1954) p. 123ff. For discussion of baptism, Eucharist and the making of the Church see Paul Avis *The Identity of Anglicanism: Essentials of Anglican Ecclesiology* (London: T&T Clark, 2008), chs. V and VI; and Susan K. Wood, *One Baptism: Ecumenical Dimensions of the Doctrine of Baptism*, ch. 7.

³⁵ Article XXV of the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion affirms that baptism, together with the Lord’s Supper, are ‘Sacraments ordained of Christ … not only badges or tokens of Christian men’s profession, but … sure witnesses, and effectual signs of grace … by the which [God] doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm our faith in him’; The Westminster Confession affirms: ‘Baptism is a sacrament of the new testament, ordained by Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church; but also, to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life’ (Ch. XXVIII, i).

Issues arise over the nature of ‘sacrament’ and ‘sign’, and the Church of Scotland criticised the Faith and Order paper of the World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (henceforth cited as *BEM*) for settling for a level of unclarity on this matter (‘Reply Proposed by the Board of World Mission and Unity’, IV (1)-(2), in M. Thurian (ed.) *Churches Respond to BEM*, vol. I, p. 97). The Church of England notes that *BEM* ‘does not work with a concept of baptism as an external mark or sign by which individuals may choose to signify conversion of heart. Rather, its concept of baptism is of a sign and instrument given by God whereby he incorporates men and women into the Church’ (Church of England responding to the Lima Text, para. 34, in Thurian (ed.) *Churches Respond to BEM*, vol. I, p. 34), and subsequently approves this emphasis (para. 42, Thurian, Vol. III, pp. 36-7). The Church of Scotland, in dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland, while emphasising that ‘the “primary image” which shapes the understanding of baptism is that of a person being baptised “upon profession of faith”’, affirms that ‘the action of the Triune God is the theological underpinning of the sacrament of baptism’ (February 2006), and cites the 2003 Act governing the practice of baptism: ‘Baptism signifies the action and love of God in Christ, through the Holy Spirit, and is a seal upon the gift of grace and the response of faith’ (*Act IX 3, Acts of the General Assembly 2003*).

The Thirty-Nine Articles and Westminster Confession both intimate that that which is worked in us by virtue of our baptism unfolds over time. The Westminster Confession does so most explicitly: ‘The

both our churches accept that something once for all is effected by it,³⁶ and we acknowledge that an effect of baptism is that it makes us one: ‘Baptism constitutes a basic unity among Christians which is fundamental’;³⁷ ‘By baptism the whole Church receives the candidate into a fellowship grounded upon a shared discipleship in union with the one Lord of the whole Church’.³⁸ Thus both the Church of Scotland and Church of England concur with the landmark paper of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches, *Baptism Eucharist and Ministry (BEM)*, that baptism is a gift of God through which ‘Christians are brought into union with Christ, with each other and with the Church of every time and place’.³⁹

Sadly, however, Christians are divided. We are already made one, but we are not yet one. This is because our baptism is complete and efficacious, but we are not yet fulfilling the unity it has begun in us. One aspect that the Church of Scotland marks as of value in *BEM* is the rediscovery ‘of the universal or catholic and unified nature of the baptised community, with its implications for relations among Christians’.⁴⁰ *BEM* exhorts churches to recognise that ‘our one baptism into Christ constitutes a call to the churches to overcome their divisions and visibly manifest their fellowship’ (*Baptism*, para. 6).

In the years following *BEM* ecumenical endeavours have gained impetus from the unity that is recognised among the churches by virtue of our baptism. Nevertheless, it is hard to fulfil our unity because it is hard to accept the freedom that baptism gives us. Baptism brings freedom from all that blocks our relationships to God and to one another, but we tend to keep some of these blockages in place. Unity is possible insofar as, and only insofar as, we open ourselves up to God’s action of making us free.

Indeed, the very process of being open to God and of being made free is particularly well conveyed by means of Paul’s central metaphor for baptism, *viz.* dying and rising

efficacy of Baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered; yet, notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God’s own will, in His appointed time’ (Ch XXVIII, vi); the Thirty-Nine Articles does so chiefly by the image of grafting and the statement that ‘Faith is confirmed, and Grace increased by virtue of prayer unto God’ (Article XXVII). It follows that both find the baptism of infants agreeable (Article XXVII; The Westminster Confession, Ch XXVIII, iv).

³⁶ Westminster Confession Ch XXVIII, VII; the Lambeth Conference Report 1978 stipulates that a request for re-baptism ‘must be declined, as it suggests that the efficacy of baptism lies in the effects on the individual's feelings, and denies the fact that baptism incorporates the person who receives it into Christ’ (p. 73). The Lima Document, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, reinforces that ‘Baptism is an unrepeatable act. Any practice which might be interpreted as re-baptism must be avoided’ (sect 4 para 13). The Church of England response to BEM concurs with this, because an act of ‘re-baptism’ would ‘call in question the reality of God’s act of grace which is not dependent upon human response’ (para 44., Thurian (ed.) *Churches Respond to BEM*, Vol. III, p. 37).

³⁷ The Church of Scotland ‘Response of the Church: Deliverances of the General Assembly on the Report of the Board of World Mission and Unity (Edinburgh, 27 May, 1985), para. 25, printed in *Churches Respond to BEM: Official responses of the “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry” text*, Vol. I (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986) ed. Max Thurian, p. 86.

³⁸ Church of England ‘Responding to the Lima Text’, para. 33, printed in Thurian (ed.), *Churches Respond to BEM*, p. 34.

³⁹ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Geneva, WCC, 1982), ‘Baptism’ para. 6.

⁴⁰ ‘Report proposed by the Board of World Mission’ I (3), in Thurian (ed.). *Churches Respond to BEM*, vol I, p. 93.

with Christ (Rom. 6.3-11; Col. 2.13, 3.1-3). We die to those things that get in the way of Christ's Spirit dwelling within us, and this dying is an opening up of ourselves to God, so that the new life of Christ's Spirit becomes more and more that which animates us. This holds true of us as individuals (Galatians 2.19b-20). It also holds true of us as communions and as ecumenical partners: 'Rid yourselves ... of all malice...', the First Letter of Peter exhorts, and 'let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ' (1 Peter 2.1, 5).⁴¹

Dying and being made free

We are so familiar with the baptismal language of dying and rising with Christ, that we do not always translate it further. Paul said that in dying we are freed from sin (Rom. 6.7), but it is not obvious why dying brings freedom, nor why we find freedom hard to accept. Jesus' parable of the unmerciful slave (Matthew 18.23-35) can help us to get a purchase on Paul's imagery, so long as we also acknowledge that it is unusual to use a parable from the Gospels to elucidate Paul's theology, and to use a story about forgiveness to elucidate baptism.

When the king in the parable cancels the slave's impossibly huge debt, the king, in effect, dies to that debt and takes his slave with him. Both are potentially able to live a new life, free from the implications of payback and control. The slave's dying and rising is a process the king effected, just as our dying and rising is a process God effects when we go down into the death of Christ at our baptism.

Although the slave is made free from the world of debt, he has not in himself yet died to that world, and he continues to bully a fellow-slave for the money owed to him. We need not think that the unmerciful slave is unusually mean, or that he is strangely forgetful of the king's kindness. He is carrying on in the way he is used to; the way of a violent slave economy. Moreover, he presumably does not yet have any money, and so tries to get some in the way he knows how. He has had no experience of living debt-free, and he turns to his usual means of fending for himself.

We, like the slave, are initiated into a life without debt and indebtedness, and have not yet dared, or learned how, to live it. For the sake of our self-protection, we cling to the things of this world – be they material goods, grievances, insecurities, or the anxious desire to control our relationships with others. Nicholas Peter Harvey writes in his book *Death's Gift*, 'The offer of forgiveness, while unconditional ... is not without its painful consequences in terms of facing oneself. So the temptation is turn away from the newly revealed sinlessness back to "normal life"'.⁴² The slave in Jesus' parable resumes 'normal life', rather than living under the new kingdom of values to which the king has brought him. The potential is real for him to live the life of freedom. The

⁴¹ Consider the emphasis upon the Church as the 'Temple of the Spirit' within the Reformed – Roman Catholic International dialogue, second phase (1984-1990), 'Towards a common understanding of the church' (para. 76). 'The church is ordered through baptism, in which all who believe in Christ are not only washed and signed by the Triune God, but are "built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood" (1 Pet 2.5)' (para. 134).

⁴² Nicholas Peter Harvey, *Death's Gift: Chapters on Resurrection and Bereavement* (Peterborough: Epworth, 2007), pp. 99-100.

potential is real for us too: ‘For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God’ (Romans 8:15-16).

The making of the Church

When we are baptised, we die with Christ to the impossibly huge debt that enslaves us, and rise with him to new life. We are no longer fellow slaves, but are made brothers and sisters of one another on account of what Christ has done to us. This is the making of the Church. We are brothers and sisters to one another through Christ, and only through Christ. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer expressed it in *Life Together*, ‘the basis of our community’, of our brotherhood and sisterhood, is what we are ‘by reason of Christ’: ‘Our community with one another consists solely in what Christ has done to both of us.’⁴³

Although Bonhoeffer does not explicitly say so, his is a baptismal account of Christian community. Like slaves whose debt has been cancelled because of what their king has done, Christians are related to God and to one another by what Christ has done to them: ‘Without Christ we should not know God and could not call upon him, nor come to him. But without Christ we would also not know our brother, nor could we come to him. The way is blocked by our own ego. Christ opened up the way to God and to our brother’.⁴⁴

The Church as the crucified and risen body of Christ

Michael Ramsey, Archbishop of Canterbury from 1961 to 1974, developed a baptismal ecclesiology remarkably similar to Bonhoeffer’s account of Christian community. ‘Dying to their own self-centredness’, he wrote, ‘Christians enter a new life wherein the centre is not themselves but the risen Christ’.⁴⁵

In *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, Ramsey’s description of the Church reflects both the complete and the on-going nature of baptism. On the one hand he calls the Church ‘the Body of Christ crucified and risen from the dead’.⁴⁶ On the other, he, like Bonhoeffer, recognises in Christians an on-going ‘battle with the “ego”’, which means that dying and rising are ‘still to be experienced’, and that ‘the Church is the scene of dying and rising in every age of history’ (p. 35). Indeed, the very nature of the Church is as a body that dies and rises. ‘Division severs His body’. Unity, ‘the one Body’, comes about only where ‘every member and every local community dies to self in its utter dependence upon the whole’ (p. 6). Since this is how unity is achieved, the very ‘structure of the Body set[s] forth the dying and rising with Christ’ (p. 6).

⁴³ *Life Together*, p. 14.

⁴⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (London: SCM, 1954), p. 12.

⁴⁵ Michael Ramsey, *The Resurrection of Christ* (London & Glasgow: Collins, Fontana Books, 1961), p. 94.

⁴⁶ A.M. [Michael] Ramsey, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 2009), p. 4.

Divisions in the Church reveal the various ways in which we have not died, and are therefore not yet free from hurt, self-assertion, the desire to exercise control, and the desire to call in debts. Ramsey warns that ‘if the problems about schism and reunion mean dying and rising with Christ, they will not be solved through easy humanistic ideas of fellowship and brotherhood, but by the hard road of the Cross’ (p. 6). The dying, he says, is a ‘stern reality’ (p. 7). We will consider below some of the exacting aspects of the call to die.

If we respond to our divisions by dying to make room for Christ and for one another, the power of God can work in and through us. We become habitable dwellings for the Spirit. To return to Pauline imagery, we continue our journey out of the culture of slavery, so that the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are not slaves but are children of God and joint heirs with Christ, ‘if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him’ (Rom. 8.15-17). Being glorified with Christ is not a reward for good behaviour, because we have suffered with him, but is the very fruit of that suffering. Dying is the only means by which we can be truly open to God’s Spirit, or, as Ramsey puts it, the only way of being centred in Christ: ‘For, as He is baptized into man’s death, so men shall be baptized into His; and, as He loses His life to find it in the Father, so men may by a veritable death find a life whose centre is in Christ and in the brethren. *One died for all, therefore all died*. To say this is to describe the Church of God’ (p. 23).

Continual dying and rising

The Church is made through baptism, and is structured baptismally as a Body that dies and rises. As the body of Christ, we find unity according to how we give ourselves to the process of dying and rising. *BEM* emphasizes the on-going nature of baptism: ‘Baptism is related not only to momentary experience, but to life-long growth into Christ’ (*BEM* para 9), and, indeed, beyond, in that baptism has an eschatological dimension, looking forward to the fullness of time.⁴⁷ What is promised in baptism is none other than the Kingdom of God. Our baptism may not be completely fulfilled in this age; the Kingdom may not be fully realised in this age. Nonetheless, the Kingdom breaks in to our present time, and we can be more or less open to it doing so.⁴⁸

The invitation is always to make ourselves open, always to die again; we never exhaust our baptism. All of Christian life and the fulcrum of Christian spirituality is the dying and rising with Christ, so as continually to make room for God and for one another. We do not move on to another stage where something different is required.

This is why we pray:

⁴⁷ Faith and Order Paper No. 111 (1982). On this eschatological dimension, and baptism as a call to struggle against the forces of wickedness, see The Cyprus Agreed Statement, *The Church of the Triune God*, Sect IV, n. 17.

⁴⁸ Susan K. Wood, *One Baptism: Ecumenical Dimensions of the Doctrine of Baptism* (Collegeville; Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2009), ch. 1, explores the ways in which baptism is ‘inaugurated eschatology, the end time present now’, p. 1.

Grant, Lord, that we who are baptized into the death of your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ may continually put to death our evil desires and be buried with him; and that through the grave and gate of death we may pass to our joyful resurrection; through his merits who died and was buried and rose again for us, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord.⁴⁹

The role of prayer

Gregory of Sinai called prayer itself ‘the manifestation of baptism’, because in baptism Christ and the Holy Spirit come to dwell in our hearts.⁵⁰ In prayer, we empty ourselves to make room for the Spirit; the Spirit that we receive at our baptism, and that makes us into a temple of God (I Corinthians 3.16-17).⁵¹ Prayer is an opening of ourselves to God so that God can become our centre, and so that we, thereby, can participate in the divine life. It follows that prayer is fundamental to any process whereby Christians come together as one, for without prayer we are not able to dismantle many of the obstacles that lie within our own selves. Without prayer opening our eyes, enlarging our hearts, or bringing us to a point of conviction, we may not even discern these obstacles.

Herbert McCabe, OP, described all prayer as ‘an abandonment of ourselves...because it is a sharing in Christ’s abandonment of himself in death’. ⁵² He shared the sense, conveyed by Bonhoeffer and Ramsey, that the central task of the Christian is to move oneself (in the sense of one’s ego)⁵³ aside so as to make room for God. ‘In prayer we stop believing in ourselves, relying on ourselves, and we believe and trust in God’ (p. 218). McCabe expressed both how prayer itself is a kind of dying, and how this kind of dying contains our rising; for as we move ourselves aside Christ can dwell in us and so we in him:⁵⁴ ‘It is all a sharing in Christ’s death ... looking forward to that ultimate sharing in his death which is our own death in him, through which we rise in him to understand the Father in the Son, to pray the prayer which is the Spirit, to communicate with our Father in joy and love for eternity’ (p. 218).

Corporate egos

As individuals, our way to one another is frequently blocked by our egos, as Bonhoeffer puts it.⁵⁵ This is also true of us as communions. As churches we need to

⁴⁹ Collect, Evening Prayer on Friday, *Common Worship Daily Prayer* (London: Church House Publishing, 2005), p. 190; Collect, Saturday of Holy Week, *Common Order* (Edinburgh, Saint Andrew Press, 1996) p. 899.

⁵⁰ ‘The Signs of Grace and Delusion’. See Simon Tugwell, OP, ‘The Manifestation of Baptism’, *New Blackfriars*, 52/614 (1971): 324-330, and Simon Tugwell, OP, ‘Reflections on the Pentecostal Doctrine of “Baptism in the Holy Spirit” II’, *Heythrop Journal*, 13/4 (1972): 402-14.

⁵¹ ‘Towards a common understanding of the church’, Reformed-Roman Catholic international dialogue, second phase (1984-1990), n. 76., emphasises the ‘three closely-linked “Pentecostals” [that] belong to the foundation of the church’: the Spirit descending on Jesus at his baptism, and upon the disciples in the upper room, and upon the Gentiles as they listen to the word of God (Acts 2.1-12).

⁵² Herbert McCabe, OP, *God Still Matters* (London: Continuum, 2002), p. 218.

⁵³ *Life Together*, p. 12; *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, p. 35. Cf. Heather Ward, *The Gift of Self* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1990).

⁵⁴ Cf. Ramsey, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, p. 27.

⁵⁵ SCM, 1954, p. 12.

die to ourselves, and to recognise the on-going call to do so. This, it seems to me, is consonant with the Reformed principle of *reformanda*: ‘the need for constant renewal and conversion of the church, as complementary to its continuity’.⁵⁶ Indeed, reflecting on this principle in 2002, the Panel on Doctrine of the Church of Scotland wrote: ‘We may feel that we have to work hard at change, but perhaps also we need to put ourselves in the place where we become open to change, vulnerable to being recreated. It is a process which has been defined by the sequence “broken down ... broken open ... breaking out”’ (Report to the General Assembly, 2002, 4.7).

The obstacles that church egos present to ecumenism are not obvious. We can fail to notice them for at least three reasons.

First, ecumenism works, partly, by churches asking what gifts they can each bring to the others, and how they can be responsible in helping one another to live worthily of their baptism. Secondly, ecumenism involves distinct communities seeking to work out and retain their integrity. Thirdly, therefore, in ecumenism we tend to hold ourselves at the centre of our concerns, and bring both our wisdom and our hurts to the table (both of which need honouring, but both of which get in the way, if we do not know when to get them out of the way).

The mid-twentieth century conversations between our two traditions raised a crucial question about unity:

The New Testament teaching about the nature of the Church being what it is; the Episcopalian and Presbyterian ‘Churches’ being what, in the course of history they have come to be, neither of them claiming in its separatedness to exhibit the whole truth and wealth of the One Church of Christ, yet each claiming to possess gifts from the Head of the Church which it cannot in conscience deny or resign, and each being as desirous of respecting the conscience of the other as it is bound to obey its own – this being the historic situation, are there conceivable modifications and mutual adaptations of the two Church systems whereby they may be reconciled in such a plenitude of faith and order as will conserve the fullness of their traditions?⁵⁷

What looks at first sight to be an honourable desire, *viz.*, the desire of both parties to conserve the fullness of their traditions, on further reflection looks to be going in the opposite direction from our baptism. What is Christian about wishing to give nothing up? What is so valuable in each of our own identities that will not be refined by dying and rising?

Our distinct communities need to live baptismally: to die, or practice self-abandonment, in that way of making room for Christ and for one another. As churches grow in wisdom and tradition, they retain sight of their basic and shared identity in Christ by the baptismal discipline of continually dying. This is what refines them, and purifies their wisdom and traditions. Ramsey tells ‘theologian, reunionist, philanthropist’ alike ‘that their work and their ideal is, in itself and of itself, nothing’.

⁵⁶ The Church of Scotland response to *BEM*, ‘Reply’ V (2), in Thurian (ed.) *Churches Respond to BEM*, vol. I, p. 98.

⁵⁷ *Relations between Anglican and Presbyterian Churches* (London, SPCK, 1957), p. 7.

‘But,’ he continues, ‘all that is lost is found; and the Cross is the place where the theology of the church has its meaning’.⁵⁸

While Christians have a responsibility to guard what has been handed down to us, we can become self-protective in our ways, and thereby distort what we have been given, and even forget that essentially we have been given freedom. Dying to ourselves for the sake of one another does not mean disregarding our traditions, or living superficially on the surface of them, as shall be argued later. It means going deeply into those traditions and being challenged by them in the process of discerning what in us needs to die. As shall also be argued below, we cannot see clearly in advance of any process of dying, what needs to die and to what our dying will give rise. The deeper we go into our traditions, the deeper the possibility of challenge and discernment, as we uncover those things that have become obstacles to the love of God within us. Going deeply into our traditions leads, paradoxically, to a paring back. Going deeply is a process of baptism.

By paring ourselves back, we find our shared identity in Christ. As Bonhoeffer conveys, this shared identity in Christ is all that we are, and wholly what we are:

I have community with others and I shall continue to have it only through Jesus Christ. The more genuine and the deeper our community becomes, the more will everything else between us recede, the more clearly and purely will Jesus Christ and his work become the one and only thing that is vital between us. We have one another only through Christ, but through Christ we do have one another, wholly, and for all eternity.⁵⁹

Baptism is the start of our life together, the basis of our unity, and the foundation of the Church. It is also, ultimately, the only identity we claim. Ecumenically, we need to start with what God has done to and in us. We tell our history not because that is a good starting point or basis for ecumenical dialogue, but because and insofar as that history reflects what God has done to and in us. We take our histories seriously because we have been baptised, and because we have been baptised we need to stay radically in touch with who we are. The radical dynamic of going back to our roots lends a purifying lense through which to view our history. As we move out from baptismal unity to fuller unity on other and all matters, we also pare ourselves back to realising the fundamental baptismal truth, that we are who we are because we died with Christ and have been raised with and in him. In this lies our new birth, our new identity, and the basis of our relationship with one another. The ‘essence of baptism and the gift of the Spirit is Christological and ecclesiological. “... don’t you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life” (Rom 6.3-4).’⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Ramsey, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, pp. 7-8.

⁵⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, p. 14.

⁶⁰ John E. Colwell, *Promise and Presence: An Exploration of Sacramental Theology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005), p. 120.

Four things that dying to self probably does NOT mean

1. Dying to our true selves

Dying to ourselves cannot mean stripping ourselves of who we truly are, that is, who we are called to be by God. It must mean stripping ourselves of all that gets in the way of realising our calling in God. ‘The extension of the self, like that of the Kingdom, knows no bounds when it is in God’, writes Heather Ward in *The Gift of Self*. But in our present state, ‘ego at once inflates our vision of our natural capacities and diminishes our hope of glory. For the self to enter that glory the illusions and pretences of ego must be deflated’.⁶¹

We easily acquire baggage that distorts our true identity. Consider the following example of Polish Christians concerned to honour their compatriots. The peacemakers Jean and Hildegard Goss-Mayr visited Poland 10 years after the end of World War II. They asked some Polish Christians if they would be willing to meet with other Christians from West Germany. The Poles said ‘no’. One of their number exclaimed: ‘What you are asking is impossible. Each stone of Warsaw is soaked in Polish blood! We cannot forgive!’ Before the peacemakers parted, the whole group said the Lord’s prayer together. When they reached the words ‘forgive us our sins as we forgive’, everyone stopped praying. Tensions built up, until the Pole who had spoken most vehemently said, ‘I must say yes to you. I could no more pray the Our Father, I could no longer call myself a Christian, if I refuse to forgive. Humanly speaking, I cannot do it, but God will give us strength’.⁶²

The Poles’ reluctance to meet the Germans was understandable, but it blocked their realising their true identity in Christ, *viz.*, as children of God who are free from sin. Their sin was not at first obvious to the Poles. They were initially rather like the older brother of the Prodigal Son, in Jesus’ parable (Luke 15.11-33). He had just cause for complaint. He also had a strong sense of fairness and of dutiful behaviour. He prioritised all of these over the most important thing, which was the father’s love for his sons; for *both* of his sons. The Poles prioritised, in honour of their people, the remembrance of harm done.

Sin can be understood as the prioritising of some goods over the thing that is really important.⁶³ It prevents us living in the freedom God has bestowed upon us. Being in sin is a matter of being enslaved, including being enslaved to grievances. Those who are hurt by violence or injustice need repentance as much as the perpetrators of violence and injustice, because they need release from the grievances that enslave them.⁶⁴ Repentance, like all prayer, is a mini-baptism; a dying and rising through which we can be made free to live in the love of God. The Poles had to die to their offence and to their own sense of virtue, so that God’s love could come first. Their

⁶¹ Heather Ward, *The Gift of Self* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1990), p. 23.

⁶² Walter Wink recounts this episode in *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), pp. 275-6. He takes it from Jim Forest, *Making Enemies Friends* (New York: Crossroads, 1988), pp. 76-8. For Jean and Hildegard Goss-Mayr’s reflections on their peacemaking endeavours, see *A Non-Violent Lifestyle* ed. Gerard Houver (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1989).

⁶³ Cf. Herbert McCabe OP, *God, Christ and Us* (London; New York: Continuum, 2003), p. 30.

⁶⁴ Cf. Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), p. 114.

experience illustrates how God does not strip us of our God-given identity. Rather, God brings that identity to fruition when we let go of the things that stand in the way.

2. Ring-fencing aspects of our own identity, and identifying in others what (we think) they need to give up.

Ecumenically, there is a tendency to ring-fence in advance aspects of our own tradition that we think must be preserved. There is an equal tendency to identify in other communions that to which they should be prepared to die. The Church of England, for example, tends to ring-fence episcopacy, and the Church of Scotland tends to highlight episcopacy as that which must be moved aside in some way or other, for the sake of fuller unity between our two churches. Similarly, some Anglicans tend to identify in Roman Catholicism the need to move aside the supremacy of the Pope, Papal infallibility, and the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and Assumption of the Virgin Mary.

However, we often do not see clearly, or ahead of the process of dying, what it is that needs pruning. If we think we know, we are still maintaining control of the process, and therefore hardly dying. The process is called ‘dying’ because it is painful and radical; it takes us to the root of ourselves. It is not merely being challenged and rising, or suffering self-doubt and rising. Dying is an utter dismantling, such that we abandon control and give ourselves to God. In advance of prayerful engagement, or, sometimes, crises, that trigger the dying, we often cannot identify specifically the things in us that need to die.

In the case of the Polish Christians, the moment of conviction, when they realised they needed to change, was at one and the same time the revelation of that to which they had to die. They realised, because they could not pray without doing so, that they had to consent to meet the German Christians, which, at that moment, they realised involved needing to forgive. Had they thought about it in advance, they might have stipulated certain conditions according to which they would meet the German Christians. As it was, the Lord’s Prayer brought them to the point of self-abandonment, and thereby beyond an attempt to control their situation. They discovered that they had to die to their impulses towards self-protection and the honouring of their people. These impulses were not inherently bad, but they were obstacles to the love of God and, as such, they stood in the way of the Polish and German Christians finding their common unity in Christ.

The experience of the Poles reveals how control contradicts the process of self-abandonment. It also suggests that there is much we do not know or cannot see ahead of the process of letting go. Since the things to which we must die often present themselves as goods, we do not always see that they are obstacles. Since we operate under a range of mixed motives – for example, to love God, but also to guard our honour, to let others know how they have hurt us, to protect ourselves against that which makes us vulnerable – we do not discover many of these motives until the process of dying peels back the layers. Moreover, we cannot know what form our rising will take; what goods it will involve. We may not even know that they are goods we would desire. The Poles probably had no prior desire for friendship with Germans, but they gained a life-long friendship with them. Significantly, this friendship yields life for us precisely because it was forged from the Poles’ process of

dying. Their friendship would have been less fruitful, in terms of what it can teach us, had it not been germinated by such a death. As it is, their friendship, and others like it, can help us to open ourselves up to the possibility that both our dying and our rising may look immeasurably different from what we would imagine.

The Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I (1886-1972) tried in his life to encourage the churches to relinquish control and risk openness in their relations with one another. In an interview with the French Orthodox theologian, Olivier Clement in 1969, he lamented the ‘fear and distrust’ between theologians of different communions, who sought to ‘defend themselves and to defeat the others’.⁶⁵ In this interview, Athenagoras revealed a willingness to abandon himself to the truth; to let go of the impulse to control where truth can point:

If truth is the truth, we must not be afraid for it; let us give it, let us share it, let us show it in its fullness, let us welcome all that there is of light and love in the experience of our brethren. If we continue in this attitude, then truth will become clear of itself, it will conquer all limitations and inadequacies from within, on the basis of the common mystery of the Church. Let us enlarge our hearts, ‘let each one of us’, as the apostle says, ‘look not to our own things, but rather to the things of others’ (Philippians 2.4).

The Poles discovered that God’s truth led them to a life fuller than they had even envisaged, once they looked not to their own things but to the things of others. When we lay our egos aside, we find that God does not leave us vulnerable and exposed, but transforms us towards fullness of life. As St Paul put it, in speaking of our pending physical death, we can trust that we will not be left naked, but will be further clothed, ‘so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life’ (2 Corinthians 5.3-4).

3. Compromise

Compromise is a pale shadow of what can be achieved by dying to our own needs to serve the needs of others. It is, perhaps, even a falsification of the process. Compromise is a half-way position, and one which we achieve through careful negotiation and a great amount of control and restraint, on our own part and on the part of those whom we are meeting. Dying, I am suggesting, involves a relinquishing of control. But it opens us up to God and thereby promises resurrection. Resurrection is not God’s reward to those who die; it is God’s fruit, born of the work of dying.⁶⁶

4. Shelving of our differences

If churches are to die to certain aspects of themselves for the sake of ecumenism, this cannot mean shelving our obvious differences, and settling for the most accessible common denominators. As already indicated, the process of dying breaks us open, it cuts to the heart of us. It takes us so deeply into ourselves that we begin to know ourselves as God knows us. We begin to see the gap between ourselves as made in our own image, and our true selves as made in the image of God, and as called into God’s likeness. We can approach this true understanding not by a shallow shelving of differences, but by a process of going deeply into our traditions until we access the depth of our spirituality. The deeper we go in the tradition in which we are rooted, the

⁶⁵ <http://www.stpaulsirvine.org/html/athenagoras.htm>

⁶⁶ Cf. Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 257-8.

more likely the depths discovered will speak to the depths of other traditions.⁶⁷ Augustine said, “I know less of myself than thou dost know. I beseech Thee now, O my God, to reveal to me myself also, that I may reveal to my brothers my weakness” (*Confessions*, X, 37). He found God plumbing the depths of his soul, and realised that what is revealed at the depths is what can best be shared with others. The depth within us, while being less accessible than our superficial levels, is not thereby less communicable, for deep speaks to deep.⁶⁸ Participating in a reality that transcends and embraces us, is possible only insofar as we are all prepared to go deeply. It is also to be expected that some crises that are to inform our dying will be occasioned only by deep engagement with the riches of our traditions – not because these riches are suspect, but, on the contrary, because they are reliable guides (as was the Lord’s Prayer, in guiding the Poles towards forgiveness).

A harder question

Sometimes might we be asked to give up even that which God has given us, and which we understand to be part of God’s plan? This was a crucial aspect of Abraham’s dilemma when asked to sacrifice Isaac. It may also have been a part of Jesus’ suffering in Gethsemane: did he really need to die to accomplish his mission?

In the end, Abraham did not have to slay his son, but he learned this only by going into the very darkest place of being actually prepared to do so. The story of Abraham and Isaac is morally one of the most difficult in our religious heritage. Even according to what is perhaps its most palatable interpretation – that the story provides an argument in narrative form to show that God does not desire child sacrifice – the lesson is learned only because of the lengths to which Abraham is prepared to go. We do not know how to deal with this story, and we are often ashamed of it, but it stands as a witness to the possibility that we might be asked to do the unthinkable; to put to death that which we most cherish, that which seemed to be most part of God’s gift and promise, and that which we cannot bear to hurt. It may yet prove to be an argument in narrative form that God does not desire exactly the sacrifices we at first think. If so, the narrative also implies that God needs to find ways of showing us what God does desire, and sometimes the ways God finds take us beyond what we are able to fathom.

Rising

That said, the very reason that our path is one of dying and rising is because Christ himself, who is God’s gift and promise, laid down his life. Christ’s sacrifice, as Nicholas Peter Harvey emphasizes, is unfathomable. Socially, his life-affirming ministry gave his disciples no cause to see why he should give himself up to death.⁶⁹

⁶⁷Cf. Nicholas Adams’ account of scriptural reasoning, in *Habermas and Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 242.

⁶⁸Cf. McCabe, *God Matters*, pp. 172-3.

⁶⁹N.P. Harvey, *Death’s Gift*, p. 81. Harvey clarifies that Jesus died not as a martyr to a just cause for which he had fought in his ministry, but by way of obedience to the Father, despite the life-affirming quality of his ministry. Only thus could his death be pure and have the total power to save, for it was not compromised by the self-righteousness that can accompany pursuit of lofty causes (pp. 83-4). That

Politically, the authorities saw no sense in it. Theologically, his death expressed ‘an all-encompassing love quite beyond explanation or rationalization, ensuring that all things cooperate unto good, that our sins are forgiven and our evil cast out without limit or condition’ (p. 8).

Christ laid down his life that he might take it again (John 10.17-18), not because resurrection is the reward for good behaviour, but because it is the fullness of life that comes from such a dying. The resurrection does not undo Jesus’ death but declares its significance; it reveals its victory. It shows that Jesus’ self-giving love is redemptive; that it can heal us and make us whole. This is most strongly argued by Hans Urs von Balthasar in his reflection upon Holy Saturday. Without the descent into hell there would remain aspects of human evil for ever past redemption. In embracing the reality of hell and rising to new life, God, through Christ, is revealed as able to overcome godlessness, abandonment and death.⁷⁰ Nothing of our alienation from God is left untouched by Christ’s death. All is able to be healed, so that we can make our passage out of slavery and realise our vocation as the adopted children of God. Christ’s resurrection, Harvey writes, shows his ‘death as the victory over all that holds us back from our true selfhood and vocation as “sons of God and joint heirs with Christ” (*Death’s Gift*, p. 8). As Christians participate in that death, we become channels of the risen Christ. Our true selves are found in this, that the risen Christ becomes our centre and our life. As our baptism is progressively realised, we are freed to serve the living God (p. 9).

Michael Ramsey argues that in ‘two ways the death of Christ contains within itself the fact of the Church – by His baptism into our humanity, by His negation of the rights of self before God. But all this is true only because His death is followed by His resurrection.’⁷¹ In dying, Christ is ‘made naught with nothing of His own’, and so is ‘in the Father’s glory and in that glory He is raised from the dead’ (p. 22). In this Ramsey sees the very ‘meaning of the Church’: ‘the eternal love of Father and Son is uttered in the Christ’s self-negation unto death, to the end that men may make it their own and be made one. The unity, in a word, means *death*. The death to the self *qua* self, first in Christ and then in the disciples, is the ground and essence of the Church’ (p. 22).

There is no alternative route to the making of the Church, than the route of baptism. There is no way to fuller unity other than the way of our baptism; the way of dying to our egos – our fears, our grievances, our sense, perhaps even, of what God has entrusted to us – so as to make room for Christ and for one another. There is no way of discerning the forms of our dying outside of the process of prayerful engagement, and little likelihood that we will envisage the forms of our rising ahead of the process of dying. There is no rising without dying, but from dying, expressions of the risen life cannot fail to come, because Christ by his Spirit is able more to dwell in us, and we in him. The very dying promises new life in God’s kingdom, which, in its final expression, will be a life of perfect unity.

Jesus did not befriend death but endured it (p. 80) helps to make the point that we may be called to die in ways that seem to go against the grain of God’s work within us.

⁷⁰ *Mysterium Paschale* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990; first published 1970).

⁷¹ Ramsey, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, p. 22.

6 PARTNERSHIP IN THE GOSPEL: A BIBLICAL MODEL

Introducing *koinonia*

If baptism is the start of our life together, the basis of our unity, and the foundation of our church, then the hard to define but important New Testament idea of *koinonia* offers a way to live out our baptismal heritage. When the specifics of its use in Paul, and in the Johannine Epistles, are set more broadly in the context of New Testament theology, it may be read as offering a link between the saving action of God in Christ and the calling of the Church to respond to that action. Indeed, the conversations between the Church of Scotland and the Church of England have taken Paul's words in Philippians 1.5 as their motto, 'your partnership in the gospel', and sought to apply them to the developing relationship between our two churches. 'Partnership' is offered here as a translation of *koinonia*, which is often translated elsewhere in our English Bibles as 'fellowship', 'sharing' or 'communion'. While avoiding the temptation to stretch this term to mean all things good in an ecumenical context, we offer an exposition of its use in the New Testament as a way of grounding the way ahead.

Clear examples of the use of *koinonia* and its cognates as noun, verb and adjective appear most often in the New Testament in the acknowledged letters of Paul,⁷² although its frequency of use is not high even there. Its roots lie in notions of what was 'common', in contrast to the 'private' (*idios*), and it is to be found in classical texts in relation to many different spheres, such as 'public' life, the state, business partnerships and marriage. In these texts, according to traditional exegesis of the term, *koinonia* connotes a variety of relationships, often carrying the meaning of 'having a share in', or 'participating in', although it could also mean 'having something in common' with another, or 'being in association' with another, or even 'imparting', 'giving a share' of something. 'Common life'/'common good' was an idea which embodied a cultural understanding to which justice, order, that which was beneficial, and friendship all contributed. Philosophers such as Pythagoras, Plato and Aristotle used the term to describe ideal societies or brotherhoods, in which possessions were shared 'in common'. It was also frequently applied to a 'close life partnership' or 'marriage', and could be used to refer to a contract of Roman law, the 'consensual *societas*', which was a reciprocal and legally binding association or partnership, freely entered upon by individuals or groups who had a shared goal or concern. In religious contexts, it was appropriate to discuss *koinonia* between gods and humans, and in the mystery religions, *koinonia* as union with the god was considered possible through certain rites. The Hellenistic cities that Paul encountered were full of groups of people who came together for business, social or cultic reasons, and who might discuss and promote *koinonia* in its widest sense.

The world-view in which *koinonia* developed as a concept is very different from that of Judaism. In Judaism there was little emphasis on close fellowship between humanity and Yahweh, and rather more on God's lordship and the servanthood of the people. The Greek concept of friendship, and its networks, is not found in the same

⁷² '[M]ore than three out of four New Testament examples of koinon-terms are in the Pauline corpus', John Reumann, 'Koinonia in Scripture: Survey of Biblical Texts', in Thomas F. Best and Günther Gassmann (eds), *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994), pp. 37-69, p. 40.

way, and the root *koinon* cannot easily be mapped on to Hebrew. The Hebrew root *chabar*, to ‘join together, bind, unite’, is perhaps the closest, although only a small number of its derivatives are translated with a *koinon* term in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible completed in the century or so before Christ (e.g. Ezekiel 37.16, 19). Koinonia is never used to refer to Israel’s relationship with God, but it is used to describe fellowship with pagan deities (e.g. Hosea 4.17). Later Hellenistic Jewish writers such as Josephus and Philo do use *koinon* words more frequently, and with a wide frame of reference. However, it was a term and an idea which was not widely known or adopted in Palestinian Judaism, and was unlikely to have played a part in the teaching of Jesus.

In contrast, Saul of Tarsus came from a rather different context, that of Hellenistic Judaism, and it is not surprising that *koinonia* would be a term he knew and would find relevant to his theology. As Rutishauser-James summarises the Pauline use of the term, it ‘expresses not only the commonality in giving and receiving material resources (2 Cor 8.4; 9.13; Rom 15.26), but, crucially, for all Christian believers, their sharing and participating in the gift and work of Christ and of the Holy Spirit’.⁷³ The ‘*koinonia* in the gospel’ of believers, as described in Phil 1.5, is not a static state of being in relationship, but involves active, practical participation in Christian life.

While acknowledging the hermeneutical dangers of taking examples of the use of a particular word in a biblical context and seeking to apply it without further theological reflection in a modern context, we offer here an exploration of the use of *koinonia* in selected texts, as a basis for our proposals to explore ways in which we might live out our oneness in the body of Christ. First, however, mention needs made of a more recent challenge to the traditional exposition of the term which has so far been offered. In the journal *Ecclesiology*, Andrew Lincoln has recently highlighted a comprehensive study of this issue by Norbert Baumert, which rejects the notion that *koinonein* in any context includes the aspect of participation in something held in common.⁷⁴ Just how significant this view is for ecumenical debate depends both on the importance of the idea of participation in the mystery of God in that debate, and on the accuracy of Baumert’s analysis. As Lincoln points out, there is a diversity of usages of *koinonia* terms in the Pauline corpus and in the New Testament more generally, and there seems little indication that Paul or any of the other early Christian writers had a fully worked out theology centred on the term. Later commentators do well not to burden the term with complex theological significances which the NT witness does not support. Moreover, the sort of participation argued for above is not heavily dependent on a mystical sense of participation in the divine, but rather on an active encouragement to work together for the common good of the church, springing from a shared experience of the energising grace and Spirit of Christ. A participation which spurs on, rather than promotes an inward-looking stasis –this emphasis is the one most helpful to ecumenical endeavour. The second point, that of the accuracy of Baumert’s analysis, will be considered further below.

⁷³ Sigrid Rutishauser-James, “‘Partnership’ or ‘Fellowship’: which, *today*, is truer to the biblical witness?”, *The Expository Times* 120.7 (2009), pp. 327-330, p. 328.

⁷⁴ See Andrew Lincoln, ‘Communion: Some Pauline Foundations’ in *Ecclesiology* 5 (2009), pp. 135-160. The book under discussion is Norbert Baumert, *Koinonein und Metechein- synonym? Eine umfassende semantische Untersuchung* (SSB 51; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2003).

Some Examples in Pauline Texts

'The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a *koinonia* in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a *koinonia* in the body of Christ?' (1 Corinthians 10.16)

As Paul Avis points out in his editorial in *Ecclesiology*, and Lincoln considers at length, this verse is surely the most problematic for Baumert's anti-participation stance. For many commentators, this statement is an early, possibly catechetical Hellenistic assertion about the eucharistic elements, which puts the tradition handed down to Paul, given in 1 Cor.11.23-25, into Hellenistic, *koinonia* terms. The statement asserts that to eat bread and drink wine is to proclaim the Lord's death, but also, clearly, to partake or participate in the blessings and benefits of that death. Crucially, *koinonia* is used here in the context of a call to unity among the Corinthian Christians, who are struggling with the issue of food sacrificed to idols (10.14, 19, 25-30) and the different needs of those with strong and weak faiths (8.9-13). The rhetorical point Paul makes is that 'the body of Christ' involves not only Jesus' body killed on the cross, but also the community at Corinth, who are to be understood as the 'body of Christ' (17b, 12.12-27). From christological, soteriological and sacramental concerns, Paul moves to ecclesiological considerations, with the purpose of promoting unity among the Corinthian Christians. With the use of *koinonia*, participation in the one loaf of bread, Paul 'moves the emphasis to the commonality as all partake of ... the one bread as one body'.⁷⁵ This commonality, however, it should be noted, is to be promoted among diverse house churches in Corinth, not among the churches in Corinth and elsewhere, or in any sense the church universal. Moreover, participation in the table of Christ means one cannot also participate in the table of idols or demons (10.18, 20). Participation has meaning and significance in this chapter of 1Corinthians, and demands an exclusive commitment to Christ. In the eucharist, those who partake receive a share in Christ, and his gifts of the Spirit and grace; they also have a share, or are partners with each other 'in Christ', belonging to Christ and to the body of Christ which is the Church. As the Second Anglican/Roman Catholic Commission's Report, *Church as Communion* puts it, relying heavily on this Corinthians passage, 'in the common celebration of the eucharist..., celebrating the memorial of the Lord and partaking of his body and blood, the Church points to the origin of its communion in Christ, himself in communion with the Father; it experiences that communion in a visible fellowship; it anticipates the fullness of the communion in the Kingdom; it is sent out to realize, manifest and extend that communion in the world'.⁷⁶

The concept of *koinonia*, certainly at least as demonstrated in 1Corinthians 10, is a clear example of Paul's understanding of the inter-relatedness of participation in the eucharist, which somehow involves participation in the death of Christ, and a particular relationship between Christians who eat this meal together. 'Partnership' is a good way to understand this participatory relationship between Christians: whether it is a helpful way to translate *koinonia* in the context of the eucharist and the participation of believers in or with the body or blood of Christ is open to debate. *Communio* language may be more appropriate in this sacramental context, although

⁷⁵ Reumann, 'Koinonia in Scripture', p. 43.

Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission, *Church as Communion*, 1990, para. 24.

this Latin term certainly needs the help of another, *participatio*, to do justice to *koinonia* in other contexts. Either way, participation in the thing shared in common, the bread and wine, the body and blood of Christ, is clearly stated and cannot be ignored.

‘...thankful for your *koinonia* in the gospel from the first day until now’
(Philippians 1.5)

The ‘thanksgiving’ section of Paul’s letters is the most common place in which the term *koinonia* appears in his writing.⁷⁷ As has already been noted, Philippians 1.5, the ‘*koinonia* of the gospel’ (a phrase found nowhere else in the New Testament) involves an active sharing in the gospel for salvation and for mission to others. This partnership is spiritual in its nature (see at 1.7, where the Philippians are described by Paul as his ‘partners in God’s grace’), but this reality on a spiritual plane is expressed in concrete ways in the spreading of the gospel and in the repeated financial contributions to the work of Paul’s mission (4.15- ‘a matter of giving and receiving’). The practical and financial participation of the Philippians in Paul’s work is firmly grounded in a theology which sees them as partners or stake-holders in the gospel.⁷⁸

‘If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any *koinonia* in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete; be of the same mind...’ (Philippians 2.1-2)

Greek concepts of *koinonia* often included an ethical aspect, involving positive values such as justice, order and peace which were vital for the sharing of some aspect of life together. In Paul, *koinonia* is less about commands and more about motivation to live in Christian community. It speaks of implied actions which stem from a relationship with Christ, with the Spirit or with others in faith. The reference in Philippians 2 to the *koinonia* of the Spirit offers a way in to understand the less transparent blessing found at 2Corinthians 13.13, which speaks of the ‘the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the *koinonia* of the Holy Spirit’.⁷⁹ In both of these examples, Philippians 2.1-2 and 2Corinthians 13.13, ‘partnership’ offers a fresh and striking way to understand the active relationship between believers as a worshipping body and the Spirit.

There are several examples in Pauline texts in which the idea of ‘partners’ in aspects of Christian mission is an obvious way to understand *koinonia*: in Philemon 17, where Paul encourages Philemon, that if Philemon considers him (Paul) to be ‘his partner’, he should welcome Onesimus back; and 2Corinthians 8.23, where Paul refers to Titus as his ‘partner and co-worker’. As many commentators point out, these verses, with

⁷⁷ 1Cor 1.9, Phil 1.5, Philemon v.6, 2Cor 1.7.

⁷⁸ See Markus Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (London: A. & C. Black, 1997), p. 60.

⁷⁹ Of course, the participatory aspect of *koinonia* in 1Cor 13.13 has been hotly debated, depending on the way the phrase ‘*koinonia* of the Holy Spirit’ is to be understood: as the relationship within the Christian community made possible by the work of the Holy Spirit; or as the participation of believers in all the Holy Spirit offers. Margaret Thrall, in her ICC Volume on II Corinthians Chapters 8-13 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), pp. 916- 919, offers a helpful discussion of the issue. In this paper, it is argued that there is a participatory element to the phrase.

the others considered, suggest that *koinonia* has a double association in Pauline texts, a ‘vertical’ aspect, referring to the relationship with God, and a ‘horizontal’ aspect, referring to relationships with others, almost always in this literature with other Christians, and the sharing of tasks with them.⁸⁰ While the exact nature of the inter-relatedness of the vertical and horizontal aspects of *koinonia* is not made clear in the Pauline texts, it is clear that active participation in the life of the Christian community and a meaningful, active, salvific relationship with God, Son and Spirit, are central to Paul’s understanding of what it means to be a follower of Christ.

Of course, there is a business aspect to some of the uses of the word in Paul, which is not surprising given the history of *koinonia* in the classical world. In Philippians 4.10-20, Paul discusses the financial support given by the Philippians, using *koinon* terms. In 2Corinthians 8 and 9, and Romans 15.26-27, a similar idea is expressed. As these references highlight, *koinonia* in Paul is not usually synonymous with *ekklesia*, but refers rather to that to which believers are called: fellowship with Christ and the Spirit; participation in the blessings of Jesus’ death; being part, though faith, of Christ’s body; and having responsibility for mission, care of other believers locally and in Jerusalem, with a stress on hospitality and good works. Whether or not the reference to the pillars of the Jerusalem church giving Paul the ‘right hand of *koinonia*’ in Galatians 2.9 refers to the establishment of a formal business agreement, or the confirming of an already existing relationship, whether formal or not, the verse affirms this reading of the word. *Koinonia* in Paul is about specific relationships of mutual trust and support between particular church groups.

Partnership in the Gospel: Working out our Oneness in Christ

Koinonia in the New Testament is not essentially about God’s plan for salvation, or about relationships within the Trinity. Nor does it point to a settled ecclesiology, with specific structures of ministry. Its contextual focus is the local grouping of house churches and their relationships with one another and their responsibilities towards wider mission and the church in Jerusalem in particular. It is concerned with the actual situations and beliefs in action which these groups shared in common. One aspect of the idea which is particularly useful for ecumenical thinking today, as Reumann himself argued, is its embodiment of the crossing of boundaries. Contextually, it reflects the ability of the gospel to move from one world to another, from Semitic to Hellenistic thought, from country to town and city. The gospel experience of the incarnate and risen Messiah is presented, in its use, in the vocabulary of Greek thought. Its existing associations are added to by the gospel emphasis of solidarity with the suffering of others. This practical crossing of boundaries, in the creation of active partnerships between worshipping communities, may be of particular significance to the relationship between our two churches as we seek to build a new partnership in mission across the Border. The multi-layered nature of the concept, its resistance to being pinned down beneath any one definition, allied

⁸⁰ The concentration of four examples of *koinonia* occurring in 1 John (1.2-3, 6-7) involves the vertical connection with the Father and the Son, which anchors a horizontal linking of fellow-believers with one another. The stress is on the responsibility of those with such a vertical relationship with God to live in relationship with those on the horizontal plane, perhaps in response to those who were stressing that such horizontal responsibilities were not important for those who participate in God.

to its Pauline connection with participation in the Body of Christ in a powerfully significant way, suggests it is an apt and strong foundation for our endeavours.

7 PATHWAYS TO PARTNERSHIP: PRACTICAL STEPS

We commend the following modest but practical steps arising out of the relationship between our two churches that is charted in the body of our report. The list that follows is intended to consolidate what is already happening between our churches, to supplement them with some new initiatives and to share our fellowship in the gospel with other partners.

1. Each church should appoint a senior representative to spearhead the enhanced relationship between our churches. These representatives would take part in the various interfaces between the churches and (subject to the appointment process in each church) serve as the representative to each other's governing body as often as convenient. The Church of Scotland has already identified a former Moderator of the General Assembly to fulfil this role. The Archbishops of Canterbury and York have expressed their readiness to appoint a bishop to carry this portfolio and to represent the strengthened relationship between our churches at the annual Ecumenical Bishops' Meeting at Lambeth Palace.
2. The Church of England and the Methodist Church of Great Britain should invite the Church of Scotland to participate in the follow up to the work of the joint Anglican-Methodist working party on the ecclesiological implications of the phenomena of 'emerging church' and 'fresh expressions', alongside the Church of Scotland's proposed membership of the Fresh Expressions organisation.
3. Discussions are under way that would enable the Archbishop of Canterbury to be invited to address the General Assembly.
4. Our churches should explore ways in which the St Andrews-tide visit of the Moderator of the General Assembly to London (the Court Visit), which already includes a meeting with the Archbishop of Canterbury, could be made more beneficial to both churches.
5. The bi-annual bilateral and cross-disciplinary consultation (which is co-chaired for the Church of England by the Archbishop of York) is a major plank of our relationship. It would be useful if the two 'senior representatives', referred to above, could be included in the delegations for future meetings.
6. In the area of national mission and public affairs there are already several channels of communication and consultation between our churches (interfaith work; the Mission Theology Advisory Group, MTAG; the RADAR group that scans public affairs on behalf of the churches). We believe that there may be scope for closer consultation on the Church's mission in urban and rural areas and that if a major national issue were to arise, that affected both nations, this should be worked on together.
7. The existing cross-fertilisation between the Church of England's Liturgical Commission and the Church of Scotland's Doctrine and Worship Task Force should be encouraged and that the fruits of this consultation should be shared more widely.

8. The bilateral consultation on faith and order between our churches, that has proved so stimulating to both parties, should continue to meet each year. The Scottish Episcopal Church should be involved forthwith. The aim of the consultation is (a) to consult together on our churches' responses to important ecclesiological and missiological texts at the international level, especially those of the WCC's Faith and Order Commission; (b) to share our work on the theological agendas of each of the three churches; (c) to monitor and progress the implementation of the enhanced 'fellowship in the gospel' between our churches.
9. We suggest that this closer three-way working on theological and doctrinal matters should include a combined meeting, say every five years, of the Church of England's Faith and Order Commission, the Church of Scotland's Doctrine and Worship Task Force and the Doctrine Commission of the Scottish Episcopal Church.

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