THE SEVERN FORUM

'The Future of Ecumenism in England'

by

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In 1897 the great scientist Lord Kelvin noted that radio had no future. In 1903 the President of the Michigan Savings Bank advised Henry Ford's lawyer not to invest in the Ford Motor Company because 'The horse is here to stay and the automobile is only a novelty, a fad'. Those predictions are only matched by two giants of computing. In 1958 Thomas Watson, the Head of IBM, confidently predicted that there was a world market for about five computers, and in 1977 Ken Olsen who was then the head of DEC stated that he saw no reason why anyone should want a computer in their homes.

Prediction is a perilous business, all the more so in theology because the Holy Spirit has a habit of turning the impossible into the possible and conjuring life and hope from the depths of pessimism and despair. So, talking about the future of unity is a perilous business. What we can do, rather more sensibly, is analyse some trends which seem set to influence the future of ecumenism.

A recent study of religion in Edwardian Britain (on the eve of the first world war) suggests that roughly 25% of the adult population, disproportionately women, would have been in church on any given Sunday, compared to 6% today. Church attendance was already falling, both in absolute terms and against population growth, in the Church of England since the 1850s and in the Free Churches since the 1880s. But on the eve of war, England exhibited some of the features of a 'faith society' – two-fifths of adults probably attended worship monthly, and almost everyone was touched by rites of passage. Clive Field conjectures that perhaps 53% of the population had some '…reasonably regular and meaningful relationship with organised religion' and only 1% professed no faith However, that faith component should not be pressed too hard – by 1926 according to a *Daily News* survey, 25% of the population rejected a personal God, Christ's divinity and the inspiration of the Bible. Secularising and sacralising are tricky processes which need careful nuancing. [1] It is also probably true, although unproven, that growth and decline have existed side by side because there have always been congregations and parishes which have bucked trends.

However, recent history for the historic churches of England has been about playing from the back foot against prevailing trends of indifference and apathy from most of the population, aggression from some and a dominant high popular culture which long ago celebrated God's funeral. It may well be that people are still 'religious' in the practice of syncretistic spiritualities or popular belief, but that is far from Christian orthodoxy and commitment. Ironically the same years have also produced at a European level fine, eloquent theologies by Protestant and Catholic alike – Barth, Rahner and von Balthasar surely deserve to be ranked amongst the highest. The intellectual argument about faith has been far from lost, except in the popular mind.

That is, as it were, the backdrop against which the drama of modern church history has evolved. Despite a rumbling debate about whether there was a revival during the 1950s, for the historic Protestant churches, the curve of decline has been steadily downwards. The pattern of Catholic adult conversion roughly mirrors that curve. Its growth has been primarily migrant. [2]

[1] Clive Field ' "The faith society." Quantifying religious belonging in Edwardian Britain 1901-1914' *Journal of Religious History* vol 37 issue 1 (March 2013) pp. 39-63.
[2] Robert Currie, Alan Gilbert, Lee Horsley *Churches and churchgoers: patterns of church growth in Britain since 1700* (Oxford, OUP 1977) p.30

Migration and ecumenism

During the twentieth century populations became increasingly mobile as air and rail transport improved and multiplied. It became increasingly possible to flee from war, insurrection and poverty. Migration changed Britain profoundly. Successive waves have brought the world church on to England's High Streets – Irish, Jamaicans and Poles during the 1950s, Indians and Cypriots in the 1960s, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis in the 1970s, and more recently Ghanaians and Nigerians. The 2005 church census revealed that 1 in 6 of English worshippers was either Asian or Black.[3]

Government statistics bear witness to our increasing diversity. In 1951 4.3% of the population of England and Wales were born outside the UK. In 2011 that had risen to 13% (1.9 million to 7.5 million people), and during that period patterns of migration have become increasingly diverse. The top ten non-UK countries of birth accounted for 61% of the foreign born population in 1951, but only 45% in 2011.[4]

Migration has dramatically altered the religious landscape. It has transformed the life of some historic congregations, particularly in London and large urban conurbations. It has brought a welter of new Pentecostal and independent denominations and grouping which behave very differently to historic English denominations. Not only is the world church now on our High Street, so too are the mosques, temples and gudwaras of our burgeoning Muslim, Hindu and Sikh neighbours.

It should not surprise us that migrants cling to their faith and carry their churches with them. Anyone who has attended an Anglican chaplaincy in the Mediterranean will know what I mean. It out Dibleys the Vicar of Dibley. It should not surprise us therefore that Afro-Caribbean Pentecostals sought to continue practising their faith when they arrived in England. The at best pie-bald welcome afforded to them by indigenous English churches in the wake of the Windrush simply re-enforced that tendency to exclusivism.[5]

Membership of CTE is one guide to that change. When we were founded in 1990 there were sixteen members. Now there are forty-two, and the list of prospective members continues to grow. So, when we think of the future of ecumenism in England, handling diversity is salient. That diversity is ethnic and cultural as well as theological and spiritual. It will have to encompass the charismatic and non-charismatic, theologies of signs and wonder as well as post-Enlightenment Western theology, the legitimate diversity of race and culture and their religious expression, and also (perhaps most difficult of all) genuinely divergent understandings of what constitutes Christian morality, particularly in relation to human sexuality. Put more theologically, what might inter-cultural ecumenism look like, and should orthopraxy join the ecumenical canon?

That exciting diversity also reveals a further contour for the future of ecumenism. English Christianity now consists of those who have deep memories of English ecumenism, and those who have none.

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[3] Peter Brierley *Pulling out of the nose-dive: a contemporary picture of church going: what the 2005 religious census reveals* (London, 2006) p.90

[4] *Immigration Patterns of non- UK born populations in England and Wales in 2011* (Office of National Statistics 2013); http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_346219.pdf (accessed 12 Feb 2014)

[5] J.D. Aldred *Respect: understanding Caribbean British Christianity* (London, Epworth 2005) pp. 87ff

That means that the trajectory of ecumenism can no longer be simply linear, it has also to be iterative.

1) Inherited ecumenism

English church history was dominated by ecumenism between roughly the end of the first world war and the 1970s. Internationally, the creation of world Christian bodies was the equivalent of the creation of the League of Nations, an attempt to ensure that such horror never descended on the world again. It flowed initially through two follow up streams from the Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910 – Life and Work, and Faith and Order – and was to lead eventually to the creation of the World Council of Churches in 1948. English hands were all over it – the ubiquitous strategic presence of Joe Oldham, the bureaucratic genius of Bill Paton, the driving force of George Bell, the public presence and authority of William Temple, the commitment of Oliver Tomkins, the theological power of Lesslie Newbigin. And that is to name but the obvious few. Many of these pioneers had grown up through SCM, whose influence in the 1920s and 30s cannot be overstated. Its watchword, when it began in 1890 was 'the evangelisation of the world in this generation', its focus on volunteering for missionary service abroad. Roughly a fifth of the 50,000 students in higher education in pre-1914 Britain belonged to SCM. [6] Its influence was remarkable. It brought together Anglicans of differing hues, Scottish Presbyterians and English Free Church students at just the moment when nonconformity had come of age, sloughed off its civil disabilities, and felt able not just to look the Church of England in the eye, but to see possibility of common cause. The friendships forged amongst the student members of SCM provided some of the structural framework for later ecumenism.

Their influence was obvious in the creation of the WCC, but that international commitment also had its domestic corollary. From the moment negotiations began about the formation of the Church of South India in 1919 (and, ironically, most of the theologians involved were English and worked in England), to the demise of the English Covenant on the floor of the House of Clergy in 1982, there was a unity scheme of some sort in discussion. There were achievements – the reunion of the Church of Scotland in 1929, the family union of Methodism in 1932, the creation of the British Council of Churches in 1942, the formation of the United Reformed Church in 1972. Looking back, three comments come to mind. The first is that all of this was fundamentally an Anglican-Free Church affair which was attempting to heal some of the deep-seated divisions in English culture and Christianity which stretched back to the period from the Civil War to the Industrial Revolution. At the level of personal relations it has succeeded brilliantly, but in an institutional sense it failed by a handful of votes in General Synod in 1972 when the Anglican-Methodist scheme was defeated. A good deal of the frustration that church leaders feel about institutional ecumenism flows from that legacy of disappointment and the subsequent inability to (as it were) normalise LEP's, those harbingers of the ecumenical future which has yet to come about.

The second is that many partners in the present ecumenical enterprise were not formed by that history, so they share none of the heritage of ecclesiological nuance about the nature of episcopacy, and equally significantly, none of heaviness of repeated engagement and failure hangs upon them.

The third is that the Anglican-Free Church conversation was posited on a misreading of the complexity of the Church of England, which from the 1920s onwards was as acutely aware of its

[6] Adrian Hastings *A history of English Christianity 1920-1985* (London, Collins 1986) p 88

catholic heritage and its place as a 'bridge' between Rome and Geneva as it was of its Cranmerian Reformed and evangelical past. However, even in the 1960s everything seemed possible to the excited ecumenist. Keith Clements, distinguished Baptist ecumenist, was a student at Cambridge in the mid 1960s –

'… I was in a circle who believed we were entering into the era of an unstoppable ecumenical advance. Undefined, maybe naive, but it was a feeling that we were all somehow 'on the way to unity'. We were being welcomed at each other's communion tables and altars. Extraordinary reports were reaching us from Rome as the Second Vatican Council got under way. The Abbot of Downside made history by coming to preach in Great St Mary's, Cambridge. Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, as over our bread and cheese lunches we argued and speculated. In such an atmosphere it did not really seem to matter which denomination you presently belonged to. It made little sense to transfer from one to another because one's real loyalty lay to the coming Great Church' [7]

By the time the decade was out that looked as optimistic as the Wilson government's rhetoric about the white heat of technology. A big story, the story of the possible united church in England, was coming to an end, and its ending overlapped with an intellectual wariness about all 'big stories' from Marxism and Maoism to Christianity and Islam. It also co-incided with the slow emergence of multi-cultural Britain, and the broadening of Christian horizons. It wasn't simply migrants who changed those horizons, just as determinative was Vatican II and the *aggorniamento* (which can be roughly translated as 'bringing up to date') of the Roman Catholic Church.

2) Catholicism and ecumenism

In the sermon that so gripped Keith Clements in 1965, the Abbot of Downside, Christopher Butler, set out his understanding of the quest for unity. He spoke of belief in God, revelation in Christ, the Bible as 'God's Word expressed in human language', baptism, Christian ethics and '…a destiny beyond the grave' as shared Christian realities. That he felt added up to 'communion' (koinonia) and therefore to a degree of unity. However, he was clear that from a Catholic point of view this was not the 'perfect communion' that Jesus spoke of in John's gospel. Catholics, he said, held the particular view that perfect communion was already present in the world – in the episcopal college of Roman Catholic bishops gathered around the successor to Peter.

That tension between a recognition of a common communion in Christ and a perception of the perfect communion of the episcopal college should, he felt, result in dialogue. But, trusting in the Spirit's guidance, he called his congregation to '…look forward to a Christianity so full and rich that it can measure up to the needs of all our denominations, to the needs of the whole of humanity, to the needs of the human spirit which forever seeks not a point without length, or breadth, or depth, but an all-enfolding totality, God himself, One in three persons.'[8]

Butler was in Great St Mary's pulpit about two months after the promulgation of Vatican II's Decree on Ecumenism – *Unitatis Redintegratio*. It was white hot and exciting. A mere twenty years before (1943) Pius XII had declared that the mystical body of Christ 'is' the visible, institutional Roman Catholic Church. Now, here was Butler introducing his ecumenical congregation to that critical

[7] Keith Clements 'Free church, national church' *Theology* vol CXIII, no 876, Nov-Dec 2010, pp 421-8, at p. 424
[8] B.C. Butler 'The unity of Christendom' in Hugh Montefiore (ed) *Sermons from Great St Mary's* (Collins, London 1968) pp 194-200. The sermon was preached on 24th January 1965

conciliar word 'communion'. That was theologically central to Vatican II, and because of it, because the fathers of the council could recognise in their fellow Christians something of Christ, the Council replaced that 'is' with the words 'subsistit in', 'subsists in the Roman Catholic Church. It was a massive shift in self-understanding, away from utter exclusivity to an exploration of what the Spirit had been up to beyond the church's walls.

It was a game-changing moment, and from then on, the Catholic Church became a serious ecumenical player in England, and it was inevitable that eventually the British Council of Churches would needed replacing by a different non-conciliar kind of body which could incorporate the Roman Catholic Church's understanding of authority. That was accomplished at Swanwick in 1987 which laid plans for the Ecumenical Instruments that we now have.

Beyond that Protestant ecumenical players didn't seem to realise that the theological rules had changed too. One of the very ablest Protestant ecumenists, Lesslie Newbigin, was a towering figure in world ecumenism, a Presbyterian missionary to India who became both an architect of and a bishop within the Church of South India. He was also one of the finest ecclesiologists of his generation. He was the theological brain behind the definition of unity which commanded the purview of the WCC in the 1950s, namely the visible unity of all who are in Christ in any one place ordered in such a way that they are related to the whole fellowship of Christ's people everywhere. [9] It was a model which he derived from the New Testament, and to which he hoped all Christians could return. In a lecture given in retirement he returned to theme, concluding that denominations '…could not be the 'building blocks of the universal church' for they represent 'the retreat of the Church into the private sector when the public world was abandoned to the pagan ideology which rules over the so called developed world.'[10]

It is a very Protestant methodology. There is no perception here of Butler's understanding that the 'perfect communion' is in some sense present on earth in the historic experience of the Catholic Church, a view which would be echoed by the Orthodox in their self-understanding. It is was that which was new to ecumenical debate.

As the Decree was received in the Catholic church, scholars began to write about what the shift from 'est' to 'subsistit in' actually meant. Reviewing that work forty years on Cardinal Kasper noted first of all that from a Catholic perspective, it contained the entire ecumenical problem.

Mystici Corporis,(1943) the last encyclical to state baldly that the true church was the Roman Catholic Church was in fact remarkably innovative as well as being deeply conservative. It was the work of Pius XII the wartime Pope, better known for his diplomacy and contacts with Nazi Germany (where he had been nuncio before the war).Its innovation lay in the way in which it shifted the focus of Catholic eccesiology from the church as a perfect society with the Pope as chief magistrate to an organic, mystical understanding of the body of Christ. Although it was in no doubt that the mystical body 'is' (est) the Catholic church, the church had long recognised that there were individuals beyond the Catholic church who exhibited all the signs of holiness, to the point of martyrdom, and the encyclical dealt with that for, '…by an unconscious desire and longing [they] have a certain

[9] Lesslie Newbigin 'Unity of "all in each place" ' in Lossky, Nicholas et al (eds) *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* (Geneva WCC 1991) p 1043f

[10] Lesslie Newbigin 'The basis and forms of unity' *Mid-Stream* 22 (1984) pp 1-11 http://www.newbigin.net/assets/pdf/84bfu.pdf (accessed 12.2.14)

relationship with the Mystical Body of the Redeemer.'[11] The Holy See glossed that in 1949 in a letter to the Archbishop of Boston of 1949 explaining that those who were not members of the Roman Catholic Church but who were united to her 'by desire or longing' (which could be implicit) were not beyond the reach of salvation. [12]

The significance of the Decree on Ecumenism was that it went beyond that recognition of holy individuals to 'elements of the church'. In Kasper's words it was recognising that there are churches and ecclesial communities that '…although not in full communion, rightly belong to the one church and possess salvatory significance for their members.'[13] That was why the language changed from 'est' to 'subsistit in'. But, 'est' was not replaced by 'subsistit in', rather 'est' was subsumed in it. The Council was not claiming that it was a church amongst lots of other churches. This wasn't ecclesiological relativism. The Catholic church is still clear that it is the true church of Jesus Christ. What has changed is that the Catholic Church now understands itself as in dialogue, that it is sinful because the church is the company of sinners she therefore bears some responsibility for historical divisions, and equally some of the separated communities have better developed individual aspects of Christian truth – and therefore the church cannot express its intrinsic catholicity without them. That was a profound change of self-understanding, underscored by the fact that 'subsistit in' plays an important role not only in the Decree on Ecumenism, but also in *Lumen Gentium* , which sets out the ecclesiology of Vatican II. The implication of all this is that for Catholics ecumenism is about conversion and renewal and the exchange of gifts and it is a spiritual exercise.

3) Pentecostalism and ecumenism

If Catholicism represents one aspect of the re-charting of the ecumenical sea, the changing relationship between Pentecostalism and ecumenism is another. If Catholicism is marked by a magisterium which holds diversity in unity, Pentecostalism is at the other end of the spectrum. It is best described as a movement, it is gloriously, maddeningly pluriform and ecclesiologically diverse. Yet, in its diverse origins, Pentecostalism was profoundly ecumenical. Take William Seymour's extraordinary ministry at Azusa Street, San Francisco in 1906-08. Seymour was an African-American, the son of freed slaves whose family roots were Catholic. What is remarkable about Seymour's ministry wasn't the charismatic gifts that attended his ministry, but the astonishing fact that those charismata briefly gave birth to a congregation that was interracial, where the leadership included women and men, black and white – and this in the midst of segregationist laws. Seymour read that reality from Scripture – 'we being many are one bread and one body.' (1 Cor 10:17). In the first edition of his magazine, *Apostolic Faith*, he envisaged the outpouring of the Spirit which they had experienced as 'Christian unity everywhere'. [14] Another early Pentecostal commentator, Frank Bartleman protested that '…there can be no divisions in a true Pentecost.' [15] It was classic restorationism, and as such it was implicitly ecumenical because where the Spirit was, there could be no division. And that unity was spiritual and invisible, not institutional.

[11] *Mystici Corporis* (1943) para 103
[12] https://www.ewtn.com/library/CURIA/CDFFEENY.HTM (accessed 14.2.14)
[13] Walter Kasper 'The Decree of Ecumenism, read anew after forty years' in Walter Kasper (ed) *Searching for Christian Unity* (New York, New City Press 2007) pp 18-36, a p. 25
[14] For Seymour see William Kay *Pentecostalism: a very short introduction* (Oxford, OUP, 2011); Allan Anderson 'Pentecostals, healing and ecumenism' *International Review of Missions* vol 93 issue 370/1, pp. 486-497
[15] Anderson *art cit*

During the early decades of the twentieth century Pentecostalism became an international phenomenon, but it also became an excluded and marginalised phenomenon, especially in western Europe. Part of the reason was class, just as it had been in England in earlier centuries with seventeenth century nonconformity and the Methodist movement. Pentecostalism operated mainly amongst the working classes, and its stress on charismata led to mockery and disdain. As so often in church history exclusion breeds exclusivism, and Pentecostalism developed largely in isolation from the dominant twentieth century ecclesiastical narratives.

But, there were exceptions – between 1921-59 the American Assemblies of God were active members of the International Missionary Council (one of the precursors of the WCC) – but by 1963 fundamentalism prevailed and their General Council suggested that the WCC was the forerunner of the 'Scarlet Woman'. The growth of neo-Pentecostalism and conservative evangelicalism during the 1980s did nothing to assuage that polarisation.

But, even whilst that was happening, the Pentecostal Trinitarian denominations continued to see the need for fellowship and co-operation amongst themselves at a world level – the first World Pentecostal Convention was held at Zurich in 1947. There was also, and significantly, what some Pentecostal historians call half a century of a 'clandestine relationship' with the WCC [16] . Significant players in that relationship have been Donald Gee of the AOG in the 1950s, the South African David du Plessis, Pentecostal observer at the WCC from 1954-61 and also at Vatican II, and more recently Mel Robeck, an AOG minister and church historian who has been on the staff of Fuller Seminary since 1974. Certainly in the earlier days of this relationship they were taking a huge risk. Du Plessis in particular was looked at with some suspicion and rejection by fellow Pentecostals, yet from his work came the Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue which began in 1974.

It is quite remarkable, given the prevailing mood of suspicion about ecumenism which prevailed amongst the majority of Pentecostals that in his 1952 Kerr lectures at Glasgow, Lesslie Newbigin, then the Bishop of Madurai in the Church of South India, suggested that the seemingly static ecumenical engagement between Catholics and Protestants might be unlocked by a new understanding of the Spirit, and asked:

'May it not be that the great Churches of the Catholic and Protestant traditions will have to be humble enough to receive it in fellowship with their brethren in the various groups of the Pentecostal type with whom at present they have scarcely any Christian fellowship at all?'[17]

He also, perceptively, noted that the collapse of relationships between ecumenism and Pentecostalism, was marked by faults on both sides. Certainly persecution (in some countries) and mocking prejudice in others caused Pentecostalism to withdraw from its uniquely ecumenical restorationist enthusiasm into a defensive sectarianism, and that in turn resulted in a caricaturing of the historic churches as designed to stifle the creativity of the Spirit.

However, the growth of Pentecostalism across the world since Newbigin wrote has been extraordinary. Counting is difficult because definitions are difficult. Do you count just Pentecostals, or charismatics, or independents, or post-denominationalists, or neo-apostolics? Do you include the 'Han Chinese churches' or the African Independent Churches (AICs).? The Pew Forum suggests that

[16] Anderson *art cit*
[17] Lesslie Newbigin *The household of God* (London, SCM 1953) pp. 110-1

Pentecostal and charismatic groups now make up 26.7% of the world Christian population – roughly twice the size of Orthodoxy, and roughly half the size of Catholicism. They group Pentecostalism into a broader 'Protestant' category, and suggest that the historically Pentecostal churches worldwide are now roughly equal in size to world Anglicanism (10.8 to 10.6 %) – but that needs to be read with the proviso that 'independents' are by far their largest Protestant category at 38%. [18]

That numerical growth has been reflected in an institutional and theological maturing. Pentecostal theology and studies are replete with doctoral studies, journals, conferences, journals and all the other accoutrements of academic study. Thanks to such pioneers as du Plessis, it has also resulted in a series of ecumenical dialogues – 1972 – 2006 with the Catholics, from 1996 with the World Communion of Reformed Churches, from 2005 with the Lutherans. They have ranged widely and informatively over theological issues from the obvious like the role and gifts of the Spirit to the role of Mary, the nature of koinonia and the relationship between the church and the world. [19] Since 1966 two Chilean Pentecostal Churches have been full members of the WCC. The kaleidoscope is shifting.

It has shifted in the UK. Two patterns have overlapped. I think (and it is to our shame) that we have barely noted the maturing of indigenous white Pentecostalism and the changing attitudes of the main denominations towards ecumenism. That may not be reflected everywhere locally, but there again I can call to mind unecumenical Anglican vicars to whom the Anglican-Methodist covenant is an unknown mystery. The second pattern we have noticed, and that is the growth of Afro-Caribbean Pentecostalism.

Although the history of black Pentecostalism can be traced back to 1906 in South London[20], the arrival of the Windrush from the Caribbean in 1948 heralded the most transformative period of migration, first from the Caribbean, but consequently from Africa and the Indian sub-continent. The exponential growth of black churches happened post Windrush. There are now, it is estimated, about a million black Christians and about 4,000 black-led congregations. Estimates of the number of black Pentecostal denominations varies, but it is at least 300, serving a community which is 2% of the British population and 6% of the worshipping population.[21] The dynamics are profoundly different to those of the historic denominations - missional, entrepreneurial and centripetal rather than centrifugal. Spinning off new churches and networks, often based around individuals, is understood as a method of growth. That raises questions for black Pentecostalism itself, because as Joe Aldred says, its leadership can't simply stand back and observe this fragmentation.[22] It is important to note though that this is fragmentation rather than schism as the historic churches understand it because they remain united in doctrine, and in communion with each other. Those two Pentecostal realities have co-incided, and they are helping change the shape and texture of the ecumenical scene.

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[18] *Global Christianity: a report on the size and distribution of the world's Christian population* http://www.pewforum.org/files/2011/12/Christianity-fullreport-web.pdf: accessed 20.ii.14

[19] Wolfgang Vonday 'Pentecostals and ecumenism: becoming the church as a pursuit of Christian unity' *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* vol 11 no 4 (Nov 2011) pp 318-30

[20] Babatunde Adedibu *Coat of many colours: the origin, growth, distinctiveness and contributions of Black Majority Churches to British Christianity* (Gloucester, Wisdom Summit 2012) pp 26ff on the ministry of Thomas Brem-Wilson

[21] Adedibu *op cit* p.50

[22] Joe Aldred 'Challenges facing black church leadership' in Joe Aldred and Keno Ogbo (eds) *The black church in the twentieth century* (London, DLT 2010) pp.215-35, at p 228

The two themes that we've explored – the Catholic understanding of the ecumenical task, and the emergence of Pentecostalism – have changed the ecumenical landscape irrevocably, and they will have a profound effect on the future of English ecumenism.

Mission and ecumenism

As David Goodhew and his colleagues noted in their seminal collection of essays on church growth in England since the 1980s, as a rough rule of thumb, growth is to be found amongst the so-called new and migrant churches (and in this sense Catholicism is a migrant church), and decline amongst the historic denominations.[23] That experience, combined with the legacy of disappointment over long history of what we might call the Anglican-Free Church model of ecumenism, and the growth of evangelicalism, led the historic denominations to turn their attention from ecumenism to mission in the latter decades of twentieth century. *Mission shaped church* (2002) noted the importance of ecumenism in mission in passing, adding that '…the main tension is that cooperation seems so sensible, but mechanisms for it are so cumbersome'. It expressed doubts about LEPs and failed to extend its exploration of a theology of unity grounded in trinitarian perichoresis beyond the relationship of 'fresh expressions' to the institutional Church of England.[24]

It was a telling symptom that somewhere, somehow in England the theological relationship between unity and mission became uncoupled, and that is unfortunate, because they are actually one indivisible theological whole. Jesus is sent to preach the gospel, proclaim release for the oppressed and gather all the disciples into unity with the Father. There can therefore be no theological divorce between evangelism, social justice and the quest for unity. That relationship between mission and unity is profoundly articulated in the high priestly prayer in John 17 - 'As you have sent me into the world', Jesus prayed to the Father, so have I sent them into the world. And for their sakes I have sanctified myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth. I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you Father are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us so that they world may believe that you have sent me.' (John 17:20-22 NRSV).

Sending, holiness, truth and unity are bound together in John 17. It is as if Jesus' prayer separates the white light of discipleship into its constituent colours. To belong to Jesus is to be sent as Jesus was sent. To be a disciple of Jesus is to be caught up into the holiness of God which transforms and changes you, although you may not notice it happening. It is to witness to the truth because God is truth. And it is about being in unity with all those others who are called into and embraced by discipleship, whether we like them or not, or agree with them or not. Yet, as with light, what we perceive are not the colours but the indivisible whole, and it is because all those parts are fused in one that Jesus prays for his disciples '…on behalf of those who will believe in me *through their word*'.

Over the past sixty years we have learnt that is mission is not God 'sending' Jesus, and Jesus 'sending' the church to do mission to the world. We have learnt rather to talk about the *missio Dei.* God's very being is mission. God is, is you like, best described not as a noun but a verb. The life of

[23] David Goodhew (ed) *Church growth in Britain, 1980 to the present* (Aldershot, Ashgate 2012)
[24] *Mission-shaped church* (London, Church House Publishing 2002) pp. 25 and 96

the trinity itself is marked by dynamic interaction which flows in loving excess into the act of creation. In the delightful image of the Catholic theologian Stephen Bevans, 'It is though God as such is….a great conga line, I like to imagine–moving through the world, inviting the world–material creation, human beings–to join in the dance. And the more that join the more attractive joining becomes.' [25] The point of God's missional dance is that it is designed to include not exclude. It is barrier breaking – not just Jews but Gentiles, not just the Roman empire, but the lands beyond, every nation, every culture. In other words, mission is inseparable from the unity.

Whatever the future of ecumenism in England may be, it must involve the re-discovery of the intimate relationship between unity and mission which mirrors the life of the trinity.

The face of English Christianity has changed so much, that it is a matter of genuine rejoicing that schemes like Street Angels, Hope, Food Banks and the Big Lunch are bringing local Christians together in missionary service. A nice example during *More Than Gold* (the churches' response to the Olympics) was when Coptic Orthodox and Seventh Day Adventists were handing out water provided by the Salvation Army on the steps of St Pancras parish church. Ecumenism is not lineal, it is iterative, and it is important that those who do not have the English experience of ecumenism in their spiritual DNA discover for themselves that sharing in service together can be the starting point of mutual discovery of each other and Christ on the ecumenical pilgrimages . There is ecumenical hope in new and existing configurations for community service and mission.

4) A 'new' ecumenism?

Those new configurations are evidence of what looks like a world-wide phenomenon . The morphology of the church is changing, and the old boundaries and demarcations no longer work. The Global Christian Forum has emerged alongside the WCC, with the encouragement of the WCC, to provide opportunities for wider fellowship than has been possible within traditional ecumenism. Locally too new alignments are taking place. Writing in 2003, David Schutz, the Ecumenical Officer for the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne attended a lunch to launch 'Transforming Melbourne 2003'. There were representatives from over 100 churches there – one Catholic, one Lutheran, one United Church and three Anglicans – which leaves 95 others, and he reeled them off, almost all Pentecostal and charismatic, hardly any of them members of the Victoria Council of Churches. Reflecting on the experience, he mused that at first sight this looked like the '…fractured disunity' of the church, but as he listened to them discussing and praying, '…I became aware that there was a depth of unity among these Christians that I rarely experienced among the larger Christian bodies.' 26

A similar shift has recently been happening in England, sometimes growing out of an including Churches Together groups, sometimes not. It is relational and missional rather than organisational or bureaucratic. 'Revive Rugby' is an exemplar. It began with an attempt to re-invigorate the Week of

[25] Stephen Bevans 'The Mission has a church: perspectives of a Roman Catholic theologian' , paper given at the Edinburgh Missionary Conference 2010, available on line - http://www.edinburgh2010.org/es/recursos/papersdocuments8ad4.pdf?no_cache=1&cid=34423&did=22380&sechash=43e9d7d6; accessed 8.v.14

26 David Schutz 'Seeking an alternative ecumenism: Thomas Oden and JPII' www.cam.org.au/eic/images/stories/documents/ThomasOden.doc (accessed 28.02.12)

Prayer for Christian Unity and has grown missions, a joint ministry to the nighttime economy, Street Pastors, Hope4 - an initiative with the homeless that provides a drop-in centre, a soup kitchen and a winter night shelter that rotates around seven different church halls, a Foodbank and Debt Counselling, to name but a few. 27

Quietly, without anyone noticing over the past decade or so, local church leaders have been gathering for prayer with a heart for the community in which they find themselves. It's not been researched or analysed, but a new style of ecumenical activity has emerged below the radar. Its focus is outward looking. It's about doing as much as being, and is based in the simple pragmatism that the kingdom of God and its demands are far grander and greater than any of us. Simply put, its better together, and we'll do together what we can and what we can't, we won't. There is an energy for unity. 28

Unity is no longer perceived as the dangerous distraction it once seemed to some. A friend from the Evangelical Alliance reflected on the entry of one powerful local evangelical leader and his church into alliance with other churches, 'He has a heart for the city and he realises that he can't go it alone.' That is reflected in the work of some leading American evangelicals like John Armstrong in his book *Your God is too small* and Bruce MacLaren's *Generous Orthodoxy*. MacLaren defines himself, tongue-in-cheek, as a '...missional, evangelical, post/protestant, liberal/conservative, mystical/poetic, biblical, charismatic/contemplative, fundamentalist/calvinist, anabaptist/anglican, methodist, catholic, green, incarnational, depressed-yet-hopeful, emergent, unfinished Christian.' 29 There's a lot of that around, wanting to drink from all God's wells in a post-denominational world. Its been common currency amongst the historic churches since about 1850 if hymnbooks are any evidence, but now it is becoming for many the dialect of choice. We are moving from an era of ecumenical negotiation to one of ecumenical co-operation, but co-operation on a far wider basis than twenty years ago.

That shift is both a welcome recognition of the widening of the ecumenical tent to include new partners, and an appreciation that the theological achievements of the modern ecumenical movement have led us to base camp of such theological agreement on the doctrinal Everest, that we appreciate just how complicated the rise of the climb towards full visible unity might be. At the end of his stewardship of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, Cardinal Kasper reviewed the forty years of dialogue since Vatican II between his church and the four main Western traditions – Anglicanism, Lutheranism, Methodism, and the Reformed, [30] – he noted that the five traditions are agreed about the Good News of the Gospel, the Creeds, the Trinity and the incarnation, and that together we '…confess that there is one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, to which in different ways we belong, so that even in our differences, we are brothers and sisters in the one Lord and in the one Spirit of Christ.' [31] The issues which in previous generations led not only to schism but to torture and war – the nature of baptism, the eucharist, tradition and Scripture, and the doctrine of justification – are now points of convergence and emerging consensus. However, as

27 Available on line at http://www.reviverugby.net/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=94236. (accessed 9.05.14)
28 http://www.morethangold.org.uk/uploads/file/PR-20121001.pdf. Accessed 21.11.12
29 Bruce McLaren *Generous Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan 2004), p 29
30 Walter Kasper *Harvesting the fruits: basic aspects of Christian faith in ecumenical* dialogue (London, Continuum 2009)
31 *ibid* p 197

Kasper concludes, 'The churches find themselves at an intermediate stage, confronted by difficult questions to which they give conflicting answers..'[32]

Receptive ecumenism

In the interim then, what are we to do? One answer to that question lies in the possibilities of 'receptive ecumenism', pioneered by Paul Murray at Durham University and the methodology underlying ARCIC III. The value of receptive ecumenism lies in its origin. It is intimately connected with the struggle of a Catholic couple, Paul and Andrea Murray to make sense of their experience as Catholics who have both been profoundly shaped by working in an ecumenical environment and being taught by great teachers from other traditions.[33] For both the setting was initially ecclesial – for Andrea with the Catholic Bishops' Conference as a researcher, and then as a diocescan ecumenical officer and a part-time pastoral tutor in an Anglican college, for Paul as a teacher of theology at Ushaw where he had responsibility as a Catholic staff member alongside Anglican and Methodist colleagues for a compulsory course on 'Church and Ministry in an ecumenical context'. Both found themselves asking what the grace they were experiencing through their experience of other ecclesial communions meant for them as Catholics. There were striking similarities with spiritual ecumenism, which also articulated a sense of ecumenical hospitality and fruitfulness, but they felt that there was more.

Ecumenical learning is not just individual, it is also collective, and deeply structural for we can learn from each other about things like the ways in which we make decisions as churches, exercise leadership and organise stewardship, as well as the more obvious areas like spirituality and liturgy where we've been happily thieving magpies for a couple of generations. Once Paul moved to a post at Durham University this experientially based intuition developed into a major international inter-disciplinary academic programme.

Within Catholic theology receptive ecumenism is a natural development from Vatican II's understanding that the church of Christ 'subsists in' the Catholic Church, which was underlined and affirmed by John Paul II's historic encyclical *Ut unum sint* (1995). His invitation to theologians and leaders in other Christian communions to help re-imagine the Petrine ministry in such a way that it might once more become a focus of unity rather than division, exemplifies receptive ecumenism. In a sense it is a sharing of wounds, of what does not work and asking ecumenical partners for healing. The Petrine ministry, founded to be a focus of unity, has become a symbol of division. That grieves us and hurts us. How might you help heal us? Or to change the example to my own Reformed tradition, conciliar government, founded to help us together discern the guidance of the Spirit has become the method of countless splits and fracturings. That pains us to the heart. How might you help heal us from your experience of governance and leadership?

[32] *Ibid p 201*

[33] Paul and Andrea Murray 'The roots, range and reach of receptive ecumenism' in Clive Barrett (ed) *Unity in Process: reflections on ecumenism* (London, DLT 2012) pp. 79-94, at pp 80-86

If ecclesial partners are open to each other, the possibility emerges that we move beyond the closed particularity of our traditions to new places and new perceptions which will allow us to move beyond what seem at the moment to be insuperable barriers.[34]

Receptive ecumenism builds on traditional ecumenism, which as we have seen has achieved remarkable things. Do not assume that the seam is exhausted. By the time this lecture is given the Church of Ireland the Methodist Church in Ireland may have agreed to the mutual interchangeability of ministry, and one wonders how that will affect the Anglican-Methodist Covenant in England. Similarly, Anglicans and Moravians have achieved full communion in America, and the Church of Ireland is considering whether it might adopt a similar scheme. Full visible unity (however that might be expressed) remains the ultimate goal of the pilgrimage for the historic English churches, the problem is that it is becoming more eschatological by the day as Catholic Church maintains that women bishops are an ontological impossibility and the Church of England discovers that that they are a theological necessity. In the Spirit's good time we believe even such divisions can be understood and overcome, so our eyes have to turn to the penultimate.

With that in mind, let me recap. English ecumenism has an exciting and bright future. Patterns of migration and the presence of the world church and the world's faiths on our High Streets means that ecumenism can never again be what it was in the mid twentieth century. England itself and England's Christianity have changed irrevocably. The ecumenical future will be about enlarging the tent to welcome Christ's fabulously diverse family. That must mean learning the theological languages of both Catholicism and Pentecostalism the better to appreciate their gifts rather than expecting them to speak default Protestantism. It will also mean facing up to the hurt and exclusion experienced by many migrant Christians and allowing them to play their full part in the body of Christ. It will mean living simultaneous at different stages on the ecumenical journey with different partners because there is no longer a shared memory. That will mean welcoming the era of co-operation, but realising that for the moment at least it co-exists with the era of negotiation. Receptive ecumenism has the flexibility to embrace and enable both.

Let me finish with a story from that distinguished Anglican ecumenist, Mary Tanner. She recalls attending a meeting at a seminary in Ireland to prepare for a world conference on Christian unity. One speaker was in full flow about his vision for unity when a scruffy dishevelled old man wandered in and sat down. He listened carefully, but the speaker appeared not to notice him. When he finished there was silence. Everyone was looking at the stranger. He broke the silence, 'Do you know what's happening out there?' pointing to the window, 'People get drunk, they take drugs, they fight in denominational gangs, they shoot to kill, and family is against family.' Then he went on, 'He came to bring unity and peace. For God's sake get on with it.' And he got up and left. No one knew who he was, where he came from or where he went but his message was profound. Get on with it. Its not a sideshow. It is for a world that desperately needs a sign that a new way is possible, a way of reconciliation and unity. [35]

[34] Paul Murray 'Receptive ecumenism and Catholic learning – establishing the Agenda' in Paul Murray (ed) *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: exploring a way for contemporary ecumenism* (Oxford, OUP 2008) pp 5-25

[35] Mary Tanner 'For God's sake –get on with it' in Clive Barrett (ed) *op cit* pp. 203-208