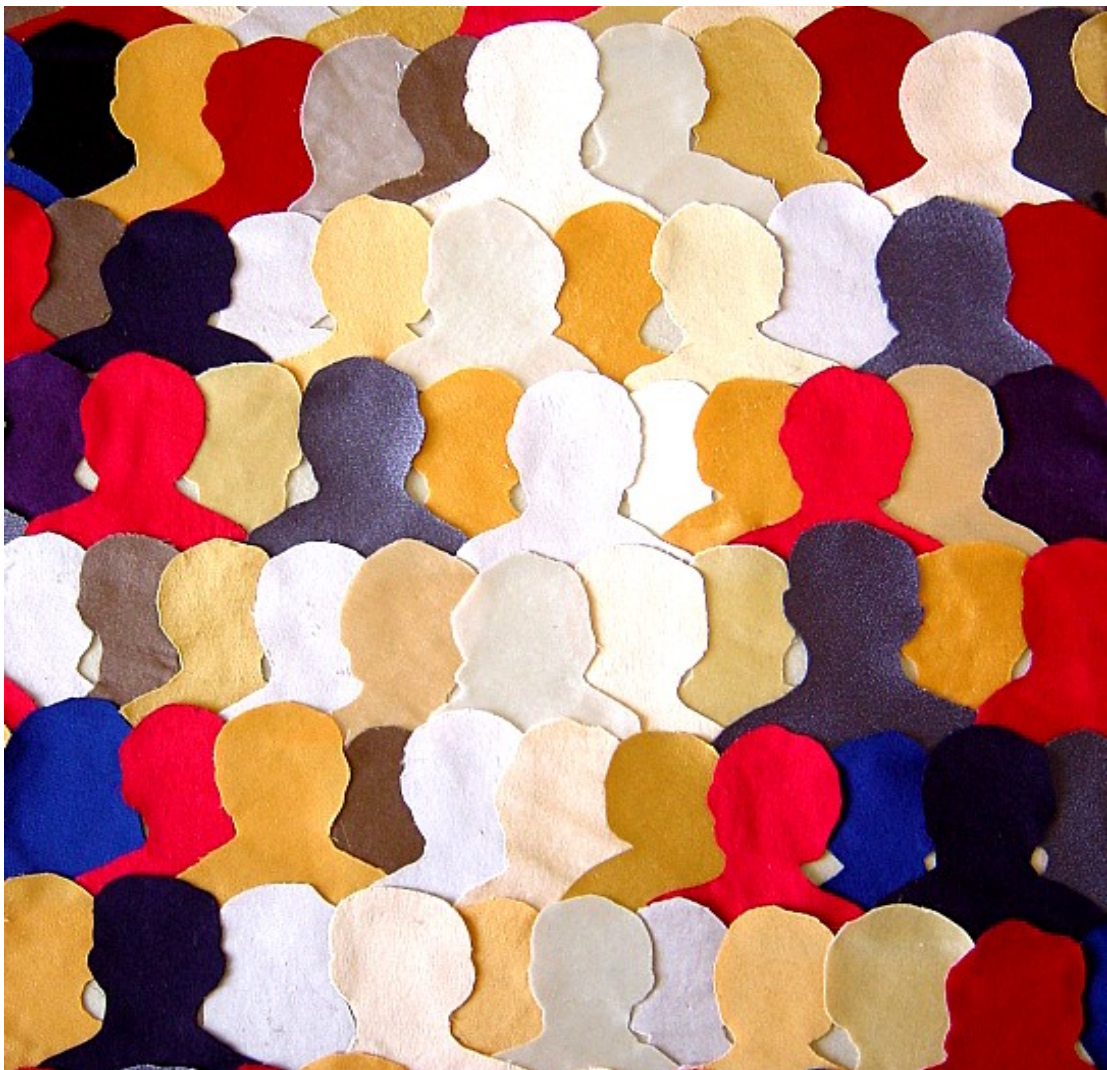


Digging Out the Embedded Church

**Discovering the Body of Christ within the churches:
an introduction to the history of Christian Unity**

John Isherwood



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Dedication

In this Centenary year of the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh (1910), this book is dedicated to all those pioneers of Christian Unity throughout the history of the Church who, beyond narrow interests and prejudices, glimpsed the vision of the body of Christ worshipping, witnessing and serving together in the Kingdom of God as Christ intended.

'These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.'

Hebrews 11.39-40 ANIV

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INTRODUCTION

Drifffield is a little country town in East Yorkshire. Nobody could claim it to be the centre of the universe, but it became the place where, as a young airman on National Service, I caught a glimpse of a little bit of heaven on earth.

Just slightly over 50 years ago I was posted to Drifffield RAF station. I had only recently come to follow Jesus as Saviour and Lord, and had been baptised at a Brethren Assembly in the south of England. After training as a high-frequency direction-finder (a trade already out of date because of the coming of radar) I found myself on a little team in the Signals Section trying to give directions to aircraft by Morse code, stuck in a hut in a turnip field at the edge of an airfield where pilots were trained fly Vampire and Gloster Meteor jets.

On my first Sunday at my new station I set out to find a company of Christians whom I was told worshipped in a certain street in the town. I remember it was a beautiful July morning as I donned 'civvies', baggy flannels and a tweed jacket, and left my smoky billet of twenty men, some enjoying a long lie-in despite the continuous music from a rather raucous amplifier.

I cut across a path from the perimeter track of the airfield and found a field path leading down to a stream. I had been told that the path was a short-cut into the town and soon it led by a little bridge through poplar trees, their masses of silver leaves shimmering in the sunlight, on to cottages and then to a street of Victorian houses, mellow-bricked with pantile roofs.

It was quite easy to find the place I had been directed to as the town was small and the street was a wide one leading off the main thoroughfare. I didn't know what kind of building the meeting was held in, but I seemed to feel it would not be of a typical Nonconformist kind. On a gate leading into a builder's yard was a small board with the words *Gospel Hall* on it. I walked into the yard feeling sure this was it. On the left was a low, one-storey structure with a pipe-chimney sticking out from its tiled roof.

I lifted the latch on the door and entered a small porch. An overcoat hung on a peg. Ahead was a door with a clouded glass panel in it and a big, round, brass doorknob. Slowly I turned the knob and stepped into the meeting place. Sunlight streamed through plain glass windows on the right, lighting up a pure white tablecloth which was being laid out on a sturdy polished oak table by an old gentleman.

The sunlight touched his white hair, as white as the cloth. He was thin, red-faced, with a disciplined white moustache. His eyes sparkled with life as he looked up and greeted me. 'Hullo, young man.' I explained that I was a Christian airman and wanted to 'remember the Lord Jesus' (that was an expression I had learned from the folk where I had been baptised). He assured me that I was very welcome and invited me to sit on one of the heavy, dark wooden benches set in a square round the table.

We talked of this and that while the old gentleman took out of a cupboard a metal plate and a cup. He then went into the porch and rummaged in the pockets of the coat hanging there for a small, brown paper packet, out of which he produced a barm cake, a little round piece of

bread, nicely browned on top. He placed this on the plate on the table. From the cupboard he drew out a bottle of wine and poured some into the cup. I looked round the room. The table was in front of a small pulpit that was backed by a Bible text: 'That in all things he might have the pre-eminence' (Colossians 1.18). The hard, dark benches filled up the rest of the room, which had obviously been a builder's storeroom at one time, and a large black-leaded stove stood solidly in the centre, its shiny pipe leading up into the roof.

Soon a few people began to arrive, mainly middle-aged or elderly, country folk with rugged kind faces and welcoming smiles, the ladies with straw hats of various sizes and shapes well set on their heads.

I had attended a Brethren 'Breaking of Bread' meeting before so I knew that the hour-long gathering would be unstructured, with simple, extempore prayers by the men only and wistful, devotional hymns sung unaccompanied from a little black book. There was an American harmonium in the room but this was not used for the Communion service.

I expected a short homily or mini-sermon to be given by one of the brothers, and this was the case this Sunday. The prayers and homily were all centred on the adoration of Christ, especially in his dying on the Cross, which was the central theme of most of the hymns in the little black book.

After a brother had said an appropriate prayer of thanks 'for the bread', symbolising the body of Christ, the barm cake was passed round the members, each breaking off a piece and eating it in silence, symbol of the body of Christ. A different brother gave thanks for the cup of wine, symbol of the blood of Christ, which also was passed round the members in silence, each sipping from it. (The wine was 'real wine', not just fruit juice.)

For the rest of my National Service I met with this little group of believers in Jesus and wondered why all Christians could not meet in this way, simply and uncluttered.

I attended their mid-week prayer and Bible ministry meetings, often having to listen to speakers with droning voices, but with at least something to say relevant to living the Christian life. Only the men prayed at these meetings, and to me this seemed odd, as the 'sisters', I found, were spiritually perceptive and well instructed in the 'things of God'.

There was some consternation among the sisters (but no offence taken) when one or two young Christian nurses from the local hospital began to attend the meetings (perhaps hearing that a few airmen had started to attend the Gospel Hall), and asked why they could not contribute to the conversational-style Bible readings, where only the men took part.

We airmen conducted Sunday afternoon classes for children we gathered off the streets. We taught them Bible texts; one was Hebrews 13.1, 'Let brotherly love continue', which was particularly appropriate for two boys who regularly pummelled others before repeating the text.

These were happy days in which I found a group of healthy-minded believers in Jesus who worshipped in a particular and rather odd way, with no pretensions to be better, holier or more instructed than other Christians. They were well disposed towards all who loved and served Jesus. Yet, perhaps because they were mainly an elderly congregation lacking the

energy required to meet other Christians, they did not actually witness or worship with other than themselves.

I had dug into the life of that East Yorkshire town and found embedded there some real believers with whom I felt at one. I knew that there were other members of the true Church embedded in the existing churches in the town, but I met very few of them.

At the top of the street in which the Gospel Hall was located was a Continuing Primitive congregation in what looked like an old-fashioned schoolroom. This small company had refused, some 20 years previously, to join other Methodist churches in reunion schemes. They conducted their class meetings on old Methodist lines, which mainstream Methodism had largely abandoned. Not far from it was a neat, new, prosperous-looking Roman Catholic Church to which an RAF lorry took Catholics to Mass each Sunday morning. In the same street as the Gospel Hall was a large pseudo-classical-fronted Methodist Church, and towards the little stream, as I remember, was a meeting-place for Elim Pentecostalists, earnest and noisy. On a small rise in the town stood a large Perpendicular medieval parish church, once the only church in the town, conducting its services with the measured rhythm of the Book of Common Prayer.

Embedded in all these congregations was the true Church. And so it is today. Fifty years later it is more important than ever before that the true Church should be dug out. It has been embedded for centuries now in the churches of our land.

Not one of the manifestations of the Church can itself claim to be the one and only true Church. Yet each manifestation, usually in the form of a denomination, has been created out of sincere and earnest convictions, and to deny the importance of some of those convictions is to impoverish the Church as a whole.

Schemes of union and reunion do not themselves address the question of how to keep alive valuable distinctive denominational insights while, at the same time, creating opportunities for experiencing practical united worship, witness and service.

THE AIM OF THIS BOOK

The aim of this book is two-fold. First, it aims to provide a brief outline of the history of efforts throughout the history of the Church to promote or maintain Christian Unity. Heroic attempts at unity have failed time and time again – there really have been ecumenical martyrs! Yet always there have been hopeful signs and none more so than from the beginning of the 20th Century.

Secondly, it is an attempt to discover ways in which *Christian* Unity, as distinct from *Church* Unity (the organic merging of denominations), can be experienced in 21st Century Europe, where Christendom has disappeared and the Church finds herself in a society increasingly embracing secular and non-Christian world-views.

This book is written very much from a European and Western perspective. The title was suggested by some thoughts of Alec R Vidler, underlining my conviction that 2,000 years of history have covered from sight the true Church, which is not an institution in itself. Though sometimes glimpsed in institutions and sometimes obscured by them, it is composed of all who have come to acknowledge Christ as Saviour and Lord.

HOW DO WE DIG OUT THE EMBEDDED CHURCH?

In the 21st Century, as never before, these people are getting to know, respect and even love one another, and a beginning is being made to the realisation of Jesus' prayer that his followers 'may be brought to complete unity.'

It is a question of 'digging out the embedded church.' The 'digging out' process involves taking the trouble to meet with our fellow Christians regularly, to socialise with them, pray with them and cooperate with them in witness, worship and service. While the first part of this book has to record the failure, largely, of Christians in the past to do this, the second part gives evidence of hopeful signs that Christians are today digging beneath the surface of denominational structures and discovering the oneness that Christians possess in Christ.

Today we have a wonderful opportunity to build on the ecumenical¹ foundations laid in the 20th Century. That last Century saw a remarkable growth in understanding and goodwill among Christians, which I believe was the work of the Holy Spirit of God.

This book concerns itself with asking questions such as what is the essential nature of Christian Unity? And what is the tie that binds Christians together? Can Christian Unity be expressed across denominational lines and yet denominational differences be preserved? Should such differences be preserved? Can we find a basis for unity without relinquishing belief in the supreme authority of the Scriptures? The answers suggested will be controversial to many, but if the book serves to arouse concern about how Christ's longing for the unity of his people can be visibly expressed, at last, after 2,000 years of division, the purpose of the book will have been achieved.

The Christian Church has been active for 2,000 years. From a simple beginning under Jesus of Nazareth, an unofficial Jewish rabbi, it has become a worldwide complex body with so very many facets, traditions and accretions that its own members are sometimes at a loss to define what exactly it is or was meant to be.

In *God's Judgement on Europe*, A R Vidler writes:

'We cannot go out of the present Churches and start a new Church; for Churches are not man-made but God-given, and they are God-given through an actual historical tradition of faith and order.'

*The Church of God is not a sect of people who hold the same views. It is the body of Christ, the body of those who have been born again by the acts of God in his Christ and made citizens of the Kingdom of God, irrespective of their views or their merit or any of their other peculiarities, simply by the pure love and mercy of God.'*²

¹ I shall have to use the word 'ecumenical' many times in this book. It is used in the sense of describing inter-denominational fellowship and co-operation between Christians. In the last few years the word has taken on inter-faith connotations; that is not how it is used in this book.

² Vidler, A R, *God's Judgement on Europe*, Longmans, Green and Co, first published 1940, Ch 7, pp 101-102.

Vidler suggests that the true Church is there all right, buried under a mass of social, cultural and theological debris which, nevertheless, gives clues as to what is underneath. To dig out this 'one true church' which is there in all the three traditions of the Church, Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant, is the supreme challenge for the 21st Century Church.

It is not a matter of trying to create a pristine church: a new start, so to speak. This has been tried many times in the history of the Church and all the attempts have failed to unite Christians in any meaningful way. Anabaptist groups in the 16th Century; the Oxford Movement, the Irvingites and the Plymouth Brethren in the 19th; all tried sincerely to get Christians to model themselves and their churches on how the Early Church lived in apostolic purity. Sadly, all proved to be divisive of the body of Christ.

C S Lewis used a different way of expressing the conviction that the true Church has never been lost, but is there all the time under the various branches of the Church. In a brilliant introduction to a translation of Athanasius's *On the Incarnation of the Word*, he wrote that before he became a Christian he learned to recognise that there was something common to all the brands of Christianity he came across. This something he called a consistent 'smell'. It was the smell of 'mere Christianity', and he came across it in writers as diverse as Bunyan, Hooker, Dante, Francis de Sales, Spenser, Walton, Pascal, Johnson, Vaughan, Boehme and Traherne.

He could, of course, have added very many more names to that list. In all of these he detected something 'unmistakably the same; recognisable, not to be evaded, the odour which is death to us until we allow it to become life.' Lewis reminds us that while the Church is lamentably disunited, it is also true that a unity exists which is 'an immensely formidable unity', something our divisions have not destroyed. This 'something', this 'odour' which Christians have in common, we shall try to discover in this book.

There was a time early in the 20th Century when hope arose that there could be a coming together of churches to create mergers and new structures that would unite many of the people of God. Some progress was made, some mergers did take place, but there was a lot of talking and theologising and not much to show for it. Now there is a new spirit abroad, which says that, realistically, many denominational differences are too entrenched, and, anyway, too important, to be allowed to die or be subsumed by other traditions.

We should be celebrating the rich diversity of the Church; but celebrating it with each other. ***Unity in diversity*** is the key thought and hope.

The Trinity is the exact model for Christian Unity, expressing as it does diversity in complete harmony. Timothy (Kallistos) Ware, describing the Eastern Orthodox view of the Church as an image of the Trinity, writes:

*'In the Trinity the three are one God, yet each is fully personal; in the Church a multitude of human persons are united in one, yet each preserves his personal diversity unimpaired.'*³

3 Ware, Timothy (Kallistos), *The Orthodox Church*, Penguin Books, 1967, p 244. A similar thought is found in the writings of Walter Kaspar, a Roman Catholic Cardinal: 'The Church is like an icon of the Trinity.'

That the Church should express this diversity in visible unity is the view of a number of writers today. Christian Unity is not about doing away with differences of Christian experience and expression: its aim is to express the richness and diversity of the Christian faith in such a way as to show that each particular emphasis contributes to the expression of the wholeness of the one Church.

Writing in 1952, Nicholas Zernov, an Eastern Orthodox scholar, maintained that ‘Christians today do not want unity – do not feel guilty of the sin of division.’⁴ This is not so true now. There is a growing longing for a demonstration of unity in diversity among Christians.

Zernov locates the main cause of disunity in the belief that one’s own Communion alone is true to God’s will for the Church. He writes, ‘No one system of ecclesiastical administration, of liturgical customs, or of devotional practice has universal and obligatory significance.’⁵ This is slowly dawning upon many Christians today. Walter Kaspar, a Roman Catholic Cardinal writing in 2004, sounds a similar note in decrying triumphalism on the part of any church. In his book *That They May All Be One – the Call to Unity Today*, he writes:

‘There can be no unity as long as any given church maintains that the accepted and binding truth of another church is contrary to the Gospel.’⁶

He expresses his belief that the ecumenical movement is at a turning point today. While he accepts that agreement on institutional ecclesiological differences is probably a long way off, he sees hope in a return to what he holds was the initial inspiration of the movement – ‘spiritual ecumenism’.

He explains what he means by this term:

‘...listening and opening ourselves to the demands of the Spirit who also speaks through different forms of piety; it means a readiness to rethink and convert, but also to bear the otherness of the other, which requires tolerance, patience, respect and, not least, goodwill and love which does not boast but rejoices in the truth.’⁷ (1 Corinthians 13.4-6)

For Kaspar, spiritual ecumenism is primarily a ‘biblical spirituality’ which ‘safeguards the uniqueness and universality of the salvific significance of Jesus Christ.’ Kaspar sees dialogue not just as listening to one another but also learning from one another. He writes,

‘Ecumenical dialogue absolutely does not mean abandoning one’s own identity in favour of an ecumenical “hotchpotch”. Ecumenical dialogue does not aim at spiritual impoverishment but at mutual spiritual enrichment.’

⁴ Zernov, Nicholas, *The Reintegration of the Church*, SCM Press, 1952, p 106. Zernov (1898-1980) was a Russian ecumenist who lived in England from 1934. He was influential in making Eastern Orthodoxy known in the West.

⁵ Zernov, Nicholas, *The Reintegration of the Church*, SCM Press, 1952, p 74.

⁶ Kaspar, Walter, *That They May All Be One – the Call to Unity Today*, Burns and Oates, 2004, p 171.

⁷ Kaspar, Walter, *That They May All Be One – the Call to Unity Today*, Burns and Oates, 2004, p 160.

He cites examples of this: as Catholics have learned from Protestants in recent years to value Holy Scripture more fully, so Protestants have learned richer ways of worship from the Catholic celebrations of the liturgy.

No one section of the Church, if the practice of united action and worship is to be achieved, can dominate over the others. Humility towards and tolerance of each other have not been characteristics of Christian denominations in most of the Church's 2,000-year history.

In any real fellowship of traditions the Catholic and Orthodox churches will have to accept Christians from other traditions as fellow believers, even though they may be viewed in Catholic/Orthodox terms as not actual members of the one true Church or of the 'truest' of the churches. This viewpoint has already been taken on board, officially at least, by the Roman Catholic Church in its attempt to make the spirit of Vatican II a reality.

Protestants, equally, have to be able to accept Catholic and Orthodox believers as fellow Christians, even though they believe they have to reject many of their peculiar tenets of faith and habits of worship.

Some thinkers in Orthodox churches are re-assessing their relations with non-Orthodox churches, though with none of the inspiration for change that the Roman Catholic Church received in the pronouncements of Vatican II.

To consider all Protestants as Christians simply because they are Protestants or all Catholic/Orthodox members as Christians simply because they belong to those traditions would be foolish. Each tradition has a large body of nominal Christians adhering to it and each tradition is aware that 'conversions' are necessary if real allegiance of heart to Christ and his teachings is to be experienced.

'Gathered' as distinct from national or 'multitudinous' churches may well have to come to terms with widening their description of what a true Christian is. For some believers a real Christian is one whose Christian life is based on a specific experience of conversion, a 'born-again' experience; for others it is an experience of justification by faith which is required; for others a charismatic experience, an insistence that outward manifestations of the Holy Spirit are the only true signs of a real Christian faith.

What is needed is an investigation into what is the scriptural norm for defining a Christian, what is essential for a person to be called a Christian. Personal temperaments and upbringing play a greater part than perhaps we realise in determining our view of what is a real Christian faith.

In *The Mystery of Faith*,⁸ Orthodox Bishop Hilarion Alfeyev describes some of the ways people have come to faith, some with sudden conversions, and others only after long struggles with doubt and perplexities. Often a child raised in a Christian home will not have a dramatic experience of conversion. 'But,' he writes, 'here, too, faith received from our families must be thought through and suffered by each individual: it has to become part of our own experience.' He adds: 'What we do know is that nobody is born a believer.'

⁸ Alfeyev, Bishop Hilarion, *The Mystery of Faith*, Darton Longman and Todd, 2002, p 6.

For Alfeyev, 'Faith is a gift, though often it is given through the efforts of the person who has sought it.' This experience of conversion to a living faith in God and Christ is common to all three traditions, no matter how different the preparatory road to conversion is in all three. The Protestant Evangelical emphasis on personal conversion is well attested, from Calvin's '*subita conversio*' and John Wesley's heart being 'strangely warmed' in the meeting place in Aldersgate Street to Billy Graham's call to 'get out of your seat' to declare faith in Christ at his mass rallies.

But, equally, the Orthodox tradition, as expressed by Bishop Alfeyev, strongly stresses personal turning to Christ in order to be an authentic Christian. Roger Crosthwaite, writing in the magazine *Anglo-Orthodoxy* in 1984 on *Orthodox Evangelism*, gives three features of Evangelism: the '*Sacramental*',⁹ the '*Ecclesial*' and the '*Personal*'. It is sacramental evangelism in that through the sacrament a person enters 'into the Body of Christ and the fullness of the Holy Spirit.' It is ecclesial in that on conversion a person enters into the fellowship of the whole Church. On personal conversion he writes, 'We believe in personal conversion to a personal Christ,' and quoting Derwas J Chitty he adds that to be converted 'is not just to gaze on him (Christ) as from outside, but to have our life taken into his Sonship, by the Spirit of Adoption whereby we cry, "Abba, Father".'

Crosthwaite goes on to say that to speak today of a 'personal' entering into Christ and of 'personal' faith in Jesus as Lord and Saviour is not popular. But, he believes, Orthodox evangelism must preach for personal decision, for a personal living experience of a living God which has a firm basis in biblical and patristic theology. He issues a challenge to his readers. As Billy Graham's *Mission England* was about to be launched, he wrote, '...how many Anglo-Orthodox persons are involved with Mission England? Billy Graham may not be an Anglican – but he is an evangelist.'¹⁰

Orthodox evangelism is also ecclesial; converts must become part of the body of Christ, the Church, by baptism as well as by personal decision to trust Christ. But this is only what Protestant evangelists have also insisted.

When John Wesley said that Christianity knew nothing of a solitary religion, he was underlining a fundamental fact about the Christian faith. Just a cursory reading of the New Testament makes it clear that Jesus and the New Testament writers thought of true religion as primarily a corporate matter. Jesus' pattern prayer, the 'Lord's Prayer', is not meant to be said in an individualistic way. Jesus spoke of fulfilling one's mission in life within the body of the Kingdom: 'Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness' (Matthew 6.33 NRSV). Many of Jesus' parables are kingdom parables, likening the kingdom of God to a harvest, the leaven in bread, a wedding feast and so on.

James sees pure and undefiled religion as having a corporate expression (James 1.27). Paul's concept of the Church is of its being the Bride of Christ (Ephesians 5.25-27), a Building (1

⁹ *Sacrament*: In the Catholic and Orthodox use of this word, a sacrament is a religious act (ceremony) that conveys grace to the recipient by the very action of the ceremony (*ex opere operato*). In Protestantism, while the word is often used of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, it is by some regarded more as an ordinance (an act commanded by the Lord Jesus) than an act which conveys spiritual blessing in itself.

¹⁰ Crosthwaite, Roger, *Orthodox Evangelism in Anglo-Orthodoxy*, Vol 3, No 1, Easter 1984.

Corinthians 3.10ff), or a Body (1 Corinthians 12.13). Peter speaks of believers as being 'living stones' built together as priests into a 'spiritual house' for the worship of God (1 Peter 2.5). The Apostle John uses the word *koinōnia*, a sharing in common, when he describes the essence of the Christian life: 'Truly our fellowship (*koinōnia*) is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ' (1 John 1.3 NRSV). John in his vision of heaven sees the Church as a city, the 'new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a Bride adorned for her husband' (Revelation 21.2 NRSV).

But the New Testament concept of the Church is that of a unity having within it diversity. Paul speaks of the Church as having many members gifted in many ways. There is not here in his thinking a monolithic concept of the Church; individuality in the Body is not despised or ignored, but celebrated. The great challenge to the Church has always been how to manifest this unity without stifling individuality and how to encourage this diversity without causing it to fragment the Church.

The great model and inspiration for the Church in this quest for diversity within unity is the Triune Godhead, in which the diversity of the three persons celebrates and enhances the unity of the One Godhead. Mankind finds it impossible to have complete unity within itself: the story of the Fall of Man shows how rebellion against God leads to division within the human race. History is a continuous record of empires, nations, cities, dynasties and families fighting amongst themselves and consequently losing any unity they might have had.

So the Holy Spirit is given to create the unity man cannot achieve (Ephesians 4.3), and it is up to Christians to 'maintain the unity in the bond of peace.' On the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit fell on the Church there was complete unity: they were all '*homou epi to auto*,' all together with the same thing in mind (Acts 2.1). Days later they were still of 'one heart and mind' (4.32), but this unity did not last long.

The Church is meant to reflect the harmony of the Trinity, complete in unity, rich in diversity. Yet soon after the beginning of the Church's growth, divisions began to appear within its ranks. Jesus' prayer for the unity of his followers, 'that they may be completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me' (John 17.21 NRSV) has never since the very earliest days been realised.

So, are those who hope today for a widespread movement towards Christian Unity, when the Church is so much larger and complex than it was in those first days, just naive optimists, idealists who are always going to be disappointed in their hopes for the Church? Certainly, the Church's record in history of attempts to bring about unity is not an inspiring one. At almost every period of history it has been true of the Church that it was 'by schisms rent asunder, by heresies distressed', and that is true still today as we begin the Church's 21st century.

Yet there is this to say. We are entering a period in which it may well be possible for the Church to enjoy a 'spiritual ecumenism' not experienced so far in its history, by coming to accept that many of the schisms and heresies of the past are really no bar to the declaration of oneness in worship and witness.

Arianism was a heresy that the Early Church recognised as creating a barrier to unity, and its teachings on the Person of Christ are still held today by one or two sects. That barrier must still hold if the Church is to be loyal to its Scriptures and Creeds. But there are other

‘heresies’ of the Early Church period, for instance Nestorianism and Monophysitism, which while not being mainstream Christian theology can be thought of as odd Christological views rather than as heresies, for both hold a high view of the deity of the Person of Jesus.

Eastern Orthodoxy is today reassessing its judgement of these two ‘heresies’. In fact it has gone further than that. On 23-28 September 1990 the *Chambésy (Geneva) Agreed Statement* was issued between the Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches, which for most of Church history had been separated from each other. In this statement both sides condemned the Eutychian and Nestorian heresies and lifted the ancient anathemas standing against each other. The Roman Catholic Popes Paul VI and John Paul II signed joint declarations with Pope Shenouda III of the Coptic Orthodox Church in 1973 and 1979.

It may well be that now the ‘*filioque*’ clause in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, which stated that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father *and* the Son, which has divided Catholic and Orthodoxy for so long, need no longer be a cause for division. In purely theological terms, it may well be that both East and West can agree on the Father being the source of the Holy Spirit’s procession and that the perceived historical ‘snub’ to the East by Rome in its unilateral action on the doctrine can be forgotten.

The situation we are in today is unique in respect to the change in attitude to Christian unity, and it is a change that has taken place quite recently. What is new, in both Catholic and Protestant circles, is that there is a growing realization that to worship with and have fellowship with Christians from the opposite side is not to compromise one’s own beliefs. I, as a convinced Protestant Evangelical, do not capitulate to Rome by searching out, meeting with, and supporting Catholics who, as I do, believe in Jesus as personal Saviour and Lord. Similarly, Catholic Evangelicals do not fear contamination by responding to Protestant offerings of fellowship and cooperation.

The 19th Century saw the most remarkable growth of the Church worldwide that has ever taken place, and this was largely due to the overseas missionary movements of all three traditions of the Church, Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant. Then, in the early 20th Century, arising largely from the impetus to growth given by the missionary movements, came the realisation of the harm being done to the work of the Church by its divisions. This directly or indirectly led to the formal Ecumenical Movement, the **World Council of Churches** (WCC) and national Councils of Churches and, in the UK, the present *Churches Together* movement.

In the latter half of the 20th Century the charismatic and renewal movements crossed denominational barriers in the West and led to inter-church cooperation to a degree never before seen in the Church’s history. Para-church organisations came into being which drew Christians together, particularly in the fields of healing ministries, agencies for social concern and humanitarian aid to the ‘Third World’.

At the same time, schemes for unions and mergers of denominations, having had some success in the early part of the century, particularly overseas, seemed to run out of steam by the end of the century. Paradoxically, as far as Evangelical Protestantism is concerned, the late 20th Century saw also a decline in interest in denominational distinctives: what mattered most were a local church’s Evangelical credentials.

Roman Catholicism underwent an ‘*aggiornamento*’¹¹ which, in respect to its relations with other denominations, meant that after Vatican II the long-held official view that members of other churches could not, ipso facto, be considered as fellow Christians came to be regarded as out-dated in the face of a new spirit of brotherliness which came to regard them as ‘separated brethren’.

However, in responding to liberal tendencies in Protestantism, particularly regarding the place of women in the ministry of the Church, the Catholic Church put itself in a position in which organisational and structural union with other churches now seems less and less likely. But ‘spiritual ecumenism’ is still on the agenda.

There is now a widespread acknowledgement that ‘Christendom’ is no more, and that all Christian churches are living in a situation in some ways resembling the situation faced by the Early Church. Surrounded by a culture unsympathetic to the world of Christian faith, in reality each denomination is a collection of local churches, ‘*ecclesiae*’, as in the first days of the Church.

Yet, instead of being surrounded, as in the days of the Early Church, by a multitude of pagan religions, temples and religious activities, the Church is now surrounded by a secularism and humanism, which is commonly indifferent to it, but now shows some increasingly hostile elements. In addition, immigration has brought to Europe, in particular, world religions that challenge the exclusivity of the Christian Gospel.

While organised Christian endeavours have little appeal for many people today, spiritual desires and longings have not yet been extinguished. Christendom is no more, but there is a new spirit abroad among many Christians. While old entrenched doctrinal and ecclesiastical positions still hinder organic and structural union, a sense of sharing a common and treasured belief is becoming more and more evident.

As never before, Christians of many traditions are ready to meet together in worship and witness and social action. The rise of aggressive secularism and the fact of increasing pluralism in Western countries have made many Christians appreciate the common ground we share with other Christian believers. The realisation of this opportunity has been a long time in coming.

As long ago as 1894 thinkers in the Church were having to address the taunt of secularists that Christianity had had its day: it had gone down as a sun that had set. Joseph Parker, the famous London Congregational preacher responded, ‘Yes, it has gone down precisely in that way. I am not aware that even when the sun has gone out of sight, it has gone out of existence.’¹²

The Church has not gone out of existence in the UK today, but it does need digging out of the existing churches to make itself known in unity and love.

¹¹ *Aggiornamento*, literally ‘bringing up to date’: One of the key words used during the Second Vatican Council.

¹² Parker, Joseph, *None like it, a plea for the old sword*, James Nisbet, 1894, p 147.

Traditionally, the Church has made itself known to the world by its beliefs – the *kerygma* rooted in the Scriptures and expressed in a Creed (which affirms the faith to its own people and declares it to the world) and in a shared experience of the risen Christ, often expressed sacramentally in Baptism and Communion. And these three elements of the Christian faith (Scripture, Creed and Sacraments) are still to be found in the Church today.

In each church there are people who delight in the Scriptures and live by them, who confess the classical faith as expressed in the Creeds and have a personal experience of Christ as God and Man. Sometimes, sadly, these Christians are surrounded by fellow members and even leaders of their church who, in one way or another, reject the authority of the Scriptures and cannot assent to the declarations of the Creeds, and for whom Christ (and it is usually this way) is not fully God.

In 1966 a famous debate took place in the Methodist Central Hall in Westminster among Evangelicals in the UK about whether or not Christians should stay in or leave denominations that had in them leaders and members who denied the traditional faith of the Church. One side argued that the ‘remnant’ should withdraw from the apostate body and form a new alliance of Evangelical churches. The other viewpoint was that Christians should stay to be ‘light and salt’ in their denominations.

This is the stance taken in this book. In tune with the concept of ‘digging out the embedded church’, the call of this book is not for Christians to leave their denominations but for them to maintain their witness to the traditional truths at the heart of their denominations and, above all, to declare by meeting, worshipping and witnessing with Christians of other denominations that these truths really are a uniting force.

At a recent united service I attended near to my home, I heard a call for Christians to work with other Christians openly in the community and not just to work within one’s own church. The speaker saw the danger of adding extra meetings and efforts to churches often heavily loaded with work and so suggested that it was not extra ecumenical activities that we had to think up, but to do ecumenically with each other what was already being done.

From my own experience I can say how helpful this idea is. I was a worker at a mission hall in Lancashire for many years and we did evangelism the best we knew how. But we were one church among several, each doing its own thing. Then one year we combined with four other churches for a special enterprise. The reaction of the local people changed positively as we approached them in witness, for we were not representing the ‘Town Mission’ (an individual group) but the churches of the area together in our combined effort.

It seems to me that to go for the creation of one organisation to which all denominations belong is not desirable. The Church should be able to show its unity without displacing time-honoured structures of church government like the historic episcopate, the rule of elders over a local congregation or local synods, any more than Baptists should abandon believers’ baptism or Presbyterians infant baptism.

In this book we shall look at a number of attempts that have been made in the history of the Church to get to the bottom of the question, ‘In what does Christian Unity consist?’ We shall try to find out why they failed, and then we shall ask what relevance those attempts have for us today in the 21st Century.

It is time for Christians in all the three traditions of the Church, Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant, to take seriously what has never yet in Christian history been taken seriously, that there should be a visible and joyous celebration of our Lord's command to be one, so that the world will know that he was sent to be its Saviour and Lord (John 17. 23).

There is value in denominationalism in so far as it holds on to aspects of the Christian faith which others may not appreciate or, sometimes, have not even considered. Baptism by immersion after confession of faith is a very vivid and meaningful ritual to many people; the stress on a real presence in the Lord's Supper is something that many Protestants feel they cannot altogether deny.

We need to be open to the views of other Christians, not with the result that we abandon our own views, but that we may enhance them and learn to have insights which are not in our own tradition. This does not mean an impoverishment of the Church, a reducing it to its lowest common denominator, but an enriching of it.

If I belong to a tradition of worship which is very exuberant and noisy I may well benefit from knowing about and experiencing worship of a different kind with long silences and meditation. And the reverse may be true. Perhaps some of us need the tight constraints of a denominational discipline of worship in order to feel 'at home' in a particular setting. Yet we can learn to appreciate other 'homes', too, all part of the One Home that is the Body of Christ.

What follows next is a brief survey of attempts that have been made in specific epochs of Church History to do something about the divisions among Christians. We will find that unity could only be maintained, in some cases, by denouncing heresy. The Early Church had three tasks in this respect: to root out heresies, to counteract schism and to establish the essentials of Christian belief for all time in statements that summarised the main beliefs of Christians (the Creeds).

It is quite remarkable how these objectives were achieved, though it took many years and was not without stern opposition at times, and were achieved in such a way that even today in the 21st Century the Creeds produced can be accepted by the three main traditions of the Church, Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant, as the formal grounds of faith. Not all in those traditions can come to terms with the way the faith is expressed in the Creeds, but it seems to be a fact that subscription to them (especially to the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed) is becoming the basis for 21st Century ecumenism.

I see Christian Unity as being expressed realistically only by Christians who are in continuity with the classical Christian view of the Scriptures, the Person of Christ and the Creeds. This does not mean a 'fossilising' of the faith but a restating for the present day of past confessions and convictions of faith in such a way that we can be happy to own them as a vital part of our Christian inheritance. As it happens, most Christians today, taken worldwide, are happy to maintain this continuity.

CHAPTER 1 CHRISTIAN UNITY IN THE EARLY CHURCH

For nearly the first 400 years of the Church's history, the Church was a beleaguered minority in the Roman Empire, often drawn together in a fellowship of suffering. This was the period of spasmodic outbursts of persecution, at first from Judaism, but increasingly from the government of the Roman Empire, which came to see Christians as anti-social disturbers of society and a threat to the unity of the Empire.

This was also the period of the rise of heresies and schisms, heresies which in their beliefs were inimical to the truth of the Gospel and schisms in which Christian groups split away from the main body of believers, hoping to form 'true' and 'pure' churches.

Gnosticism, in its various forms, challenged Biblical truth by saying that matter was evil and had been created by a secondary, lesser god. This had all sorts of implications for the truth of the Christians' good news, particularly in denying the Incarnation and the Atonement of Jesus through his death on the Cross.

Had Gnosticism won the day in the Church (and there was a claim by some of its exponents that it revealed Christian truth), the Church would have had no message of liberation from sin for all, no Trinity of the Godhead and no supreme good God totally in charge of his world.

The Church also had to resist a **Judaising tendency**, which wished to retain obedience to the Mosaic law as a way of salvation and to place Jesus in the category of a Jewish teacher with no claim to deity (as the Ebionites did). If the Judaisers had won the day in the Early Church, the Christian faith would have become no more than a sect of Judaism, with no message of a universal reconciliation of man and God through the mediation of One who was both Man and God.

Unity was a prime concern to Christian leaders of the period just after the deaths of the apostles and before the rise of the great Apologists of the faith. The writer of Clement of Rome's *Epistles to the Corinthians* (c.95 AD) makes urgent appeals in his first letter for Christians to submit to approved church leaders who are in a succession of leaders descended from the apostles themselves.

Ignatius of Antioch (c.35-107 AD), in letters to churches in towns in Asia c.107 AD, is one of the first Christian leaders to use the term 'the Catholic Church'. He is emphatic that the unity of the Church can only be maintained by submitting to the rule of the local bishop. 'Let no one do anything,' he writes, 'which pertains to the Church, apart from the bishop.'¹³

Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons (c.177-200 AD), sees the unifying force in the church to be 'the knowledge of the truth'.¹⁴ By 'the truth' he means the doctrines concerning God and Jesus,

¹³ This demand to submit to the local bishop is a constant call in Ignatius's letters. See Bettenson, Henry, *The Early Christian Fathers*, Oxford University Press, 1969, p 40, letter to the Ephesians; pp 42-43, letter to the Magnesians; p 47, letter to the Philadelphians; p 49, letter to the Smyrnaeans.

¹⁴ Bettenson, Henry, *The Early Christian Fathers*, Oxford University Press, 1969, p 89.

and the order of the Church which had come down from the first apostles, preserved through an episcopal succession. He believes that the Church can identify this succession in the names of bishops descended from the Apostles. He refers to the disputes beginning at Corinth mentioned in Clement's letter and sees Rome as the Church that has apostolic authority to correct the errors of the Corinthians. The truth handed down is Biblical truth but it is expounded by faithful men who are consistent in their teaching with the apostles' doctrine.

But there were false counter-apostolic views abroad from a very early date. There were also men who divided the church, not doctrinally, but by their style of church discipline, which went counter to the general conduct of the churches. Some of the heresies were ephemeral; some were long-lasting; and some can even be found today, mainly in sects which have risen up since the 19th Century.

Jerome (c.345-420 AD) said that there was something in the distinction that a schism was a separation from the Church while a heresy was a denial of orthodox doctrine; but he noted that every schism had within it a fault in doctrine.

We can see in the Church's response to these challenges to its faith the formation of responses that have become the bases for unity which we can rediscover and celebrate today.

Almost all the heresies in the Early Church, up to the 4th Century, have to do with opinions concerning either the Person of Christ (some denying his complete humanity, others impugning his full deity) or the relationship of Father, Son and Spirit within a Triune Godhead.

THE MAIN HERESIES AND SCHISMS OF THE EARLY CHURCH

Let us look at the main heresies and schisms of the first 400 years of the church.

Docetism

The first challenge to apostolic teaching can be found within the New Testament itself in the form of a heresy often termed Docetism. As John was writing his letters in the province of Asia towards the end of the 1st Century, he challenged the view that the real humanity of Christ only **appeared** to have a real body of flesh and blood (*dokeo* – 'I seem or appear to').

The roots of this heresy lay in Gnosticism (from *gnosis* – knowledge), widespread in the 1st Century, which claimed an inner knowledge of the way things were in the universe. Later, in Christianised forms, Gnosticism was to trouble the Church considerably, so that in the next century Irenaeus of Lyons wrote strongly against it as a deviation from Christian truth.

Gnosticism, if unchecked, would have seriously diminished an apostolic view of the person of Christ and his redemptive work, because Gnosticism presupposed an antithesis between the physical and the spiritual. Matter was evil, only spirit was good. This dualistic view could not accommodate the idea of a supreme, good God taking on a material form in human flesh. Some Christian Gnostics tended to see the God of creation as opposed to the supreme good God, because a good God could not have been involved in the creation of matter.

A certain Docetic teacher, often identified as Cerinthus, was troubling the church in John's region by denying, further, that Christ, the Messiah, died on the Cross. He seems to have been teaching that Jesus was only an ordinary man until his baptism, when a higher power came upon him. This power left Jesus just before his Crucifixion. By his dualism, this teacher thus separated Christ (Messiah) from Jesus the man. John, the apostle of love, sternly refutes such teaching. Listen to him in his first letter:

'Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognise the Spirit of God: every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.' (1 John 4.1-3)

And he continues:

'This is the one who came by water and blood – Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth.' (1 John 5.6-7)

Note how John has no hesitation in calling such a teacher 'anti-Christ', as one who denied both the real humanity of Christ and that in his humanity he died on the Cross. John was passionate for unity in the church, but only on the ground of truth.

Paul probably had incipient Gnostic views in mind in Colossians when he asserted Christ to be our true gnosis (Colossians 2.3) and not an inferior being, but the very fullness (*pleroma*) of Deity. If Docetism had won the day, Christ would have been a phantom figure and Jesus' death only that of a man.

Marcionism

Gnostic views were widespread, and in Rome, in about 160 AD, **Marcion**, a wealthy ship owner, son of a bishop, and a native of Sinope in Pontus on the Black Sea, began to teach dualist views, particularly in relation to the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. He had been excommunicated from the church in 144 AD.

He saw the Old Testament to be revealing an inferior God to the one seen in the New Testament. The God of the Old Testament was inferior in not being loving and gracious like the God of Jesus; he was the Demi-urge creator which Gnostics talked about. Marcion saw in 10 of Paul's letters, which he interpreted as being against the law of the Old Testament, the true Christian Gospel. The rest of the New Testament writings, except most of Luke, he rejected.

His movement became known as Marcionism and was a threat to mainstream 'catholic' Christianity. But out of the church's tussle with Marcionism came the very necessary step of deciding which scriptures circulating among the churches were authentic and canonical and which were not. So it did the church an immense service. By the end of the 2nd Century a canon of Scripture, largely the same as the mainstream churches' canon today, came into

being. Marcionism, in being a highly organised movement, and in appealing to many by its asceticism, even to rejecting marriage, lasted until the middle of the 5th century in the West.

The Ebionites

Another challenge to Christian orthodoxy came early on, towards the end of the 1st Century, when some Jewish Christians claimed to be the true followers of Jesus. They were the Ebionites (from the Hebrew for ‘poor men’). They rejected the deity of Christ. From limited sources we learn that the Ebionites were ascetics, binding themselves to keeping the Torah rigorously. We know from Acts Ch 15 that Jewish Christians in Jerusalem wanted Gentile Christians to be made to submit to Mosaic laws, though there is no evidence in the scriptures that these men were Ebionites. A Council meeting in Jerusalem about 49 AD resisted this call to bring Gentile Christians into obedience to the law. Paul, particularly, was adamant that the Gospel would be compromised by insisting on law-keeping as a way of salvation (see Appendix 2).

Montanism

Many of the sects which challenged the mainstream church in these first four centuries advocated a tough, rigorist, ascetic Christian faith. There is evidence that as Christianity increased in numbers throughout the Roman Empire, reactions to the disciplined life of the very earliest Christians set in, especially after Christianity became a major religion of the Empire from Emperor Theodosius’s time (c.346-395 AD). One such sect was that of the Montanists.

About the same time as Marcion was gathering followers, a man named **Montanus** in Phrygia was teaching that the Church was too lax in its discipline of those who had lapsed from the faith in times of persecution, and that it lacked earnestness and spiritual power. Montanus demanded an ascetic life-style from his followers, but, unlike Marcion, Montanus’s emphasis was on the charismatic gifts which were given to the first apostles.

Montanus himself claimed, as did two of his female followers, to have been endowed with the power of the Spirit of God in order to prophesy. Their most forceful prophecy was that the end of the age was imminent and that the New Jerusalem (see Revelation Ch 21) was about to come down upon them in Pepuza. Like so many subsequent Adventist sects in Christendom, the Montanists were undermined by the non-fulfilment of their prophecy.

As the Marcionists took away some of the authority of Scripture from the Church’s heritage, so Montanism added to it by advocating a supra-scriptural authority.

These two tendencies, to be one’s own authority as to what is and what is not Scripture on the one hand, and to assert that Scripture is secondary to the immediate dictates of the Holy Spirit on the other, have from time to time in the history of the Church fractured Christian unity.

Novatianism

When the persecutions of the Church began, Christians had to come to terms with how to reinstate fellow Christians who had apostatised or lapsed during the time of trial. About 250 AD a schism formed around **Novatian**, a learned priest in Rome who wrote a completely orthodox treatise on the Trinity. His followers, similarly, were orthodox in doctrine; the issue causing the schism was the lenient treatment of Christians who had, so it was held, denied their faith in the Decian Persecution of 249-250 AD.

Novatian and his followers became a rival church to the catholic church and their congregations lasted some centuries, though not in large numbers. Here we have a dispute about church order and discipline and not of heresy. You could argue, however, that the doctrine of the church is at issue here. Is the church a company of strong, pure believers only, or a mixture of the strong and the confident, the frail and the vacillating? The whole question of authority was raised by the Novatian schism. Who has the authority to bar from fellowship or accept into fellowship? More broadly, can there be a sole authority which speaks for the whole church?

At the time of the 16th Century Protestant Reformation the question of authority was the most important divisive issue. Was it the Papacy with tradition or '*sola scriptura*' (Scripture alone) that was to decide doctrine and church order?

There was some agreement on doctrine at the Regensburg Colloquy of 1541 between Protestants and the Catholic Church, but it was mainly on the question of authority that the Colloquy floundered. The reason for both Catholic and Protestant persecution of the **Anabaptists** was largely a question of their not submitting to authority and so undermining the foundations of society. And so with the Novatian and Donatist schisms (Donatism: see below). By the time these schisms appeared a universal ('catholic') church was emerging in the West, and a schism was a break away from her authority. The Eastern schism to come later in 1054 was also, at root, a dispute over authority.

For us today, in the 21st Century, there is no one body which can realistically speak for all Christians. We do not live, anywhere in the world, in a 'Christendom', and while this may seem a great loss to many Catholic and Orthodox Christians, the break-up of Christendom has occurred and there is no going back to a condition in which there is one organised, visible Christian Church.

What that means for Christian Unity is that each Christian denomination or group today has to work out its own ways of commanding authority and discipline, guided by its tradition and the Word of God. But it also means that each denomination or group should seek dialogue with Christians of other traditions to learn, with them, ways of dealing with issues of discipline and authority.

Donatism

At the later Diocletian Persecution, in 310 AD, in North Africa, a schismatic body, the Donatists, came into being over the same issue as in the Novatian schism.

Donatus led a protest group on the election of a bishop to the see of Carthage, North Africa. This was on the grounds that the bishop had been consecrated by a *'traditor'*, that is, one who in the heat of persecution had handed over copies of the Scriptures to the Roman authorities, who destroyed them. As in the case of the Novatians, Donatus's followers wanted to see the church purged of compromise and to see it following a rigorist life-style.

Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD) saw the danger of Donatism and wrote strongly against it. The Christians of Hippo where he had become bishop were divided into Catholic and Donatist factions.

Theologically the two sides had much in common, but they differed strongly on the nature of the church. Some extreme Donatists in North Africa took to violence against the Catholics and so brought the Donatists as a whole into disrepute.

The question at issue was, is the church a company who are holy, pure, and untainted by any compromise, as the Donatists held it to be, or is it a company of less than perfect, failing sinners, as Catholics held and Augustine taught? These differences of view are still with us today, though it seems that the Donatist view is still a minority one among the mainline churches. The church is a school for sinners, not a sanctuary for saints.

Sabelianism

About 250 AD the Church in Rome had to deal with a view of the relation of Father and Son in the Godhead which was decidedly unorthodox. The catholic doctrine was that the Godhead comprised three distinct Persons in one unity of Godhead. A teacher called **Sabellius** proposed that there is no real distinction between the Father and the Son, that the two are modes or aspects of the One God. His aim was to safeguard the oneness of Deity and, by blurring the distinctions between the Father and the Son, show that the Father could be said to have suffered on the Cross.

Arianism

Arianism was the most important and persistent heresy which came to a head in the early 4th Century. In Alexandria, Egypt, an ancient city of learning and Greek culture, the Christian Church had become well established. It upheld a high view of the full deity of Christ. But a presbyter of the city, **Arius**, taught otherwise. Jesus could not be equated with deity and though he could be called both Son of God and logos (John 1.1), he was a created being and not eternal with the Father, not sharing his deity. Arius probably taught that there was a time when the Son 'was not'.

His views were refuted by many, especially a champion of orthodoxy, **Athanasius (c.296-373 AD)**. Arius's views were condemned at the **Council of Nicaea (325 AD)**, called by **Emperor Constantine**, who suggested that the term *'homoousios'* (of the same substance) should be applied to Christ's relationship with the Father. The term was embraced by the Council and became, for subsequent Councils and Creeds of the Church, the classic way of defining the relationship of Father and Son.

The fortunes of the Arian party in the Church were to fluctuate during the next centuries, sometimes seeming to become the new orthodoxy, but eventually relegated to the role of a minor but persistent heresy, surfacing from time to time in history, even into the 20th Century. If Arianism had won the day, no doctrines of incarnation and atonement would have remained in the Church. Athanasius in *On the Incarnation* (c.318 AD) pointed out clearly that those two truths were inextricably linked together.

Macedonianism

The doctrine of the Person of the Holy Spirit also came under attack. The early Apostles' Creed has little to say about the Holy Spirit, simply asserting, 'I believe in the Holy Spirit'. The later **Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (381 AD)** says more:

'I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified. Who spake by the prophets.' (Book of Common Prayer)

Some asserted that the Holy Spirit was created by the Son and was thus subordinate to the Father and the Son. (In Orthodox Christian theology, God is one in essence but three in Person – Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who are distinct and equal.) Those who accepted the heresy were called Macedonians, but were also and more descriptively known as *pneumatomachians*, the 'spirit fighters'.

Some sources attribute leadership of the group to Macedonius, a semi-Arian who was twice bishop of Constantinople (died c.362 AD). Today there are sects and cults which continue this heresy.

Pelagianism

In the early 5th Century, as the Goths began to press on the boundaries of the Roman Empire to the north, another heresy, Pelagianism, appeared, which threatened the very basis of salvation as taught in the New Testament. The question raised was, can a person in any way save himself?

An ascetic theologian from Britain, **Pelagius**, living in Rome, was concerned about the moral standing of Christians. Pelagius wanted to safeguard man's free will, with each person responsible for his own actions as the basis for judgement. But he went further and denied original sin and taught that by right choices and good living a man could justify himself before God. This was strongly opposed by Augustine, who saw it as undermining the free grace of God in salvation.

Pelagian ideas, in some form or other, were to survive right through Christian history, probably acting as a corrective to those extreme doctrines of grace which deny any free will in man.

Nestorianism

In the late 4th Century the divine and human natures of Christ caused much debate in the Church. **Nestorius**, a patriarch of Constantinople, seems to have taught that there were two separate natures in the incarnate Christ, the one divine and the other human. This was not a question of denying either the deity or humanity of Christ, but an attempt to show that they were distinct in the Person of Christ. This was the form of Christianity that first reached the Far East (China) in the 8th Century, as witnessed by the *Sigan-fu Stone*.¹⁵

Nestorius was challenged to say whether he could call the Virgin Mary '*Theotokos*' (God-bearer) and 'Mother of God'. He rejected these terms and could not conceive how the divine *logos* could be totally one with the human Jesus. Christ was one Person, with two distinct natures. So in Jesus there was the Christ born of Mary (so he could use the term '*Christotokos*'), and there was also the 'Son of God'.

Nestorianism lingered on in the East and only disappeared from Kurdistan during the First World War.

Monophysitism

In the 5th Century a completely different perspective of the Person of Christ was seen in Monophysitism (from the Greek *monos* meaning 'one, alone' and *physis* meaning 'nature'). Unlike Nestorianism, it saw only one nature in Christ: the human nature was absorbed into the divine at the Incarnation.

Both Nestorianism and Monophysitism were attempts to try to define the relationships of these two natures, human and divine, in Christ. Athanasius had written about a 'natural union' (*henosis phusikos*) but he wisely did not attempt to define the mode of that union. Nestorianism held that the union of the two natures was a moral union, that is, the more Jesus 'the man' acted in tune with God, the closer he came to union with 'the *logos*'. The heart of Monophysitism is to be found in the assertion that there is but one nature, the divine, in Christ.

A A Luce, in his work on Monophysitism,¹⁶ points out the serious implications of the Monophysite view for Christian theology. He believed it tended to reduce appreciation of Jesus as human; his sufferings and passion are played down, and the Cross loses its cosmic significance. Monophysitism, coming from the monasteries of Egypt, tended to stress other-worldly concerns. But if Christ did not assume a full human nature, could human nature be fully redeemed? Both Nestorianism and Monophysitism were declared to be heretical at the **Council of Chalcedon** in 451 AD.

¹⁵ *The Sigan-fu Stone (North West China)*. A Nestorian tablet from 781 AD found in the early 17th Century. The inscription on it in Chinese gives evidence of a Nestorian missionary, Olopen (or Alopen) bringing his brand of Christianity to China in the 8th Century. See Cross, F L and Livingstone, E A, eds, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Oxford University Press, 1997.

¹⁶ Luce, A A, *Monophysitism, Past and Present*, SPCK, 1920.

An attempt was made in 482 AD (29 years after the Council of Chalcedon had condemned Monophysitism), to reconcile the Monophysite Egyptians and Copts to the larger Church. Probably the work of Acacius, patriarch of Constantinople, a document known as the *Henoticon* was drawn up with the clear backing of the Emperor Zeno. It did not please extreme Monophysites, or Rome. The authors of the *Henoticon* were excommunicated from the Church of Rome, thus provoking the first schism between the Eastern and Western Churches, which lasted until 518 AD.

The *Henoticon* can be called a ‘fudge’ in that it did not represent the Monophysite cause clearly enough. It stood by the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed and condemned both Nestorianism (which claimed there were two Persons in Christ) and Eutyches who insisted there was only one nature in Christ, yet it did not endorse the Chalcedonian ‘definition’ which spoke of two natures, human and divine, in the one Person of Christ.

Arising from a Monophysite view of Christ, some Eastern theologians taught that Christ had only one will (Monothelitism). This view was condemned at the Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 680 AD, in which it was declared that Christ has two wills, human and divine.

RESPONSES TO THE HERESIES

Councils were called to deal with these heresies. The four major councils outlined below were called by the Emperor and composed mainly of Eastern bishops, though authoritative in their declarations for both Eastern (Greek) and Western (Latin) churches, creating a unity of Christological and Trinitarian doctrine which remains to this day.

The major councils which dealt with these heresies (and many issues of Church order) were:

Nicaea (325 AD), which asserted, against Arianism, that Jesus was of the same nature as God: he was not a created being as Arianism held.

Constantinople (381 AD), which asserted, against Macedonianism, that the Holy Spirit was one in the Godhead. It countered Apollinarianism, which did away with the real humanity of Christ, and it reaffirmed the Council of Nicaea’s position on the Person of Christ.

Ephesus (431 AD), which denied the Nestorian teaching of there being two separate persons, human and divine, in Christ. It also dealt with Pelagianism, which gave man the ability to save himself and saw sin as acts of men rather than an inborn tendency to do wrong.

Chalcedon (451 AD), which reasserted that Christ has two natures completely in harmony within the one Person. Both Nestorianism and Monophysitism continued to undermine the unity of doctrine of the Church for many years. It is only in very recent years that reconciliations have been possible, Nestorianism all but dying out, and the present Monophysite churches in the East coming to be accepted as Christian churches.

Out of this period of the 4th and 5th Centuries came the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (381 AD) which is accepted by all the main Christian traditions today, Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant. The Orthodox Churches take exception to the inclusion of the *filioque* (‘and

from the Son') phrase in this Creed,¹⁷ which states that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and from the Son. To the West *filioque* safeguarded the full Deity of the Son; to the East it did not safeguard the distinctiveness of the Father. Today exploration of the clause is bringing the two sides nearer together.

In relation to Christian Unity in the 21st Century, how should we regard these debates over doctrine in the early days of the Church? Have they any relevance to us today?

THE RELEVANCE OF THESE ISSUES TO THE CHURCH TODAY

The first thing to say is that *any attempt to describe what God has done for man in the Incarnation is beyond the scope of language to deal with adequately; neither the Greek philosophical terms of the first four centuries, nor any language we may use in the 21st Century, are adequate.*

The battles with heresies led to terms being used which became the standard terms of debate and were used in the formation of the great Creeds of the Church (what F D Maurice called the 'compasses' of the Church). Whether terms like *substantia, homoousios, phusis* and so on can do justice to the good news of Jesus may be doubted, but their value lies in pointing, compass-like, to one or two basic truths without which there could be no good news.

These truths are that God the Father, the Holy Spirit and Jesus share the Deity of One Godhead; and that Jesus, one of this Godhead, became really man and died for man's sins out of love for all humanity. That really is the core of the Gospel and there is large Scriptural support for it.

Where a doctrinal position cannot subscribe to that, as in the case of Arianism or Macedonianism, unity is not possible. As for Nestorianism or Monophysitism, the Scriptures do not give us enough information to make definite statements about the relationship of man and God in the Person of Jesus. Nestorianism and Monophysitism both speculate on what is not revealed in Scripture, and Chalcedon, in not so speculating, was wise to state simply that Jesus was one Person in two natures and to leave it at that.

Political and historical factors have taken oriental Orthodox churches into isolation from both mainstream Orthodoxy and from Western Catholicism and Protestantism, but in very recent years the Roman Catholic Church and the Coptic Orthodox and Syrian Orthodox churches have consulted each other with some measure of agreement on Christology.

Out of the Early Church period comes an idea for a basis of unity which has appealed to ecumenists across the centuries. Time and time again the ideal of **Vincent de Lérins** kept being resurrected, always to find that its limitations made it impracticable. Vincent, who died some time before 450 AD, probably became a monk on the island of Lérins off the south coast of France, where a centre for Christian learning had been established. It is relevant to our present study to note that, to Vincent, a true tradition must be consistent with the teachings of Scripture, which for him were the final court of appeal. He accepted that there

¹⁷ See Ch 2.

was development in the interpretation of Scripture, but held that true development did not change the truth.

He wrote:

*'The ancient doctrines of heavenly philosophy should, as time goes on, be carefully tended, smoothed, polished; it is not right for them to be changed, maimed, mutilated.'*¹⁸

There were marks by which a true development (tradition) could be determined. These marks were a catholicity consistent with what has been believed everywhere, at all times, and by all Christians: *'quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est.'*

Since the 5th Century, however, so many accretions to the faith have been made as to render his three-fold test invalid, and even in Vincent's day many who were truly Christian could not come to terms with the Chalcedonian definition. However, it must be remembered that Vincent warned that even his three-fold test for defining true doctrine is to be followed in relation to the *Rule of Faith*, not lesser details.¹⁹

Today our approach to unity has to include the acceptance of a wide divergence of practices and views even among those whose commitment is to the Nicene Creed.

However, allegiance today to the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed does come near to satisfying Vincent's criteria, as all its clauses are ones which have been believed by the vast majority of Christians through all the ages of Christian history.

Because the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed is rooted in Scripture it is a very apt affirmation of faith for all Christians. Allegiance to it cuts across many denominational boundaries. Orthodox, Catholic, Reformed Protestant and Charismatic Evangelical can subscribe to it. The contentious *filioque* clause does create problems of unity with East and West but it is worth remembering that not all Orthodox theologians consider it to be heretical. Perhaps in ecumenical gatherings which include Eastern Orthodox believers, the *filioque* clause can be omitted as a gracious response to Orthodox convictions. Perhaps, also, non-Chalcedonian believers can be rehabilitated by the acceptance of this Creed.

Holding to the Nicene Creed will have to allow for plenty of debate about its meaning and relevance to the 21st Century world. In the Epilogue to his book *The Person of Christ*, Donald Macleod makes this point well. He writes:

'Is the task of Christology completed? Is Chalcedon final? By no means! We cannot content ourselves with merely repeating the words and phrases of the past till the Day of the Parousia. These very words themselves require to be teased out, using, among other things, the insights of modern psychology and modern genetics. Besides,

¹⁸ Moxon, Reginald Stewart, B D, *The Commonitorium of Vincent de Lérins*, Cambridge University Press, 1915, p 92.

¹⁹ Moxon, Reginald Stewart, B D, *The Commonitorium of Vincent de Lérins*, Cambridge University Press, 1915, XXVIII, p 71.

Christology constantly faces new challenges and each such challenge both changes and enriches us. Even those who cannot always be thanked for their answers must at least be thanked for their questions.

How do we translate homoousios and perichoresis into the plain English of today? The 4th Century theologians ransacked their world for appropriate images. We must find ours in the world of singularities, quarks, black holes and electro-magnetism. He who finds a serviceable new image puts the whole world in his debt. The task goes on, then.²⁰

David Willis sees the creeds as ‘channel markers’ to guide the ship of the Church. He writes:

‘There were and are, when it comes to the Church’s teaching about Christ, only a few ways to speak about the mystery of the unity of God and humanity in the person of Christ. These major ways came to be defined as channel markers within which saving, sane, wholesome navigation could proceed. That is a very different picture from ones that either toss out the doctrinal development of this period altogether or treat the formations of these agreements as pretty much the last and final word. Channel markers for sane navigation are for proceeding. That means the dynamic business of discerning what the makers of the creed agreed to at the great ecumenical councils and then attempting to translate and interpret that agreement into the terms and ethics which serve the purposes of the gospel in subsequent languages and cultures.’²¹

It is not the purpose of this book to investigate how the Nicene Creed can be applied to the cause of Christian Unity today, but to call for this to be done. The task has already been begun in the symposium *Nicene Christianity, the future for a new Ecumenism*. In this volume Ephraim Radner observes that Creed must go with Canons:

‘We must realize... that the communal ordering of the Creed’s speech was given in the context of Canon Law. If the Creed makes any sense or points to any sense within the faith of the Christian community, it does so only within the context of the ascetically ordered life of the Church.’²²

His caveat shows what a lot of work lies ahead in relating ecumenism to the Creed, but even Radner ends on a hopeful note:

‘Let us take our minds, let us take our money, let us take our wills and our plans, our strategies for reform, our manifestos and demands, and let us give them over to one another. That is order. And at that point, ‘credo in unum deum et in Iesum Christum, et unam ecclesiam’ will be a sound with a startling swell.’²³

²⁰ Macleod, Donald, *The Person of Christ, Contours of Christian Theology*, Inter-Varsity Press, 1998.

²¹ Willis, David, *Clues to the Nicene Creed*, William Eerdmans Publishing Coy, 2005, p 78.

²² Radner, Ephraim, To desire rightly, the force of the Creed in its Canonical Context, essay in *Nicene Christianity, the future of a new Ecumenism*, ed Seitz, Christopher, R, Brazo Press, 2001, p 220.

²³ Radner, Ephraim, To desire rightly, the force of the Creed in its Canonical Context, essay in *Nicene Christianity, the future of a new Ecumenism*, ed Seitz, Christopher, R, Brazo Press, 2001, p 228.

CYPRIAN AND AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

The influence of two great North African bishops, both of Carthage, must be mentioned in relation to Christian Unity.

The first is **Cyprian (c.200-258 AD)**. Cyprian was born and brought up in an upper-class pagan family and was converted to Christ as a young man. Intensely earnest about his Christian faith, on baptism he forsook pagan ideas and literature, concentrating solely on the Christian Scriptures. In his rejection of Greek pagan ideas he was like Tertullian (c.170-200 AD), another great church leader in Carthage, who once wrote, 'What has Jerusalem to do with Athens?' Some Christian leaders in the Early Church, like Clement of Alexandria (c.150-215 AD), had tried to encompass some aspects of Greek philosophy within Christian truth; not so Cyprian or Tertullian.

Cyprian is particularly important to a history of Christian Unity in that he lived and suffered during times of persecution and had to deal with the question of 'Does the Church have a place for Christians who have fallen away from the faith but want to be restored to the Church? Is the Church only for those who are strong and pure, or has it a place for the weak and sinning?'

This is a question that Christians in Eastern Europe had to face on the demise of Communism at the end of the 1980s. During the 1960s and 70s I got to know one or two churches behind the 'Iron Curtain' and saw how one church dealt with one of its members who had, for 20 years, gone over to the Communists, becoming a Party member and spying on his fellow Christians. When he wished to rejoin the church he had left, it is good to record that he was freely welcomed back into fellowship.

Cyprian had fled in the Decian Persecution (205-251 AD), the first systematic persecutions of Christians, and, returning to Carthage, found that the Church there (and generally throughout the empire) was bitterly divided about what to do with the 'lapsed'. The Emperor had demanded that all citizens should make a pagan sacrifice and some Christians did (named the '*sacrificati*'); others (the '*libellatici*') bought certificates ('*libelli pacis*') saying they had sacrificed when they had not.

Cyprian also found that those who had stood firm (known as the 'confessors') were easing the lapsed back into the Church. Cyprian influenced two church councils in Carthage which followed (251 and 252 AD) to lay down the moderate discipline that the lapsed should only be allowed back into Church after due repentance and penance. But for Cyprian it was the local bishops who had the rule in the matter.

The persecution had given rise to schisms of believers who could not accept such easy restoration of the lapsed, and Cyprian's high view of the authority of the bishop came into play. As long ago as the middle of the 1st Century, Ignatius of Antioch had insisted that nothing ought to be done without the authority of the local bishop; Cyprian followed this tradition. For him, the question of the lapsed was a matter for the bishops.

The consequence of this was that the Church of the (accredited) bishops became the only place where a Christian could find his home. Unity was the issue. Outside of the Church, the single, universal church throughout the world, there was no salvation. The charismatic

prophets of the days of the *Didachē*,²⁴ and the authority of the confessors in the days of persecution, gave way to the supreme authority of the bishop from now on.

Two more issues were raised at this time. The primacy of the bishop of Rome, the city in which by tradition both Paul and Peter had died, over the other bishops of the Empire, was debated. Scholars are not quite clear as to what Cyprian's position was on this, though he disagreed with the Papal teaching that schismatics and heretics did not need to be re-baptised to enter the one true Church; he was a rigorist on this, insisting that they had not been really baptised in the former churches (even where that baptism had been Trinitarian).

After the death of Decius, the next Emperor, Valerian, also began to persecute Church leaders. Cyprian was arrested in 257 AD and the following year was executed.

What issues does all this history raise for us today? One is clearly that an Episcopal form of Church government was established, rooted in the concept of 'apostolic succession' of Clement of Rome and Irenaeus, and that this was to be the unalterable form the mainstream Church was to take (Orthodox East and Catholic West) for the rest of church history.

When non-episcopal churches appear from the time of the Reformation onwards, either they are impossible to integrate into a concept of Unity (an impossibility felt by the Orthodox) or they are somehow (as at present the Catholic Church maintains) to be seen as lesser churches than the true one.

Another issue is the primacy of the pope (the bishop of Rome), the seed of which doctrine was clearly sown by Cyprian's day. In his *On the Unity of the Catholic Church*, Cyprian, in one version of the text of the treatise known as the '*Primacy Text*' writes:

'Again, after his resurrection he says to him (Peter), "Feed my sheep." He "builds his church" on him, and to him he gives his sheep to be fed: and although he confers an equal power on all the Apostles, yet he has appointed one throne and by his authority has ordained the source and principle of unity. The other Apostles were, to be sure, what Peter was, but primacy is given to Peter, and the Church and the throne are shown to be one.'

Scholars debate whether or not this was Cyprian's final view of the Papacy, but the idea took root and became a central tenet of Catholicism in the West. **Pope Damascus I (366-384 AD)** made much of the claim for Peter's (Rome's) primacy over all other bishops.

This view of the Papacy is a great stumbling block to unity to both Protestants and Orthodox.

Yet another issue is the question of the nature and importance of baptism for unity. Is Trinitarian baptism enough to establish a person as a Christian? The Catholic/Orthodox

²⁴ *Didachē*, also called *Teaching Of The Twelve Apostles*, was the oldest surviving Christian document on church order, probably written in Egypt or Syria in the 2nd Century. In 16 short chapters it deals with morals and ethics, church practice, and the eschatological hope (of the Second Coming of Christ at the end of time), and presents a general programme for instruction and initiation into the primitive church.

position would see baptism as not to be repeated, as it incorporates the Christians into the Church once for all, a position also taken by many Protestants.

Finally, is the Church for the holy only? Who is holy enough to be in the Church anyway? If I sin as a Christian, can I be restored on repentance only?

These are all issues to be thought about today in the context of Christian Unity. If I am concerned about the structural and organic union of churches then, it seems to me, the difficulties of union are immense: the historical legacies of the Episcopal churches cannot be laid to one side. But a measure of unity is possible on the basis of shared spiritual life. As to the validity of each other's baptisms, the Catholic view of Rome in Cyprian's day of accepting Trinitarian baptism as a basis for fellowship should prevail today.

Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD) profoundly influenced the development of the thinking of the church in the West among both Catholics, and later, Protestants. He was born in Tagaste in Numidia (Algeria today) of a pagan father and a devout Christian mother, Monnica. After some schooling locally he went to Carthage where he studied rhetoric. Here, at 17, he began to live with a woman by whom he had a son, Adeodatus ('gift of God'). They stayed together for 14 years until he came under the conviction that the relationship was wrong.

Reading Cicero turned Augustine's mind to concepts of prayer and faith; he began to read the Christian Scriptures but found them uninspiring. The Persian dualistic philosophy of Manichaeism attracted him with its rigorous asceticism, and he followed its teachings for nine years. Manichaeism was an amalgam of faiths with some smatterings of Christianity. It taught that man was trapped in an evil prison amid the conflict of light against darkness and spirit against matter. Religious messengers such as Jesus and the Buddha could bring light, but in the individual struggle against the passions and appetites lay the way of liberation.

Augustine became disillusioned with Manichaeism, and he moved to Rome in 383 AD and then on to Milan, in the north of Italy, where there was a powerful Catholic bishop, Ambrose, to teach rhetoric. Augustine was still not free from fighting his passions, especially his sexual appetite, but he became more and more open to the teaching of the Christian church. He began to accept a neo-Platonist concept of God as the One supreme existence to which man can aspire to be joined.

In his autobiographical *Confessions*, Augustine tells the delightful story of how, depressed by his low spiritual state, he entered a garden and heard, from somewhere nearby, a child chanting or singing, 'Pick up to read, pick up to read.' This caused him to take up a letter of Paul he had been reading earlier. There his eyes fell on these words:

'Let us live honourably as in the day, not in revelling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy. Instead put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires.' (Romans 13.13-14)

He came to a living faith, and was no longer a religious dilettante trying out the various philosophies of the age, but a child of Christ and a son of the Church. He was baptized in 387 AD by Ambrose, along with his son Adeodatus.

In 391 AD he returned to his native Algeria and became ordained as a priest; four years later he was appointed assistant bishop of Hippo, and soon after full bishop. Here he founded a monastery and a school to train clergy. He died there in 430 AD as Vandal invaders were attacking the city.

Augustine's influence on the future doctrine and development of the Church was immense. He wrote against the Donatists and Pelagians, who, in his eyes, harmed the Church, the one by schism from it, the other by making man his own saviour and by denying original sin in man. Against them, Augustine taught that the Church was not an exclusive company of the 'pure' but a mixture of the good and bad, and that sacraments performed in Christ's name outside the Church were valid.

Against the Pelagians he developed both his strong sense of the grace of God, giving us in Christ what we could never deserve, and his conviction that it is the sovereignty of God alone which chooses the elect to salvation. This high view of the sovereignty of God was to mould the thinking of almost all the early 16th Century Protestant Reformers in Europe; it was to be the cause of a reaction to its severity in the 17th Century in the theology of Arminius and others; and it is a source of contention still with us today.

Augustine's great work *On the Trinity* emphasised the equality of the Persons of Father, Son and Holy Spirit over against earlier views of the subordination of Son and Holy Spirit within the Godhead.

When the city of Rome fell to the invading Visigoths under the semi-Arian Alaric in 410 AD, and people were conscious of an era coming to an end, Augustine took nearly 25 years to write *The City of God* (412-426 AD), which was to mould Church thinking on the relationship of Church and State for very many years to come.

In it, World Empires constituted the Earthly City, the Church the Heavenly City. There in the heavenly city are the predestined of God. The Church, as the heavenly city, is destined to rule the world as a visible body empowered by God to correct and teach the secular State, whose duty is to support and further true Godliness. In this way Augustine opened a vision of the Church which was to dominate the medieval Church's thinking about its place on earth. The head of the Church on earth, which increasingly from the 5th Century onwards was seen in the West and the Bishop of Rome, had a duty to guide the affairs of men: the Papacy became involved in the affairs of princes even to engaging in military action to promote the Church's interest.

To understand the Catholic concept of the Church today, we must understand Cyprian's stress on the importance of bishops as God's appointed rulers and Augustine's strong sense that the Church has a visible present on earth in a body to which all Christians should belong.

Later in history some Christians (Protestants) would abandon an Episcopal view of church government and others reject the role of the Church as mentor to the State, and instead advocate that the Church withdraw from the world and its society.

As for the Eastern part of the Church, it did not develop a Papacy or centralized control. It looked to the seven Ecumenical Councils from 325 to 787 AD as authoritative for doctrine and order, and it accepted the ancient Eastern churches of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem as leading, *autocephalous* (literally 'self-headed') churches.

The Eastern Church's relationship with the Papacy was from early years strained, and it became openly hostile in the 11th Century. The Orthodox concept of the Church was that of a body of believers in whom the Christ dwelt, especially through their participation in the Eucharist, rather than a structured community of believers all owing allegiance to a central God-appointed head on earth.

CHAPTER 2 THE FIRST GREAT SPLIT: EAST AND WEST PART COMPANY

The ‘undivided Church’ as Orthodoxy sees it lasted from Pentecost to 1054. During this time there were plenty of divisions, heresies and schisms, yet it would be true to say that, doctrinally anyway, a consensus was reached that most Christians have subsequently accepted. This is seen as summarised in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed of Constantinople in 381 AD. Western bishops accepted this Creed and, because it came out of an Ecumenical Council, Orthodoxy sees it as the authentic Creed of the Church for all time.

However, Orthodoxy does not accept the *filioque* clause: it claims this was inserted at a later date, and unilaterally, by the Western (Latin) Church. *Filioque* (‘and from the Son’) is the phrase that says the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father **and from the Son**; it was probably first used at the Latin Third Council of Toledo in 589 AD. Orthodoxy sees this as detrimental to the Father as the sole source of being in the Godhead. So, on two counts, Orthodoxy rejects this clause: one that it was imposed by one part of the Church on the rest (Emperor Charlemagne denounced the Greeks for not using the *filioque*), and the other that it is bad theology.

Long before this first split of the Church in 1054, the Eastern Christians had developed a distinctively Greek kind of Christianity. By as late as 450 AD few Western scholars could read Greek (even Augustine of Hippo had difficulty), and it was rare for a Byzantine scholar to know Latin.

There were other deep differences, too. As Timothy Ware points out in his book *The Orthodox Church*, the Eastern idea of Church government was collegial rather than monarchical.²⁵ No one bishop rose to be the supreme bishop over the East as the bishop of Rome had become Pope in the West.

Today there are additional centres for Orthodoxy, for example Moscow, but still the same principle is maintained of each patriarchate being autonomous yet linked to all the other churches by adherence to the Orthodoxy which came out of the seven Ecumenical Councils (from Nicaea in 325 AD to the **Second Council of Nicaea in 787 AD**).

The distinction between laity and clergy was not as acute as in the West, where theology was firmly in the hands of the clergy. Salvation was seen in the East as *theosis*, the indwelling of God in the believer and the indwelling of the believer in God.

Salvation in the West has had more to do with a forensic view of sin’s guilt being cleared by the death of Christ on the Cross. For the East the Cross was the means of man’s redemption, but salvation is more than just forgiveness, it is also the union of the believer with God. So in the Orthodox theology, the resurrection, by which the risen Christ is given to all who receive him, is central.

Other differences also developed between East and West, with the East permitting clergy to marry (though not bishops, who came from the monasteries) while the Catholic Church

²⁵ Ware, Timothy, *The Orthodox Church*, Penguin Books, 1967, p 243.

insisted from the second Lateran Council of 1139 that all priests must be celibate. (The call to celibacy for clergy had been made in the West from very early days.) There was even a dispute about the use of unleavened bread (*azymes*) in the Eucharist, which the East rejected.

The actual split came over a question of authority: had the Pope in Rome jurisdiction over Constantinople, the leading Patriarchate of Orthodoxy? By 1054 Italy had tried to impose its Latin rite there. In retaliation the Patriarch of Constantinople (Michael Cerularius) demanded that Latin churches in Constantinople should use the Greek rite, and closed them down for not doing so.

Matters came to a head when Pope Leo IX sent a legate to Constantinople to bring the city into line. The Pope's representative, Humbert, gave Constantinople a bull of excommunication and accused the Greeks of omitting the *filioque*. Constantinople replied in kind and the damage was done. Reconciliation in part is only now being made, in the 20th and 21st Centuries.

The Crusades further embittered relations between East and West when Latin patriarchates were set up in Jerusalem and Antioch: they then had two Patriarchs, Greek and Latin!

Relations reached their lowest point in 1204, when Crusaders attacked Constantinople, wrecked Greek churches and killed many fellow Christians.²⁶

Before Constantinople fell to the Turks in 1453, and as a direct result of the threat to the Church from expanding Islam, an ecumenical Council was called in 1438 as a continuation of the reforming Council of Basle. It met first in Ferrara and then, the next year, in Florence. Delegates who would not follow the Pope to Florence remained in Basle and denounced him as a heretic and deposed him.

The aim of the **Council of Florence** was union between the Latin and Greek churches. The Pope, Eugenius IV, was present with the Greek Emperor, John VIII Palaeologus, and Joseph, the Patriarch of Constantinople. The points of contention between the two communions were Catholic as opposed to Orthodox terms and usages: the *filioque* clause in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, the use of *azymes*, the doctrine of purgatory and the position of the Pope as supreme Teacher of the Church.

There was cautious assent to agreement on these points by the Orthodox, but little enthusiasm for union in Constantinople. Even many Greek delegates to the Council who had signed for the union did not further it practically once they were home. A gesture of unity was made in the church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople by the holding of a united service conducted by Orthodox and Catholic priests, even as the Turks were at the gates of the city. But it was too little and too late.

²⁶ Timothy Ware writes: 'Christians in the West still do not realize how deep is the disgust and how lasting the horror with which Orthodox regard actions such as the sack of Constantinople by the Crusaders.' (*The Orthodox Church*, Penguin Books, 1967, p 69.) The violence and the sacrilege of the Crusaders, so-called fellow Christians, in, for example, the destruction of the altar and screen in the Church of the Holy Wisdom (Hagia Sophia), drove a deep wedge between the Eastern and Western Churches which has not yet been removed. Political intrigues of the Western (Latin) leaders with ambitions in the East brought about this disgraceful episode.

It is interesting to reflect that the issues debated at the Council of Florence have still not been fully resolved by the Orthodox and Catholic churches, to this day.

In 1453 Constantinople fell to the Turks. It has never been in ‘Christian’ hands since. The southern Mediterranean lands of North Africa, Turkey, and Mesopotamia, once areas of strong Christian influence, all fell under Islamic rule. Christians were allowed to be a ‘protected people’ (*dhimmis*) with an inferior status in society. The magnificent church building of Hagia Sophia (St Sophia, Holy Wisdom) stands today in Constantinople as a forlorn symbol of Constantinople’s Christian past.²⁷

The bishop of Rome is regarded with reverence by Orthodoxy, but not in any way with the submission required by Catholics. So while Orthodoxy is ‘Catholic’ in its understanding of salvation, with its stress on the supreme importance of the sacrament of the ‘*divine liturgy*’,²⁸ it is not Roman Catholic and refuses to recognise the Pope’s infallibility as teacher of all Christians. This position is illustrated in the way the two sides view the Eucharist. Catholics hold to a dogma of transubstantiation, while the Orthodox, strongly believing in a ‘real Presence’ in the bread and the wine, do not have a dogma to adhere to in order to explain or describe it.

Some critics of Orthodoxy have drawn attention to nationalism in Orthodoxy, which has sometimes fostered ethnic conflict. This may well be because of the State and Church unions and the desire to be the only religion of a particular area, rather as Islam sees itself as destined to control the lives of all within its orbit. This is alien to the spirit of Protestantism and modern Catholicism.

The aversion to intercommunion is deep-seated in many Orthodox people. To have a common celebration of the Eucharist would, to Orthodoxy, be an assault on its claim to be the one true Church. But if Christian Unity is not just to be a hollow phrase intercommunion must come about and it may well have to start at ‘grassroots’ level.

For many Catholics also there is difficulty in grasping the prospect of intercommunion, but at least, at present, the official Catholic view of ‘separated’ Christians is that they are part of the Church Invisible and genuinely fellow-believers.

An article in a religious newspaper in November 2005 reported that:

*‘The “Vatican opens the ecumenical door on Communion” by allowing non-Catholics to receive Communion on special occasions, but still forbids its own communicants from receiving Communion in non-Catholic congregations and gatherings.’*²⁹

²⁷ *Hagia Sophia*, (St Sophia). This beautiful and gracious Church, built in 537 AD by the Emperor Justinian I, should have been a perpetual monument to the goodness of the Gospel; it became a mosque at the capture of Constantinople in 1453, and since 1935, under secular governments, has been a museum.

²⁸ *Divine liturgy*. The term used in Orthodoxy for the central ceremony of their Holy Communion (Eucharist or Mass).

²⁹ Church of England Newspaper, 11 November 2005.

There is so much that Orthodoxy shares with both Catholicism and Conservative Protestantism, especially in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, with its commitment to the doctrines of the Trinity, the real humanity and deity of Jesus, and Jesus as sole Saviour and Lord. It has much to offer the West in its '*apophatic theology*',³⁰ its truth of *theosis*, its freedom from a central overpowering authority and in its sense of the majesty and mystery of the Godhead in the Divine Liturgy.

In September 2006, the Russian Orthodox Church called for 'traditionalist' Christian churches to join to meet the threats of secularism and liberal theologies. An appeal was made by Bishop Hilarion of Vienna, the Moscow Patriarchate's representative to ecumenical organisations, during the Dialogue of Civilisations forum in Rhodes. His appeal for an alliance was not just to Roman Catholics, Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox and traditionalist Anglicans, but also to traditionalist Protestants, which in effect meant Conservative Evangelicals.

Earlier, in August of the same year, Metropolitan Kyrill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, the Russian Church's chief of external relations, contacted Pittsburgh's Bishop Robert Duncan, seeking to restore relations between Moscow and the traditionalist dioceses in the Episcopal Church.³¹

This is surely evidence of something new happening in the Church, which ought not to be ignored by any of the three traditions.

Orthodoxy does challenge some Western theology, in particular its doctrine of original sin seen as original guilt. In Orthodoxy man is seen to inherit Adam's fallen corruption and mortality but not his guilt, and consequently in Orthodox teaching an unbaptised baby is not in danger. Recent theological developments in the Roman Catholic Church on the question of limbo, an intermediate, eternal place for unbaptised babies outside heaven, are pointing in the direction of the doctrine being dropped, which would bring Catholicism closer to Orthodoxy and Protestantism.

All three traditions agree, however, that mankind is fallen and cannot bring itself back to God without the Incarnation and the Atonement.

While Orthodoxy and Catholicism share much in common – sacramental worship, '*sacerdotalism*',³² veneration of Mary, and belief in the efficacy of the prayers of the departed – yet Orthodoxy can be quite close to Protestantism, especially in its Evangelical form. For instance, on the question of purgatory Orthodoxy parts company with Catholicism:

³⁰ *Apophatic theology*, also known as 'Negative theology'. A theology that attempts to describe God, the Divine Good, by negation, to speak only in terms of what may not be said about the perfect goodness that is God. In brief, negative theology is an attempt to achieve unity with the Divine Good through discernment, gaining knowledge of what God is *not* (*apophasis*), rather than by describing what God *is*.

³¹ *Church of England Newspaper*, 6 October 06.

³² *Sacerdotalism*. The idea that a propitiatory sacrifice for sin must be offered by the intervention of an order of men separated to the priesthood.

*'When a man dies in the grace of God, then God freely forgives him all his sins and demands no expiatory penalties: Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, is our only atonement and satisfaction.'*³³

It would be true to observe that in general Eastern Orthodoxy has not tried to proselytise in the way that both the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant churches have tried to win the Orthodox to their brands of Christianity. For this both groups need to repent of any unchristian conduct towards the Orthodox, while in no way retracting their particular views and emphases.³⁴

Yet, to be realistic, Orthodoxy looks askance at both the Roman Church and the Protestant churches, seeing them all as defective. A very interesting Orthodox writer who critiques both camps is Alexis **Stepanovich Khomiakov (1804-1860)**. Under the influence of William Palmer of Magdalen College, Oxford (not the Palmer of the Tractarians), he wrote a seminal work, *The Church is One* (1844-45).

He saw the Orthodox Church as 'an organic society of which Christ was the Head and the Holy Spirit the Soul and whose essence was "freedom in the spirit at one with itself."³⁵ He saw Protestants as having freedom but no unity and Roman Catholics as having unity but no freedom. He levelled a devastating attack on Papal Infallibility – it is a sort of eighth Sacrament in Khomiakov's eyes, in that it suggests the person can be separated from holiness and still be the Church's Teacher.

On the other hand, Protestantism replaced the Church with the 'I' of each individual having the right to interpret and teach.

For Khomiakov, holiness of life is the basis of the Church's real unity. Dealing with Khomiakov's teaching, Serge Bolshakoff writes, 'Unity must be promoted first by saintliness,' and 'If Eastern and Western Christians lead a godly life, they will find the way to unite.'³⁶

Khomiakov denounced 'formal unions'. Both Eastern and Western parts of the Christian Church must repent of their sins and wrong attitudes to the other. 'The reunion of Christendom may be achieved only through the mutual love of Eastern and Western Christians.' Therein lies hope.

As never before, East and West are talking to each other and learning from each other. This is part of the new thing that is happening in our day. We cannot repent of our sins if

³³ Ware, Timothy, *The Orthodox Church*, Penguin Books, 1967, p 259.

³⁴ See Lawrence, John, *Hard facts of Unity, a Layman Looks at the Ecumenical Movement*, SCM Press, 1961, Ch 8.

³⁵ Bolshakoff, Serge, *The Doctrine of the Church in the works of Khomiakov and Moehler*, SPCK, 1946, p 302.

³⁶ Bolshakoff, Serge, *The Doctrine of the Church in the works of Khomiakov and Moehler*, SPCK, 1946, p 302.

we do not talk to each other. Our task is to find ways of increasing our contacts and our understanding of each other.

One of the ways this is being attempted is through the work of the *Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius*. The Fellowship was founded in 1928 by members of Eastern Orthodox and Western churches (the latter mainly but not entirely from the Anglo-Catholic element in the Anglican Church). Before the Communist Revolution of 1917 in Russia there had been little contact between Eastern and Western Churches. In the 18th Century Anglican ‘non-jurors’ (who had sworn loyalty to James II and would not swear loyalty to the incoming and, as they saw it, usurping Protestant William of Orange) had engaged in talks with the Orthodox concerning union, but nothing concrete came of them.

During the 1917 Communist Revolution, Orthodox believers fled the new atheistic regime, and, as religious refugees, found homes in the West, particularly in France and in the UK. One of the young Russian refugees was Nicholas Zernov, who, with the *Student Christian Movement*, organised conferences in 1927 and 1928 in the town of St Albans to bring Eastern and Western Christian students together.

At these conferences in St Albans, a gesture towards union was made by having communion services in the same chapel though at different times. This does not seem like a great step forward in unity, yet Orthodoxy at that time still regarded contact with ‘heretics’ and ‘schismatics’ as forbidden.

As Roman Catholics would have nothing to do with the Fellowship officially, it was left to Anglicans and Orthodox in the main to foster the vision of unity through the Fellowship. Since its founding, the Fellowship has encouraged debate, discussion and joint study by the Eastern and Western Churches. Its Journal is called *Sobornost*, a Russian word which can be translated ‘togetherness’, ‘cooperation’ or even ‘unity in diversity’.

The Fellowship has done much to foster understanding between Eastern and Western Churches, and currently has both an Orthodox and an Anglican President. It stands for traditional Nicene Christianity and against women in church leadership and the practice of homosexual life styles.

CHAPTER 3 'NO ARGUING WITH HERETICS' – THE MEDIEVAL CHURCH

What kind of discipline did the Early Church exert over those who caused divisions or were morally at fault? As far as the evidence of the New Testament is concerned we can say that the church was taught to exclude such members, with the hope of their restoration, but that there was no thought of other punishments and certainly not of using the kind of force which later the Church of the Middle Ages was to wield. Only with the power that came with the Church's imitation of the State did she descend to the violence against heretics or schismatics that was the mark of most of the Inquisitions.

Immorality in the Church was dealt with summarily, from the evidence of Paul's letters and the letters of Jude and Peter. 'You must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy (covetous), or an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard, or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat' (1 Corinthians 5.11).

Christians who fall into sin must be gently restored (Galatians 6.1). Even brothers who are idle or disregard the apostolic traditions ought to be shunned to make them feel ashamed, but still be regarded as brothers in Christ (2 Thessalonians 3.6, 14). Jude was aware that immoral and apostate men were infiltrating themselves into the church but advises only that they be shown mercy (Jude 4, 22-23). Peter in similar language describes the false teachers in the church but leaves them to be judged by God (2 Peter 2).

Paul has a curious instruction concerning how to deal with immorality: the immoral person must be handed over 'to Satan with a view to the destruction of the flesh that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord' (1 Corinthians 5.5).

Schismatics must be warned and put out of the church: 'Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that have nothing to do with him' (Titus 3.10). Even doubters of the resurrection were reasoned with but not excluded from fellowship (1 Corinthians 15.12ff).

A teacher in the church was taught by Paul to be patient and long-suffering and gentle with one who opposed him (2 Timothy 2.23-26), with the hope of his repentance and restoration. The Epistle of Jude and 2 Peter give evidence that heretical teachers were causing trouble in the Church, but in both these Epistles there is no suggestion that they are to be dealt with by temporal punishments: God alone will judge them.

The first and second Epistles of John are also concerned with the problem of heretical teachers. They are to be discovered by the proclamation of the truth of Jesus' real humanity and real deity (1 John 2.4, 15), and 2 John 10 warns against allowing them to be welcomed into the church and our homes.

The time had not come when heresy was to be seen as deserving of punishment by the State. The Church was a minority in society and beginning to be persecuted. There is a story that John the Apostle fled from the public baths in Ephesus when he learned that the heretic Cerinthus, a Docetic teacher, was also in the baths! Shunning heretics and proclaiming the truth against them seems to have been the apostolic method of dealing with them.

The question of heresy does not come into the texts of the Gospels, but Matthew's church teaching does include how to settle disputes in the church (Matthew 18.15-17), and the final sanction against an offender is to put him out of the church.

Both Matthew's and John's Gospels have the saying of Jesus which is taken in some churches to mean that the church has authority to forgive or not to forgive an offender, to bind him or loose him (Matthew 16.19 and John 20.22-23), but what exactly the binding and loosing entails is a question of much debate. In any case there seems to be no sense of temporal punishment involved. In the days of the Early Church, heresy was not punished other than by excommunication.

However, when the Church became a State religion, from the latter part of the 4th Century, heresy was seen as divisive both in the Church and in society as a whole. Measures began to be taken to root it out by force.

The first known killings of heretics came in the middle of the 4th Century when Priscillians³⁷ at Trier were executed in 385 AD for heretical views, but large-scale persecutions came later, in the 13th Century, when opposition to the growing threat of the Cathari became bitter. Both **Martin of Tours (died c.400 AD)** and **Ambrose of Milan (died c.397 AD)** protested against the executions of the Priscillians, and **John Chrysostom (died c.407 AD)** wrote that 'to put a heretic to death would be a crime inexpiable.'

The Cathari (the 'pure ones') were a Gnostic sect with Christian overtones which vigorously attacked the institution of the Church through its preaching in the vernacular. The Church/State connection was abhorred by the Cathari, whose aim was perfection of soul and release from all influences seen in the appetites of the flesh and in worldly glory. Asceticism was embraced vigorously by the most advanced of the Cathari, the so-called '*perfecti*', and they shunned marriage.

There were thorough-going or partial dualists among them, seeing in the Old Testament an evil god and in the New Testament glimpses of the true God. A curious mixture of ideas crowded into their thinking and influenced their concepts of spirituality. The deity of Christ was denied but he was seen as the soul of the cosmos. The Church was not needed to interpret Scripture, which they read in the vernacular, rejecting most of the Old Testament and some of the Prophets. Marcion's heresy lived on in them.

Europe in the early 12th Century was full of wandering preachers, and the ideal of the poor man of Christ lovingly living ascetically for God, epitomised by **Francis of Assisi (1181-1226)**, caught the popular imagination. Friedrich Heer notes: 'Catharism spread so quickly that even its own leaders were unable to control it.'³⁸ It appealed to labourers and to noble men and women alike, giving an attractive 'alternative world-view', as we might say today, to the dominant Catholic view of Christendom.

³⁷ Priscillian was a Spaniard, a high-ranking layman who by his example of asceticism and self-denial gained many followers. He was consecrated Bishop of Avila by sympathetic bishops but his teaching, possibly of a Gnostic nature, was condemned. Finally, he and several of his followers, including a woman supporter, Eucrotia, were executed, in spite of the protests of Martin of Tours.

³⁸ Heer, Friedrich, *The Medieval World*, Mentor, 1961, p 207.

Catharism gave its extremely earnest seekers after 'purity' a status in their circle. Such *perfecti* were prepared by a year's catechumenate, testing and penance in order to receive the *consolamentum*, the gift of the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands of the *perfecti*. After such a ceremony the *perfecti* were prepared for a life of austerity, abstinence from sex and meats and readiness, if necessary, for suffering and martyrdom. For the rest of the believers, the *credentes*, who could not attain to such a standard, there was the hope that, just before death, they might receive the *consolamentum*. Catharism conducted a sort of parallel church experience, with prayers and hymns, a communal meal and a breaking of bread to take the place of the Mass.

Catholicism had become remote to many ordinary worshippers, with a sort of secret religion conducted in the sanctuary in an alien language. A brotherhood of suffering existed among the Cathari, and a kiss of peace and a sermon in one's own language contributed to the sense of belonging to a pure and spiritual people.

Yet the Cathari were heretics. Their rejection of the authority of the Church; their use of the vernacular in worship and preaching; their dualism and heterodox, docetic views of the Person of Christ; and their rejection of the belief in the resurrection of the body, meant that the essential elements of Catholic Christianity were denied.

The growing link between the Church and the State made it inevitable that heresy in the Church was seen to be inimical to the health of the State. The Church began to look to the State to punish those she declared to be heretics. In 1022 Robert of France had 13 Cathari burned at Orleans. Not only was the Church as an institution outraged by heresy, but ordinary Catholics felt the offence, too.

In 1114 in Germany, mobs dragged some heretics from prison and burned them. On more than one occasion clergy rescued heretics from lynch mobs.

The Second Lateran Council³⁹ of 1179 commended the punishment of heretics by secular bodies. In 1184 Emperor Frederick Barbarossa put all heretics under the ban of the Empire⁴⁰ so that heresy came to be seen as a kind of treason. Executions of Cathari, usually by burning, lasted for the best part of 200 years in Europe. With the Bogomils (lovers of God), another Cathari-like sect from Eastern Europe, the Cathari were to trouble the Church for the most of the 12th and 13th Centuries.

What must be borne in mind is the wide extent of Catharism in Europe by the early 13th Century. Both geographically and socially they posed a threat to the Church and the Empire.

³⁹ There was a series of Church Councils which met in the Lateran Palace, in Rome between the 7th and 18th Centuries. The most important was the 4th Lateran Council under Innocent III, at which the doctrine of transubstantiation was declared to be the truth about the Eucharist and yearly confession to a priest was required of all Christians.

⁴⁰ *The ban of the Empire*. As well as Luther being excommunicated from the Church by Papal decree, the newly elected Emperor, Charles V, as the Church's secular custodian, put him under the ban of the Empire by the Edict of Worms, 26 May 1521. By this Edict Luther was banished from the lands of the Empire (and was hidden for his safety by friends for a while in Warthburg Castle), and wherever his writings could be found they were to be burned.

They were missionary-minded and their appeal was to people weary of much that was jaded in the religion of the day.

So great was the threat seen to be that between 1208 and 1228 a Papal Crusade was launched against the Cathari (also called Albigensians) in their centre in Albi, Southern France. In 1181 a first Crusade against them was conducted without success, but the 13th Century attempt saw their downfall throughout Europe. In the Crusade, indulgences were offered to soldiers fighting against them and confiscated Cathari estates were granted to crusaders. By the early 14th Century Catharism was all but annihilated.

In the wake of this successful Crusade, the Inquisition (not an institution, but a widespread network of investigations into heresy) came into being in Toulouse in 1229, along with the setting up of a Papal University there. Scriptures in the vernacular were banned and Catholics were required to abjure heresy from their youth. A repressive era for heretics was ushered in.

Similar in many ways to the Cathari were the Bogomils of Eastern Europe. They rejected most of the Old Testament except the Psalms. Creation was the work of an evil power. Dualist Gnostic influences were strong among them, as among the Cathari, and the Eastern Orthodox Church denounced them as heretics. As among the Cathari, sexual activity was deplored. Material things were evil, so water baptism and the Lord's Supper were rejected in favour of a purely spiritual interpretation of the sacraments. The Bogomils had two grades of followers, the '*ordinary*' who could be finally blessed by a 'spiritual baptism' just before death and the '*Perfect Ones*' who lived on a higher plane all their lives by a rigorous, ascetic life-style. Both the Bogomils and the Cathari created their own bishoprics, making them seem even more of a threat to the Church.

Some German Cathari peasants did come to England in 1162, but they met with little success, were branded and expelled. Four years later the Council of Clarendon had written into it a clause against favouring heretics. Heer points out that it was 'the first example of a secular heresy law to be found in Medieval Europe.'⁴¹

In both the East and the West heresy was seen as leading to the breakup of society if left unchecked, but it was suppressed more vigorously in the West than in the East. In several European countries the mechanism for rooting it out was to set up investigations into its extent and to give heretics a chance to conform to the Church's demands. These investigations or Inquisitions began in the reign of **Pope Gregory IX (1227-1241)** and were successful in controlling the most dangerous of the Gnostic groups; only the Waldensians and Lollards (who were not Gnostic but theologically Orthodox except for their ecclesiology) survived.

Inquisitions were held in France, Spain, Italy and Germany but not in the British Isles or Scandinavia. The inquisitions as organised by Gregory IX were conducted by mendicant Orders (friars), especially the Dominicans, who visited towns with a view to hearing of suspected heretics. Informers were anonymous and the accused were allowed no appeal for trial.

Voluntary confessions led to penance. The threat of confiscation of goods no doubt brought many suspects to repentance, equally with the threat of death and torture. Heresy became

⁴¹ Heer, Friedrich *The Medieval World*. Mentor, 1961, p 207.

politicised: ‘When Frisian and Saxon peasants refused to pay church tithes in 1234 large numbers were condemned as heretics.’⁴²

The inquisitions brought many heretics to ‘repentance’ by recanting their views, no matter what they thought privately, and some unrepentant heretics were burned to death, but these cases seem generally to have been rare.

By the 16th Century the Italian Inquisition had rooted out incipient Protestantism from their land. The last case of burning a heretic was in Seville in 1781. The great Dominican teacher, Thomas Aquinas, justified the inquisitions by stating that heresy was more serious than, say, forgery, for heresy was a corruption of faith and as forgers are put to death by the State, so should heretics be taken off the world for the safety of others. He said that heretics should be given two admonitions to recant, out of mercy, but a stubborn heretic was a danger to others and would infect them if allowed to live.⁴³

Two notorious Inquisitors must be named, Torquemada of Spain and Conrad of Marburg, Germany.

Tomas Torquemada (1420-1498), a Dominican, was created the first Inquisitor General of the newly established Spanish Inquisition in 1482. His Inquisition was independent of the Papal Inquisition, and was thorough and effective, especially against Jewish ‘converts’ (*Marranos*) and Muslim ‘converts’ (*Moriscos*) who had lapsed from their professed faith in the Catholic Church. It is estimated that 2,000 executions by burning occurred under Torquemada in Spain.

In Germany **Conrad of Marburg (c.1180-1233)** was a fanatical Papal Inquisitor appointed by Gregory IX to root out Cathari and Waldensians. He was responsible for the deaths of many ‘heretics’ and his excesses of persecutions were denounced by a court of bishops at Mainz. Later he was assassinated.

Two groups, the Lollards and Waldensians, were regarded by the Church as dangerous sects. But they were not at all like the main threat to the Church, the Cathari-like sects, whose basic world-view was a Gnosticism that rejected most of the tenets of the Christian faith.

‘*Lollards*’ was the nickname for those preachers in England who followed the main teachings of **John Wycliffe (c.1330-1384)**. The word ‘*lollard*’ probably came from a derogatory view of popular preachers (Dutch word *lollen*, to sing, to chant) who purveyed Wycliffe’s ideas across the country; it could be later used of anyone critical of the Church.

Their views would later be embraced by mainstream Protestantism. They included rejection of the institution of the Papacy; the right of an individual to interpret the Scriptures, which were regarded as the sole authority for faith; and the rejection of a celibate priestly class, of transubstantiation and of confession. They also rejected the many appurtenances to the Christian faith which they felt had been added by the Church, such as indulgences, the need for pilgrimage and so on.

⁴² Brown, Harold, O J, *Heresies*, Hendrickson, 1988, p 277.

⁴³ Bettenson, Henry, *Documents of the Christian Church*, OUP, Second Ed, 1963, pp 132-135.

Lollard ideas lingered in English religious life and, to some degree, prepared the way for its reception by the middle of the 16th Century of Lutheran teaching.

The Waldensians were so named after a merchant of Lyons, **(Peter) Waldo**, who died early in the 13th Century. What inspired Waldo and his followers was the same spirit of poverty and meekness that inspired Francis of Assisi to reject a worldly way of life and live a simple Christ-like life.

Persecution of the Waldensians was largely based on the charge of their being schismatics and unauthorised itinerant preachers, yet they did oppose Church teaching on such matters as purgatory and prayers for the dead. The Waldensians, unlike the Lollards, did have a distinguishable structure with pastors and leadership.

A study of Peter Waldo's *Confession of Faith* of 1180 shows that he and his followers were thoroughly orthodox in their holding to the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation of the Son of God. The *Confession* lacks the evangelical note of justification by faith in Christ alone in the form expressed in the 16th Century Reformation (a lack found also in Wycliffe's theology), and the Waldo *Confession* can be read as a testimony to salvation by good works.

At the time of the Protestant Reformation the Waldensians came under the influence of the Calvinists in Switzerland, to the north of their valleys in the Italian Alps. They gradually became an identifiable Protestant denomination, closely associated with the Reformed tradition of Geneva. Their churches are found today mainly in Northern Italy.

It has been noticed by historians that 12th Century Christendom was more open and tolerant than that in the next Century. The toleration extended to the Jews. **Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153)** and **Peter Abelard (1079-1142/3)** believed Jews should be tolerated in a Christian society: was not Jesus a Jew? Gilbert Crispin (died 1117), Abbot of Westminster, conducted public and polite debates with Jewish merchants, and this kind of thing also happened in Spain, France and Italy.

By the 13th Century, disputations between Christians and Jews became forbidden, but by then neither were Christian heretics to be argued with: they must be re-converted or removed from society. Peter Lombard (c.1100-1160) accepted St Paul's view that heresies drew out the true faith.

This gentle approach was overtaken by a sterner Augustinian view: no liberty for errors – convert or die. The concept of death for heretics became rooted in Western Christendom's psyche, and the major 16th Century Protestant reformers did not quite rise above the idea. In societies in which traitors could be executed for treason, where Church and State were closely linked, they saw heresy too as a sort of treason.

Miguel Servetus (1511-1553) was executed as a heretic in Geneva by the civil authorities with Calvin's approval (though he tried to persuade the town not to burn him but execute him more mercifully), and the Swiss Reformer **Zwingli (1484-1531)**, in Zurich, saw the deaths of several Anabaptists for rejecting infant baptism and a State-Church connection. As 16th Century Protestant reformers saw heresy as inimical to the welfare of both Church and Society, they sustained a medieval concept of the Church.

Today there is no 'Christendom' trying to impose the Christian faith on societies. One can argue from the teaching of the New Testament that such a state of affairs was never 'meant to be'. Yet Christians must have a basis of unity that excludes as well as includes. Later in this book we shall try to outline what this basis is which binds the majority of Christians together.

CHAPTER 4 THE SECOND GREAT SPLIT: WESTERN CHRISTENDOM TORN APART – THE PROTESTANT UPHEAVAL

Innocent III's papal reign (1198-1216) epitomises the Western ideal of the Church as having powers both temporal and spiritual. In his reign transubstantiation was set down as a dogma and auricular confession to a priest was enforced. In his reign both Henry IV of France and John of England were forced to bow to the Pope's will. In his reign attempts were made to extirpate heresy, particularly of the Cathari (Albigensians) in Southern France.

From the cradle to the grave, for both rich and poor, the Church ruled all of life – though the rich had the prospect of a better life beyond death as they paid for the mitigation of pains in purgatory by having masses said for them.

Rumblings of discontent against the power of Pope and priest arose in England as early as **Bishop Grosseteste of Lincoln (1170-1253)**. Almost all his life, Grosseteste was deeply disturbed by the worldliness of the Church and the stifling effect of the centralised power of the Roman Curia. He was a scholar, Biblical commentator, theologian and scientist. His treatise *De Luce* ('On Light') suggested that light was the first form of all matter to be created.

In 1235 he left the academic life of Oxford to become Bishop of Lincoln. As a pastor he had a zealous concern to remove clergy living a worldly life, both religious and secular. In 1245 he went to Lyons to plead for church reforms in England before Pope Innocent IV. Five years later he went again to Lyons and a Memorial he had written was read to the Pope. In it he appealed to the grace and condescension of Christ in coming to earth to redeem mankind as a model for Christian ministry. He laid the blame for the indolence, luxury and worldliness of the Church firmly on the bad example of the Papal Curia. Innocent IV considered excommunicating him.

Just before his death, Grosseteste had another tussle with the Pope, who tried to impose his own nephew, Frederick of Lavagna, as a canon of Lincoln Cathedral. Grosseteste firmly opposed the move, consistent with his campaign against non-residency of the clergy. He prepared even for open rebellion against the Pope if necessary: it was not unity at any price for him. A century later Wycliffe was to be influenced by his writings.

John Wycliffe (c.1330-1384). Wycliffe was an Oxford scholar, and Master of Balliol College around 1360. He was an acute critic of the worldliness of the Church of his day, which he saw as a lack of grace. He held the thesis that rule and authority were only valid when exercised by godly people. The Church was in the midst of its *Great Schism* at this time, with three rival Popes all claiming authority to rule the Church.

Wycliffe attacked folk religion, with its superstitious pilgrimages and reverence of relics, as well as the non-residence of clergy in their parishes. He questioned the doctrine of transubstantiation, though he held to a real, though not physical, presence of Christ in the Eucharist. He taught predestination of the elect to salvation and inspired the translation of the Bible into English from the Latin. Many copies of this translation are still extant.

As later with Tyndale, Wycliffe's aim was to put the Bible in the vernacular into the hands of the people. His followers as travelling preachers, the 'Lollards', spread his views across the land. Although he was not excommunicated, Wycliffe's body was disinterred and burned by the Church in 1428 as the body of a heretic.

The importance of Wycliffe's part in inspiring the translation of the whole Bible into English cannot be overestimated. Copies of the Wycliffite Bible reach all levels of society and played a significant part in making Biblical truth accessible to lay people.

Criticisms of the Papacy threatened the unity of the Church, though not all critics wished to leave the Church. In *De Monarchia*, c.1311, **Alighieri Dante (1265-1321)** spiritualised the secular order: the State is of God as truly as the Church is; profane history is under God's control; and the power of the Emperor is derived directly from God, not from the Church or the Pope. Bishops must exercise their powers as constitutional and not absolute rulers of dioceses.

In Oxford, William of Occam, writing between 1330 and 1350, saw the Church and State as two glories, independent of each other (as the sun and the moon). Each in its own sphere is supreme: neither must interfere with the other except in extreme circumstances, for example if the Pope was a heretic or the Emperor a tyrant.

Far more serious criticisms of the status quo were made by **Marsiglio of Padua (c.1275-1342)**. In his *Defensor Pacis* (1324) he exalted the power of the State above that of the Church. Ultimate authority resided in the people, not in any individual or group. The Church had no rights which were not given by the State, even to the owning of property or spiritual jurisdiction. The Pope was subject to the Emperor; the clergy had no rights over the sovereign and no voice in his selection; the people as a whole might depose him, but not the Pope. The Prince alone was empowered to condemn heretics, but only if the welfare of the State was threatened. Needless to say Marsiglio was excommunicated.

Disaffection with the totalitarian nature of the church continued to grow, and it was the overbearing authority of the Papacy which lay behind much of Wycliffe's opposition and that of **Jan Hus (c.1372-1415)**, the Bohemian martyr-scholar who spread Wycliffe's teaching in Central Europe. The Papacy itself contributed to this rise of discontent by the crises of the **Avignon Papacy** and the Great Schism (1378-1417), in which Christendom was divided as Popes and anti-Popes all vied for power.

John Hus was the first Protestant martyr, before there was, strictly, such a thing as Protestantism. Wycliffe's views were brought to Prague by scholars in 1401, and at his Bethlehem Chapel in Prague (beautifully rebuilt in Communist days and a tourist attraction today) Hus preached many of Wycliffe's ideas. In his *De Ecclesia* ('On the Church') he drew heavily on Wycliffe and criticized the power structures of his day. His condemnation of the worldliness of the clergy aroused considerable hostility. As Rector of Charles University he gained a popular following, but the Church forbade him to preach and excommunicated him in 1411. He was summoned to appear at the Council of Constance in November 1414, condemned, and burned as a heretic on 6 July 1415.

Hus's followers kept his teaching alive and a moderate section of them later became known as the *Unitas Fratrum* ('Unity of Brethren'), who had an impressive record of suffering for

unity's sake in subsequent centuries, the spiritual ancestors of the Moravians who come into church history in the 18th Century.

The Unity of the Brethren were the spiritual descendents of the Hussites who had carried Jan Hus's and John Wycliffe's teaching from Prague across Bohemia at the beginning of the 15th Century. Lollard (Wycliffite) views survived in Bohemian libraries despite official opposition and prohibition of the study of Wycliffe's works, yet in 1410 his books were burned publicly.

Jan Hus's execution failed to extinguish his teaching that the Bible should be the sole authority for faith and conduct and that civil or ecclesiastical authority could be challenged if it did not conform to its teaching. In the Church of St Martin-in-the-Walls, not far from Hus's own Bethlehem Chapel, in 1414, Holy Communion was celebrated for the first time by the congregation partaking of the cup as well as the bread.

The cup (*chalice-calice*) became the symbol for a reforming section of the Church who became known as the 'Utraquists' (from *utraque*, 'and the other'). The Utraquists were given a special status in the Catholic Church from 1433 and only lost their position as the established Church in Bohemia after the Thirty Years' War, when full Catholicism was restored. Compromises are not at all common in the history of the Church and the Utraquite compromise was short-lived. The Utraquites themselves were opposed to the radical Hussites, the 'Taborites', based on the fortified town of Tabor in Southern Bohemia, and defeated them in battle at Lipany, ending the Taborite rebellion.

With Utraquist priests officiating at first, a group of reformers calling themselves 'Brethren' met in the village of Kunwald in 1457 and at Lhota in 1467, and formed themselves into a Church, choosing three of their number by lot to be their ministers. Later these men were ordained by Waldensians, and attempts at union were made with the Waldensians and other schismatic, though not heretical, groups, but these attempts came to nothing.

The Bible was central to the Brethren's life, and a printed Bible in Czech was produced from Hebrew and Greek, the *Kralice Bible* (1579-1594). The Brethren, like the Waldensians, anticipated the Protestant Reformation before Luther and **John Calvin (1509-1564)**. They had some 200 churches in Bohemia and Moravia by 1507, when Pope Alexander VI issued edicts against them. In 1520 two of the Brethren contacted Luther, who approved of their confession of faith.

In Northern Europe, **Johann Rucherat ('John of Wesel') (c.1400-1481)**, **Johann Wessel of Groeningen (c.1420-1489)** and Johann Pupper of Goch were Reformers before the Reformation, all living in the Netherlands. John of Wesel, Canon of Worms, was accused of preaching Hussite doctrines on the Church and the sacraments. He was tried by the Inquisition in 1479 and publicly recanted, but was imprisoned until his death.

Wycliffe's legacy of questioning Church authority was kept alive in these Netherlands Reformers. Wycliffe taught that the Bible only was authoritative; he rejected the doctrine of transubstantiation, the practice of granting indulgences, compulsory fasting and extreme unction. Johann Wessel similarly attacked indulgences (Luther came across his writings with delight in 1522), and criticised the Papacy even though he taught in Paris for many years.

In 1570 'the Brethren' inspired the *Protestant United Synod of Sendormir* in Poland, where Protestantism (Calvinist and Lutheran) was facing a revival of the Catholic Church. The

'Consensus' of Sendormir called for an avoidance of dissension and an acceptance of the Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. By the Consensus it was agreed to accept the orthodoxy of the Protestant traditions present at the Synod, Lutheran, Calvinist and Brethren, even to exchanging pulpits and to accepting their differences in discipline and worship. Frequent intercommunion and attendance at one another's synods were advocated.⁴⁴

These influences tended to loosen the ties of the Church and State and led eventually to the situation we face in the West in the 21st Century, that of the almost complete secularisation of society. It can be argued that these loosening of the ties of State and Church were providential in that today's ecumenical activities are so much freer without them.

Soon the entire Roman Church system came under attack, as the Renaissance influence of free enquiry brought scholars to re-examine the historical claims of the Papacy to supremacy, and as the Scriptures were studied in their original languages of Hebrew and Greek.

Erasmus's Greek text of the New Testament appeared in 1516 and Archbishop Ximenes's polyglot translation in 1522, though it had been prepared earlier. The invention of the moveable-type printing press in Europe around the 1450s rapidly spread both scholarly treatises and polemical woodcuts throughout Christendom. These publications criticised abuses of the Church and created what were perceived by the Church to be new and dangerous teachings.

In his 95 theses of 1517, Luther protested at, among other things, the way indulgences were being sold as remedies for guilt, when only true contrition and a real act of repentance (as in the sacrament of penance) could bring God's forgiveness. While the main Reformers (Calvin, Luther, Zwingli, Bucer, etc) rejected some aspects of sacramentalism, for example the doctrine of transubstantiation, they did not reject the concept of sacraments altogether.

For Calvin, in the Lord's Supper Christ was both represented and presented to the partaker. Other more radical Reformers, the Anabaptists in particular, tended to remove the sacramentalist element from their expressions of the Christian faith. For them there was no 'real presence' of Christ in the Holy Communion. Somewhat confusingly, they came to be known as Sacramentarians.

Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536) was a Dutch scholar and one of the earliest of the Reformation period to call for a coming together of the two conflicting sections of Christendom. He was the foremost humanist scholar of the age and, although ordained as a priest in 1492, he strongly criticized monasticism and the clerical abuses of the day.

In trying to steer a middle course between what he saw as the extremes in Protestantism and the Catholic church, he came to be rejected by both sides. The times were calling for a dogmatism that Erasmus's irenic spirit deplored. He visited England and taught theology at Cambridge University for a time, and was friendly both with the Protestant divines like John Colet, a leading Biblical scholar, and Thomas More, the Chancellor of England who was executed for his opposition to Henry VIII's rejection of the Pope's authority. In one tract

⁴⁴ Slosser, G J, *Christian Unity, its history and challenger in all communions, in all lands*, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co Ltd, London, 1929, pp 36-37.

Erasmus wrote he asserts, through one of the characters of a dialogue, ‘The Church is a body of men who, however good they may be, are not infallible’.

In 1517 **Martin Luther (1483-1546)**, an Augustinian monk and lecturer at the new university of Wittenberg in Germany, summarised in 95 theses a series of ideas for debate which challenged accepted attitudes and practices of the Church. The issue of the validity of Papal indulgences, bought to mitigate the Church’s temporal punishment for sins, came to the fore, and led to a whole host of Catholic practices and doctrines being questioned.

Luther’s own journey to assurance of faith had come through reading the Bible in the original languages (Erasmus’s Greek New Testament came out in 1516) and his discovering that the Scriptures taught that God justifies (sets right) the sinner on the basis of his faith in Christ alone.

The newly developed art of printing enabled his ideas to spread quickly throughout Europe in the form of tracts and polemical woodcuts.

Luther’s views were condemned by Pope Leo XII, and he was excommunicated in 1521 when he refused to retract his beliefs. Luther’s own peace of mind *coram Deo* (‘in the presence of God’) came through personal trust in Christ’s sacrifice alone: he campaigned against the superstitions of the folk religion of his day as also against a sacramental system which he believed deprived people of direct access to God. It must be borne in mind, however, that Luther was not the only priest in the Church in his day who had struggled through to an experience of being justified by God by faith alone.

On the subject of Christian unity, Luther’s view was that there were plenty of true believers outside the Church of Rome. He knew Hus’s views and approved of his stand against Rome. He met the Bohemian (Czech) Brethren and generally admired them. He read the Greek Fathers and knew they did not submit to the authority of the Bishop of Rome.

As for unity with Catholics, Luther was more cautious than some of his fellow Reformers. For Luther it was not peace at any price. Catholics and Protestants met at Augsburg in 1530, and seven Princes signed in favour of the Lutherans’ *Confession* (the first Evangelical Confession), drawn up largely by **Philip Melancthon**, Luther’s assistant, to try to conciliate Catholics.

Much of the text of the *Confession* was on matters held in common by both Catholics and Protestants (for example opposition to Anabaptism), but the particular Protestant insistence on the place of personal faith for salvation was retained. The Confession made the plea that in it,

*‘...nothing can be found differing from scripture, or from the Catholic Church, or from the Church of Rome as we understand it from its (classical) writers. We are not heretics. Our trouble is with certain abuses, which have crept into the Churches without any clear authority. The ancient rites are to a large extent carefully preserved among us.’*⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Rupp, E G and Drewery, Benjamin, ed, *Martin Luther, Documents of Modern History*, Edward Arnold, 1970, pp 145-148.

Probably the most earnest of the Reformers for unity was **Martin Bucer (Butzer) (1491-1551)** of Strasbourg, who tried to mediate between the Swiss theologians and Lutherans. Luther tended to distrust the Swiss; he differed strongly from them on the doctrine of the Eucharist, insisting on a 'real presence of Christ' in the elements. Luther's basis of unity, even among fellow Protestants, was truth (and truth as Luther saw it) rather than a yielding of conviction for the sake of conciliation.

Soon after Luther's initial protest against Rome in 1517, reformed Swiss theologians such as **Zwingli** and Oecolampadius and German theologians such as Melancthon, Bucer and Osiander found themselves drawn, with Luther, to a Colloquy to be held in Philip of Hesse's castle in Marburg in 1529. It only lasted two days. The point of it all was to see how much these 'Protestant' scholars could agree.

After lively discussions they found they could agree on 14 of 15 proposals on doctrine. Many of these, such as that on the Trinity, were universal doctrines agreed by Catholics and Protestants alike, but it was on the nature of the Eucharist that there was deep disagreement between Luther and the Swiss. Luther had gone to the Conference only reluctantly as he was sure the Swiss view was heretical and that they would not change their minds.

The issue was, is the body and blood of Christ really present in the elements of the Eucharist? Luther was adamant that Jesus' words, 'This is my body,' must be taken at face value as literally true. Zwingli made the plea to Luther that this must be taken figuratively, and called for a distinguishing between essential doctrines and non-essential ones. To Luther the question of the corporeal presence of Christ in the Supper was an essential matter, not a non-essential. They parted agreeing to differ and not to use bitter words against each other.

The whole debate over 'essentials' and 'non-essentials' is ongoing and is largely a Protestant problem. The difference between the two is resolved much more clearly by the Catholics (for whom it lies in accepting the tradition of the infallible teaching ministry of the church) and by the Orthodox (for whom it lies in the teaching of the seven Ecumenical Councils of the universal Church).

What seems to be happening today is that very many Christians are seeing that there are a few core truths that are true for all true Christians which are sufficient to provide grounds for unity, while allowing them to hold on to denominational allegiances: confession of Christ as Saviour and Lord; submission to the Word of God; and confession of a classical Creed. Pressures of secularism and pluralism are, perhaps, helping us to see more clearly the essentials from the non-essentials.

A Conference on unity was called for at Eisenach in May 1536. Luther was ill but struggled to make some contribution to the discussion, and there was some show of unity between the Germans and the Swiss.⁴⁶ As the outcome, the *Augsburg Confession* was signed by the delegates.

One of the most disputed doctrines taught by the Church Reformers, justification by faith alone, was upheld by many Catholic theologians. Martin Luther, who made this truth his

⁴⁶ Atkinson, James, *The Great Light, Luther and the Reformation*, Paternoster Church History, Vol iv, The Paternoster Press, 1968, pp 111-113.

battle-cry, is perhaps the most famous exponent of the doctrine, but his own Augustinian superior at the Erfurt monastery, **Johannes von Staupitz (c.1465-1524)**, taught a strong doctrine of grace which made men righteous before God.

Cardinal Contarini (1483-1542), who was the Pope's representative at the **Colloquy of Regensburg (Ratisbon)** in 1541, which tried to bring Catholic and the new Protestant theologians together, had come to an experience of saving grace some time before Luther's. The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church says of him, 'His own mystical experience of 1511, which led him to put his trust in the merits of Christ rather than religious observances, antedated Luther's *Turmerlebnis*'⁴⁷ by several years.'

Calvin, a young observer at the short Regensburg Colloquy, wrote to his fellow Genevan Reformer, William Farel, that the Catholics had conceded much on justification. 'For they have committed themselves to the essentials of what is our true teaching. Nothing is to be found in it (the article on justification) which does not stand in our writings.'⁴⁸

This is not at all to say that Contarini had embraced Protestantism, but is an indication that there was common ground between Catholics and Protestants in the 16th Century, in addition to their clear agreement on the classical Patristic Creeds.

But Regensburg failed to proceed to agree on the powers of a General Council on Transubstantiation and on Penance. The Colloquy lasted only about a month; Luther rejected the agreement on justification as 'a patched-up thing' and Rome rejected it because there was no mention of merit. On both sides of the debate at Regensburg there had been humanist scholars who were wanting success.

A second attempt at a Colloquy at Regensburg in January 1546 also failed and hostilities broke out between the two sides. The great issue was, and still is, the question of authority, an insuperable difficulty to unity then: we must consider if it is so now. The time was not then ripe for a grappling with this matter.

But Protestantism itself was not yet ready for unity within its own ranks. In 1560 John Calvin wrote to Archbishop Parker urging Queen Elizabeth to convene an Assembly of Protestant ministers to frame a plan of worship and government for all Reformed Churches. Calvin was prepared to accept episcopacy for the sake of unity; Cranmer and Bucer were supportive of the move, but no action was taken. Yet there were no essential doctrines touching on the very nature of salvation on which the main Protestant churches disagreed.

The Protestant insistence on private judgement can lead to tolerance of other's views or, equally, the entrenching of one's own opinions.

As well as the religious and doctrinal differences, political forces worked against alliances of any kind between Catholics and Protestants, except when they united against the Anabaptists.

⁴⁷ *Turmerlebnis*. Luther's experience of justification by faith, as he studied the Scriptures in a tower of his Augustinian monastery.

⁴⁸ Matheson, Peter, *Cardinal Contarini at Regensburg*, quoting a letter from Jean Calvin to Guillaume Farel, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1972, p 109.

The Swiss cantons like Geneva, which had gained independence upon becoming Protestant, did not want to surrender their freedoms to Catholicism.

It is important to remember that the 16th Century Reformers believed in the universality of the true Church, visible and invisible. They did not see themselves as creating division in the body of Christ, but rather as renewing it in holiness and faithfulness to the Scriptures, and they wished to affirm the essential oneness of all Christians in that body. Their stern opposition to the Anabaptists was largely on the grounds that these radicals, in rejecting infant baptism and substituting for it baptism of believers only, and in denying a State-Church connection, were fragmenting the body of Christ and destroying the concept of a visible Church, a church of the whole of a society.

As things have turned out, the Anabaptist position has become the norm: we can generally say that churches today do not represent the society in which they are found. Their ideal of a Church for convinced believers, not the multitudinous Church of the mainstream 16th Century Protestant Reformers, lived on and has come to be an important part of Protestantism today.

There were, however, some extreme Anabaptist groups which revelled in their freedom from the authority of the Catholic Church, and became unrestrained in their pursuit of what they deemed to be the teaching of the Holy Spirit. An extreme group took over the city of **Münster** in **1535**, expelling its Catholic and Lutheran citizens.

This group created a sort of theocracy which, under siege from its opponents, practised a community of goods, encouraged polygamy and put down dissent in the city by frequent executions. Münster was besieged and conquered by a combined Catholic and Lutheran army and brutally punished. Münster gave a bad name to all Anabaptist groups, even those orthodox in the main tenets of the Christian faith such as the Meuronites and Hutterites, and Anabaptists suffered death in their thousands for refusing to give up their faith and way of life.

Protestantism has given birth to several extremist groups since then, usually when the authority of the Bible has been superseded by ecstatic experiences as normative of the Christian life.

Yet apart from the Anabaptists, who could not be tolerated, there was a desire among the Protestant Reformers for Christian Unity. For example, John Calvin had a very high view of the Church. It was the body of Christ and must be pure and ordered according to the word of God (the Bible).

In 1536 Calvin, fleeing as a young man from his native France where ‘Lutherans’ (Protestants) were being persecuted, came to Geneva in Switzerland. He was asked to take up the rôle of teacher in the Protestant community recently established there. His treatise on the fundamentals of the Christian faith, *The Institutes of the Christian Faith* (1536), covered the main doctrines of Christianity as found in the Church’s classical Creeds, and so he was thoroughly orthodox in his adherence to the doctrines of the Trinity, the Incarnation and Atonement.

As many of the 16th Century Protestant Reformers did, he drew on St Augustine for his doctrine on the sovereignty of God and the supremacy of grace in salvation. He drew up

Regulations for the good ordering of the Church in Geneva (the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*), setting out how it was to be governed and disciplined on what came to be known as Presbyterian lines, with elders, pastors and teachers (but no priesthood!).

He saw the ideal Church as working closely with the civil magistrates, so that Godliness might be acknowledged in all aspects of the life of society and of the Church. Thus infant baptism was maintained in the Genevan church, not as the baptismal regeneration of a child, but as the drawing of the child into the body of the faithful, the Church. Consequently, like most of the Protestant Reformers of the 16th Century, he opposed the Anabaptists, who rejected the baptism of infants and saw the Church as a community of the faithful, gathered out of the main body of society. The Reformers held that Anabaptism undermined and fragmented society and destroyed God's plan for the Church.

Calvin saw the Catholic Church as corrupt and erring but having within it Christian believers. He longed for the unity of Evangelicals (Protestants), which he believed could be brought about by agreement on the essentials of the faith. He was even ready to consider episcopacy as an acceptable order of church government, but the time was not yet ripe even for a Protestant ecumenism.

In his treatment of the Lord's Prayer, Calvin stressed the corporate nature of prayer. Not only should we think of all Christians as our brethren but also 'all men who dwell on earth. For what God has determined concerning them is beyond our knowing except that it is no less godly than humane to wish and hope the best for them.'⁴⁹

So there is a wideness in Calvin's view of the oneness of humanity tempered by his view of God's sovereign election of some parts of humanity. Calvin seemed to feel that during the first 500 years of the Church's history her doctrine and ministry remained pure. He hoped for a consensus among Christians, and Vincent de Lérins' threefold basis for Christian Unity might well have been his model, but whether or not it was, his *Latin Catechism* of 1538 urged Christians to seek unity and peace among themselves on the basis of a 'syncretism'⁵⁰ by which the Devil's darts could be extinguished.

Within 50 years of the rise of the Protestant Reformation, Europe was fragmented into Catholic, Reformed (Calvinist) and Lutheran regions with small pockets of radical groups, usually termed Anabaptists. They refused a Church/State connection and the political power which uneasily went with that, and rejected infant baptism, and so re-baptised people who joined with them in their communities.

In Europe the religious peace of Augsburg of 1555 tried to settle the upheaval of the Reformation by introducing the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio* ('as the region, so the religion'). The purpose was to create some kind of peace, and try to settle the religious contours of the Continent.

⁴⁹ Calvin, J, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, The Library of Christian Classics, ed McNeill, J T, and Battles, F L, SCM Press, 1961, Vol xxi, 3:20:38.

⁵⁰ Calvin, J, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, The Library of Christian Classics, ed McNeill, J T, and Battles, F L, SCM Press, 1961, Vol xx, 1:11:13, footnote. The word 'syncretism' as used in Calvin's day was the equivalent of the word ecumenism today; it did not carry the idea of an amalgamation of religions.

Anabaptist groups, beginning first of all in Switzerland, were not considered in this arrangement as they were largely *personae non gratae* and, in any case, not political entities. Among them there were fanatical factions such as the Zwickau prophets and the leaders of the city of Münster (1533-35), who were seen as dangerous revolutionaries.

Two main groups of orthodox Anabaptists remain to this day, the **Mennonites** and the **Hutterites**.

What must be remarked is that the Anabaptist concept of the Church as gathered-out congregations of the faithful is in practice how many Protestants in Britain view their Church today. The mobility of worshippers moving between churches and denominations, the disappearance, to all intents and purposes, of any Protestant State/Church connection, and the breaking down of denominational barriers from the mid-20th Century onwards have created a view of the Church that it is the local church that matters first and foremost in identifying allegiances.

The Church of England has to be singled out as a very special kind of Protestant Church, claiming to be both Catholic and Protestant. Political events brought it into being as an established State Church in 1534 under Henry VIII. It still retains its legal connection to the State to this day, despite calls over very many years for its disestablishment. On the Continent there are countries such as Sweden which have established churches, but dissent is now tolerated, officially at least, everywhere in European countries.

In the Reformation period differences between the mainstream Protestant churches were not about the classical Christological and Trinitarian Confessions of the Church universal, but about baptism, the Lord's Supper and Church order. These were all issues in which they also differed from the Catholic and Orthodox Churches.

Episcopacy was retained by the Church of England and Lutherans, while the Calvinists followed a Presbyterian⁵¹ form of government. By the late 16th Century, Congregationalist ideas of church governance were appearing in southern England (the 'Brownists') and were to become a permanent feature of Christianity in Britain. All these churches practiced infant baptism, though denying a Catholic doctrine of baptismal regeneration. By the 17th Century, Anabaptist ideas from the continent lead to the formation of Baptist congregations, which were Congregationalist in church order and practising credo- (believers') baptism.

The sad experience of the **Colloquy** held in **Poissy (1561)**, just north of Paris, must be mentioned here. Huguenots (French Protestants) and the Catholic Church met to promote unity at a conference convened by the Queen Regent, Catherine de Medici. It lasted about a month.

Theodore Beza and **Peter Vermigli**, a Calvinist and a Zwinglian, led the argument from the Protestant side. Beza began by urging the delegates not to deny their differences nor fail to assert their close agreement on many points of doctrine. However, his assertion that while the

⁵¹ *Presbyterian*. The Presbyterian form of Church order was by the rule of elders ('*presbuteroi*' in the Greek of the New Testament) over a congregation. As Presbyterianism developed, congregations became linked together under the guidance of regional councils, presbyteries and synods. In Scotland, Presbyterianism is the established, national Church. In Holland it became the officially approved Church body, if not formally established.

Eucharist was not just a commemoration of Jesus' death, neither was it a literal partaking of his body, which was in heaven and not on altars, caused the greatest disturbance among the Catholics, and led to cries of 'blasphemy' and hissing.

Charles de Guise, Cardinal of Lorraine, backed by Jesuits and six cardinals, represented Tridentine⁵² Catholicism. The Jesuit Diego Laynez, a renowned debater, was sent by Pope Pius IV to give a strong Tridentine perspective, and the Colloquy ended with no movement towards unity. If anything, it hardened the views on both sides.

Sadly, Poissy was the last opportunity for many years for reconciliation between the parties. The next year, in March 1562, a massacre of Protestants meeting at Vassy in an unauthorised religious gathering led to a religious war in France which lasted until 1598. One result of the massacre at Vassy was that a mediating political party came into being, *les politiques*, who wanted religious toleration of the Protestants.

Toleration was finally granted in 1598 by the **Edict of Nantes**, signed by Henry IV of Navarre. The Edict allowed Protestants and Catholics to live side-by-side, and differed from the situation created by the Peace of Augsburg in which each ruler determined the religion of his subjects in his area of control. Under the Edict the State granted practical support to Protestant pastors. The Edict was revoked in 1685 by Louis XIV, after which many thousands of Huguenots fled for refuge to other countries.

Lutheran ideas had appeared in France early on in the days of the Reformation, and even royalty was interested in them at first, but it was the Calvinism coming over the border from Switzerland that became the main Protestant influence in France. It is estimated that by 1561, just before Calvin's death, there were some 2,000 Calvinist 'conventicles'⁵³ in France.

Christianity became a political force, and this must be borne in mind when assessing the impact of Protestantism in France. The name '**Huguenots**' was applied to the French Calvinists, a nickname of uncertain origin. Calvin, as the young lawyer who had to flee France because of his Lutheran views, dedicated his powerful and seminal religious treatise of 1536, the *Institutio*, to Francis I of France.

In Central Europe another 30 years of religious conflict between 1618 and 1648 devastated the region. Nationalistic and political aspirations played a great part in the conflicts as Bohemians (Czechs) resisted the authority of a decaying Catholic Empire. The Czechs had set up a rival King to replace the Catholic Emperor Ferdinand II, and this Protestant rebellion was crushed at the Battle of Bila Hora near Prague in 1620. The Swedes and Danes and even the English were drawn into the conflict, and Catholic France supported the Swedish intervention in order to counter the power of the German empire. Two separate treaties ended the wars and re-established the *cuius regio-eius religio* principle of the Augsburg formula.

⁵² *Tridentine Catholicism*. The Catholicism which was framed by the decisions and decrees of the Council of Trent in Italy (1545-1563). It was a response to the need for both internal Church reforms and a counter to Protestant theology. Tentative moves during the Council for conciliation with Protestants came to nothing.

⁵³ *Conventicles*. Illegal or secret religious gatherings.

The whole dreadful period damaged the cause of Christian Unity, but it created a longing for the peaceful co-existence of the warring sides and the beginning of the concept of ecumenism (then called 'syncretism').

In the conclusion of her book *Problems of Authority in the Reformation Debates*, G R Evans makes the valid point that both sides, Catholic and Protestant, could only see as polarisations the issues they faced: 'Scripture and tradition, faith and works, and so on.' She writes:

*'We need to recognise that a large proportion of the difficulties which are voiced today about going forward to unity are the legacy of attitudes and assumptions of the sixteenth century.'*⁵⁴

The time had not yet come to consider the possibility that, for example, justification by faith and justification by works are not contradictory terms but complementary. Komensky, in the next century, was to point to this truth, but even his time had not yet come.

Throughout the next four centuries the two sides in Western Christendom stayed apart, sometimes bitterly divided. Voices for Christian Unity in the 17th and 18th Century were rare but not unknown.

⁵⁴ Evans, G R, *Problems of Authority in the Reformation Debates*, Cambridge, University Press, 1992, p 288.

CHAPTER 5 QUOTATIONS ON THE THEME OF CHRISTIAN UNITY

At this point we are going to interrupt the story of attempts to further Christian Unity, and gather together a collection of quotations on the theme culled from several centuries, mainly the 20th Century.

Alec Vidler – 20th Century:

'It is the Church of the saints and martyrs and prophets who have been the lights of the world in their several generations that has the demand upon your allegiance – not the Church which has been corrupted by wealth and worldly power. But the true Church is embedded in the existing Churches – you will not find it elsewhere.'

David Butler – 20th Century:

'A divided church cannot easily preach reconciliation to individuals, nor to a divided society.'

Didachē – 2nd Century:

'As this bread was scattered upon the mountains and has now been gathered together, so may Thy Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into Thy Kingdom. For Thine is the glory and power, through Jesus Christ for evermore.'

Ignatius of Antioch – 2nd Century:

'You all make up together a single temple of God, one altar, one Jesus.'

Dionysius the Areopagite – 5th Century:

'It is not possible to be gathered towards the One and to partake of peaceful union with the One while divided among ourselves.'

Bishop Hilarion Alfeyev – 20th Century:

'To regard today's Catholics and Protestants as "pseudo-churches" is totally alien to the spirit of the ancient Church Fathers.'

George Whitefield – 18th Century:

'Though I profess myself a minister of the Church of England, I am of a catholic spirit; and if I see a man who loves the Lord Jesus in sincerity, I am not very solicitous to what outward communion he belongs.'

John Bunyan – 17th Century:

'If you are the children of God, live together lovingly; if the world quarrels with you, it is no matter; but it is sad if you quarrel together; if this be amongst you, it is a sign of

ill-breeding; it is not according to the rules you have in the Word of God. Dost thou see a soul that has the image of God in him? Love him, love him; say "This man and I must go to heaven one day"; serve one another, do good for one another, and if any wrong you, pray to God to right you and love the brotherhood.'

John Donne – 17th Century:

'You know, I never fettered nor imprisoned the Word Religion, not – immuring in a Rome, or a Wittenberg, or a Geneva; they are all virtual beams of one sun – They are not so contrary as the North and South poles.'

Nicholas von Zinzendorf – 18th Century:

'I acknowledge no Christianity without fellowship.'

'Each denomination is generally possessed of some jewel peculiar to itself.'

Donald Gee – 20th Century:

'I do not believe that sound denominational loyalty is inconsistent with interdenominational cooperation in great affairs like Evangelism that are the business of every true Christian.'

Dr Charles Malik – 20th Century:

'I find reconciliation and unity the simplest thing in the world if only men love Jesus Christ above everything else, and fix only on his Cross and his Resurrection.'

Cardinal Walter Kaspar – 21st Century:

'There can be no unity as long as any given church maintains that the accepted and binding truth of another church is contrary to the Gospel.'

'An ecumenical spirituality – will primarily be a biblical spirituality, and will express itself in the common reading and study of the Bible, which for all Christians is the fundamental common witness of God's salvation in history fulfilled in Jesus Christ.'

Richard Baxter – 17th Century:

'In things necessary, unity; in things indifferent, liberty; in all things, charity.'

'It is not as Romanists, Greeks, Lutherans, Calvinists, Arminians, etc, that we are saved, but as catholic Christians aspiring to the highest perfection.'

'It is a great and common sin to be part of religion as a faction and to confine one's love and respect to a denomination instead of the church universal. Of the multitude who say they are of the Catholic Church, it is all too rare to meet with those who are of a catholic spirit.'

How rare then it is to meet a man who suffers and bleeds for the wounds of the church universal and takes them to his heart as his own sufferings.

Stick close to this one Bible and let nothing come into your faith or religion but what comes there; and when controversies arise, try them by this.'

John Owen – 17th Century:

'There are many sore Divisions at this Day in the World, among and between the Professors of Christian Religion, both about the Doctrine and Worship of the Gospel, as also the Discipline thereof. That these divisions are evil in themselves, and the cause of great Evils, Hindrances of the Gospel, and all the Effects thereof in the Worlds, is acknowledged by all; and it is a thing doubtless to be greatly lamented, that the generality of them who are called Christians, are departed from the great Rule of keeping the Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace. He who doth pray always, who is not ready with his utmost Endeavour to remedy this Evil, to remove this great Obstruction of the Benefit of the Gospel, is scarce worth the Name of a Christian.

...There is but one way of effecting this so blessed and desirable a Work (unity)... that all Churches endeavour to reduce themselves unto the Primitive Pattern. Let us all but consider what was the Life and Spirit of those Churches, wherein their Honour, Glory and Order did consist, making it our joynt Design to walk in the Principle of that Grace of the Spirit wherein they walked, in the Exercise and Use of those Gifts of the Spirit which were the Spring of, and gave Vertue unto all their Administrations, renouncing whatever is Forreign unto, and inconsistent with these things, and that Grace and Unity will quickly enter into Professors, which Christ hath purchased for them. But these things are here only occasionally mentioned; and are not farther to be pursued.'

Anthony Norris Groves – 19th Century:

'Sectarian exclusiveness and the fondness of man to make his own knowledge the measure of another man's liberty, are deeply-rooted, bitter weeds.

...It is a mark of apostasy to be of those who separate themselves from God's own redeemed ones.

...It is ten times better to have to do with those who are catholic in a sectarian system, than those who are sectarian with no system.'

J H Merle D'Aubigne – 19th Century:

'If you have not unity, religion is not of God; if you do not have diversity, religion is not of man.'

Nicholas Zernov – 20th Century:

'The time has come when the members of the Church must with confidence in God's love and power ask him to restore the lost oneness of his flock.

Karl Adam – 20th Century:

'Nothing is more like an Evangelical who really prays than a Catholic who really prays.'

'...Though we cannot create any final unity in Christendom (we) must do everything possible to prepare the way for dynamic unity, a unity of hearts and minds.'

J A Komensky – 17th Century:

'The second long and difficult labyrinth were my irenic labours, ie my wish to reconcile Christians (if it should please God), who in various ways to their own hurt and near ruin wrangle concerning the faith. I expended much labour in this matter. So far, almost nothing has been accomplished, but perhaps my labours shall succeed yet... There are but a few who hope for results.'

'Fear is a poor guarantee of lasting friendship.'

Thomas M'Crie – 19th Century:

'When dissensions arise in the Church of God, and it is divided into parties, whatever the occasion or matter of variance may be, there must be guilt somewhere.'

William Temple – 20th Century:

'The secular world has lost all experience of unity and can do no more than play with the aspiration towards it. The Christian world is moving steadily and rapidly towards deeper unity, and has an actual experience of Christian fellowship across all secular divisions which is full of hope for the future of Christendom and through it for mankind.'

'I believe in the Holy Catholic Church and sincerely regret that it does not at present exist.'

Pere M J Guillou – 20th Century:

'It is no small thing to share a common love of Christ, the saviour of mankind, and a common acceptance of his gospel as the only saving truth.'

John M Frame – 21st Century:

'Though I love the Reformed faith – I don't think it (or any other section of the church) can claim to represent the correct view in everything – heaven might give some surprises.'

Gerard W Hughes – 20th Century (when conducting retreats):

'After a time I found that I was usually unaware of a person's denomination and saw clearly that the real division among Christians does not lie in the denomination to which they may belong, but in the way in which they relate to God and the world. There

are often much bigger divisions between people of the same denomination than between individuals of different denominations.

Denominational differences – are rarely theological, but more usually results from cultural conditioning.'

Alec R Vidler – 20th Century:

'Reuniting the existing churches seems laudable but is unrealistic as they are no longer potentially powerful institutions in modern society – It is more likely they will have to die, in order that by the grace of God and in His good time they may be born again.

The moment has not yet arrived when we can do the decisive thing; we have to prepare ourselves and to prepare society for the fresh revelation of the arm of the Lord, and to apprehend His judgement in order that we may be ready to receive His mercy.

The restoration of the universal Church may be as remote as the restoration of Christendom.

The existing condition of the Church, its disunity, its worldliness, its acceptance of compromise – is certainly a scandal – but the weakness of the Church and her humiliation draws rather than repels the believer.

It is not impossible that in the providence of God, Europe will be re-evangelised by what we now call "the younger churches".'

Cardinal Mercier – 20th Century:

'In order to unite with one another we must love one another; in order to love one another, we must know one another; in order to know one another, we must go and meet one another.'

A R Cross – 20th Century:

'Christian unity – is not based on agreement on ecclesiology, baptism or ministry (though this is not to imply that these are unimportant), but in our common life in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.'

Hans Kung – 20th Century (speaking of Catholic and non-Catholic Christians):

'There is already a deep communion, koinonia, between them and us; it is founded on one baptism, faith in one Lord, and love for him; and it is stronger and more important than anything that separates us. We are Christians, and they are Christians.

What we need for reunion is that this communion which already exists should grow. What we need is that both sides should create more and more common ground between us, until at last what separates us becomes insignificant and full unity is a reality. This "perfect unity" will not be uniformity. As the Pope [John XXIII] has said, it will be unity in essentials, freedom in all else.

What we can have is unity in the sense of the living koinōnia of the Scriptures, which is unity in diversity, unity in a variety of rites, languages, customs, modes of thought and action and prayer. Such unity is more perfect than uniformity.'

Robert Murray McCheyne – 19th Century:

'I believe it to be the mind of Christ, that all who are vitally united to Him, should love one another, exhort one another daily, communicate freely of their substance to one another when poor, pray with and for one another, and sit down together at the Lord's table.'

I have sat with delight under the burning words of a faithful Lutheran pastor. I have been fed by the ministrations of American Congregationalists and devoted Episcopalians, and all of my flock who know and love Christ would have loved to hear them, too. If dear Martin Boos were alive, pastor of the Church of Rome though he was, he would have been welcome, too; and who that knows the value of souls and the value of a living testimony would say it was wrong?'

John Henry Newman – 19th Century:

'You cannot have Christianity and not have difference.'

Georges Florovsky – 20th Century:

'Christian disunity is an open and bleeding wound on the glorious body of Christ.'

T W Manson – 20th Century:

'The Church is the embodiment of the "Remnant" idea.'

Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission⁵⁵ (ARCIC 2) – agreed statement: Salvation and the Church – 20th Century:

'The term justification speaks of a divine declaration of acquittal, of the love of God manifested to an alienated and lost humanity prior to any entitlement on our part. Through the life, death and resurrection of Christ, God declares that we are forgiven, accepted and reconciled to him. Instead of our own strivings to make ourselves acceptable to God, Christ's perfect righteousness is reckoned to our account.'

Timothy Ware – 20th Century:

'It is unity of faith that matters, not organisational unity.'

Orthodoxy rejects the whole concept of intercommunion.

This, then is the ecumenical role of Orthodoxy: to question the accepted formulae of the Latin West, of the Middle Ages and the Reformation.'

⁵⁵ *The Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission.* An organization which seeks to make ecumenical progress between the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion.

St Germanus of Constantinople – 8th Century:

'The Church is an earthly heaven, in which the heavenly God dwells and moves.'

Paul N Evdokimov – 20th Century:

'We know where the Church is; it is not for us to judge and say where the Church is not.'

Samuel Azariah – 20th Century:

'The divisions of Christendom may be a source of weakness in Christian countries, but in non-Christian lands they are a sin and a scandal.'

Stephen Neill – 20th Century:

*'There is one word which is hardly ever found in ecumenical literature – the word **conversion**.*

If the gospel is true at all, it is literally a matter of life and death for every man and woman now living in the world.

The final and terrible difficulty is that churches cannot unite unless they are willing to die.'

John Binns – 21st Century:

'In a world which has seen the effect of hate and conflict in the 20th Century and in a Church which believes in unity, it is reasonable to expect that, while there may be setbacks on some levels of the search for unity, the momentum towards agreement and friendship will continue on others.'

F Roy Coad – 21st Century:

'Views on Christian unity must eventually go back to views on what it is that makes a Christian.'

G H Lang – 20th Century:

'If my heart will seek the good of those only who are in my circle, I am a sectarian indeed.'

John Stott – 21st Century:

'We rejoice and give thanks that the great majority of Christian believers affirm the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds.'

J Gresham Machen – 20th Century:

‘How great is the common heritage that unites the Roman Catholic – to devout Protestants today?’

G K A Bell – 20th Century:

‘The way to Christian Unity is not through organisation and official constitutions or elaborately organised public meetings [but through] personal relationships, personal friendships.

It may be sooner than we know that those who are on the side of Christ will be compelled to stand visibly, in spite of denominational differences. To be together in action, and to be together in desire, for Christ’s sake, may at least be a beginning of the fulfilment of His prayer that all may be one.’

R T Kendall – 21st Century:

‘The Holy Spirit in me will not fight the Holy Spirit in you.’

Basilea Schlink – 20th Century:

‘The ecumenical assignment is really a sacred commission – because it allows us to take part in the suffering of Jesus, who suffers today on account of his torn body. It is a task which should move us to the depths of our very being and should impel us, through love of Jesus, to do all that we can to heal those wounds whatever it costs.’

Colin Gunton – 21st Century:

‘The fate of Christianity in the modern Western world depends upon a secure hold on the Nicene inheritance.’

Thaddeus D Horgan – 20th Century:

‘It is at the parish level that Christian Unity will or will not happen.’

John Nelson Darby – 19th Century:

‘The outward symbol and instrument of unity is the partaking of the Lord’s Supper.’

Desiderius Erasmus – 16th Century:

‘Consider [Jesus’] prayer to the Father at the Last Supper, when death was imminent. One would suppose that he would ask for something extraordinary since he knew that whatever He asked for He would obtain. He said, “O Holy Father, keep them in my Name that they may be one as We are one.” See what a noble union Christ asks for us. He said not that they may be of one mind but that they might be one, and not only in any manner but “As We are one”, we who are one in a most perfect and ineffable

manner. He declared that men could be saved only by nourishing among themselves peace and concord.

He called Himself a shepherd and his servants, sheep. Who has ever seen sheep fighting with sheep? What will the wolves do if the sheep tear at one another?’

John Calvin – 16th Century:

‘It must be counted on among the worst evils of our epoch that the Churches are thus separated one from another, so much so that hardly any human society exists among us, still less that holy communion between the members of Christ which all profess but very few sincerely cultivate in reality.’

Martin Luther – 16th Century:

‘It is a dangerous and terrible thing to hear or to believe something contrary to the one witness, faith and doctrine of the entire holy Christian Church, which has been maintained harmoniously from the beginning, that is, for more than fifteen hundred years, through the whole world.’

Anonymous:

‘Scholars have an interesting word to describe the relationships of Persons in the Godhead. They speak of “perichōrēsis”, from the Greek words, “choros” a dance and “peri”, around. The harmony of Father, Son and Holy Spirit is that of a joyous dance circle, each dancer an individual, but each contributing to the vigour and symmetry of the celebration. Perichoresis is the model for Christian Unity; we are meant, in our glad acceptance of each other in the Church, to dance together in complete harmony.’

Connop Thirlwall – 19th Century:

‘On the eve it may be of a harder struggle than has ever yet tried our strength, common prudence enjoins us to gather and unite all our forces. At such a time the first of duties is to seek peace at home, and to strive by all allowable means to ensure and maintain it: to draw as tight as possible the bands of Christian fellowship; to deal the largest measure of charity consistent with a regard to the truth; to avoid, as far as we can, questions which tend to engender strife, or to provoke bitterness; to put the most indulgent construction on all that seems ambiguous in the words or acts of our brethren; to waive minute and merely speculative differences, and to take our stand on the broad ground of our common faith.’

Cardinal Basil Hume – 20th Century:

‘There can be no doubt that a major obstacle to the effectiveness and well-being of the pilgrim people of God is disunity in its ranks. Throughout this century it has become clear that, moved by the Spirit of God, Christians have experienced increasing frustration and impatience with divisions among themselves. Non-believers, too, readily take refuge in criticism of Christian disharmony. It is only by abandoning ourselves

completely to the truth of the Gospel that all our Christian divisions can be overcome – our divisions must not hinder any longer the urgent need for Christians to preach together the Gospel of Jesus Christ.’

Archbishop George Carey – 21st Century:

‘We must see disunity as one of the most terrible diseases of the body. Let us see disunity as it really is – the ugly blasphemy which mocks the Cross of Christ and insults his name. Yet, in truth it is even more than that because our disunity confounds the gospel of unity that we preach.

How dare we go to others with the message of reconciliation when Christian churches still huddle in their dug-outs and fight their 400-year wars?’

Brother Roger of Taizé – 20th Century:

‘Now, at the end of the twentieth century, we Christians are confronted with the result of our divisions – mutual impoverishment.’

Jan Willebrands – 20th Century:

‘Theological discussion is a necessary help to discover and to manifest the unity in faith which we already enjoy and to restore that unity where it had been lost.’

Cardinal Suenens – 20th Century:

‘Ever since the sad divisions of the 11th and 16th Centuries, the Church has lacked the visible unity which manifests the unity of all Christians. Although we are baptised Christians, brothers in the Lord, we have tolerated the establishment of misunderstandings, barriers, “Berlin walls” between us, which fragment the city of God which is meant to provide the world with a picture of brotherly love, the supreme sign of its credibility.

We find in the Spirit, unity and plurality at the same time. There is plurality in that unity and unity in that plurality. There is no uniformity. It is the fullness of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.’

Gordon Rupp – 20th Century:

‘An “Ecumenicity” which has no roots in denominational loyalties means in the end a rootless Ecumenical Movement, cut off from the living springs of Christian tradition which are real, existing, worshipping communities of Christian men and women.

One of the perils of our time may be the Catholic or Protestant “ecumeniac” who leans over so far backwards to be eirenical that the historical rocking-chair is upset.

It is part of the deep mystery of his Being, that Church History, the whole of Church History, divided in our experience – is one in him.’

S L Greenslade – 20th Century:

'The first demand – is that we should be prepared to worship on occasion with Christians of different traditions in simple Christian fellowship, even when we do not fully understand, or [when we] disagree with or actually dislike their forms of worship. What cannot be done regularly can be done sometimes, and if we cannot do it sometimes, we had better stop talking about an underlying Christian unity of spirit. The second demand is that we should seek to lay aside prejudice and to understand other ways of worship, holding ourselves ready to learn from them.'

A M Hunter – 20th Century:

'Preoccupied – absorbed in its own ecclesiastical concerns and disabled by denominational differences and disputes, is the Church in fact “blocking” the witness which God’s people ought to be making to a sin-sick and fear-ridden world?'

Keith A Fournier – 20th Century:

'Can we overcome the prejudice and bitterness and misunderstandings that divide us? Yes, we can. With God, all things are possible, and we know that unity is God’s will for his family. The question is not, can we? The real question is, will we? That must be answered by each of us. What is your answer?'

Paul – 1st Century – Romans 12.4-5:

'Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.'

Paul – 1st Century – Romans 15.5-6:

'May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and one mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.'

Paul – 1st Century – Ephesians 4.3-6:

'Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.'

Jesus – John 17.20-23:

'My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them

and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.'

CHAPTER 6 HOPES FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY IN THE 17TH CENTURY

Foremost among those who called for toleration in a war-torn 17th Century in Central Europe must be the name of **Jan Amos Komensky (Comenius) (1592-1670)**. He was born in Moravia, part of the Czech Republic, in or near Uhersky Brod, where today there is a fine museum of his life and work. His father was a prosperous miller, but by the age of 12 Komensky had lost both of his parents.

A sensitive and thoughtful lad, he came to join the *Unitas Fratrum* ('Unity of the Brethren'), a community of the poor with high ideals of peace, integrity of life and deep spirituality. Founded in the 15th Century as spiritual descendants of John Hus, the Brethren had by Komensky's day expanded their ranks to include the nobility, and were between five and 10% of the population of Bohemia.

They were thoroughly orthodox in doctrine, trinitarian and confessing the classical Creeds, and had been inspired by the orthodox but schismatic Waldensians. In 1575 the *Czech Confession* had been signed in Prague by the Utraquists, the Lutherans and the Unity. The Confession was Lutheran-based and it united (outwardly at least) the Protestants of Bohemia.

Komensky became a life-long worker for Christian Unity, especially between Protestants. The Hapsburg Emperor Maximilian accepted the Confession in that he did not persecute its adherents, and in 1609 the Bohemian nobility received a charter from the new and decidedly eccentric Rudolf II, guaranteeing them freedom of worship.

Anti-Hapsburg agitation had been going on in the Empire since the end of the 16th Century, and in Government reprisals Komensky, then 13 years of age, lost his home in the flames. He moved to live in Písek to study at the Brethren School there from 1608 to 1611, and then went to Germany, to the Nassau Academy at Herborn, for two years.

Here he came under the influence of three teachers in particular. From J H Alsted he learned to relate revelation to science in a synthesis which was being overturned by new advanced thinkers of the age. J Fischer-Piscator taught him Bible doctrine and inspired him with the teaching of the *Parousia* (the 'Coming Again') of Christ. From J H Althusius he learned political theory and the concept of a contract between a ruler and the leaders of the Estates he ruled over. Komensky met **David Pareus (1548-1622)** at Heidelberg and came under the influence of his ecumenical spirit. Pareus hoped the Unity of Protestants could be brought about by holding a sort of Protestant Council of Trent.

In Bohemia things came to a head politically when a crowd of Protestants stormed the Hradčany Palace in May 1618 and threw two Hapsburg governors out of a window. The mob was protesting against violations of the Royal Charter of Toleration of 1609, and that the Hapsburg Ferdinand II, aiming to become Emperor, was also assuming the throne of Bohemia.

As they threw the governors out of the window (still pointed out to tourists today) they cried out, 'Shout to Mary to help you.' They fell on a dung heap below the window and survived.

When Ferdinand did become Emperor the next year Bohemian Protestants deposed him as their king and put Frederick V of the Palatinate in his place. He lasted only a few months, as

the 'Winter King', because again warfare followed (1620) and at the Battle of Bila Hora (White Mountain), near Prague, the Bohemian rebels were crushed by Imperialist forces. Some rebels were executed in Old Town Square. Their lands were confiscated and Frederick fled, his lands invaded from the Spanish Netherlands.

In 1621 Imperial troops sacked Fulnek, where Komensky, now ordained as a minister of the Brethren, was headmaster of their school. His library was burned by the troops and his books burned publicly in the town square. With about a hundred of the Brethren, Komensky had to flee from Moravia. His wife and two sons had died in the plague and he was going to be in exile for the last 50 years of his life. In 1624 he remarried, marrying Marie Dorita, the daughter of a Unity Bishop, Jan Cyrill, who five years before had hopefully crowned Frederick V as King of Bohemia.

Komensky now travelled widely in Europe trying to raise support for the Brethren. He finally settled in 1628 at Leszno in Poland, where the ruler and landowner was a member of the Brethren and had made his town a refuge for religious refugees. Komensky wrote at this time:

*'Brutal and bloodstained sword destroys my beloved country – my poor people are being oppressed, tortured, murdered and imprisoned. God's truth is being suppressed, pure divine services are being prohibited, priests driven out or thrown in gaol.'*⁵⁶

To try to describe the violence, deceit and confusion of Europe, Komensky had written in 1623 *The Labyrinth of the World*. It has a strong ecumenical theme condemning denominational bigotry. He wrote:

'There I saw how two or three of the chapels adjacent to each other were considering joining themselves into one. But they could find no means of attaining harmony among themselves. This miserable confusion and mutation of these fine Christian folk filled me with great indignation.'

Komensky's basis of union for Protestants rested in the essential agreement in the primary truths of the Christian faith confessed by the Unity, the Lutherans and the Reformed (Calvinists). In *Haggaeus Redivivus* (1632) he wrote:

'As for ourselves, let us learn not to dogmatise beyond what is written, but rather to stand in the holy commandment given us. I say, let the Holy Bible be our canon, our faith, our standards, our rule.'

Komensky not only longed for unity among Protestants, he had an even wider hope. In *An Exhortation of the Churches of Bohemia to the Church of England*, he called for a vision of worldwide unity of Christians – a coming together of dry bones to make one people as Ezekiel had seen the Valley of Dry Bones come alive and become one. Komensky never lost hope in this vision. Prophecies given by the Brethren from time to time and the hope of the

⁵⁶ Panek, Jaroslav, *Comenius, Teacher of Nations*, Orbis, Prague, 1991, p 26. Poland had become, from the 16th Century, a refuge from persecution for Protestants, both Orthodox in doctrine and unorthodox.

imminent return of Christ (Komensky came to believe it would be in 1670, the year he died) preserved him from despair.

Komensky was made a bishop of the Unity of the Brethren in 1632 as he taught at Leszno and supervised the education of the Brethren. He drew inspiration from the writings of **Francis Bacon (1561-1620)**, who asked for a universal reform of the study of the sciences and laid a foundation for discovery of the reality of phenomena based on hypotheses, the scientific method. He also read the Dominican **Tomasso Campanella (1568-1639)** whose goal was to achieve a harmoniously ordered society of peace and justice. He saw education as the great means to achieve this.

Komensky is chiefly remembered as a pioneer of an enlightened view of education. He believed in pre-school education and the home as the sphere of first learning. He was intensely interested in the teaching of languages: the mother tongue and Latin, even a universal language for all Europe. His *Ianua Linguam Reserta* ('Open Gate of Languages') in 1631 was well received throughout Europe by Catholic as well as Protestant educators. It broke new ground in language learning. Children were not to chant things by rote but learn by things meaningful to them. School plays were to be produced in Latin. By 1669 Jesuits were using his books in their schools.

There grew up a Comenian party in London who invited Komensky to visit. Komensky believed England was the country best suited to receive and propagate '*pansophic*' ideas. All learning must be related and universally accepted. He arrived in London in September 1641, when the Long Parliament was in session discussing church and political reform.

While in England, Komensky wrote on church reconciliation and the reform of education. Parliament was ready to set Komensky up with a College where scholars would research his ideas, and Komensky might have settled in England, but his wife would not leave Leszno. It was not a propitious time for Komensky to be in London. The Comenian group itself was split into revolutionary and royalist factions.

England was in turmoil over the *Grand Remonstrance* (1641) led by John Pym in dissatisfaction with Charles I's rule. Komensky dedicated his *Via Lucis* to England and later, in 1668, to the **Royal Society**, which had been inspired by his ideas. *Via Lucis* dealt with the universal struggle of good and evil and good was to triumph through universal education. Most pagan books were to be discarded but there were to be universal books enlightening our understanding of the universe, the Scriptures and our consciences, all these to be approved by a central *College of Light*.

Komensky saw man's preparation for eternity beginning in the womb. Education went on all the way through life. There was to be a department of the College called the *School of Old Age*. Old age was to be a time of rest, contemplation and study. Yet Komensky was practical as well as idealistic. He wrote about the correct ordering of schools and the governors; each school should resemble little churches. There was to be personal and individual reform of each believer as well as a re-ordering of society.

Cardinal Richelieu invited Komensky to go to France but he preferred to go to Sweden. He went in July 1642 and met **René Descartes**, but was not taken with him. The two philosophers parted politely but coolly. Komensky called Descartes' ideas 'the most malignant of all philosophies.' Komensky wanted to defend the link between science and

religion; for Descartes the pure rational analysing of things sufficed. Komensky was concerned that Descartes lacked human sympathies.

In 1645 Komensky, with Calixtus, attended the *Colloquy of Thorn* in Poland where an attempt was made to bring together Lutherans, Catholics and Reformed. The time was not ripe: petty wrangling defeated the purpose of the gathering.

In 1648 Komensky's second wife died, and the next year he married Jana Gajusova, the daughter of a Czech Protestant pastor. Now Komensky severed his links with the Brethren. He subsequently had some time in Transylvania, where there was an anti-Hapsburg coalition.

Komensky may have been the first educator to produce a picture book for children, *Orbis Pictus*, which appeared in 1653.

From 1654 the Swedes invaded Poland and, for the second time in his life, Komensky saw his library go up in flames. This time his home was burnt as well, as the opposing Polish soldiers sacked Leszno. Itinerant and homeless, he turned to live in the Netherlands again, where he was granted an honorary professorship. In 1657-58 the Amsterdam City Council published his comprehensive work *Opera Didactica Omnia*, which reflected his passionate hope that men should form 'one all-inclusive world society by reason of common knowledge, common law and common religion' (*Panegersia*, or '*Universal Awakening*').

Ecumenical in spirit as he was, Komensky was uncompromising in his opposition to the Socinians, who denied the Deity of Christ and the atoning value of his death. In his youth he had passed through a spiritual crisis but came out of it with a deep commitment to the truth of the Deity of Christ. His hopes for humanity rested on this truth and on the literal return of Christ. It is interesting to note that the dispute between Socinians and Protestants brought Protestants and Catholics together.

Komensky collected 'prophecies' uttered from time to time by people connected with his circle of friends. In 1663 he wrote *The Last Trombone Over Germany* in which he saw the Turks as God's punishment on a corrupt Christendom. Fellow Calvinists tended to be embarrassed by his belief in prophecies and his chiliastic⁵⁷ view. In his last years he softened in tone towards the Hapsburg Emperor Leopold I and Pope Alexander VII.

At 75 years of age Komensky attended the Breda Peace Conference, which in 1667 brought to an end the sea-wars between England and Holland. His *Angelus Pacis* (1637) called, optimistically, for the ending of all wars.

His whole philosophy of life was that mankind, learning and the universe were one and that the Christian faith was sent to bring this about. Divisions among Christians were therefore particularly reprehensible. He hoped for a universal language, a universal education and a universal religious body. He envisaged a *World Consistory* composed of Jews, Muslims, Christians and pagans. For the resolution of political conflict there was to be a *World Senate* and an *International Court of Peace* to meet every 10 years alternately for Europe, Asia, Africa and America. Work was not to be done on a feudal basis but through officials answerable to public control. In most of these plans Komensky was ahead of his time. He had

⁵⁷ *Chiliastic*. Holding as doctrine that Jesus will reign on earth for 1,000 years.

a concern that merchant adventurers should not exploit people in the markets that were opening up in the European colonies overseas.

The philosopher closest to Komensky was **Gottfried Wilhelm Leibinz (1646-1716)**, a mathematician and the founder of the Prussian Academy. Like Komensky, Leibinz worked for the reconciliation of the factions within Protestantism and for peace between nations. The rationalists looked askance at both of them. ‘Comenius – pointed to a more humane alternative to Cartesianism as a way to the modern world.’⁵⁸

Komensky died in exile, still optimistic in spite of all he had seen and suffered, and was buried in a little Reformed Walloon Church in Naarden.

Despite his suffering because of bigotry, in church matters Komensky retained an eirenical and ecumenical spirit which comes out very strongly in his work *Panorthosia*⁵⁹ (‘Universal Reform’). In religious disputes he developed his principle of ‘Both-Neither’: both sides have acceptance; neither side dominates the other. He laid down three rules for settling disputes:

- **Universality.** The principle here is that in all opinions there is something that is universally accepted as true.
- **Simplicity.** Here Komensky quotes St Hilary: ‘God poses no subtle questions when he invites us into heaven.’
- **Agreement.** We should look to make some concession to the other point of view.

Komensky tried to show how his ‘both-neither’ principle could be applied to some of the thorny questions of dispute in his day:

- **The dispute over the *filioque* clause.** Both Western and Eastern points of view are acceptable. The Holy Spirit flows from the Father, ‘the one outflow of everything’, *through* the Son.
- **God’s foreknowledge.** Is it the cause of things to come or not? We can say ‘neither’ because with God all things are now, yet we could also argue ‘both’, that is, God knew beforehand what would come to pass and made it come to pass. Both are true.
- **Justification.** Is this a passive, imputed righteousness by faith (the Reformed tradition), or an active, imparted righteousness by faith (the Catholic position)? Both, says Komensky, are true. We are justified by works and by faith, Scripture tells us this. He writes: ‘It is pointless to reiterate the question whether we are justified by faith or works. For the answer must be “by both”, since the Scripture expressly confirms both of them.’ We have to grasp the righteousness of Christ as our priest (justification by faith – Paul) and we have to maintain a close imitation of his holy life (justification by works – James); further, we enter into the essential righteousness of God by becoming partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1.4).
- In the **Eucharist**, Komensky maintains that all Christians must agree that Jesus said ‘This is my body – blood’. The difficulty is explaining how it happens. But we are

⁵⁸ Panek, Jaroslav, *Comenius, Teacher of Nations*, Orbis, Prague, 1991, p 80.

⁵⁹ Komensky, Jan Amos, *Panorthosia or Universal Reform* (1645), translation by Dobbie, A M O, Sheffield Academic Press, 1995, Ch 1-18 and 27, p 129ff.

not told how, so why speculate? Komensky tries hard here to bring Catholic and Protestant together here by talking of accepting transubstantiation in a metaphysical sense, but this does not seem to be a satisfactory solution. But isn't Komensky's principle in finding what is 'agreed on' a sound one here?

- On **infant baptism**, Komensky believed both paedo-baptists and Anabaptists should concede that their position could not, without contention, be argued from Scripture. Infant baptism is neither specifically commanded nor rejected by Scripture, so toleration of each other's position should prevail. Again, the 'both-neither' principle rules!

Komensky is far too naive in his hope that the 'both-neither' principle would satisfy protagonists in the 17th Century, but perhaps he has something to say to us in the 21st Century.

A notable contemporary of Komensky was a German, **Georg Calixtus (1586-1656)**, whom the *New International Dictionary of the Christian Church* calls 'an early ecumenist', and the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* 'a Protestant theologian.'

He was Lutheran Abbot of Königslutter and, from 1614, professor of theology at Helmstadt University. His view of what a true Christian is was remarkably like that expressed by John Wesley in a letter to a Roman Catholic in 1749, except that Wesley did not mention baptism in his letter.

Calixtus described a Christian as one who was baptised and who prays to God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost. He believes Jesus was the Son of God, born of a Virgin; that he redeemed us by his sufferings and death; that he was raised from the dead and will return to earth as judge of all. Such a Christian does not persist in wickedness (Wesley would have gone further on this point!).

George Calixtus (his family name was the Danish 'Kallison') lived, as did Komensky, in the turbulence of the Thirty Years' War, and was all his life caught up in religious controversy. Born in Flensburg, Schleswig-Holstein, he entered Helmstadt University as a young man and studied mathematics, classics and philosophy. He came to see later in life that learning could become a substitute for true faith and spirituality.

Graduating as Master of Arts after only two years at University, he began to teach. Between 1609 and 1613 he made a series of teaching tours around Germany and to England and France. On his return to the Continent he was appointed Professor of Theology at Helmstadt University, in which post he remained for the rest of his life.

In England he was impressed by the order of the Church of England and its bishops' libraries! He took a doctor's degree in 1616 and three years later married a widow, the daughter of a Helmstadt burgomaster.

Calixtus was greatly disturbed by the divisions among Christians: Protestants fought Catholics and fought among themselves, Calvinists fought Lutherans and Melancthon-Lutherans fought hard-line Wittenberg Lutherans. Helmstadt's position, under Calixtus, was that of a moderate anti-Papal Protestantism, yet it was open to contacts with Catholics, but

also anti-Socinian. Calixtus himself was even prepared, for unity's sake, that the Pope should be acknowledged as the titular head of the Church.

There was a naivety about his hope that the entrenched ecclesiastical position of the Reformed, Lutheran and Catholic Churches could be laid aside in the interest of unity. Calixtus tried to find in the faith and confessions of the Early Church the basic confession which could bind all Christians together in the Apostles' Creed. Could not all true Christians confess the faith of the early martyrs? Would not the Vincentian Canon suffice?

He had many enemies, who disliked his mediating position, and many sorrows in the deaths and disabilities of his children and in the decline of the University as a result of the War. But the University recovered and Calixtus soldiered on to the end, outliving his wife by only two years, yet confessing in his loneliness as he sat in the dark trying to read, 'Christ's death and merit is all my merit,' and dying peacefully in Christ.

German Protestantism was rent into two major divisions in Calixtus' day, Reformed (Calvinistic) and Lutheran; and, of course, there was the long-standing opposition of the Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches. A Conference was convened by King Wladyslaw IV of Poland at Thorn (Torun) in 1645 in West Prussia, at that time under his protection, to attempt to bring about some sort of reconciliation between the warring factions.

The Conference opened with much pomp and met in the Rath-Haus in the city. There were present 27 Roman Catholic theologians, 23 Lutherans and 15 Reformed (authorities differ on the exact numbers). There were 36 sessions altogether, and both Komensky and Calixtus were present, but Calixtus took no part in the proceedings because of wrangling between the Lutherans and the Reformed. Some Lutherans were offended that Calixtus had been invited to the Conference by an Elector who was Reformed! Calixtus was supposed to be a Lutheran and the Reformed were glad to have his allegiance.

The Conference, as one might have guessed, achieved no lasting result; some Lutherans were suspicious of Catholic motives for being there. It is significant that when there were times of worship, especially after the opening ceremony, the factions met separately! There was objection from some delegates that the opening prayer had been assigned to a Roman Catholic Bishop. Komensky left the Conference a month before its end, 'disgusted with haggling.'⁶⁰

What is important for our studies is that the principle of looking to the early days of the Church as a model for present ecumenical thinking was accepted by many at this Conference.

Calixtus held that what was believed in the Church in the first five centuries was conformable to Scripture, though he thought Rome had introduced many 'intolerable opinions'. Despite these 'opinions', Calixtus was still open to ecumenical debate with Rome. Komensky's plan for a universal Church also guarded against innovations by urging that 'no one imports new rituals into the Church, or even old and spurious ones which do not date back to Christ or the

⁶⁰ Rouse, Ruth and Neill, Stephen C, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517-1948*, SPCK, London, 1954, p 90.

Apostles and never had the approval of the Universal Church':⁶¹ the Vincentian Canon revisited?

There are similarities between Komensky's and Calixtus's views on Christian Unity. In *Desire and Effort for Ecclesiastical Concord (Desiderium et studium concordiae ecclesiasticae)*, written in 1650, Calixtus held that we must distinguish between what is essential and what is not; we must use simple, not philosophical language. We must hold on to fundamentals of the faith such as that we cannot be saved by our own merits but only by Christ and that we must accept as our brothers all who recognise Christ as the Head. Calixtus was not for neutrality or indifference to the essentials of the Gospel: we must know what we believe, but also what binds us together as fellow Christians. Essentially, for Calixtus, the secure foundation for Christian Unity was in the Apostles' Creed and not in modern confessions; he wished the Roman Catholic Church to hold only those beliefs confessed in the first five centuries.

In the turmoil of the religious disputes of the 17th Century another voice inviting Protestants to come together was that of a Scot, **John Dury (1595-1680)**. Rouse and Neill in *The History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517-1948* write of Dury that his life presents 'a remarkable example of a life which was wholly devoted to the service of ecumenical reconciliation and unity.'⁶² They go on to say that:

'The basic principle that Dury followed... was that favourite concept of the humanist and Anglican tradition, the simplicity of the early Christians and of the ancient Church, which found its classic expression, apart from the Bible, in the Apostles' Creed and in those theological principles which are common to the Fathers of the Church.'

He became caught up in the movement for conciliation between Calvinists and Lutherans on the Continent, and became a sort of ambassador to the Swedish church for Bishop Davenant of Salisbury in proposing an end to strife between the two factions. He was rebuffed on several occasions on the grounds that his ideas were impracticable: for example, that Calvinists would never accept the Lutheran Formula of Concord.

Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658) had plans to unite European Protestantism under English leadership and sent Dury to negotiate with the Swiss Cantons, but there was no outcome of this initiative.

Dury never lost hope in his ideal of Christian unity but he never saw it really applied. As with Komensky and Calixtus, so with Dury, if there was to be Christian unity there must be a differentiating between the fundamentals of the faith and what he termed the 'circumstantials'. He saw a close connection between the cooperation of Christians working on the foreign mission field and a growing unity among Christians at home. In this he anticipated the **Edinburgh World Missionary Conference 1910** by over 300 years.

⁶¹ Komensky, Jan Amos, *Panorthosia or Universal Reform* (1645); translation by Dobbie, A M O, Sheffield Academic Press, 1995, Ch 1-18 and 27, p 243.

⁶² Rouse, Ruth and Neill, Stephen C, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517-1948*, SPCK, London, 1954, pp 97-99.

The Eastern Churches were not rent asunder by anything like the Reformation in the West. Only one eminent Eastern Churchman was affected by Protestant ideas. This was **Cyril Lukaris (Lucar) (1570-1638)**,⁶³ patriarch of Constantinople. Having studied in Italy and been drawn to Calvinism, he was attracted to Anglicanism and established contact with Oxford University.

He is notable for presenting the 5th Century *Codex Alexandrinus* (one of England's greatest Biblical treasures) to Charles I in 1628. He signed a *Confession of Faith* on Protestant lines in 1638 in Geneva, refining Orthodoxy, as he saw it, in a Calvinist manner. He sought a rapprochement between Orthodoxy and Protestant Reformed teaching by suggesting that Reformed doctrine should be placed in the Context of the Early Fathers, that Scripture and Tradition should be seen as a whole revelation, and that good things that had become corrupted should not be abandoned but the good in them sought out.

The *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* calls him 'the first important theologian of the Eastern Church since the fall of Constantinople in 1453' and 'the most brilliant and politically outstanding Greek Patriarch and national leader of the 17th Century.' He was murdered by a collusion of Turkish, Catholic and Orthodox enemies.

In England, **Richard Baxter (1615-1691)** proposed a national and comprehensive Church for England, not only to unite Christians but to be a bulwark against an unreformed Roman Catholicism.

His model was a medieval model in that he saw England to be a Christian kingdom with the Sovereign as head of the Church as well as of the State. His longing for Christian Unity would have let Independents into the National Church; an Independent congregation would still be able to be part of the established Church. A great disciplinarian, Baxter saw the magistracy as part of the divine plan for creating a godly church, not as separate from the Church but as part of it. All true Christians are united in Christ and therefore should worship together.

The Church of England was an episcopal church but Baxter's view of episcopacy was radical. There was to be no overlording of the church by bishops: their authority was to be exercised through a council of pastors. He saw that much of what denominations held dear, including belief in an apostolic succession, created division rather than unity in the Church. His definition of what was needed to be a church member of any denomination was a personal repentance and a Trinitarian faith.⁶⁴

⁶³ Cyril Loukaris (Lucar), 1570-1638. He is remarkable in being an eminent Orthodox leader (he became Patriarch of Constantinople) who was profoundly influenced by Protestant thinking. He signed a Confession of Faith which was clearly Calvinistic through which he hoped to purify the Orthodox Church. He was a supporter of Biblical translations. The *Codex Alexandrinus* Manuscript of the Bible in Greek is now in the British Library in London.

⁶⁴ Baxter held the view that the Church of England 'derived its succession' not from Rome but from the 'British and Scottish Church' (see Slosser, G J, *Christian Unity, its history and challenger in all communions, in all lands*, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co Ltd, London, 1929, p 56). Slosser writes also that Baxter saw that unity depended upon the personal sanctification of Christianity.

Baxter's famous dictum *'In things necessary, unity; in things indifferent, liberty; in all things, charity'* begged the question of what is meant by 'necessary' and 'indifferent.' For Baxter, doctrinally necessary things were assent to a 'sacramental covenant', the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Decalogue and the infallible truth of Scripture. These were basics, and what Baxter called 'indifferent, small and doubtful points' should not be insisted on for unity. Most of Baxter's 'necessary' things concerned pastoral matters, not doctrinal ones. Interestingly, Baxter prophesied, like Dury, that foreign missions would help to unite Christians, and in this he was to be proved right. He was right, too, to see danger in the power of bishops in the 17th Century, but he was a voice crying in the wilderness. ***The Act of Uniformity of 1662*** ended all his hopes.

The Act of Uniformity with its matchless *Book of Common Prayer* was the last attempt to impose church uniformity on England and Wales. Times were changing. Royal authority had been challenged once and for all in the English Civil War, and for many people spiritual authority was no longer to be found in an episcopal hierarchy. The tinker of Bedford had as much right to be heard on spiritual matters as their lordships. Nonconformism was now deeply rooted in the spiritual landscape of Britain in England and Wales and was to take root soon in Scotland, as patronage questions were to divide the (Presbyterian) Church of Scotland from the early 18th into the 19th Century.

We cannot leave the 17th Century without mention of a most remarkable man who brought into being an unconventional religious movement which, paradoxically, while advocating and practising an uncompromising pacifism and meekness of spirit, severely censured all Christians who clung to traditional and time-honoured forms of worship.

George Fox (1624-1691) was born in the village of Fenny Drayton in Leicestershire (then called Drayton-in-the-Clay). His father was a prosperous weaver, a warden in the parish church, married to Mary Lago, a woman of a higher social class than himself and a descendant of one of the Moravian martyrs of the 16th Century. George was an unusually religious young man with a serious and enquiring mind. He had little formal education and became apprenticed to a shoemaker while still a youth.

At 19 he left home and wandered across England to London, where he sampled the sermons of some of the City's leading preachers. He was not impressed. On his return home he stopped attending the Parish Church, to the distress of his parents, and could be found sitting alone reading his Bible. He came to believe the Church placed too much emphasis on externals, on an academic and learned clergy, and on a sacramental form of worship. In 1644 a crisis came when, despairing of knowing the truth about God and religion, he heard a voice saying to him, 'There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to Thy condition.'

Subsequently he had visions, which were about the struggle of light with darkness and the triumph of an ocean of light and love over an ocean of darkness. He wrote that in that he saw 'the infinite love of God.'⁶⁵

Fox's mission, from then, was firmly fixed in his mind. It was to draw folk away from the formal religion of the churches and chapels to the inner life of the Spirit who lived in

⁶⁵ Van Etton, Henry, *George Fox and the Quakers*, Longmans, Green & Co, London, 1959, p 27.

everyone – from outward forms to inner truths. For Fox the Word of God was not found in an infallible Bible but in an infallible Holy Spirit teaching us new things.

His first imprisonment was for interrupting a sermon in St Mary's Church in Nottingham. He would have been allowed to discuss the sermon with the preacher after the service, for these were the days of Puritan ascendancy in the Church of England, in which a supreme place was given to the expounding of the written word and discussion on it. But he was not allowed to interrupt the sermon.

The issue Fox raised was, what was the '*sure word of prophecy*' in 2 Peter 1.19 (AV)? The actual words of the Bible, as the preacher held, or the Spirit's voice speaking in a person as Fox maintained? Fox and his followers, while not neglecting the Bible, emphasized rather the inner light or voice speaking within a person. It is said that Fox was as upright as a pine tree and as pure as a bell, and his immense courage and faith enabled him to endure many imprisonments and assaults without bitterness and with forgiveness. At a time of civil war he spurned violence in every form and refused a commission offered to him in Parliament's Army.

His followers, called '**Quakers**' by a judge, a name that stuck with them, preferred the term *Friends* or *Seekers of the Truth*. They rejected forms or liturgies, instead depending on the Spirit of God to lead them in worship; they had no clergy and put much store on silent worship. They taught and preached righteousness and justice (even rebuking market stallholders for cheating their customers), and created a tradition of social concern and action that has been a mark of the Friends ever since.

But what can be said about them in a book on the history of Christian Unity? They were certainly divisive in their origins and suffered much for their exclusive view and practices. In recent years they have entered into ecumenical activities, but as a non-confessional body which cannot share in the Church's heritage of the Creeds. For this reason they have not become a member of the WCC, though their body, *The Britain Yearly Meeting*, is a member of *Churches Together in Britain and Ireland*.⁶⁶ The Quakers' view of the Scriptures as secondary in authority to the inner light which is in everyone is yet another reason why they could not accept the basis for Christian Unity offered in this book.

⁶⁶ See *Quaker Faith and Practice*, The Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain, 2005.

CHAPTER 7 CHRISTIAN UNITY AND THE EVANGELICAL REVIVAL IN BRITAIN

Towards the end of the 17th Century the phenomenon of **Religious Societies** appeared in English religious life. These societies were to have an important role later in the spread of the *Evangelical Revival*, and helped to create a bond between spiritually like-minded people. They drew not only serious Anglicans together in worship and prayer and good works, but in some cases brought *Dissenters* and Anglicans together.

Reacting against what many Christians saw as growing unbelief and immorality in society, little cells of earnest Anglican men met to improve their spiritual lives, their fervour, their faith and their piety. London had about a hundred of these groups by the end of the 17th Century. A contemporary account of their rise and growth in 1678 was written by Dr Josiah Woodward in 1698.

Frank Baker writes, ‘These societies... were intended solely for spiritually minded churchmen, though they did succeed in winning some Dissenters back to the Anglican fold.’⁶⁷

In Germany similar groups, ‘*collegia pietatis*’, had grown up in the late 17th Century, inspired by the Lutheran theologian **Dr Philipp Jakob Spener (1635-1705)**. (Count Nicholas von Zinzendorf was his godson.) A group began to meet twice a week in Spener’s home to stir up ‘*heart religion*’ among clergy and laity. In 1675 he wrote *Pia Desideria*, from which the Pietist movement took its ideals.

The principles of Christian living outlined in *Pia Desideria*, though not deliberately copied as such, were similar to those of the English Evangelicals of the early 18th Century Revival: serious attention to Bible study; encouragement of the laity in stirring up faith; a renewal of fervent preaching; and an involvement in the practical, social effects of the Gospel. There was no desire to form a new church, but to revive believers’ faith and encourage personal conversion to Christ.

This was also true of the ‘*methodists*’, as they were dubbed in 18th Century England and Wales. The term ‘methodist’ (without a capital letter) was not used at that period to describe a member of a denomination, but to label a very serious-minded ‘enthusiast’ who believed that each person needed to be converted to a faith in Christ alone for salvation, an experience sometimes referred to as ‘*receiving the new birth*’.

In the early days of the Revival, in the late 1730s, there was no thought of their dividing from the Church of England. That separate churches did eventually emerge in distinct bodies, the Methodists under Wesley and the Calvinistic Methodists in Wales under **Howel Harris** and Daniel Rowland, was due to social, national and theological factors.

⁶⁷ Baker, F, *The People Called Methodists* Ch 7, 3 Polity. A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain, Vol 1, ed Rupert Davies and Garson Rupp, Epworth Press, London, 1965, p 215.

Women were not usually members of the societies, but there was at least one for women; it was at Wolverhampton and had 80 members.

In 1739 **George Whitefield**, on his second sea-voyage to America, wrote a *Letter to the Religious Societies* in which he defined his view of the purpose and role of such groups. Once printed the next year, it was 'immediately translated into Welsh.'⁶⁸ This letter shows clearly how the members of societies were to act and think, according to Whitefield. His views were endorsed both in England and Wales by the Wesleys and Harris. He wrote:

*'The end of your meeting is not that you may think yourselves more holy than your neighbours, much less to form a sect or party, or to promote a schism or sedition in the Church or State. No: such thoughts, I trust, are far from you; for they are earthly, sensual, devilish. The only end which I hope you all propose by your assembling yourselves together, is the renewing of your depraved natures and promoting the hidden life of Christ in your souls.'*⁶⁹

Elsewhere in the Letter, Whitefield stressed the importance of confessing one's sins to each other in the societies' meetings, a practice of the Moravians and a feature of early Methodism.

In Dr Woodward's account of the rise of these societies in London there is reference to a stirring sermon by **Dr Anton Horneck** at the Savoy Chapel. Horneck was a German who studied theology at Heidelberg University and came to London in 1661. He became an Anglican, a member of Queen's College, Oxford, and in 1670 Prebendary of Exeter Cathedral. The next year he became a Chaplain to King William III and a preacher at the Savoy Chapel. He is credited with being among the first in London to organise young men of the church into groups for weekly prayer and spiritual exhortation, and was therefore a chief instigator of the Religious Societies.

One of the most famous of the spontaneous societies was the one founded at Epworth Rectory in 1701 by the **Reverend Samuel Wesley**, father of John and Charles. His wife, Suzannah, ran what was virtually a society in the kitchen of the Rectory. Little wonder that it could be said that '**John Wesley** was born with religious societies in the blood,'⁷⁰ and that he carried the idea into Oxford University. There the society, dubbed by his contemporaries at the University the 'Holy Club', influenced a whole cohort of earnest young men, many of whom were influential as leaders in the Evangelical Revival.

Later, on their return to England in 1738 from Georgia, where their attempts to stir holiness in the hearts of the settlers and in their own hearts had largely been a failure, the Wesleys found themselves drawn into helping to found a society in Fetter Lane, off Fleet Street. It was at a similar and nearby society meeting that John Wesley found assurance of faith, salvation

⁶⁸ Evans, Eifion, *Daniel Rowland and the Great Evangelical Awakening in Wales*, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1985, p 87.

⁶⁹ Evans, Eifion, *Daniel Rowland and the Great Evangelical Awakening in Wales*, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1985, p 80.

⁷⁰ Evans, Eifion, *Daniel Rowland and the Great Evangelical Awakening in Wales*, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1985, p 80.

and peace with God. This society in Nettleton Court, off Aldersgate Street, not far from St Paul's Cathedral, was founded by James Hutton, who was later to become a Moravian.

The concept of the Religious Society gave rise to the founding of societies with specific objectives. The *Reformation of Manners* was formed from 1691 to try to enforce the laws against profanity, drunkenness and sexual immorality. Others were founded for the distribution for Christian literature at home and abroad, the *Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge* (SPCK) in 1698 and the *Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts* (SPG), to give spiritual provision in the growing numbers of colonies and trading stations and to take the Gospel to native populations, in 1701.

The 'methodist' societies promoted by the Wesleys, George Whitefield and Howel Harris in England and Wales drew on the inspiration of the Religious Societies already in place across the land by the 1740s. In the Wesleys' case, they particularly drew from Moravian patterns of worship and discipline.

By the 1740s there was open access to the Wesleys' societies to all who simply wished to 'flee from the wrath to come' and were therefore in earnest about their salvation. Soon afterward 'class meetings' began to be formed within the societies to provide pastoral oversight in small groups of all society members.

About the same time 'bands' were formed on the Moravian model. These were small groups of especially keen members of the society who were keen to pursue entire holiness, and were prepared for the searching discipline that this entailed.

The creation of these societies in England and Wales in the early 18th Century furthered a sense of brotherhood and oneness among some Protestants which had not been known before. Catholicism was seen as an alien religion and politically suspect. John Wesley, one of the leaders of the Evangelical Revival, while on occasion seeming to think kindly of Catholics, could also support the *Protestant Association*, which was virulently anti-Catholic, on the grounds that Roman Catholics could never be trusted to be loyal to the Protestant succession.

But for some Protestants in Britain, as the doctrines of the new birth and of assurance of saving grace by faith came to be known and experienced in the Church of England through the Wesleys, George Whitefield and Howel Harris in particular, a bond was created which crossed denominational boundaries.

Reading the journals of the pioneers of the Revival one senses that there really was an expectation that a new day was dawning for the churches. In the case of Harris and the Wesleys, the societies which sprang up from their labours developed into new denominational groupings after the deaths of the leaders. But Whitefield's followers did not form themselves into a distinct group and could be found in societies across the land.

Whitefield, himself, was not a 'party' man. William Seward's *Journal*,⁷¹ written on his journey across Southern England in the summer of 1740 to raise support for Whitefield's

⁷¹ Manuscript Journal of William Seward. Seward (1702-1740), travelling companion and financial supporter of George Whitefield from 1738 to his untimely death in 1740 after preaching to a mob in the open air at Hay-on-Wye, wrote three Journals. His Journal covering his return to England by sea from Georgia was published. His other two, recounting his preaching tour across Southern England

work in America, shows him, though a Church of England man, having fellowship in prayer and preaching with Presbyterian, Independent (Congregationalist) and Baptist ministers and even Quakers. What was drawing together these men across denominational lines was the revival of the old 'Puritan' doctrines of grace, election and the sovereignty of God.

What was happening was the emergence of an interdenominational Evangelicalism which, just 100 years later, was to declare its unity to the world in the founding of the Evangelical Alliance.

In the American colonies much of Whitefield's support came from Dissenting ministers and their congregations. The Presbyterians, Congregationalists and representatives of the Church of England in the colonies often gave him a hard time for his ecumenical spirit and his irregularity in preaching wherever and whenever he could. At home in England, in his journal for 18 April 1739, telling of the reception his preaching had had at Cheltenham, Whitefield wrote:

*'We shall see greater things than these; for almost every day persons of all denominations come unto me, telling how they intercede in my behalf. And it shall now be my particular business, wherever I go, to bring all the children of God, notwithstanding their differences, to rejoice together. How dare we not converse with those who have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?'*⁷²

The experience of the 'new birth' and the passion for serious and holy living which were hallmarks of the Evangelical Revival of the 18th Century even had the potential to embrace believers at the extremes of the religious life of the day. Many preachers of the Revival saw signs of the fellowship of saints in those Quakers who manifested such signs of grace, and devout Roman Catholics could even be given a tentative acknowledgement as fellow Christians even though there was as yet no possibility of Catholics gaining an acceptable place in society.

William Seward, Whitefield's travelling companion, met one or two Roman Catholics whom he found exhibited marks of God's grace. He wrote that when he visited a Roman Catholic family near his home in Worcestershire he felt he ought to tell them that the Pope and his cardinals were in as safe a state as Church of England bishops and clergy. All that mattered was true worship of God in the Spirit. He visited a Roman Catholic relative who, he felt, knew more of the true Gospel than many people in the Church of England.⁷³

In a short *Letter to a Roman Catholic* published in 1749, John Wesley offered the hand of Christian fellowship freely. He made it clear that he was not trying to convert his readers to Protestantism. He wrote:

'My dear friend, consider, I am not persuading you to leave or change your religion, but to follow after that fear and love of God without which all religion is vain.'

into Wales in the summer of 1740, are in manuscript. One of these is in Bangor University Library (B Ms 34), the other in Chetham's Library, Manchester (Mun A2116).

⁷² *George Whitefield's Journals*, Banner of Truth Trust, 1960, p 253.

⁷³ *Manuscript Journal of William Seward*, 16 Aug 1740, Bangor B Ms 34.

and also,

*'If God still loveth us, we ought also to love one another. We ought, without this endless jangling about opinions, to provoke one another to love and good works. Let the points whereon we differ stand aside: here are enough wherein we agree, enough to be the ground of every Christian temper and of every Christian action. O brethren, let us not still fall out by the way. I hope to see you in heaven. And if I practise the religion above described, you dare not say I shall go to hell.'*⁷⁴

All the great Evangelical Revival leaders spoke against bigotry, and at the *Foundry Society*, the Wesleys' centre in London, laymen and clergy who, sadly, were soon to become bitterly divided spent almost heavenly times of united praise and worship together during the first five years of the Revival. After a near-Pentecostal meeting on New Year's Day 1739, in the *Fetter Lane Society* off Fleet Street, Whitefield wrote in his journal four days later:

*'January 5, 1739. Held a conference at Islington, concerning several things of very great importance, with seven true ministers of Jesus Christ, despised methodists, whom God has brought together from the East and the West, the North and the South. What we were in doubt about, after prayer, we determined by lot, and everything else was carried on with great love, meekness and devotion. We continued in fasting and prayer till three o'clock, and then parted with a full conviction that God was going to do great things among us.'*⁷⁵

Why evangelical believers who had so much in common during the early days of the Revival came to be at odds with each other is hinted at very strongly in Eifion Evans' biography of **Daniel Rowland**. He shows how the Revival brought Dissenters and Church people together on the basis of a shared experience of the new birth; a love for the Bible as the only source of knowledge about God; a keenness for evangelism, especially among their fellow church or congregation members; and their orthodox faith and commitment to living a godly life.

On 1-2 October 1740 a conference was convened at the village of Defynnog near Brecon, when Dissenters and Churchmen came together. **Howel Harris** of Trefeca, an Anglican layman whose dramatic conversion in 1735 had led him to a life of preaching in Wales and England, was the leader of what could be called the Church methodists. Daniel Rowland was present, a minister of the established Church who like Harris took his message of salvation by faith in Christ beyond his parish boundaries, and, like Harris, saw a great number of people respond to his message, often with deep emotion. Dissenting ministers were also present from Baptist and Congregational meetings.

⁷⁴ Ed Hurley, Michael, SJ, *Letter to a Roman Catholic*, published in 1749, Geoffrey Chapman, 1968, pp 53-54.

⁷⁵ *George Whitefield's Journals*, Banner of Truth Trust, 1960, p 196. For John Wesley's account of those days see Curnock, Nehemiah, ed, *The Journal of John Wesley, AM*, Standard Edition, Charles Kelly, London, pp 121-122. Fetter Lane Society: founded on 1 May 1738 in a meeting room off Fleet Street, London, as a Church of England Religious Society for the promotion of holiness and faith. It was supported by Moravians who were living in London and the Wesleys themselves were members.

The aim of the conference was to bring into being united societies of ‘awakened’ believers. Rowland was concerned, as a Church minister, not to be seen to approve of Dissent and separation (which was less of a problem for Harris), and the conference came to nothing.

Evans suggests several reasons for its failure. One was Harris’s overbearing manner, a personality issue. Another reason was the differences of church order. Were the Dissenters going to have to abandon their separateness and Independent church principles? What about the divisive issue of the place of assurance in the Christian life? The ‘methodist’ position accepted by several of the Revival’s leaders was that a Christian ought to know full assurance of faith, a clear mark of the new birth – Rowland and his friends were not so sure about this.

The Dissenters were also concerned about the emotionalism apparent in the stress of the ‘methodists’ on ‘opening the heart in conversion’. Evans writes:

‘At Defynnog in October 1740 two spiritual life-styles, one old and the other new, were in tension around the same Gospel message. In the outcome, the two went their own separate ways as the “Dissenting Way” and “the Methodist Way”. Once again the new wine could not be contained in the old bottles.’⁷⁶ (65)

By the summer of 1740 John Wesley had become at odds with the Moravians, in whose meeting place in Fetter Lane he had become assured of free salvation in Christ, on several issues. In July, Wesley left the Fetter Lane Society, which he had been instrumental in founding, for the Foundry meeting place, near Moorfields, opened just a little while before.

Wesley’s leaving Fetter Lane to concentrate on his work at the Foundry was due to his disquiet at a teaching which had taken hold on the Society there. A young Moravian, **Philip Moulther**, taught that until a person seeking God had received the divine gift of assurance, he or she should not do any religious acts or devotions nor attend any of the ‘*means of grace*’,⁷⁷ but simply be ‘still’ – sit still before God.

Wesley took several friends with him on leaving Fetter Lane and the wound of parting from the Moravians was never healed. The ‘stillness’ teaching was soon to be repudiated by the Moravian leaders.

One may judge that Wesley was right to see Moulther’s teaching as bizarre and pastorally defective, but was he right to secede to the Foundry? James Hutton gave the Moravian view of the secession when he wrote:

‘John Wesley, displeased at not being thought of as formerly, and offended with the easy way of salvation as taught by the Brethren, publicly spoke against our doctrines in his sermons.’⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Evans, Eifion, *Daniel Rowland and the Great Evangelical Awakening in Wales*, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1985, p 115.

⁷⁷ According to John Wesley, the ‘*means of grace*’ included ‘Works of Piety’, such as ‘Prayer’, ‘Fasting’, ‘Bible Study’, ‘Holy Living’, ‘Sharing in the Sacraments’, ‘Fellowship’ and ‘Works of Mercy’.

⁷⁸ Benham, Daniel, *Memoirs of James Hutton*, London, 1856, p 54.

Whitefield and Harris became increasingly opposed to the Wesleys' universalism⁷⁹ and their doctrine of entire sanctification. When Whitefield returned to England in 1741 after his second visit to America, he preached at the Foundry and what he said caused much displeasure to the Wesleys. Years later, in 1778, John Wesley wrote that on that occasion in 1741, Whitefield 'preached the absolute decrees, in the most peremptory and offensive manner.'⁸⁰ In Whitefield's account of the sad meeting he reflects: 'It would have melted any heart to have heard Mr Charles Wesley and me weeping, after prayer, that if possible, the breach might be prevented.'⁸¹

Attempts at reconciliation came to nothing despite the efforts of **Selina, Countess of Huntingdon (1707-1791)**,⁸² who had tried to bring the factions of Evangelicals together.

The Countess of Huntingdon was a remarkable figure who played a major role in the 18th Century Evangelical Revival. Born into the aristocratic Shirleys family, she was brought up with her two sisters on the family estate at Staunton Harold, between Ashby-de-la-Zouche and Donington Park. In surroundings of landscaped woods with an ornamental lake and stone bridge, she enjoyed the privileged life of the nobility. Intelligent and well educated, Selina found herself asking deep questions about ultimate issues from an early age, particularly after attending the funeral of a girl of nine – her own age.

Her soul was not fulfilled in the round of parties and balls she was expected to enjoy, and so she was fortunate, in a dissolute age, to find a serious-minded, moral and faithful husband in the 9th Earl of Huntingdon of Donington Park, who was 11 years older than herself.

Her sister, Lady Margaret Hastings, to most people's amazement and the annoyance of some, came under the influence of a 'methodist' preacher, Benjamin Ingham, who had been a member of the Wesleys' 'Holy Club' in Oxford. He followed the Wesleys to the colony of Georgia and, like them after his return to England, came into assurance of faith in Christ. Lady Margaret's conversion spoke to Selina, who came to a similar act of trust in Christ sometime in 1738.

Selina became an aristocrat leader in what was mainly an entrepreneurial and working class revival movement. She was almost completely misunderstood by most of the nobility who knew her, and she became well acquainted with most of the leaders of the Revival, the Wesleys, Howel Harris, the Welsh evangelist, and, in particular, George Whitefield.

⁷⁹ The word 'universalism' used in the 18th Century did not mean that everyone would be saved, but that the gospel was on offer to all people. High Calvinists such as John Gill, a contemporary of Wesley, refuted this and said that Christ died only for the elect, who were predestined by God for salvation.

⁸⁰ Dallimore, Arnold, *George Whitefield, the life and times of the great Evangelist of the 18th Century Revival*, Vol ii, Banner of Truth Trust, 1980, p 542.

⁸¹ Dallimore, Arnold, *George Whitefield, the life and times of the great Evangelist of the 18th Century Revival*, Vol ii, Banner of Truth Trust, 1980, p 541.

⁸² Cook, Faith, *Selina, Countess of Huntingdon, her pivotal role in the 18th Century Evangelical Awakening*, The Banner of Truth Trust, 2001, pp 219-220.

From 1768 Harris's home at Talgarth near Brecon became a centre for the Revival, and a training college for 'methodist' preachers was established there, largely financed and regulated by the Countess. It was a para-church body to serve all evangelical fellowships.

The Countess was responsible for founding several chapels, and she tried to keep them within the Church of England, but in 1779 an Ecclesiastical Court ruled against their being anything else but Dissenting places of worship. Her network of chapels, some of which are in existence today, became known as the **Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion**.

Theologically, Selina was of a Calvinist persuasion, but she had an ecumenical spirit, especially in the early days of the Revival, and tried on several occasions to bring together the diverging elements of the Revival.

In August 1749, when the Countess was in Bristol, Howel Harris arrived in the town. As George Whitefield also was in Bristol, and the Wesley brothers were in the area, the Countess thought it too good an opportunity to miss to try to bring together the now openly divided factions of the work of God. She hastily convened a meeting and was able to get the Wesley brothers to attend. Despite agreeing to 'give up all we can', the conference came to nothing formally, though it may have helped to remind the leaders whose side they were on.

To her great credit the Countess did not give up her attempts to bring the leaders of the Revival together. Faith Cook tells of at least two other attempts. John Wesley, feeling rebuffed that her ladyship did not call him or his brother to preach in her circles (and convinced that it was because of their doctrine of '*Christian Perfection*') wrote to her urging unity among preachers. He wrote referring to the progress of the Revival:

'As labourers increased, disunion increased till at length those who were not only brethren in Christ but fellow labourers in his gospel had no more connection or fellowship with each other than Protestants have with Papists.'

Wesley saw three grounds for fellowship among Christians: belief in original sin, justification by faith and practical holiness of life. In this letter, which Wesley sent to a good number of clergy as well as to the Countess, he gave admirable tips to prevent disunity, such as 'defend each other's character.'⁸³ The letter resulted in only three replies from the clergy but Selina was moved to do something about the issue and her positive response to his appeal brought another letter to her from Wesley:

*'I own freely, I am sick of disputing. I am weary to bear it. My whole soul cries out "Peace, peace!" At least with the children of God, that we may all unite our strength to carry on the war against "the rulers of the darkness of this world."'*⁸⁴

In 1766 Selina arranged to bring together the Wesley brothers and George Whitefield, with the result that the Wesleys had more involvement in her chapels and Whitefield in the

⁸³ Cook, Faith, *Selina, Countess of Huntingdon, her pivotal role in the 18th Century Evangelical Awakening*, The Banner of Truth Trust, 2001, pp 220-221.

⁸⁴ Cook, Faith, *Selina, Countess of Huntingdon, her pivotal role in the 18th Century Evangelical Awakening*, The Banner of Truth Trust, 2001, p 221.

Wesleys' societies. But Whitefield had only four more years to live, so the really strongly united front which all hoped for never came about.

The Countess's attempt to bring peace between the Wesleys and the **Inghamites**⁸⁵ also came to nothing. She sent George Whitefield to Newcastle upon Tyne to try to negotiate with them with a view to their union, but although Charles was amenable to discussion, John Wesley refused to attend even though Ingham attended Wesley's Conference.⁸⁶

Although it was contrary to the instinct of her spirit, the Countess did get caught up in the latter part of her life in the Calvinist/Arminian controversy that divided the Evangelical Revival leaders, and, consequently, their congregations. So keen were the feelings on the questions of predestination and free will (and, to make matters worse, on the 'Wesleyan' doctrine, as it was perceived to be, of entire sanctification), that when Wesley's Conference of workers in 1770 minuted disapproval of what they considered to be the antinomian tendency of Calvinism, Selina found that she could not invite Wesley to the second anniversary of the founding of Trefeca College. Similar doctrinal differences caused the resignation of the saintly **John W Fletcher, Vicar of Madeley**, a close associate of Wesley, as President of the college. The rift was never healed and, in certain circles, exists to this day.

It must be recorded, sadly, that the pioneer of the *Evangelical Awakening in Wales*, Griffith Jones of Llanddwror, became disaffected with the fervour of 'revivalists' such as Rowland and Harris. As a loyal Anglican, Jones looked askance at the irregular style of their preaching in its organisation (itinerant evangelism, crossing parish boundaries willy-nilly), its use of laymen (Harris never did become ordained), and its appeal to emotions and experiences.⁸⁷

In view of all this, Charles Wesley's poem, written in the latter years of the Revival, comes to be seen as wistful rather than hopeful. The first two lines run: '*Come on my Whitefield (since the strife is past) and friends at first are friends again at last*', but there were few organic or visible evidences of the strife being over.

The leaders came to honour and respect each other and Wesley gave a most warm commendation of Whitefield and his work when he gave the Memorial address for Whitefield at his own City Church in London in November 1770. It seems he preached this same tribute

⁸⁵ *Inghamites*. Benjamin Ingham was a member of the Holy Club at Oxford University with the Wesleys and went with them to Georgia as an ordained Church of England clergyman to do missionary work among the settlers of the new Colony. Like the Wesleys, Ingham was impressed by the spirituality and faith of the Moravians who were on board the ship in which they sailed to America. On his return to England Ingham preached widely, concentrating on the north of England. Opposition to his preaching by Church authorities led him to preach out of doors and on farms and in cottages and inns in the spirit of Whitefield and the Wesleys and Howel Harris in Wales. By 1742 50 'Inghamite' Religious Societies had been founded and Ingham handed them over to be supervised by the Moravian leadership. He married a sister of the Countess of Huntingdon, Lady Margaret Hastings.

⁸⁶ Stevens, Abel, *The History of the Religious Movement of the 18th Century called Methodism*, ed Willey, William, in 3 Vols, Vol 1, George Watson, London, 1865, pp 318-319. Stevens points out that Wesley's decision not to attend was based on sound judgement as he probably sensed the inherent instability of what Stevens call Ingham's 'mongrel association'. By 1759 this association was beginning to disintegrate.

⁸⁷ Evans, Eifion, *Daniel Rowland and the Great Evangelical Awakening in Wales*, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1985, p 140.

twice more to congregations of Whitefield's followers and saw these sermons as giving 'a blow to that bigotry which had prevailed for many years.'⁸⁸

There is no doubt that the Evangelical Revival did move some members of the Church of England to break down denominational barriers and be prepared to worship with Dissenters. By the time of the Revival there is evidence that a few Dissenters were already mixing in the Religious Societies with Anglicans, so that when they began to share the common evangelical experience of being '*born again*' the bond of fellowship they felt was strengthened further.

Whitefield and his travelling companion, William Seward, addressed many of these Societies as they travelled throughout England, and in America Whitefield preached in Dissenting meeting places.

When Seward made his way alone across Southern England into Wales in the summer of 1740 (Whitefield had sent him back to England from Savannah, Georgia, to gain more support for their projects in Negro education and orphan work), he found most support for his evangelical Gospel among the Dissenters, and wrote in his journal:

*'I have been led by the Spirit of God to speak in a Quaker meeting, to expound in several Baptist meetings, to pray and exhort in a field, in market place and Town Hall and yet I remain a member of the Church of England; the gospel of Christ consisting not in any outward mode of worship but in righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.'*⁸⁹

In another place, commenting on a Church of England minister who was being opposed for having an interest in the despised 'methodists', he wrote: 'Poor Church of England, what will thou come to when the preachers of the Articles are excluded from serving thee...'⁹⁰

Scotland had its own divisions in this period, not so much on doctrinal lines as on matters of church organisation and the question of patronage overruling the desires of a local congregation. When Whitefield went to preach in Scotland in July 1741 at the invitation of the Erskines, who had founded a Secession Church, he was dismayed to find that his friends did not want him to preach in the established church. Whitefield had a fine appreciation of the oneness of all believers in the body of Christ and would not confine his ministry to the secessionists in Scotland; his experience of preaching among both Anglicans and Dissenters in the American Colonies created in him a dread of division and bigotry in the Church.

Looking back at those divisions today, it is easy to blame the failure to unite on pride, personality clashes, or a certain crudeness of Biblical interpretation which saw everything in black and white terms and could not handle the paradoxes of theological debate. Perhaps the time was not ripe.

⁸⁸ Dallimore, Arnold, George Whitefield, the life and times of the great Evangelist of the 18th Century Revival, Vol ii, Banner of Truth Trust, 1980, p 511 footnote.

⁸⁹ *Manuscript Journal of William Seward*, 15 Sep 1740, Chetham Ms MUN A2116.

⁹⁰ *Manuscript Journal of William Seward*, 6 Aug 1740, Bangor B Ms 34.

Whatever differences the Wesleys and their followers and Whitefield and Harris and their followers had with the Moravians, the Moravian desire for Christian unity could not be doubted. Their patron and protector **Count Nicholas von Zinzendorf (1700-1760)**⁹¹ had a passion for unity.

He had become patron of the persecuted Moravian Brethren, spiritual descendants of the *Unitas Fratrum*, and offered them a refuge on his lands in Saxony, a settlement the Moravians called '**Herrnhut**', 'the Lord watches'. The history of the arrival of these refugees in Herrnhut is a case study in Christian Unity.

Some of the refugees were persuaded by a malcontent in their midst to become critical of Zinzendorf. Zinzendorf left his home in Dresden to settle in Berthelsdorf, a village a mile away from the refugees' settlement. Among them were not only Brethren of the unity, but other Protestants, Lutherans and Calvinists and some members of a quasi-Anabaptist group, the Schwenckfelders.

Zinzendorf drew up a *Brotherly union and Compact* to weld these disparate groups together. The Herrnhutters signed it on 4 July 1727. It was then that Zinzendorf came across an old copy of the *Brethren's Discipline* which Komensky had edited, and read it to the Church at Berthelsdorf. On 13 August that year the Pastor of the Berthelsdorf Lutheran Church, with Zinzendorf present, conducted a Communion service at which his own congregation and the Herrnhut refugees took part.

Moravian historians record that a sort of Pentecostal experience fell upon the congregation, a tide of love and unity swept over them. From this event Moravian missions worldwide were born. It was Moravian missionaries, sailing out to settle in Georgia, the new British colony in America, that awoke the Wesleys to their need of assurance of faith. Zinzendorf, after he had himself become an ordained and accredited minister of the Moravian Church in 1737, ordained Peter Bohler, who was influential in the Wesleys' spiritual journey to faith.

Zinzendorf's focus for Christian Unity was the *adoration of the Lamb*. He longed for all 'Christed ones' to be visibly expressing their unity. People who had 'heart' religion all belonged together in the One Church. The unity of these 'Christed ones' in the entire world already exists, it has to be rediscovered and made visible. ***The unity of the Church is a fact to be built on, not an ideal to be achieved.***

Denominationalism, for Zinzendorf, was not a disaster. He wrote: 'Each denomination is generally possessed of some jewel peculiar to itself.'⁹² The division of Europe into Catholic and Lutheran areas was an act of divine Providence. The real cause of shame for the

⁹¹ Zinzendorf, Nicholas von, see Lewis, A J, *Zinzendorf – the Ecumenical Pioneer; a study of the Moravian Contribution to Christian Mission and Unity*, SCM Press Ltd, London, 1862, Ch 6. Zinzendorf was a German aristocrat. He can be called the founder of the Moravian Brethren, who settled on his lands at Herrnhut in Saxony when they fled from persecution in Germany. They were the spiritual descendants of the Hussites and the *Unitas Fratrum* of Komensky. Ordained by a Moravian bishop. Zinzendorf cannot be fitted into any of the usual subclasses of Evangelicalism, though many Evangelical leaders were influenced by his pietism. He stressed a religion of the heart in protest against much arid intellectualism of his day.

⁹² Lewis, A J, *Zinzendorf – the Ecumenical Pioneer; a study of the Moravian Contribution to Christian Mission and Unity*, SCM Press Ltd, London, 1862, Ch 6, p 80.

denominations was not their distinctiveness, but that nominal Christians were allowed to rule in them. Nominal Christians do not ‘adhere to Jesus as the Lamb of God.’ As soon as two persons of different denominations come together in the Lamb ‘and have one heart, nothing can keep them from being agreed.’

In the 17th and 18th Centuries reason became elevated to an almost divine position among many philosophers. This trend was seen in Protestantism, where logic was expected to rule theology as it ruled Mathematics and Science. While there could be agreement that the doctrine of the Trinity could not be explained mathematically (though failure to do so led to the founding of a Unitarian movement under Theophilus Lindsey and Joseph Priestly), there was no such agreement in other areas of theology, especially not in the case of the doctrine of election. The hyper-Calvinists, like John Gill, pressed the logic of the sovereignty of God to a supra-lapsarian⁹³ position and gave no room at all to human endeavour in one’s justification before God. The Arminians held that was reasonable to hold to free will and man’s cooperation with God in working out one’s salvation.

By the 18th Century, distinctive doctrines (especially those smacking of ‘enthusiasm’) were regarded with suspicion, and it might have been thought that the age was ripe for the broadness of a Latitudinarian⁹⁴ church to give rise to some movement towards unity and harmony. But hopes of visible unity came to nothing. Churchmen and Dissenters actually talked about steps to unity. Rouse and Neill point out that two of the leading churchmen of the Georgian church, **Joseph Butler (1692-1752)** and **Thomas Secker (1693-1768)** had both, though Anglicans, received their theological education in Dissenting academies. **Philip Doddridge (1702-1751)**, a leader of the Independents, had imbibed much of the irenic spirit of Richard Baxter and initiated discussions with Churchmen. Secker wrote to Doddridge that there were many Churchmen, indeed, all the bishops, in his opinion, who wanted union with Dissenters, yet he could add, ‘But still I see not the least prospect of it.’ **Isaac Watts (1647-1748)**, the pioneer hymn-writer, welcomed Presbyterian and Baptist Dissenters to have communion in his Congregational (Independent) church.

On the Continent, in 1711, **Dr Ernst Jablonski**, a Moravian bishop, supported the plan of the King of Prussia, Frederic I, to unite Lutherans and Reformed in his domains by introducing bishops to the churches by means of the English episcopate. The deaths soon afterwards of those involved, the King, John Sharpe, who was Archbishop of York, and Queen Anne, resulted in the failure of the project.

William Wake, Archbishop of Canterbury (1657-1737), fostered hopes of some sort of union with the Anglican Church and even lived in Paris for a while as English chaplain. In

⁹³ The *sub-lapsarian* maintains that God devised His scheme of redemption *after* the ‘lapse’ or fall of Adam, when He elected some to salvation and left others to run their course. The *supra-lapsarian* maintains that all this was ordained by God from the foundation of the world, and that therefore the eternal destiny of each person was settled *before* the ‘lapse’ or fall of Adam.

⁹⁴ *Latitudinarian*. Any of the 17th Century Anglican clerics whose beliefs and practices were viewed by conservatives as unorthodox or, at best, heterodox. After first being applied to the Cambridge Platonists, the term was later used to categorize churchmen who depended upon reason rather than argument from tradition to establish the moral certainty of Christian doctrines. Limiting that doctrine to what had to be accepted, they allowed for latitude on other teachings. The Latitudinarians thus became the precursors of the similar Broad Church movement in the 19th Century Church of England.

the Sorbonne there were theologians who responded positively to Wake, especially Dr Louis Ellies Dupin; Wake was ready to accept that the doctrine of transubstantiation need not hinder intercommunion between the two Churches.

But it would be true to say that the Catholic branches of the Church, Roman and Orthodox, were seen by most Protestants of Britain in the 18th Century to be defective or even apostate, and there was not serious consideration of unity with them. The *Toleration Act* of 1689 gave freedom of worship to all Dissenters except Roman Catholics and Unitarians. In view of James II's acceptance of Catholicism, this was understandable. The rejection of Unitarian views indicates that the doctrine of the Trinity was a uniting factor at that time, and the rejection of Roman Catholicism owed as much to political interests as to theology.

This period also saw a great expansion of European commercial and colonial interests overseas. Accompanying this expansion were Catholic and Protestant messengers. Converts were sought and, in some cases, made in large numbers among the native populations in South America, Africa and Asia.

The Catholic Church had been busy making converts, especially in Latin America and the Far East, without any rival Christian presence to deal with, from the 16th Century, but Protestant colonial expansion gathered momentum from the middle of the 18th Century. The American colony of Georgia was founded in 1732 as a refuge for debtors from English prisons, but it was intended also as a counterforce to the presence of Spanish colonists to its south. It was also established as a Church of England enclave, and the Wesley brothers and George Whitefield spent some time there as parish priests.

The revival of the Evangelical faith in both Anglican and Dissenting Churches led to the rise of the Protestant overseas missionary movement. It began with the founding of the **Baptist Missionary Society** in 1792 and the **London Missionary Society** in 1795. Protestantism in England and Wales was beginning to wake up to the vast numbers of people in the world and to their spiritual needs.

In 1792 **William Carey (1761-1834)**, an English Baptist, had written a tract on the subject *An Enquiry into the obligation of Christians to use means for the conversion of the heathens*, in which he tried to assess the number of people worldwide who had no knowledge of the Christian Gospel. The next year Carey was in India as a missionary with the *Baptist Missionary Society*, and there he remained until his death in 1834.

Three years later, in 1795, Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Wesleyans and Anglicans contributed to the founding of the London Missionary Society, a Protestant missionary society which had as its goal a non-denominational mission to the South Seas. It was to produce many notable missions and pioneer missionaries, not least **Robert and Mary Moffat** and **David Livingstone**, their son-in-law, in Central Africa.

It can be said that the London Missionary Society, as a para-church body, was one of the very first ecumenical ventures of the modern period; it allowed missionaries to be free to pursue whatever form of church order they felt right. The basic truths of the Gospel based on the Creeds were accepted as binding on all.

It was from the overseas Protestant missionary movement's desire and need for cooperation in the overwhelming task of reaching the 'heathen' worldwide with the Gospel that the modern ecumenical movement of the 20th Century came into being.

CHAPTER 8 VISIONS OF CHRISTIAN UNITY IN THE 19TH CENTURY

In the 1830s three remarkable religious movements came into being in Great Britain, all of which, in different ways, tried to regain the primitive unity of the Church. Each was motivated by despair over the divided state of the Church.

They were the **Irvingite Movement** and its establishment of the **Catholic Apostolic Church**, the **Oxford Movement**, and the **Plymouth Brethren Movement**.

All three were romantic in outlook in that they envisaged a return to the purity of the Early Church, a golden age when (it was held) Christianity was close to the pattern laid down by the apostles. *But all three resulted in a further dividing, not a uniting, of the Church.*

THE IRVINGITE MOVEMENT

Edward Irving (1792-1834)⁹⁵ greatly influenced the founding of the Catholic Apostolic Church, which tried to recapture the offices and practices of the early Church and hoped for a return to primitive unity, even experiencing a revival of speaking in tongues and the performing of miracles in the spirit of the first Pentecost. It quickly became a sect, but tried to justify its meeting separately from other Christians on the ground that it had been raised up by God to testify to the oneness of all believers.

(Some of the Plymouth Brethren had a similar way of trying to justify separatism, based on a curious confidence that if all Christians joined their congregations the pure primitive church would be brought about.)

The Catholic Apostolic Church was a strange mixture of influences: Catholic (in its ritual and order), Charismatic (in its appeal to freedom in its worship), Millennial (in its predictions of the near return of Jesus at his Parousia), and Evangelical (in its devotion to the Person of Christ as Saviour).

⁹⁵ Irving was a Scot educated at Edinburgh University and licensed to preach in the Church of Scotland in 1815. He became assistant to a well-known Evangelical preacher in Glasgow, Thomas Chalmers, and worked among the poor of the city. He preached in London churches and drew great crowds to his impassioned preaching in which he rebuked the rich for their treatment of the poor. He got caught up in teachings on the Second Coming of Christ (Parousia) and was excommunicated by the local presbytery in 1833. He was then deposed as a preacher by the Church of Scotland for his teaching on the human nature of Christ, which held that Christ partook of our sinfulness as well as our bodily human nature. His followers built a large church for him in Regent Square in London, where soon ecstatic worship with healings and tongues were experienced, and which became a fashionable church. He was later expelled, and took with him some followers who formed themselves into the Catholic Apostolic Church. The 'catholic' nature of their worship lay in their stress on a Real Presence in the Eucharist, the reservation of the sacrament and the use of holy water.

THE OXFORD TRACTARIAN MOVEMENT

Another movement which also looked back to the Early Church and to the catholic heritage of the church in general as an inspiration for its renewal and recovery of faith was the Anglican Tractarian Movement. It had its origins in the University of Oxford in 1833. The leaders of the movement, **John Keble (1792-1866)**, **John Henry Newman (1801-1890)** and **Edward Bouverie Pusey (1800-1822)**, saw the Church of England as a divinely appointed body, a *Via Media*, a middle way between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, and the Church for the nation.

They called church members back to the Church's *Thirty-nine Articles of Religion*; the Book of Common Prayer with all its services and rubrics; submission to the bishops; and Catholic doctrines. Their worship sought to follow the practice and faith of the Early Church Fathers.

However, Newman abandoned his belief that the Church of England was a *Via Media* and was received into the Roman Catholic Church. The teaching of the Oxford scholars revived the catholic heritage of the Church of England but did nothing to win over many people of a Low Church or Evangelical persuasion. It also gave rise to hopes among some Anglicans and Roman Catholics that there could be some kind of reconciliation between the two communions.

In the 19th and 20th Centuries several women in religious orders, Anglican and Catholic, became devoted to the cause of Christian Unity. In 1857, both the Anglican-sponsored *Association for the Promotion of the Unity of Christendom* and the *Community of the Holy Cross* at Wapping in the East End of London were launched. The latter was led by Mother Elizabeth Neale, the sister of **John Mason Neale**, who did so much to create interest in Early Christian hymns and Eastern orthodox spirituality. The Community, strongly Anglo-Papist at first, became wider in its views of Christian Unity in the 20th Century.

A similar widening of view on Christian Unity came about in the community of sisters at Grottaferrata near Rome. Here, especially after Vatican II, the sisters followed Pere Couturier's vision of 'vertical ecumenism' – the drawing of Christians together through prayer – and devoted themselves to praying for the 'complete unity' commanded by Jesus for his disciples.

Etheldreda Anna Benett was the Foundress of the Anglican Society of the Sisters of Bethany, in Clerkenwell, London, in 1866. She included daily prayer for unity in her community's rule from its beginning. Today, at Southsea, Hampshire, the sisters continue their Foundress's early ecumenical commitment by daily prayer for unity.

Their website (September 2008) states that:

'The Sisters seek to share the work of reconciling the divided Churches of Christendom and the whole world to the glory of God the Father... The intention of the Eucharist every Thursday is for Unity followed by an Office for Unity... At the heart of each Sister's vocation is the call to prayer, sharing in Christ's work of reconciling humanity to God. Praying in the Spirit which unites us all to Christ and in Christ, for the wholeness of broken humanity, for the integration of creation, for the peace of the world and for the Kingdom of God.'

In 1857 an *Association for the Promotion of the Unity of Christendom* was founded, on the Anglican side by Bishop Forbes of Brechin and Dr F G Lee and on the Roman Catholic side by Lisle Phillipps and A W Pugin, the notable neo-Gothic architect. Its aim was first for 'united prayer that visible unity may be restored to Christendom', but even this modest goal was shunned by the Roman Catholic Church, which condemned the Association.

It is interesting to see how Lisle Phillipps offered a way forward to Protestants to draw near to reunion with Rome in a treatise he wrote that same year, entitled *On the future unity of Christendom*.⁹⁶ He set out the proposition that the Protestant Reformers protested against what Rome never actually held. He gave many examples of doctrines to which Protestants objected and tried to show that what Roman Catholics actually held was not what Protestants thought they held. He was unlikely to win over true Protestants by most of the examples he gave, and his footnote that the dogma of the **Immaculate Conception** of Mary promulgated in 1851 was not an innovation and did not go beyond 'the original deposit of revealed truth' is very unconvincing. And he avoided the really big issue: is salvation *sola fide* (by faith alone), or is union with the Catholic Church necessary for salvation?

Connop Thirlwall (1797-1875),⁹⁷ a 'Broad Church' man, eminent historian and Bishop of St David's, writing in 1870, saw clearly that the recent decree of the infallibility of the Pope put paid to any idea of union between the Anglicans and Rome. Only unconditional submission to Rome would satisfy the ascendant Ultramontane⁹⁸ position.

Henry Edward Manning (1808-1892) was a Fellow of Merton College, Oxford. He had an unusual spiritual journey, from Evangelicalism to an association with the Tractarian Movement, and, though he was hostile to Roman Catholicism, to conversion to its communion in 1851, becoming its head in England as Archbishop of Westminster and Cardinal. He was a strong ultramontane advocate of Papal infallibility at Vatican Council I (1870). The imposing but somewhat stern brick Westminster Cathedral is one of his many legacies to English Roman Catholicism.

Manning wrote an open letter to Dr Pusey, a leading Tractarian, on the subject of the workings of the Holy Spirit in the Church of England. It contained a devastating critique of

⁹⁶ Phillipps, Ambrose Lisle, *On the Future Unity Christendom*, London, 1857. This work is an ultramontane apologetic which seems unable to conceive of any other kind of unity except that of organic union with Rome.

⁹⁷ Thirlwall (1797-1875) was made a Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge in 1818; he was an eminent classical scholar. After studying law he was ordained in the Church of England in 1828. He wrote an 8-volume *History of Greece* (1835-44) and was appointed Bishop of St David's in 1840. He was a liberal Churchman in the sense of not being either in the Evangelical or Catholic camps of the Church. He stood for liberal measures like the removal of disabilities for Jews, and supported the Government's giving a monetary grant to the Catholic College of Maynooth in Ireland and it's not condemning outright the views of the liberal Bishop Colenso on the composition of the Pentateuch, yet he was cautious about the value of the liberal Essays and Reviews in 1860. Thirlwall was one of the many clergymen, 'liberal' and Evangelical, who were worried about the growing influence of the Roman Catholic Church, especially after 1870, when the infallibility of the Pope, speaking as Teacher of the Catholic Church, became a dogma.

⁹⁸ *Ultramontanism*. A religious philosophy within the Roman Catholic community that places strong emphasis on the prerogatives and powers of the Pope.

the Church of England's doctrinal position. Pusey replied with a series of *Eirenicon*s contending that there was much in the Roman Church which was unofficial and added on to doctrines which both the Anglican and Roman Churches held in common; if the Church of England needed to put its house in order, so did the Roman. Anglican apologists now spoke of two Romes; the Rome which held to classical Biblical and Patristic doctrines and the Rome which demanded allegiance to a whole range of new and alien doctrines not held by Christendom at large.

The convening of the first **Vatican Council** in **1870**, with its passing of the dogma of the infallibility of the Pope when speaking as the Teacher of all Christians, '*ex cathedra*', was a severe setback to any hopes of drawing the two communions closer together. Later, in 1896, Pope Leo XIII's Bull *Apostolicae Curae* condemned Anglican orders as defective and invalid. It was a sharp rebuttal of any overtures towards unity from the Anglicans.

The effect of the Oxford Movement on furthering the cause of Christian Unity was to make the divisions in the Church seem more acute. The Tractarians wrote about the Church of England as the Via Media but the many Anglicans who defected to Rome under the influence of the Tractarians and the many who did not defect but stayed in the Church with decidedly Catholic views and practices were proof to many Dissenters and Evangelicals that the Church of England was being drawn steadily to Rome rather than being a middle way between Rome and Protestantism.

J A Froude (1818-1894), brother of Hurrell Froude, who was one of the earliest supporters of the Tractarians, wrote in his *Short Studies on Great Subjects*⁹⁹ that the Oxford Movement seriously damaged the Evangelical party in the Church of England. The Church of England, after the Tractarians, had a clearly Anglo-Catholic party within it, the 'ritualists' of a few years later, which it had not had before, even among those of 'High Church' views.

THE PLYMOUTH BRETHERN MOVEMENT

The Brethren had their beginning in Dublin in 1829, but were later, in the 1840s, associated with Plymouth in Devon. They were not taken up with the charismata of the Early Church as the Irvingites were and, unlike them, had little interest in rituals as a means of bringing the Church back to its roots in the Primitive Church. The Brethren generally believed that the organised Church was corrupt in doctrine and practice and was beyond remedy. It was a Church in ruins and there was no point in trying to purify any of the many existing denominations. They felt that the only course open to them was to separate from all denominations and welcome all Christians into their fellowships, solely as brethren and sisters in Christ. Their cry was for Christians to gather only to the name of the Lord Jesus, not to any other name.

Sadly, they themselves soon became fragmented into several schismatic groups on a whole range of issues. They became divided over interpretations of prophecy, and whether or not Jesus became sinful in order to bear our sins on the Cross; whether there ought to be clearly designated officers to rule in the church; whether worship should be under the spontaneous

⁹⁹ Froude, James Anthony, *Short Studies on Great Subjects*, Green & Co, Longmans, Vol iii, 1893, p 172.

direction of the Holy Spirit – not planned and programmed; and whether assembly government was to be centralised or each assembly was to be autonomous.

One of the earliest of the Brethren, **John Nelson Darby (1800-1882)**, was a former Church of Ireland minister. He was a prolific commentator on the Scriptures and a tract writer. In the early days of the Brethren movement he wrote several tracts on the subject of Christian Unity. Unity for Darby could not be created out of the existing denominations of the day, but only by the Spirit of God drawing people together, but it could be seen visibly by ‘the outward symbol and instrument of unity in the partaking of the Lord’s Supper.’¹⁰⁰ The vision was for Christians to gather at the Communion table regardless of denominational affiliation.

But Darby laid down a principle which was to undermine this unity in the end. He wrote about separation from evil being God’s principle of unity. In his tract on this subject he did not define what ‘evil’ was, except to speak of it in general terms as idolatry, worldliness and wickedness. Sadly, ‘evil’ was soon to be seen as the holding of theological views not in harmony with the teaching of the leadership of the Brethren as it gathered around Darby.

It must be recorded, however, that Darby wrote another tract on unity in 1853, which, while not rejecting separation from evil as a principle of unity, more positively wrote on grace and love as unifying factors in church life. In this tract, he saw the danger of being occupied with the evil to be separated from, rather than focusing on God himself. He wrote: ‘Holiness is not merely separation from evil, but separating to God from evil,’¹⁰¹ and that the person not doing this can be ‘occupied with evil, with proving evil, and proving evil against others.’ For Darby, in this tract at least, ‘the power of unity is grace, and, as man is a sinner and departed from God, the power of gathering is grace.’¹⁰²

However, the Brethren in their early days demonstrated unity as no other group did to the same extent at that time, by gathering together Christians from several Protestant denominations into a fellowship that looked only to Christ as its head. There was to be no centralised authority: the Lord was the only authority in each church or ‘Assembly’. At first they were prepared to have Christians visit their Assemblies who still held ties to other denominations, and they accepted that their own people, the Brethren, were free to join Christians of other fellowships in their worship and services.

Their earliest magazine, *The Witness*, upheld this principle of freedom. In its first volume, which came out in 1837, we read that

‘...a credible profession of faith in the Lamb, and a consistent conversation (behaviour) is all that we have a right to require; if we demand more we are guilty of the sin of schism; we divide those whom Christ has united on purpose that they might strengthen and edify one another.’

The article goes on:

¹⁰⁰ Darby, John Nelson, *The nature and unity of the Church of Christ*, Dublin, 1828, p 29. Subsequently, the Lord’s Supper, observed weekly by the Brethren, came to be seen as the focus of the church’s (Assembly’s) unity.

¹⁰¹ Darby, John Nelson, *Grace, the power of unity of gathering*, 1853, p 62.

¹⁰² Darby, John Nelson, *Grace, the power of unity of gathering*, 1853, p 70.

*'We pray that... all who desire the welfare of the Church of Christ, may labour to see themselves and others so circumstanced as not only to love, but to receive into the appointed fellowship of breaking bread, all whom they believe to be brethren in Christ Jesus; not requiring uniformity nor oneness of understanding, but only the possession of the one Spirit.'*¹⁰³

One of the early Brethren was **Anthony Norris Groves (1795-1853)**, who has been rightly called 'the Father of faith missions.' This meant Christian endeavours to take the Gospel to those who have not known it on the principle of seeking support by prayer from God alone, and not from appeals to people in general or by relying on commercial investments.

But he was also a pioneer of Christian Unity and while many, particularly in the 19th Century, followed his example of working by faith (including his brother-in-law, **George Müller**, who founded his entire orphanage work in Bristol on the faith principle), not so many captured his large vision of Christian unity.

After studying chemistry, dentistry and surgery in London, he practised as a dentist in Plymouth and Exeter before enrolling in Trinity College, Dublin, to prepare for the Church of England ministry. In Dublin he associated himself with a group of men who tried to follow the pattern of church life laid down in the early Church, having, so they believed, no separate clergy and no organisation other than the local congregation, which was responsible only to the lordship of Christ for its sustenance and governance.

Groves withdrew as a student at Trinity only a few months before he would have graduated because he came to believe that the New Testament did not require ordination as laid down by the Church of England. He also did not believe he should go as a lay missionary with the **Church Missionary Society (CMS)** (founded in 1799), as he learned that he would not be able to officiate at the Lord's Supper as a layman.

With immense courage, and ploughing his own money into the venture, he set sail in 1829 in a borrowed ship with a group of followers that included his wife and three children, to sail, via St Petersburg, to found an independent mission in Baghdad. In 1825 he had written a challenging work, *Christian Devotedness*, in which he set out the principle that a follower of Jesus should give all his wealth unreservedly to Christ, assured that God would supply all his real needs.

The mystic and the seer were combined with the dynamic man of action in Groves. In Baghdad the little missionary group suffered plague, famine and civil war. His wife and daughter died there in 1831 and little appears to have been done outwardly in evangelism, but Groves recorded no bitter thoughts and wrote that he had learned '...to kiss the hand that wounds, to bless the hand that pours out sorrow' and to submit his soul entirely to the will of God, though he could not see a ray of light.

¹⁰³ *The Witness*. This quotation shows how, in the very earliest days of the (Plymouth) Brethren, there was an ecumenical spirit in accord with Anthony Norris Groves' dictum that life not light was the basis of Christian fellowship, even for the fellowship of the Lord's Supper. Brethrenism quite soon came to lose this understanding of oneness in Christ in practical terms, though holding it in theory.

Groves used his medical knowledge to treat eye disorders successfully, and came to value education in mission, but there was no future for the group in the troubled city. He left Baghdad to survey the prospects of work in India, and eventually resettled his mission in Chittoor, about 60 miles inland from Madras. He married again in 1835, on his return to England, and new recruits went out to help his work in the Godavari Delta region, a missionary work to which the Brethren are still committed today.

In his life of Groves, G H Lang, himself one of the Brethren, defines the principle of Christian unity which he believed the first Brethren held as 'liberty of fellowship with all the family of God'. He quotes Groves' first biographer:

*'The original principles of this happy communion are fully detailed and largely dwelt upon, in Mr Groves' letters and journals; they tended to nothing less than the enjoyment of union and communion among all who possess the common life of the family of God. The realization of these principles enabled Mr Groves, whether in Ireland, England, Russia, or the presidencies of India, to go in and out among God's people, everywhere, both conveying and receiving refreshment.'*¹⁰⁴

Lang wrote his life of Groves when he himself was working as a missionary in a Muslim country and saw in the situation in which he found himself an illustration of how this principle of 'liberty of fellowship' works. He writes:

'From thirty years' observation of travel in the gospel in nearly as many countries I am sure this liberty is a most real asset for spreading the truth as to the church of God. I write in a town in North Africa, 650 miles from the Mediterranean. Beyond to the south stretches only the vast desert. It is a veritable outpost of the three kingdoms, those of man, the devil, and God. To represent the last in this almost wholly Moslem town I find, twinkling amidst the Islamic midnight, a small native Coptic Presbyterian Church, a Lutheran Mission of godly Germans, aiming to reach the Moslems, and a small company of Exclusive Brethren. Upon the principle that witnessing against their errors is the primary duty I can have fellowship with no one, and must stand before the Mohammedans either as one of the general run of irreligious English tourists, or as claiming that those who seek to represent Christ do not do so. In the first case my influence would be nil; in the other I should so far nullify what testimony to Christ there is. If separation from evil is my first duty, I must refuse fellowship with the Lutherans because of a relic of ritualism – they light two candles on the Table; to me a childish thing but to which they seem to attach importance as a symbol of the presence of Christ; I must repudiate the Presbyterians, for they have a 'pastor' ordained by men, which I think a rudimentary clerisy; I cannot accept the loving welcome of the Exclusive Brethren because they hold a modified form of church federation, which I judge to be non-apostolic and dangerous; and moreover, all three parties baptize infants, a practice I abhor. But upon the principle of recognizing and supporting what is of God, I can enjoy and help in the public ministry of the Word, in private study

¹⁰⁴ Lang, G H, *Anthony Norris Groves, saint and pioneer*, Thynne and Co, London, 1939, p 148. Groves' first biographer was his widow Mary (nee Thompson). The quotation by Lang from her biography of her husband is from her *Memoir of the late Anthony Norris Groves*, Second Edition, James Nisbet and Co, London, 1857, p 39.

*thereof, in prayer, in the remembrance of the Lord at his table, and in personal Christian intercourse.*¹⁰⁵

In his views on missionary work Groves broke new ground for that day. He saw that in countries outside 'Christendom' such as India there was the possibility of believers breaking down denominational barriers and clearly showing true Christian unity. Most missionaries seemed to be perpetuating abroad the denominational divisions of the homeland. He believed strongly in developing an Indian-led ministry. The Indian preachers were not to be above their flocks by education or superior living style and he himself sought to live frugally. There was to be no denominational allegiance and no separate clergy as such, yet he was on good terms with missionaries from the established societies like SPG, CMS and the Wesleyan Society. He wrote in 1847:

*'To make myself one in heart with **all** God's children, is one of the principles I have ever held. I love them ten times more, because they belong to Christ, than I feel separated from them on any comparatively lesser ground.'*

Groves did venture into industrial missions in India (silk and sugar) with some failure and some success – but his principle of operating by faith remained.

He died in England in 1853 an 'ecumenist' to the last, speaking not long before his death at a Bible study of about 25 people from all denominations.

Perhaps the clearest exposition of the 'open' Brethren teaching on the true nature of Christian fellowship and unity is found in Groves' letter to John Nelson Darby on 10 March 1836.¹⁰⁶

Darby's followers came to be known as the *Exclusive Brethren* (not their own name for themselves), and they separated from other Brethren they considered to be doctrinally unsound; they also developed a centralised church government, unlike their 'open' counterparts, who repudiated all central control and maintained the strict autonomy of each assembly.

Groves could see the tendency of Darby and his followers to establish unity on the basis of what people believed rather than on what they were in Christ. In this letter he faithfully warned Darby, '...you will be known more by what you witness against than what you witness for and practically this will prove that you witness against all but yourselves.'

This was a perceptive and prophetic judgement. Groves felt that Darby had moved away from the view of Christian unity and fellowship that they had at the first. In the early days, Groves asserted, the basis of fellowship was seen to be the divine life that was in a person. Now, said Groves, many of the little gatherings of the Brethren were making **light, not life, the test of reception into communion.**

¹⁰⁵ Lang, G H, *Anthony Norris Groves, saint and pioneer*, Thynne and Co, London, 1939, pp 148-149.

¹⁰⁶ This letter can be found in the Appendix A to F Roy Coad's *A History of the Brethren Movement*, The Paternoster Press, 1968.

The *Open Brethren* principles for church unity can be summarised as follows:

- If Christ has received a person, then the local church may, and indeed must, receive them. Thus life, not light, is the binding force for fellowship.
- Denominationalism, in so far as it separates believer from believer, is wrong. Groves wrote: ‘Oh when will the day come, when the love of Christ will have more power to unite than our foolish regulations have to divide the family of God?’
- Separation from other believers’ fellowships was not required for a person to be received into the communion of a Brethren assembly. Many Brethren assemblies, even those nominally not tied to the Exclusive Brethren system, went away from this principle, but it is truly an ‘open’ principle.
- Fellowship with other believers in their own places of worship was to be enjoyed, provided one’s conscience allowed it.

So what do these principles mean for us today as we try to dig out the embedded church around us? It means that differences of belief and practice need not, and should not, hinder Christians who share the same divine life of Christ from worshipping and witnessing together openly. Until this is done wholeheartedly and regularly and becomes widespread in the Church, the valuable lessons that the early Brethren taught the Church in the early years of the 19th Century will be lost and the Church will be the poorer.

WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM THE OPEN BRETHERN

This complete openness by some of the early Brethren to receive fellow Christians was not just limited to receiving fellow Protestants. Lang quotes an early Brethren writer who was even open to receiving an Eastern Orthodox or Roman Catholic believer in his fellowship. Lang found a tract of 1838 by a Brethren writer who wrote:

‘Though the fullest devotedness and separation from the world are enjoined as a privilege and duty, yet gladly would we have admitted the late Emperor of Russia before he died (a member, of course, of the Greek Orthodox Church), as we would the Archbishop Fenelon (a French Roman Catholic but a true Christian), without obliging or calling upon either to give up their thrones. The only ground of communion is real faith in Jesus.’¹⁰⁷

I remember hearing that Professor F F Bruce, formerly John Rylands Professor of Biblical Exegesis at Manchester University, and a lifelong member of the Open Brethren, when asked whether he would be happy to receive the Pope and the strongly Protestant Dr Ian Paisley at the Breaking of Bread in his assembly, without much hesitation replied, ‘Yes, but not on the same occasion!’

From as early as 1834, Groves saw clearly that in considering the whole question of fellowship with Christians of other denominations there should be two guidelines. The first is the duty we have to ourselves to meet with a fellowship of Christians which we feel

¹⁰⁷ Lang, G H, *Anthony Norris Groves, saint and pioneer*, Thynne and Co, London 1939, p 140.

honours the Lord and his Word; the second is that we must have liberty to worship with any congregation where Christ's presence is. He wrote:

*'Consider the church at Jerusalem; consider the church at Corinth, how much to be questioned, how much to be condemned, yet the apostles bore with and reprov'd, but separated not. Indeed the more my soul searches into this matter, the more I feel I cannot formally separate, or openly denounce them whom I do not feel are separated from Christ, and denounced by him as his enemies. If I were to give up this principle, I know of none to guide me, but that which I have always seen fail, and which engenders a spirit more hurtful than could arise from a readiness to endure contradiction to your own views: this looks more like crucifixion of self, than casting out as evil, those who, with whatever faults, we cannot but believe are children of the kingdom.'*¹⁰⁸

Again, in 1837, he continues the thought of not separating from other Christians simply because they own things we disapprove of:

'I also daily more and more desire to see raised up for God discriminating witnesses, discerning between things that differ; enduring the evil for the sake of the good, rather than fleeing from the good for fear of the evil. I am so fixed in this principle, that I could never give it up, even were those I most love to oppose me in it. It is, to my conscience, the breath of God; the image of God's acting and mind.'

*What a blessing it is that the Lord's heart is so large, that he can help whenever he sees some good thing; whereas man withdraws, because he sees some evil thing, which is generally found to mean something that wounds his own self-love in the little scheme he had set up as perfection.'*¹⁰⁹

Groves was unusual in his day in his consistent commitment to the principle of unhindered and open fellowship with all true Christians. Robert B Dann writes in his biography of Groves:

*'There was one quality that made Groves almost unique in his generation. It was his habit of seeking fellowship with Christians from backgrounds quite different to his own. His ecumenical spirit, and his freedom from obligation to any particular missionary agency or denomination, meant that he was open to influences from every direction, without being required to toe any party line.'*¹¹⁰

For his day (and perhaps for ours, too) Groves had a revolutionary view of Christian unity. He saw our life on earth as a preparation for our life in heaven. Groves wrote in 1834:

'Does it not appear clear that the nearer the principles of the communion of the church on earth assimilate (ie become similar to) those which must finally prevail in the kingdom of heaven, the more perfect they must be?'

¹⁰⁸ Lang, G H, *Anthony Norris Groves, saint and pioneer*, Thynne and Co, London 1939, p 145.

¹⁰⁹ Lang, G H, *Anthony Norris Groves, saint and pioneer*, Thynne and Co, London 1939, p 145-146.

¹¹⁰ Dann, Robert B, *Father of Faith Missions, the life and times of Anthony Norris Groves*, Authentic Media, 2004, p 451.

Dann writes:

*'Here is the key, Groves thought, to Christian unity. Unity in heaven will not be a result of intellectual agreement on matters of doctrine or church practice; it will be a unity of love embracing all who belong to Christ. And if this is the basis of unity in heaven, should it not be the basis of unity on earth?'*¹¹¹

Dann goes on to quote Groves:

'Loving all whom Christ loves because they bear his impress; let this same rule then decide the question as to the subjects of our communion here on earth: all whom Christ loves, who bear his impress, or whom we ourselves acknowledge as Christians.'

Dann himself writes:

'We may be aware of errors in the doctrine or practice of other Christians, but Christ himself is aware of those errors and has never made that a reason for denying them his love.'

He quotes Groves again:

'So long as we judge Christ to be dwelling with a man, that is our warrant for receiving him – and as to his errors, though we bear them weeping, still we must bear them.'

And we ought to add to Groves: 'Our fellow Christians ought to bear our errors, too.' It is, perhaps, Groves' insistence that true Christian fellowship requires us to bear with imperfections and errors in our fellow Christians that is his greatest contribution to the cause of Christian unity.

We should note that on this principle the key to deciding if a congregation or church is apostate or not is its manifestation of Christ in them. A group of Christians may be in error (from our point of view) on many things, but we need to know if Christ is the acknowledged head of that fellowship or not. If a religious body does not uplift the headship of Christ there can be no basis of unity with it. Note, too, how seriously Groves regards the sin of disunity in the Church, 'the awful sin of schism, of sin against Christ and his mystical body.'¹¹²

FEELERS TOWARDS UNITY

What can we say about these 19th Century attempts to further Christian Unity? The Irvingites paved the way for what was later to be known as Pentecostalism and later still the Charismatic Renewal of the Church. There is no doubt that the 20th Century renewal movement was an attempt to revive the more spontaneous worship that it was believed the

¹¹¹ Dann, Robert B, *Father of Faith Missions, the life and times of Anthony Norris Groves*, Authentic Media, 2004, pp 269-270.

¹¹² Lang, G H, *Anthony Norris Groves, saint and pioneer*, Thynne and Co, London 1939 p 157.

apostolic church enjoyed, and that with spontaneity went a widening of circles of contact among Christians.

This, too, was the legacy of the Brethren. Although their original desire was to break down denominational barriers by meeting other Christians in their own territories and by accepting all believers at Brethren worship meetings, it was not long before contacts with other believers were shunned by many of the Brethren Assemblies. Yet the concept of the simple gathering together of all believers on the basis of faith in Christ only did not entirely die in Brethrenism, and several leaders of the late 20th Century renewal movements came from its ranks and advocated open fellowship of believers.

The unity the Oxford Movement strove for was a visible unity of the Church. The concept of ‘spiritual ecumenism’ would have held little appeal to the Tractarians. Dissent was as deplorable as breaking the unity of the visible Church.

Those leaders of the Oxford Movement who did not join the Roman Church still held to their belief that the Church of England was the *Via Media* between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism, both of which were departures from the undivided Church of the Early Fathers. Given that belief it was logical to see other Churches in England as destroyers of the unity of a divinely appointed Church, a Church which could be seen everywhere in its parish ministry, its priests and its bishops.

Something must be written about the ‘Broad Church’ visions of Christian Unity in the 19th Century, because several of its remarkable thinkers and scholars addressed the problem.

First, we must define what we mean by ‘Broad Church’. Broad Church thinkers felt they were in tune with the liberal thinking of their day and therefore with the spirit of the age. They disliked dogmatism, whether Catholic or Evangelical, and put a considerable stress on reason applied to theology and to the latest Biblical researches. But this does not mean that their theology was necessarily weakened. They were often men of intense religious feeling and were distressed by the divisions of denominationalism in the Church. As B G Worrall says, the Broad Church was ‘a mood rather than a party, and was, in fact suspicious of parties.’¹¹³

This was particularly true of **Frederick Denison Maurice (1805-1872)**, whose father was a Unitarian minister and saw most of his family reject Unitarianism to embrace Trinitarian doctrine, including ‘F D’ himself, but the hurt of division never left him. During his time at university, Maurice refused to subscribe to the *Thirty-nine Articles* of the Church of England, thereby forfeiting his chance to take a degree and fellowship.

In an age of sharp doctrinal disputes Maurice is remarkable for his trying to show that Christianity is bigger than any of its factions. In his book *The Kingdom of Christ* he reflects on three ‘systems’ in the religious life of Britain in his day, the ‘Liberal’, the ‘Evangelical’ and the ‘Catholic’.

He shows sympathy for all three viewpoints but notes their weaknesses. The Liberals want the unity of the Church but only by rejecting much of the Church’s heritage, liturgy, and

¹¹³ Worrall, B G, *The making of the modern Church*, SPCK, 1988, pp 96-97.

articles of faith. The Evangelicals want a heart religion of personal faith instead of a reliance on the rite of infant baptism to bring them into the Kingdom of God. Catholics offer the comfort of having the one true Church but can only hope that her authority is sound.

None of these, to Maurice, are truly spiritual positions; he is against system-building, he will adhere to no party. God has set up the Church to be the one unifier of all humanity.

Maurice held several eminent academic positions: 1840, Professor of English Literature and History at King's College in London; 1846, Chaplain in Lincoln's Inn; and in the same year, Professor of Theology in King's College. With others he founded the Christian Socialists in 1848 and a Working Men's College in 1854. In one of his theological essays he doubted the endlessness of after-life punishment.

It is hard to know whether or not to class Maurice as a Broad Church man, but in stressing the value of the Incarnation for man rather than making the Fall the starting point of his theology as the Evangelicals tended to do, he was regarded as a 'Liberal'.

Yet for him historic confessions of faith were important. In the *Kingdom of Christ* he wrote:
*'The Creed is the document which has served as protection to the meaning of the scriptures against the tendency which the Church doctors in different ages have exhibited to disturb and mangle them.'*¹¹⁴

He saw the Creeds as acting like compasses to keep all three main streams of the faith, Roman, Orthodox and Protestant, on course. But Maurice's passion for unity was not for the Church alone, but for all humanity.¹¹⁵ Salvation for Maurice was realising our inclusion in Christ, the Centre of all Humanity.

Thomas Arnold (1795-1842) was headmaster of Rugby school.¹¹⁶ He had the Broad Churchman's dislike of parties in religion and put forward ideas for making the Church of England a truly national Church by including all Protestant denominations within its communion.

In his pamphlet *Principles of Church Reform* (1833)¹¹⁷ he uttered a cry of despair over the future of the Church of England unless there was a radical change to make her a really national institution. His proposals for making a Church which would be acceptable to Churchmen and Dissenters by an Act of Parliament were idealistic and unworkable. Nonconformists felt patronised by the proposals and his ideas for an overhaul of the

¹¹⁴ Maurice, Frederick Denison, *The Kingdom of Christ*, Second Edition, Vol 2, J G F and J Rivington Ltd, 1842, p 24.

¹¹⁵ See Jackson, M J, and Rogan, J, Introductory Essay to Principle of Church Reform, SPCK, 1962.

¹¹⁶ From 1828 to 1841. He advocated a high standard of Christian conduct for his pupils.

¹¹⁷ *Principles of Church Reform* (1833) came out in the very year that John Keble, a Tractarian (Oxford Movement) leader, made a quite different protest about the state of the Church of England. Keble wanted a Church committed to Catholic principles which would exclude Dissenting ideas from the national body. Arnold was radical in his playing down of ritual in worship and in his willingness to embrace Dissenters in his concept of a national Church.

episcopate were too radical for most Churchmen. Arnold does not seem to have understood the spirit of Dissent.

He was a Fellow of Oriel College, Oxford, from 1815 to 1819, and so was a contemporary of some of the Oxford Movement scholars. He opposed the Oxford Movement as being too restrictive; he wished for an open Church to include Protestant Dissenters in a national body. He was radical in wanting a far greater part for the laity in the Church of England, even to their being allowed to give Communion and sit on clerical synods.

He became Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford in 1841 and he is regarded as one of the leaders of the Broad Church, but this term is not to be equated with theologically 'liberal' today: the terms 'Broad' and 'Liberal' had not yet come to take on extreme theological radicalism. This was to come.

Broad Church men wanted a Church which was wider than the established Church, open to modern scholarship and, usually, politically liberal ideals, but they were firmly committed to the basics of the Christian faith and adherence to the classical creeds.

Dean A P Stanley (1815-1881)¹¹⁸ was a formidable Broad Church scholar who tried to develop contacts with Nonconformists and had a wide sympathy for all brands of believers. He spoke of a 'movement immeasurable, irresistible' that he felt was abroad in his day, drawing Christians closer together.

Educated at Rugby under Thomas Arnold, he became Fellow of University College, Oxford, in 1838; later Professor of Ecclesiastical History at Oxford, from 1856 to 1864; and then Dean of Westminster from DATE till his death.

As a Broad Church man he wanted toleration for all Christians (including Unitarians), and opposed disciplinary action against Bishop Colenso, who had written a critical work on the Pentateuch. He was a notable scholar of the Eastern Church and of the history of the Jews. His 'liberalism' can be seen in his wanting to remove the anathemas from the *Athanasian Creed*. He invited the Tractarian leaders, Keble, Liddon and Pusey to preach in Westminster Abbey, but they refused.

Among the Nonconformists there is no more heroic name in the story of Christian Unity in the 19th Century than that of the little-known and little-remembered Scot, **David Nasmith (1799-1839)**, the founder of the **City Mission Movement**.

Brought up in a Christian home in Glasgow, at the age of 16 he founded a Society for the distribution of Bibles among the poor in the city. Later he formulated a plan for missions to

¹¹⁸ *Dean Arthur Penryhn Stanley*. Ruth Rouse writes: 'In estimating Stanley's contribution to Christian unity, it should be realized that his irenic approaches went far beyond England. He travelled widely and made contacts with the leaders of the Churches: in Russia, Greece, Mount Athos, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and Constantinople with the ancient Eastern Churches; in Sweden and Denmark with Lutherans; in Herrnhut with Moravians; in Hungary and France with Reformed; in the United States with many Churches. He was the friend of Dollinger, of Pere Hyacinthe, and of Baron Bunsen. He attended the Old Catholic Congresses in 1871 and 1872. He was in Rome just before the Vatican Council and deeply regretted that he could not remain, as Archbishop Tait had recalled him for the Ritual Commission.' Rouse, Ruth and Neill, Stephen C, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517-1948*, SPCK, London, 1954, p 336.

big cities, aiming to unite Christians of all evangelical denominations to do spiritual and social work among the poor. *This was the beginning of the idea of those ‘para-church’ organisations which were to become so important in the 19th and 20th Centuries. This had been the concept behind the founding of the London Missionary Society on interdenominational lines for pioneer missionary work in several parts of the world. Now the big cities of Great Britain and Europe were seen by those who had Nasmith’s vision as equally worthy of a ‘missionary call’.*

Nasmith spent the rest of his short life founding interdenominational city missions in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dublin, Cork, Belfast, Londonderry, Paris New York, Boston, New Orleans, Manchester (1837), Liverpool (1829) and London (1835).¹¹⁹

His plan for mission was to unite Christians of all denominations in evangelistic bodies. He had to work against opposition from leaders of the main denominations but he insisted on the principle of a mission not being part of a denomination. When the Reverend Baptist Noel, of St John’s, Bedford Row, London, published an account of the spiritual destitution among the poor, Nasmith went to see him and put to him his plan for interdenominational cooperation. Noel rejected the idea. He said Nasmith must choose ‘between the Dissenters and the establishment’. Noel argued that a mission on undenominational lines would be an artificial institution, not a real church work. However, later Noel became a supporter of Nasmith and his work.

Though the Bishop of London led the official opposition, Nasmith bravely went ahead, meeting in a house in Hoxton with two friends in May 1835.

Once founded, the **London City Mission** was not free from interdenominational strife. Conflicting denominational loyalties seemed to be behind some of the criticism of the work, but Nasmith said he refused to recognise a divided church: the denomination of his workers was irrelevant.

Eventually he withdrew from the work he had founded but it continued to minister to the poor.

City Mission workers were deliberately not called missionaries but ‘agents’, and were supervised by an agent elected by the subscribers to the Mission. The tasks of the mission were to evangelise (their slogan, often seen on their Annual Reports, was ‘to evangelise, not to proselytise’), to teach the converts, to supply basic needs of the poor, food and shelter, and to make them self-sufficient where possible by running sick-clubs and burial societies.

Holy Communion and the Christening of children were not at first observed by the City Missions, but as the converts were reluctant to go to the parish or any other church (most converts were among the ‘unchurched’ or among lapsed church members), the people the Mission helped tended to see it as their ‘church’. By the 1940s the Mission’s halls had become recognisable nonconformist churches, having the sacraments and their own membership.

¹¹⁹ For the story of Nasmith’s life see Weylland, J M, *Round the Tower, the Story of the London City Mission*, 1875.

Denominations began to form their own home missions by the middle of the 19th Century and one famous denomination was born out of this time. By 1878 the *Christian Mission* in the East End of London was called the **Salvation Army**. It was founded as a non-sacramentalist body, storming Satan's strongholds as an army and not trying to be a 'church'. Today, at the beginning of the 21st Century, the Salvation Army now calls itself a 'Church'.

Nasmith wore himself out in the service of his vision of a non-denominational mission, dying a poor man at 39 years of age. He was buried from a Wesleyan Chapel with prayers led by a Presbyterian and an address given by a Congregational minister. The interment was conducted by an Anglican in Bunhill Fields Cemetery, the Dissenters' burial place in City Road, London, just opposite Wesley's Chapel. Several cities in Britain still have City Missions working as part of the City Mission network, though now some Mission Halls have been given up and some have become independent congregations.

The Evangelical Alliance was founded in 1846, when Evangelicals were at their most influential in Britain but were feeling they needed to consolidate their position. This was in part to counteract the threat from the growing Catholic influence of the Tractarian (Oxford) Movement. It was a remarkable alliance of 800 Christian leaders from many countries, 10% of whom were from America and 6% from the Continent of Europe. Fifty-two branches of the Church were represented, all, of course, Protestant. Rouse and Neill write:

*'It was the one and only definitely ecumenical organization – which arose out of the Evangelical Awakening of the 19th Century.'*¹²⁰

The only article of faith in their doctrinal basis of nine articles which could be considered distinctly Protestant was Article 2: 'The right and duty of private judgement in the interpretation of (the) scriptures.'

The Alliance promoted prayer among Evangelicals and was deeply committed to the overseas missionary movement, planting the idea of cooperation among missionary societies in India. It was also a voice in support of religious liberty in a variety of political situations, but as Rouse and Neill point out, it did not have an agenda for bringing denominations together, but saw itself as a central organisation for a voluntary union of individual Christians of different churches. It was strongly Protestant and incurred some censure for its hostility to Rome from some of its members, yet it was a step forward as an expression of Christian unity.

The only other notable ecumenical attempt in the 19th Century was the founding of the *Association for the Promotion of the Unity of Christendom*, and it held out a wider hope than the Evangelical Alliance. The Association was founded in 1857 as a result of Anglican and Roman initiatives, and embraced Orthodoxy as well. It had a sole object, to pray for unity, 'that visible unity may be restored to Christendom.'¹²¹ But the reactionary **Pope Pius IX** disapproved of its aim and in 1864 forbade it to Roman Catholics.

¹²⁰ Rouse, Ruth and Neill, Stephen C, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517-1948*, SPCK, London, 1954, p 320.

¹²¹ Rouse, Ruth and Neill, Stephen C, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517-1948*, SPCK, London, 1954, p 279.

It was the Protestant overseas missionary movement's concern for cooperation in the wide variety of its work and fields, by the middle of the 19th Century, that was to give rise to an ecumenical movement in the 20th Century which was to move even beyond the bounds of Protestant cooperation.

The London Missionary Society was a pioneer among Protestant work overseas. It was founded in 1775 when Anglican and Dissenting ministers came together with the clear purpose 'not to send Presbyterianism, Independency, Episcopacy, or any other form of Church Order and Government – but the glorious Gospel of the blessed God' to the mission field.¹²² Conferences were arranged in which several missionary societies discussed mutual problems, and the principle of 'comity'¹²³ was observed, by which there was to be no unnecessary intrusion of one society's work into another's area, but each was to keep to its own sphere of influence on the field.

In the same ecumenical spirit the *London Society for the Promotion of Christianity among the Jews* (1809) (later to become Anglican), the *Religious Tract Society* (1799) and the *British and Foreign Bible Society* (1804) were founded across denominational lines.

Kenneth Scott Latourette points out that though there was some friction between denominational missionary groups in India at the height of the missionary movement in the 19th Century, 'there were also consultation and cooperation across denominational lines.' He records:

*'The rise of the Evangelical Alliance in the Occident in the 1840s had its repercussions in India. In 1855 a Conference was held in Calcutta of fifty-five members representing six missions and three of the European churches in Bengal and it was declared that for years the Bengal missionaries had in essence, if not in name, maintained an Evangelical Alliance.'*¹²⁴

A similar move towards cooperation on the mission field came in China in 1877 with the calling of the *General Conference of the Protestant Missionaries in China* in Shanghai.¹²⁵ Nineteen different missionary societies were present, 10 of them American, one from Basel and the rest British. One hundred and twenty-six delegates represented these societies. Standing next to each other in the Conference's group photograph are Hudson Taylor of the **China Inland Mission (CIM)** and Griffith John of the London Missionary Society, both leaders of interdenominational societies who pioneered cooperation between Protestant missionaries on their fields in China.

¹²² Rouse, Ruth and Neill, Stephen C, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517-1948*, SPCK, London, 1954, p 150.

¹²³ *Comity*. Courtesy; respect; a disposition to perform some official act out of goodwill and tradition rather than obligation or law.

¹²⁴ Latourette, K S, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, Vol 6, *The Great Century, North Africa and Asia, 1800-1914*, Paternoster Press, 1971, p 129.

¹²⁵ *Report of Conference*, Presbyterian Mission Press, Shanghai, 1878.

In this Shanghai Conference's *Report*, a concluding article urged both practical cooperation between the societies represented and the observance of the principle of comity. It reported that comity was already being observed in South India, Burma, Madagascar, in some parts of Polynesia and the 'Turkish Empire', but that this did not extend to the Romanists, Socinians or any group whose activities tended to 'antinomianism'.¹²⁶

What seems to lie behind all the calls for unity and cooperation which this *Report* advocated was the sense that the task of evangelising China was so overwhelming because of its vast size and the powerful influence of its ancient culture that no one society could function effectively on its own.

Along with these pioneering attempts at cooperation on the mission field came a series of conferences in England and America planned to continue to investigate the needs of the missionary societies overseas.

The first of these was held in Liverpool in 1860. At a large General Public Meeting held in the Philharmonic Hall as part of the conference, the **Earl of Shaftesbury** took the chair. In his remarks he likened the gathering to 'a National Synod – of all branches of the Christian Church: Baptists, Moravians, Wesleyans, Independents, members of the Church of England, members of the Church of Scotland, branches of all those denominations which love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.' He saw the Conference as 'something like an Oecumenical Council of the dominions of her Majesty Queen Victoria'.¹²⁷

These comments are interesting in showing the Protestant churches' attitude to mission at that time, as the Earl's remarks were received, according to the Report, with great applause. They show a British Christian's view that his country was raised up by God to have 'dominion' over heathen nations, and that all denominations were responsible for the furtherance of this aim by working together in harmony on the mission field.

In subsequent missionary conferences, in London in 1888 and New York in 1900, this vision of cooperation for world evangelism was carried forward and prepared the way for the most influential of the conferences, in Edinburgh in 1910. This was to go beyond solely missionary interest in its influence and was to begin to consider ways in which churches could find common ground, or if this was not possible, to learn to understand each other's positions. This development was, in turn, to lead to the founding of the WCC in 1948.

¹²⁶ *Antinomianism* (from the Greek anti, 'against' + nomos, 'law'), or *lawlessness*. The idea that believers are under no obligation to obey the laws of religion or morality.

¹²⁷ *Report of Conference on Missions* held in 1860 in Liverpool, James Nisbet, London, 1860.

Ruth Rouse summarises the trends that, by the end of the 19th Century, were leading towards the remarkable change in relations between Christians which became known in the 20th Century as the ecumenical movement.¹²⁸ She writes of:

- ‘One of the most powerful and dynamic missionary movements the world has ever seen,’ which led to the cooperation of Christians of different denominations.
- The founding of the Evangelical Alliance as ‘a new thing in Christian history’.
- The development of a sense of ‘togetherness’ amongst Christians of many denominations, crossing national barriers. ‘Christians conscious of this “togetherness” became the volunteer reserve force of ecumenism,’ and prepared the way for the advance in ecumenical activity created at Edinburgh 1910.
- A demand for Churches to draw together as well as individual Christians to share fellowship.

To the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference of 1910 were submitted eight areas of interest to the promotion of missions worldwide, and the last of these was *Co-operation and the Promotion of Unity*.

W H T Gairdner, a Church of England missionary in Cairo, writing on behalf of the Committee of the World Missionary Conference, pointed out that the mission field which had gone furthest in the matter of cooperation was China.¹²⁹ Delegates had heard a plea from China for unity in an earlier session of the Conference, *The Church in the Mission Field*. Now they heard specific facts about unity that had already been achieved in Western China in nine areas of missionary work. Strict comity was observed for the missionary operations of those areas. There was a common course of study, a union university formed by a federation of four missions, cooperation in medical missions, a common printing press, Christian magazine and hymn book, and a standing committee working towards the aim of one church organisation for Western China.

A Chinese delegate, **Cheng Chung-yi**, working with the London Missionary Society, in the seven minutes allotted to each speaker, gave a strong plea for unity as a compelling need because of the greatness of the task and because the Chinese yearned for unity in both Church and Nation. He said: ‘Speaking plainly, we hope to see in the near future a United Christian Church without any denominational distinctions.’ He maintained that denominationalism was alien to the Chinese Christian mind.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Rouse, Ruth and Neill, Stephen C, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517-1948*, SPCK, London, 1954, pp 309ff.

¹²⁹ Gairdner, W H T, Edinburgh 1910. An account in interpretation of the World Missionary Conference.

¹³⁰ Gairdner, W H T, Edinburgh 1910. An account in interpretation of the World Missionary Conference, pp 183-186.

With so much talk of unity and cooperation at Edinburgh, it was natural that there should be a move to ensure that something lasting should come from the Conference. There was a solemn half-hour of silence with shut doors, leading to sharing in saying the *General Confession* to acknowledge the sin of disunity, followed by the united reciting of the Apostles' Creed.

The Chairman of the Commission which had discussed the promotion of unity then moved a resolution to form a *Continuation Committee* 'international and representative in character' which would carry out, on the lines of the Conference itself, measures to continue moves towards cooperation and unity in the setting up of an *International Missionary Committee*. It was stressed that the creating of organic, ecclesiastical union was not a part of this Continuation Committee's brief. The setting up of the Continuation Committee was carried by a unanimous vote.

The question of what kind of visible unity was envisaged had to be raised. One speaker wanted 'a great united organisation', but others found unity to be not in organisation but in a shared spiritual life.

Professor James Denney¹³¹ felt unity was only possible among those who shared the same attitude toward Christ. He wanted a unity based on common loyalty to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, not on agreement over doctrinal or ecclesiastical positions. There were speakers, however, who urged that denominational differences were important. Each denomination held some truth that was important to the whole church and must be preserved.

From all these deliberations and discussions the Catholic branch of the Church was excluded as there were no official Roman Catholic delegates, but several speakers expressed the hope that one day the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches would become involved in working for unity.

Edinburgh 1910 led to the formation, directly or indirectly, of two ecumenical study groups; indirectly, the *Universal Christian Conference on Life and Work* in Stockholm in 1925 and, directly, a *World Conference on Faith and Order* in Lausanne in 1927. The Stockholm Conference dealt with practical issues relevant to the progress of the churches' life and witness; the Lausanne Conference tried to face doctrinal questions.

Over 50 years later, Faith and Order produced a paper in which baptism was considered as a basis for unity (known as the '*Lima*' text as the Conference which produced it was held in Peru). The view of this Paper is that 'the necessity of faith for the reception of the salvation embodied and set forth in baptism is acknowledged by all the churches.'¹³²

All denominations would agree that personal commitment is necessary for responsible membership in the body of Christ. However, the strong and traditional hard-line Baptist view

¹³¹ Gairdner, W H T, Edinburgh 1910. *An account in interpretation of the World Missionary Conference*, p 206. James Denney (1856-1917) was prominent in seeking to bring unity to his native Scottish churches by being involved in the negotiations which led to the formation of the *United Free Church* in 1900 and taking part in the measures which were to bring about union with the established Church of Scotland after his death.

¹³² Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, Faith and Order, Paper 111, WCC, 1982.

that infant baptism is no baptism at all and that baptism on confession of faith is therefore required for membership of a local congregation is still a stumbling block.

On this question, Anthony R Cross writes gloomily, ‘There seems to be little prospect of a rapprochement in the foreseeable future – if ever.’¹³³ But the fact that increasingly Catholic and Orthodox practice is to see that open confession of Christ follows infant baptism at a later date should encourage credo-baptists to accept the provisional nature of infant baptism as a valid form of baptism if done in the name of the Trinity.

Roman Catholic participation in *Alpha Courses* indicates an acceptance of the need for a subsequent ‘conversion’ experience in the lives of people who have been baptised as infants. The common response of some Catholics to their need for a personal conversion to Christ, that they have no need of it as they were baptized as Christians in infancy, may be getting less common.

The ‘Lima’ text also considered the Eucharist and the Ministry and, as in the case of its treatment of Baptism, tried to summarize the viewpoints of major Christian traditions on these aspects of faith. The purpose of the document seems to have been simply to get Christians to think about points of view taken by traditions other than their own. This has been the value of the recent series of ARCIC discussions.

After all the discussions, there is little evidence of any of the traditions making radical moves to give up long-held doctrinal positions, but an understanding of each other’s views and an awareness that much is held in common have come about.

In 1992 a group of Evangelicals made a response to *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, which had been published in 1982.¹³⁴ The response shows quite clearly that Evangelicals can face up to views other than their own with courtesy and humility, but equally that there are areas which are basically irreconcilable with the views of the other traditions. The Conclusion to the Evangelicals’ response states that there are two areas that must be held fast by Evangelicals: the supremacy of Scripture over tradition and a non-sacramentalist understanding of the Christian faith.¹³⁵ It needs to be added, however, that all true Christianity is sacramental to some degree. Evangelicals need to be reminded that they have the sacrament of the preached Word when Christ is brought to their hearts.

It is essential if Unity is to be real and not coerced that each tradition should hold to its own distinctive views (often won at great cost in the past) and also to learn to appreciate different perspectives of the faith. This is the view taken in the document *Called to be One*, published by Inter-Church House for *Churches Together in England Publications* in 1996.

¹³³ Cross, Anthony, *Baptism Christology and the Creeds of the Early Church: Implications for Ecumenical Dialogue*, essay in *Ecumenism in History*, ed Cross, A R, Paternoster Press, 2002, p 32.

¹³⁴ *The text of the Lima Report with an Evangelical Response*, Ed Schrottenboer, Paul, World Evangelical Fellowship, The Paternoster Press, 1992.

¹³⁵ *The text of the Lima Report with an Evangelical Response*, Ed Schrottenboer, Paul, World Evangelical Fellowship, The Paternoster Press, 1992, p 19ff.

*'The liturgical movement in western churches has restored the corporate nature of the Eucharist in the Roman Catholic Church, and with it the desire of the faithful for more frequent communion. It has also restored the holy communion to a more central place in the worship of the Church of England and of many Free Churches. Documents such as Baptism Eucharist and Ministry have helped many Christians to see that their understanding of the Eucharist is much closer to that of most other Christians than they realised. Both these factors have added to the pressure felt by Christians in widely-separated churches to receive communion together.'*¹³⁶

Ideally the 'sacramentalist' should be able to sit down with the 'non-sacramentalist' at the Lord's Table under the one truth that our Lord is present among them.

The practice of baptism, which is a cause of division in the Church at present, can yet be a factor in uniting Christians, if the mode of baptism is left as a matter of debate and the reasons for its observance concentrated upon.

There can be agreement as to its great importance in the Church and it can be agreed that:

- **Baptism declares the truth of the Trinity (Matthew 28.19).**
- **Baptism is a sign of the incorporation of the believer into the body of Christ, and so into the universal Church (at the moment of initial faith in the case of credo-(believers') baptism, or in anticipation of future conversion in the case of paedobaptism).**
- **It is also a commitment to a pursuit of holiness in the resurrection power of Jesus (Romans 6.3,4).**

Horton Davies¹³⁷ points out in his treatment of 'the theology of initiation' that a change is occurring today in how many churches see baptism, infant or adult. Before the 20th Century the churches were severely separated by holding to paedo- or credo-baptism, yet today we can have such unions as that of the United Reformed Church and the Churches of Christ which have found a *modus vivendi*¹³⁸ in the case of baptism, the United Reformed Church being paedobaptist and the Churches of Christ credo-baptist.

Davies points out that both the Anglican and the Roman Catholic Churches have been rethinking the purpose and meaning of infant baptism. It is clear that in the early Church baptism as an initiatory rite was taken very seriously, with a long preparation period for the catechumens. Davies comments that the modern requirements for baptism seem, by contrast with the early church, casual and appallingly minimal.

¹³⁶ *Called to be One*, Churches Together in England (Publications), Inter-Church House, London, 1996, pp 72-73.

¹³⁷ Davies, Horton, *Worship and Theology in England*, Book 111, Vol VI, Crisis and Certainty, Ch 11, The Theology of Initiation.

¹³⁸ *Modus vivendi*. A Latin phrase signifying an agreement between those whose opinions differ, such that they agree a way of relating while still recognising that they disagree.

He writes:

*'It is the Eastern Orthodox Churches alone which have retained most of the tradition of the 4th Century theologians and thus they provide a model for today which the Roman Catholic Church, in restoring the catechumenate, and the Anglican Church in admitting children to Holy Communion, are imitating.'*¹³⁹

Often the chief value of consultations such as Faith and Order and ARCIC is not to get positions to give in to each other, but to understand each other. Such understanding often paves the way for fellowship previously thought impossible. This spirit of genuine searching for theological understanding of each other's positions ought to be sustained and expanded across all Christian denominations.

However, ARCIC's purpose was to work towards the visible union of the two Communion under a common Papal headship and this would be unacceptable to most Evangelicals in the Anglican Church. The kind of ecumenism which this book advocates does not envisage that kind of attempt at unity, believing it would lead to further division of the Church.

These gatherings of Faith and Order and Life and Work arising out of Edinburgh 1910 became the basis for the foundation of the WCC, which was launched in Amsterdam just after the Second World War, in 1948. The WCC did not claim to be a legislative body or an embryo world Church, but its formation did encourage a few denominations to merge later in the century. Most of these mergers were overseas, and the only successful merger in the UK was that of the Presbyterian Church of England and the Congregational Church in 1972. They formed the United Reformed Church, to which was added the *Disciples of Christ* in 1981.

The WCC's commitment to the doctrine of the deity of Christ was made clear at its inauguration, and at its Assembly in New Delhi in 1961 the text became clearly Trinitarian. It read:

*'The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of Churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the Scriptures and therefore seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.'*¹⁴⁰

Nearly 50 years later, that vision is still a long way from being realised.

The ***New Delhi Declaration*** on unity saw it as:

- *The confession of all baptized people that Jesus Christ is Lord and Saviour.*
- *The holding of 'one apostolic faith'.*
- *The preaching of one Gospel.*
- *The breaking of one bread.*
- *Joining in common prayer.*

¹³⁹ Davies, Horton, *Worship and Theology in England*, Book 111, Vol V1, *Crisis and Certainty*, Ch 11, *The Theology of Initiation*, p 33.

¹⁴⁰ Quoted in Boegner, Marc, *The Long Road to Unity*, Collins, 1970, p 284.

- *Sharing a corporate life of witness and service to all.*
- *Acceptance of each other's members and ministry.*

'It is for such unity we believe we must pray and work.' This is a fine vision, though the details need spelling out. What is meant by the 'preaching of the one Gospel?'

However, since New Delhi, the WCC seems to have lost something of that vision. Various branches of the Evangelicals, many Roman Catholics and the Orthodox Churches have expressed concern at the way the WCC developed in the 1980s and 1990s. Their two main areas of concern have been its involvement in political agendas and its acceptance of a pluralistic approach to other world faiths.

The *Report of the Seventh World Council of Churches Assembly* in Canberra in 1991, whose theme was *Signs of the Spirit*, included a controversial address by Professor Chung Hyun Kyung, Professor of Theology at Ewha Women's University, Seoul, in which she invoked the spirit of nature.¹⁴¹

On p 39 of the *Report* we read: 'Come, the Spirit of earth, air, water, the raped, tortured, and exploited by human greed for money.' For the speaker the image of the Holy Spirit is an Eastern Goddess of compassion, a *bodhisattva*,¹⁴² perhaps also an image of Christ.

But the *Report* warns: 'Not every spirit is of the Holy Spirit. The prime criterion for discerning the Holy Spirit is that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ; it points to the Cross and Resurrection and witnesses to the Lordship of Christ.'

The Orthodox churches who were present at this Assembly (the Roman Catholic Church is still not a member of the WCC, but **Pope John Paul II** sent greetings) warned that there had been an increasing departure from the basis of the WCC and it was in danger of becoming a forum for debate on issues without any specific Christian theological basis. There was a departure from Biblically based Christian understandings of (a) the Trinitarian God, (b) salvation, (c) the 'good news' of the Gospel itself, (d) human beings as created in the image and likeness of God, and (e) the Church.

Orthodox members were particularly concerned about the undiscerning references to 'spirit' at the Assembly. A private spirit or the spirit of the world is not the Holy Spirit; a Christian cannot invoke the spirits of the earth, air and sea, etc. Evangelicals expressed similar concerns and had much in common with the Orthodox positions; they were disturbed by the reluctance of the WCC to use Biblical texts.

The contact with other world religions seen at Canberra was continued at the eighth WCC Assembly at Harare (Zimbabwe) in 1998. At this Assembly, for the first time, relations and

¹⁴¹ WCC Report *Canberra 1991*, pp 235-258.

¹⁴² *Bodhisattva*. Anyone who is motivated by compassion and seeks enlightenment not only for him/herself but also for everyone.

dialogue with other world faiths were made an on-going commitment. Fifteen representatives of other faiths were invited to Harare and eight presentations from other faiths were given.¹⁴³

As yet, however, the WCC stands by its confession of 'Jesus Christ as God and Saviour'. Canberra 1991 saw the ecumenical movement's purpose, among other things, as moving towards (a) a recognition of each other's baptisms as envisaged in the 'Lima' text; (b) a recognition of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed as a basis of doctrinal confession; and (c) a consideration, wherever appropriate, of forms of Eucharistic hospitality.

The WCC has shown that churches can come together, not just to discuss matters of mutual interest and concern but actually, in some cases, to form united churches. Even in the 19th Century there had been a reunion of Presbyterian denominations in Scotland. Then in 1932 a reunion of sections of Methodism took place, culminating in the present united Methodist Church.

OTHER MAIN DENOMINATION UNIONS AND REUNIONS OF THE 20th CENTURY

The other main denominational unions and reunions of the 20th Century were:

(a) The United Church of Canada (1925)

This was a massive achievement. It has been computed that this merger was the result of 'nineteen distinct acts of Church union', bringing together 'forty distinct Christian bodies.'¹⁴⁴

(b) The Church of Christ in China (1927)

The national Christian Council of China inspired the creation of this body (more a federation of denominations than a united Church) on the basis of the belief that 'there is an essential unity among all Chinese Christians.'¹⁴⁵ The bond of union of this federation had three main tenets:

- *Faith in Jesus Christ as our Redeemer and Lord, on whom the Christian Church is founded; and in our earnest desire for the establishment of His Kingdom throughout the whole earth.*
- *Our acceptance of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the divinely inspired Word of God, and the supreme authority in matters of faith and conduct.*

¹⁴³ Ed Briggs, John, Oduyoye, Mercy Amba, Tsetsis, Georges, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement*, Vol 3, 1968-2000, World Council of Churches, Geneva, 2004, p 161.

¹⁴⁴ Rouse, Ruth and Neill, Stephen C, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517-1948*, SPCK, London, 1954, p 454.

¹⁴⁵ Rouse, Ruth and Neill, Stephen C, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517-1948*, SPCK, London, 1954, p 459.

- *Our acknowledgement of the Apostles' Creed as expressing the fundamental doctrines of our common evangelical faith.*

This three-fold basis for unity, replacing the Apostles' Creed with the Nicene Creed to accommodate Eastern Orthodox Christians, is the model for unity I wish to commend in this book.

(c) The Three-Self Patriotic Movement, China (1954)

In China in 1954 the Three-Self Patriotic Movement came into being, 'self-governing, self-supporting, self-propagating'. This was at a time of strong Government opposition to Christianity. Today it exists alongside 'unofficial' churches. The **China Christian Council** was formed in 1980 as a parallel body to the TSPM 'to unite all Chinese Christians who believe in the heavenly Father and who acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord.' The **Catholic Patriotic Association (1957)** is the Roman Catholic counterpart of these bodies.

(d) The Reformed Church of France (1938)

By 1905 Protestantism had become severely fragmented. Eight divisions of French Protestantism, most of them using the description 'Evangelical' in their titles, came together into a Federation of French Protestant Churches. 'Pastors of different tendencies met for joint study and prayer.'¹⁴⁶

Further discussion on unity followed and, interestingly, a compromise was made. This was to accommodate both the smaller 'free' churches which stressed a 'gathered church' concept, in which members were those who had experienced a personal affirmation of faith, and the churches of a multitudinous tradition who regarded all those who had been baptized as members of the church. A distinction was made between 'membership' and 'responsible membership'. Some Evangelical Reformed churches, especially in the south of France, refused to join the new body.

(e) The Church of Christ in Japan (1941)

This Church was formed under Government pressure by 34 denominational groups agreeing to form a union (*Kyodan*), originally with a very orthodox statement of faith. Created during the Second World War, it needed to free itself from Government control after the War. It did this with some denominations defecting, as it claimed to be a Church rather than a federation of churches, so unity as such was not achieved. The *Kyodan* is now one denomination among many.

¹⁴⁶ Rouse, Ruth and Neill, Stephen C, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517-1948*, SPCK, London, 1954, p 464.

(f) **The Church of South India (1947)**

This was a union of four southern dioceses of the Anglican Church of India, Pakistan, Burma and Sri Lanka and most of the *South India United Church*. Negotiations for unity were begun in Tranquebar, the little town where Protestant missions to India began in 1706, in 1919. A South India United Church of Presbyterians and Congregationalists had been founded in 1908, but the vision of a greater union of churches which held to the supremacy of Scripture was kept alive.

The story of the Church of South India showed for the first time in history that episcopal and non-episcopal churches could unite. Church order (the ministry) rather than doctrines were the most difficult questions to face. Agreement on the Scriptures as the supreme authority in faith and life, the Nicene Creed, and baptism and Holy Communion as sacraments came more easily than agreement about the validity of each other's ministries.

Ministers who had not been episcopally ordained worked side-by-side with episcopally ordained ministers. After the union all new ministers were episcopally ordained. The benefits of union have been the sharing of the riches of different liturgies, and, for mission purposes, an example of progress in Christian unity in a pluralistic society.

Mention must be made of the **Mar Thoma Church of South India**. It claims to be directly descended from the mission of the Apostle Thomas in India. Its origins are certainly very ancient and of the early Eastern Church rather than the Western. It has kept its own identity, resisting absorption by either Catholic or Protestant missionary bodies. Despite internal divisions over the years, it has about 1,000,000 members worldwide.

It defines itself as 'Apostolic in origin, Universal in nature, Biblical in faith, Evangelical in principle, Ecumenical in outlook, Oriental in worship, Democratic in function, and Episcopal in character.'¹⁴⁷ It had its own reformation in the early 19th Century when it rejected many Catholic practices, such as prayers for the dead and to the saints, and the Eastern Orthodox use of icons. It came to stress the importance of the Bible in liturgy and daily life. The Church has been actively involved in the programmes of the WCC from its inauguration, and is a member of the *Christian Conference of Asia*, the *National Council of Churches* and the *Kerala Christian Council*.

(g) **The United Church of Christ in the Philippines (1948)**

This union drew together the Philippine Methodist Church, the Evangelical Church, the United Evangelical Church of the Philippines and, in 1962, the Church of Christ (Disciples).¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ Rev C P Philipose, in Introduction to Concise History of Malankara Marthoma Church (1936) by T C Chacko, pp 12-13.

¹⁴⁸ *A History of the Ecumenical Movement* Vol 3, 1968-2000, ed John Briggs, Mercy Amba Oduyoye & George Tsetsis, World Council of Churches, pp 506-507.

(h) **The Evangelical Church in Germany (1948)**

The situation among Protestant churches in Germany is highly complex, but unions were achieved after the Second World War. Twenty-eight regional churches existed in 1933: 'Twenty were Lutheran in confession; two were Reformed; the remaining six were United, among them the old Prussian Union of 1817, by far the largest of German Evangelical Churches.'¹⁴⁹ In addition there were Free Churches, not tied to the State. In 1948 the Evangelical Church of Germany brought these strands together in a '*Bund*'.¹⁵⁰

(i) **The Church of North India (1970)**

The movement for unity here can also be traced back, as for the Church of South India, to the meeting in Tranquebar 1919. In 1924 Congregationalists and Presbyterians came together to form the United Church of North India. In 1970 five other groups joined this union to form the Church of North India. These groups were the Anglican churches of India, Pakistan, Burma, and Ceylon; the British and Australian Conferences of the Methodist Church; the Baptist churches of North India (connected with the Baptist Missionary Society of the UK); the Church of the American denominations; and the Church of the Brethren and the Disciples of Christ in Central India. As in the case of the Church of South India, Episcopal and non-episcopal churches were brought together in the union and both paedobaptisms and credobaptisms were approved.¹⁵¹

(j) **The Church of Pakistan (1970)**

This Church was formed from the Anglican Church of Pakistan, the Methodist Church, the Pakistan Lutheran Church, and the Sialkot Church Council. In 1972, when Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan) became an independent State, the Church of Bangladesh came into being.¹⁵²

In 1970 a similar scheme to that of North India, involving Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians and the Church of South India, Jaffna Diocese, was planned for Sri Lanka, but it did not come into being.

(k) **The United Reformed Church (UK) (1972)**

This was a merger of the Congregational Church and the Presbyterian Church of England. In 1981 the majority of the Disciples of Christ joined this Union.

¹⁴⁹ Rouse, Ruth and Neill, Stephen C, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517-1948*, SPCK, London, 1954, p 466-467.

¹⁵⁰ *Bund* is the German word for federation or union.

¹⁵¹ *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, Vol 3, 1968-2000*, ed John Briggs, Mercy Amba Oduyoye & George Tsetsis, World Council of Churches, pp 503-504.

¹⁵² *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, Vol 3, 1968-2000*, ed John Briggs, Mercy Amba Oduyoye & George Tsetsis, World Council of Churches, p 507.

A UNITY NOT DEPENDENT UPON STRUCTURES

In the Church unions in India, the thorny question of the recognition of episcopal and non-episcopal ministries had to be faced. This was the very question that caused problems for the hoped-for merger of the Methodists and Anglican Churches in the UK and brought it to a halt. In this latter case a Service for Reconciliation was to be followed by the consecration of the first Methodist bishops, in which Anglicans would take part; all ordinations thereafter were to be performed by bishops. It was the Anglican vote, however, that turned down union in 1972. Negotiations for union were revived in 1995.

The two World Wars which convulsed Europe in the first half of the 20th Century were important factors in giving rise to the ecumenical movement. 'Christian' Europe had twice torn itself apart, and the churches had been unable to prevent, or even stem, the rising tides of paganism and imperialism which gave rise to the wars.

Although the Roman Catholic Church seemed wary of such ventures as the WCC, and still is not a member, there can be no doubt that the desire for unity found in Roman Catholic circles was given encouragement by the proceedings of the WCC, and that the **Second Vatican Council (1962-65)** expressed the strong desire to draw near to other Christians.

A completely new age in inter-church relations began when this Council published its *Decree on Ecumenism*,¹⁵³ on 21 November 1964. Here the belief was expressed that a new thing was happening in the Church: 'There increases from day to day a movement, fostered by the grace of the Holy Spirit, for the restoration of unity among all Christians.'

This movement was seen to belong to those who 'invoke the Triune God and confess Jesus as Lord and Saviour.' The document regards as 'separated brethren' all who have been properly baptised (that is, in the name of the Trinity) and who believe in Christ. But it is clear that such fellow Christians belong to denominations which have, during the course of history, separated themselves from the main body, that is, the (Roman) Catholic Church.

Many Protestants, and probably most Eastern Orthodox believers, see things differently; the Roman Church is the separatist body itself! This is a difference of view which is not easily going to be removed if organisational and institutional unity is the aim.

However, the unity that I wish to commend is a practical and grass roots unity which is not dependent on structures. The differences can be accommodated by the willing acceptance that the removal of denominational distinctives is not required for Christian unity. Our unity can be expressed in the form of witnessing, working on projects and worshipping together.

The new attitude to believers outside the Catholic Church seen in Vatican II was part of the *aggiornamento* of the Church, and as such was welcomed by many Protestants. In general we can say that this remarkable Council changed nothing and changed everything at the same time!

¹⁵³ Ed Flannery, Austin, OP, Vatican Collection Vol 1, *Vatican Council II, The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents*, New Revised Edition 1992, (ninth printing) Dominican Publications, pp 452ff.

It changed nothing in respect of doctrines and dogmas. Views which many Protestants have traditionally considered stumbling blocks to intercommunion and even fellowship, such as the invalidity of Anglican Orders, the place of Mary in Catholic devotion (which was, if anything, heightened by the Council), the doctrines of transubstantiation and the Sacrifice of the Mass, belief in purgatory and the practices of praying to and for the dead and granting indulgences, were all confirmed strongly by the Council. Above all, the Pope came out of the Council with just as strong a teaching authority as before, even though the collegiality of bishops was embraced as a principle relevant to modern days.

Yet at 'grass roots' level much has changed as a result of the Council. Before the Council, many local priests regarded contacts with Protestants as undesirable. I remember talking to two young Catholic priests in 1967 about my beliefs as an Evangelical. One responded enthusiastically and wanted an exchange of views in the spirit of Vatican II, quoting some of Luther's views with approval, while the other was very reserved and obviously embarrassed by his companion's openness.

Today there are many examples of Protestants and Roman Catholics praying and serving together in social action and witness, and cooperating to form pressure groups on a variety of moral issues.

The openness to Bible reading fostered by Vatican II is another clear change which draws Protestants and Catholics together. And the rise of the Charismatic Renewal in the 1970s created movements like the **Maranatha Community** in which Catholics feel free to share regularly at a deep level with other Christians of many denominations.

Surprising things happen. Perhaps the most surprising for many staunch Protestants is the way in which esteemed Protestant Evangelical teachers are now willing to say, despite their differences with Roman Catholicism, that they are able to come together in worship and witness with Catholics.

Surprising things are happening from the Catholic side, too. The intransigence and dogmatism of **Pope Pius XI (1922-1935)**, who taught that unity for Protestants and Orthodox meant coming back to submission to Rome, seems bizarre to many Catholics today.

Pius XI forbade Roman Catholics to take part in conferences with non-Catholics. His treatment of the Benedictine **Dom Lambert Beauduin**, exiling him from his Amay monastery in Belgium, would be seen as reprehensible by many Catholics today.

Dom Lambert Beauduin had a desire for liturgical renewal in the Catholic Church, with an emphasis on the Biblical foundations of liturgy. He also had an ecumenical spirit which was inspired by his contacts with the Eastern Orthodox faith. Daily Bible Reading was to be an important part of the life of the monks in his Abbey at Amay: the whole Bible was to be covered from Genesis to Revelation.

Equally, he sought ecumenical contacts for his monks with Eastern Orthodox believers at a time when the Church expected his monks to work only for the conversion of the Orthodox. There followed an inevitable clash with the Papacy. Beauduin resigned as Abbot of Amay, was condemned by the Church for 'errors', and ultimately was exiled to the South of France for 20 years. He returned to the Community in 1951, when it had relocated at Chevetogne.

It is interesting that 60 or so years later, **Pope John XXIII** could endorse Beauduin's view of Christian Unity.

In *Evangelicals and Catholics Together*, James I Packer, in his essay *Crosscurrents among Evangelicals*,¹⁵⁴ sees the way forward into unity through the two sides concentrating on 'informal grass roots collaboration' in 'para-church' associations. None of the writers of the essays in this volume seem concerned with organisational and structural unions, but with practical cooperation in evangelism and social concern.

Objections are raised that, while Evangelicals in 'evangelism' seek converts, Catholics in their 'evangelisation' seek mainly to lead those who are already by baptism members of the Church into a realisation of what it means to be a real Christian. Such an objection is countered by pointing out that the end result is the same, a calling on Jesus to save and restore one to God.

The great uniting doctrine is the supremacy of Jesus. In general, Evangelicals and Catholics Together holds that the binding force of the acceptance of the classical Creeds, together with the renewal by the Holy Spirit which exalts Christ as the only Saviour and Lord, create a solid basis for united service and witness.

The para-church model for Christian unity will not satisfy the Catholic and Orthodox churches, which claim to be 'holy, catholic and apostolic', with all that that implies for discipline, authority and continuity. The model can, however, at a lower level, manifest those very same marks of the Church. Christians can get together to speak for holiness in individual and public life; they can show they have a universal faith; and they can hold to the apostolic Scriptures as their authority for faith and behaviour.

The question has to be raised, as it is by some Protestants, are the differences in understanding of the doctrine of justification by faith, the central Reformed tenet, too great to be overcome?

This doctrine is not dealt with in the classic Christian Creeds. Most Catholics would assert that justification is, in the first instance, by grace alone, but that the justified person has to strive to be justified by the works he does. This is where justification and sanctification overlap.

The Scriptures teach that Abraham was justified by both faith and works, but in different senses (Romans 4.3 and James 2.21-24). Abraham's faith that brought him righteousness was made 'perfect' (*hē pistis eteleiōthē* (James 2.22)) or 'complete' by his works; that is, in his sanctification. So his justification is completed by his sanctification.

Many Protestants would rather speak of works giving evidence of justifying faith. Yet Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants all reject an antinomianism that separates faith and works. There is ground here for acceptance of each other's positions.

¹⁵⁴ Packer, J I, *Cross Currents among Evangelicals*, Ch 5 in *Evangelicals and Catholics Together*, ed Colson, Charles and Neuhaus, R J, Hodder and Stoughton, 1996, p 173.

Some Evangelical Protestants want to make justification and sanctification distinct, one instantaneous by faith alone, the other, progressive by conformity to Christ throughout one's life. They make a distinction between imputed righteousness and imparted righteousness. Catholics tend to fuse the two, but both insist that justification is God's work alone and is achieved by grace and not by man's own efforts. If Christians rely on their own good works to save them, they are not being true to their Biblical heritage and, sadly, much folk religion in all three traditions is of this kind.

Similarly, the Orthodox insist that good works do not save us.

Recently I attended a Greek Orthodox Sunday morning service of the divine liturgy, and the bulletin given to all who attended as they entered the church contained a little homily on good works. Quoting 'St Mark the Ascetic', the paper read, '...do not imagine that works themselves merit either hell or the Kingdom. On the contrary, Christ rewards each man according to whether his works are done with faith or without faith in Himself.' A further note, from the editor of the paper, reminded us that when Jesus was asked, 'What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?', he answered, 'This is the work of God, that you believe him whom he sent.' It concluded by showing that true faith in Christ produces 'works of faith' in action and attitudes.

But while Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox are so near on such a fundamental matter of faith, there are growing differences in matters of ecclesiology.

Since Vatican II an issue has arisen which seems to have put to an end any realistic hopes of union between the Anglican Church and both Rome and the Orthodox Churches. This is the ordination of women priests and bishops.

In June 2006 **Cardinal Walter Kaspar** gave warning to the House of Bishops that the consecration of women bishops in the Church of England (a step that seems inevitable) would end ecumenical dialogue with the Church of Rome. In this he was echoing the position of the Orthodox Church as expressed by **Archbishop Hilarion** of Vienna at the 9th Assembly of the WCC at Porto Alegre. If anything, the Orthodox position on the question is more inflexible than the Roman. For Archbishop Hilarion, 'A revelation from above is needed for Orthodox Churches to start ordaining women.'

The idea of Anglicans and Orthodox sharing the Eucharist together, as once hoped for, is, according to the Archbishop, now 'completely impossible.'¹⁵⁵ He maintains that the Anglicans' moral stance (no doubt referring to the homosexual-practice debate) has made dialogue even more difficult. All this reinforces my view, that the path to Christian Unity is not along official channels, but must proceed by working out a 'spiritual ecumenism', by meeting fellow Christians on an unofficial level on the basis of a shared love for Jesus as Lord and Saviour, an acknowledgement of the authority of the Scriptures and the joint confession of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed.

¹⁵⁵ *Church of England Newspaper*, 16 June 2006 and 22 August 2008. Bishop Hilarion repeated his warning that, for the Orthodox church, Anglican moves to instal women bishops would mean the exclusion of 'even the theoretical possibility of the Orthodox churches acknowledging the apostolic succession' of Anglican bishops.

In her study of the *Evolution of the English Churches, 1500-2000*, Ch 12, *Churches Together and Churches Apart*,¹⁵⁶ Doreen Rosman surveys the changes that have developed in these churches in the 20th Century. She points out that the Church in England has moved from a vigorous pursuit of uniformity (seen in the unsuccessful Acts of Uniformity of the 16th and 17th Centuries) to an acceptance of *diversity in unity*.

Rosman characterises modern churches as having the following features:

- *Among Protestant churches, a tolerance of doctrines and ecclesiologies which had previously sharply divided Christians.* Examples include the General and Particular Baptists joining together in the Baptist Union; the formation of the United Reformed Church in 1972, which brought together different ways of ordering church life; the subsequent inclusion of the Churches of Christ, which brought together in the same body paedo- and credo-baptist views; and, from 1917, with the first ordination of a female minister (in the Congregational Church), a growing acceptance of women's ordination.
- *An increased place for the study of the Scriptures.* This was seen right across denominational lines and was particularly noticeable in the Roman Catholic Church after Vatican II. In 1967 Lenten interchurch Bible study groups began, and they still continue. In 1986 120,000 of their study books were sold.
- *An increased commitment to the observance of the Holy Communion or Eucharist; this is particularly noticeable in Protestant churches.*
- *The sharing of church premises for worship, not only between Protestants, but sometimes embracing Catholic congregations.*
- *An increase in lay involvement in all the mainstream denominations.*
- *A sharing of different kinds of 'spirituality' across denominational lines.*

The charismatic and renewal movements have been influential in this as have the ecumenical worship of communities like **Taizé** and **Iona**. Catholics and Protestants now enjoy each other's hymns.

Rosman suggests that schemes for church unions are 'too tidy' for many church members today. People want a unity that does not mean uniformity.

There is a danger here, however. The current pursuit of 'spirituality' has, in some cases, led to an indiscriminate acceptance of anything vaguely 'spiritual'. Some Churches Together projects and aspirations which are not deeply rooted in Scripture have embraced almost 'New Age' concepts.

The hallmark of the Christian spirituality which I would advocate is found in the Biblical revelation:

- ***It is an expression of devotion to the Person of Christ in his full Deity and Manhood and is dependent on his atoning work on the Cross.***

¹⁵⁶ Rosman, Doreen, *Evolution of the English Churches, 1500-2000*, Cambridge University Press, 2003, Ch 12.

- *It is in continuity with the ‘spiritualities’ of the Church throughout the ages, which have similarly been rooted in the Scriptures and the Person of Christ. It is indeed wonderful how these very different spiritualities, from the days of the Early Greek Fathers, through the mystical writers of the Middle Ages, to Lutheran and Puritan spirituality, have all, almost without exception, had something of the same ‘fragrance’ in them that drew C S Lewis to the Christian faith.*
- *It is cooperation in local witness, especially over the Easter period. It is the considerable cooperation of denominations in the work of Christian Aid.*
- *It is shared prayer and worship occasions, often using modern songs and choruses which have come out of the charismatic movement. The Women’s World Day of Prayer draws many denominations together. Churches Together brings many groups of Christians together in the yearly Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.*

The Week of Prayer began in 1908 when an American Episcopalian and an Anglican clergyman began to pray for Christian Unity in the week of 18-25 January (from the feast of St Peter to the feast of St Paul). Their hope was for a return of churches to Roman Catholicism as the way to achieve unity of Christians. Later, in the 1930s, a French Roman Catholic priest, Paul Couturier, widened the hope of the Week.

He did not believe that it was necessary for all Christians to become Catholics. He said, ‘We must pray not that others may be converted to us but that we may all be drawn closer to Christ.’ This week of prayer is now observed by many denominations, and since 1966 it has been backed by both the Roman Catholic Church and the WCC.

Even within the Reformed Protestant tradition there is evidence of a desire to rethink formerly entrenched positions. John M Frame, writing in 1991 as associate professor of apologetics and systematic theology at Westminster Theological Seminary-West in Escondido, California, speaks of openness among many Christians to see their denominational allegiances in perspective. He writes:

‘I am convinced that such openness will in time be used by God to bring his church to a oneness beyond anything we have experienced in our day – a oneness not based on doctrinal indifference, but on a fuller understanding of God’s word than any of our present groups can claim to have.’¹⁵⁷

Frame is thinking primarily of unity among Protestants, but there is even openness to the Catholic Church in his book, which is missing from many Reformed writings. For example, he tells of his wife attending a women’s Bible study for all denominations, which harmoniously included Roman Catholics. He points out that the Protestant Reformers did not believe that ‘the Roman Catholic Church had totally lost all the characteristics of a true church. They did not, for example, re-baptize people who had been baptized as Roman Catholics.’¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Frame, John M, *Evangelical Reunion; denominations and the Body of Christ*, Baker Book House, 1991, p 83.

¹⁵⁸ Frame, John M, *Evangelical Reunion; denominations and the Body of Christ*, Baker Book House, 1991, p 37.

In the last chapter of his book Frame gives 34 practical steps that can be taken to further unity among Christians.¹⁵⁹ Here are a few which are relevant to the theme of the present book:

- Avoid a partisan spirit when thinking of your denomination.
- Pray for God's plan for the reunion of his Church to come about.
- Get involved in local interdenominational Bible studies.
- Be open to the teaching of other denominations than your own.
- Respect the discipline of other denominations.
- Read what others say about your denomination.
- Do not insist on re-baptizing or re-ordaining people who enter your denomination from another orthodox (Nicene Creed) body.
- Find three good jokes about your own denomination or tradition and share them with your fellow members.
- Help your church to look outward rather than inward.
- Do not settle for gossip.

Evangelicals, Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox believers are now coming to appreciate how much they have in common (despite some acute differences) in their attitude to the authority of the Scriptures, in their position on ethical matters, in their devotion to the Person of Jesus and in their acceptance of the confession of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed.

The *Charismatic Movement* brought into being a whole host of Christian groups (often known under the umbrella terms of 'house churches' or 'restoration churches'), so causing further divisions of the Church of Christ, but Rosman points out that there is evidence of these groups beginning to appreciate the historic denominations and even, to some extent, cooperating with them.¹⁶⁰

As long ago as 1875 a movement to bring together Evangelical Christians for prayer and Bible study began in **Keswick**, Cumberland. This was under the banner '*All One in Christ Jesus*'. Today, arising mainly, but not entirely, from the Evangelical wing of the Church, have come other interdenominational gatherings: Greenbelt, New Wine, Grapevine, Soul Survivor, Living Water, and others – each attracting many thousands of delegates.

When the Pentecostal Movement began, early in the 20th Century, churches were divided by its dynamic 'new' approach to worship and witness. The 'mainstream' Pentecostal groups, *Elim* and the *Assemblies of God*, felt it their duty to witness to the truth of the restoration of the gifts of Pentecost to the Church – even if it meant dividing the churches further.

¹⁵⁹ Frame, John M, *Evangelical Reunion; denominations and the Body of Christ*, Baker Book House, 1991, pp 165-169.

¹⁶⁰ Rosman, Doreen, *Evolution of the English Churches, 1500-2000*, Cambridge University Press, 2003, Ch 12.

But things have changed. Richard Massey, in his biography of Donald Gee,¹⁶¹ who was one of the most important pioneer Pentecostal leaders, quotes from the publisher's foreword to Gee's book *Towards Pentecostal Unity* to show that Gee's concern for unity among Pentecostals was realistic enough to see that there could be no 'worldwide denomination to embrace all Pentecostals.' Quoting, Massey says of Gee:

'He was certain that organizational unity was an impossible dream. His vision and prayer, however, was that Pentecostals would drop petty differences and independent attitudes and then unite in spirit and various ways to evangelise the world. He called for "a world fellowship by recognizing, not organising."'

Gee himself quotes from a vision a missionary friend had. The man had written:

'I wonder if you still remember a vision the Lord gave me at that first United Pentecostal Missionary Conference in Johannesburg when you were out here?'

In that vision a large congregation of Christian workers could be seen, all looking forward, towards a platform where Jesus was standing. While they could all see the platform they could not see each other because there were wooden partitions around, so that none could have fellowship with the others. But it was clear they all had the same aim and that all were looking to Christ.

Then a wonderful quiet fire came down from heaven, going through these wooden partitions, which burnt up in that fire, but no smoke or flames could be seen and it did not disturb the people. The partitions just seemed to burn up and disappear.

And now the workers could see each other and greeted each other and there seemed to be such wonderful harmony and they continued looking forward to Christ who was still standing on the platform.

Although the wooden partitions had disappeared, it did not alter the position of the various workers; each one still kept his own individuality, but they all seemed to love each other and esteem each other highly.'

Gee's comment on this was:

'We are seeing all over the world the fulfilment of this vision. Those who want to maintain or rebuild the partitions should be very careful lest haply they work against God. Especially mistaken are any zealots trying to build up a new Pentecostal body, hoping thereby to absorb all the others. They never will.

It is time to burn our partitions, not one another.'

What Gee hoped for among Pentecostals, may we not hope for in a far wider sense? In the vision given, partitions were burned away but each person retained his own identity. In Gee's words, the call of this book is also for 'fellowship by recognizing, not organizing' but on a scale that takes in all Christian denominations. This seems a simple and easy goal,

¹⁶¹ Massey, Richard, *Another Springtime*, Highland Books, 1992, pp 168-169.

but it is not, because of the Church's past history. But the present moment is the time to begin to make it a reality.

In the 1960s, when the Charismatic Movement influenced churches not traditionally Pentecostal, Gee was wise enough not to look askance but, rather, to develop contacts with churchmen and bodies outside the mainstream Pentecostal movement, even to going as an observer with **David du Plessis** to the Faith and Order meeting in St Andrews in 1960.

To a Roman Catholic priest Gee wrote in 1960:

*'I am more convinced than ever of the essential unity of those truly in Christ, even when members of communions are as utterly diverse as Roman Catholic and Pentecostal. This is really an amazing thing. Perhaps more of a "miracle" than some of the things we mutually call "miracles." You have enriched my own spiritual life very much by this gesture of love and fellowship. In the Pentecostal Movement I am trying to inculcate a bigger vision in many ways, and I am sure the atmosphere is changing in that direction. In both the Roman Catholic and the Pentecostal groups there are extremists, which we must both deplore. I fear there are some among us who almost equate "Protestant" with "Christian" and there is almost as much ignorance and prejudice where the Orthodox churches are concerned. It is my privilege to teach Church History to the students here, and so I have some golden opportunities to inculcate a more balanced view.'*¹⁶²

The Charismatic Movement held a ground-breaking gathering of Christians of various denominations in Kansas City in 1977, all from within the movement, but including representatives of Episcopal, Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Baptist, Roman Catholic and other denominations.

Between the 1950s and 1980s, Billy Graham, an American Southern Baptist minister, preached to enormous crowds through his worldwide 'Crusades'. In the UK he not only brought together Evangelical Christians from many denominations, but earned the respect of church leaders who were not Evangelical. It can even be demonstrated that his influence throughout those years was such that the number of ordinands in Evangelical Colleges increased.

When Graham began his Evangelical ministry, for some years he was anti-Catholic, and Catholics on the whole were not at all disposed to support him. Yet in 1981 he had an interview with Pope John Paul II, and by that time he was glad to include Roman Catholics on his Crusades and accept the support of Catholic Churches.

Some Protestants regard his change of heart as a betrayal of the Gospel. How could a thorough Evangelical like Graham conscientiously have fellowship with Catholics who held unbiblical doctrines? In the next chapter we shall look at this issue.

For Evangelicals, Billy Graham and his Evangelistic Association were uniting influences in promoting worldwide mission. In 1974 an **International Congress on World Evangelisation** was held in Lausanne, Switzerland. There were 2,500 delegates from about 150 nations meeting under Graham as honorary Chairman 'to frame a Biblical declaration on

¹⁶² Massey, Richard, *Another Springtime*, Highland Books, 1992, pp 173ff.

evangelism – (and) state what the relationship is between evangelism and social responsibility.’¹⁶³

Out of this Congress came the **Lausanne Covenant**, drawn up under the leadership of the Anglican **John Stott** and signed by most delegates. The Covenant was to work toward ‘the whole church (taking) the whole gospel to the whole world.’ The Covenant represented a very wide spectrum of Evangelicals worldwide and stressed the uniqueness of the Bible as ‘the only written word of God, without error in all that it affirms and the only infallible rule of faith and practice’ for believers.

The uniqueness of Christ was also affirmed to counter growing pluralist pressures.

By the time of the Lausanne Congress, Evangelicals had become concerned about the Christian responsibility to a needy world.

A **Lausanne Committee for World Evangelism** was formed and a second Congress was held in 1989 in Manila with an even greater number of delegates (3,600 from 170 nations). Unlike the first Lausanne Congress, Lausanne II had a charismatic representation among its delegates.

In Vol 3 of *A History of the Ecumenical Movement*, Keith Clements and Todor Saber write:

*‘The WCC, sister ecumenical bodies and churches in Eastern Europe joined in paving the way for Billy Graham’s historic evangelism campaigns in Yugoslavia (1967); Hungary (1977 and 1989); Poland (1978); the GDR, Czechoslovakia and the USSR (1982); and Romania (1985). These spectacular events gathered millions of people, had tremendous impact on ecumenical relations and confidence-building, and created new perceptions of religion.’*¹⁶⁴

The kind of Evangelicalism Billy Graham now embraced was able to cross the political boundaries of East and West and draw together Christians of many denominations.

For many, all this was evidence of the Holy Spirit doing a new thing.

¹⁶³ *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, ed Lossky, Nicholas et al, WCC Publishing, Geneva/William B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1991, p 594.

¹⁶⁴ Ed Briggs, John; Oduyoye, Mercy Amba; Tsetsis, Georges, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement*, Vol 3, 1968-2000, WCC, Geneva, 2004, p 549.

CHAPTER 10 THESE BRIDGES CAN'T BE CROSSED?

I have several friends who think that the Christian Unity I am advocating is a betrayal of my Protestant faith. How can an Evangelical Christian have fellowship with people who pray to Mary and the saints, or believe in transubstantiation or see the Mass as a sacrifice?

In this chapter I want to address two questions. One, what is required to become a Christian? And two, if a person is truly a Christian what beliefs which they hold would cause a barrier to my fellowship with them?

WHAT IS REQUIRED TO BECOME A CHRISTIAN?

This question is dealt with in the *Catholic Truth Society's* booklet: *What Catholics Believe*¹⁶⁵ – here is the text taken from Section 9, *Becoming a Christian*:

'From the beginning, anyone who wished to become a Christian had to be baptized, that is, bathed or washed in running water as a sign of God's cleansing from sin. Thus everyone who wishes to become a Christian must first of all recognize that he or she is unworthy of God's love, and has deserved to lose his friendship, both as an individual and as a member of the human race.

But to say that we are sorry is not all we have to do in order to become a Christian. We must believe that Jesus is the Son of God, because, in believing this, we are led to love him as the Son of God, and so are filled with the love of God. There is no true love without faith, faith in the fact that God's Son loves us, and has come down to earth to show us the true way to the Father.

That is why, at every baptism service, there is a profession of faith by the candidate; and even when a tiny infant is being baptized, his parents have to make the act of faith for him, until he is old enough to make it personally. And that is also why we say the Creed, the act of faith, at each Sunday Mass, to make us realize that this act of faith is not something which we do once and for all, but need to do throughout our lives.'

The text goes on to say that:

'A Roman Catholic Christian is one who believes that being a Christian also implies accepting the Pope as the successor of St Peter, and accepting the continued guidance of the Catholic Church as to matters of faith and moral conduct.'

But the way outlined above to **become** a Christian differs little from the way it would be explained in many Protestant Churches, even Evangelical ones. The core of the matter is personal faith in Christ, for paedobaptists to be expressed vicariously by the godparents but later to be affirmed by the baptized individual, for credobaptists to be expressed at the time of baptism.

¹⁶⁵ *What Catholics Believe*, Catholic Truth Society, London, 1981, p 19.

Repentance and faith are at the heart of the way of salvation for Roman Catholics, Protestants and Eastern Orthodox believers alike. The accepting of the teaching role of the Pope is not stated in this booklet as the way a person becomes a Christian, but is to be the mark of one who has become a Roman Catholic Christian. This acceptance of the supreme teaching role of the Pope most Protestants would reject, but not the declared way to become a Christian in the first place.

SOME CATHOLIC DOCTRINES WHICH SOME PROTESTANTS FIND BARRIERS

Let us look at some particular Catholic doctrines which some Protestants find are barriers to fellowship and united witness and worship.

a) The Sacrifice of the Mass

The sacrifice of the Mass is a symbolic re-enactment of the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross. Official Catholic and Orthodox teaching is not that Christ is sacrificed again at each celebration of the Mass as he was on the Cross, but that in the Mass the victory and triumph of his death are made good to communicants. It is made clear by Catholic teaching that only Christ can take away our sins:

‘Only he – only Christ – was able and is always able to be the true and effective expiation for our sins and “for the sins of the whole world”. Only his sacrifice – and no one else’s – was able and is able to have a “propitiatory power” before God, the Trinity and the transcendent holiness.’¹⁶⁶

b) Transubstantiation

For Catholics and Orthodox believers the body and blood of Jesus are literally in the bread and wine after their consecration by a priest. It may be argued that this doctrine is false, but that it does not stop a person looking only to Jesus for salvation. It could be argued that such a high view of the Eucharist makes the believer more, not less, committed to Jesus as the way to eternal life.

In ‘folk’ Catholicism and Orthodoxy it may well be that a form of superstition surrounds this doctrine, and eating the host as literally the body of Christ is a substitute for real faith and repentance. But this is a misunderstanding of the doctrine.

It is interesting and sad to reflect that that in the Protestant Reformation the doctrine of the presence of Christ in the Lord’s Supper became the most disputed doctrine, the one that should have bound all believers together.

¹⁶⁶ Ed Flannery, Austin, OP, Vatican Collection, Vol 2, *Vatican 2, More Post-conciliar Documents*, Costello Publishing Co, 1982, p 74.

- **Luther** wanted to assert the ubiquity¹⁶⁷ of Christ's body, and so believed his presence was there in the bread and wine on the altar.
- **Calvin** wanted to assert that Jesus' body was in heaven, but his presence was brought to the table by the Holy Spirit (through the *epiclēsis*¹⁶⁸), and we could consider that in the Communion Christ was both represented and presented to the communicant.
- **Zwingli**, although he altered his position somewhat in later life, took the view that the Lord's Supper was simply a commemoration of the death of Christ.
- The **Anabaptists** generally held a similar position. It is curious that among an Anabaptist group such as the **(Plymouth) Brethren**, the Lord's Supper (the Breaking of Bread) in some of their Assemblies has assumed an almost sacramental character. If a Brethren Assembly has declined and can no longer function as a 'local church' it is often the case that the Breaking of Bread will continue to be observed even though all other meetings are ended; some of their Communion hymns are devout and beautiful expressions of the sense of the Lord's presence at the 'table'.
- **The Orthodox Church**, while holding to a real and bodily presence of Christ in the Communion, does not usually attempt to define it in philosophical terms such as transubstantiation.
- **Girolamo Savonarola**, the 15th Century prior of Florence, helpfully explains that the body of Christ, given for us on the cross, is now in heaven and that body is not the same as his body in the sacrament. Instead, the sacrament becomes the body of Christ because he chooses to be present in a special way. A direct parallel with this is seen (and celebrated by Protestants) when we recognise that a fellowship of believers is also truly the body of Christ – without us claiming that any of the people present were an actual physical part of the body that was crucified.

'Since the body of Christ is not present in the Blessed Eucharist by becoming locally present through His descent from heaven into the host, but solely by conversion, we must recognise that His presence in heaven differs in substance from His presence in the sacrament.'

*In heaven His whole body occupies a place and time; like other bodies. But He is present in the host, in an indivisible manner, and in a sense so wonderful, that this whole body is present in every fragment of the host. This means of existence is possible only to God, whose power exceeds the bounds of our intelligence.'*¹⁶⁹

c) **Justification by Faith and Works**

The Protestant, Roman Catholic and Orthodox all assert that God alone justifies the sinner. All true Christians agree that justification leads to sanctification and that sanctification is the

¹⁶⁷ *Ubiquity*. The ability to be present in every place.

¹⁶⁸ The *Epiclesis*. That part of the Eucharistic Prayer by which the priest invokes the Holy Spirit (or the power of His blessing) upon the Eucharistic bread and wine.

¹⁶⁹ *The Truth Of Our Faith Made Manifest In The Triumph Of The Cross*, Brother Girolamo Savonarola, ed and rewritten with Introduction and explanatory notes by James E Dainty. Available at <http://sites.google.com/site/savonarolaproject/> or at <http://freecourses.org/>.

outcome of being justified. Agreement on this doctrine was achieved early in the Protestant Reformation at the *Colloquy of Regensburg* (1541) – though the extreme positions on the doctrine seen in Luther and the later **Council of Trent** were not part of the discussions. It became to be a centre of contentious debate for many years to come.

The question of the relationship of works and faith in salvation foundered on the understanding of what salvation is. Both sides agreed that grace alone brought a person into a right relationship with God initially, but salvation as sanctification was then the issue. Protestants tended to separate justification from sanctification, Catholics to see both as integral to the experience of salvation.

In 1999 Lutherans and Catholics published a *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, claiming that Catholics and Lutherans hold a ‘shared understanding of justification’.

Here is a summary of what was agreed:

- Justification is the work of a Triune God.
- We receive salvation in faith and so become justified (initially through infant baptism, later confirmed by faith).
- This faith is God’s gift to us.
- We are sinners and can never merit God’s salvation.
- We cooperate in the justification only as an effect of grace (Catholic). There is no cooperation as such but believers are personally involved in justification in their exercising faith (Lutheran).
- Justification does not depend on the ‘life-renewing’ effects of grace on a believer (Lutheran). Agreed, God’s gift of grace in salvation remains independent of human cooperation (Catholic).
- Justification by faith and renewal of life are distinct but not separate.
- A Christian is both a sinner and a justified person (Luther’s dictum: *simul justus et peccator*) and only voluntary rejection of God brings separation from him.
- The works of the law cannot justify but the law is still needed as a standard of conduct for believers.
- God’s promise of forgiveness in Christ gives certainty of salvation.
- Good works follow justification as its fruits.
- Catholics assert the meritorious character of good works in the sense that there is a reward in heaven for good deeds, but this does not undermine their belief that justification always remains the unmerited gift of grace.
- Nothing done prior to justification by faith merits justification.

The Agreement concludes that what Lutherans now believe does not fall under the condemnation of the Council of Trent.

d) The Veneration of the Virgin Mary and the Place of Mary in Salvation.

Both Catholics and Orthodox have a deeper veneration for Mary than is usual among Protestants. *The Immaculate Conception of Mary* – the dogma that she was conceived without original sin – is held by the Roman Catholic Church, having been promulgated in 1854. The Eastern Orthodox Churches tend to reject this dogma, or suspend judgement on it, on the grounds that it would impair Mary's actual sinlessness and because their concept of original sin differs from that of the Western Churches.

The *Bodily Assumption of Mary* – the dogma that after her death she was assumed bodily into heaven – is held by Orthodox and Catholic Churches alike. It was promulgated in the West in 1950.

Both dogmas claim to have a long history of acceptance in the Church, though the Scriptural evidence for them is suspect and sparse. The earliest homily we have on the Bodily Assumption is by Theoteknos, Bishop of Livias, in Palestine, in the 6th Century. Neither of these dogmas about Mary is accepted by the Protestant churches.

These dogmas should not take away from the supremacy of Christ in salvation, because Mary's immaculate conception and bodily assumption do not save us. However, in the *Credo of the People of God* in the Vatican documents¹⁷⁰ (146) it is held that Mary 'cooperates with the birth and growth of divine life in the souls of the redeemed,' and most Protestants would be unhappy with that statement.

The whole issue of Tradition versus Scripture comes into focus on doctrines concerning Mary more than in any other area of doctrine. Protestants are concerned that there are unwarranted inferences made about Mary in Church tradition, which elevate her role in salvation and tend to undermine belief in only one mediator. Further, in what way can the Catholic Church speak of Christ being Mary's Redeemer if she was sinless in conception and life?

The word '*Mediatrix*' is used of Mary in Vatican II documents, but with a caveat. Using this term for Mary would seem to detract from the supremacy of Jesus, and it is hard to see how the Catholic position can be maintained, yet officially the teaching is that acceptance of Mary's role in bringing the Saviour into the world does not diminish Jesus' place as sole Saviour.

In Vatican II *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*¹⁷¹ this supremacy is maintained. The statement reads:

'In the words of the apostle there is but one mediator: "for there is but one God and one mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a redemption for all" (1 Tim 2.5-6). But Mary's function as mother of men in no way obscures or diminishes this unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its power. But the Blessed

¹⁷⁰ Ed Flannery, Austin, OP, Vatican Collection Vol 1, *Vatican Council II, The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents*, New Revised Edition 1992 (ninth printing), Dominican Publications, p 391.

¹⁷¹ Ed Flannery, Austin, OP, Vatican Collection Vol 1, *Vatican Council II, The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents*, New Revised Edition 1992 (ninth printing), Dominican Publications, pp 418-419.

Virgin's salutary influence on men originates not in any inner necessity but in the disposition of God. It flows forth from the superabundance of the merits of Christ, rests on his mediation, depends entirely on it and draws all its power from it. It does not hinder in any way the immediate union of the faithful with Christ, but on the contrary fosters it.'

Further on the text reads:

'...the Blessed Virgin is invoked in the Church under the titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix. This, however, is so understood that it neither takes away anything from nor adds anything to the dignity and efficacy of Christ the one Mediator.

The Church does not hesitate to profess the subordinate role of Mary.'

It must be said here that it would be unwise to pretend that there is no disagreement among Christians on the question of the role of Mary in salvation. A recent ARCIC document (May 2005) might give the impression that Protestants are coming round to accepting a Catholic view of Mary, but this is only to a very limited extent. Certainly a reappraisal of how Protestants view Mary is going on and there is a new awareness of the greatness of her role in bringing Christ into the world. Christian Unity has not to do with saying there are no differences of beliefs but of learning how to relate to people who are in Christ yet who differ from us on many points of belief.

e) Prayers to the Saints

For Catholic and Orthodox Christians the intercession of the saints, particularly that of the Virgin Mary, is important in their religious lives. But it is usually alien to the Protestant spirit, on the grounds that there is one mediator between God and men and that is Christ Jesus (I Timothy 2.5).

The Roman Catholic claim is that prayer to the saints 'in no way diminishes the worship or adoration given to God the Father, through Christ, in the Spirit; on the contrary, it greatly enriches it.'¹⁷² In any case, there is no suggestion that the saints save people, for Jesus is the only Saviour.

f) Purgatory

'Purgatory' is a name given to a time of purifying after death before reaching heaven. The soul envisaged in purgatory is elect, someone who dies 'in the grace of Christ' and is saved by Jesus and on the way to heaven, but who needs purifying; the ultimate destiny of the individual is not the issue.

¹⁷² Ed Flannery, Austin, OP, Vatican Collection Vol 2, *Vatican Council II, The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents*, New Revised Edition 1992, (ninth printing) Dominican Publications, pp 412-413.

In the Vatican II Document *The Credo of the People of God*, it is held that some souls in purgatory who ‘die in the grace of Christ’, still ‘must make expiation in the fire of purgatory.’¹⁷³ This phrase ‘make expiation’ is worrying to many Christians, Protestant and Orthodox. It is clearly Roman Catholic teaching that purgatory is for Christians who ‘had not made satisfaction with adequate penance for their sins and omissions.’¹⁷⁴ Such Christians are ‘cleansed after death with punishments designed to purge away their debt.’ This is clearly unacceptable to Protestants and to many Orthodox believers as well.

Timothy Kallistos, as Timothy Ware, an authority on Eastern Orthodoxy, wrote concerning Orthodox theologians’ view of purgatory:

*‘The majority would be inclined to say that the faithful departed do not suffer at all. Another school holds that perhaps they suffer, but if so, their suffering is of purificatory but not an expiatory character; for when a man dies in the grace of God, then God freely forgives him all his sins and demands no expiatory penalties: Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, is our only atonement and satisfaction.’*¹⁷⁵

It must be said also that not all Protestants reject the idea that there is no reckoning with God for the saved person, after death. What does Paul mean when he says that Christians who build well for God will receive a reward and those who do not will suffer loss (1 Corinthians 3.14-15)? And when he says: ‘For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due to him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad’ (2 Corinthians 5.10)?

g) Indulgences

Indulgences are not given to remove sins but are ‘remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven.’¹⁷⁶ They are meant to contribute towards the self-discipline of believers.

Most Protestants will deplore these dogmas and practices, but can they say that they *necessarily* prevent salvation being received by a person who is looking to Christ alone to save them? An Evangelical, in particular, may wonder how a person can hold to such views and yet look to Christ alone for salvation. But many Catholics and Orthodox do so. The multifaceted nature of salvation, seen as justification by faith, or deification, or as love excluding sin, or as abandonment to the Divine love, etc, should make accommodation of views of salvation a possibility.

¹⁷³ Ed Flannery, Austin, OP, Vatican Collection Vol 2, *Vatican Council II, The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents*, New Revised Edition 1992, (ninth printing) Dominican Publications, p 394.

¹⁷⁴ Ed Flannery, Austin, OP, Vatican Collection Vol 2, *Vatican Council II, The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents*, New Revised Edition 1992, (ninth printing) Dominican Publications, p 64.

¹⁷⁵ Ware, Timothy (Kallistos), *The Orthodox Church*, Penguin Books, 1967, p 259.

¹⁷⁶ Ed Flannery, Austin, OP, Vatican Collection Vol 1, *Vatican Council II, The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents*, New Revised Edition 1992, (ninth printing) Dominican Publications, p 75.

h) Confession

The sacrament of penance involves the confession of sins to a priest as one authorised by God to pronounce absolution. If the priest is seen only as *declaring* that God forgives the penitent sinner, then Protestants can have no real disagreement with that, but, officially, the Catholic Church teaches that the priest is the *means* by which forgiveness is procured.

A Protestant would hold, from Scripture, that only God can remove and forgive sins. In the Eastern Orthodox Church the priest is careful to declare he is present at the confession as a witness. Timothy Ware points out that care is taken in the Orthodox rite of Confession, by the position in which the penitent stands, facing a Cross, an icon of Christ and a copy of the Gospels, to emphasize ‘that in confession it is not the priest, but God, who is the judge, while the priest is only a witness and God’s minister.’¹⁷⁷

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is not so clear on the priest being only an agent, but says:

‘Only God forgives sins. Since he is the Son of God, Jesus says of himself, “The Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins” and exercises this divine power: “Your sins are forgiven”. Further, by virtue of his divine authority he gives this power to men to exercise in his name.

The Confessor is not the master of God’s forgiveness, but its servant.’

In December 2007, **Pope Benedict XVI** announced a plenary indulgence to pilgrims to Lourdes. To many Protestants this seems clearly to advocate a view of salvation by works, and creates a difficulty for fellowship with Catholics. But if such an indulgence is granted in a ‘purificatory but not expiatory character’ (to quote Kallistos) then it need not hinder fellowship.

i) The Supremacy of the Pope as Teacher for all Christians

The supremacy of the Pope is a formidable barrier for Church unions, but not for the kind of Christian Unity advocated in this book. Historically, accepting the Pope’s supremacy has been a matter of division between Roman Catholics and other Christians. Since Vatican II, Catholics can now view other Christians who do not submit to the supremacy of the Pope as fellow Christians.

The question of authority in the Church is one that each denomination has to face. Conferences, synods, and national assemblies constantly have to make ethical and doctrinal decisions for their members, and the recent turmoil in the Anglican Church shows how divisive the issues can become.

‘Spiritual ecumenism’ has to leave questions of authority and discipline to each denomination to work out. But if the three bases of Christian Unity advocated in this book are the foundation of fellowship between Christians, then those who accept these bases may enjoy fellowship even if a denomination should officially reject one or all of them. The concept of

¹⁷⁷ Ware, Timothy (Kallistos), *The Orthodox Church*, Penguin Books, 1967, p 259.

unity held in this book urges Christians to be loyal to their denominations but to constantly look beyond the borders of their denomination to enter an extra-denominational fellowship. This will seem a precarious basis of unity for those who hold that churchmanship entails submission to the authority of one Church.

A most hopeful sign of the growing unity between Catholics and Protestants can be found in Vatican *Dei Verbum* ('Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation'). The Roman Church now urges the frequent reading of the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, and especially the Gospels, for all its people, not just for the clergy and the religious. It also commends cooperation with 'separated brethren' in Biblical scholarship.

This is a long way from the Church's attitude in the fairly recent past when cooperation with non-Catholics in matters of theology and Biblical studies was opposed and there was little encouragement for ordinary church members to read the Scriptures daily for themselves. So it is remarkable how both Catholics and Protestants today can freely meet together to study the Bible and encourage one another in its truths.

Dei Verbum, however, is clear that the Tradition of the Church complements Scripture, and it argues strongly that through the apostolic succession, God has placed in its bishops the means of authenticating the Tradition. Most Protestants (and many Orthodox believers) would feel that some aspects of the Catholic tradition have added to the content of Scripture rather than having merely interpreted it.

Where 'facts' are put forward, as in the case of the Immaculate Conception and the Bodily Assumption of Mary, questions are raised as to where the authority for these claims to truth lies. *Dei Verbum* states:

'The Christian economy – since it is the new and definitive covenant, will never pass away and no new revelation is to be expected before the glorious manifestation of our Lord, Jesus Christ.'

Many Protestants would consider these dogmas as 'new public revelation' as far as the texts of Scripture are concerned. These could be an obstacle to Christian unity, but they need to be seen in the context of the vast areas where there are agreed interpretations of Scripture.

Despite the above doctrinal differences between Catholics and Protestants, collaboration in witness and service is still possible. J I Packer, a Protestant theologian, has written:

'Though Protestant and Catholic church systems stand opposed and official beliefs diverge on many aspects of the doctrine of salvation, those who love and trust the Lord Jesus Christ on both sides of the Reformation divide know that they are in a real sense united in him and are joint heirs of glory not only with him but with each other. Jesus' high-priestly prayer for the unity of his disciples as a visible reality in their life on earth (see John 17.20-23) therefore weighs heavily on their minds. This prayer clearly entails the thought that God's one international family should seek to look and sound like one family by speaking and acting as such, and that means aiming at togetherness wherever togetherness can be achieved. The alternative is to grieve the Lord. So where there is fellowship in personal faith, fellowship in service should follow, and the cherishing of isolationism as the more comfortable and less

*demanding way would be sin. The quest for togetherness in mission, up to the limit of what conscience on both sides allows, is thus both permissible and desirable.*¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁸ Packer, J I, *Cross Currents among Evangelicals*, Ch 5 in *Evangelicals and Catholics Together*, ed Colson, Charles and Neuhaus, R J, Hodder and Stoughton, 1996, p 171.

Having looked at some of the attempts to bring Christians together over the Church's 2,000 years of history, attempts which have largely failed, what can we do now in the 21st Century?

Our main thesis is this: there is in the present century an unprecedented '*kairos*'¹⁷⁹ opportunity for Christians to stand in united witness to the good news of Jesus Christ. Up to now the three main divisions of the Church, Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant, have gone their own ways and often been in opposition to each other. Now, for the first time in any significant way, the three traditions are listening to and even learning from each other.

But we must face facts. It is clear that there can be no unity with those who hold liberal 'non-realist' theologies. By a 'liberal' I mean one who is ready to break away from allegiance to a classical Christianity as seen in a commitment to the Bible as God's revelation to us for all times and a confession of the Creeds of the early Church.

Those who do have a basis of unity find it in classical Christianity as seen in God's revelation in the Bible, the Creeds and, for Catholics and Orthodox Christians, in the Church's traditions and dogmas.

That we have to talk of 'liberal' and 'classic' theologies at all is very unpleasant. Would it not be better to have a 'unity' that encompassed all views? The trouble is it would not be unity as portrayed for us in the Bible as being of 'one heart and mind' (Acts 4.32) on the central issues of the faith.

It would be wrong for either side to belittle the other. Sincere and devout liberals often have insights the traditionalists ought to consider, and liberals can find in traditionalist faith inspiration for daily living, but ultimately the two sides cannot journey as one.

However, there is a growing awareness of a oneness among those of all three traditions who hold to a traditionalist and Trinitarian expression of the Christian faith. A 'Christendom of souls' has emerged as an ideal to be pursued, so that, for the first time, Christians of all traditions are able to witness and worship together openly before the world. For almost the first time Christians can celebrate unity in diversity in a practical and not just a theoretical way. Doctrines which up to now have seemed to be irreconcilable can be faced up to openly and are being found either not to be irreconcilable or not unsettling to a common basis of faith.

There is evidence that, while different traditions are holding fast to their historical heritages, today the common basis of faith is found in the Nicene Creed, a confident acceptance of the Scriptures (Old and New Testaments) as the supreme authority for faith and conduct, and a personal conversion to Christ as Saviour, Lord and God.

¹⁷⁹ *Kairos*: An ancient Greek word meaning the right or opportune moment (the supreme moment).

If the opportunity for the Church to stand together in an increasingly secular and perhaps hostile world is not to be lost, practical steps must be taken to facilitate united worship and witness. This should stem from a real conviction that this is what our Lord wishes for his Church, and not just an attempt to try to fill emptying churches.

In this chapter we shall present evidence that Christians are now expressing their unity in ways which would not have been previously possible.

SOME EXPRESSIONS OF CHRISTIAN UNITY

a) The Maranatha Community

Maranatha was founded in 1980 when a Methodist and a Catholic met for prayer. *Unity, Healing and Renewal* were the key words bringing them together. From this has grown a Community of members from very many denominations who meet regularly to pray, worship and witness their oneness is Christ. In stressing continued full loyalty to one's denomination or fellowship, the Community is a choice example of how the true 'embedded' Church can be dug out and its members find each other.

Maranatha is steeped in prayer, and in a quite remarkable way, Maranatha members, worshipping together across denominational lines, work together to present a united Christian voice.

Simply because it is united and not seeking a party line, Maranatha can speak out effectively against the anti-Christian measures advocated by our secular society, and promote the interests of the kingdom of God. It has a very competent research team providing facts upon which to base its critique of modern society. This activity is supported by regular *Trumpet Call* e-mails and leaflets which alert Christians to respond to needs and issues.

As I write, Maranatha is continuing its long involvement in bringing reconciliation in Northern Ireland. It is monitoring the move to legalise euthanasia. It mobilised a great army of people to protest about the continuing genocide in Darfur and the injustices being suffered in Zimbabwe. It has inspired several projects working among the homeless and has warned of the danger of cannabis to mental health (a danger the present government is at last conceding does exist). All this is done interdenominationally, with no political axe to grind.

It is imperative that para-church organisations do not become hijacked by sectional interests. People with strongly held views tend to want others to conform to their way of seeing things.

We have considered how Roman Catholics will have to learn to hold their views of Papal Supremacy in such a way as not to hinder manifest unity with all other Christians; Protestants will have to learn to appreciate the presence of Christ in what they may regard as strange rituals and liturgies; and the Orthodox will have to learn to value diversity and some measure of innovation in the Church as well as tradition.

In the kind of unity we are thinking of here, not structural, but in witness and worship, all this should be possible. Indeed, it is already taking place within the Maranatha Community.

Intercommunion is not yet practised in the sense of literally taking bread and wine together, but it is already practised at Maranatha conferences and retreats in the sense that Protestants sit with Catholics as they celebrate the mass, without actually taking the elements, and vice-versa. Everyone is encouraged to attend the Roman Catholic Mass, and Protestants are encouraged to receive a blessing alongside those who receive communion. And the clergy of all traditions share together in the Protestant Communion. Most recently a Roman Catholic priest took the intercessions, while nine other clergy ministered the other parts of the liturgy.

I would call this *sitting-in* a ‘Sensing the Presence of Christ’. If it is objected that this is a sham and not the real thing, it can be urged that it is certainly better than sitting apart.

A more difficult situation arises when considering intercommunion with Eastern Orthodox believers, who have an even stronger sense of the singularity of their church than do many Roman Catholics. But ‘Sensing the Presence of Christ’ would be a step forward here, too.

Attending each other’s communion services is already being practised by other groups, even when fully participating in intercommunion as such is not yet possible. A correspondent wrote to me:

‘Cooperative ministry to seafarers in the Port of Rotterdam, while I was there, was exceptional, especially with regard to the Eucharist, which was purposely celebrated in an identical way by Roman Catholics, Anglicans, and Dutch Reformed.’

b) Churches Together

In 1990 **Churches Together** was formed from the ecumenical work of the **British Council of Churches (BCC)**, which was constituted in 1942 by the cooperation of 16 denominations and several organisations. Its doctrinal basis was that of the WCC, and therefore Trinitarian. By 1950 the BCC had 119 members appointed to represent member churches covering the whole of the British Isles, and it operated through 175 local councils of churches.¹⁸⁰

The basis of Churches Together reads:

‘The Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland is a fellowship of Churches in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the Scriptures and therefore seek to fulfil their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.’

Gestures are made from time to time to try to show that progress is being made ecumenically. In the spirit of Churches Together three ecumenical canons have been appointed to the staff of Blackburn Cathedral: the German Lutheran Bishop of Braunschweig (Brunswick), a Methodist District Chairman and the Roman Catholic Dean of Blackburn.

¹⁸⁰ Rouse, Ruth and Neill, Stephen C, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517-1948*, SPCK, London, 1954, p 625.

Ministers, priests and laypeople in all denominations are hard-pressed to do all they have to do without further ecumenical activities. The correspondent quoted above wrote to me:

'The diaries of most denominational ministers and lay-leaders are too full. Where local churches share the same units of mission-field it is much easier to cooperate.'

A speaker at a Churches Together meeting recently made the same judgement, and said that we should think of sharing in each other's meetings and activities rather than of multiplying ecumenical gatherings. He cited as an example the visitation of old people in care homes. If one church has a surplus of people willing to visit, they should offer to go on the rota for visiting of a church which has not enough workers. Together, most needs can be met by basic care and love offered in Christ's name.

P Mark Achtemeier tells of a Presbyterian church in South Dakota which was approached by nearby local Roman Catholics who were planning a prayer service for their (the Presbyterians') church and its work.¹⁸¹ This same Roman Catholic Church later made cakes to raise money for a building programme of a Baptist Church. Inspired by Churches Together there is joint worship, albeit just for one week a year, in the *Week of Prayer for Christian Unity*.

c) *Traduction Œcumenique de la Bible*

Inter-church academic study of the Bible and translation work is exemplified by the production of the *Traduction Œcumenique de la Bible*, a joint effort of the Protestant *Société Biblique Française* and the Catholic *Editions du Cerf* in 1988.

d) **The Sharing of Meeting-places**

The sharing of meeting-places by different denominations is now becoming more common. Resources are often wasted by keeping several meeting-places going in one location. Would it not be better if, say, the Anglicans, Methodists and United Reformed believers in a town shared the same building? This may or may not lead to an amalgamation of services. Each congregation could have its own order and identity.

e) **Sharing Baptism**

Some Anglican and Free churches already observe both paedo- and credo-baptisms. On Easter Day 2008 the Archbishop of York, **Dr John Sentamu**, baptised 27 candidates in a water tank outside the Minster. Most were baptised by immersion, some with one immersion, others with a threefold immersion. A baby was christened and a girl of seven baptised by immersion. An ecumenical group in York, *One Voice*, had organised the event. The Archbishop, helped by representatives of the candidates' own churches, did the baptizing. It was a significant display of Christian unity, but it was also a statement from a

¹⁸¹ Ed Braaten, Carl E and Jenson, Robert W, *The Ecumenical Future*, William B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2004, p 197.

very senior Anglican bishop that differences of modes of baptism need not hinder visible unity in the Church.

f) The Warrington Church History Society

Societies for the study of Church History can be a fruitful means of ecumenism. The *Warrington Church History Society* was founded in 1980, and this interdenominational group has enjoyed many fascinating and informative lectures and outings to a wide range of historical sites. Each year the Society enjoys a traditional carol service in one or other of the Warrington churches. The particular value of a Church History Society is that local histories are often part of the curriculum as well as general Church History, and this brings a sharing of the Christian heritage of a locality.

g) Social and Political Action

Christians are combining forces today to address many issues affecting Christian morality and faith. All traditions are finding how much they have in common in concerns over abortion, the regulation of drugs, the expansion of gambling casinos, the Sexual Orientation Regulations, incitement to religious hatred measures, third world debt, environmental issues, and religious discrimination.

The Maranatha Community gives a lead in many of these concerns and its voice is well respected in Parliament. The Community works alongside other interdenominational groups who are doing similar work. As an example of cooperation on these issues, Maranatha cites at least 13 or 14 agencies concerned with the issue of abortion.¹⁸²

h) Shared Publicity and Public Relations

Many parish magazines publicise all the activities of the churches in their area instead of just their own. Also agencies like *Christian Publicity Organisation* provide publicity and outreach materials for use by Churches.

i) Shared Resources

In some areas Roman Catholic schools welcome such interdenominational bodies as *Youth for Christ* into their assemblies and even their classes.

j) Ecumenical Centres and Communities

Ecumenical centres like *Taizé* in France still attract many Christians of all denominations, and there are many Sisterhoods and Brotherhoods throughout the UK which gather together Christians of all denominations for worship and witness. There is one such Sisterhood in

¹⁸² Maranatha's *Trumpet Call*, May 2007.

West Kirby, near to my home, the **Sisters of Jesus' Way**, modelled on the **Evangelical Sisters of Mary** of Darmstadt in Germany.

k) Shared Evangelism

The Alpha Course from **Holy Trinity Brompton**, an Anglican Church in London, has crossed denominational barriers in a remarkable way, though it did not set out to be an ecumenical venture.

Fr Raniero Cantalamessa, who has served as the *Preacher to the Papal Household* since 1980, has visited and spoken at Holy Trinity, and highly commends the course to Roman Catholics – an *Alpha Course for Catholics* was set up in 2003. He has urged Alpha to continue as a ministry to the whole Church of Christ.

The course began in 1992 as an introduction to the Christian faith, and is now used by all the major denominations, worldwide.

Every two years about 1,000 church leaders from 76 countries attend Alpha's international week in London. In May 2007 this conference was attended by the Catholic Archbishop of Moscow, three Catholic bishops from Peru, and three Anglican bishops from India, and more than 30 denominations were represented. A delegation from Zambia reported that every prisoner in their country was able to listen to Alpha talks by radio and a report from Russia announced that 'on the stage today we have Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox, all together running Alpha.'¹⁸³

Alpha is Evangelical and Charismatic in style and doctrine and some Evangelicals on the Reformed wing reject it as being too Charismatic and/or as compromising Evangelical truth. The fact that Alpha stresses the need for a personal conversion experience and an encounter with the Holy Spirit shows how much traditional Charismatic Evangelicalism has reached into areas not considered traditionally Evangelical. The success of Alpha (in some 7,000 UK centres, embracing 25% of all UK churches, and through 31,000 courses worldwide) demonstrates how denominational antagonisms are less and less apparent in today's Church.¹⁸⁴

l) Shared Community Action

Inter-church cooperation in serving the community has been successfully undertaken in several cities over the past few years. This has been with an enthusiasm for united witness which has not been seen before. The aim of these ventures, particularly in inner-city areas, was to renovate and restore neglected areas physically, socially and spiritually. Examples have included *Soul Survivor*, *Soul in the City* in London, *Merseyfest* on Merseyside, and *Hope 08* nationally.

¹⁸³ A feature in *Church of England Newspaper*, UK Focus, July 2007.

¹⁸⁴ Brookes, Andrew, *The Alpha Phenomenon*, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, 2007, pp 22, 27.

m) Para-church Organisations

Para-church bodies have evolved, especially with the use of modern technology and the internet, into very important agencies for evangelism and social welfare, but also for promoting Christian Unity. The vast majority were begun by Protestants, mainly Evangelicals, but from the middle of the 20th Century Catholics, and to a lesser extent, Orthodox believers have contributed to their work.

I define a para-church body as an organisation that is not a church or denomination in itself but exists independently of them to further the evangelistic, social welfare or teaching ministries of the Church at large. Monastic and religious orders are not included in this definition as they are usually an integral part of a denomination.

Para-church groups came into existence in Protestantism as early as the 17th Century. In Germany, P J Spener's *collegia pietatis* were in this category as '*ecclesiolae in exclesia*', 'little churches within the Church', to promote the renewal of the Church. Spener's groups, like John Wesley's Methodist societies, were rejected by their own churches, and to the degree that this happened, they can be called 'para-church' movements.

Practically all para-church groups have come into being to meet a need which it was considered the churches were not meeting, or to enlarge or improve their work and witness.

Protestant missionary societies such as the London Missionary Society and CIM (1865) were founded as inter-denominational societies to help churches of various denominations in their work overseas. The CMS and SPG were founded primarily for the missionary work of Anglicans.

Most of the missionary societies were para-church in spirit and effect. Without its para-church societies the Church of England would have still never officially sent out a single missionary.

At home, para-church bodies such as *City Missions* (1830s) and the *East London Christian Mission* (1865) were founded to meet the needs of the poor in the growing industrial cities. Though both these bodies eventually became 'churches' in their own right, they were founded on non-denominational lines.

From the Hope 08 handbook can be drawn up the areas of service in which para-church bodies are working in the United Kingdom. Ninety-five associated groups are listed in this handbook. The book states:

'From its beginning Hope 08 has been an ecumenical initiative which can thus witness to the power of the gospel to unite people in a world of many divisions.'

'Hope 08 is a God-given opportunity for the Church to work together and share the good views of Jesus in all its fullness.'

n) Shared Study Courses

There is a wide range of *Study Courses* on the Bible and the Christian life. Some are on websites, other use booklets and envisage groups getting together, either in church settings or completely secular ones, and often with a meal as part of the programme.

o) Bible Colleges

Out of the 14 listed as ‘The UK’s leading Bible Colleges’ in the *Church of England Newspaper*, 10 October 2007, only five had denominational affiliations. Even the ‘denominational’ Colleges attracted students from denominations other than their own.

p) Pastoral help agencies; support for families and marriage

The *Marriage Course* and parenting courses are becoming established and grew out of previous inter-denominational successes such as the Alpha Course. Other *Church Growth* agencies are helping to produce leadership and discipleship in Churches in order for them to grow.

q) Relief organisations

Together, **Christian Aid**, **Tear Fund**, **World Vision** and many other organisations provide emergency and long-term aid to victims of ‘war, poverty, famine, disease and natural disaster.’

r) Specialist ministries

Many specialist ministries can only work effectively on the understanding that different denominations will work cooperatively or support the work of non-denominational agencies. This approach is seen in chaplaincy work in hospitals, prisons, universities and the armed forces. In addition para-church bodies help churches to engage in ministering to prisoners, members of the armed forces, the police, nurses and doctors.

One agency places Bibles in hotels and hospitals, schools and prisons and others work with the police in partnership for reducing crime.

An interesting development in specialist ministries has been the forming of fellowships within professions. Such groups as the **Christian Medical Fellowship** draw people from all traditions for fellowship and specialist support in their work.

s) Missions and Campaigns

Missions and campaigns were strong and effective in the past and are now less popular. Towards the end of the 20th Century Catholics became welcome members of these outreaches, which were previously mainly attended by Evangelical protestants.

We need constantly to remind ourselves of the simple tie that binds all Christians together and at the same time be aware of the many ways that faith has been expressed sincerely by our many fellow Christians.

WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?

When my fellow Protestants say they could never have fellowship with Catholics because of their doctrine of transubstantiation, I have to ask on what level they could not have fellowship. Could they not even pray with them, sing hymns with them, weep and rejoice with them? It really goes back to the principle that Anthony Norris Groves enunciated – *life, not light* is the basis of Christian fellowship. There are Catholics who have not submitted to Jesus as Saviour and Lord just as there are similarly Protestants or Orthodox who have not done so. But where the divine life is apparent, I can have fellowship in worship and witness and action.

We can be hopeful today that there can be progress in visible unity in the Church, but there does not seem much prospect of the Protestant-Catholic-Orthodox divide being overcome in any structural or ecclesiological way: the differences in concept of the nature of the Church are so entrenched and so diverse. The very essence of Protestantism is the emphasis on the individual's approach to God, while the sacramentalist system has required the Church to mediate between God and the individual.

John H Erikson points out in *The Ecumenical Future*¹⁸⁵ that differences in Church order which the Protestant Reformation underlined are still with us today, when doctrinal differences are gradually being resolved. He writes:

'By the closing decades of the 20th century, that century of remarkable ecumenical advances, differences in Order would continue to divide, even though disagreement in Faith had lost much of its divisive power.'

Michael Root writes in the same volume of essays¹⁸⁶ of the dilemma ecumenists are in today because of the different views of what the Church is. Each tradition is separated from the others by its ecclesiology, yet all share the marks of 'Church'. Now even Orthodox and Catholic theologians have come (or are coming) to accept that Christian groups other than themselves can be thought of as 'Churches' in some sense. This points to an acceptance that there can be some kind of Christian Unity without Churches being united organically.

The answer to the dilemma is, first and foremost, to define who and what is a Christian.¹⁸⁷ The highly complex sacramental system which developed in the Orthodox and Catholic Churches would seem to tell us that the unregenerate is brought to salvation by ceremonies conducted by the Church. The infant is brought to Christ through baptism. This is the medieval way of salvation, which began to evolve in Church history in the 2nd Century.

¹⁸⁵ Ed Braaten, Carl E and Jenson, Robert W, *The Ecumenical Future*, William B Eerdmans Publishing Co 2004, pp 149-150.

¹⁸⁶ Ed Braaten, Carl E and Jenson, Robert W, *The Ecumenical Future*, William B Eerdmans Publishing Co 2004, pp 106ff.

¹⁸⁷ Coad, F R, *A History of the Brethren Movement*, The Paternoster Press, 1968, p 277.

Even some Protestant churches today, heirs of the teaching of the Magisterial Reformers who held to a medieval concept of the church as co-extensive with society, while not subscribing to baptismal regeneration, see infant baptism as bringing a child into God's covenant with the Church. But these churches would insist that, for a child to become a Christian, there must be personal faith in Jesus as Saviour.

In 1990 Keith A Fournier wrote a book with the title *Evangelical Catholics*.¹⁸⁸ In it he claimed to be such a Christian and held it up as the most natural of descriptions for a believer in Jesus. Yet he remained committed to the teaching and discipline of the Roman Catholic Church. He writes of his conversion experience:

“Lord, I want to believe,” I cried out, “If you are real, please come to me and save me. I confess my sin, and I ask your forgiveness. I invite you, Lord Jesus Christ, to be my Saviour.”

My Protestant friends say to me that he cannot be both Evangelical and Catholic. But if his turning to Christ was real (and only God knows his heart) I must accept he has become my brother in Christ, even though he is holding some views which I reject. Fournier also writes:

‘An evangelical wave is sweeping Christian churches of every tradition, including my own. And it is leaving in its wake renewed and committed believers who are striving to re-evangelise their churches and evangelise the nations. But, for the most part, these believers are doing their work apart from one another.’

Even in a sacramentalist system, personal faith is seen as essential to salvation. While devotion to Mary and the saints in the Catholic and Orthodox traditions remains very high, they are not meant to eclipse a personal faith in Jesus, nor to replace him as supreme Saviour of mankind.

The doctrinal basis of the WCC is still a firm assertion of a belief in a Trinity and in the real humanity and deity of Jesus.

The Orthodox ‘Jesus Prayer’, ‘Lord Jesus, Son of God, be merciful to me a sinner,’ echoes in the heart of all true Christians of whatever denomination. I cannot separate myself from, ignore or despise anyone who cries out to Jesus like this. They may be, from my point of view, mixed up with all sorts of errors, but they share with me new life in Christ and I must make the effort to meet them, pray with them and help them as I am able. If I make understanding of the faith rather than possession of Jesus the basis of my fellowship with other believers, I am putting a stumbling block in the way of real unity.

All three traditions see the Cross of Christ as the means of our forgiveness and his Resurrection as the empowering of the believer to live a holy life. The doctrine of justification by grace through faith, a cause of contention in the Church at the time of the Reformation, no longer seems to be a divisive factor for many Christians today. At a ‘folk religion’ level there are Catholics who are trying by their works to merit salvation, as there are Protestants who are doing the same. It is the task of teachers in all three traditions to explain that this is not the Gospel.

¹⁸⁸ Fournier, Keith A, *Evangelical Catholics*, Thos Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 1990.

The Eastern Orthodox emphasis on salvation as deification, *'theosis'*, is a doctrine rooted in the New Testament and one that is coming to be appreciated more and more in the West.¹⁸⁹ The statement by Athanasius, 'The Son of God became man, that we might become god,' (the second 'g' is always lowercase since man can never become God) indicates the concept beautifully. He amplifies the meaning when he says *theosis* is 'becoming by grace what God is by nature.'¹⁹⁰

WHAT IS THE WORD OF GOD?

If, then, a personal love for Jesus and dependence upon him for salvation is one of the bases for Christian Unity, a second is a determination to be ruled by the teaching of the Bible. Now this raises a whole host of questions about *hermeneutics* (interpretation) and authority. Yet in all three traditions there is a declared allegiance to the supremacy of the Bible in all matters of faith and conduct.

But what is meant by '*submitting*' to the Word of God? How do we find an attitude to Scripture which will be a uniting factor among Christians? Clearly, fundamentalism is not a uniting factor, if by the term we mean a rigid adherence to a literalist view of the Scripture. Most scholars in the Catholic and Orthodox traditions, and many in the Protestant tradition, reject modern fundamentalism while still believing that God speaks uniquely through the Bible to his people today.

The fundamentalism of today is a phenomenon not known by the Early Church or by the Protestant Reformers. The key to unity in Biblical interpretation is not a modern non-realist treatment of Scripture, but a willingness to accept that my fellow exegete is sitting under the authority of the Word of God, and accepting it seriously as God's voice to us in all ages.

In other words, it is a 'classic' interpretation of Scripture which binds Christians of all denominations together, rather than an interpretation which breaks away from a serious attempt to do justice to the very words of Scripture.

Most Christians, in all three traditions, share this 'classic' way of interpreting Scripture, and believe that God is speaking through the Biblical revelation today.

Origen, John of Damascus, Anselm, Luther, Wesley all thought of 'God' in different ways, and there are as many ways of understanding Christ as there are believers in him, but that is not to say these ways are necessarily alien to each other.

The traditional ways of interpreting Scripture, which take seriously the existence of the supernatural, can be, and in fact are, a uniting factor for Christians. It is quite extraordinary what breadth there is for interpretation within the constraints of such a 'classic hermeneutic'.

¹⁸⁹ *Deification (theosis)*: This doctrine is taught in the New Testament in the following passages: John 14.23, 15.4, 17.21-23; 1 John 2.24, 4.12-26; Ephesians 2.19-22; Colossians 1.27; and 2 Peter 1.4.

¹⁹⁰ Athanasius, *De Incarnatione Verbi Dei* ('On the Incarnation').

Vincent de Lérins spoke of a ‘progress’ in the faith, but not of change. There can be progress in hermeneutics without changing the classical way of interpreting the Scriptures. For example, the term ‘*homoousios*’ is a development in interpreting those scriptures which relate to the relationship of Father and Son in the Godhead, but it is not an overturning of the truth of the intrinsic deity of the Son.

Philip Edgcumbe Hughes writes:

‘...the Bible is for everyone. It is not the preserve of the specialist. To allow it to become the book of the expert, on whose pronouncements the average person is dependent, is an abuse and inversion that can only lead to disastrous results. The effect is to take the Bible out of the hands of those for whom it is intended, that is the totality of mankind.’¹⁹¹

It is remarkable how the classical ‘realist’ interpretation of Scripture seems to work. It produces faith, love, hope and unity.

For a short time I taught men and women in Indian Colleges who were working among tribal groups. The backgrounds of the students and the people they ministered to and my own were very different from each other. Yet we were bound by a common love of the Scriptures and understood each other’s comprehension of them. This is a particularly valuable contribution the ‘classic’ approach can make to Christian Unity.

Is ‘**inerrancy**’ needed for a high view of Scripture? ‘Inerrancy’ usually means the view that if a ‘fact’ is recorded in Scripture, then that ‘fact’ cannot be erroneous. Some notable Evangelical scholars do not subscribe to inerrancy, yet still regard Scripture as God-inspired and authoritative and normative for faith and Christian behaviour.

John Stott cautions against the use of this term as detracting from what should be a proper response to the Scriptures in submission and obedience. He writes:

‘...it is unwise and unfair to use “inerrancy” as a shibboleth by which to identify who is evangelical and who is not. The hallmark of authentic evangelicalism is not subscription but submission. That is, it is not whether we subscribe to an impeccable formula about the Bible, but whether we live in practical submission to what the Bible teaches, including an advance resolve to submit to whatever it may later be shown to teach.’¹⁹²

Christian unity lies not in an intellectual assent to total inerrancy, but in a living belief in God as revealed in the Scriptures as the one who gives spiritual life to a person.

The Roman Catholic Church sees Scripture as fundamental to all its doctrines and dogmas. The Orthodox see tradition as building on and interpreting Scripture, but in no way replacing it. The present Roman Catholic attitude to Scripture is one very close to a conservative Protestant Evangelical view.

¹⁹¹ Hughes, Philip Edgcumbe, essay: *The Truth of Scripture and the problem of historical relativity in Scripture and Truth*, ed Carson, D A, and Woodbridge, John D, IVP 1986, p 176.

¹⁹² Stott, John, *Evangelical Truth, a personal plea for unity*, IVP 1999, pp 73-74.

Chapter 3 of the *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, Dei Verbum*, deals with the divine inspiration of Scripture. We read:

'Since, therefore, all that the inspired authors, or sacred writers, affirm should be regarded as affirmed by the Holy Spirit, we must acknowledge that the books of Scripture, firmly, faithfully, and without error, teach the truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the sacred Scriptures.

Thus... "all Scripture is inspired by God, and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3.16-17).¹⁹³

The Orthodox Church, likewise, claims to have Scripture as its foundation for faith and practice, but, with the Catholic Church, claims also that the Church, through 'tradition,' has faithfully interpreted the Scriptures throughout its history. Timothy (Kallistos) Ware writes:

'The Christian Church is a Scriptural Church: Orthodoxy believes this just as firmly, if not more firmly, than Protestantism. The Bible is the supreme expression of God's revelation to man, and Christians must always be "People of the Book." But if Christians are People of the Book, the Bible is the Book of the People; it must not be regarded as something set up over the Church, but as something that lives and is understood within the Church (that is why one should not separate Scripture and tradition).¹⁹⁴

Most Protestants are uneasy about the concept of tradition being placed alongside the Scriptures, but even Protestantism finds it hard to do away with tradition. I know Protestants who would claim that they abide by the Reformation principle of '*sola scriptura*' but are firmly rooted in a Calvinist or Anabaptist tradition and interpret the scriptures with the help of a body of writings holding their viewpoint almost exclusively. Equally, few liberal Protestants can escape a 'tradition' in their handling of Scripture and many have a demythologising tradition which treats the texts in a 'non-realist' way.

How then can we tell which 'tradition' is acceptable? I suggest that if a tradition is consistent with the plain meaning of the Creeds, and so uplifts Christ as Saviour, Lord and God, and coheres with a doctrine of the Trinity, it is acceptable. Protestants will say that the Catholic tradition teaches more than the bare text of the Creeds and will find that hard to cope with, but at least it can be held that none of their traditions undermine the Creeds. That is why adherence to the classical Creeds is so important for Christian Unity. When a tradition parts company with the Creeds, then we must part company with that tradition.

If it is true that Christians in their traditions are more or less divided on ecclesiological matters, yet understand each other better on doctrinal issues and views of spirituality, then it seems sensible for Christians to speak with one voice where they can.

¹⁹³ Ed Flannery, Austin, OP, Vatican Collection Vol 1, *Vatican Council II, The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents*, New Revised Edition 1992, (ninth printing) Dominican Publications, pp 757.

¹⁹⁴ Ware, Timothy, *The Orthodox Church*, Penguin Books, 1967, p207.

It is not likely, in the foreseeable future, that either the Roman Catholic or the Orthodox Church will abandon its claim to be the one true Church, or that either will accept women into the priesthood.

The evidence seems to be that there has been a hardening of attitude towards other churches by the Roman Catholics since the turn of the Millennium. The Vatican document *Dominus Iesus* of 2000 cautioned Catholics not to think of their own church in terms of equality with other denominations. There was a sense in which any church other than the Roman church was not a 'proper' church.

Recently, Pope Benedict XVI, Joseph Ratzinger, who was behind *Dominus Iesus*, has repeated that warning to the dismay of many ecumenists.¹⁹⁵ Yet the door of fellowship opened in Vatican II towards other Christians will not be shut by this later pronouncement. It simply underlines what this book has been maintaining, that the pursuit of formal union schemes with Rome or the Orthodox Churches is not the way forward.

The Church is made up of people who love and worship Christ and follow his teaching and such are embedded in the historic churches. Our task is to seek them out as brothers and sisters largely lost to us by denominational divisions, to have fellowship with them in worship, witness and service: to 'dig them out', in Vidler's phrase. Digging requires effort; it will not be done by wishful thinking.

¹⁹⁵ Article in *The Times*, 11 July 2007. Subsequently (September 2007), Cardinal Walter Kaspar has explained that the Roman Catholic Church does not infer that other churches are false churches but that they have a different way of understanding what the church is.

CHAPTER 12 NOW WHAT?

This book began with my finding a simple company of believers in an East Yorkshire country town and subsequently finding that their confession of faith in Christ as Saviour and Lord was consistent with the confession of the faith in all three classical traditions of Christianity. The way they worshipped, having no clergy as such nor any central Church authority, made them so very different from the majority of Christian churches. But I found Christ in their midst as I was later to find him in Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, Reformed, Catholic and Orthodox hearts and in the lives of many other believers.

It seems to me that there are several reasons why Christians hold back from ecumenical activity.

REASONS WHY CHRISTIANS HOLD BACK FROM ECUMENICAL ACTIVITY

a) **The word ‘ecumenical’ itself.**

The word, from the Greek ‘*oikumenikos*’, ‘of the inhabited earth’, means universal, worldwide. So to have ecumenical interests is to have the interest of the worldwide church at heart.

But for many Christians, Catholic or Protestant, the word is associated with the idea of compromise. It is assumed that ecumenism means finding the lowest common denominator of the Christian faith and having to give up the rest.

However, that is not the concept of ecumenism envisaged in this book. Again and again the idea of ‘unity in diversity’ is expressed across a wide range of denominational loyalties. There is a basic core of ‘primary truths’ which cannot be yielded, which true Christians of all denominations hold.

These truths are those which Christians throughout history have held: that Jesus, true Man and true God, is our Saviour and Lord; that the Bible holds the revelation that brings us that truth and is the supreme authority for faith and conduct; and that the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed is the essential Confession of the whole Church.

A person or church may hold ways of expressing these primary truths which seem strange to other believers, but if they are ways which do not undermine the truths, they must be accepted as part of the Church’s rich diversity.

b) **Some believers avoid ‘ecumenism’ because it seems to be dominated by either ‘charismatic’ Christians or so-called ‘liberals’ who do not have a high view of the authority of the Bible.**

It is true that in Churches Together both these groups can be found, but that is no reason to avoid trying to ‘dig out’ the embedded Church within those groupings who love and worship

Christ and are trying their best to serve him. Of course there will be difficulties if the Bible is not authoritative for some members of ecumenical groups. It is not unity at any price.

I have quoted in this book instances of ‘Reformed’ Christians who are happy to engage in common witness with Roman Catholics, knowing that many of these will be ‘charismatic’ Catholics. In his *Foreword* to **Dr Martyn Lloyd Jones’** book *Joy Unspeakable*, Peter Lewis says both the charismatic movement and the renewed interest in Reformed and Puritan teaching have contributed to the revitalisation of the Christian Church – but that they are both in danger of becoming stale. Instead of seeing the two movements in opposition, Lewis sees they have much to contribute to each other. He writes:

‘We are beginning to see an appreciation of expository and doctrinal preaching and teaching among “charismatics” and a real attempt to introduce greater congregational participation and more contemporary expression of praise into certain “reformed” churches and meetings. At a deeper level, the profounder reaches of spiritual experience are already sought and shared by both alike. For many reasons, biblical, historical, and experiential, it is becoming increasingly untenable and even absurd to see these two movements as fundamentally alien to one another.’¹⁹⁶

c) For some Protestants ecumenism means a ‘sell out’ to Rome, or a ‘take-over’ by that Church.

Certainly some of the Papal pronouncements, particularly in the 19th Century, might have given the impression that Protestants needed to be absorbed into the Catholic Church in any meaningful ecumenism. But Vatican II made it clear that, while the Roman Church longs for all Christians to come into its fellowship (*koinōnia*), those who stayed outside were to be regarded as ‘separated brethren’, with no compulsion for them to come in.

Just a cursory reading of church history makes it clear that there are too many strongly held convictions within the Christian body for a unified, monolithic church ever to become a reality.

The Orthodox Church, even more strongly, considers their communions to be manifestations of the one true Church, though they can relate to other bodies of believers as containing fellow Christians. However, many Catholic and Orthodox believers see ecumenism as a threat to their standing as being the only ‘true’ churches. Protestants ought to remember that they have a history of proselytising, ‘sheep-stealing’, from other Christian communions in order to bring them into Reformation truth.

Today there is much more awareness and valuing of the riches of other churches’ traditions. Timothy Ware in his book *The Orthodox Church*,¹⁹⁷ quotes from a letter of Khomiakov as he describes his view of the relationship of Orthodoxy to other churches. He writes:

¹⁹⁶ Lewis, Peter, Forward, in *Joy Unspeakable* by Dr Martyn Lloyd Jones, Kingsway Publications, first published 1984, p 8.

¹⁹⁷ Ware, Timothy (Kallistos), *The Orthodox Church*, Penguin Books, 1967, pp 332-333.

'Khomiakov, seeking to describe the Orthodox attitude to other Christians, in one of his letters makes use of a parable.

A master departed, leaving his teaching to his disciples. The eldest faithfully respected what his master had taught him, changing nothing. Of the two younger, one added to the teaching, the other took away from it. At his return the master, without being angry with anyone, said to the two younger: 'Thank your elder brother, without him you would not have preserved the truth which I handed over to you.' Then he said to the elder: 'Thank your young brothers, without them you would not have understood the truth which I entrusted to you.'

Clearly, Khomiakov, a strong upholder of Orthodoxy as the divinely appointed guardian of Christian truth, was prepared to see the value and authenticity of other traditions, the Catholic and the Protestant.

Note the comment 'without being angry with any one.' Fear and distrust of each other, as potential threats to our standing as Christian churches, is beginning to die away.

However, ecumenists who hope for the organic union of churches will probably be dismayed by the recent measures (October 2009) of the Roman Catholic Church to encourage 'catholic' Anglicans to leave their Communion and enter a special relationship within the Catholic Church. These may well seem to be an attempt to diminish a fellow Christian community. Others may see it differently as offering a way out of a dilemma for traditionalists in the Anglican Communion.

This whole issue is not relevant to the kind of ecumenism advocated in this book. 'Digging out the (real) embedded Church' is what matters.

Many Roman Catholics are already having fellowship, worshipping and witnessing with the Christians of other denominations, and any Anglicans who do not take advantage of the Catholic Church's recent offer can also enjoy 'spiritual ecumenism' with other believers if they are willing.

d) There is a suspicion among some Protestants that members of Catholic and Orthodox Churches are not, on the whole, real Christians.

Some Protestants feel that Catholic and Orthodox believers cannot be real Christians because they are relying on the sacraments or the prayers of saints to bring them to God.

In 'folk Catholicism' there may well be people who are relying on these things, but they are uninstructed members of their church. The official teaching of both the Roman and Orthodox churches places salvation very squarely on the grace of the Saviour and his sacrifice. The gift of this salvation is received by faith. An increasing number of members of the Roman Catholic Church call themselves Evangelical Catholics, and have testimonies of personal conversion to Christ as clear as anything heard among Protestant Evangelicals.

The church at Corinth was full of Christians who were very mixed doctrinally, and some with a low standard of morality were nevertheless called 'saints' by Paul because they 'called

upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Corinthians 1.1). Sadly, Protestants also have nominal Christians in their congregations.

e) Ecumenical activities take up too much time, which we should be spending on our own churches.

This is a genuine concern to many. I think that if 'ecumenical activities' are seen as something of a duty, a fad or a fashion, then they probably will be a waste of time. But when they arise naturally out of prayer with believers of other denominations, they will be profitable to all involved.

It is not so much a question of adding to one's own church's workload as of sharing our work with others or of dropping something we could be doing on our own and replacing it by cooperation with other churches who are doing the same or similar things.

A few years ago I attended a Methodist service where the preacher said he regarded the 20th Century as 'the Century of the Holy Spirit.' This sparked off an interesting discussion with the friend who was travelling with me. He was not sure he could accept that description.

I have come to accept the preacher's verdict. In the 20th Century the Holy Spirit moved in the Church in at least three remarkable ways. Early in the century, the Pentecostal, and later the Charismatic movements, despite their aberrations, began a new openness to the promptings of the Holy Spirit of God. The modern ecumenical movement arose out of the desire for cooperation of overseas Protestant missionary societies and opened up far wide areas of cooperation among Christians. Mid-century the Church of Rome entered a period of review (*aggiornamento*) and renewal which led to very many Catholics reaching out to fellow Christians of other denominations. Old antagonisms between Christians began to be challenged, and a willingness for Christians to work and witness together resulted in a growth in practical and spiritual ecumenism.

WHAT? SO WHAT? NOW WHAT?

Preachers are told to keep three phrases in mind when preparing to preach: **What? So what? Now what?** The preacher should fully grasp the passage or theme; he should fully evaluate the implications; and he should explain what response is required. As we look at the history of attempts to further Christian Unity, we should ask these same questions. What happened and what is important? What are the implications for us today? What response is required?

The '*What?*' is the fact that there has been much division in the Church over its 2,000 years of history, but there have also been notable attempts to bring Christians together. The '*So what?*' is that all those attempts must not be lost, but be learned from, and that Christian Unity is a 'pearl of great price.' The '*Now what?*' is to recognise that great progress has been made and we must further the initiatives of the past and make new ones.

The history of attempts at unity provides clear indicators for the way forward and prepare us for the 'Now what?'

INDICATORS FOR THE WAY FORWARD

a) The classical Creeds of the Early Church must be the foundation of any basis of Christian Unity.

The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381 is the most appropriate foundation for any basis of Christian Unity, as it is confessed by both Eastern and Western Churches. As we have seen, attempts to modernise the wording of the Creeds may need to be made, provided they give insights into the original words, yet there is an alternative view. The words that lie behind the Creeds, such as ‘incarnation’, ‘Trinity’, and ‘substance’ are the common currency of a classical Christian faith. They are words with universal significance throughout the Church, key words of the faith which are faithfully reflected in the words of the Creeds.

b) It has become clear that, realistically, unions and reunions of churches are only going to take place within the protestant tradition.

The 20th Century saw a good number of unions and reunions, usually among the younger churches of the ‘global south’. Paradoxically, the hope of Catholic and Protestant unions became less sure at a time when there was much more openness and contact between the traditions than previously.

Views in Protestantism which demand a place of leadership for women in the Church and the acceptance of the practice of homosexual lifestyles have made unions between Protestant and Catholic and Orthodox churches impossible, and hinder fellowship even at the ‘grass roots’ level.

Further, it is not realistic to expect the Roman Catholic Church to abandon its allegiance to the supreme authority of the Papal Office or the Orthodox to give up their conviction that their Church is the one, true, ‘undivided’ Church to which all Christians should belong. Nor can Protestants give up their allegiance to the supremacy of the authority of the Scriptures. The future for Christian Unity as a visible organisational unity seems farther off than ever.

c) Organisational unity is not the only model for Christian Unity, nor is it even desirable.

Nicholas von Zinzendorf, founder of the Moravian Church, spoke of there being a ‘jewel’ in every denomination. To him the greatest setback to Christian Unity was not denominationalism but nominalism. Organisational unions of churches do not guarantee a real meeting of souls who, to use Zinzendorf’s phrase, are ‘*Christed Ones*’.

Alec R Vidler, in a remarkably prophetic book, *God’s Judgement on Europe* (1940), wrote that reuniting the existing churches seems laudable but it is unrealistic as they are no longer –
*‘...potentially powerful institutions in modern society... It is more likely they will have to die, in order that by the grace of God in His good time they may become born again.’*¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁸ Vidler, A R, *God’s Judgement on Europe*, Longmans, Green and Co, first published 1940, p 107.

Perhaps this dying process is now beginning. Vidler's advice for church institutions in the dying period is for them to hang on to their present structures so that 'as large as possible a body of Christians may be ready for drastic change as soon as the way is opened.' One clear way to prepare for this 'drastic change' is to develop 'spiritual ecumenism'.

This is clearly part of the 'Now what?' For us today, a 'Christendom of souls' (to use G K A Bell's phrase) is becoming apparent. It is dawning on the Church that Christian Unity does not mean conformity or uniformity. Speaking about relations between Catholic and non-Catholic Christians, Hans Kung comments:

*'There is already a deep communion, koinonia, between them and us; it is founded on one baptism, faith in one Lord, and love for him; and it is stronger and more important than anything that separates us. We are Christians and they are Christians... what we need for reunion is that this communion which already exists should grow. What we need is that both sides should create more and more common ground between us, until at last what separates us becomes insignificant and full unity is a reality. The 'perfect unity' will not be uniformity. As the Pope (John XXIII) has said, it will be unity in essentials, freedom in all else... What we can have is unity in the sense of the living koinonia of the Scriptures, which is unity in diversity, unity in a variety of rites, languages, customs, modes of thought and action and prayer. Such unity is more perfect than uniformity.'*¹⁹⁹

While there is a growing together in the understanding of the essentials of the Christian faith, it may yet be a long time before all Christians can have intercommunion and share in the elements of the most uniting of all services. Intercommunion already takes place quite frequently within the Protestant tradition, especially among Evangelicals. The united communion at the close of the *Keswick Convention* in the Lake District, whose motto is 'All one in Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3.28), is a symbol of this oneness. But it is still exceptional that Catholic and Orthodox celebrate with one another or with Protestants.

In Vatican II's *Decree on Ecumenism*, there is a section on Eucharistic sharing: it is made clear that this sharing of Communion is only to be with those Christians who believe a Catholic doctrine of the Eucharist, 'who have a faith in the sacrament in conformity with that of the Church.'²⁰⁰

But where, as yet, full intercommunion is not possible, a 'sensing the Presence of Christ' in each other's communions is already experienced in ecumenical gatherings such as those in the Maranatha Community. I advocate that this should be more and more a feature of Christian life in this century.

¹⁹⁹ For more material on this point see Hans Kung, *The Church*, Sheed and Ward, New York, 1967, especially pp 107-150 and 203-262.

²⁰⁰ Ed Flannery, Austin, OP, the Vatican Collection, Vol 1, *Vatican Council II, The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, New Revised Edition, 1992, pp 561-562.

d) We should encourage informal grass-roots collaboration through ‘para-church associations.’

It is quite remarkable how the concept of cooperation between Christians of groups who were formerly hostile to each other has gathered pace. Progress has been made in unity, in the cooperation of Christians at a local level on social projects to help the community, in joint prayer meetings and study groups and in open witness to the Gospel. There is no evidence that involvement in para-church activities lessens a person’s commitment to his or her own denomination.

In the book *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* (1996), J I Packer, a respected Reformed theologian, urged both sides to engage in ‘informal grass roots collaboration’ through ‘para-church associations’. In general, *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* holds that the binding force of the acceptance of the classical Creeds, together with the renewal by the Holy Spirit which exalts Christ as the only Saviour and Lord, creates a solid basis for united service and witness.

Hope 2008 was planned for the UK by para-church groups getting Christians to work together. Katei Kirby of the *African and Caribbean Evangelical Alliances* wrote: ‘Hope 2008 has the potential to fulfil Jesus’ prayer in John 17, breaking down barriers between race, culture and custom.’

The 20th Century saw such para-church activity multiply in schemes of evangelism, Christian witness in universities and colleges, in emergency and development programmes worldwide and in prayer and worship.

e) We should accept the place of paradox in Christian theology.

A lot of disagreeable and unproductive argument would have been avoided in the past if the principle of ‘Both-Neither’ had been applied where it could be. There is a place of paradox in Christian theology. Jan Amos Komensky’s ‘Both-Neither’ principle ought to be taken seriously. It cannot always be applied, of course, but it is most helpful in the areas of justification by faith and works, on free will and predestination, on the doctrine of the Trinity as an Undivided Unity and as a Composite Godhead, and on Christ as both truly man and truly God.

f) We should stand together on the essentials of unity.

Again and again in the history of Christian Unity we hear the cry to make the ‘essentials’ the basis of unity and to leave aside ‘non-essentials’. The question is, ‘What are the essentials?’, and great disagreements have resulted from opening up this matter. Sifting through the many arguments and discussions, however, it becomes clear that Christianity is essentially a religion of grace, and that what makes a person a Christian is the heart-cry ‘God be merciful to me, a sinner’, expressed on the grounds of what Christ has done for me through his death and resurrection. To become a Christian the indwelling Christ in one’s soul is enough.

In the past, animosities grew between Christians as to what were the essentials, even to the point of doing violence to each other. There were often political, international and even

economic factors giving rise to such enmities. But it ended with people who were calling on Christ to save them persecuting, and even killing, other Christians who also were calling on Christ as Saviour. For fellowship today (at its simplest level) it should be enough for Christians to cry the Jesus Prayer of the Orthodox: ‘Lord Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.’

The implication of this for ‘Now what?’ is that if only we can come to recognize that the Christ-life in another person comes about by this cry of repentance and faith, then we will want to seek to pray and worship with that person, since any strange doctrinal views they may have (from our point of view) do not destroy the Christ-life in that person.

There are three confessions that have been shared throughout the long history of the Church, in harmony with the Vincentian Canon. They are:

- A personal and corporate recognition of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord celebrated in daily living and in the Holy Communion (Lord’s Supper, Eucharist, Breaking of Bread).
- A genuine readiness to submit to the Bible as God’s authoritative revelation to us for faith and conduct.
- A confession of the classical Creeds of the Church

Beyond the boundaries of these confessions there is ample room for a diversity of views which do not undermine or deny them.

Continuity and change are two sides of any doctrinal confession. The 18th and 19th Centuries saw a break with the continuity of the Church’s past. Much of their theology and Biblical studies (for example in the demythologising of the New Testament story), and modern ‘liberal’ hermeneutics, tend to break continuity with the past.

We need to ask of any modern scholarship, does it have continuity with the past in such a way that it is in harmony with historic interpretations of the core beliefs of the Christian faith?

g) We should recognise the global *koinonia* of the Church.

We should recognise and welcome the new global *koinonia* created by the Holy Spirit. A mark of the Spirit’s activity is the way in which the younger churches of the ‘global south’ are beginning to take the leadership of the Church and be the centres of growth.

As long ago as 1940 Alec R Vidler wrote that it is not impossible that in the providence of God, Europe would be re-evangelised by what are often called ‘the younger churches’.²⁰¹ This is already happening – at present, African and South American bishops are consecrating bishops for American traditionalist dioceses. As a traditionalist bishop said to me recently, ‘the centre of operations’ is now in the young churches. Even at Edinburgh 1910 it became

²⁰¹ Vidler, A R., *God’s Judgement on Europe*, Longmans, Green and Co 1940, p 107.

clear that leaders of the younger churches were impatient with the Western Church's divisions, and had spiritual insights that we ought to own and follow.

One of these insights is that no one culture, race or nation can arrogate to itself leadership of the Church. The Church is a truly worldwide body and expresses its faith in a vast army of languages, races and cultures.

From its very beginning Christianity has crossed cultural, social and racial barriers. Many of the persecutions the Church endured in the first four centuries were caused by a growing fear on the part of the authorities that Christians had a universal appeal which, if left unchecked, could become a destabilising influence in the Empire.

Kenneth Scott Latourette, in his seven-volume history of the expansion of Christianity, gave the title *The Great Century* to his Volume 6, which dealt with the 19th Century. Christians of all denominations continued this expansion of the faith worldwide in the 20th Century.

Away from the confines of Europe and North America, the Church is growing rapidly today. There are now many missionaries from Asia, Africa and South America in Europe. All this bodes well for a great expansion of 'spiritual ecumenism'. As never before, Christians can now count themselves part of a global *koinonia*. The practical implications of this are that we learn from one another, across the cultures, respect our differences, and celebrate our common faith openly for the world to see.

But if there is to be unity in all this, a shared confession of faith must be found. It is the basic conviction of this book that this has emerged over the years.

h) Ordinary Christians must lead the way. Unity cannot be imposed by decree.

Paul Richardson wrote an article in the *Church of England Newspaper* about Adrian Hastings, entitled *Ecumenism's Future*, in which he looked at Adrian Hastings' biography of Oliver Tompkins. Hastings concluded that the 'organic union' of churches was simply not going to happen; the complexities of church history were too great. Summarising Hastings, Richardson wrote:

'The solution to the ecumenical impasse, Hastings argued, was for ordinary Christians to take the matter into their own hands.'

'Whatever church leaders and theologians may think, baptism marks our entry into the one church of Jesus Christ. Baptism and Eucharist should be bound indissolubly together. The battle for Institutional Unity may have been lost, but this should not prevent intercommunion at the grassroots – a de facto ecumenism that in the end would transform the churches.'

Richardson concluded:

'Perhaps the way forward is for us to practise "theological ecumenism," to try to cross over into different traditions and to ask what they have to teach us. This could lead to a

*deeper ecumenism, one that does not gloss over the depth and importance of theological divisions.*²⁰²

‘Theological ecumenism’ and ‘de facto ecumenism’, by which ordinary Christians take things into their own hands, are part of the ‘Now what?’ needing to be acted upon today. In this survey of the history of Christian Unity we have come across many voices saying similar things. They have been calling on ordinary Christians to take the initiative to meet fellow Christians to pray, work and worship with them. It really is an urgent matter.

Orthodox, Catholic and Evangelical Protestants have become wary of high-level talks that do not address the real grounds of our union in Christ. ***We must make church history by moving forward to meet, recognise and work with our fellow Christians ‘embedded’ in the Churches.***

i) Diversity is in the nature of the Trinity and should be embraced.

Our doctrine of the Trinity asserts strongly that God is One, and within the Oneness is the harmonious and loving relationship of Persons. The Church is meant to reflect this unity and diversity.

Neither the leaders of the Oxford Movement nor certain of the so-called ‘Exclusive’ Brethren were happy with diversity; their ideal was oneness in doctrine and worship. It is very difficult for Christians who believe theirs is the one true visible Church on earth to accept such diversity. Yet since the middle of the 20th Century the hand of Christian fellowship has been offered by those holding such beliefs to those who do not. It is the great new fact of our time.

Diversity allows us to be happy with each other’s ‘separateness’, when it no longer has any hostility or threat about it. When Christians are seen visiting each other in genuinely happy fellowship and celebrating another church’s distinctive spiritual life as part of the richly-faceted wisdom of God (what Paul calls a rainbow-coloured wisdom (Ephesians 3.10)), then the beginning of real Christian Unity will be being formed.

j) We should recognise the larger unity in God’s purposes – to reconcile all things in Christ.

The unity of Christians should be a paradigm for the whole of humanity. Of all religions, the Christian faith points to unity in diversity. Humanity is one (Acts 17.26) as the Universe is one, as all creation is one, and one day all creation will be summed up as One in Christ (Eph 1.10).

So in the measure that Christians do not manifest unity, they are working against the purpose of God for the whole universe. Unity in diversity is a miracle, and the world cannot attain it, and yet it is at the very heart of the universe, so incredibly diverse, but having all things interrelated. Atheistic communist and fascist regimes have tried to impose unity on their

²⁰² Richardson, Paul, article *Ecumenism’s Future*, *Church of England Newspaper*, 6 October 2006.

people and they have failed. The Church's inquisitions and Acts of Uniformity likewise did not succeed in creating harmony among believers.

It is no light matter to be indifferent to the unity of Christians. In the measure in which we work, here and now, towards the visible unity of all Christians and are peacemakers in a divided and warring world, we are in tune with God's plan for the universe. In the measure in which we keep separated from our fellow Christians and are indifferent to the disharmony of our world and go our own ways, we are out of harmony with the Divine will, not only for the Church, but for the whole of humanity.

k) Christ has left us an example – that we should love one another.

In Romans 12.10 Paul writes: *'Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honouring each other.'*

Christians should not only accept one another but love one another deeply – as Christ commanded. This involves honouring one another by putting others in first place and desiring their blessing and success before one's own. There have been significant breakthroughs when clergy have prayed, 'Lord bless me, but only if you will bless my brother more.' And even more significant blessing has been seen when churches in a locality have deliberately chosen to pray, 'Lord bless our church, but only if you will bless the other churches in this area first.'

Such an attitude completely removes all sense of competition and replaces it with a delight in all that God is doing in other fellowships and churches.

l) Jesus Christ is the centre of Christian Unity.

One of the perennial causes of disunity in the Church has been building churches around personalities. It always needs to be guarded against. One guard against this tendency is to develop a strong sense of 'spiritual ecumenism'. With this sense, however singular a person's expression of faith is (and pioneers of new churches are often singularly innovative), the forcefulness of the personality of the pioneer will be tempered by a desire not to cause divisions in the body of Christ.

As the spokes of a wheel come closest together at the centre, the closer we are to Christ as our centre, the closer we will be to each other. When we meet as Christians we meet in the name which is above all other names – Jesus Christ.

Any other focus than Christ as our centre will hinder unity. We may have the highest regard for our Church or tradition, but Christ must come first.

Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.

***Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus
through all generations forever and ever! Amen.***

Ephesians 3.20-21 NLT

APPENDIX 1 THE NICENO-CONSTANTINOPOLITAN CREED

This is the text of the Vatican-based interdenominational *International Consultation on English Texts* (1975).

*We believe in one God, the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.
We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the
Father.
God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God,
begotten not made, of one Being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven;
by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from (of) the Virgin Mary and was
made man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into
heaven.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.
We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father (and the Son).
With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified.
He has spoken through the Prophets.
We believe in one holy, catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.*

This is not the Nicene Creed which came out of the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD, but a development of it, one probably ratified by the Council of Constantinople in 381 AD and affirmed at Chalcedon in 451 AD.

The developed version of this Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed differs in no essential respect from that which came out of Nicaea in 325 AD. The later Creed is fuller in expressing the Biblical basis of the Christian faith. For instance, where Nicaea 325 stated that Jesus ‘suffered and rose again the third day’, the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed has ‘crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, suffered death and was buried and rose again on the third day according to the scriptures’, clearly a more Biblically accurate confession.

In both Creeds the eternal deity of Jesus is affirmed. Nicaea 325 has ‘the only begotten Son of God who was begotten from the Father before all worlds’; the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed has ‘the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God’.

In both Creeds, Jesus’ suffering was ‘for our salvation’.

Later, the Western Church added the *filioque* clause in order to state that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father ‘and from the Son’ (*filioque*).

Gerald Bray writes:

*‘The filioque clause was never accepted in the East, and although it did not provoke the great schism of 1054, it helped to prevent a reunion of the Churches in 1274 and again in 1439. Today it is a major difference between the Eastern and Western Churches.’*²⁰³

At one level, the *filioque* debate is a matter of semantics, a question of a Greek or Latin word being preferred. The Greek (Eastern) church, in speaking of the relation of the Holy Spirit to the Father, used ‘*ekporeuesthai*’, to go forth as from a source, and the Latin (Western) Church used ‘*proceder*’, to come from, without involving any idea of origin.

The Western Church was keen to emphasize the full Deity of the Son, and *filioque* says that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and also from the Son. The Eastern Church, while also holding to the full Deity of Christ, wished to safeguard the sole origin of the Holy Spirit in the Father, as the source of all things, and so could not accept the *filioque*. The debate goes on and there are theologians on both sides who maintain that theological truth, not just semantics, is the issue at stake.

One way forward that has been suggested is that the Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Father, should be seen as coming *through* the Son. Some Eastern theologians seem happy with this definition.

The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed is the only Creed that all branches of the Church, Orthodox (without the *filioque*), Roman Catholic and mainstream Protestant, can accept, and so is an important basis for Christian Unity. Since 797 AD, no Council has been convened which is truly ecumenical, binding on both Eastern and Western Churches; the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed is a Creed coming from this period of the ‘undivided’ Church.

At first, creeds were used as baptismal confessions; later they were incorporated into liturgies. So creeds are meant to be assertions of faith, a faith that binds all Christians to God and to one another. These classical creeds have bound the people of God together through the long history of the Church. Here is the value of retaining the creeds substantially as they were first formed.

Where churches have dispensed with credal confessions, they have tended to lapse into some form of Unitarianism. This is graphically illustrated by the history of the English Presbyterians, who abandoned creeds in the mid-18th Century: all their congregations ended up as Unitarian churches. Modern groups like the Brethren and the Pentecostal Churches, while not reciting Creeds liturgically, have strong commitments to their doctrines. Cults like the Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Mormons reject the Creeds.

²⁰³ Bray, Gerald, *Creeds, Councils and Christ*, Mentor Books, 1997, p 183.

APPENDIX 2 FOUR BIBLICAL TEXTS ON THE THEME OF CHRISTIAN UNITY

a) Psalm 133

This Psalm describes the characteristics of unity in a graphic way. As a ‘song of ascents’ it was probably used in Temple worship in Jerusalem. The pilgrims going up to worship are united in their act of devotion as a united family is bound together in happy (where ‘good’ = ‘beautiful’) fellowship. It is an analogy of the unity of the people of God in any age and so can be applied to the Church.

The writer sees the people’s unity as being like the anointing oil with which a high priest was consecrated to the service of the Lord (Exodus 30.22-33). There the oil flowed down his beard, like the dew of distant Mount Hermon distilling over and blessing Zion.

This oil was costly, fragrant, must not be copied and was holy. Christian unity is costly; it cannot be achieved without considerable pain and patience and self-sacrifice. It is a fragrant thing. Visitors to churches where there is unity smell it almost as soon as they enter the church. It cannot be imitated successfully; a pretence of unity is soon detected as false. True unity is a beautiful thing that delights the heart of God and so is ‘holy’.

Michael Wilcock writes on this Psalm:

‘Does the life of our own church fellowship achieve this? Does it even seek it?’

Aiming at real unity within a church is a much greater challenge than attending ecumenical events between churches. If we cannot get on with the members of our Christian fellowship what right have we to try to promote unity more widely?²⁰⁴

b) John 17. 21-23

These are key verses in any discussion of Christian Unity as they are the words of our Lord. Christians living as one body declare to the world by so doing that they are an illustration of the unity in the Godhead, and they authenticate Christ’s ministry and message to the world. As Christian unity is so much at the heart of Jesus’ concern for the manifestation of the Godhead, the pursuit of it cannot be an option for Christians today.

c) Ephesians 4.1-6

Paul’s words on the unity of believers are equally searching. He says unity has a seven-fold aspect: one body; one Spirit; one hope; one Lord; one faith; one baptism; one God and Father of all.

²⁰⁴ Wilcock, Michael, The Message of the Psalms 73-150, The Bible Speaks Today, IVP 2001, p 244.

Six of these aspects seem clear enough, but what is meant by ‘one faith’? One commentator says it means ‘justifying faith’, but it seems to me that the term ‘one faith’ cannot be limited to one aspect of faith. Rather, I believe that it embraces all that it means to be committed to God in Christ: the phrase is a description of the tie that binds all Christians together, that distinctive ‘smell’ of Christianity that C S Lewis refers to and which we mentioned in the Preface. It is that vision of a redeeming God which all his children have, however limited the vision of it is (1 Corinthians 13.12).

Paul says this unity is only achieved by hard effort, to manifest what God has already given us in Christ. It is a unity made and inspired by the Spirit of God (Ephesians 4.3), but Christians must make every effort to guard it in the binding power of the Spirit of God. In other words, we must not let the bonds of peace be loosened.

How is this to be done in practical terms? Not by never disagreeing with our fellow Christians, but by having peace, goodwill, benevolence in all our dealings with one another. It will probably involve our saying sorry (and meaning it), and letting our feelings or inclinations be ignored or even hurt, though it will not mean setting aside our consciences.

The really difficult thing in working out principles of unity between believers is to know when to say ‘no’ to self and one’s own hopes and ideas in the interest of the common good, and when one’s own views ought to prevail. I think most of the squabbles in churches and fellowships have to do with having personal feelings hurt rather than matters of principle being the real issue.

Paul sees unity among believers as a sign of maturity, and his vision is that this maturity should be entered into by all Christians as they come to know Christ better and better. We cannot say we know Christ and are ‘attaining to the whole measure of the fulness of Christ’ (Ephesians 4.13) if we are not at one with our fellow Christians.

d) Acts 15. The Council of Jerusalem

There was conflict in the early days of the Church over the place in the church for the Jewish Torah. Did Gentiles have to submit to these laws and rituals as well as their fellow Jewish Christians? It was a crucial issue.

Lois Malcolm, in a footnote to her essay in *The Ecumenical Future*²⁰⁵ points out that this passage in the Acts telling the story of the debate of the *Council of Jerusalem* (Acts 15.1-35) lies at the very heart of Luke’s account of the Christian faith. It is exactly half way through his book. It marks the turning point in the early history of the Church. At first most Christians were Jews brought up to observe the law of Moses, but soon many Gentiles, particularly in Antioch in Syria, were brought into the Church. They had no background of Jewish law-keeping. Were these believers now under obligation to keep of all Torah requirements and, more importantly, were they really a part of Israel or still outsiders as Gentiles had always been considered?

²⁰⁵ Ed Braaten, Carl E and Jenson, Robert W, *The Ecumenical Future*, William B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2004, p 222.

The ‘apostles and elders’ of the Church in Jerusalem met to consider this matter (v 6). Peter, Paul and Barnabas related how they had come to see that Gentiles who believe in Jesus were accepted by God (v 8), and had received the Holy Spirit and had had their hearts purified by faith, implying it was not by law-keeping (v 9). They were therefore ‘saved’ without law-keeping. James, the Lord’s brother, accepted this position and accepted, moreover, that such Gentiles who had come to Christ were now part of God’s people (v 14), since by believing in Jesus they now bore the Lord’s (Yahweh’s) name (v 17).

James made a personal recommendation to the Council that Gentile converts to Christ should not have things made difficult for them (v 19). He said they should not be forced to be circumcised as some church teachers had been demanding (v 1) and thus be bound to keep the whole law of Moses, but that they should be asked to abstain from food picked up in the market place which had been polluted by being offered to idols. They should also be asked to keep from sexual immorality and from eating meat which had not had the blood drained from it and, generally, ‘from blood’ (v 20).

A letter to be sent to Gentile Christians to declare this resolution was then drafted, and this was endorsed by the whole of the ‘Council’ as the evident working of the Holy Spirit (v 28). The letter was well received by the Church in Antioch.

What is the significance of all this for Christian Unity today?

- **We learn from Acts 15 that the Christian faith is rooted firmly in God’s grace.**

Faith in Christ, not keeping of the law (that is, not law-keeping that would destroy grace), is how anyone becomes accepted by God. To have to rely on circumcision would have destroyed grace. So Gentile Christians were asked to ‘avoid’ (v 29) the four things listed in the letter. This in no way compromised their acceptance by God by grace. They had to stand aloof from pagan practices just as aliens living in Israel had been required to do under the Levitical code. So God’s grace is the ground of Christian Unity today, not doctrinal distinctives which do not undermine grace.

- **Though one man made the judgment at first (v 19), his ruling was endorsed by the whole Council.**

The Holy Spirit brings unanimity in decision-making in the Church, and we ought to aim at this in our ecumenical contacts today.

- **The ruling was open to being adapted to local circumstances.**

Later, Paul, who agreed with the decision of the Council, adapted the ruling so that it would not become a hard and fast rule. He accepted that providing one’s fellow-Christians were not offended, food offered to idols could be eaten, as idols did not exist anyway (1 Corinthians 8). We can learn from this that rulings made by Christian bodies can be adapted to changing circumstances, but not, of course, if they were to undermine a basis of faith rooted in grace.

APPENDIX 3 PURITAN ARTICLES OF FAITH

Below are the 16 Articles of Faith drawn up in 1654 by Puritan divines to provide agreement on the fundamentals of the Christian faith. They are listed here to illustrate how what was deemed to be a strongly 17^h Century Protestant Confession sounds in terms of today's ecumenical discussions. It compares with the *Thirty-nine Articles* of the Church of England in not criticising other denominational confessions.

1. *That the Holy Scripture is that rule of knowing God and living unto Him which whoso does not believe cannot be saved.*
2. *That there is a God who is the Creator, Governor and Judge of the world, which is to be received by faith, and every other way of the knowledge of Him is insufficient.*
3. *That this God who is the Creator is eternally distinct from all creatures in His Being and Blessedness.*
4. *That this God is One in Three Persons or subsistences.*
5. *That Jesus Christ is the only Mediator between God and man without the knowledge of whom there is no salvation.*
6. *That this Jesus Christ is true God.*
7. *That this Jesus Christ is also true Man.*
8. *That this Jesus Christ is God and man in one Person.*
9. *That this Jesus Christ is our Redeemer, who by paying a ransom and bearing our sins has made satisfaction for them.*
10. *That this same Lord Jesus Christ is He that was crucified at Jerusalem, and rose again and ascended into Heaven.*
11. *That this same Jesus Christ being the only God and Man in One Person remains forever a distinct Person from all saints and angels notwithstanding their union and communion with him.*
12. *That all men by nature were dead in sins and trespasses, and no man can be saved unless he be born again, repent and believe.*
13. *That we are justified and saved by grace and faith in Jesus Christ and not by works.*
14. *That to continue in any known sin upon what principle soever is damnable.*
15. *That God is to be worshipped according to His own will, and whosoever shall forsake and despise all the duties of His worship cannot be saved.*
16. *That the dead shall rise, and that there is a day of judgement wherein all shall appear, some to go into everlasting life and some into everlasting condemnation.*

It is worth noting that all the Protestant Reformation Confessions are rooted firmly in the early Church Creeds, and thus share the Christological and Trinitarian convictions of the worldwide (ecumenical) Church.

*'The purpose of the Reformation Confessions was not to draw up new formulations of the faith, but rather to give a theological exposition of the creeds.'*²⁰⁶

²⁰⁶ *Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century*, edited by Arthur C Cochrane, SCM Press Ltd, 1966, p 26.

APPENDIX 4 THE THREE TRADITIONS COMPARED – A GENERAL SURVEY

Catholicism (Roman and Anglican)	Eastern Orthodoxy	Protestantism (including Evangelical Anglicans)
Sacramentalist	Sacramentalist	Non-sacramentalist
Authority: Papal + Scripture + Tradition + 21 Councils (RC)	Seven Councils + Regional Synods Scripture + Tradition	Scripture + Confessions of faith
Apostolic Succession (RC and Anglo-Catholic)	Apostolic Succession	No claim to Apostolic Succession
Seven sacraments	Seven sacraments	Two sacraments
Salvation through faith by grace – justification and sanctification one work	Salvation through faith by grace – justification and sanctification one work	Salvation through faith by grace – sanctification a separate work
Eucharist – transubstantiation	Transubstantiation – but term used with caution	From Real Presence to only a Commemoration
Mary and saints venerated	Mary and saints venerated	Mary honoured but not venerated
Prayers for the dead	Prayers for the dead	No prayers for the dead
Fasting – special days	Fasting, especially before Communion	Little emphasis on formal fasting
Infant baptism	Infant baptism (by immersion) + Chrismation	Infant + Believers' Baptism
Creeds: Apostles', Niceno-Constantinopolitan, Athanasian	Niceno-Constantinopolitan (minus the <i>filioque</i>)	Apostles', Niceno-Constantinopolitan, Athanasian
Clergy celibate	Clergy celibate or married Bishops celibate	All clergy celibate or married
No women's ordination	No women's ordination	Women's ordination
Images venerated	Ikons venerated	No images or icons venerated
Purgatory after death to cleanse the faithful or as an expiation	Purgatory rejected as expiation	No purgatory

What all three traditions have in common:

All three major Christian traditions hold:

- Personal love for Jesus as supreme Saviour and Lord.
- Submission to the Holy Scriptures as the authority for all faith and conduct.
- Confession of an early Christian Creed.

Note on Eastern Orthodoxy:

The Oriental Orthodox churches (Coptic, Syrian, Armenian and Ethiopian) which have been separated from the Orthodox Church since the 5th Century because of their Monophysite teaching have now come together with the Orthodox Church to try to reconcile their differences. An official dialogue took place at *Chambésy* (Geneva) between the two sides in December 1985. A second dialogue resulted in an 'Agreed Statement' issued from the Anba Bishoy Monastery, Egypt, in June 1989. A second 'Agreed Statement' came out of this dialogue in Chambésy in September 1990 through the *Orthodox Centre of the Ecumenical Patriarchate*.

APPENDIX 5 CHARISMATIC GIFTS IN THE CHURCH

In the days of the Apostles, miraculous signs and wonders were uniting influences among the early Christians and drew many pagans to faith (Acts 5.12-16). Subsequently, the belief in miraculous interventions, especially in healings, was kept alive throughout most centuries of Christian history.

For **Eusebius**, the first historian of the Early Church, as for **Bede** writing the history of the Anglo-Saxon Church, miracles were part and parcel of the Christian experience. Augustine, in the 5th Century, changed from doubting that miracles still happened after the days of the Apostles to accepting that they did occur.

The cult of relics kept alive the belief in miracles throughout the Medieval period, but the Protestant Reformation, in moving away from superstitions, disregarded the miraculous as a vital element of the Christian faith. Even before the scepticism of the 'Enlightenment', mainstream Protestantism ruled that miraculous healings and gifts of the Spirit had died out with the death of the Apostles.

In Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536),²⁰⁷ there are only a few references to what can be termed the apostolic gift of healing (4.19.18-21 and 19.6). He sees the Roman Catholic sacrament of *extreme unction* as originally introduced to bring healing to the very ill (James 5.13-16), but concludes that miraculous healings passed away after the days of the Apostles. He writes:

'...those miraculous powers and manifest workings, which were dispensed by the laying on of hands, have ceased; and they have rightly lasted only for a time. For it was fitting that the new preaching of the gospel and the new kingdom of Christ should be illumined and magnified by unheard-of and extraordinary miracles. When the Lord ceased from these, he did not utterly forsake his church, but declared that the magnificence of the kingdom and the dignity of his word had been excellently enough disclosed.'

Calvin held that the Gospel of Jesus was of a different order after the days of the Apostles, but gives no scriptural basis for this view. This cessationist view of miraculous gifts was to become the settled view of Reformed Protestantism from then on.

The Puritans,²⁰⁸ following Calvin, taught that the charismatic gifts of the Apostles were not for the present day. **John Owen (1616-1683)**, the great Puritan theologian of the

²⁰⁷ The Library of Christian Classics Volume XXI, Calvin: *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* Books III.XX to IV.XX, ed John T McNeill, translated by Ford Lewis Battles, London, SCM Press Ltd, 1961, 4.19.6.

²⁰⁸ I use the term 'Puritan' not in the strictest sense to refer only to those established clergy of the 16th Century who opposed the Elizabethan Religious Settlement, but in the wider sense to mean those Protestants, both Anglicans and Dissenters, who held to the main tenets of a 'Calvinist' theology. Such Puritans flourished up to a little after the Restoration of the Monarchy.

Cromwellian period, in a treatise on the Holy Spirit, took the usual line that miraculous gifts in the Church had ceased with the death of the Apostles, but suggested that God might one day introduce them again.

The teaching and example of George Fox inspired some of his followers (Quakers) to experience instant illuminations and demonstrations of the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

The rationalist Latitudinarians of the 18th Century, on the whole, rejected any claim to an immediate experience of the power of the Holy Spirit, and it was only with the Evangelical Revival in Britain in the 18th Century that healings and manifestations of the power of the Holy Spirit were experienced in mainstream Protestantism.²⁰⁹

Some attempt to restore the gifts of the days of the Apostles was made in the 19th Century by the Irvingites, but in the 20th Century the phenomenon of Pentecostalism, in its various forms, declared that the apostolic gifts had actually been restored to the Church.

Although the question of healing and other charismatic phenomena as interventions of God can be divisive, it is taken seriously by groups within all the main denominations and so can be a factor furthering Christian Unity. The whole question is probably not so divisive now as it has been in the last few centuries.

²⁰⁹ Isolated movements, such as the 1625 Six Mile Water revival in Antrim, excepted.

In 1995 Pope John Paul II put out a reflection on the words of Jesus ‘that they all may be one’ (John 17.21). It is strongly in the spirit of the Vatican II *Decree on Ecumenism* and offers hope to those who are trying to further meaningful ‘spiritual ecumenism’ today.

Pope John Paul II held that ‘many elements of sanctification and truth can be found outside her (the Church of Rome’s) visible structure’. The Catholic Church is linked to other Christian bodies by the union of the Holy Spirit. The Pope quotes from the *Decree on Ecumenism* to state: ‘All the justified by faith through baptism are incorporated into Christ’, so they should be seen as brothers and sisters.

The phrase ‘justified by faith through baptism’ is interesting in that it clearly asserts that baptism is a sacrament conferring grace but that the justification it stands for must be appropriated by faith. So personal conversion is needed for justification to be real. Stressing the need for ‘internal conversion’ and quoting Vatican II again he writes: ‘There can be no ecumenism worthy of the name without a change of heart.’

The Pope calls for a ‘spiritual ecumenism’ involving a repentant heart, the pursuit of holiness and prayer for unity. He is very earnest about the value of ecumenical prayer and urges Christians to meet ‘more often’ and ‘more regularly’ for united prayer. Hopeful signs of the convergence of views are seen in what is already happening when Protestants and Catholics have Bible study and worship together.

But *Ut Unum Sint* sees the goal of complete and visible unity as only finally possible with ‘the acceptance of the whole truth into which the Holy Spirit guides his disciples’ (p 43). This is why more space is given in this document to Catholic relations with Eastern Orthodoxy than with Protestantism. Both these traditions of the Church hold a belief in the apostolic succession of their bishops, a high regard for Mary and the saints, and a sacramental theology which is at the root of all their worship.

Relations between Protestantism, Catholicism and Orthodoxy are made difficult by the great variety of Protestants that exist, and their suspicion about the place of ‘tradition’ in relation to Scripture. Of course, Orthodoxy is unhappy about the additions to the faith of the ‘Undivided’ Church that Rome has made, and the claim of infallibility of the Papacy, but Rome is ‘nearer to Constantinople than it is to Geneva’. Pope Paul VI proclaimed St Benedict patron of Europe, and in 1984 John Paul II did the same for Cyril and Methodius, the founding saints of European Orthodoxy, making them co-patrons with Benedict.

Ut Unum Sint makes it clear that fellowship with Rome’s ‘separated brethren’ in Protestantism and Orthodoxy is to be enjoyed here and now, but the document also makes submission to the authority of the Catholic Church the basis for complete unity.

²¹⁰ *Ut Unum Sint*, a 115-page booklet published by the Catholic Truth Society in 1995.

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