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EDITORIAL
This issue completes the fiftieth annual volume of ONE IN CHRIST and includes contributions to the anniversary day of reflection held in June at the Monastery of Christ our Saviour, Turvey, on the theme: ‘What does unity mean in a world that is falling apart?’ (*Durber, Ritchie, Scott, Canny, Freeman*). The next issue (51/1) will include papers from the corresponding event held in October at the Holy Cross Monastery, Rostrevor (OIC’s other monastic home): a conference on ‘Parables of Communion: journeying together’.

Two of our articles (*Allchin, McGreevy*) are reprinted from OIC’s first issue. They focus on Newman and John Keble, both wounded by disunity, and partners in the ‘theological effort [which] carried a spiritual renewal inescapably with it’ (*Allchin* quoting Louis Bouyer). The Oxford Movement’s voicing of ‘Tradition, apostolic succession, ministry, episcopate [as] not primarily engines against dissent, but rungs in Jacob’s ladder where the angels ascend and descend’ (*Allchin* quoting Owen Chadwick) still rings true.

The present pages revive a feature of earlier issues, of using lengthier quotes as ‘page fillers’, as on pages 249 and 269; the first being from John Keble’s sermon on *The Duty of Hoping against Hope* (surely timely), and the second from Martin Luther, on the journey of faith as the way of the cross.

This leads us into a principal theme of this issue: martyrdom. In the early Church, the martyrs bore witness to the truth by their deaths, while their spreading veneration gave expression to, and cemented, communion among the churches (*Sheridan*). The present reality of ‘Martyrdom and Communion’ was the subject of the recent Bose conference (*Br Luigi* in Reports and + *Warwick*); its principal theatre today is illuminated in *Bouwen*. The elements of his geopolitical analysis of the Middle East—social injustice, political tensions, blaming the external ‘other’, seeking identity in the myth of a past golden age, extremism—are increasingly discernible in the West.

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Editor designate announcement from the Editorial Board.
From 2018, Sr Emmanuel Billoteau of the Benedictine monastery, Notre-Dame de la Sainte-Espérance, Mesnil, France will assume the editorship of ONE IN CHRIST.
FOR THE FUTURE OF THE CHRISTIAN PRESENCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Frans Bouwen*  

The many rapid and radical changes that have happened recently in the Middle East make it impossible to offer concrete perspectives for the future. This article therefore focuses on examining the roots of the violent upheavals—geopolitical context, religious radicalization—and on pointing out the resources Christians have at their disposal and the challenges and commitments they are called to face, if they want to prepare for their future. It is crucial to emphasize the vital link between the Christian communities and the pluralistic environment they are living in by vocation; any future can only be a common future.

A rapidly changing reality

During the last five or ten years, the course of history seems to have accelerated unexpectedly in the Middle East, events following events with such speed and in such contrasting ways that they almost wipe out what was there before and leave an air of uncertainty hanging over the future. How is it possible in such circumstances to offer any prospects for the future? A good illustration of this reality is the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the Church in the Middle East, which the Roman Catholic Church held in Rome in October 2010. It was, in principle, a Roman Catholic event but the concern and participation were much larger. The meeting was called with a view to examining the tragic repercussions of the Western invasion of Iraq in 2003 on the Christian presence in this country and in the surrounding region. The participants outlined a vision for the future: spiritual

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renewal, greater participation by the laity, ecumenical collaboration with other Churches, dialogue and cooperation with Muslims and Jews. In particular, they emphasized the importance of religious freedom and freedom of conscience, and of active participation in public life, based on the concept of equal ‘citizenship’ for all, independently of ethnic or religious belonging.

However, these reflections and resolutions seemed to be completely overtaken, only a few months later, by the successive upheavals that came, at first, to be called ‘the Arab spring’: Tunisia (December 2010), Egypt and Yemen (January 2011), Libya (February 2011) and Syria (March 2011), besides new developments in Iraq some time later. In a few months the whole context had changed in the Middle East. Nobody had seen these developments coming. Now, also, it is equally impossible to foresee what the situation is going be in a couple of years time. The same thing can be said about the future of the Christian presence in this region, because it is inseparably linked to the general context. In the midst of all this, Christians are paying an especially heavy price in several places. Some alarmist voices are even foretelling the total disappearance of Christianity from that part of the world.

Therefore the purpose of the present essay is not to describe how the future of Christianity might look, but will concentrate on issues that condition this future: a) the geopolitical context, of which the Christian communities are an integral part and in which they have to build their future; b) the impact of recent religious radicalization and exclusivism; c) the resources that Christians have at their disposal; and finally d) the challenges that they have to face and the commitments that they have to make. Some hopeful new realities that are making their appearance in some places will all also be mentioned, although they are still rather fragile.

a) Geopolitical context

Christians, in the Middle East as everywhere in the world, do not and cannot live in a ‘void’, disconnected from history and geography, as well as from their own people. They are called to bear witness and serve in the present time and in the country where they find themselves as a consequence of very diverse factors. It is part and parcel of God’s design for them and of their mission. Hence the importance of taking into account the prevailing geopolitical factors
in the places where they live. Some of these factors are the outcome of a long history which has deeply marked personal and collective identities and has greatly conditioned reactions and behaviour; other factors appeared recently on the scene in the region and threaten to change drastically traditional patterns of society, civilisation and living together. Some of these geopolitical factors were generated locally; others are the result of ancient and recent foreign—often Western—interventions. In fact, as a consequence, the Middle East has been experiencing an endemic instability for more than a century now. And instability, as is well known, is a fertile breeding ground for all kinds of extremism.

The recent uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt occurred mainly because of local reasons, social and political: an unjust society, with an ever increasing gap between rich and poor, lack of work for the young generation in spite of them being professionally and academically qualified, absence of perspectives for the future. At times the political factors were not less important: authoritarian regimes, corruption, lack of personal freedom, a feeling of being entirely marginalized in decision making, etc. The spontaneous massive protests were genuine, expressing a real search for justice and freedom, and were able to bring together very different sectors of society: younger and older, students and workers, Christians and Muslims, etc. Therefore the qualification ‘Arab Spring’ looked entirely justified in the beginning. These protests succeeded in toppling the authoritarian regimes in Tunisia and Egypt, but they were unfortunately too spontaneous, too new, without any real organization or programme, particularly in Egypt. As a consequence, the Islamist movements took advantage of the absence of central authority to seize power, with the disastrous consequences that are well known. Nevertheless, these genuine protests are still alive, undercover, and one may hope that they will resurface one day and then be able to prepare a different future.

In the past, remote and recent, Western interference has been powerful and dominant in the Middle East, for two main reasons. The region is extremely rich in mineral resources, especially oil, and is of crucial economic and political importance. It is also strategically located: on the juncture between Europe and Asia, at a crossroad of many vital trade routes. Western European powers and the United States of America have always tried to control the region for their own economic and military interests and, to achieve that goal, did not
hesitate to intervene in the internal politics of those countries, in order to make sure that authority remained in the hands of people who were on their side. One of the best illustrations is the creation of artificial states and borders in the Middle East after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the First World War. The destabilizing effects can still be felt today and some of the recent violent campaigns of Daesh (‘Islamic State’) and likeminded movements have precisely, as one of their objectives, to draw new borders in the region. Most of the time Western intervention did not show any real interest in the well-being of the local population, their dignity, personal freedom and human rights, nor great respect for cultural diversities or identities. Consequently, large sectors of the local population lived under the impression that all the decisions concerning their country and their future were taken abroad and imposed upon them, without any local consultation. A strong anti-western resentment and desire for revenge developed in several places, and this is going to play a considerable role in the increasing influence of extremist groups. Among other issues, the non-solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that has been lingering on for about a century plays a significant role in the anti-western feelings, in particular among the masses. In Islamic circles it is often considered as the latest colonial intervention by the West and is even described as a present day remnant of the crusades.

As long as no serious efforts are undertaken to find a solution to these local problems and to impose clear limits on this international interference, no enduring stability can prevail in these regions. This is going to be a long process that has to happen essentially on the local level, but the international community bears its own heavy responsibility, being to a large extent co-responsible for the present turmoil, and should offer its respectful support, without imposing any preconceived model. It is above all of vital importance that the West learns to discover and respect the cultural identities and proper genius in the Middle East, without gauging events, situations and persons unilaterally according to Western categories or criteria.

At the same time any forceful Western interference might have various negative repercussions on the local Christians, because they are easily associated with the West, rightly or wrongly. They are at times even considered as agents of the West, because of their cultural affinity and because the West is often still considered as being Christian as a whole by large segments of the Muslim World. They
find themselves in an uncomfortable situation. In particular, they will have to be very prudent in calling for Western help or intervention, when they are confronted with local problems or involved in local conflicts. Western help that is offered, of whatever nature it might be, should never separate Christians from their historical and social partners and surroundings. It should always involve in one way or another those with whom Christians are called to coexist and to build together an open society, otherwise the results could be negative rather than positive.

On the local level, Christians have the task of finding ways of tackling the unstable situation, together with their fellow citizens and in liaison with other grassroots groups that are equally looking forward to a profound change. Their active collaboration in the preparation of a more just society, from now on, will be of vital importance for their place and role in the future.

b) Religious radicalization and exclusivism

It is in this general context of confusion and instability that religious radicalization developed, in particular Islamist extremism. This phenomenon is not entirely new; the first modern Islamic reform movements go back to the nineteenth century. However, in recent times, they took on a more extreme character and a more violent expression. They became violently exclusive, condemning and even trying to eliminate everyone and everything that is different, not only non-Muslims but also Muslims who think differently. They claim to be driven by religious motives. The ‘Islamic State’ (IS) and similar movements—sometimes related to each other, other times deadly enemies—are concrete examples of it. The tragic consequences for Christians are well-known, but they were not the only ones to suffer and their victims were not the most numerous.

The international community cannot allow these movements to impose their violent and exclusive methods, and even less so should it tolerate or use them for implementing its own foreign policy in the region. However, when one wants to face up to these groups, it is essential to start by examining their origins and their true driving forces. Are their roots really religious? Or is religion once again exploited and abused, in order to cover up other motives and justify other aims?
The reformers of the nineteenth century had become vividly aware of the inferior, humiliating status of the Muslim World at that time, in comparison with the West. In the Middle Ages of the glorious Arab-Islamic civilization, the Muslim World was ahead of the West in many fields of sciences, medicine, military equipment and strategy. How did it happen that the same Muslim World fell so far behind in almost all domains? On top of all this, many Muslim countries were at that time under Western colonization or dominion. The answer of the reformers was: because Muslims are unfaithful to their religion. If they were really faithful to Islam, the God of Islam would never have allowed this state of subjection. Hence, the remedy is: be good Muslims, and everything will change. This vision is summarized in the basic slogan of Islamism: ‘Islam is the solution’. This slogan looks credible for the masses as long as there is no other solution available; as a primary condition for mobilizing people, it presupposes a desperate situation, be it in the economical, the political or the cultural field.

Lately, this anti-western reaction has been reinforced by new Western negative influences, in particular, the consequences of globalization and of the rapid development of social communication media. The Muslim World feels invaded by images and ideas coming from the West that clash directly with fundamental traditional values in Islamic societies: morality in general, family life, position of women, gender theory, etc. Even more so, critical thinking, the spirit of modernity, with a strong emphasis on pluralism and historical criticism, is seen as a direct threat to Islam as religion and as society. Not having a reasonable answer to these questions, coming from their own historical and religious traditions, Muslim reformers thought that the solution would be to go back to the Islam of the first golden ages, convinced that the problems would then automatically disappear. However, the real problem is that nobody knows what these golden ages were and that immediately many different interpretations of them sprung up, some being more extreme than others. Given that there is no generally accepted teaching authority in Islam, each interpretation tended to consider its position as more faithful and as a consequence started condemning those who did not agree. Different groups declared each other infidels and started fighting and killing each other, using extreme and exclusive interpretations of religious texts and traditions.
What was initially a reaction of self-defence, has now taken on a very aggressive attitude, towards other Muslims, non-Muslims and the West in general. The Western world and society often feel threatened by these attitudes and, more concretely, by the terrorist actions instigated or claimed by these organizations. In fact, deep down these convulsions show that the Muslim World is at present going through a profound crisis.

The recent increase in tension between Sunni and Shia Muslim is another illustration of the mixture of geopolitical and religious, local and international motivations, with repercussions both regional and worldwide. In the Middle East it is in the first place a matter of struggle for supremacy between two countries, Iran and Saudi Arabia, with their allies, the former being predominantly Shia and the latter Sunni, for control of the oil market and political predominance in the region. The religious differences are exploited, locally and internationally, to reinforce cohesion among their followers and exacerbate hostilities towards the others.

How to confront these phenomena that threaten local and world peace? In the first place, the international community has to find ways of acting effectively in order to put an end to the murderous campaigns of organizations like IS and their kind. However, putting an end to these violent expressions is not sufficient. It would be like treating the symptoms of an illness without caring about its deeper causes. Real stability in these regions is only possible when serious efforts are deployed to eradicate social injustices, political tensions and oppression that are at the roots of these violent reactions. The international community has its own responsibility in this field: it should not impose a solution from outside, but should try to create the necessary conditions for justice in international relations in order to allow a local solution to emerge.

At the same time, a profound renewal of religious thinking is needed in Islam. One can hear many voices, even authoritative Muslim voices, like Al-Azhar University in Cairo, denouncing today’s violence in the name of Islam, by saying: ‘That is not Islam’. Some of these voices come from Muslim religious authorities or famous personalities; they also frequently come from many ordinary practising Muslims in the Muslim World as well as in Western countries. However, this answer is not satisfying. It is not by excluding the extreme movements from the Muslim community that the
problem will be solved. A deeper renewal in Muslim religious thought is required, especially in the interpretation of texts that can be invoked to justify sectarian exclusion and violence. Another sensitive issue is the distinction and some form of separation between religion and state, a basic requirement for fully equal citizenship of non-Muslims in Muslim countries, in view of building an open society and securing the future of Christians in it. The new hermeneutics should probably go in the direction of recognizing a human mediation in the revelation of the sacred texts, and the application of a certain historical critical approach in the interpretation of traditions and later legal texts, in order to make possible a reinterpretation in function of contemporary reality. This is going to be a long process. Some new thinkers have already engaged in that direction, mainly in Western countries, but in the present context their voices can hardly be heard in the predominantly Muslim countries.

This renewal is, of course first of all, the responsibility of Muslims themselves, at all levels. Can non-Muslims, that is to say Christians, contribute to it in some way? Christians should always remember that many Churches, in particular the Roman Catholic Church, had to pass through a long and difficult stage of misunderstandings and sometimes internal exclusions before being able to reach a common approach to modernity. Besides, this common approach is never once and for all a final position, and requires ongoing attention and reflection. Perhaps some of these reflections can even be done in common. On the local level, Christians should stay in discreet and respectful relations with those Muslim believers who wrestle with these fundamental questions, and at times feel themselves threatened by extremist elements in their own surroundings. These relations are of vital importance in this transitional stage, in order that Christians may be an integral part of the society that is in the making. They should be discreet, because any public support could be counterproductive; they should be respectful, because they should not try to impose their own approaches but make room for an authentic Islamic renewal, which might prepare the way for a common commitment. The future of Christianity in these regions is to a large extent dependent on this common awareness and responsibility.
c) Christian resources

The future of the Christian presence in the Middle East, as we saw, is largely conditioned by the geopolitical context and by recent religious radicalization. However Christians living in this region cannot adopt an attitude of wait and see until these conditions improve. They have their own role to play, starting now. Their presence in these regions is not simply the result of history; it is also a calling and a mission: to be witnesses of Christ there where the Lord has placed them, in time and space. Therefore, it is important to have a look at the historical, cultural, social and religious resources Christians have at their disposal and at the vision and commitments that are required from them if they want to cultivate hope in a better future and prepare for it.

The most solid foundation for Christians to keep hoping in the future is their centuries old presence in the region, going back to the very origins of Christianity in some countries. They often played an essential role in shaping the language of the peoples, in moulding the local culture and building a national or ethnic identity.

Christians have made a significant contribution to the birth of the Arab-Islamic civilisation, in particular between the eighth and the tenth century in Damascus and in Baghdad, by translating from the Greek and the Syriac languages into Arabic the ancient patrimony of Greek and Syriac philosophy, natural sciences, medicine, theological thinking, literature, etc., as well as by offering expertise in arts, architecture and techniques. In the nineteenth century again, Christians played a significant role in the renewal of Arabic literature and thinking (nahda), being more in contact with what was happening in the West and being able to integrate it into their cultural environment. Christians and Muslims, consequently, have in common a large period of history, share the same culture and belong to the same people. They even have to some extent a common identity. In a pastoral letter of 1992, the Catholic Patriarchs of the Middle East conclude: ‘We draw on a single heritage of civilization. Each of us has contributed to its formation according to his own genius. [...] Christians in the East are an inseparable part of the cultural identity of Muslims. In the same way, Muslims are an inseparable part of the cultural identity of Christians. For this reason, we are responsible for one another in the sight of God and history.’ Many Muslim thinkers and authorities recognize publicly that the Middle East would be much poorer without a Christian presence.
This common heritage should not make us forget that there have been in the past moments of tension or even confrontation in our mutual relations, but Christians and Muslims have always been able to overcome them. That memory could serve as a supplementary source of hope in the present context of conflict: why should they not be able to find a solution today as they did in the past? Their common belonging can also help Christians and Muslims in working together to open up Middle Eastern society for the best of modernity, with its plurality and positive critical spirit regarding the past and the present.

At the same time, some new forms of Christian presence can be discerned in the Arab World. In the Arabian Peninsula, the numbers of Christian migrant workers coming mainly from South Asia may be around two million. They have no local civil rights and no permanent residence, but they are there. Some of them might stay. Will they be able to put down roots in this region and constitute permanent communities? It is a very open question, given the human rights situation of migrants in these countries, but something new could come about, a frail seed of hope for the future.

In the midst of the violence spread by radical Islamist movements, some surprising reactions can be discerned. In the student world, for instance, some young people are horrified by this violence in the name of religion and want to distance themselves from it. In reaction some young women abandon their veil; some people reject all religion and declare themselves atheist; others still secretly follow Christian news and preaching on social media. One should be very careful not to draw too hasty conclusions, but it shows that certain things are moving. Can such a movement be helped? Are the existing Christian communities ready to welcome such persons?

d) Challenges and commitments

The two major threats to the future of Christianity that are most evidenced in the media are emigration and persecution. Both challenges call for serious reflection and systematic research.

Emigration of Christians is not a new phenomenon in the Middle East. It started mainly with the industrial developments in Western Europe and North America and has been going on since then with ups and downs. The rhythm of emigration periodically accelerated or slowed down according to the quality of the political and economic situation in the Middle East. Present emigration has to be seen and
studied against this background. Secondly, a more systematic study of the present trends has to concentrate on getting accurate numbers, as much as possible, and on examining the real causes. In fact, today some individuals or groups—including church leaders and church groups—tend to exaggerate the numbers and to speak about it in alarmist terms, at times in order to collect more financial aid in the West. Similarly, if one wants to study the present rhythm, it is not really helpful to go back to what the numbers were before the First World War in present Turkey, or before 1948 in Israel-Palestine. More recent trends and numbers have to be examined as a priority. Of course, the situations in Iraq, after the 2003 invasion, and in Syria, after 2011, are special cases and require a specific approach. In these countries, the situation is really dramatic and worrying.

Churches are very conscious of the possible consequences of emigration and have been attempting to slow down the process in many different ways, for instance in the framework of the Middle East Council of Churches. Today the challenge is more urgent than ever and has to be viewed in function of the rapidly changing situation that needs to be analysed methodically; such evaluation should not be driven primarily by emotion or sentiment.

The question of how to evaluate and tackle the challenge of persecution of Christians is even more urgent as well as more delicate. There can be no question of minimising their sufferings or denying the need to come to their assistance. There are a number of undeniable cases where Christians are forced to choose between renouncing their faith and losing all they possess, even their life. The real question is: what are the best ways to help them? Publicising to the utmost their tragic fate and denouncing it as a purely religious persecution are perhaps not the most helpful ways. Christians are not the only believers or minorities to be persecuted in the present turmoil. Many other individuals and groups suffer like them and with them, mainly because they think or believe differently from the dominating religious radical movements that condemn everybody and everything different. Isolating Christians too much from this context could sometimes even worsen their fate. At best it will improve their situation only momentarily; which is already important and should not be disregarded. However, the real solution can only come with a real change in the general situation that is at the roots of the present upheavals. It is only when stability, freedom, human rights, peace and
religious freedom prevail that new ways will open for the future of Christianity in the region. This general objective should be the priority of all, even if it requires a long and persistent commitment, a more just and human policy, locally and internationally, with many local and international responsibilities involved.

On the local level, if Christians want to work effectively for their future presence, they have to take an active part in public life, culturally, socially, financially and politically, from now on. The churches are called to encourage and to prepare their members for such commitment. In some parts of the region, in particular those countries that have been living for centuries under Ottoman rule, this will require developing a new mentality. As a consequence of the communitarian regime, or *millet*, prevailing under the Ottoman rule, churches are in fact not only religious bodies, caring for the spiritual good of their members; to some extent they also have become ethnic entities, given the fact that their spiritual leaders were representing the community before the civil authorities in all matters. As a consequence, Christians tend to look to their churches and their leaders for every kind of need in the social and administrative fields; they tend to be inward looking instead of engaging themselves in the wider society.

At the same time, in a kind of reflex of self-defence, facing an environment that was often considered as hostile, some communities tended to withdraw into themselves, living as distinct bodies, building protective walls around themselves, with some kind of ghetto mentality. It is now becoming more and more manifest that such isolated communities have no future. From now on, they will have to commit themselves actively within the wider society; otherwise they will be rejected as foreign bodies. However, this active commitment within civil society presupposes that Christians have a profound personal faith; if this is not the case, there is a real danger that they will be absorbed by the larger, non-Christian environment and will progressively disappear. Therefore, they need prophetic leaders, who are not afraid to take a courageous stand, telling the truth to authorities, denouncing injustices and taking the lead with their people. The concrete ways of acting out this commitment will differ from one place to another, but everywhere Christians are called to cooperate actively with those persons and groups with whom they are
living, in building a just society, from now on, if they want to have a place in it in the future.

Given the small numbers of Christians and the diversities and divisions of their churches and confessions in most countries of the Middle East, a constant concern for greater collaboration and Christian unity is another vital condition for their future. Only together will they have a future. Already in their pastoral letter of 1992, the Catholic Patriarchs wrote: ‘We shall be Christians together or we shall cease to be.’ At the grassroots level, Christians are well aware of this reality and have been living it out for generations. Together they have faced the ups and downs of history, together they have been discriminated against or persecuted at certain periods, together they have experienced martyrdom. Today they work spontaneously together in all social and educational activities. Spontaneously they will identify as ‘Christians’, while members of the clergy are used to identifying themselves according to their denominational belonging. Church leaders, who live in close relationship with their community, are called to value and promote this natural solidarity and to recognize that it should be taken more into consideration in pastoral planning and even in theological reflection, because the future may well be rooted there.

This need for a close collaboration among churches in view of consolidating the Christian presence in the region has been a priority concern for the Middle East Council of Churches for several decades. During the last ten years, the leaders of the various Christian communities have been meeting and working together more than ever in recent history, being confronted together with the grave and at times tragic effects of the upheavals in the region on the Christian communities. This growing collaboration, beyond denominational or communitarian divides, goes further than the instinctive reaction of survival; it is nourished by the consciousness of a common Christian heritage and is driven by a real pastoral concern. It constitutes thus a significant sign of hope for the future. This belonging together is also embodied in what is often called today ‘ecumenism of martyrdom’. In the present violent events in the Middle East, Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical and Pentecostal believers suffer together, are refugees together and at times become martyrs together. Just as the blood of the martyrs in the first centuries of Christianity became a seed for the spread of the Gospel, so also today’s ‘ecumenism of
suffering’, or ‘ecumenism of blood’, can become a powerful seed of Christian unity. Should church leaders and theologians not pay more attention to this common experience, when they speak about Christian unity and dedicate themselves to work for its accomplishment?

**Hope and faith**

The future of Christianity in the Middle East, as we saw, is to a large extent dependent on the geopolitical context, and in particular on the way the world and Islam itself will be able to respond to religious extremism and to cooperate in mutual respect. However, at the same time, Christians hold this future also in their own hands, with God’s help. Their hope for the future is rooted in their faith today. Being profoundly inserted in their historical and cultural environment, by virtue of the principle of Incarnation, Christians are called to live in the present, to open their hearts and minds to those who are living with them, in order to work together for that future. They have the right to expect that their brothers and sisters in Christ help them with all means possible. They have also the right to demand that the international community assumes its responsibility in creating the human, social and political preconditions for their future presence. However, all in all, the specific nature of each people and country should be respected and Christians should never be isolated and even less put in opposition to their brothers and sisters of other faiths or convictions. Only all together can they have a future; the international community and Christians around the world are called to recognize and support this togetherness.
MARTYRDOM AND COMMUNION IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY: A CHURCH OF ENGLAND PERSPECTIVE

+ John Warwick*

This paper was presented at the Bose Conference on Martyrdom and Communion in September 2016. It was published immediately afterwards in L’Osservatore Romano. It reflects on the distinctive dimensions of Christian Martyrdom through the lens of twentieth century Christian thought and the life and witness of those martyred. It draws on three distinctive themes: first, martyrdom as witness to Christ’s life in us—and our life in His; second, martyrdom as witness to Christian solidarity in Christ; third, martyrdom as witness to Christ’s universal love.

St Cyril of Jerusalem wrote: ‘The martyrs of the last days will surpass all martyrs.’ In recent years, the language of martyrdom has been extended to include those who die for their beliefs, irrespective of the content of these beliefs. Moreover it has also been claimed by those whose ideological or religious convictions are at best indifferent and at worst actively hostile to Christian faith. There has, however, always been a need for some sifting. Eusebius, in his Ecclesiastical History, describes something like a competition for martyrdom amongst Christian sects, among them the Montanists and the Marcionites, where the number of martyrs was often understood to correlate with the truth of their beliefs. Of the Marcionites, he writes: ‘They say they

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1 The ‘Conclusions’ of the Conference are reproduced below, pp. 300-9.

2 Catechetical Lectures on Illumination, XV: 17.
have an immense number of martyrs of Christ, but as regards Christ, they do not truly acknowledge him.\(^1\)

In this paper, I try to draw out three distinctive dimensions of Christian martyrdom through the lens of ‘Martyrdom and Communion’. The first is martyrdom as necessarily deriving from communion with God, in Christ. The martyr is one in whom Christ lives. The second is martyrdom as a manifestation of belonging within the Body of Christ, a Body which embraces and transcends every ethnic and cultural identity. When one suffers all suffer. The third is Christian martyrdom as a manifestation of God’s love for all. This includes those outside the visible Church and even—perhaps uniquely—enemies.

**Martyrdom as witness to Christ’s life in us**

T.S. Eliot, perhaps the best known western poet of the twentieth century, was an Anglican who was deeply influenced by the sixteenth century bishop and scholar, Lancelot Andrewes. (Andrewes’ life and writings have in turn been recognised and honoured within Orthodoxy, not least in Nicholas Lossky’s book, *Lancelot Andrewes the Preacher: Origins of the Mystical Theology of the Church of England.*)

In the play, *Murder in the Cathedral*, Eliot examines the last days of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury. In Becket’s Christmas day sermon, entitled *The Glory of God*, preached four days before his own martyrdom, he says this:

> A Christian martyrdom is never an accident, for saints are not made by accident. It is never the design of man for the true martyr is he who has become the instrument of God, who has lost his will in the will of God, who no longer desires anything for himself, not even the glory of being a martyr.

Eliot writes of the martyr as one ‘who has lost his will in the will of God.’ This language is resonant of the words of Diadochus of Photike (fifth century) who wrote that ‘all of us who are human beings are in the image of God. But to be in his likeness belongs only to those who by great love have attached their freedom to God.’\(^2\) So we may see martyrdom as a fruit of a willing self-surrender to God’s purposes. When the knights come to Canterbury Cathedral to murder the

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Archbishop, his priests urge him to escape. Becket replies ‘Open the doors. I give my life; I am ready to suffer with my blood.’ So his life, in this sense is not so much taken as freely given. Christian life, Christian martyrdom flows from the life of Christ in us, Christ who says ‘No-one takes my life from me but I lay it down of my own accord.’

In his sermon, Becket asks: is it an accident that the day after the celebration of the Incarnation, the Church celebrates the martyrdom of St Stephen? He answers ‘By no means!’ There is an inexorable connection between the incarnation of Christ, our baptism into Christ and martyrdom. We are baptized into the death and resurrection of Christ. As Archbishop Anastasios of Albania has put it, Christians are called to ‘an existential participation in the death and life of Christ.’

In 1920s Moscow, Julia de Beasobre was close to despair at the imprisonment of her husband by the GPU and at the Communist persecution of Christians. She describes hearing what she calls ‘the unspoken words of Another’—meaning God—in which he said: ‘Because of my Incarnation and your Baptism, there is no other way—if you agree.’ No other way but martyrdom—’if you agree’.

There is an intrinsic cruciformity to all Christian life. Anglicans and Orthodox have together affirmed that ‘Informed by the life and work of God in the baptismal and Eucharistic liturgy, the Church always seeks to die and be raised again.’ The Japanese theologian, Kosuke Koyama, writes from the context of the devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that: ‘Biblical truth is not an intact truth but a suffered truth.’ As St Paul writes, ‘Dying, and yet we live.’ Outside one of the monasteries I visited on Mt Athos were the words ‘Unless you die before you die, you will die when you die.’

**Martyrdom as witness to our solidarity in Christ**

The second strand of martyrdom and communion derives from and illuminates the corporate dimension of the body of Christ. The martyrdom of even one member of the Body impacts on the whole

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1 John 10: 18.
3 Babington Smith, *Iulia de Beausobre: A Russian Christian in the West* (DLT, 1983).
4 *Church of the Triune God*, 1.9, p. 15.
6 2 Cor. 6:9.
Body of Christ. St Paul writes ‘If one member suffers, all suffer together with it.’ St Silouan of Athos writes ‘The suffering of the other is my suffering, my neighbour’s healing is my healing. My brother’s glory will be my glory.’ The author of Hebrews writes, ‘Remember those who are in prison as though you were in prison with them, those who are being tortured as though you yourselves were being tortured.’ Christian martyrdom even of one Christian is an event that happens to the whole church, across any and all national and cultural boundaries. As an expression of this Christian solidarity across ethnic and denominational boundaries, Westminster Abbey celebrates in stone the lives and witness of ten twentieth century Christian martyrs from different countries and different parts of the Church family. I write this, however, deeply conscious of the Western Church’s frequent failure to express sufficiently the solidarity and support for the suffering churches of the East, a solidarity to which we are inescapably called.

Fresh in our minds—and in our continuing prayers—is the witness of the two Metropolitan of Aleppo, Mor Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim of the Syriac Orthodox Church and Pavlos Yazigi of the Greek Orthodox Church, abducted when together on a mission to release two abducted priests, Father Michael of the Greek Orthodox Church and Father Maher of the Armenian Catholic Church. This solidarity in Christ which was to prove so costly reflects something of the depth of the koinonia evident amongst Church leaders of all denominations in Aleppo—that I was privileged to witness on my visit in 2007. They met together regularly to pray, witnessing to Christ ‘who has broken down the dividing walls’. ‘If one member suffers, all suffer with it.’

Going back earlier into the twentieth century, Patriarch Tikhon was arrested in Moscow on 5 May 1922 for protesting about the confiscation of Church assets by the Soviet state. He was tried and put under house arrest. By this stage the Church of England had already been supporting Russian refugees for some time. Archbishop Randall Davidson had called upon all Dioceses to pray for the persecuted

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1 1 Cor. 12:26.
3 Heb. 13: 3.
4 Eph. 2: 14.
5 I Cor. 12: 26.
Church in Russia. Following the arrest of the Patriarch, Metropolitan Khrapovitskii appealed to the Archbishop to intervene. Davidson spoke out in the British Parliament urging the cause of the Patriarch and the persecuted Russian church. He also protested directly to the Soviet authorities in Moscow. On 8 May 1923, the British ambassador to Moscow, Hodson, delivered an ultimatum from the Foreign Secretary, Lord Curzon, to the Soviet Government. It included these words: 'A country in which faith is persecuted and the servants of the altar have been crucified must be struck off the list of civilised countries.' Canon Anthony Douglas campaigned actively in Parliament and in the country, rousing public opinion against the injustices perpetrated by the State against the Patriarch and the Church in Russia. Douglas records that ‘there was almost unanimous protest in the House of Commons about this suggesting that if the Patriarch were to be executed, war would follow.’ The Soviet Ambassador, Krassin, came to England to ask Douglas: ‘How can we fend off war?’ Douglas responded: ‘by releasing Tikhon and stopping the shooting of the Roman Catholic Archbishop.’ Douglas wrote in his diary: ‘Krassin went off and rang me two hours later saying that the advice had been accepted in Moscow.’

There have been many such examples of solidarity between sister churches of different countries which express an organic link between costly witness and koinonia, between martyrdom and communion. Alerted, by Fr Nikolai Velimirovich, to the plight of the Serbian people suffering the effects of typhus and warfare, many English and Scottish doctors, medical workers, relief workers and chaplains gave their services to the sick and to wounded Serbian soldiers. In 1918, the Serbian Prime Minister, Pasic, said: ‘The Anglican Church has taken care of her sister Serbia, may it be that by the aid of the Almighty, this work of charity for the Church of Serbia may be the foundation for the rapprochement and union of our two churches for the good of all humanity.’

Anglican clergy, including Douglas, lobbied the British parliament to take a stand against the Armenian massacres and in November 1915, Anglican and Orthodox leaders together urged the US President,

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1 Andrei Psarev, “‘The soul and heart of a faithful Englishman is not limited by utilitarian goals and plans’: the relations of Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitskii with the Anglican Church’, in Sobornost 33.2, p. 39.
Woodrow Wilson, to pressure Germany to intervene with the Turkish Government to stop the massacres.

More recently, in the last decades of the Soviet Union, from the late 1960s, Canon Dr Michael Bourdeaux and Keston College did extraordinary and inspiring work, often in dangerous circumstances, to alert the West to the persecution of Christians—and indeed other religions—by the Soviet regime. Such witness to the suffering of the Church in Russia did much to evoke a prayerful solidarity amongst western Christians. The Christian martyrdom served to inspire a deeper sense of belonging and communion within the wider Body of Christ.

**Martyrdom as witness to Christ’s universal love**

Thirdly, martyrdom can be seen as a reflection of Christ’s unconditional love for all—even enemies. On the cross Jesus speaks words of forgiveness: ‘Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.’ When St Stephen is being stoned to death, he falls to his knees and cries out, ‘Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.’ St Silouan describes ‘love of your enemies as the one true criterion of Orthodoxy.’ St Nikolai Velimirovich who met with St Silouan expresses such a love in his *Prayers by the Lake*:

> Bless my enemies, O Lord. And I bless them and do not curse them. My enemies have driven me more into your arms than my friends have. My friends have bound me to the earth; my enemies have loosened my bonds from the earth and have destroyed all my hopes in the world. Bless my enemies Lord, and I bless them.³

This love, Christ’s love, which includes even enemies, transcends all national, ethnic and cultural loyalties and indeed enmities. It is the love that has broken down all human dividing walls.

We see it in Edith Cavell—an English nurse and daughter of an Anglican priest. She served in German occupied Belgium in the First World War. She nursed all who were wounded saving the lives not only of Allied troops but also of German troops without discrimination. She was accused of treason for saving the lives of some

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¹ Luke 23:34.
² Acts 7: 60.
³ *Prayers by the Lake*, LXXV.
Allied troops by helping them escape to Holland. When facing execution by firing squad she said:

I have no fear, nor shrinking. I have seen death so often that it is not strange or fearful to me. This I would say, standing as I do in view of God and eternity... I realise that patriotism is not enough. I must have no hatred or bitterness towards anyone.

We see it in Shabaz Bhatti, a Roman Catholic Federal Minister for Minorities in Pakistan. He was an outspoken critic of Pakistan’s blasphemy laws under which Christians have been—and continue to be—persecuted, imprisoned and receive rough justice. Bhatti spoke out not only for Christians but other non-Muslim faiths too. He received many death threats. In March 2011 he was assassinated and called ‘a blasphemer of Mohammed’. Before his death he had said: ‘I believe in Jesus Christ, who has given his own life for us and I’m ready to die. I’m living for my community, I will die to defend their rights.’

We see it in the martyrdom of the seven Trappist brothers of Tibhirine in Algeria, who chose to stay in their monastery having been threatened by armed men and knowing of the threat to their lives and those around them. They chose to stay living a life of simplicity, prayer and welcome, a life also of service to the very poor who lived around them. Knowing of the probability of their imminent death, Father Christian de Chergé wrote in his Spiritual Testament: ‘I hope when the time comes to be conscious enough to ask pardon from God and from my brothers in humanity, and at the same time to forgive my aggressor with all my heart.’ In words addressed to the unknown one who is to kill him, he writes: ‘And for you too, friend of the last hour, who did not know what you were doing, I wish this THANK YOU and A-DIEU and that we may meet again as happy thieves in paradise, if it pleases God, the Father of us all. Amen!’

In all these martyrdoms, as in the witness of Charles de Foucauld, assassinated outside the fort he had built for the Tuareg people in the Sahara, we see a manifestation of God’s love for all humanity. In the words of Gregory of Nyssa ‘in every human person—even one that has been corrupted through his or her own shortcomings, false religious

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1 Spiritual Testament.
beliefs, or errors—the faithful Christian discerns a brother or sister for whose sake Christ died.1

This is the love that so identifies with others who suffer that it is willing to take on their suffering and even change places with them. We see it in German occupied Greece, where Archbishop Damaskinos Papanandreou, resisting the deportation of the Jews, writes to the collaborator Greek Prime Minister, Logothetopoulos: ‘Our Holy Religion does not recognise superior or inferior qualities based on religion. As it is stated “there is neither Greek nor Jew”. He was threatened with the firing squad for speaking out. We see it in 1944 in Zakynthos, Metropolitan Chrisostomos with the Mayor, Lucas Carrer, did all they could do protect the Jews from deportation to concentration camps. When asked to hand over a list of all the Jews on the island, Chrisostomos handed over a list with only two names, his own and that of the Mayor, saying: ‘If you choose to deport the Jews of Zakynthos, you must also take me and I will share their fate.’2

We see such an identification too in Mother Maria Skobtsova. When the Jews were being targeted by the Nazis in Paris and forced to wear the Star of David, Mother Maria wrote ‘If we were true Christians we would all wear the Star.’3 In March 1945 she herself was taken to Ravensbrook and, it is said, took the place of another woman going in to the Gas chamber. Mother Maria was martyred not for her solidarity with Christians but with Jews, her martyrdom expressing God’s deep love for all humanity.

Christian martyrdom reveals Christ’s love for all, a love that crosses all human boundaries transcending all nationalistic and tribal loyalties. Every human being is one made in the image of God. Every human being is, in the memorable phrase of Father Christian de Chergé, a ‘brother or sister in humanity’. Every human being is one for whom Christ died.

John Donne (1572-1631), poet and Dean of St Paul’s Cathedral, affirms in his poem No man is an Island: ‘Any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.’

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1 St Gregory of Nyssa, On the Making of Man 5, PG44:137C (trans. NPF, 2d ser., vol.5).
3 Crowns of Barbed Wire, p. 123.
THE SAINTS AS AN ELEMENT IN THE COMMUNION AND COMMUNICATION IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Mark Sheridan OSB*

The cult of the martyrs and saints, their veneration and fame for miracles, intercession to them, the cult of relics, the custom of seeking burial near the shrines of saints, etc., grew and spread as a development of popular devotion in the ancient Church without much regulation except on a local level by the local bishop. The lack of control of course led to the growth of all sorts of legends, which, as mentioned at the beginning, the Bollandists have tried to sort out for centuries.\(^1\) It also led eventually to more centralized forms of regulation. The theological rationale for the cult of the martyrs and saints was provided in the development of the idea of the communion of the saints by many theologians.

Devotion to the saints as distinct from but not separate from devotion to the martyrs developed in the new situation created in the fourth century by the cessation of the persecutions and the gradual Christianization of the Roman Empire that began with the accession of Constantine. It is very difficult to trace the development of the devotion to the martyrs before the fourth century, although there are some clear cases where it existed. For example, the hundreds of graffiti found on a wall at San Sebastiano fuori le Mura at Rome testify

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to the devotion to the martyrs Peter and Paul in the period when (according to one hypothesis) their bodies were temporarily placed there during the Aurelian persecution in the middle of the third century. The later compilations of martyrologies, menologia and synaxaria contain material from many sources not all of which are historically reliable. The cult of the saints has been the object of scholarly study for several centuries, particularly by the Bollandists, a society founded in the seventeenth century for the study of hagiography. The literature on the subject is enormous.¹ What follows here is necessarily sketchy and aims only to illustrate the shared devotion to the saints in the early Church (especially those shared by East and West) and the means by which it came to be shared.

**The early saints: witnesses and intercessors**

We first hear of the graves of apostles and others of the first Christian generation at the end of the second century in the context of an appeal to apostolic tradition in order to justify local practice. Polycrates (ca. 195), bishop of Ephesus, in a letter to Victor, bishop of Rome, mentions the apostle Philip and two of his daughters as being buried in Hierapolis and another daughter buried in Ephesus. He also mentions the apostle John: ‘He sleeps at Ephesus.’ Likewise Polycarp and Thraseas, both bishops and martyrs, are said to sleep in Smyrna. Sagaris, also a bishop and martyr, is said to sleep in Laodicea and Papirius in Sardis. These are invoked to justify the tradition of the celebration of Easter on the ‘fourteenth day of the passover’. Polycrates may have been answering an appeal of Victor to a different tradition that cited the saints Peter and Paul being buried at Rome.²

In the context of a different controversy Eusebius cites a Roman writer Caius: ‘But I can point out to you the trophies of the Apostles, for if


you will go to the Vatican or to the Ostian Way you will find the trophies of those who founded this Church.’ Then he cites Dionysius (ca. 171), bishop of Corinth, that Peter and Paul had both taught in Corinth and had both been martyred in Rome at the same time.\(^1\) The mention of ‘the places where the sacred relics of the Apostles in question are deposited’ by Eusebius suggests that there was in existence a cult honoring the apostles. Another early witness of devotion to relics is found in the Acts of Thomas, where the king Misdai, who had Thomas killed, seeks out the grave of the apostle in the hope of receiving healing for his son from the apostle’s bones. He does not find them because they had been brought to the West (Edessa), but the dust where they had lain was sufficient to work the miracle.\(^2\) Other stories and legends surrounding individual apostles also developed, particularly in relation to certain episcopal sees associated with the apostles such as Alexandria and Constantinople.\(^3\)

The next step in the development of the veneration of the saints was the honor given to those in the generation after the apostles, who followed Christ uncompromisingly even to death through persecution. A decisive figure in this development was Polycarp of Smyrna, who, according to Irenaeus and Tertullian, had been a disciple of the apostle John. The date of his death is disputed, but it was certainly early in the second half of the second century. The *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, in the form of a circular letter from the Church of Smyrna to the Church of Philomelium, is the earliest of the acts of the martyrs after the description of the death of Stephen in the Acts of the Apostles and was important in defining the literary genre of acts or passions of martyrs.\(^4\) Polycarp is described after his death as ‘an apostolic and prophetic teacher, bishop of the Catholic Church in Smyrna’. In response to the Jewish suggestion that his disciples would abandon Jesus and ‘begin to worship this man’ if they were allowed to have his body, the letter states, ‘For him (Jesus) we worship as the Son

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\(^3\) Baumeister, ‘Heiligenvehrehrung I,’ pp. 109-110.

of God, but the martyrs we love as disciples and imitators of the Lord; and rightly, because of their unsurpassable affection toward their own King and Teacher. According to the letter, the disciples of Polycarp gathered up his bones and placed them in a fitting place: ‘There the Lord will permit us to come together according to our power in gladness and joy, and celebrate the birthday of his martyrdom, both in memory of those who have already contested, and for the practice and training of those whose fate it shall be.’ The work also expresses the conviction that Polycarp ‘is glorifying God and the Almighty Father, rejoicing with the Apostles and all the righteous, and he is blessing our Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior of our souls, and Governor of our bodies, and the Shepherd of the Catholic Church throughout the world.’ This is the first clear expression of the belief that the Apostles, all the righteous, and now also the martyrs already enjoy heavenly blessedness. As a result of this work, translated into Latin, Syriac and Coptic, Polycarp came to be honored throughout the ancient Church, and this work provided a model for later martyrdoms.

The next step in the development of the veneration of the saints was to invoke them as intercessors. This practice developed from the belief that they enjoyed access (parresia: παρρησία) to the presence of God. This idea is found with increasing frequency from the first half of the third century onward. Clement of Alexandria, speaking of prayer, observes: ‘In this way is he [the true Christian] always pure for prayer. He also prays in the society of angels, as being already of angelic rank, and he is never out of their holy keeping; and though he pray alone, he has the choir of the saints standing with him [in prayer].’ Origen exhorts his friend Ambrose to martyrdom with the thought that he will be able to intercede for his children: ‘since you will give them more help after such a death than you would if you remained with them, for then you will love them with more understanding and pray for them more wisely, if you learn that they are your children and not

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1 Martyrdom of Polycarp, 17.
2 Martyrdom of Polycarp, 21.
4 Clement of Alexandria, Stromata 7:12 [78,6] ταύτη καθαρὸς εἰς εὐχὴν πάντοτε. ο δὲ καὶ μετ’ ἀγγέλων εὐχηται, ὡς ἁν ἱδὴ καὶ «ισάγγελοι», οὐδὲ ἐξω ποτὲ τῆς ἁγίας φρουρᾶς γίνεται· κἂν μόνος εὐχηται, τὸν τῶν ἁγίων χορὸν συνιστάμενον ἔχει.
merely your seed.’ Similarly, in his treatise on prayer, Origen observes: ‘Not only does the High Priest pray with those who pray genuinely, but so do the angels who rejoice in heaven over one sinner who repents more than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. So do the souls of the saints who have already fallen asleep.’ Later, in the fourth century, Cyril of Jerusalem witnesses to this idea in the worship of the Church: ‘Then [during the Eucharistic prayer] we commemorate also those who have fallen asleep before us, first, Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, Martyrs, that at their prayers and intervention God would receive our petition.’ Many other authors including Gregory Nazianzen, Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose and Augustine could be cited as witnesses to this common belief in what will eventually be called the *communio sanctorum*, a phrase first found in a sermon of Nicetus of Remesiana.

**Athanasius and The Life of Antony**

Whereas the lives of the martyrs or rather the stories of their martyrdom were generally anonymous, the lives of the saints in the post-Constantinian period were produced often by prominent figures in the Church. Among the earliest to do this were Athanasius, Gregory

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5 An exception to this is the *Life of Cyprian* by Pontius, but this was not translated into Greek and thus the fame of Cyprian remained chiefly in the West. See E. Dekkers, *Clavis Patrum Latinorum* (Sacris Erudiri 3; Steenbrugge: Abbatia S. Petri, 1961), p. 15, para. 52.
Nazianzen and Gregory of Nyssa. Devotion to the saints among the different churches was promoted and spread through the writing and translations of their lives and through pilgrimages to their shrines.

The earliest of these lives of the saints, that of Antony by Athanasius, became a prototype for later ones and had considerable influence on the production of later ones. It is therefore worth noting some of its more important features. The historical setting for the composition of this work was Athanasius’ third period of exile (355-362) spent in the Egyptian desert. The work was composed in 357, a year after the death of Antony and, according to the preface, it was written at the request of foreign monks, visitors to Egypt probably from the West where Athanasius had spent two earlier periods of exile in Trier and Rome. This was a very original work, the first Christian biography of a holy man not a martyr and it was quickly and widely imitated. Its influence on later Christian hagiography was incalculable. In addition to biblical models for holy men including the story of Jesus himself,1 Athanasius was probably influenced by the biographies of philosophers, of which there existed many from the time of Plato on.2 The *Life of Antony* proved to be Athanasius’ most effective instrument in furthering his policy of integrating the ascetic movement into the service of the Church.

One way of achieving this integration was to connect monastic life with the previous period of the church, that of the martyrs. In chapters 46 and 47 Athanasius recounts how Antony went to Alexandria during the persecution of Maximin, for he yearned to suffer martyrdom or at least to render service to the confessors in the mines and in the prisons. He encouraged those who were called to martyrdom and remained with them to the end. Athanasius says that ‘he seemed like one who grieved because he had not been martyred, but the Lord was protecting him to benefit us and others, so that he

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might be a teacher to many in the discipline that he had learned from the Scriptures.’ After the persecution had ended and the bishop of Alexandria, Peter, had also been martyred, Athanasius states: ‘Antony departed and withdrew once again to his cell, and was daily being martyred by his conscience, and doing battle in the contests of the faith.’ By this simple stroke of associating Antony with martyrdom both historically and spiritually, Athanasius managed to suggest that the monastic life was in fact a continuation of the heroic age and life of the martyrs. Later writers, notably John Chrysostom, would also promote this idea.

Athanasius also described Antony’s goal and manner of life as a monk in terms stemming from an earlier tradition both Christian and philosophic. At the beginning of the Life, after a brief description of his parents, childhood, and the death of his parents when he was about twenty, Athanasius recounts how Antony was inspired by hearing read in Church the verse from the Gospel of Matthew, ‘If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven’ (Matt. 19:21), to sell all that he had inherited and give it to the poor. Then, says Athanasius, ‘Placing his sister in the charge of respected and trusted virgins, and giving her over to the convent for rearing, he devoted himself from then on to the discipline rather than the household, giving heed to himself and patiently training himself. There were not yet many monasteries in Egypt, and no monk knew at all the great desert, but each of those wishing to give attention to his life disciplined himself in isolation, not far from his own village.’ Here Athanasius has introduced two technical terms, drawn from the Greek philosophical tradition but already part of the Christian vocabulary, to describe Antony’s action in taking up the life of a monk: prosoche (attention) and askesis (exercise.

1 Vita Antonii 47: 1. Ἐπειδὴ δὲ λοιπὸν ὁ διωγμὸς ἐπαύσατο, καὶ μεμαρτύρηκεν ὁ μακαρίτης ἐπίσκοπος Πέτρος, ἀπεδήμησε, καὶ πάλιν εἰς τὸ μονοστήριον ἀνεχώρη, καὶ ἣν ἐκεί καθ’ ἣμέραν μαρτυρῶν τῇ συνειδήσει καὶ ἀγωνιζόμενος τοῖς τῆς πίστεως ἄθλοις.

or discipline). These served to locate sanctity in the interior life and the quest for spiritual progress, a quest which is echoed in much of the early monastic literature.¹

Antony was undoubtedly famous even before his death. The story of his correspondence with the emperor Constantine and his sons² served to illustrate his fame. At the end of the work Athanasius claims that Antony’s fame was already known in Spain, Gaul, Rome and Africa.³ However, the Life produced by Athanasius served to canonize him, to use the later terminology. The work was quickly translated into other languages including Latin, Coptic, Syriac, Armenian, Georgian, Ethiopian and Arabic. The oldest Latin version is thought to have been made while Athanasius was still composing the work.⁴ About fifteen years after the death of Athanasius, St. Augustine recounts in his Confessions how he, at Milan in 386, was influenced by hearing the Life of Antony: ‘For I had heard how Antony happened to be present at the gospel reading, and took it as an admonition addressed to himself when the words were read: ‘Go, sell all you have, give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me’ (Matt. 19:21).⁵

The Life of Antony produced a role model for monks and nuns particularly in regard to progress in the interior life, in the combat with temptations and in prayer. It served also as a model in writing the lives of other monastic saints in Egypt. The various lives of Pachomius and his successors show the influence of Athanasius’ work. Indeed the Vita Prima Graeca and the Bohairic lives mention the Life of Antony by Athanasius explicitly.⁶ Here also we find the monastic

¹ See M. Sheridan, From the Nile to the Rhone and Beyond. Studies in Early Monastic Literature and Scriptural Interpretation (Roma/St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 2012), chs. 1, 2, 4.
² Vita Antonii 81.
³ Vita Antonii 93.
⁵ Confessions, Bk 8, Vita Antonii 3.
life associated in continuity with the age of the martyrs now ended. Like Antony, Pachomius also associates himself with an older ascetic, Palamon, to learn from him.\(^1\) Also in these lives, we are able to see the development in Christian piety of the role of the saints as intercessors. In a passage from the Bohairic Life, which may reflect earlier tradition, Theodore seeks to comfort the brothers after the death of Pachomius by comparing the present situation to that of a man who is a friend of the king, but lives in a provincial city rather than the capital. ‘Many,’ he says, ‘ally themselves with him so that he may obtain favors for them.’ Later he moves to the capital and his friends have even more confidence in him now that he is closer to the king. So it is also with Pachomius. He is now with the King of kings, the Lord of the universe and will ‘be heard all the more when he is in the tents of the just appealing for us.’\(^2\) This is the idea of parresia or access to the divine presence mentioned earlier and such was the common idea that led to the cult of the saints as intercessors. They enjoyed proximity to Jesus Christ. There is also present the implicit image of Jesus as king or emperor that owes much to the post-Constantinian situation of the Church.

One more Egyptian monastic saint must be mentioned, John of Lycopolis, because of his great fame in both the East and the West. As the great French historian Lenain de Tillemont observed over three centuries ago, ‘after St. Antony there is no one whose renown is greater than that of St. John of Lycopolis.’\(^3\) He also observed that, in

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\(^1\) Vita Prima Graeca, 6.

\(^2\) The Bohairic Life 125. The passage does not have a parallel in the Vita Prima Graeca.

\(^3\) S. Lenain de Tillemont, Memoires pour servir a l’histoire ecclesiastique des six premiers siècles (Venise: François Pitteri, 1732) X, pp. 9: ‘Entre tous les saints solitaires, dont la vertu a relevé dans l’Egypte cette vie angélique, qui semble avoir executé avec toute la perfection dont l’homme est capable, les règles que J.C. nous a données dans l’Evangile, on peut dire avec verité qu’il n’y en a aucun après S.Antoine dont le nom ait autant éclaté qu’a fait celui de S. Jean de Lycople.’ Tillemont seems to be using terminology that he found in the prologue to the Historia Monachorum, 3 where the reference to the teaching
addition to the principal account of John of Lycopolis found in the *Historia Monachorum* and in Palladius’ *Historia Lausica*, information regarding him or knowledge of him was to be found in the works of Sulpicius Severus, Augustine of Hippo, Jerome, John Cassian and the *Apophthegmata*. The most reliable and extensive source, the *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, attributes to John a discourse on the spiritual life in which the struggle against the passions and vices is central and essential in order to arrive at the vision of God in the contemplative life, a doctrine similar to that of Antony as portrayed by Athanasius and of many other early monastic figures such as Paul of Tamma, Evagrius of Pontus and John Cassian.

**The Cappadocian fathers**

Gregory Nazianzen and Gregory of Nyssa played an important role in the development of the devotion to the saints through their writings. About nine years after the death of Athanasius, Gregory Nazianzen composed and preached in Constantinople a panegyric on his life, which, because of the power of his rhetoric and his own later fame for sanctity, served to canonize Athanasius as a preeminent saint in the defence of orthodoxy. Recounting many of the details of his life, he depicts Athanasius as the model Christian and ideal ruler of the Church.\(^1\) He struggled heroically against the Arian heresy throughout his life. Gregory describes Athanasius as one who ‘happily preserved the unity, and religiously taught the trinity; not confounding the three persons in the unity, or dividing the substance among the three persons, but staying in the bounds of righteousness and avoiding excessive inclination or resistance to either side.’\(^2\) Early in the panegyric he says that ideally he would like to write the life of Athanasius as Athanasius had done for Antony, but that he will content himself with an encomium.\(^3\) But he notes also how Athanasius had espoused and promoted the monastic life:

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While he associated with them [the monks], the great Athanasius, just as he was the mediator and reconciler of all people, imitating him who made peace between disparate elements with his blood, so too he reconciled the solitary life with the shared by showing that the priesthood is philosophical and that philosophy requires a priesthood. For he harmonized the two and brought them into one—both quiet action and active quietness—in such a way that he convinced [the monks] that to be a monk is characterized more by the steadiness of one’s conduct than by the withdrawal [anachoresis] of one’s body.¹

Athanasius had in fact begun to ordain monks as bishops even before the death of Antony. This passage shows that Gregory understood the role of Athanasius in creating the figure of the saintly or ascetic bishop as a role model for the Church, a development to which Gregory also contributed through his encomia of saintly bishops.²

In another sermon actually composed earlier than the encomium on Athanasius, Gregory had shown his willingness to celebrate the saints and martyrs of other churches by preaching in praise of Cyprian of Carthage, although he does not seem to have known much about him other than that he had written important works, and he seems to have confused with Cyprian of Antioch.³

One of the most famous of Gregory’s panegyrics, often considered his greatest rhetorical masterpiece, was that composed in honor of his friend Basil the Great.⁴ It was originally composed and delivered three or four years after the death of Basil in January 379. In its present form it would have taken about two and a half hours to deliver. It became one of the standard sources for Basil’s life, partly because of the long personal association of the two friends, and is ‘the single greatest

² On the development of the ideal of the saintly bishop, especially of the monk-bishop, see Baumeister, ‘Heiligenvlehrehrung I,’ pp. 141-146.
exemplar of Christian hagiographic writing.” It set a standard that would be followed in the creation of Byzantine hagiography. A major aspect of Gregory’s praise of Basil is that the latter was a champion of orthodoxy and especially of ‘the doctrine of the Homousion of the Spirit of God.’ In effect, after his death Basil has been pressed into service as a saint in the cause of the orthodoxy that Gregory was promoting, one of the perennial roles of saints.

Gregory was not, however the first to canonize Basil. This had already been done by Basil’s younger brother, Gregory of Nyssa, in his work concerning the death of his sister Macrina, composed in the form of a letter, although Gregory himself admits that it goes beyond the normal limits of the letter genre. In this work Gregory not only refers to his sister Macrina as ‘the great’ but also underlines her role in making their brother Basil become ‘the great,’ thus canonizing the two of them together. The work was written in 381, soon after the death of Macrina. Although there were passions of martyrs dedicated to women, this was a pioneering work simply because it portrayed a woman as capable of achieving the same or a greater degree of sanctity than a man. Macrina becomes successively the spiritual mother of her mother and then the spiritual guide of her brother, the future Basil the Great, saving him from a life of vanity. Macrina is portrayed as capable of leading a ‘philosophic life,’ that is, an ascetic life, as heroically as any man. A large part of the work is dedicated to portraying the holy death of Macrina and her funeral. The importance

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1 See J. McGuckin, Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, pp. 373-374. See also: F.W. Norris, ‘Your honor, My reputation: St. Gregory of Nazianzus’s Funeral Oration on St. Basil the Great,’ and D. Konstan, ‘How to praise a Friend: St. Gregory of Nazianzus’s Funeral Oration for St. Basil the Great’ in Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity, (ed. T. Hägg and P. Rousseau; Berkely: University of California Press, 2000). This funeral oration (epitaphios) was translated in antiquity into at least Coptic and Armenian. See CPG 3010 and Supplement.


of this work was that it placed women’s sanctity on an equal level with that of men and created a role model for women.

**Egyptian monastic saints**

By the end of the fourth century many monastic role models in addition to that proposed in the *Life of Antony* had appeared in Greek and Latin literature. This was due in part to the fame of Eastern monasticism that drew new visitors from the West. Among these was Rufinus of Concordia (or Aquileia), who arrived in Egypt soon after the death of Athanasius in 373. In the course of the next thirty years Rufinus became the most important translator of Greek Christian literature into Latin. One of these works was the *Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius, for which Rufinus also provided a continuation to bring it up to date from 324 until the death of the Emperor Theodosius in 395. Many of the events narrated after the death of Athanasius in Egypt Rufinus had witnessed first hand. He must have been acquainted with the *Life of Antony* and he mentions many of the famous monks of the period, who were disciples of Antony, including Macarius the Great, Macarius the Alexandrian, Isidore of Scetis, Pambo at Cellia, Moses and Benjamin in Nitria and many others.¹ He also notes the construction of churches at the tombs of martyrs (II, 27).

A little later, Rufinus translated another work that served to promote devotion to Egyptian monastic saints in the West. In 394 a group of seven monks from Rufinus’ monastery on the Mount of Olives made a trip to Egypt to make the personal acquaintance of the monks whose fame had already spread to Jerusalem. They wrote an account of their trip in Greek, better known by the Latin title, *Historia monachorum in Aegypto*, which was translated into Latin by Rufinus.² The trip began at Lycopolis (Assiut) with a visit to John of Lycopolis and then continued down the Nile with many visits along the way until they reached the monastic communities of Nitria and in the Delta. Along the way they visited about twenty-six places and/or

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² See p. 203, note 3 above. For an English translation, see: Norman Russell (ed.), *The Lives of the Desert Fathers: The Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* (Cistercian Studies 34; London: Mowbray, 1981). Jerome thought that the Latin version was an original work by Rufinus, but Butler (see p. 208, note 1) demonstrated that it was a translation from the Greek text.
people. One of the more interesting and longer accounts is that of their visit to Apollo (ch. 8) in the territory of Hermopolis (Ashmunein) in the Thebaid, which begins by noting that the Holy Family had visited there. Apollo is described as the father of 500 monks living both as hermits and in monasteries. The visitors spent a week listening to his teachings and hearing of his miracles. They record that he assigned three monks to guide them to the next monastic settlement, who were fluent in Greek, Latin and Egyptian, an interesting illustration of the international character of Egyptian monasticism in that period. They did not get to visit Macarius the Great, for he had died a few years earlier, but they heard of his fame and recorded it (ch. 21). Others too, like Amoun, the founder of Nitria, and Macarius of Alexandria, who had already died, are recorded, for their fame was still very much alive (chs. 22–23). Other works of this type such as the Lausiac History of Palladius and the Paradise of the Fathers in Syriac served to spread the monastic ideal of sanctity and the devotion to monastic saints.¹

Another work from the same period that illustrates both the growing travels or pilgrimages from the West to the East and the development of the cult of the saints is the Itinerary of Egeria, written about 381–384 by a lady from Spain. In fact the cult of the martyrs seems to have developed together with the growth of pilgrimages on the part of Christians and the visit to the shrines of the martyrs was the occasion for hearing the stories of their combat for the faith.² Egeria was not the first pilgrim of note to the Holy Land.³ That honor goes to Constantine’s mother, Helena. By the time of Egeria fifty years later many had made the journey, but Egeria left an account of her journey in the form of a letter to her ‘sisters’ back in Spain. She was interested in visiting not just the Holy Land proper, but the biblical lands in general and so the account opens with the journey through

the Sinai where the pilgrims venerated the holy mountain and prayed there. She mentions also the monks who lived there, who offered them hospitality, and the church where the burning bush was located. There they read the passage from Scripture describing the event. She notes that there was another adjoining mountain called Horeb, where the prophet Elias had found refuge and where there was now a church. From Jerusalem they also visited Mount Nebo, from which Moses had viewed the promised land, Jericho and many other places mentioned in the Bible.

On her return trip Egeria also visited Syria and Mesopotamia, where in the area of Edessa she venerated the martyrium of the Apostle Thomas and notes that the letter sent by Jesus to Abgar was preserved there. Eusebius already knew of this legend and records it in his Ecclesiastical History. Egeria mentions that there were many martyría in the city and that many monks lived close to them.¹ Then she travelled to Haran where she met the local bishop who showed her the location of the house where Abraham had lived and the well from which the holy Rebecca had drawn water. There she found also a church with a martyrium dedicated to a holy monk named Elpidius whose feast was held on the 9th of the Kalends of May, a feast to which all the monks of the region came.² Evidently the Old Testament patriarchs were venerated as saints in this region, for Jacob is also mentioned and the tomb of Laban the Syrian was identified.

After returning to Antioch, Egeria and her party went to Tarsus and from there to the shrine of Saint Thecla near Seleucia. There she found a very beautiful martyrium and monasteries of monks and nuns with whom she visited. There also she read all the Acts of Saint Thecla.³ Evidently the shrine of Saint Thecla was already a well-established place of pilgrimage. Egeria mentions many other martyría along the route of her travels including those of Saint Eufemia at Chalcedon and that of the Apostle John at Ephesus. Not only pilgrims travelled but also the devotion to particular saints travelled with them. Although Thecla’s shrine at Seleucia may have been the principal goal of pilgrimage and devotion to her, there seems to have

¹ Egeria. Pellegrinaggio in terra santa, §19.
² Egeria. Pellegrinaggio in terra santa, 20. She does not explain why he was considered a martyr.
³ Egeria. Pellegrinaggio in terra santa, §22,5
been an important devotion to her in Egypt at the shrine of Menas in the Mareotis near Alexandria. Pilgrims then as now wanted to have objects of devotion to take home with them. ‘The bodies of Christian martyrs were thought to be repositories of healing power, a power made portable in the form of souvenir artefacts sold to pilgrims at or near the shrines.’ These included small clay flasks (ampullae) to hold holy water or oil and clay medallions stamped with the image of the saint. Hundreds of such objects can be found in museums today throughout the Mediterranean world, testifying to the extent of the pilgrimage practice and the spread of the fame of the particular saints. There are numerous examples of two-sided flasks or medallions with the images of Menas on one side and that of Thecla on the other. Thus the same objects of devotion could provide models for both men and women.

The fame of such shrines as those of Thecla and Menas as places of healing and a little later the shrines of holy men such as Simeon Stylites led to increased pilgrimages and this in turn to increased fame.

The development of a common martyrrology

Three more saints in particular may serve to illustrate the role of the saints in communion and communication: Cosmas and Damian, and Nicholas. Cosmos and Damian were brothers, both physicians, from the Roman province of Cilicia. According to the tradition, they practiced their profession in the port of Ayas in the province of Syria and were martyred about 287 under Diocletian. They did not accept payment for their services and attracted many to the Christian faith. As early as the 4th century, churches dedicated to the twin saints were established at Jerusalem, in Egypt and in Syria. Their relics, deemed miraculous, were buried in the city of Cyrrus in Syria. Churches were built in their honor by Proclus of Constantinople and by the Emperor Justinian (527–565), who sumptuously restored the city of Cyrrus and dedicated it to the twins, but brought their relics to Constantinople; there, following his cure, ascribed to their intercession, Justinian, in gratitude also built and adorned their church at Constantinople, and

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2 Davis, The Cult of Saint Thecla, pp. 116-120.
it became a celebrated place of pilgrimage. At Rome Pope Felix IV (526–530) rededicated the Library of Peace (Bibliotheca Pacis) as the church of Saints Cosmas and Damian in their honor.\(^1\) Saints Cosmas and Damian are invoked in the Roman Canon (Eucharistic prayer) in the prayer known as the *Communicantes* (from the first Latin word of the prayer) after Mary, the Apostles, several bishops of Roman and other saints:

In communion with the whole Church, they venerate above all others the memory of the glorious ever-virgin Mary, Mother of our God and Lord, Jesus Christ, then of blessed Joseph, husband of the Virgin, your blessed Apostles and Martyrs, Peter and Paul, Andrew, James, John, Thomas, James, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Simon and Jude: Linus, Cletus, Clement, Sixtus, Cornelius, Cyprian, Laurence, Chrysogonus, John and Paul, *Cosmas and Damian* and all your Saints: grant through their merits and prayers that in all things we may be defended by the help of your protection.

Saint Nicholas of Myra or Bari enjoys even more widespread veneration throughout the Greek, Latin and Slavic Churches. According to the tradition, he was bishop of Myra in Lycia and died 6 December, 345 or 352. There is scarcely anything historically certain about him except that he was bishop of Myra in the fourth century. Some of the main points in his legend are as follows: He was born at Parara, a city of Lycia; in his youth he made a pilgrimage to Egypt and Palestine; shortly after his return he became bishop of Myra, was cast into prison during the persecution of Diocletian, was released after the accession of Constantine, and was present at the Council of Nicaea (although his name does not occur in the lists that are preserved). In 1087 Italian merchants stole his body at Myra, bringing it to Bari. Numerous miracles are attributed to him. The legends concerning him were first collected by Simon Metaphrastes in the tenth century.\(^2\)

Other saints, who enjoyed great popularity in the West, such as St. Martin of Tours, did not make it to the East. His biography by Sulpicius Severus was not translated into Greek. In fact very few Latin works were translated into Greek. An exception to this rule was John Cassian, whose works were partially translated into Greek and were

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\(^1\) *Acta Sanctorum*, 27 September, p. 432.
\(^2\) *PG* 116.
known to the Patriarch Photius.¹ The result was that, ironically, he came to be honored as a saint in most of the Eastern Churches, but not in the West except in Marseille, because he was thought to have been in conflict doctrinally with St. Augustine.²

The celebration of the anniversaries of the martyrs made it necessary, at least in the larger Christian communities to fix these in calendars. This is the starting point for the history of the liturgical calendars, which eventually develop into the martyrologies and synaxaria such as the Martyrologium Hieronymianum and the Synaxarium of Constantinople.³ The existence of such calendars made it possible to include saints from other places. Thus, for example, the Martyrologium Hieronymianum (pseudonymously attributed to Jerome), is a compilation of a general martyrology of the Eastern Churches, a local martyrology of the Church of Rome, some general martyrologies of Italy and Africa, and a series of local martyrologies of Gaul. In its earliest form it is thought to have originated in Aquileia in the fifth century, but in its present form seems to be from the end of the sixth century.⁴ These compilations underwent continuous revision in the various Churches.

¹ Photius, Biblioteca, §197. PG 103-104.
⁴ See H. Delehaye, Commentarius perpetuus in Martyrologium Hieronymianum ad recensionem H. Quenti in Acta Sanctorum XXIV November 11, part II (Brussels, 1931). For the synaxaria, see H. Delehaye, ‘Le Synaxaire de Sirmond,’ in Analecta bollandiana, xiv. 396-434, where the terminology is explained; idem, Synaxarium ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae e codice Sirmondiano (Brussels, 1902), forming the volume Propylaeum ad acta sanctorum novembris.
WHAT DOES UNITY MEAN IN A WORLD THAT IS FALLING APART?¹

Susan Durber *

The world might seem to be ‘falling apart’, echoing Yeats’ prophetic poem The Second Coming. But the reality is complex: for there are also dominating, centralising forces like the economic orthodoxy which results in increasingly unequal growth, and a globalising culture which undermines the rich diversity of world cultures—phenomena which smack of empire. Instead, we need the unity of ‘communion’ (koinonia), which is at the heart of God, and God’s gift to the world; thus we may reconnect with creation and with other communities. This is the WCC vision of unity, most recently explored in its convergence text, The Church: Towards a Common Vision.

What does it mean to say that the world is falling apart?

We use the expression ‘falling apart’ to talk about our own lives sometimes. And I imagine we think we know what we mean. We use it at a time of grief or loss, when we can no longer keep going as we used to. We use it when a relationship is breaking up, or when we sense that an illness is becoming stronger or destroying our sense of who we are. Sometimes we use it when we have a growing feeling that some world we have loved or that has shaped us is coming to an end.

But what would it mean to talk of the whole world ‘falling apart’, in the sense of not being a ‘whole’ world anymore? We might believe that some bad things are happening in the world; there are wars, there is poverty, there is corruption, there are refugees, there are bombs in city centres and drones taking out people in desert places. But people

¹ Paper first given at the One in Christ anniversary conference on this theme in June 2016 at Turvey Monastery.

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What does unity mean in a world that is falling apart?

often mean rather more than this when they say that the world is ‘falling apart’. The phrase somehow conveys that something more radical than an accumulation of suffering has happened, that significant ties or bonds have broken, that something quite fundamental is at stake, as though the very ground on which we stand is somehow shaken.

It’s now almost one hundred years since Yeats wrote the words much quoted since in his poem *The Second Coming*.

*Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;*  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.*

These words have clearly continued to touch a chord and to express what many feel about ‘the state we are in’ as humankind. Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold.

However, there is certainly not unanimity about how to interpret what is presently befalling the world, or even about whether what we see happening around us is indeed all bad. Many would argue that the centre that cannot hold is the kind of centre that we have long needed to let fall. If it is the kind of centralising power of a world empire, it needed to fall apart. If it’s the kind of understanding in which it is assumed to be the norm that men should rule over women, then it needs to fall apart. If you think that the centre is a powerful Christendom that uses its power to dominate, exploit and control, then that too needs (or needed) to fall. Yeats’ poem speaks of a fear of anarchy, but there have been many in the world who have seen in ‘the centre that holds all things together’ something painful and wrong too. In such a scenario, amidst such fears, we need a vision of unity which does not sound like a call to return to the totalising powers of empire.

I want to suggest, in this paper, that a Christian invitation to unity is not a call to lost power or to a lost centre, but an invitation to discover and deepen ways in which human beings and communities may find something like *communion* with one another, a kind of relating that is actually hospitable to difference and diversity, a communion that is

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without a controlling norm and which is also profoundly nurturing of the kind of love and hospitality of which the world stands in need today. Communion suggests something like mutuality, it evokes a kind of dynamic and movement, it enables us to imagine relationships that might be intimate, loving, touching, opening up vulnerability and depth, but never controlling or totalising. This kind of relating is something that a quality of Christian unity or communion might offer to the world.

It might be helpful first though to think a bit more about what kind of condition the world is actually in. Is it helpful to describe it simply as ‘falling apart’? Is that the best kind of metaphor? Or is that metaphor simply one that fits the experience of those who have lost power in the world in recent times? How do we find and listen to the metaphors and perspectives of those who might want to celebrate some kinds of ‘falling apart’ while also still seeking a new and better world? Before we answer the question about unity, perhaps we need to reflect a little longer on how we might describe the world we inhabit.

It is not easy to understand the world we live in, though there are many who are repeatedly trying to influence our perceptions every day, from the leader columns of the newspapers to the person we stand next to at the bus stop. How do any of us really know what is going on in the world all around us? There was a very revealing TED talk given in June 2014, in Berlin, by Swedish researchers Hans and Ola Rosling.\(^1\) They revealed to a stunned audience how ignorant about the world most of us actually are, our perceptions so often based on a poor grasp of fact, our analysis weak and often too much reliant on our own very particular and partial perspectives. In their research, they asked numerous groups of people some simple questions about how things are in the world—like literacy rates among women, about economic inequality, or how many people in the world get vaccinated for measles—to see how close most people can get to something that matches reality. They discovered that, in terms of actually knowing what’s going on in the world today, human beings do worse than a set of random answers. Most of us, when we think about the world, draw

on largely outdated facts and we often have little idea about how to draw generalised conclusions from the few things we do know.

And of course it’s not just a question of each of us gaining a few clearer facts about the world. We need to learn how to interpret the ‘facts’, and we need to learn whose voices to listen to, to help us do that. We can look up the World Bank’s statistics about poverty or we can ask what Oxfam has to say, or what those who are experiencing poverty say. We can look up the Met Office graphs about climate change or we can listen to the farmers of El Salvador or Kenya. We can ask the UN Commission for Women about how we are doing on women’s rights in the world these days or we can ask a women’s co-operative in Bangladesh. You can look up statistics on aging in the world, but the world looks very different if you live in Sweden (where the population is dramatically ageing) or if you live in Malawi (where the highest proportion of people are under 25). I’m often struck that Christians in the UK will talk blithely about the decline of the church, without recognising that in much of the global South Christianity is growing fast. The world is much more complex than the reality with which most of us live in our heads.

Working for Christian Aid was one way in which I learned some new things about the world and began to ask some new questions about what it means to belong to the church and to respond to the God who is reaching out in love to the world. Here are some things I learned about the world on the way and which I find I can never forget. They are things that mean I can’t now only see it as ‘falling apart’—though I do recognise that there is much suffering in the world and much that needs to change.

Creation

I think we are discovering in a new way, as Pope Francis puts it in his encyclical *Laudato Si,*¹ that the whole creation is connected and that we can’t think about humankind without thinking of ourselves in relation to everything else; the creatures, the earth, the air. We have seen, in recent times, both the power of human beings even to destroy the earth, but also the nature of humankind as part of the whole creation. We have seen that we cannot afford to think of the world ‘falling apart’ and that, indeed, there are interconnections that we

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have forgotten and must recover and honour. ‘Everything is connected’ repeats Pope Francis. Where once we thought that it was possible to choose whether to be on the side of justice for human beings or to put our energy into environmentalism, polar bears and trees, now we see that these things belong absolutely together. Some of the dichotomies of the past have been revealed as false. If the world has been ‘falling apart’ then we are more determined now to keep it connected and to rebuild our own connection with the earth. I would never have guessed that Christian Aid’s priority would be ‘climate change’. ‘Never mind making poverty history—climate change could make it permanent’ is a quotation now seared in my memory.

**Power**

Christian Aid understands poverty as at root a lack of power; the power to have a say, to claim your rights, to access essential services and to reach your share of the world’s resources. Ending poverty is about empowering the poor. But one of the largest shifts happening now in the world might be said to be about where power is held. Power is now in increasingly centralised places, with multi-national corporations, for example, often holding total budgets greater than the GDPs of some individual countries. We have an increasingly globalised space, but a sense of a decline of democratic power and governance in that global space. You might say that power now seems both more dispersed but also further away, always somehow ‘higher’ than where I live. This means that people are losing a sense of faith in the powers they have to determine what the world will be like.

**Economics**

There are those who would say that the world is simply becoming increasingly dominated by one economic system, over which no one seems, in reality, to have the kind of control that would make it work for the flourishing of us all and indeed of the planet. There has, it is true, been economic growth globally and many have moved now out of extreme poverty, but *inequality* is rising, with some fearful implications in terms of rising injustice, violence and hopelessness. An Oxfam report from 2015 says that ‘the combined wealth of the richest 1

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1 Nazmul Chowdbury, quoted in *The Climate of Poverty: facts, fears and hope*, Christian Aid, 2006
per cent will overtake that of the other 99 per cent of people next year unless the current trend is checked.” In terms of economic orthodoxy, there does now seem to be one ‘centre’ which draws all and which admits no alternatives, while failing to provide a good life for all.

**A networked world**

We live in a world that is shaped now by the internet and by new means of communication, the implications of which we are only beginning to take in. The way we work, communicate and share information has changed, but also the ways we relate to each other. We can be both more ‘in touch’, and yet more alone. We ‘join’ fewer physical institutions or groups and yet we are connected with many through social media. There is a sense in which we feel ourselves to be both increasingly alone with our localised prejudices but also part of a globally networked village, with only a few dominating voices, memes and narratives. Is our networked world providing a new, but terrifying, and uncontrollable centre?

**Sameness and difference**

In some parts of the world and in some contexts there seems an ever wider willingness to embrace difference with ease, while at the same time there is a reassertion of a new kind of identity politics where difference can become the beginning of war. In some contexts there is less acceptance of difference as perhaps there once was, but a new struggle for a single controlling centre.

There is a struggle going on around the world between those who now believe that gender is a spectrum and that we can choose or construct it for ourselves, and those who want to reassert an essential difference between male and female, and to hold all to a single view of how men and women should live in relationship. And in many places a comfortable multiculturalism has given way to a reassertion of one culture as dominant.

In many places it is more difficult to find a consensus about what it might mean to live together for the common good, and instead people

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are drawing together into discreet communities that compete for power, rather than seeking to love together in diversity.

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So, is this is a world that is ‘falling apart?’ It is certainly a world where there is suffering and injustice, but it is not always because things are ‘falling apart’. There are some places where people are resisting the forces of a very strong centre indeed—the prevailing economic orthodoxy, for example. There are places where people are rediscovering a need for a new sense of interconnection, with creation. There are also places where communities are fragmenting and where identity and difference seem more important now than community and unity.

So what might it mean to pray for or to live Christian unity in such a world as this?

I wonder whether it might mean acknowledging that the unity which Christians celebrate and hope to live, is not the kind of unity which many in the world now actually fear, a unity that is based on centralising, dominating power, a unity that seeks to make all conform to one way of living, being or organising the economic or any other part of life. There is a legitimate fear of a certain kind of unity which turns out to be a kind of defeat for many in the world. The kind of unity we seek has to be different from the unifying amalgamation of the multi-national corporations, or the regularising and conformity of the global cultures of McDonald’s and Disney. Christian unity is different from the kind of unity that makes every one the same or in thrall to the same institutional power.

The latest WCC convergence text, The Church: Towards a Common Vision, is the work of many hands and many hearts and minds, has been through several key revisions and new drafts. It reflects as faithfully as it can what people representing very different churches around the world and across many traditions can say together about what it means to be the church and what the church is really here for. No one church will find in the text its own understanding of what it means to be the church, simpliciter. The text is not about achieving a dominant voice that all must own, but it is about bringing together different voices to see what can be said in harmony or in tandem. The text reflects the realities of the different contexts from which the people who contributed to it come. In reading the text, you see words
in English, but it helps to imagine the people behind the words and to remember that from the particular drafters and revisers, to the churches and communities who sent in responses, from the wide variety of member churches of Faith and Order and beyond; from Orthodox, Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Pentecostal Christians, Reformed, Methodist, Baptist, Salvation Army and more, come people who bring their love of the church, their convictions about it and their hopes for it. Each of them longs to be heard, having struggled to shape the text in a particular way, fought for a particular phrase or argued for more emphasis here or there. And each has listened to others and tried to interpret what might have sounded strange to them, to stretch their own understanding and to reach for those moments when they could agree that a particular phrase or a new way of structuring the text worked, so that all could somehow say ‘Yes’ to a final text. Around the table that produced this text were people from the global South and from the North, academics and pastors, women and men, lay and ordained, those who love this kind of work and those who have little patience for it, those who are passionate about justice and peace and those who long for the quiet spaces of worship, those with ecumenical hope and those who wonder if we will ever find the unity for which Christ prayed. The text was woven, not in a tower block in Geneva or in the offices of ‘Christian unity incorporated’, but in the midst of a growing fellowship of people, many of whom learned to love each other in the process even as they wrestled and struggled.

What does this text say that might help us with our question? It says, first of all, that we work with God’s mission, God’s great design for all creation, that brokenness be healed and communion restored. God is working to heal the world of its wounds, and the church is a sign and servant of that mission—bringing salvation to the world. In words often attributed to Rowan Williams, ‘It is not that the church has a mission, but that the God of mission has a church.’ The church’s very reason for being is to be part of God’s mission to restore what is broken in the world. Christian Aid has often reflected that poverty and injustice are the result of broken relationships; between those who own the land and those who work it, between men and women, between people and creation, between those who control money and those who have few resources and little power. Poverty happens when people have lost sight of the kind of communities that would work for the common good, for the good of all, in which no-one is left behind.
The Christian faith proclaims that God is working to mend what is broken in the world, to enable relationships to become real again, not so that one community can ‘win’ or dominate, but so that people can find a new way of relating to one another. Where the relationship between humankind and the earth has been broken God longs for it to be restored. When the relationship between men and women is distorted so that mutual love is replaced by dominance and abuse, God longs for gender to be redeemed. When some people seek to make slaves or to defeat enemies, God offers a new way of being human together.

In Christian theology, and as increasingly spoken of in ecumenical theology, the very heart of God is understood to be reconciling, mutual and life-giving love, even the heart and being of the Trinitarian life of God. The mission of God is rooted in this relational loving and giving and it is this gift which God pours out upon the world. To quote The Church: Towards a Common Vision,

> Communion, whose source is the very life of the Holy Trinity, is both the gift by which the Church lives and, at the same time, the gift that God calls the Church to offer to a wounded and divided humanity in hope of reconciliation and healing.

To speak of unity in this way as communion (in Greek: koinonia) is to suggest a model of unity that is far removed from anything that might seem to be mechanistic, coercive or institutional, but first of all dynamic and relational. Koinonia, communion, positively welcomes difference and diversity, but always the kind of difference which refuses to be stuck or fixed but which is constantly questioning, challenging and yearning to overcome any separation or alienation. It is about reconciliation rather than amalgamation, about giving and taking in mutual exchange rather than simply adding to, about transformation rather than adding up and putting together what is just already there.

If the Church can be a sign and servant of this kind of unity, then it could indeed be of service to a world which has tired of the kind of unity which simply takes no prisoners or which models domination, the kind of unity which draws all into a common and controlling centre. If the church can offer this gift of God then it will bring hope to a world which needs to find connections again between planet and

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1 Faith and Order paper 214, 2013, p.5
people, between centralised and local, between male and female, between an economy of money and a real economy of life. In a world seeking to honour difference, to reject all kinds of empire and to find again a depth of relationship, a vision of unity as communion, churches and Christians living in communion could indeed be real signs of hope. The goal of Christian unity is never only for the sake of the church itself, but to participate in that wider healing and reconciliation which is God’s mission for the world. As we look at the world around us, perhaps we can see that the world needs to find ways of relating and finding relationship and connection that will allow for mutuality, equality and generosity.

As The Church: Towards a Common Vision says,

the growth of churches towards the unity of the one Church is intimately related to their calling to promote the unity of the whole of humanity and of creation, since Christ, who is head of the Church is the one to whom all are to be reconciled. (2103, pp 22-23)

The kind of unity that the world needs may be the kind that is rooted in intimacy and relationship, in true knowledge of the other and in the kind of relating that is open, generous and hospitable. A unity that is envisaged as koinonia, communion, is rooted first in mutual relating and understanding, in the honouring of the other rather than in their domination or defeat, and of course ultimately rooted in what is revealing of the heart of God in the miracle of the Trinity.

Of course, the healing of the world’s pain, an end to ruinous inequality and poverty, the silencing of guns and the calming of the world’s fury, will not come simply because some good people long for it or even pray for it. Communion between divided peoples, the healing of our deepest wounds, the overcoming of poverty will come because of what God is doing in the world, and because God’s people begin to recognise where that is happening and join in. The church can be a sign of God’s love for the world, and more powerfully so if it can itself receive God’s gift of communion. But ultimately, the gift is God’s. That means of course that the promise and the hope are in a surer place than our fragile and bruised hands, and as we hold out such hands to receive the gift, so we must be ready to pass it on to the people around us, to the earth beneath our feet and to the future horizon that waits for the blessings and gifts of love.
THE CENTRE FOR THEOLOGY & COMMUNITY

Angus Ritchie

*In the first of three contributions about the Centre for Theology and Community, Canon Angus Ritchie, Director and Priest in Charge of St George-in-the-East, introduces the Centre, its history and mission, and the lay community it has founded in Shadwell.*

*All three contributions were first delivered at the One in Christ anniversary Day of Reflection on the theme ‘What does unity mean in a world that is falling apart?’ at Turvey Monastery in June 2016.*

While the practice of Community Organising may not be known to many readers, its fruits are probably more familiar. Citizens UK (Britain’s Community Organising alliance) has been at the heart of campaigns for the Living Wage, Refugee Welcome, and Britain’s first anti-usury laws in more than a century.

Churches, mosques and synagogues have been at the heart of this remarkable grassroots alliance. As Sister Josephine explains, the practice of Community Organising draws different denominations, religions and beliefs together—not by skating over our distinctive beliefs, but by encouraging us to draw deep on our spiritual and ethical sources, to share the stories of what inspires and angers us, and out of such conversations to discern and promote a truly common good.

The Centre for Theology and Community (CTC) was founded in 2005. It emerged out of Christian engagement in Community Organising in east London—and a desire by churches of different denominations to root this work more deeply in our life of prayer, and in theological reflection. We have found that the most effective organising work happens when we combine a sense of *urgency* about the injustices around us and a *patient* process of listening to where the Spirit is already at work in the inner-city neighbourhoods in which we live. This *urgent patience* is revealed to us most clearly in the Gospels, where we find Jesus both burning with anger against injustice, and drawing aside to spend time in prayerful communion with his Father.
Our experience of organising is that the process of working across difference serves to deepen, and not to dilute, our engagement with our own community of faith. To take one example, our engagement with local Muslims on the issue of exploitative lending (and the seriousness with which they take Qu’ranic teaching on usury) has challenged us to engage more faithfully with what the Bible and Tradition have to say on such matters.

In 2015, CTC moved into the East Crypt of St George-in-the-East; a Church of England parish in Shadwell where Sunday attendance had dwindled into the teens, and the Diocese was reviewing the future provision of ministry. After discussion with the Bishop of Stepney and the Parochial Church Council, CTC entered into an innovative partnership with both, seeking to renew ministry in the parish through Community Organising, theological reflection and prayer. At the heart of this process of renewal was an ecumenical lay community: the Community of St George. The community would have a daily rhythm of prayer—silence, Eucharist, and Compline (beginning with a time of reflection modelled on the Examen)—which focused on patient listening and discernment. Silence, the Eucharist and the Examen all embody a spirituality of receptivity, rooting the action of each day of ministry in the work the Spirit was already doing in our midst.

As Jessica Scott observes, the word ‘community’ can be used rather glibly. However, when it begins to take tangible form (both in the life of a lay community, and in the practice of Community Organising) there are inevitable challenges and tensions. The pilot year helped us all to clarify the distinctive charisms which the Community of St George would require, if it was to renew the life of the wider parish. In particular, the Community has moved from being housed in a single property to being based in flats around the church, signifying the way its life is woven into the relationships and worship of the wider congregation. The Community of St George is focused on developing the capacity and spirituality of this wider body of worshippers. In particular, the congregation’s numerical growth has created an exciting opportunity to nurture and teach the new Christians who have begun to worship with us—but also to draw old and new members of the congregation in to action beyond the church’s walls. In 2017, this will include feeding homeless people, developing a social enterprise with local Muslim women, and organising for affordable
housing in a neighbourhood where many families are having to leave because of rising rental costs.

It is an exciting and challenging journey; one which constantly reinforces our conviction that the work of renewal requires both passionate commitment, and a patient dependence on the Lord. For the richest fruit is borne, not when we are implementing our own detailed master-plans, but when our attention is focused on discerning what the Spirit is already doing, and how we might enter into that work.

Jessica Scott

Jessica Scott, Member of the Community of St George, 2015-16.

Very often, when I tell Christians that I live as part of a lay community, the response I get is a kind of bland positivity—the word ‘community’ itself is such a warm one that presumptions are quickly made and half-listening very often follows. We know that community is a nice thing. We know that community is a good thing. Certainly that depth of outlook characterised my own thinking about a year ago as I considered joining the St George-in-the-East community.

As details were added to the outline of what it would involve, I continued to think, sweetly, of a nice and good time, and a rather novel time too—l lapsing into an imagined future founded on romantic notions of a Church of England parish, and my own capability to save the world.

The plan proposed was for a group of nine to move in together—an ecumenical selection including a young family—to share time and meals, space and recreation, in the church’s rectory we would inhabit. We would commit to a shared pattern of prayer—opening up and closing the church every day, spending half an hour in silent prayer before a daily Eucharist, and leading Compline each evening. We would also be intentional about working with the church to renew its mission—welcoming new people on a Sunday as well as getting to know the hopes of those who had attended for some time. Our outlook too would aim to be outward facing: taking up opportunities
to know our neighbours in Shadwell, especially those organisations with whom the church might act for the good of those in the parish.

And the kind of bland positivity that hears what I have outlined as merely nice and exciting, a kind of novelty, is exactly what, as I experienced it, stood as an obstacle to any of it being meaningful and true.

Because the bland positivity that hears ‘community’ and unthinkingly summons to mind something straightforwardly good is precisely what lets us all carry with us a whole host of expectations and aspirations for what community might be like. It let us—in the lay community itself, and some of those in our congregation—have in mind unvoiced but in practice quite specific imagined ends—of what we might do and see and achieve.

Those expectations in turn lend themselves to a kind of twitchiness that wants to check everything is on track. Bonhoeffer warns of the want to incessantly check the temperature of the Christian community, and our spiritual pulse—and I can testify to some early weeks of anxious, well intentioned, questions asking who exactly we were, what exactly we were doing, and for whom we were doing anything at all.

That want to locate the community, to be in a kind of control of where it was heading, and to have our own particular dream for it guiding the way was something that simply but painfully needed to be left behind.

For where our time as a community seemed to be most transparent to the work of God was not where each sphere—home life together, the church we serve, and the area we work in—was treated as a separate unit, each competing for our time, and to which we partially belonged, but rather the points at which each sphere seemed to overlap with the other, seemed to run fluently alongside the other.

When time is spent praying with the same people you go on to share meals with, and the same people you go on to serve those in the local area with, the overlap between these spheres seems in a way to become more obvious, more difficult not to see.

The time you spend in silent prayer seems to equip you mysteriously for the listening required in the home you attempt to nurture; the home you nurture becomes a hospitable place for those ‘out there’; and as you tentatively make some kind of room for those ‘out there’, you realise their proximity to the whole activity of prayer—for those
on the margins, we know with Christ, have a particular knowledge of what it is to be blessed.

I suppose what I am trying to sketch is the way in which my time in community has led me, at its best moments, to see the exchange of prayer and social life and home—of silence and people and place—their merging and meeting—the inseparability of what I do in church to how I am at home to how I relate to my neighbour. Sharing those experiences with the same group of people somehow clarifies their connection.

Over time this kind of fluency bears fruit. The congregation at St George’s more than doubled as the capacity of the church to welcome and engage new worshippers deepened and grew. The community’s listening to the overlap between church and neighbourhood became formative in the parish vision process—out of which plans for a new worshipping community at the parish school, new activities in the church building with and for our neighbours, and organising for affordable housing (each of which has been taken forward and is currently unfolding) arose.

Yet the astonishing presence of God in these beginnings and unfoldings should not be disconnected from the very ordinary kind of living in which God’s fruit came: the small business of chatting over tea and coffee every week, of texting to arrange to meet parishioners outside of church, of becoming a familiar face to the man who sits on the same bench in the park everyday, of being free for a cup of tea when someone rings the rectory’s bell, of praying over and over again, of repeating the same psalms each night.

For that ordinariness is another side of the coin: as exciting and on trend as ‘community’ seems to many and seemed to me what the year has really been is quite ordinary: often prayer has seemed tedious, sometimes people have seemed annoying, frequently I have quite wanted to be somewhere other than Shadwell.

And this ordinariness extends further theologically I think: for what this activity of living together seems to be about is not, in fact, a creative and novel and radical thing, but an uncovering, and excavation of something that is true, and has always been: we’re not moulding something new and extraordinary, we are uncovering something ordinary and oddly lost, oddly made to seem extraordinary.

So as I reflect on my experience of living in community, I suppose I most want to describe it as a particular kind of practising prayer:
where there is a coherence you’re seeking, and there are moments of things fitting and aligning—when a sense of home seeps into the institution of church, or when the silence of prayer finds its way into the way you greet your brother or sister—but the way those moments come is in the depths of ordinariness, sometimes frustration, sometimes irritation, and sometimes tedium.

Unity comes forth but its kind is not something to be glibly positive about. My time in the community of St George has shown a unity that is hard to work out, actually, comes at some cost, and sanctifies in the ordinary daily times which don’t immediately make for great stories. But it is a unity which has life, and I think has truth, and which challenges those around it to make room, sometimes falteringly, for what it is able distinctively to point to. Indeed, this is a task which continues, as Angus’s piece clarifies, as the community’s life takes a new shape in 2016-2017, and a new season nurtures the seeds of ordinariness in order to bear the Kingdom’s fruit.

Josephine Canny

*Sr Josephine Canny OA, Chaplain, Centre for Theology & Community*

There is a feeling of Springtime, a vibrancy around the Centre for Theology and Community where I turn up most Monday mornings. For the past 6 or 7 years I have had the joy of acting as Chaplain to this small community of Christian activists where I have witnessed a snowballing of activities in favour of the poor—but with a different feel about them.

Inside, when we meet, you might find a group of multi-talented young men and women (and a few not so young)—there have been musicians, theatre artists, priests, men with good business heads, accountants, people skilled in multi media etc. coming from different Christian traditions—seekers of God and with a developed sense of social responsibility based on the gospel. I leave later on the Monday morning with a greater sense of hope for the Church.

The summer internship usually engages between 15 and 20 young men and women during the month of July. They are trained in
Community Organising methods and work in local Churches or various denominations.

Community Organising with Citizens UK is based on one-to-one intentional encounters and because of this simple process, many of the young people find it quite natural to ask for one-to-one spiritual accompaniment.

There is a rather big difference with these young men and women I meet who are, on the whole, rather more gospel hungry than the adolescents I have spent many of my working years with. Academically they are streets ahead of me which I find stimulating but I am often aware of their limited understanding of the spiritual world. Many have become Christian at University, or have been awakened in their spiritual lives during this period of their life.

And it has been a particular joy for me on the odd occasion when we have had interns with no particular faith background or who have not attended churches since their childhood, to see them taking advantage of the one-to-ones to ask personal questions or allay fears about Church teaching (a misconstrued version of Church teaching usually).

What I find encouraging is the balance between the prayer life and social responsibility—both given equal seriousness. This gives a balanced approach to the young men and women who engage with us. Nothing is done hastily; everything is well reflected upon, studied and prayed about. A sense of trust and openness reigns. All do not travel at the same pace—this is respected, and in terms of vocational process, doors open where those who are searching seem to find a foothold. Consequently some remarkably balanced and mature young Christian leaders have emerged.

I have had relatively little to do with the new Community of St George, but have observed their daily fidelity to prayer and this is indicative of what has marked CTC for me. My conviction is that here lies the basis for its fruitful activity and the level of ‘spiritual listening’ to the Lord which has indicated the path.

Now Angus is far too modest to say this himself, but none of this remarkable gospel activity would be happening without an intelligently creative mind in tune with the Holy Spirit behind it. Each Monday there seems to be something new happening, plans for an ethical cleaning company, provision being developed for the night workers in the city of London, and it goes on and on ... a living spring.
CHRISTIAN MEDITATION: RESTORING THE BALANCE

Laurence Freeman OSB *

In this address to the ONE IN CHRIST anniversary Day of Reflection on ‘What does unity mean in a world that’s falling apart?’, the speaker examines the current signs of imbalance and disintegration in the world of today and explains how the World Community of Christian Meditation seeks to make this rich Christian Tradition available to people today, thereby restoring a vital balance.

I resonated very well personally with the two sessions we had earlier, focussing on community: the presentations by the Centre for Theology and Community in East London, and their community,¹ and also Susan Durber’s reflections² on the nature of our crisis, our global, cultural crisis, the sense of disintegration that’s overwhelming us, and the fears that arise out of that and the great question to men and women of faith in all traditions, particularly here in our Christian tradition, how do we respond to that. In my own experience, the World Community for Christian Meditation is a community that has grown out of the teaching and the practice of silence. We basically pass on an understanding of the prayer of the heart which we’ve received from the early Christian church, the hesychia of the Eastern church, the pure prayer of the desert Christian tradition, and we teach that in a very simple way, because it is simple, not easy, but we teach it as a simple discipline, that we try to help each other to practice on a daily basis, half an hour in the morning, half an hour in the evening, this prayer of the heart, silent, still and simple that can be integrated of course into one’s lifestyle but also of course into one’s other ways of prayer. So in our oblate community in central London we integrate our silent meditation period into the Benedictine office as such.

* Laurence Freeman OSB, director of the World Community of Christian Meditation, is a monk of Turvey Monastery.

¹ See above, 223-9.
² See above, 213-22.
The imbalance of contemporary living

So I’ve been very stimulated by the conversations that we’ve had because they relate to this combination, this marriage really of contemplation and action, the loss of which may be the cause both of the disintegration that’s happening in our culture, the huge level of mental illness, and—despite our prosperity and our affluence—an increasing level of unhappiness and alienation; maybe this loss of fundamental harmony between being and doing which traditional cultures have intuitively respected and protected, and which we have lost; so on the one hand we could say that this loss of being and doing as a balance has at least contributed to this sense of disintegration, self-alienation, division, and all the dangers and complications that arise from that. And on the other hand we can say that, identifying that, a recovery of this essential balance could contribute to the recovery of what Susan was describing as ‘communion’. I like this distinction between unity as something that might be imposed or enforced compared with communion which is a more dynamic and open-ended kind of experience of oneness, the great oneness that Jesus prays for.

So my focus here would really be upon this theological, cultural, and religious recovery of the very fundamental human need to balance contemplation and action. Rowan Williams recommended a book that I’ve been reading recently called The Master and His Emissary by Iain McGilchrist, which is quite a long book, it took 20 years to write, but it brings together the latest scientific research on the two hemispheres of the brain. It’s not a religious or theological book in any way but I think it gives us tremendous metaphors. He’s coming to speak at our centre in London later this year. I think somebody did ask him if the thought meditation would help, and he said he thought it would. Basically he thinks that we have become culturally and psychologically excessively left-hemisphere oriented. The left hemisphere of the brain deals with familiar knowledge, it creates models of reality, and then of course it has come to worship these models of reality as if they were reality, and to dismiss the kind of attention, of knowledge, of consciousness that the right hemisphere of the brain specialises in; it dismisses that as being flakey—meditation, massage, incense, vegetarianism, these sort of things; so it’s all dismissed. Whereas the research shows that in fact it is the right hemisphere of the brain that specialises in direct knowledge, first-hand experience, that is much
more in touch with reality. It isn’t dealing with the model of reality, it’s here and now, and it has the capacity to handle models and categorise material and data just as much as the left hemisphere, and they do work together; but it chooses not to, because it says this is your job, you’re the emissary, the secretary. So there is this fundamental confusion between the roles of these two hemispheres which, McGilchrist says, work together, but there is a world of difference between them, between the kind of attention they give to the world.

Now, is there a Gospel story that seems to you to anticipate all of this research? Martha and Mary! This seems to take us right to the heart of the matter. It’s interesting: you could have imagined a parallel universe in which the character at fault of the two sisters would be Mary: that Mary would be meditating too much, or not meditating properly, and she would be found to be at fault. But because the human condition is what it is we have this bias towards left-brain activity, towards creating models, creating idols, being unable to say ‘sorry’—these are all characteristics of left-brain bias. So Martha, who is a good person, just as good as Mary, becomes distracted by her many tasks. And because she becomes distracted, she comes out, she disrupts the flow of wisdom that is coming from Jesus, and she says, ‘Lord, don’t you see that I am doing all the work by myself?’

Something I think that most homes, and most monasteries have heard many times: ‘I am doing all this work by myself. Don’t you care? Tell her—that woman who I won’t speak to—tell her to give me a hand!’ So it’s a very economical little Punch and Judy episode, but it very powerfully expresses I think something of our sense today of falling apart. And she is the perfect candidate to be the patron saint of stress because she’s showing all the classic symptoms of stress: isolation, alienation, anger, depression, out of touch, disruptive, and must really hate herself when she hears herself speaking like that. And Jesus responds with compassion, naming her, ‘Martha, Martha!’ He diagnoses her condition: ‘You are worrying and fussing about so many things, but only one thing is necessary.’ He doesn’t say what the one thing necessary is. But he then says something that upsets a lot of women, especially: ‘Mary has chosen the better part, and it will not be taken away from her.’ Which could be interpreted, although it would be out of character, as him saying: ‘Mary is better then you, you’re just
the skivvy in the kitchen.’ But that wouldn’t be very characteristic. So what he’s saying is surely: ‘Being comes before doing’.

There is a priority here. Just as McGilchrist can show that the right hemisphere of the brain is more in touch with reality than the left hemisphere, because it’s working on direct data rather than recorded models of reality, so Jesus is saying that Mary—and let’s hope that she is really listening, that she is awake, let’s hope that she is praying properly—that Mary, as a representative of being, does have priority, because being comes before doing, and the quality of your being, how you’re in touch with this experience of being, is going to determine the quality of your action. So the kind of world we live in, either a world that is falling apart, into division, prejudice, alienation and violence, or a world that is trying to continually rebuild communion through community, through sacrifice, through love, through witness, through self-transcendence, that the kind of world we create and are responsible for, is directly related to our experience of being.

**What Christian meditation offers**

So this would be my understanding of why it is worthwhile for Christians to take the lead in teaching contemplation. There is clearly a huge spiritual hunger and feeling of emptiness in our world, a breakdown of religious authority, of religious institutions, that has created a kind of black hole: and all sorts of things have come to fill this vacuum. It seems to me that the church, the ecumenically leaning church, has an unbelievably rich resource to draw upon, to respond to this crisis and this imbalance. Now I’m not saying that all we have to do is meditate and everything will be put right, though in another way I do believe that! but I don’t think it’s the only thing that we have to do. In our World Community of Christian Meditation [WCCM] we have evolved, over the last 25 or so years, the ideas of *inreach* and *outreach.*

**The Inreach work of the WCCM**

When John Main started the first meditation groups at his monastery of that time at Ealing, and meditation groups were open to people from the parish, from the school, people from all over London began to come, and we were teaching meditation from the Christian tradition. And a lot of people came and said: That’s great, because we like the Buddhists but we feel Christian, why do we have to go to the Buddhist centre, or do TM, or go to an ashram, does the church really
not have any wisdom, any practical skills to teach us how to build this contemplative rebalancing of our lives? And we need support, because it's not just a matter of learning a technique, it’s a discipline that we need to build into our lives, we need community, we need other people to practise this with; and we can draw on the wisdom of our Christian mystical contemplative traditions.

And we have now over 2,500 Christian meditation groups meeting around the world, and many people who maybe don’t go to the groups, or don’t go regularly to the groups but who still have a sense of community through all the other activities we do—website, retreats, seminars, books, and so on. All of that has just grown. It wasn’t a great 25 year plan, it just evolved organically and I don’t know where the next 25 years will take us.

Trying to work with churches, ecumenically, and we cover a pretty broad range now from the Salvation Army to the Church of Christ in Canada, to Reformed churches, to Rowan Williams here in the UK, to cardinals in Rome and so on, so we have a pretty broad range of collaboration, simply through the individual meditators who came into touch with this teaching. We try to restore to the heart of the Christian life the understanding of the centrality of contemplation. The best expression of this that you could find in the currently I think is Rowan Williams’ address to the Synod on New Forms of Evangelisation,¹ a couple of years ago in Rome. Before he went he said to me: ‘They think I’m going to talk about ecumenism, because that’s the easier thing to talk about, you know—evangelisation, we’re going to work on ecumenism; but I’m going to talk about contemplation.’ And in those few pages he gives really the most beautiful, inspiring statement about the centrality, the constitutive identity of contemplation at the heart of the Christian vocation. And he’s quite specific about what contemplation means. I’m not saying there’s only one way to enter into this contemplative experience. John Main didn’t say that and no sane person would say there’s only one way. However, there has to be a way in one’s life, we have to have a practice, it’s not

just something vague and idealistic, or aspirational. The contemplative experience, which is what I think Jesus is pointing to in the story with Mary, is what he’s pointing to also in his teaching on prayer: ‘Go into your inner room; don’t gabble like the pagans who think the more they say the more likely they are to be heard.’ Wouldn’t our churches be very different if we put that into practice? Stop babbling, the minute you start the service to the minute you end. Lay aside your worries and anxieties; don’t always focus upon your problems when you pray, but let go of your problems. Set your mind on God’s kingdom before everything else, be mindful, pay attention, train your capacity for attention.

This is what the mindfulness movement has taken up in a secular way in our culture because the churches have failed to address it, so there are Catholic, Church of England schools, faith schools all over the country paying thousands of pounds—and I’m not being competitive with Mindfulness, I think they’ve opened the door for us actually, I’m very grateful, I’ve many friends from the mindfulness movement, many Christian friends also who teach it. But there’s something missing in our collective Christian response to the crisis we’re facing that as yet we can provide no adequate contemplative response. So, set your mind on God’s kingdom; and then he says: live in the present moment, don’t worry about tomorrow. If you put all these elements of Jesus’ teaching on prayer together, what do you have? You have contemplation. Jesus is a teacher of contemplative prayer. He also went to the synagogue, he prayed in the temple, but when he speaks about prayer, his focus is upon contemplation.

Meditatio: the Outreach work of the WCCM

But what happens when there’s a critical mass of Christians who try, in what will always be an imperfect way, to reintegrate the contemplative dimension back into their ordinary life and their life of faith? What will happen, something we’ve discovered in a small way, is that we have something to share with the world, with the secular world. So we have on the one hand in our community what we call the school of meditation which is a rich programme of teaching, of retreats, that work towards reintegrating the contemplative dimension into Christian life. On the other hand—and it’s kind of left and right again—we have what we call Meditatio. And Meditatio is an umbrella term that we experimented with a few years ago and which has proved
to be very useful. It allows us to bring this practice, this experience, in a very simple way—not dumbed down, not despiritualised, not turned into a commodity—but we can bring this into institutions of society where this disintegration is taking place. And there’s no major institution which does not at the moment feel that it’s going through a crisis and is in urgent need of paradigm change. For example, business and finance. There’s a huge shift in the idea of how business should be done, a real sense of losing integrity, a loss of ethics, a loss of purpose, a lot of short-termism, exploitation. But also some really enlightened, serious, deep leaders who want to contribute towards making leadership more inspired, more contemplative. The key word here I think is ‘contemplative’. And I was surprised to discover really that the word ‘contemplative’ is very acceptable.

Another profession or institution is medicine, and in Dublin the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland is setting up a faculty of contemplative medicine. This is not Christian contemplative medicine but contemplative medicine. The inspiration for this is Christian, meditation from the Christian contemplative tradition but it is sharing this as something that can be of benefit to the doctors, to the nurses, and eventually we hope to the patients, without any hidden agenda or trying to convert them. In Ireland this is particularly sensitive, for the church is in a very shaky space at the moment. But because the need is so strong, there is a real response. Again, I’m not saying that we’re the only people doing this but it’s a very clear phenomenon: because the need is so strong, the response is open-hearted.

So, then a very major area in which we’ve been doing this is in education. We’re having a seminar at the end of this month in London on meditation for children. Rowan Williams is the key-note speaker. He’s been very supportive of the work we’ve been doing, and we’re now doing it in 25 countries, bringing meditation into the classroom. We’re doing that mostly with faith schools because it’s relatively easier and there are 7,200 faith schools in the UK so we have a long way to go; I think we’ve only touched about 300 or 400 so far, so I’m not pretending that we’ve solved the problem, just that we are attempting to respond, from this tradition, from this theology of contemplation to the general experience that we’ve been talking about, this feeling of things falling apart.
Crisis and opportunity

As Susan Durber I thought very brilliantly showed, we have to ask, what is falling apart, and does this crisis also represent to us an opportunity, not just to create another kind of false stability, peace as the world gives it, peace that is maintained by force, or uniformity, or repression, but peace as Christ gives it which is the peace that flows out of communion and I think comes into the world through community. Because community, as we heard this morning, is very ordinary and very frail and very imperfect. You may think community is not the best way of communicating this experience of peace, of communion, but I think it’s the one that Jesus gave us to use, and like democracy, it’s not the best, but it’s the best we have. And there must be a mystery of Providence at work in this, that community is so vital to the communication of this experience of communion.

So, on the one hand as I say we have the school of meditation which focuses upon inreach, and of course there’s a lot of overlap, but we also have Meditatio which allows us to respond to invitations, or to take initiatives: to take the fruits of contemplation into business schools, into the classroom, into emergency wards of hospitals, into our work in many areas with homeless people. We’re doing another Meditatio seminar later next month in Middlesbrough. Our coordinator there is a wonderful guy who works with the homeless, ex-prisoners, people who don’t fit in, who are on the margins, he has a most amazing gift for helping them, creating friendship among them, supporting them, and doing it with good leadership; and he’s a born contemplative, and he shares meditation with them on every occasion he can.

So these are rather random thoughts about what struck me that I could share with you, relevant to what we’ve been talking about today. And I think that the saying of the desert fathers that seemed to me to link them is one of the sayings of the desert tradition of Evagrius: ‘One who prays is a theologian, and the theologian is one who prays.’ And if we see that connection, I think a deep division within the Christian culture, in the Christian soul really, that has separated these two forces for so long, these two hemispheres of the brain, could be healed. We can bring them back together; and I think what we’ve been sharing today is a little contribution to that big reintegration of the Christian.
THE CORRELATION BETWEEN ECCLESIAL COMMUNION AND THE RECOGNITION OF MINISTRY

Susan K. Wood*

Recognition of an imperfect communion between churches, the recognition of ecclesial communities as churches, and the mutual recognition of ministry are treated as separate and discrete topics in ecumenical conversations. Nevertheless, an ecclesiology of communion suggests that ecclesial recognition and recognition of ministry within a relationship of imperfect communion should be correlated with each other in such a way that an imperfect ecclesial communion contributes to an incremental recognition of ministry in ecumenical relationships. This essay explores this question with specific references to the concept of communion in Chapter II, part D and E of the World Council of Churches document, The Church: Towards a Common Vision (2013).

Too often, the recognition of an imperfect communion between churches, the recognition of ecclesial communities as churches, and the mutual recognition of ministry are treated as separate and discrete topics in ecumenical conversations. Nevertheless, an ecclesiology of communion suggests that ecclesial recognition and recognition of ministry within a relationship of imperfect communion should be correlated with each other in such a way that an imperfect ecclesial communion contributes to an incremental recognition of ministry in ecumenical relationships. This essay explores this question with

specific references to the concept of communion in Chapter II, part D and E of the World Council of Churches document, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (2013), hereafter referred to as *Towards a Common Vision*. Obviously, such a proposal exceeds the intent of the WCC document. The suggestion here is that such a correlation within the ecclesiology of communion that forms the basis of the document would offer a breakthrough in ecumenical relationships. Hence, this proposal constitutes an exploration of implications of the document in addition to commentary on what the document says about the identity of the local church, communion, and ministry. This proposal is not without its ecumenical challenges, which will also be outlined in what follows.

**Identity of the Local Church**

The criteria for recognizing a local church is given in *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, 31: ‘the local church is “a community of baptized believers in which the word of God is preached, the apostolic faith confessed, the sacraments are celebrated, the redemptive work of Christ for the world is witnessed to, and a ministry of episkopé exercised by bishops or other ministers in serving the community”’. This definition comes from a report of the Joint Working Group of the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church, entitled ‘The Church: Local and Universal’. More briefly stated, the criteria are: word, apostolic faith, sacraments, witness, and episkopé, a particular kind of ministry.

The expression ‘local church’ is sometimes used to refer to regional configuration of churches within a synodal structure under the presidency of a minister. *Towards a Common Vision* notes the lack of agreement ‘about how local, regional and universal levels of ecclesial order relate to one another’ (32). *Towards A Common Vision* develops its statement of the local church saying, ‘each local church contains within it the fullness of what it is to be the Church. It is wholly Church, but not the whole Church. Thus, the local church should not be seen in isolation from but in dynamic relation with the other local churches’ (31). The universal church is identified as ‘the communion of all local churches united in faith and worship around the world’ (31). It

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1 See the report of the Joint Working Group of the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church, ‘The Church: Local and Universal’, 15.
has no substantive existence apart from this communion of local churches.

The Exercise of Episkopé and Apostolicity in the Local Church

Within the World Council of Churches, the necessity of a bishop for the exercise of episkopé poses a problem. Paragraph 32 acknowledges that some churches do not define a church in reference to a bishop, but simply say it is ‘the congregation of believers gathered in one place to hear the Word and celebrate the Sacraments’. The document notes that churches differ regarding whether the historic episcopate or the apostolic succession of ordained ministry more generally is something intended by Christ (47). Nevertheless, Towards a Common Vision asks whether the churches can achieve a consensus on the threelfold ministry as part of God’s will for the church on the basis of the signs of growing agreement about the place of ordained ministry in the church. In this, Towards a Common Vision is in continuity with the Lima document, Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry (1982), paragraph 25, which asked ‘whether the threelfold pattern as developed does not have a powerful claim to be accepted by churches that do not have it.’

While some churches have moved to incorporate the episcopacy, the call to consensus on this point remains problematic for others twenty-five years after the Lima document.

Significantly, Towards a Common Vision does not state that ministers must be in continuous apostolic succession or that the ministry of episkopé must be exercised by a bishop. This definition consequently leaves open the possibility that the community itself is an important bearer of apostolicity and that there may be a variety of ministers and ecclesial structures for the exercise of episkopé.

With respect to apostolicity, the section of the document devoted to ministry within the church lists several means for maintaining the church’s apostolicity, including the scriptural canon, dogma, and liturgical order, noting that ‘ordained ministry has played an important role’ (46). It adds, ‘succession in ministry is meant to serve the apostolic continuity of the Church’ (46). Appropriately, any language suggesting that succession in ministry ‘guarantees’

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apostolicity is absent. While one sometimes encounters language of ‘guarantee’ in ecclesiastical and ecumenical documents, it is inappropriate insofar as individual bishops are subject to apostasy, in which case they no longer function as a guarantee of apostolicity even though the episcopal office itself is charged with overseeing the apostolicity of the church. It is necessary to distinguish between the office charged with safeguarding apostolicity with the person exercising that office, all the while recognizing that other ecclesial elements in addition to ministry transmit, sustain, and bear witness to apostolicity. *Dei Verbum* explains, “what has been handed down from the apostles” includes everything that helps the people of God to live a holy life and to grow in faith” (8). It then says, ‘the church, in its teaching, life and worship, perpetuates and hands on to every generation all that it is and all that it believes.’ Too often the apostolicity of a community has been judged by the apostolic succession of its ministers with little attempt given to gauging the apostolicity of its life, prayer, and witness. Even though Catholics hold the episcopacy to be essential to the structure of the church, this office belonging not only to the *bene esse*, but also to the *esse* of the church *de jure divino*, they can nevertheless agree with *Towards a Common Vision* that a variety of ministers and ecclesial structures may contribute to a church’s apostolicity.

*Towards a Common Vision* describes the authority of the exercise of the ministry of oversight with respect to ‘the proclamation of the Gospel, in the celebration of the sacraments, particularly the eucharist, and in the pastoral guidance of believers’ (48). This ministry also nourishes and builds up ‘the koinonia of the Church in faith, life and witness’ (49). It further describes the tasks of *episkopé* as ‘maintaining continuity in apostolic faith and unity of life ... preaching the Word and celebrating the Sacraments ... to safeguard and hand on revealed truth, to hold the local congregations in communion, to give mutual support and to lead in witnessing to the Gospel’ (52). This describes the tasks of serving the communion *within* a local church, but does not describe the task of the ministry of oversight as serving or overseeing the communion *among* the local churches.

This represents a missed opportunity for correlating the document’s vision of the church as a communion of local churches with its theology of ministry. While the document describes the church as a communion of local churches, it does not develop in any detail the
basis of that communion or the structures or ministry that serve that communion. The document, in its initial description of the church of the Triune God as koinonia situates this communion in relation to the communion of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, describes the koinonia effected by sharing in the Lord’s Supper, and speaks of the church as centered and grounded in the Gospel (13-14). This can and should be said of the koinonia of each individual local church. It does not yet, however, address the communion of local churches with each other. One looks in vain for a statement that says that ministers, especially the ministry of oversight, must have solicitude for other local churches and the relations among them. Given the strong attention given to an ecclesiology of communion, this is a serious lacuna in the document.

Correlations of Church and Ministry Beginning with ‘Ministry’

In Catholic theology, reflection on the church often follows upon reflection on ministry. When a reflection on the church follows upon reflection on ministry, a theology of the church universal follows from a consideration of universal primacy as exercised by the Bishop of Rome. Reflections on both were a notable achievement of Vatican I, where the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war prevented a corresponding consideration of the episcopacy. The Constitution entitled ‘First Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ’ has four chapters: Chapter 1, ‘On The Institution of the Apostolic Primacy in Blessed Peter;’ Chapter 2, ‘On the Permanence of the Primacy of Blessed Peter in the Roman Pontiffs;’ Chapter 3, ‘On the Power and Character of the Primacy of the Roman Pontiff;’ Chapter 4, ‘On the Infallible Teaching Authority of the Roman Pontiff.’ In other words, in the Constitution on the Church all the chapters are about primacy, Peter, and the Pope, which is to say ministry, rather than about the church as such.

Lumen gentium took up the unfinished task of Vatican I and developed a theology of the particular churches through a theology of the episcopacy. While the Constitution begins with the chapter on the mystery of the church followed by a chapter on the people of God before treating the hierarchical Constitution of the church and, in particular, the episcopate in chapter 3, the discussion of the particular churches and their relationship to the one Catholic Church is
presented with respect to the collegial unity in the mutual relations of individual bishops with particular churches and with the universal church (23). A theology of the local church follows from the theology of the episcopacy.

Within this paradigm, mutual recognition of a community as church has followed upon the recognition of its ministry as apostolic. In current Catholic theology, the presence of what would be considered to be a valid ministry is the fundamental criteria for determining whether a community is truly a church or is designated as an ecclesial community. While Unitatis Redintegratio distinguishes between churches and ecclesial communities, Hermann Otto Pesch, among other theologians who were at the second Vatican Council, argued that the phrase ‘ecclesial community’ was meant to be inclusive of those communities who do not self designate as a church, such as the Salvation Army, rather than exclusive of those communities who do not have apostolic episcopal succession. It may be more accurate to conclude that the Council itself left open the theological question of which of the separated Churches of the West could claim the name ‘church’ in order to avoid a purely juridical concept of ‘church’ based solely on institutional criteria when large numbers of separated Christians are led to a living faith in God and his presence in Jesus Christ and to community in the Holy Spirit, even though they lack some of the institutional means ‘fully’ present in the Catholic Church. Pope Paul VI did not distinguish between churches and ecclesial communities when he addressed the representatives of the separated churches with the cry: ‘O Ecclesiae.' Exploration of the intention of the Council is not my present subject, but the history of conciliar

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2 Ibid. In this respect see the intervention of the Italian Bishop Andrea Pangrazio, cited by Pesch on page 213, who identified Christ as the bond and center of the elementa of the church present in separated communities.
interpretation illustrates how designation of churches ‘in the proper sense’ has followed upon recognition of ministry.

This correlation privileging ministry as the starting point for reflection on the church is most evident in the declaration from the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus* (2000), which states that ‘the ecclesial communities which have not preserved the valid Episcopate and the genuine and integral substance of the Eucharistic mystery, are not Churches in the proper sense; however, those who are baptized in these communities are, by Baptism, incorporated in Christ and thus are in a certain communion, albeit imperfect, with the church’ (DI 17). To be noted here is, first, that the status of ‘church in the proper sense’ is based on the character of ministry, and second, that in this text, individuals are in an imperfect communion with the Catholic Church, not necessarily their ecclesial communities. This latter point raises the ecumenical problem of ascertaining the communion of ecclesial communities as a whole, and not just their members. Pope John Paul II extended the imperfect communion of Christians to the imperfect communion of their communities in his comment on the proselytizing activities of sects in his post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in America*:

This must be borne in mind especially with regard to the sisters and brothers of the Churches and Ecclesial Communities separated from the Catholic Church, long-established in some regions. The bonds of true though imperfect communion which, according to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, these communities already have with the Catholic Church must enlighten the attitudes of the Church and her members towards them.¹

Here John Paul II speaks of the bonds of true though imperfect communion of communities, not merely individuals. Similarly, in *Ut Unum Sint*, he speaks of ‘brothers and sisters living in Communities not in full communion with one another’.²

The documents *Dominus Iesus* and *Responses to Some Questions Regarding Certain Aspects of the Doctrine on the Church* have hardened the distinction in *Unitatis Redintegratio* between ecclesial

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communities and churches.\(^1\) Furthermore, recognition of ministry has up to the present been in terms of ‘all or nothing.’ Ministry is recognized as either valid or invalid. The present official line of the church is that valid ministry confers the identity of ‘church’ on an ecclesial body. In its absence, one is left with an ‘ecclesial community’.

The ecumenical question of the mutual recognition of ministry raises the question whether recognition of ministry should in some measure follow upon recognition of churches rather than precede it. Ecumenically, this would mean that the recognition of ministry would depend on the recognition of the churchly character of that ministry’s community and not vice versa. There would, no doubt, be additional criteria for the recognition of ministry in terms of understanding its function with respect to proclamation of the Gospel, to its role in the sacraments, and to its service to the apostolicity of the church. Nevertheless, the recognition of the churchly character of the community would play a much larger role in the recognition of ministry than it presently does.

*Towards a Common Vision* does not correlate its discussion of ministry with its discussion of the communion of the church aside from its observation that ordained ministry is personal, collegial, and communal insofar as a college of ordained ministers shares in the common task of representing the concerns of the community and is rooted in the life of the community and requires the community’s effective participation (52). Thus, one critique of the document is its insufficient correlation of the topic of ‘church’ and ‘ministry,’ even while acknowledging that such a correlation is not common. While beginning with ministry can at times place an emphasis on the apostolic character of ministry to the neglect of the role of the church in transmitting apostolicity, not to correlate ministry with the nature of the church risks reducing ministry to a function to the neglect of its symbolic role in the church.

Ministers, while performing tasks of preaching, administering the sacraments, and pastoral leadership, also function representationally. In Catholic theology, for example, the college of bishops represents

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the communion of churches, the collegial relationship of bishops mirroring the bonds between the relationships of the churches they serve. Ordained priests and pastors, while individually reciting the eucharistic prayer, use the collective pronoun ‘we’ with the exception of the recitation of the institutional narrative. In ministering to the sick and to sinners, they pray for healing and forgiveness in the name of Christ, but also bring reconciliation and comfort in the name of the church. This symbolic function of ministry can and should be applied to how ministry serves the communion of churches with the minister representing his/her local church in inter-ecclesial relations.

**Correlations of Church and Ministry Beginning with ‘Church’**

The recent Lutheran-Catholic document, *Declaration on the Way* (2015), proposes an alternative approach to considering mutual recognition of ministry and mutual recognition of churches independently one from the other, suggesting that

> Newly identified theological frameworks offer perspectives allowing for nuanced, graduated, and differentiated evaluations that provide an alternative to sharp either/or assessments of ministry. The correlations of ecumenical progress made on the church issues of ministry is an especially urgent task, since such a correlation could support a qualified but immediate mutual recognition of ministry in such a way that a partial recognition of ministry would correlate with the real but imperfect communion of churches.\(^1\)

Essentially, this requires correlating the church conceived of as a communion of local churches with the collegial notion of ministry as a corporate body intrinsically related to the communion of churches. In Catholicism, the bishop represents this particular church in the episcopal College following the adage of Cyprian, ‘The bishop is in the church as the churches are in the bishop’. Within a model of the church as communion where each church is united to the bishop, who in turn is in a relationship of communion with the Bishop of Rome and the college of bishops by virtue of his ordination, ministry

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\(^1\) Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *Declaration on the Way: Church, Ministry, and Eucharist* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2015), 92.
becomes a sign or a sort of sacrament of the church insofar as it signifies the church. This means that the bishops in communion with the college of bishops are the visible sign and representation of the communion of particular churches. Membership in and union with the college of bishops is an essential element within episcopal consecration and arguably represents the 'fullness of orders,' which sets the episcopacy apart from the presbyterate and the diaconate. The latter do not have a representational function within their order as do the bishops.

Following this, an imperfect communion of particular churches (presupposing that these include churches from different denominations not in communion with each other) leads to the recognition of the imperfect communion of the ministers of these churches, particularly those ministers exercising episkopé. The question arises, though, of whether or not there can be an incremental recognition of ministry in contrast to full recognition. That is, whether mutual recognition need be full recognition or no recognition, all or nothing.

Round X of the US Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue cites a letter written by the then Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger to the German Lutheran bishop, Johannes Hanselmann: ‘I count among the most important results of the ecumenical dialogues the insight that the issue of the Eucharist cannot be narrowed to the problem of “validity”. Even a theology oriented to the concept of succession, such as that which holds in the Catholic and in the Orthodox Church, should in no way deny the saving presence of the Lord (Heilschaffende Gegenwart des Herrn) in a Lutheran (evangelische) Lord's Supper.’ Certainly, Unitatis Redintegratio, without affirming or denying the real presence

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of the Lord in the liturgical celebration of separated Christians, stated that ‘many sacred actions ... most certainly can truly engender a life of grace in ways that vary according to the condition of each church or community, and must be held capable of giving access to that communion in which is salvation’ (UR 3).

The ecumenical problems associated with the proposal of this essay, namely that there be recognized ecumenically a correlation between the communion of churches and the mutual recognition of ministry, are many. They are particularly difficult for a multilateral document such as Towards a Common Vision on account of the variety of church structures and ministerial practices represented within the World Council of Churches. Let me briefly enumerate some of them:

1. Many Catholic documents speak of the communion of Christians, not of the communion of ecclesial communities or churches. Thus, it is common to speak of a soteriological communion achieved in baptism and in grace. Consequently, the first ecumenical and theological task is to address the communion of communities.

2. Even where an Episcopal order is retained, many ecclesial communities—and here I’m thinking primarily of Lutherans, although this also applies to others—have yet to develop a robust communal theology of the episcopacy as a body. Ministry is conceived of individually rather than as an order in the church in the traditional sense.

3. Many traditions do not have a symbolic or representational theology of ministry as representing the church.

4. This model is difficult to apply to those church traditions that exercise episkopé through structures other than a bishop.

5. Many Catholics would have a difficult time thinking of ministry in terms other than validity. One is a minister with the power to confect the real substantial presence of Christ in the Eucharist, or not. There is no in-between status. Much work remains to be done to move beyond the category of validity and the traditional criteria for it. Certainly, the development of criteria for a churchly community and the role of ministry within that community would be part of an expanded theology of ministry with respect to the Eucharist.

The challenge is great, but what makes these difficulties even seem possible is the basis of the vision of the church in Towards a Common
Vision, namely the identification of the church as a communion of churches. Agreement on what constitutes the church is an important beginning. Nevertheless, even though the document presents a common vision of the church, it does not present a vision of how those churches can exist in ecumenical communion with each other or how this might affect an evaluation of ministry. Much ecumenical work still lies ahead.

'Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be.' Romans 4:18

This sentence, hoping against hope, has from the beginning been a kind of watchword in the camp and city of the Great King; a sentence inscribed, as one may say, upon the wayside crosses which are set as marks here and there on either hand of the road to the heavenly Jerusalem. It is, in a certain sense, more than faith; for faith, simply taken, only goes beyond what we see; but this hope against it goes also. Hope, such as Abraham had, such as St. Paul here describes, is an actual throwing off and mastering the impression of importunate present evils. It lifts and buoys up the whole man towards the good which faith only discerns. It not only realises, but appropriates the unseen good. It is, therefore, both a more immediate spring of action, and, as recognising God's unchangeable goodness, more intimately tied to love, the end of the commandment and the bond of all perfectness.

From John Keble's sermon on The Duty of Hoping against Hope preached in the chapel of Harrow Weald, Middlesex, on Wednesday 1 July 1846, on laying the foundation of a new church, and opening a new school.
THE CHURCH: TOWARDS A COMMON VISION.
A MISSIOLOGICAL READING

Stephen Bevans SVD

This essay presents a missiological reading of The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV). On the one hand, the document has a strong missiological emphasis, recognizing the essential missionary nature of the church and interpreting several images of the church in a missiological way. The emphasis on mission, however, could be much more consistent and expressed more strongly, especially in its treatment of the traditional Marks of the Church and in the document’s basic structure. Nevertheless, TCTCV represents a genuine advance in a missional ecclesiology.

One of the hermeneutical principles for the interpretation of the documents of the Second Vatican Council is that each should be read in the light of the others. As Ormond Rush has pointed out, the documents complement each other, and often a later development, can become a lens for a better reading of all of the Council’s pronouncements.¹ The late addition, for example, of Paragraph 44 to Gaudium et Spes (what the church can learn from the world)² might serve as a hermeneutic through which to read all the earlier documents, particularly the document on the church.

In a somewhat analogous way, it seems to me that the Faith and Order document The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV) might be read, studied, and critiqued through the lens of the other

document that was officially promulgated by the Tenth Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Busan, Korea, in 2013: the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism’s Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes (TTL). As former Faith and Order Moderator John Gibaut points out, and as the document itself acknowledges, TCTCV was significantly influenced by TTL, particularly in terms of its strong affirmation of the missionary nature of the church. Might such an acknowledged influence be an invitation to read the document on ecclesiology from a missiological lens?

This is what this paper proposes to do. I believe that such a missiological reading can serve as a good way to interpret the church document, and provide a perspective with which to critique it as well. My reflection will be in two parts. A first, shorter part will point to the ways that the document does indeed have a missiological perspective. A second part will critique the document from that perspective, offering some suggestions how the entire document could offer a more profound ecclesiology by taking the missiological perspective more seriously.

Reading TCTCV Missiologically

‘The Church: Towards a Common Vision opens with a chapter exploring how the Christian community finds its origin in the mission of God for the saving transformation of the world. The Church is essentially missionary, and unity is essentially related to this mission.’ These words appear in the document’s introduction and affirm what is expressed several other times in several ways as the document unfolds: the church’s missionary nature. The church ‘was intended by

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3 See TCTCV 1, 2, 4, 13, 23, 26, 59,67.
God, not for its own sake, but to serve the divine plan for the transformation of the world’ (59).

The placement of a chapter on the mission of the church right in the beginning of the document is extremely significant. So often, treatments of the church begin with reflection on the communal nature of the church, of its major images and ‘marks,’ and structure, ending up with reflections on its mission. But this is not the case here. Mission is up front, and holds the promise of shaping the rest of the document. Rather than speaking of the ‘nature and purpose’ or ‘nature and mission’ of the church, as previous titles indicated, reflecting first upon mission shapes the church’s very nature.

One way this missionary nature is stated is by locating the church’s origin in the very life of the Trinity: ‘The Church is fundamentally a communion in the Triune God and, at the same time, a communion whose members partake together in the life and mission of God (cf. 2 Pet. 1:4), who, as Trinity, is the source and focus of all communion’ (23). Indeed, the ‘saving activity of the Trinity is essential to an adequate understanding of the Church.’

Another way the church is explained as essentially missionary is by recognizing how the church is rooted in the ministry of Jesus, working through the Holy Spirit, to continue his work in history. The image of the church as the ‘body of Christ’ is interpreted as a missionary image. ‘The Church, as the body of Christ, acts by the power of the Holy Spirit to continue his life-giving mission in prophetic and compassionate ministry and so participates in God’s work of healing a broken world’ (1).

The same can be said of the image of the church as the Temple of the Holy Spirit, which the document links closely to the image of the church as Christ’s body. The Holy Spirit confers gifts upon baptized Christians in order to build up the body of the church, forming it into ‘a holy temple in the Lord’ (see Eph. 2:21-22), a ‘spiritual house’ (1 Pet. 2:5). The Holy Spirit enlivens and equips the Church to play its role in proclaiming and bringing about that general transformation for which all creation groans (21. cf. Rom. 8:22-23).

In the section before The Church’s treatment of the images of Body and Temple, it treats the image of ‘The Prophetic, Priestly and Royal People of God’ (17-20). It does this also in a missionary way, connecting the New People in Christ to the People of Israel. As God’s ‘chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people’ (1Pet
2:9-10), all Christians receive ‘gifts of the Holy Spirit for the upbuilding of the Church and for [their] part in the mission of Christ’ (18). The chosenness of God’s people is described not so much as privilege as responsibility—election as God’s People is a call to ‘live out their discipleship in a variety of forms of service’ (18).

Paragraphs 28 to 30 discuss an important issue in a missionary church: the creative tension between legitimate cultural and historical diversity on the local level and the unity that needs to be held at the universal level. On the one hand, ‘the Gospel needs to be proclaimed in languages, symbols and images that are relevant to particular times and contexts so as to be lived authentically in each time and place’ (28). This would allow for a vigorous, yet faithful, contextual theology and contextual ordering of ministry and structure to be developed (see 6 and 7). On the other hand, however, ‘each local church is in communion with the local churches of all places and times’ (29). The unity and catholicity expressed here is an ongoing task, one that the church has never been without since its beginning (30).

Besides the internal task of contextual theologizing, the document speaks as well of the importance of an open, dialogical stance toward women and men of other faiths and, indeed, of no faith. Because of this, while still being committed to witnessing and proclaiming God’s love in Christ, members of the church respect ‘the elements of truth and goodness that can be found in other religions or among those with no religion’ (25; see also 60).

There is a decidedly missionary treatment of the Eucharist in the document. At the Eucharist, not only the bread and wine but the participants themselves are transformed, so as to be ‘in solidarity with the outcast and to become signs of the love of Christ who lived and sacrificed himself for all and now gives himself …’ (43).¹

The final lines of The Church highlight its eschatological, and therefore missionary and provisional nature. The church, as it were, is a servant of the future, and until that future is fully inaugurated the church shares the mission of Jesus. Until he comes again in glory, the church works to bring ‘light and healing to human beings’ and to all of God’s creation (69; see 66 in terms of the church’s wider commitment to cosmic, not merely human, wholeness).

A Constructive Critique

TCTCV has been influenced considerably by the perspective of TTL. In some ways, however, it is unfortunate that each Commission issued a separate document. Much more significant would have been the publication of one document that would have reflected ecclesiologically and missiologically together. Nevertheless, major steps forward have been taken to think of the church in terms of its essential missionary nature.

In the first meeting of the WCC’s Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) after the Busan assembly in January 2016, it was actually proposed that the CWME and Faith and Order hold a joint conference in 2018 instead of separate conferences. Ultimately we decided to hold our own mission conference, and not jointly with Faith and Order, but we will invite Faith and Order to participate in a very significant way. It’s important, I think, that the proposed topic for the mission conference is somewhat ecclesiological: ‘Moving in the Spirit: Called to Transforming Discipleship’.

This section will critique TCTCV in order to point the way for an even more adequate ecclesiological vision that could be developed.

Marks of the Church

Unfortunately The Church does not treat the traditional ‘marks’ of the church in a very missiological way (see TCTCV 22). In addition, a much stronger missiological ecclesiology could have been developed if, as Cheryl Peterson, Darrell Guder, and Charles van Engen among others point out, the order of reflection on the four marks would be reversed, and apostolicity as the foundational mark of the church would be treated first. This ‘is a simple and yet revolutionary proposal,’ as Guder remarks. ‘If we start our Nicene ecclesiology with apostolicity, then we end up defining catholicity, holiness and oneness in rather different ways’ that ‘would restore missional purpose to our theology of the church."

A Missional Structure of the Church

Structure, as Hans Küng wrote fifty years ago, is a secondary or even tertiary matter of importance in ecclesiology. Nevertheless, reflection on ecclesial office and ministry is an essential aspect of ecclesiological reflection, and so it definitely has a place in the Faith and Order document. Reflection on ministry as such, ordained ministry, the ministry of oversight, synodality, and primacy is included in the document’s Chapter III, entitled ‘The Church: Growing in Communion’ (TCTCV 33-57).

For a document, however, that claims in its first chapter that the church is missionary by its very nature, the title is disappointing, and the development of ministry in it is disappointing as well. While what is said is excellent and balanced, it is what it doesn’t say that I find wanting. I take my cue from the 2008 work by the late liturgical scholar David Power: Mission, Ministry, Order, and Mary Himes’s important essay on ecclesiology in the now-classic volume edited by the late Catherine LaCugna, Freeing Theology. An ecclesiology informed by mission would understand that the whole purpose of structure and ministry in the church is to serve the mission in which it participates. A chapter like Chapter III would more accurately be entitled ‘The Church: Growing in Communion-in-Mission’ or something along those lines. The chapter does indeed speak—as paragraph 19 had said previously—of ministry as facilitating the church in its mission (52). While this is important and reflective of the church’s missionary nature, it would be even more important to understand any structure—ministry in general, ordained ministry, etc.—as arising out of a need to serve the church’s mission, not just to direct it.

Structure of the Document

A final constructive critique focuses on the structure of the document. Structure in ecclesiology—indeed in all of theology—matters, as is evidenced in the evolution of Vatican II’s Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. The document was changed radically, and a new ecclesiology

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was articulated, by the placement of the chapter ‘The People of God’ before the chapter on the hierarchy.1

In the same way, the missional structure of TCTCV could be greatly strengthened if Chapter IV, ‘The Church: In and For the World,’ would be placed after Chapter I, ‘God’s Mission and the Unity of the Church’. As it stands now, the first chapter emphasizes the church’s missionary nature, but then that is blunted a bit, it seems to me, by Chapter II’s focus on the church as a communion in the Trinity. This new arrangement would emphasize the church’s dynamic nature as such, followed by its concrete living out of mission in its life in the world. Only then would the community/communion nature of the church, with its internal structure as God’s People, Christ’s Body, the Temple of the Spirit and marked with its four essential attributes be treated. This would then allow the final chapter to be focused on how the church grows (as per my suggestion above) as a communion-in-mission, structured to serve its participation in God’s overflowing missionary life.

**Conclusion**

Ecclesiology and missiology belong together. *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* has taken bold steps in this direction. A missiological reading of the document reveals its richness. I am sure that more missiological themes can be found in the document, and I am sure that several more perceptive and constructive critiques could be made. Like every scholar, my reading as a Roman Catholic ecclesiologist and missiologist provides both a lens and a set of blinders. I do hope, however, that this exercise has been a fruitful one, one more step on the way of constructing an ecclesiology that is missiological, and ultimately a missiology that is ecclesiological.

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This paper examines the significance of preparing churches of all Christian traditions for the 2017 quincentenary of the Protestant Reformation. The Lutheran and Catholic communions’ commitment to the first-ever positive joint commemoration since 1517 in From Conflict to Communion (2013) is a head-start. The quincentenary is God’s kairos moment for bringing all churches together (not just Lutherans and Catholics) to more fully and more visibly enter into the unity that we already share in the common faith. How we prepare towards the commemoration will mark the future of the churches. The urgency for making the concerted effort is now.

**Introduction**

This paper makes a compelling case for the urgency and significance of preparing churches of all Christian traditions for the 2017 quincentenary of the Protestant Reformation. The quincentenary is God’s gift for healing the churches’ memories, facilitating their reconciliation, and for renewing the churches’ mission and witness of the gospel in our milieu. I locate this appeal through an analogous reading of the Spirit’s invitation through the prophet Haggai, and provide a comparative analysis of the sixteenth century and our present times through the lens of the best of times and the worst of times, ecumenically, amid the age of confusion that both the sixteenth century and our present milieu have in common. The paper builds upon the head start towards the quincentenary provided by the Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting

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Christian Unity in *From Conflict To Communion* (2013): both communions have committed themselves to the first ever positive joint commemoration since 1517. Still, the quincentenary is larger than just among Lutherans and Catholics, or among local churches. Opportunities to reach other churches are available. If Christians let this opportunity slip, no doubt because of the already heavy ministry commitments in our respective churches, we would have missed God’s *kairos* moment for bringing churches together. The Trinitarian Spirit of Christ has given these ecumenical gifts to help us to more fully and more visibly enter into the unity that we already share in the common faith. How we prepare towards the commemoration will mark the future of the churches. The urgency for making the concerted effort is now.

**Haggai’s invitation:** analogous to ours

I suspect that many of us feel a familiarity with the eighth century prophet Haggai’s invitation. After returning from Babylon, the post-exilic generation participated actively in *rebuilding* God’s house. But, obstacles came, life got in the way, and setbacks threw their plans. Seventeen years after their initial commitment, the Israelites grew tired. They became comfortable. And they stopped the rebuilding project. On the eighteenth year, through the prophet Haggai, the Spirit invited God’s people to resume their pledge, to rebuild God’s house.

We may sympathise with Haggai, not only because we responded to a call to ecumenical service years ago, but also because some of us have become tired in our service for Christian unity, just like the post-exilic generation who had been discouraged after seventeen years of faithful labor. We silently ask, ‘What else can we do?’ We’re in fatigue as ministers, and our churches have grown cold towards an ecumenism that leads nowhere. We’ve also gotten used to our disunity. Don’t we feel ambivalent about not sharing the eucharistic table together, and allow the reality to drown our pain of the separation?

Today, I believe that the Spirit of God is extending an invitation that is analogous to the call to Haggai’s audience. We run to our own congregations and we labor tirelessly in our separate houses/congregations, while the wider body of Christ remains divided. In fact, we’re more fragmented than the churches of the sixteenth century.
Will we consider playing a more instrumental role in rebuilding the unity of the churches of Christ?

We can all envision a better future together. Abba has given as an unprecedented kairos opportunity. Today, I want to reflect on why commemorating the Reformation Quincentenary together in 2017 is momentous. Envisioning the future is as much about dreaming up the future as it is about understanding what may occur between the present and the future. There can be no future development towards an envisioned ideal scenario without the intervention of the present to make the envisioned future a reality. There is, however, a catch: the present is both the best of times, and the worst of times, ecumenically.

**No mere commemoration but momentous for the future**

To understand why this kairos moment is so momentous like no other, we’ll have to see clearly our own milieu, and compare our times with the Church in the sixteenth century.

*The best of times*

In the sixteenth century, Christians who disagreed with the Church faced tortures, inquisitions, and intolerance from the community of faith. Now to be sure, the church in the sixteenth century was not homogenous, contrary to popular perception. There were many different views on justification in the middle ages, just as Christian thinkers disagreed on how to live in caritas. The medieval age was neither an absolutely dark age full of corruption nor a golden age for Christendom. If no clear magisterial position was given, widely differing theological opinions could largely be accepted. The supposed Protestant-Catholic dissension that gave rise to the Council of Trent was really not a Protestant-Catholic contention: Trent was actually responding to issues pertaining to dogma and theological opinions that had been in circulation since the twelfth century. Still, dissenting views from the official positions of the Roman Catholic Church could not be tolerated.

But today, tolerance has become a mantra, not just in society, but also among churches. Christian churches and communities hold a range of positions about political ideologies, such as liberty, egalitarianism, and justice. The general climate is that of inclusivity or political correctness. All are welcome to believe and practice their faiths and convictions, as they deem appropriate. No one individual,
or group, however dominant or in the minority, is to discriminate or impose restrictions on the other.

Ecumenically, churches today are more aware of the common faith that we share. Since the efforts of the modern ecumenical movement, many World Christian Communions today have been holding bilateral and multilateral dialogues. For instance, the Lutheran-Catholic and Reformed-Catholic dialogues have been ongoing for more than forty years. Baptist-Catholic, and Pentecostal-Catholic dialogues have made significant breakthroughs that were previously inconceivable. Since 1964, the Oriental Churches and Catholic Communion no longer consider each other as heretics or in anathema. Many other communions have taken steps to recognize each other’s confession of faith, sacraments (baptism, eucharist), ordained ministry, and the witness of the gospel more fully, albeit still imperfectly. Today, many mainline Protestant denominations are either in full communion or they have granted full recognition of each other’s ordained ministries to the extent that they now share the Lord’s Table together. Compared to the Church in the sixteenth century and to Christianity up until the twentieth century, with the exception of more conservative/purist churches, most communions today rarely pronounce each other as anathema. The remarkable degrees of partial to full mutual recognition among churches today are what the sixteenth century Reformers could only dream about.

The worst of times

We may say that in the sixteenth century, despite the diversity of pieties and devotions, the church was united in the authority of the ecclesiastical structures, and in their common esteem for tradition, notwithstanding examples of some bad leadership and ministerial models. If the magisterium did not delineate a correct view, alternative perspectives could co-exist as long as they fell within the scope of earlier dogmatic councils. Until anathemas were pronounced, Christians were free to follow a wide range of interpretations.\(^1\)

However, just a few years after the Reformation, even though the magisterium reformers all agreed on *sola scriptura*, *sola fidei*, and *sola gratia*, Protestants could no longer agree on the authority of scripture,\(^1\)

the place of reason, or the right use of the sciences for interpreting the normative authority of the church. The early Reformers also moved away from the medieval modes of spirituality. Reformers no longer sought to cultivate virtues. The Reformers no longer held to the means of rehabilitating the soul, or the possibility of pursuing a right ordering of desires. Instead, the Reformers saw humanity as utterly sinful and unredeemable. And since no amount of charity could rehabilitate what was innately corrupt, the principles for living an ethical or moral life changed.

Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli would not have imagined that they had ushered in a momentous era, and yet they did. Today, we see more clearly that the Reformation provided the impetus for the rapid modernization of society. The Protestant religious reformation then gave rise to many unintended consequences: the division of Christianity, the development of nation states, the privatization of religion, the separation of church and state, the increasing power given to the secular state to legislate over the practice of religion, and the increasing possibilities for the expansion of the market economy, knowledge, learning in the arts, the sciences, and in technology. In our time, society experienced the massive, unprecedented proliferation of religious hyper-pluralism, especially under modernity, thanks to the Reformation.¹

The mantra for toleration now translates to a generally accepted policy of embracing diversity. Embracing diversity is both commendable and questionable, depending on the context of its implementation. Embracing diversity has moved from the overcoming of historic, ethnic, and racial divides to issues of transmigration, sexuality, and many other concerns. Embracing diversity is now framed as the protection of the individual’s rights, and the promotion of social advocacy and justice for the oppressed. Both in the churches and in secular societies, leaders and administrators have become sensitive to the display of real or imaginary power of the dominant group over the subaltern and marginalized. Churches have become rights-conscious and context-conscious, and give theological justifications for their policies and practices. If all social norms (of rights and wrongs) are socially constructed ideals, then, no matter

¹ Cf. Brad Gregory’s The Unintended Reformation (Belknap Press, 2012); pace McGrath’s Christianity’s Dangerous Idea (Harper One, 2008).
how the biblical world was, embracing diversity means that all are equal in dignity as God’s creatures, and thus, all are to be equally accepted. Individual convictions, practices, and actions are relegated to the private sphere. In the socially-shared public square, none should be barred from recognition. To change with the times, societal norms, just as church norms, have to embrace inclusivity. In most places, the only form of acceptable intolerance, if any, is an intolerance of conservative, sectarian positions.

However, churches in North America and Europe could not agree on the extent of intersecting libertarian, egalitarian, and social justice ideologies in their religious faith and practices. Christians are more divided than ever, toeing the party-line on virtually every issue—from science and faith, to abortion, to support for America’s domestic and international roles, to many national issues—and in ways that would not have been imaginable or thought to be necessary in bygone eras, not just for the churches, but also on issues pertaining to the intersection of faith and culture, religion and civility.

Campaigns on recognizing same-sex marriage in the churches are as much alive as in the secular arenas. From Catholics, to Mainline, to Baptists, Brethren, Evangelicals, Pentecostals, and Presbyterians, no Christian churches are neutral in this struggle. The Churches’ historic disagreements—e.g. on Chalcedonian Christology, pneumatology of Pentecostals and Charismatics, or the pneumatological disagreement between Latin West and Orthodoxy in the twelfth century, or the dogma on justification—however contentious, they no longer attract the same attention as disagreements about human sexuality, the definition of marriage, and the ordination of practicing LGBTQs, along with many other irresolvable doctrinal matters and pressing issues on inter-religious engagement, encounters with religious fundamentalism, human rights, international politics, etc. Churches are often divided on how to live out their faith.

Christianity has become so diverse that there is no way to classify this hyper-plurality of Christianities in our day and age. No taxonomy is adequate. It is no longer just because churches have moved beyond Richard Niebuhr’s fivefold typology of Christianity: above culture, against culture, in culture, with culture, and transforming culture. The permutations and complexities are layered. The range of complex social, economic, political, and religious issues facing society, the church, and the churches occur locally, regionally, nationally,
internationally, globally, and these complexities are seen within a denomination, between denominations, and between fractions in multiple, non-linear, and intertwining directions more than can be adequately mapped out in this paper.

If we look at the many issues facing the churches today, in Europe, in North America, Africa, Asia, locally, regionally, nationally, internationally, and globally, it would not be far-fetched to imagine that Christianity today is at the brink of a possible Third Reformation, if true believing entails, to some degree, a separation from those who have fallen away.

Now, I may have been a bit bold to suggest that we are at the brink of a Third Reformation. After all, churches today do not command the same force majeure as the medieval Roman Catholic Church did. Most of us would acknowledge that we live in a predominantly secular society, as compared to the largely Christian or Christianized society of medieval Europe. Still, consider the range of disagreements and hyper-pluralism that could potentially expand phenomenally in our time.

Like the church prior the sixteenth century Reformation, we also live in an age of confusion, though with considerable differences. If we contextualize the church in the sixteenth century and our era, the struggle for fidelity to faith remains the same. The similarities between sixteenth century in Europe and twenty-first century North America and the West generally cannot be clearer: today, as then, we face religious plurality, and are challenged by the plurality of doctrinal views, and cosmopolitan views of humanism in confusing times.

**From Conflict to Communion: an unprecedented opportunity**

This report (FCTC) is a remarkable and watershed ecumenical breakthrough, if churches can implement its proposal. For the first time in 500 years since 1517, Lutherans and Catholics at the highest levels (represented by the Lutheran World Federation and by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity of the Roman Catholic Church) have agreed to commemorate the Protestant

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Reformation positively, and in a joint manner. On every anniversary of October 31, for the last 495 years before FCTC, Catholics, Lutherans, and Protestants mutually repudiated each other. Both sides accused each other of disobeying the gospel. Both sides derided the other as heretics who have practiced what is contrary to truth, faith, and morals. Reiterating at every anniversary, Protestants justified their breakaway and existence apart from Rome. Catholics claimed that the dissent broke fidelity from the true and undivided church of Christ. FCTC’s proposal to commemorate the quincentenary positively is an unprecedented ecumenical opportunity.

The challenge

Now, reading the FCTC text alone or knowing about the text does not and will not make a commemoration a reality. A lot depends on how FCTC is received by the churches. What will bishops, ecumenical officers, pastors, and church lay-leaders do with the document? Will we take concrete action steps to make FCTC’s vision a reality? Also, just to prepare Lutherans and Catholics for this quincentenary is already an extremely challenging ecumenical adventure, but I recommend that the quincentenary commemoration is also for all Christian churches.¹

Many Christians still hold and perpetuate stereotypes, prejudices, and misunderstandings about each other. There are layers of interpersonal, group, intragroup, intergroup, and political dynamics and factors affecting the churches’ inability to receive and recognize each other as equally true churches, despite many ecumenical efforts and headways—by Christian Churches Together, WCC, the Joint Working Group, the Faith and Order Commission, and many other ecumenical agencies—in the last one hundred years.

If we are not careful, efforts to gather churches for the quincentenary can intensify hostilities of the past, and damage the ecumenical achievements that have been carefully established in the recent decades.

For instance, how should we relive the memory of the past? How do we deal with the history of division that has so scandalized the churches’ witness to the gospel? In our commemoration, are we then celebrating the division? Or are we commemorating the loss of authority of the church in society, and the disintegration of the churches’ primary role as transformative agent of culture in society? Arguably, the church is not just more polarized than in the sixteenth century, but the church has lost its anchor to lead society; in our age, secularism is the primary ideology and agent of change in society even as the church still struggles to come to grips with her loss of power to keep society together. If we could find good reasons to commemorate the Reformation together, how do we enter the space of doxology, and enact or remember the summit of the Christian life and witness in the Eucharistic table, that in our time has become hopelessly marred by the impossibility of sharing the table together? In another instance of our moral divisiveness, can Christians share the Lord’s table with professing practicing Queer or LGBTQ believers and clerics?

For this and other reasons, a joint commemorative event comes with great risks, notwithstanding its potential for an unprecedented platform for the churches’ witness.

**Meeting the challenge of history**

Mindful of the risks, FCTC provided some wise advice for organizers. The point in the quincentenary is not to tell a different history. The sixteenth century division, which is the root of many churches’ historical consciousness, has to be told. The question and opportunity is, can the history be retold differently and with integrity to the churches’ historical consciousness, to release its healing graces and to witness to the gospel? FCTC claims:

> What happened in the past cannot be changed, but what is remembered of the past and how it is remembered can, with the passage of time, indeed, change. Remembrance makes the past present. While the past itself is unalterable, the presence of the past in the present is alterable... The point [of preparing churches for the quincentenary in 2017] is not to tell a different history, but to tell that history differently (16).

Both communions at the highest juridical levels have committed to a positive joint commemoration, not through naivety, but because of decades of Lutheran-Catholic official dialogues. They are now better
able to understand each other, having built upon careful research and rewriting of their respective historiography away from any anti-rhetoric of seeing their own traditions as heroes and the others as enemies/defectors. Here are some examples.

In 1980, at the 450th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession, Lutherans and Catholics developed a common understanding of the foundational truths of the faith, acknowledging especially Jesus Christ as the living center of their Christian faith. In 1983, on the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther’s birth, Catholics and Lutherans at international levels jointly affirmed Luther’s many essential concerns instead of condemning him. Luther was affirmed as a ‘witness to Jesus Christ’. Appraisals of Luther are more empathetic. He was re-read as an earnest, religious person and a prayerful man who critiqued the church he loved because of the parlous condition of the church of his time. Historians have corrected historiographic caricatures, for example by Catholic Johnannes Cochlæus, who condemned Luther as one who divided the church (cf. Johannes Cardinal Willebrands, 1970 and John Paul II’s letter in 1983). The Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, on his visit to the Augustinian Friary at Erfurt in 2011, acknowledged Luther’s struggle to find a gracious God.

Basically, on both sides, church historians have corrected previous negative ‘anti-Protestant’ and ‘anti-Catholic’ misdirected depictions of each other. Historians now recognize the political, economic, social, and cultural factors that have affected the churches’ development. Reforms sought to correct religious indifference and corrupt officials. Church officials were also seen as serious about their obligations. The medieval church was not a monolithic group, but a widely diverse community with different theologies, lifestyles and practices.

In 1999, both communions signed the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, after their extensive study as to whether ‘the Condemnations of the Reformation Era’ still divide the churches. Catholics and Lutherans in the United States already affirmed the basic truths of the doctrine (Augsburg, 1985). Since 2006, JDDJ has been signed by Methodists, and Reformed traditions.

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The examples show that both communions are willing to correctly remember their history in a way that will not be at the expense of the other. Mutual perceptions have changed. Some prejudices have been corrected. Ecumenical research and dialogues have paved the way. Differences and histories will have to be faced. Truth has to be reaffirmed. The gospel has to be renewed and re-contextualized for our time, as at every other age. There remained sufficient common ground to allow us to work at revitalizing our commitment to faith and mission.

A Kairos Moment

It is against this larger backdrop—of potential ecumenical progress as opposed to regression into a third reformation—that commemorating the centenary of the Protestant Reformation in 2017 presents a God-given kairos moment for all of Christianity.

The commemoration is an opportunity for educating the churches on their respective distinctive histories, beliefs, and practices and the state of ecumenical dialogues and relations with one another, so as to remove the layered stereotypes and prejudices at the ground level. The commemoration also provides platforms for healing past memories, and for creating conciliatory opportunities. Given the Christian hyper-plurality in our time, I dare say that the opportunity for pulling all churches together for unity can only be found in this quincentenary—and not just Catholic and Lutheran: ‘We invite all Christians to study the report... and to come with us along the way to a deeper communion of all Christians’ (p. 8).

However, the commemoration is not just for Christian unity. The quincentenary is also an opportunity for Christians to re-engage and to renew our witness to the gospel in our milieu.

Surely, churches would not want to return to superstition, inquisition, or religious imposition of their liberty to practice the biblical faith. Churches have their convictions, conscience, theologies, traditions, liturgies, and established practices.

Secularization is a by-product of the Reformation. Churches witness to their faith and also welcome the freedom of all to pursue both secular and interreligious convictions. Today we enjoy the freedom of liberty, equality, and justice for all.

All of these and much more are the after-effects of renewing the gospel in the sixteenth century. We now have a mandate to renew the
gospel for our time. The commemoration provides the platform for churches to explore how we may collaborate on their gospel mission and witness more than ever; perhaps with insights from other interchurch partnerships throughout the country. Churches could deliberate on Reformation’s direct and indirect impact on, ‘glocal’ expression of the gospel; interchurch families; liberty and civility; youth culture; leadership development; social justice; interreligious engagement, including correcting Luther’s anti-Jewish sentiments; and acts of charity and kindness in the cities, and to the unchurched, and more.

Furthermore, many ecumenical developments in just these recent years would provide rich resource that the churches would welcome. For instance, the Joint Working Group Consultation (JWG) of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Roman Catholic Church has urged churches to better receive one another and benefit from official agreement and dialogue reports in Reception: A Key To Ecumenical Progress (WCC, 2014). Independently, the Lausanne movement’s The Cape Town Commitment (2010), WCC’s Together Towards Life (2013), and the Papal Apostolic Letter, Evangelii Gaudium (2013) are resources that churches from these communions, which historically do not work together, have stated explicating that we should (not only could) collaborate more readily and significantly out of fidelity to the gospel. Indeed, we live in great times, ecumenically—the resources of the highest jurisdictions of the communions have paved the way. The rest is up to us, at the grassroots, to work with the leadership of these churches, with the widely available resources, as we work towards the joint commemoration.

Conclusion.

The invitation to consider our ways in Haggai is as much for us as it is for the eighth century. Like the post-exilic generation who had grown tired after seventeen years of rebuilding God’s house, we are invited to continue fervently in rebuilding Christian unity.

God has positioned us at an unprecedented time in history for the unity of the church. Past generations hoped for this day, but it was not theirs’ to enter, through no fault of theirs. Luther, Calvin, and Wesley each dreamed of reconciliation and died without seeing any glimmer of hope. The dogmatician
Karl Barth, and the ecumenist Yves Congar wished for a better ecumenical climate, and waited for a brighter future.

The quincentenary of the Reformation is God’s *kairos* platform to gather Christians from all denominations. Let us commit ourselves to more than our respective local churches. The invitation of Haggai is analogous to ours. This great ecumenical moment is staring us in our face. Will we hear the invitation of the Spirit of Christ that still calls the churches together?

‘Discipleship is not limited to what you can comprehend—it must transcend all comprehension. Plunge into the deep waters beyond your comprehension, and I will help you to comprehend, even as I do. Bewilderment is the true comprehension. Not to know where you are going is the true knowledge. My comprehension transcends yours. Thus Abraham went forth from his father and not knowing whither he went. He trusted himself to my knowledge, and cared not for his own, and thus he took the right road and came to his journey’s end. Behold, this is the way of the cross. You cannot find it yourself, so you must let me lead you as though you were a blind man. Wherefore it is not you, no man, no living creature, but I myself, who instruct you by my word and Spirit in the way you should go. Not the work which you choose, not the suffering you devise, but the road which is clean contrary to all that you choose or contrive or desire—that is the road you must take. To that I call you and in that you must be my disciple. If you do that, there is the acceptable time and there your master is come.’


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1 The paper is a revised version of a lecture delivered to the Tidewater Regional Lutherans, Anglicans, Roman Catholics, and United Methodist ecumenical consortium lecture on June 29th, 2015, at the Church of the Holy Apostles. My appreciations to Dr. Gail Trzcinski and the current editor for proofreading and comments on the original and revised paper respectively.
GOING TO CHURCH WITH J.S. BACH

Dick Wursten*

The opening choir of Bach’s Saint Matthew Passion (Kommt, ihr Töchter, helft mir klagen) read against the background of common seventeenth-eighteenth century devotional Bible exegesis, in particular the Revd Heinrich Müller’s very famous Hertzensspiegel, gives us insight into the devotion of Bach and his contemporaries.

Introduction

In Bach’s days Lutherans read the Bible in a very creative and imaginative way, mainly using a kind of ‘sacred word-association’, almost at random combining texts from all 66 (72) books of the Bible. In this network of words and phrases (almost as hypertext) new meaning emerges that is not ‘really’ (as in the historical-literal sense) there. Often one easily recognises traditional allegorical and typological topoi. Since today Bach’s cantata texts are almost the only surviving specimens of this almost lost biblical spirituality, which in se is as old (or even older) than Christianity itself, today’s listeners often find it hard to make sense of these texts. However, this is the spiritual world Bach lived in. It was the basis of the sermons he heard, it permeated the devotional and exegetical books he possessed (and read?): Heinrich Müller, Johann Olearius, and Johann Arndt, to name only the most influential ones. And it’s the material Bach’s librettists, among whom Christian Friedrich Henrici (known under his nom de plume Picander) was the most prolific, used to write the cantata texts and the scripts for the Passions. One could almost use any text to illustrate this, but I will focus on one text only, the famous opening choir of the St Matthew Passion. I will analyze this short text with the

* Dick Wursten (1960), ThD., is active on the interface between theology, history, and culture (especially poetry and music), with a preference for early sixteenth-century France (Clément Marot, Jean Calvin) and the Baroque period in Germany (J.S. Bach). He participates in the ecumenical initiative to integrate Bach cantatas in the Sunday Service in the Church of St. Norbertus in Antwerp. In daily life he is inspector of religious education in Flanders.
help of Heinrich Müller’s *Evangelischer Hertzensspiegel* (meditations on the gospel of every Sunday in the liturgical year). This book was widespread and well-read especially because Müller had included a number of *Passionspredigten* in it.¹ In these sermons he meditates on every moment of Jesus’ Passion and finds meaning in every aspect of it. Traces of these sermons can be found in many contemporary sermons, poems (e.g. Salomon Franck, Bach’s colleague and librettist when he lived and worked in Weimar²) and—of course—in the texts produced by Picander for Bach’s Passions. I do not claim to be original in my research nor in my conclusions. My source is a profound study in German by Elke Axmacher, ‘*Aus Liebe will mein Heyland sterben.*’ Untersuchungen zum Wandel des Passionsverständnis im frühen 18. Jahrhundert (Neuhausen-Stuttgart, 1984). In chapter 7 (pp. 166-203) she deals with the text of the Saint Matthew Passion. Here she suggests quite convincingly that Heinrich Müller’s text was often a direct source for Picander to ‘compose’ his text. Müller in his turn was not original, he never claimed to be. In his work we easily discern echoes of over 1500 years of meditational biblical exegesis. His writings had a huge impact because he had theological authority (he was orthodox, but the pietists also liked him), was an excellent preacher, and a sensitive author.

The texts

Between the introductory choir of St Matthew’s Passion, which already clearly refers to the crucifixion itself (especially in the last two lines), and some passages from Müller’s eighth *Passionspredigt* (sermon on Christ’s Passion) entitled ‘From the Death of Christ’, conspicuous similarities can be found. If one compares the texts, it is clear that one cannot speak of Picander simply poetising the prose of Müller (as he did for some of the arias), but it is clear that he could

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¹ Heinrich Müller, *Evangelischer Hertzens-Spiegel*. In *Offentlicher Kirchen-Versammlung bey Erklärung der Sonntäglichen und Fest-Evangelien, nebst beygefügten Passion-Predigten* (Frankfurt am Main, 1679), often reprinted.

² In one of Franck’s florilegia of spiritual poems we find a poem entitled *Auf Christi Begräbnis gegen Abend* (for the burial of Christ in the evening). In this poem we find the same twists, imagery and biblical associations as in the famous bass-arioso: *Am Abend da es kühle war*. This way of meditating on Christ’s burial is also present in Müller’s *Passionspredigten* and of course can be found with the Church fathers, in both early and high Middle Ages.
easily find all motifs of the introitus including the chorale he cites, in Müller's sermon. In the tables below I reproduce the relevant sections from Müller's sermon juxtaposed with Picander's text, first in German, then in an English translation.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Müller</th>
<th>Picander</th>
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<tr>
<td>Im Alten Testament hatte Gott verordnet, daß die Sünd-Opffer ausser dem Lager solten geschlachtet werden. Hier ist auch das Sünd-Opffer, Jesus, der sich selbst hat auffgeopffert Gott zu einem süßen Geruch ... (S. 397)</td>
<td>Am Stamm des Kreuzes geschlachtet, Sehet,—Was?—seht die Geduld, Allzeit erfunden geduldig, Wiewohl du warest verachtet. Seht—Wohin?—auf unsre Schuld; All Sünd hast du getragen, Sonst müßten wir verzagen. Seht ihn aus Lieb und Huld Holz zum Kreuze selber tragen! Erbarm dich unser, o Jesu!</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hie muß Christus erfüllen das Vorbild Isaacs, Der das Holtz, darauf er solte geschlachtet werden, selbst tragen muste, nach dem Berg Moria. Mein Hertz, so gehet das Lamm Gottes, und träget der gantzen Welt Sünde, kanst leicht gedencken, mit was für Schmertzen. (S. 398)</td>
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Müller

Oh, my beloved friends, when I have to tell the bride of Christ that her dearest friend has died, I would like to say: ‘Oh, how I would that I could not preach. It is such a sad message I have to bring: the Groom is dead’... What else can the bride of Christ say today when the message of the Groom’s death arrives? Nothing than this: ‘Oh, My sins have torn him!’ (p. 395)

In the Old Testament God had decreed that the guilt offerings should be slaughtered outside of the camp. Here we also have a guilt offering, Jesus, who gave himself to please God... (p. 397).

Here Christ is going to fulfill the example of Isaac, who himself carried the wood on which he would be slaughtered, up to Mount Moriah. My dearest, when the Lamb of God, carrying the sins of the world, goes by, you can easily imagine what it is that hurts him. (p. 398)

Picander

Come, ye daughters, help me lament. Behold!—Whom?—The Bridegroom.

Behold him!—How?—Like a lamb.

**O guiltless Lamb of God, Slaughtered on the stem of the cross,**

Behold!—What?—Behold his patience.

**Always found patient,**

**Although thou wast despised.**

Behold!—Where?—Behold our guilt.

**All sin hast thou borne,**

**Else we must have despaired.**

Behold Him, out of love and graciousness, Himself carrying the wood of the cross.

**Have mercy upon us, O Jesus.**

The introductory choir is full of ancient traditional motifs, mostly typological, which it is essential to grasp, for a true appraisal of this text. Picander framed the opening choir as a *lamentation* in which ‘the daughters of Zion and the community of the faithful’ (as they are identified in the libretto) accompany Jesus on his way to the cross. The term ‘Daughters of Zion’ first of all refers literally to the women mentioned in Luke 23:27, addressed by Jesus in verse 28 as ‘Daughters of Jerusalem’. They lamented him. Behind them, however, other ‘daughters of Jerusalem’ emerge, literary-traditional ancestors of these
women: the ‘daughters of Zion’ from the Song of Songs, to whom the ‘Bride’ turns several times for help. A glance at the first lines of Müller makes clear that Bernard of Clairvaux’s famous 86 allegorical sermons on this book of the Bible were not discarded by the Reformed exegetes. Protestant post-Reformation homiletics embraced medieval hermeneutics. This is a bit surprising remembering the way Luther criticized this hermeneutical method. Moreover, without a basic knowledge of this ‘reading of the Old Testament’ one will never understand the texts Bach set to music in many of his ‘dialogue’ cantatas, where the ‘soul’ converses with Christ, as a Bride with her Groom. A particularly clear prophetic vision of the crucifixion was seen in 3:11: ‘Go forth, O daughters of Zion, and gaze on King Solomon with the crown with which his mother has crowned him on the day of his wedding.’ This was understood as a reference to the crown of thorns, especially because a rose-garden is also present in the Song of Songs. Müller quotes this verse using the traditional allegorical interpretation: ‘King Solomon is Jesus Christ, the true Prince of Peace. His mother is the Jewish Synagogue ... The day of his wedding is the day of his suffering, for on that day he bought his Bride with his blood. The crown is the thorns the soldiers put on his head’ (p. 371).

In the third line, Picander mentions the second and most famous ‘typos’, which, according to the ancient Passion tradition, prefigures Christ on his path towards the execution: the Lamb. The basic text for this typology of course is Isaiah 53:7, ‘He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.’ Already in the New Testament, the lamb becomes the type of Christ in the baptismal testimony: ‘Behold, this is the lamb of God that carries away the sins of the world’ (John 1:29). The hymn quoted by Picander is the first stanza of the Lutheran choral version by Nikolaus Decius of the classic Agnus Dei. The reference to the sacrifices of Israel in general and the one on Atonement Day (Pesach, Easter) in particular are self-evident.

The third christological type Picander found in Müller, is the ‘example of Isaac, who carried himself the wood on which he would be slaughtered, up to Mount Moriah’ (p. 398). Only if one is aware of this then very common interpretation of the story of Isaac, the expression in the opening choir ‘das Holz zum Kreuze selber tragen’ (to carry the wood to the cross himself) reveals itself as a reference to Christ as the
anti-typos of Isaac. Once one is aware of it, the two last lines of the madrigal text clearly evoke this story.

Analysis

The material with which Picander constructs the opening choir, is thus fashioned from the rock of elementary and traditional Passion theology. The Lamb and Isaac are fixed types of Christ carrying his cross. The word ‘lamb’ is also connected to that other semantic field of the ‘wedding’ (Jesus as the Bridegroom). In Revelation 19:7 the ‘Wedding of the Lamb’ even explicitly links the two fields. The lamb is the groom, the same who is so eagerly attended by the Bride and her friends (the ‘daughters of Zion’) in the Song of Songs, who in their turn, immediately suggest those other bridesmaids from the famous parable of Jesus in Matt. 25:1-11 waiting for his arrival in the night. Many hymns use this imagery, such as the second stanza of ‘Jesu, meine Freude’ (Salomon Franck), beginning ‘Gottes Lamm, mein Brautigam’ (Lamb of God, my Bridegroom) or the very popular hymn of Adam Drese: ‘Seelenbräutigam, Jesu, Gottes Lamm’ (Bridegroom of my soul, Jesus, lamb of God), of which the melody is later associated with the famous hymn of Nicolaus von Zinzendorf, ‘Jesus lead Thou on, Till our Rest is won’. And of course the well-known hymn of Philipp Nicolai ‘Wachet auf ruft uns der Stimme’ (Wake, Awake, for Night Is Flying), a song entirely build around these equivalences.1

It is interesting to see how Picander uses this traditional material in the opening choir. He cleverly combines it with the hymn and gives it a very lively colour by introducing the exclamations of the women: Kommet, sehet (Come, look!). This adds a dramatic, even theatrical, aspect to the text. The allegorical meaning and the historical setting oscillate. The ‘daughters of Zion’ refer at the same time to the historical women alongside the road (Luke 23:27) and to the friends of the bride eagerly awaiting the arrival of the Bride (Song of Songs 3:11) and to the maidens of the eschatological parable of Jesus (Matt. 25:1-11) and—finally—to the community of the faithful present in Church for the service of Good Friday. It is exactly that ambiguity that creates the richness of meaning, so characteristic of the sermons, meditations and

1 Bach’s choral cantata BWV 40 makes this point very nicely. See my analysis on the web:
http://www.bach.wursten.be/cantatas/mystical_Bach.htm
spirituality of Bach’s times. These were the times when polysemy was celebrated. In the rest of the opening choir, the chorale of course determines the possibilities of the madrigal (free) text. The exclamations ‘wer, wie, was, wohin’ (who, how, what, where) are dictated by the text of the choral. From being a mere ‘spectator’ the faithful are drawn into the action. They not only ‘participate’ in lamenting the fate of Jesus, they get personally involved. As a matter of fact, the imagery of the lamb of God makes them the protagonists of the entire event. It is their sinfuless that triggered this dramatic scene. As in a mirror they suddenly see themselves as who they are: sinners (‘Sehet auf unsre Schuld’, Behold our guilt). At the same moment the meditation deepens and turns into a humble prayer: ‘Erbarm dich meiner’ (Have mercy). In the meantime the imagery of Isaac, as the obedient Son, who without asking why, fulfils the commandments of his Father, designates Jesus as the true Messiah. In the view of Picander this should be interpreted as a gesture of ‘love and graciousness’. That mount Moria, the place of the ‘sacrifice of Isaac’ and the temple mountain are one and the same, at least for the readers of the Old Testament, exponentially heightens the significance of the events that are going to be depicted in the rest of the Passion. Picander’s text introducing the Passion is equal in value and depth as the music it evoked from Bach.

**Summary**

Three classic typologies of Christ are present in the opening choir: 1. the Lamb (sacrifice in the OT, especially on Atonement Day, the ‘Servant of the Lord’ from Isaiah); 2. Isaac, carrying the ‘wood’ for his own sacrifice (his willingness to comply with his Father’s command); and 3. the Groom (implicit in the women along the road who bemoan Jesus’ fate, identified as the ‘Daughters of Zion/Jerusalem’, a reference to the friends of the Bride from the Song of Songs, and thus from the wedding parables in the Gospel). Without knowledge of this ‘way of reading Scripture’ one cannot begin to understand Bach’s St Matthew Passion, or many of the Cantatas.
THE OXFORD MOVEMENT: SOME NEW PERSPECTIVES

A.M. Allchin

This article by Donald Allchin appeared in the first issue of One in Christ in 1965, the first of ten which he contributed to the journal between then and 1987. On his death in December 2010, David Scott wrote: ‘The priest and theologian A.M. Allchin, who has died aged 80, was deeply Anglican, yet embraced the Orthodox church, the Roman Catholic church and the free church spirit of Wales. Donald’s desire was for unity, and the baseline of that unity was the love of God.’

In a strange way, the Oxford Movement is at one and the same time one of the best known and one of the least known episodes in modern Church history. Whatever judgment may be passed upon its work, it is without question among the most spectacular and important events in the history of English Christianity. In a comparatively brief space of time, the twelve years between the commencement of the Tracts for the Times in 1833 and Newman’s conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1845, and in a strictly limited area, the old city and university of Oxford, before it had undergone the changes and developments of the later nineteenth century, a drama was played out which involved a number of brilliant and attractive men, and which for better or for worse has decisively influenced the course of the Church’s history not only in England, but far beyond.

What is the secret of this story which has fascinated so many scholars and enquirers? There is of course the charm and beauty of the setting. Many visitors have tried to do justice to the fascination of Oxford particularly as it was then, when the green countryside came right up to the old town walks and gave the visitor an impression of a mediaeval city preserved into the modern world. The romantic movement in literature and art had suddenly woken men’s minds to the beauties of the Middle Ages, and for the impressionable young man of the 1830s, with his head full of the poetry of Wordsworth and the novels of Sir Walter Scott, Oxford seemed like the city of a dream. We shall never understand the vehemence of the opposition to the movement until we realize that one element in it was the fear that the Tractarians would really succeed in putting the clock back. Down till the middle of the
nineteenth century all the teaching members of the university had to be in Holy Orders, and all, save the heads of houses, had to be unmarried. During the eighteenth century, to compare the life of an Oxford College with the life of a monastery had never been more than a joke. There was a brief moment in the 1830s when it seemed to be becoming an uncomfortable possibility. Here were capable, earnest young men who were taking the old Oxford system seriously.

But more important than this, both as an attractive and a repellent force, was the fact that the leaders of the movement were all men who had been ‘touched by God’. They were men in whom the claims of the absolute and the unconditional were vividly and disturbingly embodied. This is the cause of their abiding greatness and of their continued interest for us.

It is well to dwell on this aspect of the movement at the outset, for it gives us a clue to its understanding which is quite indispensable. It would be easy enough to regard the whole affair as one of a romantic nostalgia for the past greatness of the Church, of a purely conservative and academic reaction to the social and intellectual changes of the nineteenth century. It would be impossible to deny that the movement contained elements of both these things. But it is not in them that its impetus, its driving power is to be found. The heart of the movement lay in a passion for holiness and truth, an ardent longing to come face to face with the living God. Here the testimony of a contemporary observer may be of value. Connop Thirlwall, Bishop of St David’s and among the most learned of nineteenth century diocesans, commented at length on its activities in his Charge for the year 1842. Anything but an uncritical admirer of the movement, he commends the great outburst of theological and patristic studies to which it had given birth, studies which in ten years had made ‘a precious addition to our theological literature, such as might perhaps suffer little by comparison with all that it had received in the course of a century before’, and he goes on to say, ‘All this would be of little value, if the spirit which has been awakened had been one merely of literary curiosity, or intellectual energy. But everyone who has observed its workings, must be aware that the case is very far otherwise; that it is bent, with a deep conscientiousness and warm earnestness upon high practical ends.’ In

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1 From Connop Thirlwall’s *Charge to the Clergy of the Diocese of St Davids*, 1842, pp. 37-38, quoted in my *The Silent Rebellion* (1958), pp. 54-5.
our own day, the same point has been made in a different way by a Roman Catholic writer of no little knowledge and perception. Louis Bouyer writes:

The most powerful, and also the most respectable attraction of the new movement was to put forward and to multiply examples of a Christianity which was at one and the same time, eager for holiness and creative of it. It was the demands which this religion made, not simply in the abstract, but immediately and in practice, which gained for it such enthusiastic and effective support. But the greatness of the Tractarian movement was that it was neither a simply intellectual revival, nor, like Methodism, a religious revival without doctrinal basis. The theological effort carried a spiritual renewal inescapably with it, just as the most authentic religious needs lay at the root of its speculative researches.¹

All this is rather far from the usual Anglican interpretation of the Oxford Movement. Because of the great influence which it has had within our Communion, many Anglican writers up to the present have been too much overawed by the events to see them in a true perspective. Too often the movement had been judged in terms of purely Anglican controversies, its setting within the whole development of nineteenth century Christianity has been ignored, and its deep but hidden affinities with the Methodist and Evangelical revivals have not been recognised.² It has been seen either as a kind of ‘second Pentecost,’ a completely new start in Anglican history, which as if by a miracle wiped away the troubles and difficulties of the previous three centuries, or it has been regarded as the great betrayal within Anglican history, the moment at which the movement begun at the Reformation received a disastrous and almost unaccountable set-back. No one seems to have considered the possibility that the Tractarians were, unwittingly, themselves being true to the position of the Reformers in refusing to regard the sixteenth century settlement as absolute and final. In either case certain doctrines and positions thrown out in the heat of controversy have come to assume an exaggerated importance, and the real substance of the movement—that which gave and still gives it life

² An interesting study of the interaction of Evangelical and Catholic elements within the Church of England in the second half of the nineteenth century is to be found in the recently published book of Dieter Voll, *Catholic Evangelicalism* (Faith Press, 1963).
and significance—has been lost to view behind the forms in which it found expression.

We may take as an example the Tractarian appeal to tradition—so important in its life and thinking. Was this simply an uncreative appeal to the past, a searching up of precedents from seventeenth century Anglicanism, and a collecting of proof-texts from the Fathers? In his admirable introduction to *The Mind of the Oxford Movement*, Dr Owen Chadwick writes of Newman:

He was incapable of representing tradition as an ecclesiastical device. It was sacramental of the life of heaven, the Church visible as a sign of the invisible. It was an earthly story of the communion of the saints in heaven. His feeling for historical continuity, his affection for the past, his reverence for an other-worldly sanctity, his love of ‘orthodoxy’ not as orthodoxy or rigidity, but as faithfulness to every truth revealed, his sense of the richness and exuberance of the Christian tradition—all these enabled him to set forth the implications of tradition in magical prose.¹

Orthodoxy as a faithfulness to every revealed truth, the concern for tradition as sacramental of the life of heaven, the thought of the Fathers as living witnesses to the truth (for they are members of the same family as ourselves), the apostolic succession itself, not primarily as an ecclesiastical device but as an expression of the identity of the Church now with the Church then, our being made contemporaries with Christ in the power of the Spirit, these are the living themes in the teaching of Newman, and Keble, and Pusey. Their interest in tradition has to be seen in the light of their stress upon the doctrines of the communion of saints and the Ascension of Our Lord. God is not a God of the dead, but of the living, arid in Him we are one with all His servants and are caught up into the marvelous interchange of earth and heaven. To quote Dr Chadwick again, ‘Tradition, apostolic succession, ministry, episcopate’ are for them ‘not primarily engines against dissent, but rungs in Jacob’s ladder where the angels ascend and descend.’

It is this thought of the nearness of God, of His indwelling among men in the Church, of His indwelling in the soul through grace, which is at the heart of the Oxford Movement. In all the writers of this school there is an amazed, and awe-struck sense of the wonder and majesty of God, and of His presence with us, and a consequent horror at the reality of

In the clear light of God’s glory, the falling short of man appears in all its tragedy. And here we come to the root of the other-worldliness of the movement, its strong emphasis on renunciation and asceticism. If God, here and now, can be all in all to the soul, can fill the whole of a man’s life and thought, aspiration and desire, then how can we turn to find pleasure in other things? This knowledge of God is something which will always involve suffering and renunciation; all the leaders of the movement were convinced of this; and all, Keble, Pusey, and Newman, found that it was true in their own experience. For it is suffering and loss which strip us of the sufficiencies of this world, so that we may find our sufficiency in God alone.

At this point there is a contemporary of the Tractarians who, because he had thought the question through to its foundations and could write about it with surprising freshness, can help us greatly to understand their position. It is Søren Kierkegaard. In his writing and life there is an equally strong emphasis on the renunciation of all things created, for God. He, too, saw how much the Protestantism of his time had lost through the loss of this vital principle. It is strangely moving to see the way in which he was coming to grasp this truth by a process of almost infinite reflexion on the calling which God had given him, at precisely the same time that the first Anglican Communities were beginning to discover in a more practical and less self-critical way.

The way that renunciation is commonly understood has appeared to me to be an attempt to make God out a foolish pedant, and God’s relationship to man an eternal stinginess and perpetual pettiness. Hence it has not appealed to me in the least. But the real situation is entirely different; for renunciation, yea, the delight of renunciation, is simply a lover’s understanding with God. So far as I am concerned truth obliges me to admit that it was God that gave me the hint. I had not dreamed of it, had not even believed myself capable of it. But it was as though God had whispered to me the secret: Renunciation is a higher relationship to God, it is really a love-relationship; and for me at least an enchantment was spread over renunciation—I have never been so enchanted.¹

Many young men and women who came under the influence of Oxford during these years experienced that enchantment. We can find them, in Hurrell Froude for example, the same impatience with the comfortable, prosperous, unthinking Christianity of their day as we find in

¹ Quoted by Walter Lowrie, *Kierkegaard*, pp. 540-1.
Kierkegaard. The lines which his friends put on the title page of the posthumously published *Remains* might as well apply to Kierkegaard as to Froude:

> Se sub serenis vultibus, austera virtus occultit,
timens videri, ne suum dum prodit, amittat decus.

Although there was no sort of conscious communication between them, the thought of ‘the monastery’ and of its meaning for the Church, was as active in the minds of men in Oxford during these years as it was in the mind of the solitary thinker in Copenhagen. During his life time, Kierkegaard never found ‘the monastery’; but since his death, his writings have often been welcomed into the houses of the communities which trace their inspiration back to Pusey and Newman, and have been received there with that silent joy and secret complicity which is so mysterious to those who have not entered upon the way which they describe. And if we find that Kierkegaard can unexpectedly help us to see the meaning of what was going on in Oxford, so too in Pusey we can find words which seem to sum up that strange, tormented, solitary, joyful life.

> ‘Though he slay me, I will trust in him.’ See meth this a great thing brethren? The great holy words will mean yet more, ‘Lo: if he slay me, I will trust in him,’ not ‘although’ only, but ‘because’ he slayeth me. It is life to be touched by the hand of God; to be slain is, through the Cross of Christ, the pledge of Resurrection.¹

While Kierkegaard’s intense concentration on the relationship of the individual with God tended to blind him to all other realities, in the Tractarians we find a fuller and more balanced position. With them the feeling of fear and trembling which seizes a man in the face of the Almighty, and the awareness of the momentous consequences which hang upon moments of personal choice, became the motive force for a rediscovery of the wholeness of the Church and of the Christian tradition. For if we are united with Christ by faith, then in Him we are united with all who are His. The fact that our religion must be deeply personal, far from making it solitary or individualist, brings us into relationship with all men.

After its sense of the reality and importance of personal religion, this rediscovery of the wholeness of Christian tradition is perhaps the most

¹ Quoted in *The Mind of the Oxford Movement*, p. 166.
striking feature of the Oxford Movement. It is one of the elements which has been often misunderstood among Anglicans of every persuasion, because again it has been seen too much in terms of controversial doctrines, the authority of the Councils, of the nature of Apostolic succession, rather than in relation to this great central concern with the union of man with God in Christ. Here, above all, our understanding of the Tractarians could be enriched by recognising that they are not so isolated in the history of nineteenth century Christianity as they and many of their followers have been tempted to think.

It was certainly not only in Oxford that men were coming to think of the Church and its history in a totally new way. All over Christendom, during the first part of the nineteenth century, there were those who were catching a new vision of the visible Church as a great divine-human reality, a living, developing organic society set down in the midst of history, and yet pointing to an end beyond all history. We should certainly be right in seeing here some influence of the dominant historical and philosophical ideas of the period. But may we not also see something more? Can we not detect the first signs of that still growing awareness that the whole Christian family, despite all that divides us from one another, shares a common origin, a common goal, and a common life? In all the great traditions of Christendom one can find, at that time, premonitions of the present movement of God’s Spirit which is bringing us all into nearer relationship with one another. In Russia, we can see it in the writings of a man like A.S. Khomiakov, the most creative figure in eastern Orthodox theology during the nineteenth century. In England, of course, it is not only the Tractarians who feel it. Its finest theological expression comes in the work of F.D. Maurice. In the Protestant world, we find it in the life and thought of two great but neglected Lutheran figures, N.F.S. Grundtvig in Denmark and Wilhelm Löhe in Bavaria. Among Roman Catholics, the same movement is to be discerned in Johann Adam Möhler, the founder of that school of theology whose latest and most remarkable representative is Professor Hans Küng.

All these men were, in different ways, concerned with unity, and in differing degrees all were being led to recognize the existence of the Christian family beyond the canonical limits of their own tradition. All were seeking to understand the facts of division and to find some way in which unity might be restored. For the most part they were working in isolation from one another, though both Grundtvig and Khomiakov
took the trouble to come to Oxford in an attempt to make contact with what was going on there. Neither visit was, in its time, particularly fruitful. But looking back over a century, in the light of what has happened since, we can see how much they had in common, and how necessary a study of them is for any fuller understanding of the Oxford Movement itself, and its place in Christian history.

On the Protestant side in particular, it is evident that the Tractarians were almost totally unaware of the fact that any similar movements of life and thought were taking place on the continent of Europe. To this day, the theological and practical work of Lobe at Neuendettelsau and of Grundtvig in Denmark, is practically unknown among Anglicans. Yet there are significant parallels between their vision of the Church as a living, historical reality and that of the Oxford Movement. Already in the 1820s, Grundtvig had stated, with an emphasis which no Anglican has surpassed, that it is impossible to found the Church on the Bible. The Church is founded on the incarnate Word of God, and it lives by the sacraments in which we hear God’s Word to us. The Bible can only be understood from within that community by which and for which it was written. The whole of Grundtvig’s great work of hymn writing and translation was inspired by the desire to make the whole sweep of Christian praise and thanks-giving available to the Church in Denmark. The parallel with the liturgical aspirations of a J. M. Neale is clear enough. That the same is true of the work of Wilhelm Löhe can be seen from the brief but tantalizing pages of the late Archbishop Brilioth’s *Evangelicalism and the Oxford Movement*.¹

On the Catholic side, the parallels have also not been fully explored. One thing that becomes clearer in the course of time, is that the figure of Newman constantly grows in importance and significance. In his own time and in his own country he tended to be eclipsed by the more spectacular figure of Manning. Indeed, the triumphant ultramontanism of the later nineteenth century has been taken by the majority of English-speaking Christians simply to be Roman Catholicism. Recent developments have shown very clearly that it is only part of a larger and more complex whole. Newman’s views on such a subject as the role of the laity in the Church are receiving new attention. His prophecy of 1871 that Vatican I would not be the last Council of the Church, has been unexpectedly fulfilled. His desire that the doctrine declared there

¹ See especially pp. 12-5.
should be balanced and complemented by other elements in Catholic teaching is widely shared. Undoubtedly his thought has been one of the influences which have brought about the present change of climate. Among Anglicans the theological interest which he has aroused on the continent of Europe has not been fully appreciated.

Perhaps the time has come when a joint study of Newman could be undertaken by Anglicans and Roman Catholics together; a study which would face Anglicans afresh with a consideration of the reasons why he left the Church of England, and Catholics with a new attempt to evaluate the extent to which he carried over many of his Anglican convictions into later life. Newman is in many ways a challenging figure to both parties in the debate. In England we seem to have been so much captivated by the fascination of his personality and style, that we have neglected the real core of his writing. Humanly speaking, the parting of friends caused by Newman’s conversion, and Keble and Pusey’s continuance in the Church of their baptism, seems sheer tragedy. Perhaps in a larger perspective, we shall find that the agonies and perplexities of that time have not been without fruit, and have a significance for us, which we have not yet been able wholly to decipher.

It is indeed only within the last twenty years or so that the full significance of the Oxford Movement can begin to be seen. What we have before us in the mid-twentieth century is a movement which is bringing Catholic and Protestant together into a dialogue, in some matters even an agreement, after four hundred years of polemic or indifference. There is a real dialectic at work between the separated portions of western Christendom, and there is an unprecedented recognition that all Christians need one another and belong together. On both sides, the growing points seem to be where there is most cross-fertilization. In all this, the leaders of the Oxford Movement, often unwittingly, had a preparatory part to play. By claiming as their own so many things which were thought to be exclusively Roman Catholic, while staying out of communion with Rome, they put a question mark against the finality of the original intention of the Reformers in demonstrating that the Reformation was a process still going on. By heightening and sharpening the differences within Anglicanism, they produced inside our own Communion a dialogue of Catholic and Protestant, which has now been taken up by so many others. By insisting always on the wholeness of tradition, they re-opened lines of communication with the eastern Church, that forgotten factor in the
ecumenical situation without which there can be no lasting resolution of our western conflicts. The tragedy is that their successors have too often lost their original universality of vision, have become rigidly anti-Protestant, imitative of the externals of Rome, and scornful or indifferent towards the hidden riches of the eastern tradition.

We said at the beginning that the Oxford Movement was at once well known and yet unknown; and we have tried to trace out some of the meaning of that statement. It is well known in that certain of its leading personalities, their lives and fortunes, their main ideas and aspirations, have been frequently described and argued over. It is unknown in that its relationships with other movements in the Church of England, and indeed in the whole Church of God, have been too little considered, or considered in too narrowly controversial a way. Still more is it unknown in that the heart and secret of the movement must, by its very nature, remain unknowable, hidden in the love and knowledge of God. For this was a movement which had both its end and its beginning in prayer.

At the conclusion of the Preface to his Sermons, Academical and Occasional, published in 1847, in which he wrestles with some of the agonising questions and the heartache caused by Newman’s departure, John Keble appended a meditation on the Lord’s Prayer, in the light of Our Lord’s ‘own Eucharistical petition THAT THEY ALL MAY BE ONE, AS WE ARE.’ It is a prayer which is as living now as it was one hundred and twenty years ago when Keble wrote it, and among its petitions is this one, which may sum up all that was deepest in the life and longing of the Oxford Movement:

Thou who hast declared unto us the mystery of thy will, to gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in Heaven and which are on earth: conform us, o Lord, to that holy will of thine, and make us all one in thee.¹

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¹ J. Keble, Sermons, Academical and Occasional (1847), p. lxxii.
JOHN KEBLE’S WAY TO CHRISTIAN UNITY

Michael A. McGreevy cssR.

This article appeared alongside that of Donald Allchin (see above) in the first issue of One in Christ, in 1965, under the rubric of The Oxford Movement. Fr McGreevy, who now ministers at St Mary’s, Clapham, taught dogmatic theology at St Joseph’s College, Shrewsbury.

My dear Newman, you have been a kind and helpful friend to me in a way which scarce any one else could have been, and you are so mixed up in my mind with old and dear and sacred thoughts, that I cannot well bear to part with you, most unworthy though I know myself to be; and yet I cannot go along with you, I must cling to the belief that we are not really parted—you have taught me so, and I scarce think you can unteach me—and, having relieved my mind with this little word, I will only say God bless you and reward you a thousand-fold for all your help in every way to me, unworthy, and to so many others. May you have peace where you are gone, and help us in some way to get peace: but somehow I scarce think it will be in the way of controversy. And so, with somewhat of a feeling as if the Spring had been taken out of my year, I am, always, your affectionate and grateful, John Keble.¹

Probably nothing more moving ever came from Keble’s pen than this letter to Newman. It is dated ‘Midnight, October 11th, 1845’, the day Keble heard of Newman’s reception into the Roman Catholic Church. If we would understand Keble’s way to unity, we must have some idea of how Keble saw the Church. This letter reflects his mind. He is sad because he feels Newman’s change of Communion has simply underlined the visible disunity of the Church. But his sadness is tempered by the belief that there exists a unity in the Church more profound than any visible signs. He held the Branch Theory. According to this there are mainly three branches—the Greek, the Latin, and the Anglican. Each has preserved the essentials of the

Church, namely true doctrine and valid sacraments. They each agree in all but their late accidental errors.

Clearly then, Keble held there was a real mystical unity between these branches. He insists very strongly on this essential unity in a sermon entitled, *The Church One.*¹ Since the Church is the Body of Christ, he says, it *must* be One. ‘Christ is One, and His Body is One, and the Church is His Body, therefore the Church must needs be One. As surely as there is but one Christ, so surely is there but one Church. St Paul puts it in as plain words as possible, “As the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.”²

Keble goes on to explain this profound unity in its analogy with the unity of the human race. ‘For as the whole race of mankind are naturally one, by their common head and root, Adam, so the whole race of Christians, the holy seed, the Lord’s nation and family, are one, in a way beyond nature, by their adoption or engraving into one spiritual Root or Head, Jesus Christ.’³

Moreover, since he considered each of the ‘branches’ of the Church to have preserved valid sacraments through the Apostolic succession, Keble saw a sacramental unity binding all Christians together. Today we would stress the Baptismal unity of all Christians as the basis of our sacramental unity, in a way which goes considerably beyond Keble’s conception of the Church according to the Branch Theory. On the way in which this Baptismal unity relates to Eucharistic unity we would not be so clear. For Keble, with his clear view of the valid sacraments of the three branches of the Church, the stress lay on the Holy Eucharist as the great sacrament of unity. His account of the unity for which Christ prayed at the Last Supper is especially worth noting.⁴ ‘Christian unity,’ he says, ‘is, most undeniably, the peculiar and paramount object of His great intercession—the unity of believers through the Son of God with the Father and with each other. “Holy Father, keep through Thine own Name those whom Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, as We are.” This for the Apostles: the next for ordinary Christians: “That they all may be one, as Thou, Father, art

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² *Sermons for Easter to Ascension Day*, p. 164.
³ Ibid. p. 165.
in Me, and I in Thee ... I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be
made perfect in one.” But this was the very effect Christ had spoken
of in His promise of the Holy Eucharist: ‘He that eateth My Flesh and
drinketh My Blood, dwelleth in Me, and I in Him’ (John, 6:57).

There is therefore, in Keble’s view, a sacramental unity transcending
all the differences that separate the branches. This is how he put it: ‘Of
sacramental union among Christians, His Apostle wrote afterwards,
“Ye being many are one Bread and one Body: for ye are all partakers of
that one Bread”.’ Yet divisions there are. Visible unity is all too
obviously lacking. Keble considered that a great many of the
difficulties the Christian felt at that time had their root in this
disunity. He asks:

What is the great cause of the doubt and anxiety, amounting
sometimes even to agony of spirit, which is more or less experienced
by so many in various portions of the Church, at this moment?
Without going into particulars, or presumptuously affecting to allot to
the several portions of Christendom their several degrees of blame for
so calamitous a state of things: the simple circumstance of the Body of
Christ being broken up into three portions, mutually separated from
each other, at least in regard of formal and acknowledged communion,
is enough to excite very real and sad misgivings, in any mind
accustomed to measure things by the plain Canons of Scripture and of
the early Church.

The condition of the Church was his greatest concern. His love for
Christ was profound, so he spared no effort to see the effectiveness of
the Mystical Body of Christ increased. He could not but be affected by
its distress. In The Christian Year he wrote of the Church:

In the waste howling wilderness
The Church is wandering still,
Because we would not onward press
When close to Sion’s hill.

Back to the world we faithless turn’d,
And far along the wild
With labour lost and sorrow earn’d,
Our steps have been beguil’d.

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1 Sermons, Academical and Occasional, p. 264.
2 Ibid p. 265.
3 Ibid p. 298.
Yet Heaven is raining angel’s bread
To be our daily food,
And fresh, as when it first was shed,
Springs forth the Saviour’s blood. ¹

Late in life he spoke of The Christian Year, which had been published in 1827: ‘The Christian Year (as far as I remember it) everywhere supposes the Church to be in a state of decay.’² And so it does. Yet depression never has the last word, for faith and hope keep breaking through. Keble was convinced that, under divine providence, full visible unity would return.

Yet the day of such unity seems far off. What can we do to bring it closer? How are we to achieve this Christian Unity? Our method must find its roots in union with Christ. Keble saw the only hope of full visible unity in a growth of visible holiness. Each Christian must strive to live more closely united to Christ. Inevitably, as it were, the result of union with Christ is union with one another. The great means towards unity, therefore, is a deeper personal holiness in each individual Christian. In this, Keble was very much a precursor of the Abbé Couturier, with his stress on prayer for the sanctification of all Christians.

Keble’s theory of Christian unity was essentially concerned with the sacraments. It is through the sacraments that we are made members of Christ, and it is the sacraments that preserve this new life in us. Unity and holiness were therefore closely connected for Keble. He saw the visible disunity of Christendom as a consequence of sin. Visible unity could not be hoped for, he considered, before Christians had made real strides in the way of holiness. Every Christian, he preached, must strive to realize the Presence of Christ ‘that you may do what in you lies towards the recovering of the fullness of His grace, both for this and for other portions of His Body: full and actual as well as virtual unity.’³

Our first step is to renew our trust in God. Whatever may afflict the Church, however great the problems facing her, she is Christ’s Mystical Body. Let no one doubt that God guards the Church that is

³ Sermons, Academical and Occasional, p. 311.
His people. The ways of God are mysterious, and we will not always understand them. But nothing should cause our trust to waver.

When God seems to be breaking down what He hath built, and plucking up what He hath planted: when we know not how soon our house may be left unto us desolate; let us not then, of all times, be seeking great things for ourselves; neither in the way of temporal safety and ease, nor even in the way of spiritual assurance and comfort; but let us turn our thoughts more dutifully than ever to the plain straightforward keeping of the Commandments of God, to the calls and obligations of every hour and moment; to purity, charity, humility, and the fear of God.¹

There can be no room for depression if we are striving to do God’s work. We may not see the results though we know it will succeed. We must therefore hope. Whatever the tribulations surrounding the Church, the Christian’s life must be dominated by hope. ‘It lifts and buoy[s] up the whole man towards the good which faith only discerns,’ writes Keble in his sermon on *The Duty of Hoping against Hope.*² He traces the workings of this virtue among the Old Testament people of God, and points out that it must be so still:

As it pleased our Almighty Redeemer Himself to be a man of Sorrow[s] and acquainted with grief, in this respect as much as in any; that His earthly life was throughout, humanly speaking, a life of disappointment—so it has ever been with His Church. The outward and visible appearance of things has always, on the whole, been against her. Her time on earth is a time of crosses, even apart from persecutions and direct hostility.³

St Paul transferred the word spoken of Abraham, ‘against hope believing in hope’ (Rom. 4: 18), to the Church, his spiritual seed; Keble adds, ‘Have we any right to complain if that word is still visibly fulfilled in our time; if after that men, as men have done their best, all that we see remains yet very unsatisfactory, the air around us full of confusing mistrust, and perplexity.’⁴ Hope must never waver or grow weak, for the God we serve is an Almighty God.

What is the source of this confidence? Christ himself, for by our Baptism we are united to Christ. ‘Whatever our spiritual anxieties may

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¹ *Sermons, Academical and Occasional*, p. 296.
³ Ibid, p. 323.
⁴ Ibid p. 324.
be, the God of our father Abraham has from the beginning provided us with a sure remedy: not to distrust the grace of our baptism, but to use it in faith and hope." We may not see the benefits yet we will patiently endure, trusting entirely upon God: ‘We are not to behave as though the grace of their regeneration were clean dried up, the sign of the cross worn entirely out of their foreheads ... We are not to set limits to His ever-bountiful returns, but, according to the measure of the gifts which he has given us, we are in all cheerfulness to venture all, hope for all, but expect to see nothing.’

The first consequence of this trust in God is humility. If we know we are about God’s work, then we will do it in his way, not ours. We will be sufficiently detached neither to be depressed at our effort’s apparent failure nor proud at seeming success. ‘There is,’ Keble points out, ‘a very dangerous and subtle snare of the Evil One, apt to beset men in times like ours: I mean, our being tempted to put all or a great deal upon the providential issue of some one project or experiment; upon the line taken by this or that individual or set of persons.’ We must avoid the twofold snare: ‘that neither seeming failure shall make us remorseful about what we really did for the best, and yet (which would be still more lamentable) shall present success lift us up, and set us on thinking ourselves to be somewhat.’

Convinced as he was that the Anglican, Roman, and Greek Communions were all branches of the one true Church, Keble felt that the way to unity could not be through individual conversions from one communion to another. Newman for many years felt the same to be true. Keble never doubted it. Therefore, he said, the safer course must be to adhere strictly to that communion in which God’s providence has placed one, and work seriously for the reform of its abuses. He was well aware of the abuses in the Anglican Communion, but even where a vital doctrine was involved, he saw the abuse as no more than disciplinary. It must therefore be better, he argued, ‘for

1 Sermons, Academical and Occasional, p. 327.
2 Ibid p. 328.
3 Ibid p. 331-2.
4 Such, for example, was the famous Gorham Judgment of 1850. Bishop Phillpotts of Exeter refused to institute the Revd. G. C. Gorham to a living in his diocese, on the ground that Gorham did not believe the doctrine of Baptismal regeneration. The Canterbury Court of Arches upheld the Bishop. In reply to an appeal, the Privy Council decided in favour of Gorham.
each person, and in the end, doubtless, more conducive to the unity of the Church, for the English Catholics “To abide in the calling wherein they are called”; overcoming, for faith and charity’s sake, the temptation to seek elsewhere more certainty, and a more satisfactory kind of knowledge: whereof the one seems rather too like “requiring a sign” and the other, like “seeking after wisdom,” in that spirit which the Apostle reproved.”

In his sermon on *Endurance of Church Imperfections*, Keble reiterates his belief in the Branch Theory, and continues: ‘May we not conclude with some certainty, that of the three great communities, which have the Creeds, the Succession, and the Sacraments, neither one is out of the Church? And therefore instead of proselytizing in a spirit of hostility, their business is to reform themselves, and pray that in God’s good time they may be reunited in visible communion.’

This was Keble’s way to unity. We, each of us, must reform ourselves. We must become more like Christ. Whether or not we agree with Keble’s principles on present Church unity, we cannot but agree that visible unity will only be perfected this way.

Our primary concern must be to reflect in our lives the life of Christ. How will this be accomplished but by embracing the teaching of Christ, receiving His sacraments, and responding to the new life in us by virtuous living? We must do all we can ‘By prayer, by good works, by patience, by self-denial, by humility.’

The result, Keble said, would be ‘full and actual as well as virtual unity, and all those blessings that would accrue from this: judging by God’s doings of old, the way of the Cross is the only way, by which these blessings can ever be restored.’

But, above all, we must pray. Unity was the theme of Christ’s own prayer at the Last Supper. ‘If one great object of Our Lord’s intercession is the visible unity of all believers in Him, and through

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1 John Keble, Preface to *Sermons, Academical and Occasional*, p. xliii.
3 Ibid p. 311.
4 Ibid. Pope John XXIII saw the importance of this way to unity: ‘We ask you then, Our dearest children, for your prayers. But We ask for more than that. We ask you to rebuild your lives on Christian principles, for that will do even more than these prayers to win God’s mercy for us and our brothers.’ Encyclical Letter, *Ad Petri Cathedram; Truth, Unity and Peace*, London, 1959, p. 38.
Him with the Father;—such unity as the world might see, and believe that God had sent Him; we in our oblation prayer beseech God before all things “to inspire continually the Universal Church with the Spirit of truth, unity, and concord; that all who profess His holy name may agree in the truth of His holy Word, and live in unity and godly love.”

As He prayed so must we, that growing to be more one in Christ, we may all be visibly one in Him.

Our prayer is not to see our own will done, but, placing all our confidence in Christ, we pray to do His work: ‘O Lord we commit our work to Thee: we know not what the end of it may prove; but take it, we beseech Thee, into Thine own hands. Prepare us, from the beginning to the end of it, for what Thy Providence shall bring forth.’

If each Christian is trying to unite his will to Christ’s, then most certainly a major step will have been taken towards visible Christian unity: ‘Go on praying and doing thy best; remember that the right prayer, the right mind and wish is, that God’s kingdom may come, not that it may come through you or me. A good servant will rejoice to see his master’s work better done by another than he could himself have done it; and he will thank God, take courage, and try again the very best he can do.’

We could not conclude our remarks on Keble’s way to unity more fittingly than with his own paraphrase of the Lord’s Prayer, from the Preface to *Sermons, Academical and Occasional*. This is how he introduces it:

May one be permitted (though most unworthy) to offer one concluding suggestion, which will surely be taken in good part by all kind readers of whatever section of the Church? It is this: That at one time or another in our daily devotions, we should offer up Our Lord’s Prayer, as a prayer, in special, for Church union: if so He may graciously accept it, remembering His own Eucharistic petition, THAT THEY MAY BE ONE, AS WE ARE

Our Father, which art in Heaven, One God the Father Almighty, One Lord Jesus Christ, One Holy Ghost proceeding from the Father and the Son; have mercy upon us, Thy children, and make us all one in Thee. Hallowed by Thy Name: Thou who art one Lord, and Thy Name one; have mercy upon us all, who are called by Thy Name, and make us

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1 *Sermons, Academical and Occasional*, p. 258.
2 Ibid p. 334.
3 *Sermons for Easter to Ascension Day*, pp. 319-320.
more and more one in Thee. Thy Kingdom Come: O King of Righteousness and Peace, gather us more and more into Thy Kingdom, and make us both visibly and invisibly one in Thee. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in Heaven: Thou who hast declared unto us the mystery of Thy will, to gather together in one, all things in Christ, both which are in Heaven and which are on earth; conform us, O Lord, to that holy will of Thine and make us all one in Thee. Give us this day our daily Bread: Thou in whom we being many, are one Bread and one Body: grant that we, being all partakers of that one Bread, may day by day be more and more one in Thee. Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us: Thou who didst say, ‘Father forgive them,’ for those who were rending Thy Blessed Body; forgive us the many things we have done to mar the unity of Thy Mystical Body, and make us, forgiving and loving one another, to be more and more one in Thee. And lead us not into temptation: As Thou didst enable Thine Apostles to continue with Thee in Thy temptations: so enable us by Thy grace to abide with Thee in Thy true Church under all trials, visible and invisible, nor ever to cease from being one in Thee. But deliver us from evil: From the enemy and false accuser: from envy and grudging: from an unquiet and discontented spirit: from heresy and schism: from strife and debate: from a scornful temper, and reliance on our own understanding: from offence given or taken: and from whatever might disturb Thy Church, and cause it to be less one in Thee: Good Lord, deliver and preserve Thy servants for ever.\(^1\)

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\(^1\) Preface to Sermons, Academical and Occasional, pp. lxxi-lxxiii.
REPORTS

THE CHRISTIAN HERITAGE OF BASRA

Erica C.D. Hunter*

I was privileged to be able to travel to Basra, in southern Iraq to attend the opening of the first of the galleries of the new museum of heritage and culture that took place on 27 September this year. The new Basra Museum, which aims to showcase the area’s archaeology and history from prehistory to the present, will be a major cultural resource not only for the city but also for southern Iraq and the wider region.

It was a particular pleasure to read a paper on the Christian heritage of Basra and southern Iraq in the two day public workshop and conference that took place on 28-29 September, with invited UK and international speakers. This event provided an unprecedented opportunity for area specialists and museum professionals to explore the rich history of Basra and its place in the wider region.

The Christian heritage of the southern region has spanned almost two millennia, first at the port of Spasinou Charax and later with the founding of Basra. As is well known, the southern region played a major role in trade and export, not only of goods and commodities, but also of religions. It was from the region of Basra that the export of Christianity took place, following the maritime trades routes via the Gulf to India.

As with the rest of Mesopotamia, the origins of Christianity in southern Mesopotamia are shrouded in the mists of antiquity. Some hints are provided by the Acts of Thomas, a legendary tale in Syriac that relates how the reluctant apostle was sent from Jerusalem to India to build a palace for a king ‘Gundaphar’. The Acts of Thomas is valuable in suggesting that there were already nascent ‘Christian’ communities in Basra in the second century. Clearer evidence for a Christian presence emerges in the third century, a time when

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episcopates were being established throughout the length and breadth of Mesopotamia, and further abroad. David, bishop of Basra went to India to evangelize and it seems probable that the traditional emigration of Syrian Christians in the fourth century to the Malabar coast was via the sea-route from southern Mesopotamia.

The *Synodicon Orientale*, a collection of synod reports dating from the fifth century that were edited in the eighth century, documents the importance that Basra had achieved. In 410, the Synod of Isaac (named after the bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, the capital city of the Sassanian empire) confirmed the hierarchy of the ‘Persian’ church. The diocese in the royal capital was sustained by six metropolitanates that formed the next rank in the organization of the Sassanid Church. These represented the major growth points of Christianity in cities throughout the Sassanid domains and included the modern cities of Nisibis, Erbil (Arbela) and Kirkuk (Karkha de Bet Selokht) in the north, along with Basra (Prat de Maishan) in the south. The Metropolitan of Basra had jurisdiction over the dioceses in the Gulf area that included the Iranian region of Khuzistan, as well as Qatar and Oman.

In 544, Basra and the southern region of Mesopotamia was visited by the patriarch of the Church of the East, Mar Aba, accompanied by Paul, bishop of Gundeshapur. The entourage toured various locations in southern Iraq, including the province of Basra and also went further to Khuzistan in order to quell insurrection that had arisen amongst the Persian bishops. Despite these difficulties and also the arrival of Islam in the area in the mid-seventh century, Basra continued to be a bishopric loyal to the Church of the East. In the late eighth century, Patriarch Timothy I (780-823)—one of the greatest patriarchs of the Church of the East who was a learned scholar of Aristotelian philosophy and took part in the historic debate with the Caliph Mahdi—ordained Hananisho, as bishop of Basra. The newly founded Islamic city of Basra must have hosted churches but archaeological evidence has not—to date—come to light. Hopefully, future discoveries will be made.

Around 840, Iso’denah of Basra wrote his *Book of Chastity* or *History of the Founders of Monasteries in the realms of the Persians and the Arabs*. This was a collection of 140 short notices concerning monastic figures, beginning with Mar Augen, who was reputed to be the traditional founder of monasticism in fourth century Mesopotamia.
The notices continued to the mid-ninth century, and in doing so provide very valuable contemporary insight into the presence of East Syrian monasticism which had made a significant foothold in the Gulf. In the early decades of the thirteenth century, Solomon, bishop of Basra wrote his Book of the Bee, a kind of religious and philosophical history of the world from creation to the coming of the Antichrist and the afterlife. Taking his cue from a bee collecting nectar from flower to flower, Solomon assembled a great variety of information gleaned from many books including the Bible as well as apocryphal works.

In this flourishing of Christianity in the region, Basra must have played a seminal ‘export’ role. Conversely in the seventeenth century, the city received an ‘import’ i.e. the introduction of Roman Catholicism when Emir Afrasiyab gave permission to the Portuguese to build a church outside the city. The rise of the Chaldaean Catholic Church in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, led the Uniate church to become the largest Christian denomination in Basra, and prompted the building of churches within the city. The Virgin Mary Cathedral was begun in 1907 and is still the largest, and most significant church in Basra. The Chaldaean Catholic Church of St. Thomas that was built in 1886 is the oldest. Situated in the city’s old quarter, this brick-built church is a rare architectural feature with its façade featuring a tymphaneum and a dentil frieze as well as rounded Georgian-style windows. The church was functional until 2004, but a leaking roof meant that it could no longer be used for worship. However, the roof has recently been repaired.

For more than thirty years, Basra and the Shatt-el-Arab have been at the centre of violence: the Iran-Iraq War (1981-1988), the First Gulf War (1990). These vicissitudes, coupled with the rise of Islamic fundamentalism following the Allied offensive in 2003, have led to a sharp decline in Christian communities in Basra. His Grace, Habib al-Naufaly, Chaldean Catholic Archbishop of Basra since 2014, estimates that today there are only 350 families living in the city. Despite its very troubled past, the city still hosts a variety of active churches: Chaldaean Catholic, Syrian Orthodox and Armenian Orthodox as well as Evangelical and Adventist denominations. Crosses on the churches are visible from the street and some are even illuminated at night. In Basra, one still does see the cross and minaret demarcating the skyline. On 15 November, His Grace gave a very graphic lecture to a packed audience at the Centre of World Christianity, SOAS
(www.soas.ac.uk/cwc) where he outlined the activities and outreach programmes of the Chaldaean Catholic communities in Basra and southern Iraq. It was gratifying to learn about the continued presence of Christians and the significant efforts being made to establish cordial, working relationships with the Shi’a clergy and tribal elders.

**Concluding comments**

The Christian presence in Basra is a precious heritage, which fortunately is continuing today. The overall situation in southern Iraq is still very fragile, but offers a glimmer of potential hope for the future. Despite the diminishing of communities, Christians and Muslims do live side by side in Basra. The contribution of Christianity to the city has been recently acknowledged in a booklet produced by the Religions Heritage campaign under the supervision of Qahtan Al Abeed, the Antiquities Inspector of Basra region. It is a very useful compendium, written in English and Arabic, giving brief details about the dates of construction and history of all the churches of Basra. It also includes the museum of Christian artefacts set up by His Grace, Habib al-Naufal. The booklet is graphic testimony to religious diversity and tolerance that still has a foothold in this southernmost city of Iraq. Like the two rivers that flow through the Mesopotamian heartland, hopefully both Christianity and Islam will continue to function side by side in Basra, and in Iraq.
CONCLUSIONS OF THE CONFERENCE: MARTYRDOM AND COMMUNION, BOSE, 10 SEPTEMBER 2016

Br Luigi d’Ayala Valva *

Introduction

‘Martyrdom and Communion’: the XXIV International Ecumenical Conference on Orthodox spirituality that now concludes its work, continuing the discourse initiated in the previous years, has tried to reflect on these two fundamental concepts of the Christian faith and their mutual relations. More than martyrdom as such, we intended to consider the potential of communion and the ecumenical horizons of Christian martyrdom. As the Scientific Committee, we did not wish to suggest a single definition of martyrdom and communion, leaving the speakers to emphasize the various aspects and the multiple dimensions, as well as the various possible connections between the two concepts. I think that from the papers the richness, the depth and complexity of the issue became clear. The various definitions of martyrdom that have been offered complement each other converging on the essentials: martyrdom is above all a testimony given to Christ (who is himself the first Witness), a testimony to the truth of the merciful love of God for men that Jesus came to reveal and which he lived up to the gift of himself on the cross. In this sense, martyrdom is above all a matter of love and life, not of blood and death. On the other hand, the dimension of communion linked to martyrdom is above all the result of intra-Trinitarian communion of God who gives witness of himself as a God of love; then it is a personal communion lived by the martyr with Christ; finally, it is a communion that redounds, as a seed, in favor of the whole body of Christ, the Church, and of all humanity.

* Conclusions pronounced by Br Luigi, monk of Bose, on behalf of the Scientific Committee of the International Ecumenical Conference on Orthodox Spirituality. This is only the ‘oral’ version, which will soon be revised and published (in Italian) in the Acts of the XXIV Conference ‘Martirio e Comunione’, by our Editions Qiqajon, before July 2017.
From what we have heard, I would like to offer a few reflections that try to bring out the challenges that the theme of martyrdom and communion poses to the Christians of our time.

**Recognizing the other’s martyrdom**

Speaking about martyrdom today, we are called first and foremost to a recognition. If it is true, according to the words of Patriarch Irinej of Serbia in his beautiful message, that today the Christian family as a whole is in fact divided into two groups—those who suffer martyrdom for their faith, and those who are living their faith still ‘safely’—then we, who mostly belong to the latter group, in European churches, are called first of all to recognize the visible sign, the witness offered, at the cost of enormous sufferings, by innumerable brothers who bear like us (and before us) the name of Christians. The heartfelt words by Patriarch John of Antioch at the beginning of the conference should make us reflect: ‘Our Eastern Christians today seek someone who pays attention to their cry but do not find them!’ The recognition of the sufferings of our brothers must be translated into concrete solidarity, which can bring us to an awareness of being part of one ‘body’. Indeed, we can recognize to be members of each other only if we suffer and rejoice together, as the Apostle says (1 Cor. 12:26), otherwise the Body of Christ and the reconstitution of its unity remain a theoretical idea. This sharing of joys and sufferings, as the Russian priest Aleksandr Elčaninov said, is the fundamental criterion of catholicity and of belonging to the Church (‘if we do not feel this, we are not within the Church!’). 1

In this sharing, a real exchange of gifts takes place, between those Churches that today are Churches of martyrs and the others, which are physically safer, but are often much weaker spiritually. As in the time of the Apostle Paul, when churches issued from the pagan world sustained with their collections the poor of the Jerusalem Church, knowing that they had received from them the gift of faith and the witness to the Gospel (cf. Rom. 15:26-27), so today we are called to become aware that these brothers bear witness for us and to us. While we are invited to recognize their suffering and to do something to alleviate it, we should also give thanks and rejoice because they are guarding in this world the ‘costly grace’ of the Gospel.

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Christian identity as a martyr identity

Martyrdom, moreover, as has often been repeated, expresses the Christian identity. It is not something marginal, accessory, or occasional. To recognize the martyrdom of the other Church, of these persecuted Churches, means therefore to honestly recognize that there (and not here) is the true measure of our Christianity, there is the true measure of the Gospel, that we have often—too often—watered down, and which we still water down, reducing it to a cultural event. As we have been reminded, martyrdom is intimately linked to the condition of the disciple who ‘takes’ and ‘bears’ patiently the cross after Jesus (cf. Matt. 10:38, 16:24; Luke 9:23, 14:27). As ‘apostolic’, the Church is and must be also a martyr Church, as Archbishop Anastasios has also reminded us.

The martyrdom, which has reappeared on the horizon of our Churches, must therefore be recognized as an invitation to rediscover the essential ecclesial identity, reminding Christians of the distinctive style of their presence within the world, if they want to be an evangelical presence and therefore a presence of communion and reconciliation. Either the Christian style is conformed to the cross of Christ, or it is not a style of communion. The figure of Christ crucified and humiliated expresses an ever-present reality for the Church, not just an image of the past. In this sense, it is necessary to do some soul-searching (ecclesial and theological) to examine if the joyful and vital proclamation of the resurrection and triumph over death has not often brought with itself an ecclesiological model of the triumphalist kind, which eventually leads to ‘make vain the cross of Christ’ (1 Cor. 1:17), in which alone we can find our glory, as the Apostle says (cf. Gal. 6:14). The fate of the Christian, of the Church, of the Gospel in the world is not, and cannot be, that of a worldly triumph, but only that of a crucified presence of a crucified love, as it was for Jesus. ‘The disciple is not greater than his master’ (Matt. 10:24).

Even though it is true that there is a visibility which is characteristically linked to the act of martyrdom since ancient times (we heard several times the quotation of the Apostle: ‘We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to human beings’, in 1 Cor. 4:9), it is however a kenotic visibility, namely one that empties itself to show the ‘Christ within us’. The demanding question is: which type of visibility do our churches seek today? A visibility as
self-assertion in society, possibly as a revenge against a situation of oppression, or a visibility that shows as much as possible, in its transparency, the truth of Christ and of his love, and therefore implies a certain degree of self-emptying of the Church? With the exception of the martyr-churches, are not we all still too linked to an ecclesial identity that, forgetting the cross, too readily appeals to the resurrection? It is the risk of ‘docetism’ that, rejecting the ‘flesh’ of history, ends up rejecting compassion with men.

**Martyrdom as ‘exodus from the self’**

Along the same lines, martyrdom is a constant challenge for the Church, to the extent that it is an invitation to an *exodus from the self*. Let us recall what Athanasios Papathanassiou was saying about martyrdom as ‘getting out of the temple’, to make visible the truth of the Eucharist in the concrete reality of existence, in communion with our fellow human beings. We have also heard from Fr Panteleimon Manoussakis: if it is true that martyrdom takes place in the Holy Spirit, therefore in the Body of Christ, and not so much in the individual body of the martyr, thus, if there is a ‘dislocation’ that is effected through the Spirit, we can then see a mysterious link between martyrdom and the desire of the Holy Spirit that drives the Churches out of their individual positions to recover their visible communion and center in Christ. This ‘exodus from the self’ of the Church, in addition to being one of the constants of the preaching of the current Pope, was a theme constantly borne in mind by the Fathers of the Holy and Great Council gathered in Crete. Archbishop Anastasios on that occasion defined ‘self-centeredness as the greatest heresy and mother of all heresies’ in the Church. We can also understand what has been said about ‘truth-telling as martyrdom’, which implies a ‘death to the self’ for the sake of communion, not only within the Church, but also in the secular and the political field and we have been reminded that Christian martyrdom is opposed to any self-assertion that seeks opposition to the other in the name of an abstract truth to defend. We could also suggest that the synodality, for which today the Ecumenical Patriarchate works tirelessly within Orthodoxy, is closely linked to the willingness of the single local Churches to ‘get out’ from their particular, national and cultural shell, basically ‘dying to themselves’ in a true martyrdom, for the sake of communion. In this sense, there is no communion without martyrdom, because there
is no communion without the cross, without renouncing one’s own will, without reception of the otherness of the other. In this sense the Orthodox monastic tradition states that the renunciation of one’s will is ‘as an effusion of blood’, that is, as a martyrdom.¹

**Remembering to reconcile with the past and open to the future**

Moreover, many of the papers have rightly focused on the act and the duty of remembering the martyrs, those who have borne witness to Christ, and often have done it in anonymity, as in the persecutions of the last century. In addition to being an act of human justice and historical truth, the fact of remembering enables this martyrdom to bear fruits of communion. Of course, our capacity of memory is limited, and only God remembers all. But despite these limitations, there is still need to recognize and accept the words of truth expressed by the martyrs, so that communion can be realized, as was said by Aristotle Papanikolau; otherwise, despite the value of that testimony before God, there is always the risk that it can remain ineffective for us. Fr Manoussakis, exploiting the etymology of ‘martyrdom’ linked to the idea of commemorating, told us how martyrdom is in itself a ‘memory’ of another memory, one with which the Lord, throughout history, relentlessly tries to awaken our attention testifying his love and his work on behalf of humanity. So there is a ‘memorial chain’ permanently extended through the act of remembering the martyrs, which is in itself an *act of martyrdom*, just as an attestation of memory and truth. In fact, in many situations, to get ahead, the memory requires struggle and force of resistance against those who have no interest in remembering and yet want to bury and forget. Recall, for example, the martyrs of the Butovo Polygon about which Fr Kirill Kaleda has spoken, and the testimony of figures such as the Grand Duchess Elisabeth Feodorovna, or Fr Alexander Glagolev, which were presented in all their current relevance by Lydia Golovkova and Konstantin Sigov.

The Churches have to practice more and more a purification not only of their historical memory, but also of their own way of remembering martyrs, freeing this act from any claim or expression of

nationalist, ethnic, or confessional opposition. They should watch over the evangelical style of this memory, which is not guaranteed by the simple fact of remembering those who gave their life for the faith. The memory cannot be conceived as a revenge over a situation of oppression, but must always remain a testimonial memory, for the sake of a truth that gives life and creates communion. This is possible also by recognizing the witness of the martyrs of the sister churches. The true martyrs have no country, are in some sort citizens of the oecumene, as Patriarch Irinej reminded us. In this sense the proposal for an ‘ecumenical martyrology’, advanced many years ago by the World Council of Churches (WCC) and supported also by our community retains its value.¹

The act of remembering by the Church, however, does not take us back to the past, but it is rather a call to conversion in the present; indeed, it is not even confined only to the present, but is open to the future. As last year in this same room the metropolitan of Zagreb Porfirije reminded us: ‘To remember means exercising a fervent expectation of what is still to come, since nothing is completely and irretrievably finished’.² The memory of the martyrs, in the authentic sense, does not come from the past but from the future and directs us towards the future, towards that Kingdom that we constantly invoke in the ‘Our Father’.

Foretaste of eschatological communion

Martyrdom, thus, directs us towards the eschatological reality of ecclesial identity. In fact, if Christian identity is an identity of martyrdom, and martyrdom is always effected by the Lord and is always future (‘at that moment I will be really a disciple’, says saint Ignatius³), then Christian identity is an open identity: none of us has the right to close it. The witness of the martyrs is the irruption of the eschaton in the historical present and calls the Church to its deeper

³ Cfr. St Ignatius of Antioch, Epistle to the Romans 4,2.
truth, which does not come simply from the past nor is given fully in
the present, but comes, is given, and is expected from the future, from
that future which is in God’s hands. Those who have surrendered their
lives in God’s hands, the martyrs, are the citizens of the heavenly
Church who ‘are a sign’ to those who are still members of the earthly
Church. This implies listening to what the cry of the martyrs means
today for the Churches, to what the Spirit says to the Churches
through them. The martyrs, those of yesterday and of today, raise
constantly a cry, ‘How long?’ which is not simply directed towards
heaven, towards God, as the Revelation of John says (Rev. 6:10), but is
also addressed to us who are here on earth and are often unable to see
the reality of this world from the perspective of heaven. This cry
reminds us of our responsibilities: ‘How long will you carry out your
divisions on earth?’

Ecumenism of blood, invitation to conversion of the Churches

Patriarch Kirill and Pope Francis, in their joint statement signed in
Havana (Cuba) on 12 February 2016, claimed that ‘these martyrs of our
times, who belong to various Churches but who are united by their
shared suffering, are a pledge of the unity of Christians’,¹ as we were
reminded on the first day of our conference by the message of
Metropolitan Ilarion of Volokolamsk. Along the same lines, the
Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, welcoming Pope Francis to the
Phanar in 2014, said: ‘The modern persecutors of Christians do not ask
which Church their victims belong to. The unity is ... already occurring
in certain regions of the world through the blood of martyrdom’.² For
his part, Pope Francis in similar terms asked, as Cardinal Koch just
recalled: ‘If the enemy unites us in death, who are we to divide us in
life?’³

We should be aware that the fact of being associated together under
the one name of Christians by the persecutors in the persecutions in
the first centuries differs from the persecutions of the twentieth

¹ Joint Declaration of Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All
Russia, 12.
² Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Address to His Holiness Pope Francis
during the Divine Liturgy for the Feast of St. Andrew in the Venerable
Patriarchal Church, 30 November 2014.
century, in which persecutors had rather the tendency to adopt a policy of division among the Churches, so as to subdue them better. They supported one against the other, and as a consequence Christians could rarely perceive themselves in solidarity under the same suffering, although fortunate cases can be found both in the Nazi death camps and in the prisons of the Soviet power, as we heard in the touching story of Nicu Steinhhardt. Today everywhere Christians are victims of persecution together. And perhaps we should be better able to grasp this as a ‘sign of the times’, in order to respond with vigilance.

The ‘ecumenism of blood’ should not be regarded as a minimalistic ecumenism, as some of its critics believe, because the experience of martyrdom is in fact the supreme experience that expresses the heart of the Christian faith. With martyrdom we are not at the periphery, but at the center of the Christian faith, hence recognizing each other as sharing the central experience, the witness to the one Lord, gives Christians a solid foundation, which requires them to revise how they perceive ecumenism and unity (ecumenism of blood, as the Patriarch of Antioch reminded us in a highly appreciated statement, should be combined with an ecumenism of repentance and conversion: conversion which means the orientation of mind and heart to what God is doing and wants us to do). Pope John Paul II in the encyclical *Ut unum sint* wrote that if the Churches ‘are able truly to ‘be converted’ to the quest for full and visible communion, God will do for them what he did for their Saints.

In martyrdom we see how unity is not something that we build ourselves, with our own strength. It is rather God who has already achieved it in the martyrs through his Spirit; recognizing the martyrdom of the other (of the other Church) means *de facto* recognizing the Spirit ‘who blows where he wishes’ (John 3:8), beyond the visible boundaries of our own Church. We must be more aware of this and draw the consequences from this for the ecumenical journey. The problem is converting from an ecumenism that seeks to build unity out of the divisions to an ecumenism that welcomes unity from the future of God to overcome the divisions that we humans have realized in the past.

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It is worth mentioning once again, after having done so repeatedly in this room during the course of our past conferences, the beautiful text of Dorotheos of Gaza depicting Christians as people who are heading towards a single center:

Suppose we were to take a compass and insert the point and draw the outline of a circle. The centre point is the same distance from any point on the circumference. Now concentrate your minds on what is to be said! Let us suppose that this circle is the world and that God himself is the centre; the straight lines drawn from the circumference to the centre are the lives of men. To the degree that the saints enter into the things of the spirit, they desire to come near to God; and in proportion to their progress in the things of the spirit, they do in fact come close to God and to their neighbor. The closer they are to God, the closer they become to one another; and the closer they are to one another, the closer they are to God. Now consider in the same context the question of separation; for when they stand away from God and turn to external things, it is clear that the more they become distant from God, the more they become distant from one another. See! This is the very nature of love. The more we are turned away from and do not love God, the greater the distance that separates us from our neighbor.¹

The martyrs have already achieved the center and from there invite us to pursue the path without fear. Their voices, to which during these days we have listened (from Antioch to Rome, from Russia and Ukraine, to Romania and to Bulgaria, Georgia and Armenia...) form together a choir singing as one: ‘We are one in Christ!’ (cf. Gal. 3:28). If we listen to this voice and recognize each other truly in communion in one martyrdom for Christ, this should facilitate mutual recognition also in Eucharistic communion, because Eucharistic communion and martyrdom have always been intimately linked in the patristic and ecclesial understanding: it is question of being consistent with our own theology.

Not surprisingly, among the ‘martyr churches’ today, like those of the Middle East, theological reflection and ecclesial practice in this field are much more advanced than in other churches. Where there is already a real sharing of sufferings, divisions appears for what they are: incomprehensible and senseless, because they contradict concrete experience.

¹ St. Dorotheos of Gaza, Discourses and Sayings 6,78.
**Gift and witness to the world**

Finally, the horizon of communion shown by martyrdom is not limited to the Church. Martyrdom is a gift *for all*, it is a seed of communion offered to the whole world. The Church, through martyrdom for the sake of faith and justice, bears witness in front of the world to a rationale ‘other’ than the worldly one: it is the rationale of love that breaks the cycle of violence and hatred. This witness must be given with humility and generosity, knowing that in this world of ours, which is not the Kingdom, it will always be contradicted, and will never be accepted by all, yet it continues to fertilize history, to place in it a seed that will be fully revealed at the end of time and that, according to our faith, in Christ crucified and risen has already yielded its fruit.

Martyrdom is not only a testimony of fidelity to God, but is also a testimony of the true face of God *to the world*, a God of love who, in the person of the martyrs, is revealed to the world as the one who gives himself unconditionally. This is the heart of the Christian proclamation, which the testimony of contemporary martyrs helps us to rediscover in its purity, freeing it from any cultural coating that is likely to adulterate it. To be credible, this proclamation can only be unitary (John 17:21: ‘so that the world may believe that you have sent me’). Martyrdom is therefore also an invitation to recover a *common mission*, starting from the essentials, thus returning to the origins of the ecumenical movement, which arose, as we know, in the first half of the twentieth century from the realization of how great a scandal was the division among Christians for the proclamation of the Gospel.

Let me conclude by quoting the *apolytikion* of the feast of All Saints, using it as an epiklesis to the Lord for our churches:

Clothed as in purple and fine linen with the blood of your Martyrs throughout the world,
your Church cries out to you through them, Christ God:
Send down your pity on your people, give peace to your commonwealth,
and to our souls your great mercy.

Τὸν ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ κόσμῳ Μαρτύρων σου, ὡς πορφύραν καὶ βύσσον τὰ αἵματα, ἡ Ἐκκλησία σου στολισαμένη, δι’ αὐτῶν βοᾷ σοι·
Χριστὲ ὁ Θεός, τῷ λαῷ σου τοὺς οἰκτίρμοὺς σου κατάπεμψον,
eἰρήνην τῇ πολιτείᾳ σου δώρησαι, καὶ ταῖς ψυχαῖς ἡμῶν τὸ μέγα ἔλεος.
A recent booklet, Pioneer Ministry in New Housing Areas: Personal Reflections and a Practical Guide, by Penny Marsh & Alison Boulton, published by Grove Books (Ev 113) provides an opportunity for Ministers and Church leaders to reflect on how the Gospel will be preached and the Church established in new housing areas. The booklet comes out of the experience of the authors. James Cassidy, who has worked as a priest in New Towns for over forty years, adds his own thoughts.

I live and work in Northampton Diocese, a diocese which encompasses three traditional counties: Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire (which used to include Slough), and Northamptonshire. Recently we had a conference looking at proposed building plans for the diocese. There was scarcely a town without some growth, large or small; there is also in the diocese the ever-increasing town of Milton Keynes. Given the drop in the number of clergy the proposed increase in potential parishioners is alarming to the diocese. The expansion and its consequences are true for other dioceses; for example in Essex, which includes all of Brentwood diocese, there are plans to use redundant airfields for housing, and the diocese is littered with them. When the nettle is grasped by Government and houses are built then diocesan pastoral plans will need to be ready.

This is not a new problem, or even opportunity. The New Towns Act of 1947, which brought into effect the war-time planning, saw the growth of the New Towns, built on the foundations of the late-nineteenth century’s Garden City movement and the development of

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Letchworth and Welwyn in the early twentieth century.\(^1\) However, these towns, and the post-war expansion of municipal housing took place in times of relative abundance of clergy. It was easy for bishops to erect new parishes with new churches and put in eager clergy anxious to start their new parishes. (In the 1950s there were so many priests in Liverpool Archdiocese that most had to wait until their silver jubilee of ordination before they became Parish Priests.) These parishes were based around fairly small churches, and the ministry was that of traditional suburban parishes, unchanged over the decades. The only exception of which I am aware, was the Catholic pastoral provision for Skelmersdale in Liverpool, a New Town, designated in 1961 where the whole town was served by a team ministry. In contrast, the Catholic planning for Milton Keynes, designated in 1967, was for small parishes, replicating the past, in the expectation that what worked in the fifties would work in the seventies and onwards to the new millennium, with the same number of clergy available.

However, there is now a major difference. In the last century there was still a fairly strong residual Christianity. If people had gone to Church in their previous location, then when moving to a New Town, the habit generally continued. People tended to come to the Church. All this has now changed. Christianity is not any more the default religion. Awareness of things Christian is not the norm. In England, in the new towns and developments, we are living in a post-Christian world. For the new residents it cannot be presumed that they have any awareness of Church, and no knowledge that their houses are built on land which (for Anglicans and Catholics) is already part of some parish to which they belong, and whose clergy will look forward to the participation of the new residents in the traditional life of the Church. They are missionary areas, and need to be treated as such.

This demands new techniques. Grove Books has recently published *Pioneer Ministry in New Housing Areas: Personal Reflections and a Practical Guide* by Penny Marsh and Alison Boulton (Grove Evangelism, EV113). The authors, who are Baptist ministers, and have worked in new housing areas, share their expertise and thoughts. Their research is valid for all ministers in new housing areas.

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\(^1\) See William Booth, *In Darkest England and the Way Out* (1890), and Ebenezer Howard, *To-morrow: a Peaceful Path to Real Reform* (1898).
Essentially the authors tell ministers to get involved in the new areas. That has been part of pastoral practice from time immemorial, and has always been the key to good pastoral ministry. The more involved the clergy are with their congregations, the better; with the joys and hopes, the sorrows and anxieties of the people.¹ What is new is the complexity and the different modes of life, and the need to be involved from the start of the often labyrinthine planning process. This is the field of the authors.

If residual Christianity can no longer be presumed in the new residents of a development it also cannot be presumed in those involved in any planning or building of it. Marsh and Boulton underline the importance of bishops and equivalents of being interested, involved and concerned in the early stages of the plan (p.12). Planners need to be told, or reminded, about the importance of the Church in the community, and what the Church can contribute to the new community. As planners change jobs and local Councils re-structure, the relationship needs to be maintained at all levels with all the concerned bodies and their ever-changing personnel. If a Church is planning on a building, this needs to be put into the plan at an early stage. If the Church wants to share a building, again this should be mentioned early in the process. If a pioneer minister is to live on site then the housing needs to found, perhaps from the plan, before any are built. This requires forward planning by the Church: this is crucial.

It is also crucial, as the authors say, to be an integral part of the planning process for as long as it takes, years or even decades. The more engagement with the process the more trust is built up, and this is vital (p.14). The churches should never be shocked when they realise the size of any development; the plans are always available. If there is ever surprise then bad staff-work is the reason.

The forward planning of the denominations should be ecumenical. If one denomination is putting in a pioneer minister does this mean other denominations can sit back? What of the existing Anglican and Catholic parishes who have a vested interest in the site of the development? Clearly it is crucial to work together, not only for the practical reasons to save duplication of effort, but also to bear witness to the common baptism we acknowledge. If the denominations can agree on one person to be the point of contact with the developers

¹ See the opening words of Gaudium et Spes.
then this is clearly beneficial. If there is one resident minister then obviously there needs to be good relations with the ministers of the other denominations. A good example of this is Cambourne, Cambridge, where there is one minister in the Local Ecumenical Partnership (comprising the Church of England, the Baptist Union, the Methodist Church, and the United Reformed Church). The Church is also shared with the local Catholic community, which has been involved with the LEP and the planning from the start. The Church building was the end result of planning and engagement, which began in the 1980s when the development was first proposed. The community first started meeting in 1999 in a doctor’s waiting room, then moving to a portacabin, then a community centre, and finally the Church in 2009. There is also a Christian school in the village. The story is typical, but what is important is the working together of the churches from the start. Marsh and Boulton offer a suggestion of how denominations may collaborate in a new housing area: one denomination may fund the housing, another a minister, the third taking the lead in building a church or school (p.15). This is but one model, other solutions may work in other areas. In all cases the lines of communication must be clear. Even if just one denomination has taken the lead the others must be kept in the picture, and support given to the person on the ground from all the denominations. Meetings and regular communication are essential to keep everyone in the picture and to limit misunderstandings.

The building up of community is integral to parochial ministry, but has become harder and harder for the clergy. The lives of young couples, the target market for most new housing, is under more and more pressure. In the early New Towns it was anticipated that the wife would remain at home, the husband being the bread winner, arriving home in the evening from local employment which had been planned into the town. Now, homes are priced at a level which requires the mortgage to be paid from two salaries, so generally neither partner can afford to remain at home and often the developments are commuter or over-spill dormitories, with the possibility of only brief moments of shared life in the evening and at week-ends. Marsh and Boulton underline that being on-site is most important for the Church minister, who clearly then shares the life of the residents, and listens to their concerns (see p. 10). The Church must be seen as integrally committed to the community, not just as a Sunday visitor—the
Marsh and Boulton discuss whether there should be a Church building (p.15). This is an interesting debate. One pioneer minister is having a successful ‘church without walls’ which meets in various spaces in the new community, including a local pub and also a redundant medieval church. It is ‘church’ in which all are welcome, without pre-conditions, focussing on community and relationships. Other new housing areas have shared community facilities which are used by the church. As someone who worked in shared environments while a community was growing I found it a blessing to have a proper base eventually. I had discovered that no amount of incense can cover the smell of stale ale and tobacco in a community hall. (It was before the banning of smoking in public places.) Yet when we moved to a ‘proper Church’ although at home, one missed the sense of provisionality, of pilgrimage. One had come, in effect, to the promised land, with all its blessings, but also with its attendant difficulties. The pro and cons need to be weighed in the planning process. One can be imaginative; Marsh and Boulton write of the use of shop premises, of running community facilities, of bidding for the use of the ‘religious facility’ described in the plan, but not yet marked on a map, and speak of the attendant difficulties (p.24).

The planning process of the Church, as well as looking at the job description for the Pioneer Minister should also involve succession planning. What is the optimum time to be a pioneer? How long before burn-out happens? Some denominations appoint for a fixed time, others value permanence. Both have value, but the responsible person for the minister needs to have care that the time for a move is carefully judged, and there has been some sort of planning for the ministry when the initial person has moved away. This of course is not only for the minister, but the minister should be careful to have (at least in the mind) successors for those in the local leadership group. Finding the ideal head of finance on Monday is fine, but by the next Monday he or she might have moved out of the area. Marsh and Boulton underline the importance of planning, and also the importance of a support structure for the clergy, as well as training for local leaders (p. 17). The role of the pioneer minister can be lonely, and one’s colleagues in more traditional churches or parishes may not always understand the stresses and strains.
A crucial part of the booklet deals with ‘Practical Steps for the Pioneer Ministers’ (chapter 5). In the past in more traditional Catholic parishes the priest visited all his flock, and was always welcome. Cold calling on parishioners in traditional parishes has died out for various reasons. But with a new development it is essential; people like to be welcomed. If they can have a gift, so much the better. The authors suggest joining with developers to see what they will be giving, so that there is no duplication. They also suggest contacting local firms to see if they will help fund an arrival pack. One minister in a new housing area told me how the local shop contributed biscuits to a welcome pack the church distributed to new residents as they moved into their houses. Whatever is given, or not, the first contact must be a welcome; a welcome on behalf of the Christian Church, with information on how the Church can be contacted (on a pen, on a fridge magnet, anything ...) and details of any Facebook page, etc. It is not recommended to take a clipboard and ask for details of church membership! If there is a conversation, then information about church membership may come out, and one is free to say if that information should be shared with the appropriate church. The important thing is the welcome, the meeting, and the opportunity for friendship. Marsh and Boulton offer various suggestions, and underline the importance of the giving and receiving of hospitality. They remind us that Jesus was often the guest of the people he met, but ‘in established churches we often think we always have to be host’ (p.20). They also remind us of the importance of prayer, and of listening to what God seems to be saying, of seeing what God is already doing in the burgeoning community and joining in with His work.

The practical steps also involve making partners with other groups, schools, businesses, cafés, pubs, etc. If the development is large there may be a community liaison person/new-arrivals worker. This person will obviously be crucial to the minister—if all goes well. Sometimes people will have had a bad experience with one church or clergy-person, and not feel inclined to try again. All the pioneer minister can do is to try to be co-operative, and be totally unthreatening. It is the openness to situations which is the key to building bridges and engaging others to share in the ministry of Jesus in what can be a difficult environment.
The booklet concludes with some advice. There is a check-list for all those who are working in Pioneer Ministry. Some are obvious: pray, reflect theologically, be bold, be adventurous; do not spread yourself thinly—do a couple of things well, don’t cater for every pressing need. Others are more hidden: beware of lack of conversations between church leaders which may lead to duplication between denominations; be ready for developers to involve other faiths in the development of a religious facility; don’t expect the Church to grow as quickly as the house-building (pp. 25 - 26).

The authors end with a short biblical reflection, reminding ministers that they are called to walk humbly with God, who sent out the seventy-two as lambs in the midst of wolves, without money or bag. (John 10: 3-4). They reassure the reader that it is an exciting ministry with many rewards (p. 27); and they end with hope and reassurance, but in the body of the booklet they have not disguised the difficulties. They are the practitioners who have laboured in the sun and the heat, and share their experience gladly.

Given the need the country has for more housing it is likely that the developments will come. I hope that the various Church leaders read this book and start planning. They too need to be involved in new housing areas, with the appropriate enthusiasm. If they fail to plan, if they lack the necessary enthusiasm, then the proclamation of the Gospel will be even more difficult for those both in leadership positions in the churches as well as for the pioneer ministers.

For those who would like more information about the experiences of the church in new communities there is a section in the Churches Together in England web-pages devoted to new communities. There more Pioneer Ministers share their stories.
From Conflict to Communion: Together in Hope. 
Joint Commemoration of the Reformation by the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church held on 31 October in Lund and Malmö, Sweden

We give below the following texts from this event:

• Joint Statement
• Declaration of Intent between Caritas Internationalis and The Lutheran World Federation—World Service
• Address of His Holiness Pope Francis at the Ecumenical Event in Malmö Arena
• Sermon of Rev. Dr Martin Junge, General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation in Lund Lutheran Cathedral
• Sermon of His Holiness Pope Francis in Lund Lutheran Cathedral

Joint Statement on the occasion of the Joint Catholic-Lutheran Commemoration of the Reformation 
Lund, 31 October 2016

Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me (John 15:4).

With thankful hearts

With this Joint Statement, we express joyful gratitude to God for this moment of common prayer in the Cathedral of Lund, as we begin the year commemorating the fivehundredth anniversary of the Reformation. Fifty years of sustained and fruitful ecumenical dialogue between Catholics and Lutherans have helped us to overcome many differences, and have deepened our mutual understanding and trust. At the same time, we have drawn closer to one another through joint service to our neighbours – often in circumstances of suffering and persecution. Through dialogue and shared witness we are no longer strangers. Rather, we have learned that what unites us is greater than what divides us.
Moving from conflict to communion

While we are profoundly thankful for the spiritual and theological gifts received through the Reformation, we also confess and lament before Christ that Lutherans and Catholics have wounded the visible unity of the Church. Theological differences were accompanied by prejudice and conflicts, and religion was instrumentalized for political ends. Our common faith in Jesus Christ and our baptism demand of us a daily conversion, by which we cast off the historical disagreements and conflicts that impede the ministry of reconciliation. While the past cannot be changed, what is remembered and how it is remembered can be transformed. We pray for the healing of our wounds and of the memories that cloud our view of one another. We emphatically reject all hatred and violence, past and present, especially that expressed in the name of religion. Today, we hear God’s command to set aside all conflict. We recognize that we are freed by grace to move towards the communion to which God continually calls us.

Our commitment to common witness

As we move beyond those episodes in history that burden us, we pledge to witness together to God’s merciful grace, made visible in the crucified and risen Christ. Aware that the way we relate to one another shapes our witness to the Gospel, we commit ourselves to further growth in communion rooted in Baptism, as we seek to remove the remaining obstacles that hinder us from attaining full unity. Christ desires that we be one, so that the world may believe (cf. John 17:23).

Many members of our communities yearn to receive the Eucharist at one table, as the concrete expression of full unity. We experience the pain of those who share their whole lives, but cannot share God’s redeeming presence at the Eucharistic table. We acknowledge our joint pastoral responsibility to respond to the spiritual thirst and hunger of our people to be one in Christ. We long for this wound in the Body of Christ to be healed. This is the goal of our ecumenical endeavours, which we wish to advance, also by renewing our commitment to theological dialogue.

We pray to God that Catholics and Lutherans will be able to witness together to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, inviting humanity to hear and receive the good news of God’s redeeming action. We pray to God for inspiration, encouragement and strength so that we may stand
together in service, upholding human dignity and rights, especially for the poor, working for justice, and rejecting all forms of violence. God summons us to be close to all those who yearn for dignity, justice, peace and reconciliation. Today in particular, we raise our voices for an end to the violence and extremism which affect so many countries and communities, and countless sisters and brothers in Christ. We urge Lutherans and Catholics to work together to welcome the stranger, to come to the aid of those forced to flee because of war and persecution, and to defend the rights of refugees and those who seek asylum.

More than ever before, we realize that our joint service in this world must extend to God’s creation, which suffers exploitation and the effects of insatiable greed. We recognize the right of future generations to enjoy God’s world in all its potential and beauty. We pray for a change of hearts and minds that leads to a loving and responsible way to care for creation.

*One in Christ*

On this auspicious occasion, we express our gratitude to our brothers and sisters representing the various Christian World Communion and Fellowships who are present and join us in prayer. As we recommit ourselves to move from conflict to communion, we do so as part of the one Body of Christ, into which we are incorporated through Baptism. We invite our ecumenical partners to remind us of our commitments and to encourage us. We ask them to continue to pray for us, to walk with us, to support us in living out the prayerful commitments we express today.

*Calling upon Catholics and Lutherans worldwide*

We call upon all Lutheran and Catholic parishes and communities to be bold and creative, joyful and hopeful in their commitment to continue the great journey ahead of us. Rather than conflicts of the past, God’s gift of unity among us shall guide cooperation and deepen our solidarity. By drawing close in faith to Christ, by praying together, by listening to one another, by living Christ’s love in our relationships, we, Catholics and Lutherans, open ourselves to the power of the Triune God. Rooted in Christ and witnessing to him, we renew our determination to be faithful heralds of God’s boundless love for all humanity.
‘Together in Hope’ Declaration of Intent between Caritas Internationalis and The Lutheran World Federation—World Service

1. Preamble

Caritas Internationalis, created in 1951, is the social and justice arm of the Catholic Church. It is at the same time a confederation of 165 national organisations present in 200 countries and territories and a central entity of the Holy See. Serve, accompany and defend the poor: its mission is to promote a civilization of love, based on the social and other teachings of the Church and is developed around five central strategic orientations that are: Caritas at the heart of the Church; save lives and rebuild communities; promote sustainable integral human development; build global solidarity; make the Caritas Confederation more effective.

In its first orientation, an objective is to contribute to and promote a culture of partnership and ecumenical and interreligious cooperation. The LWF has engaged with diakonia and service since its founding in 1947. World Service, the diaconal arm of the LWF, focuses especially on the needs of refugees and internally displaced people in humanitarian assistance, development aid and advocacy. The LWF is committed to working with other Christian World communions and faith-based organisations (FBOs) for broader reach and wider impact, aiming to empower and enable local populations through rights-based approaches.

Caritas Internationalis and the LWF World Service have worked together on several occasions during the past decades in many countries and regions addressing the root causes of poverty and humanitarian crises. Caritas member organisations have also cooperated with the LWF World Service.

On the occasion of the commemoration of the 500 years of the Reformation, the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church have taken further steps towards reconciliation and moved forward in the field of joint service to express and strengthen their commitment to the quest for unity. This is expressed in the Lutheran-Catholic study document ‘From Conflict to Communion’, in which the 5th ecumenical imperative calls for joint diaconal action. It says:

‘Catholics and Lutherans should witness together to the mercy of God in proclamation and service to the world’. §243 reads:
‘Ecumenical engagement for the unity of the Church does not serve only the Church but also the world so that the world may believe’.

The international community is also calling especially upon FBOs to engage actively in realizing the Sustainable Development Goals agenda, working towards the eradication of extreme poverty in a generation. In the Catholic world, there are various spaces of collective engagement (among which the Forum of Catholic Organisations) and in the broader Christian world, there is ACT Alliance, of which the LWF is a member and with which Caritas Internationalis has been linked for many years.

We believe that faith communities and the organisations with which they engage are uniquely placed to fight extreme poverty in all its dimensions. Not only because these communities are present around the world, but also because when trained, organised and accompanied, they are the best responders to disasters, the best promoters of integral sustainable human development, and the best advocates for their lives. What animates us is our faith and, in a secularized world, this makes a huge difference: courage, commitment, perseverance, taking risks, the belief that God is with us to confront evil and rebuild lives.

As two global Christian organisations working for human dignity and social justice, we decide to join hands. To bring hope. To witness and act together, without being exclusive. And to invite our members to engage with their counterparts and friends locally.

2. Purpose

The overall purpose of this Declaration of Intent is to consolidate and develop a mutually inspiring relationship beneficial to the people we serve, accompany and defend, based on shared values and vision regarding how our organisations can work together in the world today.

Caritas Internationalis and the LWF World Service will seek to expand and deepen their relationships and joint work at all levels. We will:

- look for opportunities
- commit to cooperate where appropriate
- engage in regular strategic discussions
- share learnings, challenges and opportunities
• ensure that members, staff and volunteers understand the Declaration of Intent and look to work together in harmony and collaboration.

3. Areas for cooperation
The LWF World Service and Caritas Internationalis will work together in the following fields at global level:
• Refugees, internally displaced people and migrants
• Peace building and reconciliation
• Humanitarian preparedness and response
• Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals
• Interfaith action and programming

4. Concrete application mechanisms
Caritas Internationalis and the LWF World Service will:
• Engage in regular strategic discussions on issues agreed upon, with specific experts on board
• Engage in common programs whenever possible
• Invite our membership to cooperate and engage in joint programming at national/diocesan/local levels, in consultation with respective member organizations in donor countries when applicable, in those fields referred to above and more as identified locally, including capacity building, interfaith action, reinforcing local civil society
• Meet annually to appreciate the work done and plan ahead
• Communicate what we have achieved.
Address of His Holiness Pope Francis at the Ecumenical Event in Malmö Arena, Monday, 31 October 2016

I thank God for this joint commemoration of the five-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation. We remember this anniversary with a renewed spirit and in the recognition that Christian unity is a priority, because we realize that much more unites us than separates us. The journey we have undertaken to attain that unity is itself a great gift that God gives us. With his help, today we have gathered here, Lutherans and Catholics, in a spirit of fellowship, to direct our gaze to the one Lord, Jesus Christ.

Our dialogue has helped us to grow in mutual understanding; it has fostered reciprocal trust and confirmed our desire to advance towards full communion. One of the fruits of this dialogue has been cooperation between different organizations of the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church. Thanks to this new atmosphere of understanding, Caritas Internationalis and the Lutheran World Federation World Service will today sign a joint agreed statement aimed at developing and strengthening a spirit of cooperation for the promotion of human dignity and social justice. I warmly greet the members of both organizations; in a world torn by wars and conflicts, they have been, and continue to be, a luminous example of commitment and service to neighbour. I encourage you to advance along the path of cooperation.

I have listened closely to those who gave the witness talks, how amid so many challenges they daily devote their lives to building a world increasingly responsive to God’s plan. Pranita talked about creation. Clearly, creation itself is a sign of God’s boundless love for us. Consequently, the gifts of nature can themselves lead us to contemplate God. I share your concern about the abuses harming our planet, our common home, and causing grave effects on the climate. As you rightly mentioned, their greatest impact is on those who are most vulnerable and needy; they are forced to emigrate in order to escape the effects of climate change. All of us, and we Christians in particular, are responsible for protecting creation. Our lifestyle and our actions must always be consistent with our faith. We are called to cultivate harmony within ourselves and with others, but also with God and with his handiwork. Pranita, I encourage you to persevere in your commitment on behalf of our common home.
Mgr Héctor Fabio told us of the joint efforts being made by Catholics and Lutherans in Colombia. It is good to know that Christians are working together to initiate communitarian and social processes of common interest. I ask you to pray in a special way for that great country, so that, through the cooperation of all, peace, so greatly desired and necessary for a worthy human coexistence, can finally be achieved. May it be a prayer that also embraces all those countries where grave conflicts continue.

Marguerite made us aware of efforts to help children who are victims of atrocities and to work for peace. This is both admirable and a summons to take seriously the countless situations of vulnerability experienced by so many persons who have no way to speak out. What you consider a mission has been a seed that has borne abundant fruit and today, thanks to that seed, thousands of children can study, grow and enjoy good health. I am grateful that even now, in exile, you continue to spread a message of peace. You said that everybody who knows you thinks that what you are doing is crazy. Of course, it is the craziness of love for God and our neighbour. We need more of this craziness, illuminated by faith and confidence in God’s providence. Keep working, and may that voice of hope that you heard at the beginning of your adventure continue to move your own heart and the hearts of many young people.

Rose, the youngest, gave us a truly moving testimony. She was able to profit from the talent God gave her through sport. Instead of wasting her energy on adverse situations, she found fulfilment in a fruitful life. While I was listening to your story, I thought of the lives of so many young people who need to hear stories like yours. I would like everyone to know that they can discover how wonderful it is to be children of God and what a privilege it is to be loved and cherished by him. Rose, I thank you from the heart for your efforts and your commitment to encouraging other young women to go back to school, and for the fact that you pray daily for peace in the young state of South Sudan, which so greatly needs it.

After hearing these powerful witnesses, which make us think of our own lives and how we respond to situations of need all around us, I would like to thank all those governments that assist refugees, displaced persons and asylum-seekers. For everything done to help these persons in need of protection is a great gesture of solidarity and a recognition of their dignity. For us Christians, it is a priority to go
out and meet the outcasts and the marginalized of our world, and to make felt the tender and merciful love of God, who rejects no one and accepts everyone.

Shortly we will hear the testimony of Bishop Antoine, who lives in Aleppo, a city brought to its knees by war, a place where even the most fundamental rights are treated with contempt and trampled underfoot. Each day the news tells us about the unspeakable suffering caused by the Syrian conflict, which has now lasted more than five years. In the midst of so much devastation, it is truly heroic that men and women have remained there in order to offer material and spiritual assistance to those in need. It is admirable too, that you, dear brother, continue working amid such danger in order to tell us of the tragic situation of the Syrian people. Every one of them is in our hearts and prayers. Let us implore the grace of heartfelt conversion for those responsible for the fate of that region.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us not become discouraged in the face of adversity. May the stories we have heard motivate us and give us new impetus to work ever more closely together. When we return home, may we bring with us a commitment to make daily gestures of peace and reconciliation, to be valiant and faithful witnesses of Christian hope.

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Sermon on the occasion of the Joint Commemoration of the Reformation, Lund Cathedral, 31 October 31 2016, by Revd Dr Martin Junge, General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

For centuries, generation after generation, we have been reading this text from the Gospel that presents Jesus as the True Vine. However, rather than reading it as an encouragement to affirm our unity, we focused on the branches that, because they did not bear fruits, were removed from the vine. This is how we have seen one another: as branches separated from the true vine, Christ.

But there were women and men who, in times when this joint commemoration was still unimaginable, already gathered together to pray for unity or to form ecumenical communities. There were
theologians, women and men, who already entered into dialogue, seeking to overcome doctrinal and theological differences. There were many, who together offered themselves to serve the poor and the oppressed. There were even some who suffered martyrdom for the sake of the Gospel.

I feel deep gratitude for those bold prophets. As they lived and witnessed together they began to see one another no longer as separated branches but as branches united to Jesus Christ. Even more, they began to see Christ in their midst and to acknowledge that even in those periods of history when dialogue was broken between us, Christ continued talking to us. Jesus never forgot us, even when we seemed to have forgotten him, losing ourselves in violent and hateful actions.

Thus, as we see Jesus among us, we have also started to see each other anew. We acknowledge that there is much more that unites us than that which separates us. We are branches of the same vine. We are one in Baptism. This is why we are here at this joint commemoration: to rediscover who we are in Christ.

However, the revelation of the unity that we have in Jesus Christ clashes with the fragmented reality of Christ’s body, his church. The vision of a communion grounded in Jesus Christ, with all its beauty and the hope that it inspires in us, also entails to suffer with even greater pain from the wounds of our brokenness. What never should have been broken was broken: the unity of the body of Christ. We lost what is given to us.

How can we continue walking now with the same boldness and hope of those who preceded us in this ecumenical pilgrimage towards unity? How do we direct our steps towards the future of communion into which God calls us? How can we be healed so that finally we may become what we already are in Christ: branches of the same vine?

A Latin American thinker, Eduardo Galeano, wrote: ‘History is a prophet who looks back: because of what was, and against what was, it announces what will be.’

I suggest that from now on we apply this key when we read the Bible text of the true vine. Let it be the hopeful and prophetic announcement of the solid link between the vine and its branches bearing fruits of healing and life in abundance. Let this be the spirit to approach this historical moment in which we commit ourselves,
Catholics and Lutherans, to move away from a past overshadowed by conflict and division and to walk the paths of communion.

No doubt, it is a promising but also a demanding journey. It takes place in times of great fragmentation and marked by tendency to conflict. Imposing sectarianisms alienate individuals and communities, leaving them unable to communicate. However, the journey we are called into must be built on even more intense dialogues. Our own narratives about who we are and who the other is generally underline and highlight our differences. Our memories are often marked by pain and conflict.

Aware of all those centrifugal forces that always risk separating us, I would like to call us to rely trustfully on the centripetal force of Baptism. The liberating grace of baptism is a divine gift that calls us together and unites us! Baptism is the prophetic announcement of healing and unity in the midst of our wounded world, and thus becomes a gift of hope for humanity that longs to live in peace with justice and in reconciled diversity. What a profound mystery: the cry of peoples and individuals living under violence and oppression is consonant with what God continually whispers into our ears through Jesus Christ, the true vine to which we are united. Abiding in this vine we will bear the fruits of peace, justice and reconciliation, mercy and solidarity that the people cry for and that God brings forth.

Let us move forward then, answering faithfully God’s call and, by doing so, responding to the cries for help, to the thirst and the hunger of a wounded and broken humanity.

And if tomorrow God would see us holding stones in our hands, like those we carried in former times, may they not be to be thrown at each other. Who could throw the first stone now that we know who we are in Christ? May they not be used either to build walls of separation and exclusion. How could we when Jesus Christ calls us to be ambassadors of reconciliation? Rather, may God find us building bridges so that we can come closer to each other, houses where we can meet together, and tables—yes, tables—where we can share bread and wine, the presence of Christ, who has never left us and who calls us to abide in him so that the world may believe.
Address of His Holiness Pope Francis at the Common Ecumenical Prayer, Lutheran Cathedral of Lund, 31 October 2016

‘Abide in me as I abide in you’ (John 15:4). These words, spoken by Jesus at the Last Supper, allow us to peer into the heart of Christ just before his ultimate sacrifice on the cross. We can feel his heart beating with love for us and his desire for the unity of all who believe in him. He tells us that he is the true vine and that we are the branches, that just as he is one with the Father, so we must be one with him if we wish to bear fruit.

Here in Lund, at this prayer service, we wish to manifest our shared desire to remain one with Christ, so that we may have life. We ask him, ‘Lord, help us by your grace to be more closely united to you and thus, together, to bear a more effective witness of faith, hope and love’. This is also a moment to thank God for the efforts of our many brothers and sisters from different ecclesial communities who refused to be resigned to division, but instead kept alive the hope of reconciliation among all who believe in the one Lord.

As Catholics and Lutherans, we have undertaken a common journey of reconciliation. Now, in the context of the commemoration of the Reformation of 1517, we have a new opportunity to accept a common path, one that has taken shape over the past fifty years in the ecumenical dialogue between the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church. Nor can we be resigned to the division and distance that our separation has created between us. We have the opportunity to mend a critical moment of our history by moving beyond the controversies and disagreements that have often prevented us from understanding one another.

Jesus tells us that the Father is the ‘vinedresser’ (cf. v. 1) who tends and prunes the vine in order to make it bear more fruit (cf. v. 2). The Father is constantly concerned for our relationship with Jesus, to see if we are truly one with him (cf. v. 4). He watches over us, and his gaze of love inspires us to purify our past and to work in the present to bring about the future of unity that he so greatly desires.

We too must look with love and honesty at our past, recognizing error and seeking forgiveness, for God alone is our judge. We ought to recognize with the same honesty and love that our division distanced us from the primordial intuition of God’s people, who naturally yearn
to be one, and that it was perpetuated historically by the powerful of this world rather than the faithful people, which always and everywhere needs to be guided surely and lovingly by its Good Shepherd. Certainly, there was a sincere will on the part of both sides to profess and uphold the true faith, but at the same time we realize that we closed in on ourselves out of fear or bias with regard to the faith which others profess with a different accent and language. As Pope John Paul II said, ‘We must not allow ourselves to be guided by the intention of setting ourselves up as judges of history but solely by the motive of understanding better what happened and of becoming messengers of truth’ (Letter to Cardinal Johannes Willebrands, President of the Secretariat for Christian Unity, 31 October 1983). God is the vinedresser, who with immense love tends and protects the vine; let us be moved by his watchful gaze. The one thing he desires is for us to abide like living branches in his Son Jesus. With this new look at the past, we do not claim to realize an impracticable correction of what took place, but ‘to tell that history differently’ (Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity, From Conflict to Communion, 17 June 2013, 16).

Jesus reminds us: ‘Apart from me, you can do nothing’ (v. 5). He is the one who sustains us and spurs us on to find ways to make our unity ever more visible. Certainly, our separation has been an immense source of suffering and misunderstanding, yet it has also led us to recognize honestly that without him we can do nothing; in this way it has enabled us to understand better some aspects of our faith. With gratitude we acknowledge that the Reformation helped give greater centrality to sacred Scripture in the Church’s life. Through shared hearing of the word of God in the Scriptures, important steps forward have been taken in the dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation, whose fiftieth anniversary we are presently celebrating. Let us ask the Lord that his word may keep us united, for it is a source of nourishment and life; without its inspiration we can do nothing.

The spiritual experience of Martin Luther challenges us to remember that apart from God we can do nothing. ‘How can I get a propitious God?’ This is the question that haunted Luther. In effect, the question of a just relationship with God is the decisive question for our lives. As we know, Luther encountered that propitious God in the Good News of Jesus, incarnate, dead and risen. With the concept ‘by grace alone’,
he reminds us that God always takes the initiative, prior to any human response, even as he seeks to awaken that response. The doctrine of justification thus expresses the essence of human existence before God.

Jesus intercedes for us as our mediator before the Father; he asks him that his disciples may be one, ‘so that the world may believe’ (John 17:21). This is what comforts us and inspires us to be one with Jesus, and thus to pray: ‘Grant us the gift of unity, so that the world may believe in the power of your mercy’. This is the testimony the world expects from us. We Christians will be credible witnesses of mercy to the extent that forgiveness, renewal and reconciliation are daily experienced in our midst. Together we can proclaim and manifest God’s mercy, concretely and joyfully, by upholding and promoting the dignity of every person. Without this service to the world and in the world, Christian faith is incomplete.

As Lutherans and Catholics, we pray together in this Cathedral, conscious that without God we can do nothing. We ask his help, so that we can be living members, abiding in him, ever in need of his grace, so that together we may bring his word to the world, which so greatly needs his tender love and mercy.
BOOK REVIEW


Who was Nathan Söderblom? To some people he was an ecumenical father, to others a liberal theologian and to even others an important church leader. Some might even think of him as a Lutheran or ecumenical saint, the first Swedish saint since the fourteenth century. In some ways he was all of this and much more.

Nathan Söderblom (1866-1931) was a professor of the History of Religion in Uppsala and in Leipzig. He was appointed Archbishop of Uppsala in 1914, he hosted the Stockholm Ecumenical Conference in 1925 and he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1930. Söderblom died 1931. That is the short story. But there is a longer one as well, covering most of his life.

There are many studies regarding different aspects of Söderblom’s life and work. In 2014 it was one hundred years since he was consecrated bishop in Uppsala cathedral and two important studies have recently been published: Professor Dietz Lange’s study in German, *Nathan Söderblom und seine Zeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011) and Bishop emeritus Jonas Jonson’s *Jag är bara Nathan Söderblom satt till tjänst* (Stockholm: Verbum, 2014). Jonson’s book has now been translated into English, published by Eerdmans and is the subject of this review.

First of all it should be said that Jonson takes advantage of earlier studies. Hence, it is not new findings that are published. But that is actually not a disadvantage. What Jonson has done is to introduce Söderblom in a full-length portrait, from birth to death, from studies to marriage, from peace work to theological preferences, from the Swedish Academy to the Swedish nobility, from activism to contemplative studies on the suffering of Christ. Jonson’s book is chronological and we can follow how Söderblom’s ideas unfolded through the years. Unfortunately neither the Swedish edition nor the translation gives any precise references to the sources Jonson has used. To the ordinary reader it does not matter but for a researcher, who would like to study the same sources, checking is impossible as the archives contain thousands and thousands of documents and there is no hint where to find a quotation or an interesting document.
Söderblom liked to call the Church of Sweden a bridge church, a church building bridges between the Orthodox Catholics, the Evangelical Catholics and the Roman Catholics, as he would have put it himself. The focus in Jonson’s study is on Söderblom as an international Church leader, on his ecumenical efforts and on his struggle for peace and for a new way for the churches to work together. This is the main part, about half the book. It is a lesson in how to boldly try, retry and try again to win people from combatting countries for peace and understanding. It is a story about failures and eventually about success.

Nathan Söderblom had a winning personality; he always had the time to speak with people and make them feel that they had his full interest. People who met him did not forget it. He usually could achieve what he wanted, but not always. It was controversial when he was appointed archbishop and he was seen as a threat to the church. After all Söderblom had studied other religions and he was a liberal theologian accepting the methods of historical critical research. Some people regarded that as giving up belief in the Word of God. On the contrary, Söderblom found a way to combine a personal, deep Christian faith with modernity.

It is mainly Söderblom’s actions, thoughts and deeds and his churchmanship that Jonson covers. You won’t find very much about his family and children and the obstacles, difficulties and crises Nathan Söderblom and his wife Anna went through. As everyone might understand it was not easy to have a workaholic as husband and father. Thus, the family relations were not always at their best. Söderblom himself tried to keep his family life hidden from the public.¹ That said it is still a book in the life biography genre.

It is more than eighty years since Söderblom was the Archbishop of Uppsala. During these eighty years society has changed. There has been one more world war, a cold war and conflicts intertwined with religious beliefs in the Middle East. It is of course difficult for an author to grasp the spirit of the times. I think that Jonson has succeeded and accordingly given the reader a key to follow Söderblom’s actions and his thoughts. Every chapter begins with a

¹To get a glimpse of Söderblom’s family life see Omi Söderblom, I skuggan av Nathan. Texter av Helge Söderblom [In the Shadow of Nathan. Texts by Helge Söderblom]. Stockholm: Verbum, 2014.
quotation from Söderblom, thus giving an introduction to the chapter with Söderblom’s own wordings. Jonson’s language is precise, sometimes poetic, and it is really a joy to read him. As you might know Jonas Jonson is among other things a poet with several hymns in the Swedish hymnbook.

The last chapter is called The Death of a Saint. Söderblom was an ecumenical pioneer with friends all around the globe. He changed the way churches worked together on social issues, even if the Roman Catholic Church at that time could not join Life and Work. Furthermore, he changed the Church of Sweden. After Söderblom it was impossible for a Swedish archbishop to ignore the ecumenical movement. Söderblom ‘had broken the provincialism of the Church of Sweden and given it a new self-image with his emphasis on evangelical catholicity, universality, and an historically conditioned responsibility for unity and peace. He had liberated the church from much of Lutheran orthodoxy’s oppressive dogmatism and pietism’s narrow moralism’ (Jonson, p. 424). The newspaper headlines declaring his death were giant, as if war had been declared, and he was buried as a saint in Uppsala Cathedral. It did not take long before the first hagiographies were published.

Jonas Jonson’s book is not a hagiography. Söderblom is treated with respect but ideas and actions are questioned and discussed and related to societal changes. That makes it the book to read when looking for the Nathan Söderblom story.

Klas Hansson, Associate Professor, Faculty of Theology, Uppsala University
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