

*Diocesan Bulletin for Christian Unity
Archdiocese of Southwark*

June 2009



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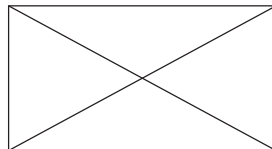
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**Together in Christ, Diocesan Bulletin for Christian Unity,
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EDITORIAL

Our offering this time could be regarded as ‘looking back to go forward’. We need to be rooted so we can grow.

Fr Michael Lovell recalls the work Bishop Charles Henderson did for Christian Unity especially for Southwark. Without his influence and support this publication might not have been produced?

Mr Alan Pavelin goes back to the roots of the Nicene Creed trying to suggest there might be a way through the barrier of the *filioque* with the Orthodox Church. Then we discover how the Greek Orthodox Church connects its blessing of the waters to Christ’s baptism in the Jordan with Dr Miller. He also displays the beauty and power of their Icons.

Warmed and refreshed we return to the road towards Unity and find that ‘Receptive Ecumenism’* might make an opening to enable some forward movement. (Part II in October)

Not to be forgotten are the smaller committees promoting friendship and understanding in the practical things Christians are doing. This time there is a description of the remit of English ARC. In the next issue Eng ARC visits Mayday Hospital, Croydon.

Michael

*On Saturday 31 October 2009 at 10.30 am at St Andrew’s Church, Short Street, Waterloo. Churches Together in South London Council will hold a session on *Receptive Ecumenism/Spiritual Ecumenism..*
All are welcome to attend.

An Easter Greeting from the Presidents of Churches Together in England

As co-Presidents of Churches Together in England, we greet you in the name of the Risen Lord Jesus. The yearly celebration of his resurrection is the gift of God the Father for the whole of creation, held together in the unity of his loving purpose. In these Easter days we give thanks for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the renewal of our commitment to go out and bear fruit that will last (John 15:16).

Mary Magdalene's encounter with the risen Jesus in the garden opened her eyes to the blessedness and unity of God's will in his risen Son. The Church is called to be a foretaste of that blessed unity in the work of the Lord's disciples for the unity of the Church and the world. It is a source of great joy to us that collaboration and co-operation between Churches and Christian communities across our nation is so rich. Through these encounters we grow together into the fullness of the risen Lord, and discover more of our calling to serve him in the world. And so we encourage ecumenical encounter and witness especially in local communities across the land.

The personal covenant which we share as Presidents has allowed us to receive Christ's gifts from each other, and we are grateful for that and the friendship that we share in the gospel. It is with gratitude that we particularly acknowledge the leadership and ministry of Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, and wish him every blessing in his retirement as Archbishop of Westminster and co-President of Churches Together in England.

We encourage you to continue in your patient work of praying and working together, to assure you of our continuing prayers for the unity and mission of the Church, and to ask that you will continue to pray for us in our ministries of Christian leadership.

May the risen Lord Jesus open our hearts and minds to new possibilities of witness and service for the unity of the Church and the service of the world.

With our prayers and blessings for this Easter season.

***Bishop Nathan Hovhannisian, Elizabeth Matear, Moderator,
Cormac, Cardinal Murphy O'Connor, Archbishop Rowan Williams.***

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Bishop Charles Henderson and the Search for Unity

Bishop Charles died three years ago, on the 10 April, 2006. Although he had taken the title of Emeritus Bishop, he had been active as a Bishop right up to the January of that year. I can recall a long conversation with him after a school carol service the previous December. He had so many years of work in the Diocese and work for Christian Unity to look back upon. At his Funeral Mass, a section of the Cathedral had been reserved for church leaders of other denominations and many were there, including leaders of other faith communities. He had responsibilities, in more recent years, in the Committee for other Faiths of the Bishops' Conference.

He once said that he could identify a particular moment when the Bishops of England & Wales adopted a new outlook on the work for unity. It was a certain moment after the Second Vatican Council when there was optimism about future progress. He remembered his time as a curate in Welling, when one of the ministers there would cross the road rather than engage the Catholic priest in conversation. We have indeed come a long way in comparative terms since then. Archbishop Cyril Cowderoy gave Bishop Charles responsibility for unity work in our diocese and the Christian Unity Commission came into being. The Bishop became 'Diocesan Chairman', a post he held until his retirement. He devised the structure for it himself, and it has remained as he designed it, with very little change over the years. He was conscious of the wide geographical area of the diocese and the different characteristics of its make up. Hence, there are three Areas with a different committee for each Area.

He was very precise about 'Structures', although he also saw them as a means to an end, often despairing about their tendency to weigh too heavily on people and sometimes inhibit progress. He would always begin any gathering with prayer on which, he maintained, everything depended. The national structures which had developed over the years, such as the English Anglican-Roman Catholic group, Churches Together in England and Churches Together in Britain and Ireland could all speak about the

contributions of Bishop Charles over the years, especially when he was representing the Bishops' Conference.

The diocese has always been represented on the Enabling Group of Churches Together in South London. This is a steering group which meets at regular intervals to administer and monitor church activities for unity in London Boroughs south of the Thames. For several years, I was 'Alternate' for Bishop Charles on this group. If his other engagements prevented him from attending, he would brief me and I would attend. He always appreciated a report back after meetings. The Bishop was Chairman of the group for two terms and I became a member, representing the diocesan unity commission. The Bishop was a well-liked Chairman, always courteous and always thorough. This style was the same at the meetings of the Area groups in the diocese. He realized the importance of 'education' about unity. So often, we experience the tension between those who are impatient for progress but lack understanding, and those who will not recognize the progress and opportunities welcomed by the Catholic Church in the work for unity. His instinct was to use every situation which allowed discussion and analysis to overcome these extremes. The 'AGM', as we called it then, at Aylesford each September was the great experience of unity amongst ourselves and this is still the case. Bishop Charles was always sorry if anyone had to miss it and he planned everything down to the last detail. As Monsignor Tim does these days, the Bishop would book the occasion at least a year in advance and follow up any action in Area groups as soon as possible afterwards. He sometimes regretted the somewhat low profile of the Unity Commission on the diocesan scene. On one occasion when the diocese came together at Aylesford, he insisted that the Unity Commission be allocated a space in one of the tents as its existence seemed to have been overlooked. In the event, we were pleased at the amount of interest shown by those who visited our stall.

The Ecumenical Partnership in Thamesmead will always be associated with Bishop Charles. A year before going there myself, to succeed Fr John O'Toole, the Bishop summoned me to Park House to explain that I would take over as Parish Priest and work closely with him to take the project forward. Archbishop Michael had given Bishop Charles total charge of the developing ecumenical scene for the Roman Catholics in the new town which had begun

to develop on the south side of the river to the east of Woolwich. In the early 1980s a wave of optimistic collaboration was abroad. St Paul's first Parish Priest, Canon Bill Clements was making great progress in line with this new spirit. Fr John had maintained the very friendly and collaborative progress which I found when I arrived. It was a unique experience.

All the church communities were drawn together by an umbrella organization. St Paul's was a step even further, in that it was a shared building, with a Roman Catholic chapel and a 'United Congregation' chapel (for Anglicans, Methodists and the United Reformed Church). Offices and meeting halls were also contained in the building. An experimental form of 'Simultaneous Eucharists' had also been undertaken. This involved linking the two chapels and congregations. The Liturgy of the Word was shared but the Liturgy of the Eucharist was kept on separate altars. An objection was made to the Apostolic Nuncio in the early days. Bishop Charles replied that permission had been given for the experiment but that he would await Rome's decision and stop if necessary. No further reply was made. The ecumenical climate was thawing in my time, and it fell to me to make the case for closing the experiment. I wrote a paper for Bishop Charles setting out the position and proposing the ending of the Eucharists. This was accepted by the Bishops of the diocese. It was a privilege to have been involved and the community had grown together spiritually from the experience of the Eucharists. Bishop Charles was tireless in his efforts to support all that we had tried to do in Thamesmead.

This has been a brief account of my association with Bishop Charles in the work for unity in the diocese and beyond over nearly fifteen years. For most of those years he was also my Area Bishop and I will always be grateful for his support and encouragement. Many others will be able to say much more about his contribution to Christian Unity and will have known his work for longer. He encouraged Una Ratciff to pioneer this journal *Together in Christ* and it remains a tribute to her hard work and to the memory of the Bishop.

Fr. Michael Lovell

English ARC – Background Information

English ARC stands for the *English Anglican-Roman Catholic Committee*. It is a national body which was set up in 1974 to promote reflection, prayer, study and practical work for unity at the local and national level in the light of the work of ARCIC – the *Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission*. There are parallel ARCs in countries where the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Churches have reasonably large representation: so, for example, there is a French ARC, a Belgian ARC, a Canadian ARC, an Australian ARC and an ARC USA.

In **English ARC** each church has a team of some thirteen people – each team generally consisting of two bishops and eleven other members, some of whom are theologians while others are academics, educators or involved with parish or other pastoral ministry. English ARC is chaired by two bishops as Co-Chairmen – currently Bishop Michael Scott-Joynt (Anglican Bishop of Winchester) and Bishop Declan Lang (Roman Catholic Bishop of Clifton).

English ARC meets twice a year, usually in spring and in autumn. These meetings begin on a Friday afternoon (around 4.0 p.m.) and end with lunch on the Saturday. This helps us not only to pray together and talk together but also to socialise together. One of the twice-yearly meetings (usually the November meeting) includes a visit to meet up with those working for unity at the grass-roots level e.g. in local ecumenical projects, airport, prison, forces and hospital chaplaincies.

Further information can be obtained from the co-secretaries for English ARC:

Revd Canon Dr Paul Avis (Anglican) based at
Council for Christian Unity, Church House, Great Smith St, SW1P 3NZ
Tel: 020 7898 1470, Email: paul.avis@c-of-e.org.uk.

Revd John O'Toole (Roman Catholic) based at
Christian Education Centre, 21 Tooting Bec Rd, London, SW17 8BS.
Tel: 020 8672 2422, Email: jotoole@cectootingbec.org.uk.

The Blessing of Water

On the first day of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity this year, the priests and deacon from the Greek Orthodox Church, *Christ the Saviour*, (Woolwich District), led an ecumenical group of 160 from St John's Church, Welling, to the lakeside in Danson Park to celebrate the *Liturgy of the Blessing of Water*. It was the first time this has taken place in this district. St John's Church is just outside the Park and the walk to the lakeside takes ten to fifteen minutes. We were blessed with the weather, it being a bright sunny day though with a cold wind.

The Solemn Blessing of Water, in commemoration of Christ's baptism in the Jordan, is an important feature of the Feast of the Epiphany in the Orthodox tradition. The timing of this ritual did not coincide with the calendar of either the Western or Eastern Church, but it was an appropriate occasion for an ecumenical event. The feast of the Epiphany was established in the 4th century and the solemn Blessing of Water is equally ancient. The ritual and its symbolism are clearly associated with Christ's baptism in the Jordan. Alternative names for the ritual are *The Blessing of Jordan* from St Gregory the Wonderworker

*The Lord, Who has come upon the Jordan River,
through its streams transmitted sanctification to all streams.*

And *The Day of Illumination*: according to St Proclus,

*Christ manifested Himself to the world;
He filled it with light and joy;
He sanctified the waters and
diffused His light in the souls of men.*

As baptism was normally by immersion in the early church it would have been natural to go to the nearest river and to bless the water. Also in Greece there were many small fishing communities around the coast where the waters were important for their sustenance, but also a threat to life – what more natural than to seek divine protection.

Having arrived at the side of Danson Lake, Father Michael Pazinas began the solemn Blessing with a Liturgy of the Word – the Mayor of Bexley, Councillor Nick O’Hare (né Teteri of Greek parents) was one of the Readers; then came the blessing of a large copper urn of water. The waters of the lake were sanctified by the immersion of a crucifix as was the Jordan by Christ. The rite ended with a sprinkling of the congregation after which all returned to St John’s Church Hall for some very welcome refreshment and warmth. This was the first time the Blessing of Water has been celebrated in this manner in Welling and it is the intention that it should be repeated in future.

A search of the Internet brought greater enlightenment as to the details of this particular Liturgy. After the incensing of the water, the scripture readings are taken from the prophecies of Isaiah 35:1-10; 55:1-13; 12:3-6, the Epistle of Paul, 1 Cor 10:1-4 and the Gospel of Mark 1:9-11. The lighted triple candle – the *Trolca* is held in front of the celebrant during the Gospel as a reminder of the manifestation of the Blessed Trinity at the baptism of Christ. Petitions follow imploring God to sanctify these waters by the descent of the Holy Spirit in order that they may bring to us the blessing of the Jordan, defend us against the snares of the devil, heal our spiritual and physical weaknesses, sanctify our homes, and fill us with the graces of the Holy Spirit. When in a long prayer of consecration the celebrant comes to the words:

***Great are you, O Lord, and wonderful are your works;
Our words are insufficient to praise your wonders.***

he blesses the water with the triple candle dipping it three times in commemoration of Our Lord’s baptism when He, the ‘True Light’ of the world (Jn. 1:9) stepped into the waters of the Jordan as the ‘Lamb who took away the sins of the world’ (Jn. 1:29). Continuing, the celebrant repeats the words three times:

***Therefore you, O loving King, come to us now through the
descent of the Holy Spirit and sanctify this water.***

each time breathing on the water in the form of a cross (as an exorcism) to purify the water from the contamination and influence of evil powers.

Then the celebrant makes the sign of the cross in the water three times with his fingers, each time repeating the words:

***Therefore now, O Master,
Sanctify this water with your Holy Spirit.***

Again symbolizing the blessing of the Jordan, as though Jesus Christ Himself comes and touches the waters.

After imparting the blessing of peace to the faithful, the celebrant immerses the holy cross into the water three times, each time intoning the troparion, *At Your baptism in the Jordan...* to symbolize the manifestation of the Holy Trinity as Jesus stepped out of the water.

Following this, the celebrant sprinkles the altar and the church with the newly blessed water. After which the faithful come up to kiss the holy cross and be sprinkled with the newly blessed water, conferring upon them the blessing of the Jordan as a token of their redemption.

Holy Water may be collected to take home. It is the custom to drink of the Holy Water for purification and healing. In the home the Holy Water is a source of blessing and protection against evil. Homes are blessed each year by a priest or deacon.

The liturgy ended, we processed back to St John's Church hall for some warmth and very welcome refreshments.

Desmond Miller

[See <http://www.byzantines.net/feasts/epiphany.htm>]





Christ the Divine Word
Archimandrite Sophrony

Christ the Divine Word of God

Icons as an aid to devotion have become popular among Christians of the west in recent years. Many will be unaware of a significant modern icon to be found in the Anglican Church of St Michael's in Upper Wickham Lane, Welling depicting *Christ the Divine Word of God*. It is a large icon situated behind the main altar where it was installed 27 April 1974 after the reordering of the church during the incumbency of the Rev. Mervyn Sweet. It had been commissioned by the Vincent Harris Mural Decoration Fund and was written (painted) by the Russian iconographer Archimandrite Sophrony.

The seated figure of the Divine Word is in white on a red background, holding an open book inscribed with the words 'I AM'. While it does provide a focal point, it is intended to be an aid to prayer rather than a simple decoration.

In the eastern tradition icons have an important place in the Liturgy, but it should be understood that when we show veneration toward an image the intention is to honour the person depicted not the icon itself. St Basil the Great explained it thus: 'If I point to a statue of Caesar and ask you "Who is that?", your answer would properly be, "It is Caesar." When you say such, you do not mean that the stone itself is Caesar, but rather, the name and honour you ascribe to the statue passes over to the original, the archetype, Caesar himself.' So it is with an Icon.

Archimandrite Sophrony was born in Moscow in 1896. After studying at the École des Beaux Arts, he left Russia in 1921 for Italy. He exhibited at the Salon d'Automne and Salon des Tuileries in Paris 1922-25. He began his studies in theology at the Institute of Orthodox Theology. Between 1925 and 1947 he lived on Mount Athos spending fifteen years in the Russian Coenobitic Monastery of St Panteleimon followed by seven years as a hermit. During 1947-59 he lived in France with disciples of various nationalities before founding the Orthodox Community of St John the Baptist at Tolleshunt Knights in Essex.

Desmond Miller

Receptive Ecumenism and Ecclesial Learning
Learning to Be Church Together

Report on a Conference held at Ushaw College Durham
11–15 January 2009 **Part I**

Introduction

In 2006, the Centre for Catholic Studies, whose director is Paul Murray, organised a conference on *Receptive Ecumenism* at Ushaw College, Durham, in order to test out some of its principles with respect to Roman Catholicism. This conference was set up as an exercise principally for Roman Catholic theologians and ecumenists to engage with other traditions. Three years later, a second conference has taken place from 11 to 15 January 2009, including delegates from many traditions: theologians, ecumenists, and local practitioners to engage with each other on this subject. This second conference was much wider in scope than the first, and represents a second stage in the development of this idea.

Receptive ecumenism is offered as a way forward, at a time when it appears that ecumenical progress has slowed to a stand still, and when neo-denominationalism is asserting itself in many of the major traditions. While full visible unity of the church may be still an ultimate vision, the present climate suggests that an interim strategy is needed to help Churches to continue to be engaged with one another, and to make some progress. Paul Murray writes in an introductory paper for the conference:

The basic principle of Receptive Ecumenism is that considerable further ecumenical progress is indeed possible but only if each of the traditions, both singly and jointly, makes a clear programmatic shift from prioritising the question, ‘What do our various others first need to learn from us?’ to asking instead, ‘What do we need to learn and what can we learn – or receive – with integrity from our others?’ Alternatively stated, the John F. Kennedy style reversal that is in view here (‘Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country’) is from asking

‘How might they become more like us so that divisions might be eased?’ to asking ‘How might we become more like them in diverse particular ways so that any specific difficulties we experience in our own thought and practice might be eased?’ As this suggests, Receptive Ecumenism is about each tradition taking responsibility at every level of its life for its own continued learning and potential further flourishing in the face of the other.

Such learning, according to Murray, is transformative, and is intended to lead to openness to other traditions, as well as to the convergence of traditions. It involves much more than offering a way for the Churches to receive ecumenical agreements, although that of course is a vital process, but engages Churches in face of and across the differences between them. In this respect, the deep seated organisational and cultural differences between Churches are as important as Faith and Order issues, and indicate a need for receptive ecumenism to be explored in a practical way in the arena of the local Church. This is reflected in a further strand in the programme of Receptive Ecumenism, which is a project to explore the implications for local Churches in the North East. Part of the conference was given over to a presentation on this project by its leaders.

Overall impressions

The conference as a whole was very tightly structured, with the main input given in formal sessions, in which generally two related papers were presented, with limited scope for discussion. In addition there were two sessions of short papers, given in parallel, which gave more scope for interaction, and four small group sessions, one of which fed into a final plenary. One particularly pleasing aspect of the conference as a whole was worshipping together in the magnificent (but cold) Chapel of St Bede. Morning Prayer included an extended meditation on the Bible reading for the day, given by Dr Catherine E. Clifford (Saint Paul University, Ottawa). These meditations provided a foundation for the day’s work, rooting it in prayer and *Lectio Divina*. Each day also exposed us in worship to the riches of three of the traditions represented in

the conference: Roman Catholic, Anglican and Methodist. More than one speaker pointed out that this in itself is indication of how far we have come in the last 100 years of the ecumenical movement.

As the very brief reports on each of the formal sessions show, there was a very rich diet of ideas at this conference. However, I have two observations about the difficulties faced by ecumenism in the present time. Firstly, there is an issue about how academic ecumenists and practitioners can engage with one another. There is no shortage of good ideas coming out of serious ecumenical study, nor is there any shortage of new ecumenical initiatives at local level. But there is a real need to bring theological reflection and practice together, to root the theology in practice, and the practice in theology. Some of the shorter papers (notably by Kirsteen Kim (Trinity College Leeds) and Clare Watkins (Heythrop College and the ARC Project)) showed what can be possible.

The second observation was forcefully made by Joe Aldred (Secretary for minority ethnic concerns at CTE). Where are the black theologians and black majority church leaders? We need to listen to their voices, laments, insights and stories. An international conference tends to be dominated by delegates from North America and Europe, but it is so easily overlooked that in our diverse community in the UK we have great potential for cross cultural as well as inter church dialogue. I hope that this is something we may begin to address.

The Content of the Plenary Sessions

The plenary sessions followed a number of broad themes. The opening session on Sunday evening, allowed Mgr Don Bolan (former staff member of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity) and Dr John Gibaut (Director of the Faith and Order Commission, WCC) to offer some initial thoughts. Don Bolan quoted Cardinal Kaspar, who has suggested that we need new ideas and creative ways for a mutual exchange of gifts between traditions. Recent statements of the Roman Catholic Church are significant in that they accept that such gifts reside in

other ecclesial communities. Through mutual recognition of Baptism, others are recognised as members of the Christ's body. There is much potential here for the Roman Catholic Church to be self critical and to receive from others.

John Gibaut suggested that Receptive Ecumenism is not a new phenomenon. It has been an essential part of ecumenical dialogue, as for example in the process that led to the Anglican Orthodox report, the Triune God. The difference now is that it has been named and so lends itself to be a far more conscious process, which can form the basis of an ecumenical programme. There is a lot of work to be done in the Churches receiving what has already been achieved in ecumenical dialogues. The question is whether receptive ecumenism can assist this.

The discussion following raised issues about the way the Churches need each other to help them through the problems they face: there is more than a hint of self interest in how they respond to crises. We need to look where the difficulties are in our own traditions. Learning from each other is not just to do with 'learning about', it is a learning which leads to conversion.

Session 2: Scriptural Reasoning

On the Monday morning, the conference focused on the reading of scripture. Bishop Tom Wright gave a report on the Synod of Roman Catholic Bishops which met in Rome in the autumn of last year, of which he was an observer. He pointed out that there are profound differences between traditions in the framework of reading scripture, and suggested that the Scriptural reasoning project can help us to engage with each other across these divisions. He was disappointed that the Synod did not give very much attention to mission, although it provided an undercurrent to the whole proceedings, and occasionally surfaced. Anxiety about fundamentalism possibly acted as a constraint in this respect. Nor was there much engagement with the political task of the Church, which is a hot issue in many parts of the world, and about which there are many resources emerging from local situations, for

example in Latin America. He ended by reflecting on how the Blessed Virgin Mary offers us a hermeneutic of mind, soul, heart and strength: in other words a framework of reading scripture within the whole body, and with the whole person.

Professor David Ford continued this session by exploring the meaning and process of scriptural reasoning. Essentially this is a method of inter-faith engagement in which Jews, Muslims and Christians study together each others' scriptures. There are two aspects to this: first each religious tradition brings its own assumptions and interpretation – the life blood of the tradition – into reading its own scriptures. By careful listening to each other, we may learn what it is like for each to read their own scriptures. The second is that my own reading of the scriptures of my religious tradition is extended and given a new horizon through the insights of the other.

David then went into a refreshing look at a controversial passage (in inter faith terms) from St John's Gospel (17.20-24), making the point that the text of St John's Gospel offers its own hermeneutic. He focused on just five words: believe, one, glory, love, as. Rabbi Peter Ochs (Professor of Modern Judaic Studies, University of Virginia) then responded, picking up these words and exploring the *Shema* from Deuteronomy. He referred to the corrective, reparative value of David's interpretation of the passage from St John, in his own reading of this classic text. This dialogue gave us an insight into scriptural reasoning in action.

Although this was my first encounter with Scriptural Reasoning, I was told by Pete Ward of Kings College London, that it is big at Kings, with groups meeting all over the place. David Ford suggested that this methodology could be explored by different Christian traditions studying scripture together (which could then be called 'ecclesial reasoning' to differentiate it from scriptural reasoning proper).

Session 3: Two examples of Receptive Ecumenism in the Roman Catholic Church

Two papers from Australian Catholics, Rev. Dr Ormand Rush and Rev. Prof. Richard Lennan on Monday evening, suggested ways in which Receptive Ecumenism is at work within the Roman Catholic Church. Ormand Rush identified five ways through which we may know what has been revealed by God to his Church: Scripture, Tradition, the Sensus Fidelium, Theology and the Magisterium. There is no systematic space here for dialogue with other Churches (nor for that matter, with socio-political or scientific insight). However, he suggested that the most appropriate arena for giving notice to other Churches is in the *sensus fidelium*, the sense of faith of the body of the church, the faith as it is lived faithfully in varying contexts and communities. As a non-Roman Catholic, it is difficult to appreciate the sea change that this view represents. It is the recognition that those who are not Roman Catholic may have important insights into the content and meaning of revelation, which can be absorbed by and indeed challenge the Roman Catholic Church.

Richard Lennan followed this by suggesting that the understanding of ordination could develop in the light of other churches' emphasis on ordination as ordination for ministry and mission, rather than focusing exclusively on ordination as a gift from the tradition.

[To be continued in the next Issue]

Roger Paul
National Adviser (Unity in Mission)
Council for Christian Unity

SOME THOUGHTS ON THE NICENE CREED

Every Sunday most church going Christians recite the Nicene Creed – more correctly, the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed – which is widely regarded as the definitive statement of the essentials of the Christian faith. It came about not because Church leaders decided one day to sit down and draw up a statement of belief, but because, as has been the case with many doctrinal definitions throughout Church history, there was a fierce ongoing conflict which needed to be resolved.

This conflict was over the Arian question, named after an Egyptian priest called Arius who proposed that Jesus was merely the highest creature of God and not divine. The Arians, who surprisingly had the support of many bishops for a time, clearly raised a very fundamental question. The Council of Nicaea in 325, followed by the Council of Constantinople in 381, drew up what became known as the Nicene Creed, with its doctrine of the Holy Trinity, and Arianism became a heresy. It survives today in the Unitarians, and in various other sects around the world, which are excluded from the World Council of Churches.

It should not be supposed that this was just an academic question being argued over by theologians. When Gregory of Nyssa visited Constantinople for the Council in 381 he wrote: ‘The whole city is full of it, the squares, the market places, the cross-roads, the alleyways; old-clothes men, money changers, food sellers: they are all busy arguing. If you ask someone to give you change, he philosophizes about the Begotten and the Unbegotten; if you enquire about the price of a loaf, you are told by way of reply that the Father is greater and the Son inferior; if you ask ‘Is my bath ready?’ the attendant answers that ‘the Son was made out of nothing’ (quoted in *The Churches Search for Unity*, by Barry Till). Would that there was such popular enthusiasm for theology today!

Following the Reformation, most of the Reformed churches dropped the Nicene Creed (and other creeds) in favour of ‘confessions of faith’, as old arguments about the divine nature of Christ were seen as less central than, for example, the authority of scripture. By the time of the World Conference on Faith and Order in 1927, when Orthodox, Anglican, and Nonconformist representatives came together in the early days of the ecumenical movement, so unfamiliar were the Nonconformists with the creeds that one of them stated ‘I think we should clear all that old lumber out of the way’, and another asked an Anglican colleague ‘Can you tell me of any volume in which I could read one of those old creeds they have been talking about?’ Such comments would not be heard today.

The biggest controversy over the Nicene Creed in Church history has been about the *filioque* (‘and the Son’), the immediate cause of the Great Schism of 1054 between the (Orthodox) East and the West (though other issues also contributed). This word, stating that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son as well as from the Father, was gradually introduced by the Western Church from the sixth century, beginning in Spain and France though resisted by Rome for a long time. It was definitively incorporated into the Creed in 1014. The Orthodox have always objected to this, for two reasons. First, they see it as an unwarranted corruption of the Tradition which did not have the authority of the whole Church, rather like those Anglo-Catholics who objected to the ordination of women on the grounds that the Church of England had no authority to make such a unilateral change of practice. Secondly, they regard the ‘double procession’ as verging on heresy, relegating the Holy Spirit to a subservient position.

These two different ways of regarding the Holy Spirit, which today seem highly esoteric and obscure to most ordinary Christians, emerged from centuries of speculation. There was a continuum of opinions; at one extreme was Tritheism, which amounted almost to belief in three Gods, while at the opposite extreme was Modalism, which emphasised the unity of the Trinity at the

expense of the plurality. The Western version of the Creed, which includes the *filioque*, tends more towards Modalism, while the Eastern (and original) version tends more towards Tritheism, though both are a long way from either of the extremes as just described.

The impression given by reading the history of these controversies is that the difference between the two positions derives ultimately from the different philosophical schools in which they emerged. A driving force behind the Western position was St Augustine, who was anxious to preserve the concept of the unity of the divine nature. The East, strongly influenced by a Platonic interpretation of Christianity, was more concerned with emphasising the three distinct Persons. Another way of expressing this might be to say that the West started with the unity of God as a given, and derived the Trinity therefrom, while the East started with the Trinity as a given, working towards the idea of the one divine nature. The East tended more towards immanence, as against transcendence, wanting to emphasise the idea of the Spirit working among people in time and space.

Any reunion of the Western and Orthodox Churches would have to reach accommodation on such questions as the role of the Papacy and the post 1054 Councils which the Orthodox do not recognise. But it is clear that it would also have to incorporate agreement on the wording of the Nicene Creed, however much this may seem to most people like arguing about the number of angels who can dance on the head of a pin. Either the Western Church should agree to return to the original wording, or an alternative wording acceptable to all should be adopted. One suggestion which has been made is that *and the Son* should be replaced by *through the Son* which would probably be theologically acceptable to both East and West. Could we perhaps end up, therefore, by replacing *filioque* with *per filium*?

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