

*Diocesan Bulletin for Christian Unity  
Archdiocese of Southwark*

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# TOGETHER IN CHRIST



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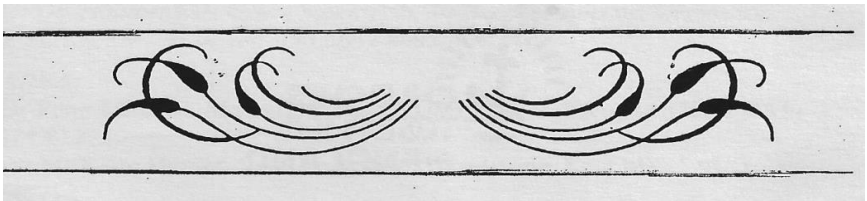
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## EDITORIAL

Welcome to all our readers, and many thanks to all contributors of *Together in Christ*.

Bishop Charles Henderson has kindly given us some beautiful reflections on the words of Jesus from St. John's Gospel - pause now to meditate on them. Bishop Charles also supplied the extract from Pope John Paul's message on evangelisers, so important for all Christians.

We are very pleased to include the sermon given by Fr. John O'Donoghue at the Anglican Church of St. Andrew's on their feast day. We are grateful for this. and also for Fr. John's leadership and devoted work for unity.

News of local ecumenical activities and experiences are always welcome, and we can learn much from reports sent by Deacon Neville Gascoigne, Margaret Moloney and Heather Walker about what has taken place in Thanet, Bromley and Beckenham. We thank the Rev. Michael Cooke for his illuminating account of an important Conference on the Gift of Authority, We hope these experiences will prompt similar ones in all our Areas.

Thanks to Alfred Kenyon who has responded to a suggestion made at the A.G.M. for inclusion in our bulletin of a touch of humour! Perhaps other such items or illustrations may be forthcoming?

We are grateful to Fr. Michael Lovell for his article on Cardinal Hume's approach to Christian Unity. reviving memories of his "deep prayerfulness and "openness to dialogue" etc. The memory of the Cardinal's inspiring message at the 1987 Forum at Swanwick, and the prayers which preceded it. and the silence which followed, will not be forgotten by those present, including Bishop Henderson (and also your Editor.)

"Set your troubled hearts at rest" (John 14. 1)

### **The Reassurance**

In these times of adversity, when it would seem that nothing is sacred and the things of God are unimportant, personal restraint even for the common good is eschewed, the hearts of good men and women are troubled, the words of the Saviour and Lord are chosen for reflection to uplift us and inspire us.

Also, hearts are rightly troubled by the sad divisions which still lessen the value of Christian witness to the world.

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"There are many dwelling places in my Father's house" (ibid. 2)

### **The Destination**

The final goal of all humankind is heaven. There, there is room for everyone. Our vision is the Majestic God calling all to himself, with Christ reigning in glory. Our Christian task is to show the way, guaranteed by Christ, to the heavenly destination. Our witness is a duty given us by Christ, who is the light of the world.

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"I am going to prepare a place for you" (ibid. 213)

### **The Journey**

While awaiting Christ to come to take us to Himself we are on a pilgrimage of preparation and expectation. It is a journey, which is perceived as: -

- (a) a personal journey with responsibility in oneself.
- (b) a shared journey with the community of the baptised, whose faith enables them to walk with Christ.
- (c) the historical journey of all peoples, throughout time, encompassing the purpose for which the human race was made and embracing all within the human race as family.

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" you know the way to the place where I am going" (ibid 4)

### **Our Search**

Like Thomas, many are searching for the way. Who will offer them the sure guidance, which we have from Our Lord. We must: and we must do it Together in a unity of heart and mind. Today the search has caused many to build up real values, on which society may learn

lessons of respect for human life, respect for the dignity of persons, values which found and support justice, peace and harmonious relations. Many heroic efforts in these endeavours

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"I am the Way?" (ibid 6)

### **The Way**

In Christ we have a sure and certain way, which leads to truth and life  
- the right of every person young and old.

"I am the Truth" (ibid 6)

### **The Truth**

To know with certainty, to have a founded hope, to be without doubt, to be able to trust, to have convictions based on certain truth ... what a blessing. Yes! This blessing we have in Christ. Knowing Him as saviour and redeemer, as the Son of God incarnate, as the source of heavenly guidance, based on the truth of God gives to those who believe the blessings which flow from the fruitful calm of conviction.

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"I am the Life" (ibid 6)

### **The Life**

The fulfilment of human aspirations is found in union with God, by Him and for Him. Our completeness is in God eternally. Before the moment of blissful union, our condition has to be adjusted to make us truly compatible with God - so we must grow into the likeness of Christ, the son of God, a process of healing and reconciliation found in communion with the baptised within the Church.

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### **God is on our side**

Because the Lord God is on our side, efforts we make to strive for the fullness of visible unity will result in success - " Anything you ask the Father in my name that he will do" (cf John 14.14).

We belong to Jesus. Jesus belongs to us and identifies with us. And He and the Father are one. (John 14.10). This assures good results for our prayers and our efforts. "And the Father, at his request, has given us another Advocate".

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## The Goal

Building up the Kingdom of God on earth is our task, through genuine love of Christ and imitating Him in our manner of life, so that the conditions will exist in which all men, women and children will have the opportunities needed, to live in peace and focus on their final destiny. A destiny won for all by the victory of Christ.

+Charles J Henderson, January 2001

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## THAT ALL MAY BE ONE

I am very happy to be with you on this your feast day. I thank Sue for giving me the privilege of preaching tonight. Recently, we had a little discussion about the difference between a homily and a sermon. We agreed the sermon is the longer of the two, so you get a sermon. No snoring, please!

Recently, I read an article by a priest who was newly ordained a priest back in 1963. He was ordered by his Parish Priest to attend a Prayer Breakfast, which was a new way of getting Christians together. They all sat at tables, not really knowing whether they should chat to each other, eat or pray. Suddenly, without warning, a clergyman stood up and announced that it was the first time he had consciously shared a breakfast with a Roman Catholic priest, and he had no intention of doing so again. He promptly left and did not return. So much for his first experience of ecumenism.

The priest then went on to describe his ongoing experience of ecumenism as follows:

"Since then, ecumenism has been a continuous succession of shocking, embarrassing, painful, funny, daft, pitiful, moving, fulfilling or profoundly edifying experiences. It has never been dull. In fact, I have decided that ecumenism is the sole area where God can have a good laugh as well as a good cry - because we, all of us, whatever denomination we belong to, do such unbelievably stupid things."

Obviously, we Catholics have perpetrated our own full share of silliness's and stupidities too - telling Protestants that reciting the Lord's Prayer in public with them was communicatio in sacris and offensive to divine ears, describing the Archbishop of Canterbury as a

doubtfully ordained layman, and replying to the comment that we all worship the same God with "Yes, you in your way, and we in HIS" - to mention just three."

We have, thank God, come a long way since 1963, not only chronologically, but especially in our understanding of each other, and the unity Jesus prayed for. We have discovered under the guidance of the Holy Spirit what unites us, and are more acutely aware of what divides us. Unity has not yet been achieved, but we are travelling and searching. I am sure St. Andrew is involved. In the Gospels we find him putting people in touch with Jesus. He will lead us all to discover Jesus in a deeper way, and lead us to a deeper understanding of His vision of unity for HIS followers. We must keep talking, listening, sharing and praying together, that the prayer of Jesus may one day be realised.

The way ahead will have its difficulties. Perhaps the final stages of its journey may be compared to scaling the last hundred feet to the summit of the mountain, exciting but hazardous. This is our challenge in Christian dialogue. Another challenge has presented itself with great urgency. I refer to our response to non-Christian faiths, particularly Islam in the light of recent events.

The theologian Hans Kung said that there can be no peace among nations, without peace among religions, and there can be no peace among religions without dialogue between religions.

In his encyclical letter *Redemptorist Missio* (1990) John Paul wrote: "Dialogue does not originate from tactical concerns or self-interest, but is an activity with its own guiding principles, requirements and dignity. It is demanded by deep respect for everything that has been brought about in human beings by the Spirit who blows where he wills. Through dialogue the Church seeks to uncover the 'seeds of the Word', a 'ray of the Truth which enlightens everyone' ; these are found in individuals and in the religious traditions of humankind" (n.56)

More recently, in the apostolic letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* at the beginning of the third millennium, the Pope wrote of "the great challenge of inter-religious dialogue", and added: "In the climate of increased cultural and religious pluralism which is expected to mark the society of the new millennium, it is obvious that this dialogue will be specially important in establishing a sure basis for peace and warding off the dread spectre of those wars of religion which have so often bloodied human history. The name of the one God must become

increasingly what it is: a name of peace and a summons to peace."  
(n.55)

Dialogue, it must be remembered, is not about winning agreements. It is about humbly listening to the other that we might get to know and understand how the other person sees and understands herself or himself. It means accepting that God has been there before we arrived. We stand on sacred ground.

Throughout history, we Christians have been very dismissive of other world faiths. Even today, we use the title 'non-Christians' to refer to followers of other faiths. They are not non-Christians; they are Jews, Muslims. Would we like them to refer to us as non-Muslims or non-Jews?

In the journey ahead there are many mountains to be climbed. I wonder about St Andrew. He, together with Philip, brought the Gentiles to Jesus. As we try to take our first tentative steps along the road of understanding, he will be with us.

St Andrew, pray for us.

Fr. John O'Donoghue,

Sermon at St Andrews, 30/11/01

*Fr. John O'Donoghue,*



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## A Tribute to Mr John Bedelis

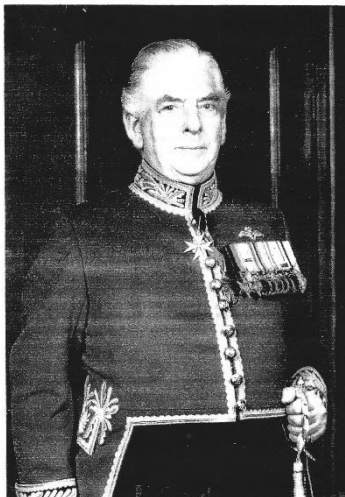
### "TOP OF THE PEW"

A Memorial Service for the late John Bedells was held at the United Reformed Church, Widmore Road, Bromley, on Sunday, 27th January, 2002. John, who was a parishioner from St Swithun's RC Church in Bromley Common, founded this inter-church general knowledge quiz 30 years ago this year, as an Ecumenical Event to bring together eight Christian churches in the Bromley Common area, for 'fun, friendship and charity'. Over the years it has grown to involve 32 churches from the Borough of Bromley and each year the competition raises over a thousand pounds for a local charity.

The service was very well attended by both clergy and parishioners of many denominations of the various churches in the Bromley area and a collection was taken there for St Christopher's Hospice where John died on 11th September last year.

John's wife, Mrs Jill Bedells, will continue to run the quiz and preliminary rounds are currently being held. The Final, which will take place on the 29th November at the United Reformed Church, Bromley, is usually attended by Bp Charles Henderson. All proceeds this year will go to St Christopher's Hospice, Sydenham.

Mrs Margaret Maloney, *SE Area CUC Secretary*



Mr. John Bedells

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## RECREATIO AB ABSURDO?

Do your local unity groups laugh together? It is arguable that until they do, unity has not sunk strong roots.

Part of the benefit is that it helps us to laugh at our misconceptions about the other Christians, and sometimes about ourselves. Non-Catholics in my experience are under the impression that Catholics live in constant fear of excommunication. Catholics know of course that nowadays they would need to do something really serious, such as supporting Glasgow Rangers, to risk such drastic action.

Then there is the mutual caricature. Members of one Church might imagine that a parish in another Church would issue a weekly news sheet stating

The sermon on Sunday evening will be about hell. Do come early and listen to our choir!

Or again

The procession of the Blessed Sacrament will take place on Saturday at 3p.m. in the Priory garden, but if it rains it will be in the morning.

There are no prizes for working out which denomination is being caricatured in each case. But hang on a moment! Caricatured? Both of these notices from weekly news sheets are real, and have been reported in the press.....

Non-Methodists are full of grateful admiration for the superb treasury of Methodist hymns which enrich all our services these days. Hence we puzzle all the more why so many Methodist churches built in Victorian days have the organist in splendid isolation halfway up the wall faced by the congregation. Once when we had an ecumenical choir in such a church, communication between organist and distant choirmaster was indeed 'through a mirror darkly', bringing 1 Cor 13:12 home to us.

The greatest gain from this undervalued phenomenon of shared humour is that these endearing characteristics of our fellow Christians help us to think about them and ourselves in a way which will promote understanding and the process of learning about each other and ourselves.

Moreover, because these are such endearing characteristics, reflecting on them helps us to grow in love as well as understanding.

Perhaps we could end with an apocryphal anecdote which appeared to come from Protestant sources around 1950. It clearly predates the second Vatican Council, for example.

A murderer felt an urge to confess. He went to the nearest Anglican vicar, who was horrified by the word 'murder' and sent him away. He then tried a Nonconformist minister who refused to entertain the principle of confession. Finally, he went to a Catholic priest, he could not hear his confession as a sacrament, or give absolution, but offered to listen 'Father, I have committed a murder'. The reply was: 'How many times, my child?'

Maybe even this apocryphal story can set us on some serious reflection about the road to unity

Alfred Kenyon

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## THE GIFT OF AUTHORITY

Forty-five people from across Kent and South London attended the one-day conference organised by Churches Together in Kent, and from comments already received the day is judged a great success. Three keynote speakers addressed three different aspects of Authority in complementary ways.

**The Revd Myra Blyth** (Deputy General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain) looked at the development in understanding of Scripture. She provided a clear and exemplary handout detailing in diagrammatic form the interaction between the received text and the Church's teaching, the need to understand the historical setting for the texts (Compare Gen. 1 and Gen. 2); the way that Literary Criticism has influenced how the text speaks to us, and the more recent developments in understanding how the texts speak to us where we are today.

Among Myra's memorable quotes were- the only Canon is the Canon of truth'; "We haven't lost the manuscript; we've lost the point". "Jesus is the one word of God in life and death". "Resurrection faith invites us to live now; Jesus is always a step or two ahead (leading us to new insights)"

**Prebendary Dr Paul Avis** (General Secretary of the Church of England's Council for Christian Unity reflected on the formal

document "The Gift of Authority" the title of the 1998 document from the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission. Rather than take us paragraph by paragraph through the document, Canon Avis gave an entertaining and lucid overview of its place in the succession of key documents that have been published in the 40 years since the Second Vatican Council. While ARCIC' S Final(!) Report of 1982 had shown a substantial measure of common understanding over the Ministry and the Eucharist, the same could not be said of Authority. The 1999 document addressed three aspects of authority in the church behind the report (a) communal authority (i.e. the whole church has authority); (b) collegial authority (the need for those who have pastoral authority to work as one); and (c) personal authority (e.g. the special role of the Pope in relation to the bishops).

Dr Avis said that his first reading of the report suggested a significant step forward - but on further study he was less certain. (a) What is the cash value of the report? (Is it too starry eyed?) (b) Does it speak language? (Does its rhetoric get too close to manipulation? Jesus is God's "yes" and we say Amen to him; is the report nearer to saying an Amen to the Papacy?) (c) Does the Report follow the right ecumenical method? (i.e. Does it seek the goal of visible unity by a series of steps which are understood and agreed?) He asked whether this report might be in danger of going too far too fast - much as a poorly-tilting train comes off the rails if it takes difficult bends too fast. One key role for the church is mutually to re-receive truths which have become out of focus.

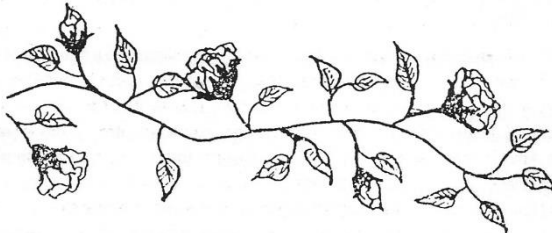
**Canon Michael Evans** (Parish Priest in Tunbridge Wells, and member of the Joint Commission for Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council) described a very different approach. In reflecting on how the Holy Spirit guides the church to discern the Truth, the Commission produces every 5 years a document - the 2001 one being entitled "Speaking the Truth in Love" Although a full text of the document is still awaited from the printers (US, and Vatican) Canon Evans was able to distribute copies of extracts from the text. The way to read the document is to look first at Part 2 (How we do things - i.e. the practicalities), and then to reflect on Part 1 which gives the underlying Theology. One of the great strengths of the Report is that not only does it give clear common statements "Methodists and Roman Catholics are united in .. ..", but

also does not shirk from showing differences, as it freely uses phrases like "Catholics understand ....", and "Methodists also recognise ....". Commenting on the work in small groups, **David Carter** writes "It was particularly useful, in the groups, to hear folk airing their ecumenical difficulties and hearing others' explanations. The old hoary question of RC eucharistic hospitality came up with Anglican and Free Church folk expressing their bewilderment that RCs wouldn't just treat us all 'as Christians and share the bread and wine', and RCs, lay folk included, explaining that for them it is a matter both of how the Eucharist is understood and its nature as a sign of unity already existing."

A bookstall with books relevant to the above themes was kindly provided by the Rainbow Centre, Petts Wood (( 01689 821789), and we were all very grateful to Diana Pattison for giving her time to be with us.

Rev. Michael Cooke

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### CARDINAL BASIL: His approach to Christian Unity

Close to the chapel building at the Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, stands a stone plaque with the phrase 'Not Strangers, but Pilgrims' engraved on its surface. They were the words of Basil Hume, spoken at the conference held there in 1987. His statement at that time was hailed as historic by Robert Runcie, then Archbishop of Canterbury. Ten years later, in the same place, the Cardinal gave another memorable address, speaking of the growth of 'mutual commitment and trust' experienced in the ecumenical journey in those ten years. There had been a real strengthening in friendships and a

togetherness in prayer. To what extent then, had the Cardinal himself provided a focus for the progress of unity on this country? To what extent was he also a cautious ecumenist, willing to dialogue and engage in prayer but making no compromise with Catholic teaching on doctrine and morals?

The key to the Cardinal's approach in so many matters after becoming Archbishop of Westminster in succession to the very different Cardinal Heenan lies in his Benedictine spirituality. This is characterised firstly by a deep prayerfulness but also an openness to dialogue and a mannered approach to others. Very often this leads to finding a consensus in any given group and the adopting of strategies based on that consensus. A particular type of leadership emerges from this which makes those involved feel valued. These gifts are especially suited to ecumenical dialogue. The Ampleforth monks knew what they were about when they elected him Abbot, and the Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop Heim, was prepared to choose him as first on the list to be Archbishop of Westminster. The rank outsider soon became a popular and respected figure in English public life.

The Cardinal was more interested in people than in structures. The structures, or Instruments of Christian Unity were only a means to an end. Others, such as Archbishop Warlock of Liverpool were better equipped to deal with them, and to develop ecumenical strategies. The public image, argues Clifford Longley of the Daily Telegraph, was what the Cardinal was good at projecting.

The number of appointments held by the Cardinal to do with Christian Unity is surprising. Even as Abbot of Ampleforth, he was a well-liked member of the Ryedale Council of Churches and was very much at home in their fraternal. It was at that time he developed a friendship with Donald Coggan, then Archbishop of York. He was involved in the early work of ARCIC in the late 1960s. The 'Confederation of Benedictines' had an ecumenical commission and he was its Chairman. From 1978 to 1987 he was President of the 'Council of European Episcopal Conferences' and was also a member of the 'Council for Christian Unity' in Rome. His experience of dealing with Roman Congregations was to prove very useful to him in holding in balance the tension between the pressure for change at home and the Vatican's customary caution. As President of the Association of Interchurch Families, he was in touch with the concerns of many ordinary families, especially in the area of liturgical participation.

In a meeting I attended recently, an experienced Methodist was telling me about a conversation he had with the Cardinal in which the subject of intercommunion came up. The Cardinal told him firmly that intercommunion was definitely the last step in the process of Christian Unity. Of course, the Cardinal, as always, was sympathetic to the feelings of non-Catholics but saw the need to speak clearly about the imperfect communion that still existed between the Christian Churches. Much later the Bishops of these islands produced the teaching document 'One Bread, One Body' during the time of the Cardinal's leadership.

In preparation for the Swanwick conference in 1987, the Cardinal was careful to invite non-Catholics to receive a blessing rather than excluding them at Communion time. He also made sure that the topic was fully explained and discussed in that particular conference. He was very much at home in the various groups he attended himself. It was at that conference he spoke about moving from co-operation to commitment involving legitimate diversity. The work also included sharing in mission and an exploration of the nature of the Church, the teaching on the Sacraments and moral issues. He recognised and understood the need for ecumenical development from the ground upwards, in other words, grass roots ecumenism. People in any given local situation had to engage on a personal level and make personal commitments. This was a ground breaking speech which won warm applause and was all the more remarkable as it was delivered from a set of hastily written notes, as were some of his great homilies.

At the CTBI Conference this year at Swanwick, I was talking to a lady delegate who had been at the 1987 conference. They were all expecting a restrained performance from the Cardinal and felt he was probably not going to be able to do much more than set out the Catholic position as they perceived it at the time. What he had to say certainly enlivened and inspired everyone.

Basil Hume had originally invited the Pope to come here in 1982 and had designed the visit to be a national event. It was an important milestone. The Cardinal forged a close working relationship with Robert Runcie and there were many advances in the ecumenical journey in 1980's England. Echoing the Pope however, the Cardinal warned that the ordination of women to priesthood in the Church of England would be a setback So it was to prove. Ecumenical high summer has turned to Autumn. The Churches do not appear to speak

with one voice on several moral issues, something the Cardinal lamented in his later years.

The Cardinal was always loyal to the Holy Father in all his undertakings, including the work for Christian Unity. When he saw opportunities for unity without compromising the Vatican, he seized them with enthusiasm. He knew instinctively when to be cautious and when to pause for further thought and in this he acted wisely. He was the right person in the right place, at the right time. As he reminds us, the fullness of Christian Unity will come in God's own time. We must continue to work for it, as the Cardinal did in his lifetime. We have much to learn from his example.

SOURCES: Butler, Carolyn (ed.); 'Basil Hume: by his friends ' (Fount Paperbacks, 1999)  
Stanford, Peter; 'Cardinal Hume and the Changing Face of English Catholicism (Geoffrey Chapman, 1993)

Fr. Michael Lovell

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## PRESENT STATE OF ECUMENISM IN BECKENHAM

I am indebted to Terry Davies for the opportunity to read the last issue and the opportunity to contribute to this one. I found it particularly interesting to see comments on the report of the International Methodist-Roman Catholic Commission, to set alongside the concerns debated in Methodist-Anglican dialogue, with which many in ecumenical circles are, perhaps, more familiar.

As chair of Churches Together in Beckenham for the last three years (a Baptist by conviction), it has been a privilege, usually pleasurable but sometimes painful, to join with friends from the fifteen participating churches in worship, discussion and service to our community. For years we ran a Christian Bookshop/Fair Trade/Coffee Shop in the High Street; there continues to be a Bereavement Support Service, a Contact Centre (a neutral meeting point for divided families), and bimonthly Community Lunches which bring together a range of people involved in serving the locality, e.g. Social Services, Schools, Mind, Red Cross, Abbeyfield, etc. These projects, as well as fulfilling the purpose for which they were instigated, have quickly served to build valuable bridges, and in many instances to facilitate warm and loving friendships between participants, irrespective of, and



often in ignorance of, the churches to which they belong. Unity through service can come swiftly and easily, and does, I am certain, bring joy to the heart of God in whose name the service is offered.

But what of the discussion of matters of faith, and sharing in worship? In Churches Together in Beckenham, many have felt recently that the time has come, not to continue holding occasional services specially planned as an ecumenical hotchpotch, from no tradition in particular (an attempt to provide something for everyone and offend no one?), but for churches to humbly offer something rooted in their own tradition, trusting that others will accept the invitation to share with them respectfully, willing to learn and understand. And what riches we have found! One of the most moving and memorable millennium events for me was the Service of Pardon at St Edmund's Church on Advent Sunday 2000. in which we were invited to share - a Catholic service, but with participation from leaders and congregations of other churches. Thank you for the privilege.

Sadly, though. I suspect we have, through service to the community and in the first attempts at sharing our traditions, done the easy bit. As discussion and shared worship continue and deepen, begin to face what still divides. I recall, for example, the poignancy of the moment, also at St Edmund's, when attending the leaving Mass for Fr Ian Knowles recently, when he lifted the wafer and then realised I was the person standing before him. Our eyes met for what seemed an eternity, before the wafer was lowered and I was given a blessing I knew that would happen, aware of the difference in belief which it illustrates, but the pain was nonetheless real and bitter. I returned to my seat and cried; I suspect Jesus cried with me, saddened by his followers' continuing divisions.

So we continue our journey, slowly, towards the oneness which Jesus prayed for us; yes we have come a long way over the last twenty years - we are now friends and colleagues, and we travel the road together, experiencing joys and sorrows on the way. The title of the ecumenical process of the eighties is, I believe, even more applicable to us now than when the phrase was first coined - Not Strangers but Pilgrims.

Heather Walker

Chair of Churches Together in Beckenham

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## THE SEARCH FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

This recent publication by the Catholic Church in England and Wales will be of relevance to all Catholics, and especially those who are involved in the search for unity.

**The Search for Christian Unity**, is a 'popular' version of the Vatican's Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms of on Ecumenism.

Chapter 1 - 'The Search for Christian Unity' makes the Catholic Church's commitment very clear.

Chapter 2 - 'Organisation in the Catholic Church at the service of Christian unity', describes how the Church officially structures its search for unity.

Chapter 3 - 'Ecumenical formation in the Catholic Church', deals with the vital issue of learning about ecumenism and forming an ecumenical attitude.

Chapter 4 - 'Communion in life and spiritual activity among the baptised', spells out appropriate ways of sharing in prayer in both sacramental and non-sacramental worship.

Chapter 5 - 'Ecumenical co-operation, dialogue and common witness', looks at practical details of working, witnessing, and sharing in dialogue together.

The Search for Christian Unity includes study questions and points for action and a foreword by Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor.

*The Search for Christian Unity, AS, 80 Pages, E4.00, ISBN 0 905241 21 5*

*Available from Catholic Communications Service, 39 Eccleston Square, London SW1V 1BX*

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## “CONTEMPLATION OF JESUS TRANSFORMS US INTO EVANGELISERS”

(An extract from the message of Pope John Paul II for the International Missions Day, October 21, 2001 )

It is time indeed to look forward, keeping our eyes set on the face of Jesus (cf. Heb. 12.2) The Spirit calls us to "direct our thoughts to the future which lies before us" (*Novo Millennio ineunte*, n.3) to witness and proclaim Christ, giving thanks "for the 'marvels' the Lord has worked for us: *Misericordias Domini in aeternum cantabo*" (Ps. 89,20) (*ibid.* n.2.) On the occasion of Mission Sunday last year, I reminded you that missionary commitment is born of ardent contemplation of Jesus. A Christian who has contemplated Jesus Christ cannot fail to be captivated by his radiance (cf. *Vita consecrata*, n. 14) and to commit himself to bearing witness to his faith in Christ, the only Saviour of mankind.



Contemplation of the face of the Lord leads the disciples to contemplate the faces of the men and women of today: the Lord identifies himself with "the least of my brothers" (cf. Mt. 25,40,45) Contemplation of Jesus "the first and greatest evangelizer" (*Evangelii nuntiandi*, n. 7) transforms us into evangelizers. It makes us aware of his desire to give eternal life to those entrusted to him by the Father (cf. John 17,2) God wants "all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." (1 Tim. 2, 4) and Jesus knew that the Father's will for him was that he should announce the Kingdom of God to other towns: "for I was sent for this purpose" (Lk. 4,43)

The fruit of contemplating the "least of his brothers" is the discovery that every person, although in a way which is mysterious for us, is in every person, although in a way which is mysterious for us, is in search of God, by whom he or she is created and loved. His first disciples discovered this: "(Lord), everyone is searching for you" (Mk. 1,37) And the "Greeks" on behalf of future generations exclaim: "We wish to see Jesus" (Jn. 12,21 ). Yes, Christ, is the true light that

illuminates every person who comes into this world (*cf. Jn 1,9*): mankind searches for him, "feeling after him" (*Acts 17,27*) drawn by an inner attraction the origin of which they themselves do not know. It is hidden in the heart of God, where there beats a desire for universal salvation. Of this, God makes us witnesses and heralds. For this purpose he fills us, like in a new Pentecost, with the fire of his Spirit, with his love and with his presence: "I am with you always, to the close of the age" (*Mt. 28,20*).

Another fruit of the Great Jubilee is the attitude that the Lord asks of every Christian, to look ahead with faith and with hope. The Lord does us the honour of placing his confidence in us and calling us to the ministry, showing us his mercy (*cf. 1Tim. 1,12.13*). This call is not reserved for a few, it is for everyone, each in his own state of life. In the Apostolic letter *Novo Millennio ineunte* I wrote in this regard: "This passion will not fail to stir in the Church a new sense of mission, which cannot be left to a group of 'specialists' but must involve the responsibility of all the members of the People of God. Those who have come into genuine contact with Christ, cannot keep him for themselves, they must proclaim him. A new apostolic outreach is needed, which will be lived in everyday commitment of Christian communities and groups.... Christ must be presented to all people with confidence.

We shall address adults, families, young people, children, without ever hiding the most radical demands of the Gospel message, but taking into account each person's needs in regard to their sensitivity and language, after the example of Paul who declared "I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (*1Cor 9.22 n40*).

The call to mission acquires a singular urgency, particularly if we look at that part of humanity which still does not know Christ or recognize him. Yes, brothers and sisters, mission *ad gentes* is today more than ever valid. I hold impressed on my heart the face of humanity that I have been able to contemplate during my pilgrimages: this is the face of Christ reflected in that of the poor and suffering; the face of Christ mirrored in those who live like "sheep without a shepherd" (*Mk. 6,34*) Every man and woman has the right to be taught "many things" (*ibid*) Faced with the evidence of human fragility and insufficiency, the human temptation, for the apostle too, is to send people away. Instead it is at this very moment that, contemplating the face of the Beloved,

each of us must listen again to the words of Jesus: "There is no need for them to disperse. Give them something to eat yourselves" (cf. Mt. 14,16; Mk.6,37). In this way we will experience at the same time both human weakness and the Lord's grace. Aware of the inevitable fragility which marks us profoundly, we feel the need to render thanks to God for what he has done in us and for all that, in his grace he will still do.

How can we fail to recall in these circumstances all the missionaries, priests, religious and laity who have made mission *ad gentes* and *ad vitam* their reason for living? With their very life they proclaim "without end the graces of the Lord" (Ps 89). Not rarely this "without end" has come to the point of bloodshed: how numerous were the witnesses to the faith in the last century!

It is also thanks to their generous giving of self that the Kingdom of God was able to grow. To them goes our grateful remembrance, accompanied by our prayer. Their example gives stimulus and support to all the faithful who can take courage seeing themselves "surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses" (Heb 12, 1) who with their deeds and words made and continue to make the Gospel resound on every continent.

Yes, brothers and sisters, we cannot remain silent about what we have seen and heard (cf. Acts 4,20) We have seen the work of the Spirit and the glory of God show themselves in weakness (cf. 2Cor 12; 1Cor 1) Still today numerous men and women with their dedication and their sacrifice are for us eloquent manifestations of God's love. From them we receive the faith, and we, in turn are urged on to be announcers and witnesses of the Mystery....

John Paul II

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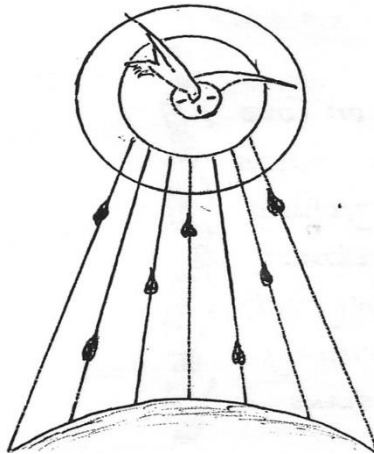
## **MISSION STATEMENT**

**By prayer and action we, the Commission members, respond to our Lord's prayer that "all may be one" (Jn 17:11)**

**To promote this ideal we will try to use every appropriate occasion both to foster friendship among Christians, and to celebrate and work together.**

**Our purpose is that:**

- ◆ **Everywhere the love of God will be known.**
- ◆ **The followers of Jesus will grow more united.**
- ◆ **The Good News will bring joy and contentment to all peoples.**



### **PRAYER FOR UNITY**

Father, pour out the gifts of your Spirit on all your children.

May all Christians receive love, support and encouragement.

Enable them to share more fully in faith, worship, witness and caring

Lead them to that fullness of unity for which Christ prayed.

Embrace them in your life of love.

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