

# TOGETHER IN CHRIST



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## EDITORIAL

We offer our gratitude to all contributors, with much appreciation of their work. We bring you Fr. Lovell's Unity talk and Medjugorje experience; Pauline's impressive care of premature babies; David's review; Manna Centre news; and John's masterly CCBI report.

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## CHRISTIAN UNITY SERVICE: UPPER TOOTING METHODIST CHURCH

*Thursday 21 January 1998 - based on Revelation 21:1-17 (New revised standard version)*

I would like to begin by thanking 'Churches Together in Balham and Upper Tooting' for inviting me to preach this evening. It is nearly three years now since I was living here and working with them. Their encouragement and generosity has helped me to realise how personally rewarding working for Unity can be and how much a local community can benefit from it.

In our reading from the Book of Revelation this evening, we are given a vision of the future, something promised at the end times by none other than God the Father. It is an eschatological prophecy given to the writer in a vision. Yes the vision is inspiring. Yes, we are called to prepare for it. We must also realise that it is promised to us in and through Jesus Christ, our Saviour. Jesus has conquered on the cross. The original translation of verse 7 runs: 'He who conquers shall have this heritage, and I will be his God and he shall be my son'. This it that son in whom the Father is well pleased. Jesus it was who set up the Church on earth to which we belong and are joined by baptism. We are his children and belong to him and in our turn we drink from the baptismal fountain together. Our life then, is bound up with that of Christ himself. Each of us needs the water which costs us nothing but achieves the sustaining of life itself, the life in God

It's not difficult for us to see that the flowing water which is God's gift of grace to us will lead us towards the vision. Not only will it lead us towards the vision but it will sustain us all as well. What the Father has promised to the Son is also promised to us. When the process is complete, the Father will 'make all things new'.

We are also aware that we live in the present and have not sampled the fullness of the future. We are being tested as Jesus himself was tested. The Unity of his Church in life and love is one of the challenges we continue to face. We must persevere in our efforts and do what we can in

our time and place to achieve it with his help. The vision of the future kingdom is there to inspire us. The means to reach the destination are given to us through Christ and his church. What we really need to do is to be convinced of this inwardly and truly turn our hearts to God.

Always, the pressures of the world work against us and we set ourselves the wrong list of priorities. are those of the 'here and now' and not of the future vision. -n-,e future vision must be worked for by the conversion of the heart to a relationship with Christ. the son of God. The relationship must be nourished by prayer and the works which flow from it.

This is the last Christian Unity Service in Unity Week for this Millennium. Millennium itself marks a point in our experience of time in relation to the birth of Christ himself. Christ and his Father stand outside our experience of time and love us into eternity. We are taken up with the charting of time and the marking of anniversaries.

At the end of this century we can be justly proud of all the advances that have been made in Christian Unity. There will be some of you here who remember when it was unusual to pray together in a Church other than one's own. Now, groups of Christians organise a great deal together and even share buildings as we do in Thamesmead Central.

The Dome, not far from us on the Greenwich peninsula is a symbol of a new age and an architectural wonder. It marks the new Millennium. For all that, I must confess that I am not one of its greatest fans. It speaks too little, if at all, of the one whose birth at a certain point in our time, is the reason for its existence. Its vision is limited in comparison to its vast space. The 'Spirit Zone' is a generous way of demonstrating the way in which all the religions of the world have opened up the many ways people express themselves spiritually but this does not speak to us of the message of Christ. More importantly, it does little to give us a vision for the future as Christians. A united vision among us is what is required. Christ is the light that shines in the darkness. The lighting of a candle will be significant for our faith if it is accompanied by a placing of our trust in Christ and our commitment to follow him through thick and thin.

A vision for our faith is needed by each one of us as we face the future. We are on pilgrimage together, and yes, we are more than pilgrims, we are friends. Friendship is ultimately dependent on the commitment of the heart. Scripture reminds us that humanity so often looks at appearances, God searches the heart. Our vision can be formed in the head but must be held close to the heart.

We need to be builders to make the vision into a reality. The tendency towards destructive power should be checked. Let us work together to build the house that contains the vision. Every time efforts are made, however small, a part is added to the whole. Let us drink the water for refreshment when we have worked hard at the task. Our prayer tonight is part of that effort. Let us keep the vision in our hearts and may we greet each other when it becomes fully real in the Kingdom of the Father.

Fr Michael Lovell B.A., S.T. B.

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### THE GIFT OF LIFE

There is an old saying "*that you never know what you're missing until its gone*". How true that is, my name is Pauline Woods and I am married to Michael, we are blessed with four surviving children, Patrick 25, Michelle 23, Catherine 15 and Caroline 14. We had two sons, Tom who would now be 18 had he lived, and Jack 20. All my children were born prematurely, including myself who was born at 30 weeks 47 years ago. I weighed two pounds and my twin brother Peter weighed 2.5 pounds. Being born on St. Peter and St. Paul's day (29th June) in 1951, it to a certain degree, solved my mother's problems at the thought of a name. Most people sadly take life and their health for granted, it is not until one is faced with the loss of a baby, or a crisis in one's own life that the importance of these gifts becomes apparent. Being a Catholic and a Christian, and being brought up in Ireland - one was always aware of the importance of going to Mass, receiving the Sacraments and not doing wrong. Catechism was taught in the schools by the Parish Priest. We went to confession every week, counted the number of times we had "sinned" and sometimes were in such a state coming home, because we had miscounted and left one out. We fasted from the night before, and not even a drop of water would pass our lips before Mass. We walked two miles to the Church, if we were lucky we got a lift in our grandfathers' horse and buggy. We dare not sneeze during Mass, we wore our Sunday Best clothes going to Mass, which were immediately removed after returning home, we then sat down to a hearty breakfast. I think people were much healthier then, we had the fasting, the walk for exercise, the meditation during Mass, then the nourishment of both the Sacrament and the breakfast afterwards. I am blessed that both my parents Mary and Eddie both in their seventies are still alive and well and living in Ireland. I visit them regularly. I cannot imagine life without them. Having had six premature babies, when my daughter Catherine was born 15 years ago, at Kingston Hospital - I saw a great need for parental support, for parents whose baby had to be cared for on the Neonatal Unit. either because of

prematurity or illness. A group of parents such as myself, the late Dr. Tessy Hanid, Sister Monica Yonge, Lynne Swatton and Others members of staff, got together in 1985 and the charity *Born Too Soon* was conceived. We offer not only parental support to parents, but we raise awareness of the problems associated with having a special baby. We raise funds to purchase vital monitoring equipment. We also hold an Annual Babies Memorial Service each year, to remember those babies who have not survived, this year's service will be held at the Postgraduate Medical Centre at Kingston Hospital; on Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> April 1999 at 10.30am. We had nearly 200 parents last year. I was reading a prayer at a Service 1993, when I collapsed and was taken seriously ill, I had a heart and lung operation and spent nearly five months in St George's Hospital Tooting, going in weighing 12 stone and coming out weighing 6 stone. I was anointed many times and not being able to breathe properly and constantly on oxygen and not able to talk, I prayed in my mind, it was the only thing that kept me sane. I was terrified Of dying and leaving my parents, brothers Tom and Peter and their family, my husband Michael and beloved children behind. They had many scares and on six occasions were brought in to say goodbye. Thankfully I survived. When one is critically ill and in a great deal of pain you get scared and after one of my worst turns and given the blessing of the sick, an inexplicable calm came over me. I said goodbye to everyone and waited to die, but my time had not yet come. We must all cherish life and not take it for granted, it is the most precious gift we will be given and only God can take it away from us.

Pauline Woods January 1999

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## BOOK REVIEW

**!Introduction to Ecumenism!** By Jeffrey Gros, FSC, Eamon McManus and Ann Riggs. Paulist Press, 1998. ISBN 0-8091-3794-1

This is the introduction to ecumenism. Written by three American Catholic ecumenists, it is by far the best general introduction to the subject yet written. Written from a Catholic perspective, it is extremely sensitive to the perspectives of other churches and deals with the ecumenical position of all the major Orthodox and Protestant traditions. It has chapters on the history of ecumenism, the key Catholic documents. Viz. - the Decree on Ecumenism of Vatican II, the Directory of 1993 and 'Ut Unum Sint', ecumenical formation and the role of the World Council

of Churches. Particularly thorough is the chapter on the nature of dialogue, examining its aims and the problem of reception. The major individual dialogues are also well discussed in the chapter relating to the various churches.

Inevitable, examples are often drawn from the American scene rather than ours in Britain, but, in combination with David Butler's *'Dying To be One'* which is the best recent account of the evolution of the English scene, and the material in the Methodist open learning Centre course, and prospects and problems on the ecumenical scene. I do recommend this book very warmly to those who wish to learn more.

David Carter

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## THE MANNA CENTRE



The Manna Centre celebrated its 15th anniversary last year with a special Thanksgiving Service on October 10th 1998, held at St. John's Anglican Church, Waterloo, London. The service was led by Bishop Peter Price; the preacher was Rev. Dr. Kenneth Leech; music was led by Michael Bold with the folk group from Our Lady & St. Philip Neri Church, Sydenham. Items representing the work of Manna were brought forward in procession. Refreshments and a birthday cake were served afterwards.

How did the Manna Centre come into being? It all began through the inspiration of Nanette Ffrench. Fr. Gerry McCann, Administrator of the Centre kindly supplied some literature, from which we can relate the story to you.

Nanette had experienced a dark period in her life. She tells us . "A passage from the Psalms ...'O that today you would listen to my voice, harden not your heart'...broke into the darkness.Somewhat that glimmer of light let me see, and in a strange way, feel the pain and injustice of the streets around me and I felt I was being called to do something about it."

Nanette asked Bishop Henderson for a property, and the building at 6 Melior Street was given by the diocese. It needed repairs, the roof leaked,

there was no electricity, water or furniture. She writes: "One of the first visitors was my brother, Barry, and we lit a candle and prayed together."

Once the doors were open people kept coming in - for various reasons. Having received bread for nothing from a bakery, the building was aptly named : 'The Manna Centre'. That was in March 1983.



*Gerry McCann*

Fr. McCann writes "The Manna, as a Christian society, working with the homeless should do two things : (1) help the poor and (2) campaign against the causes of poverty. Over the past 15 years we have been very good at carrying out our task. We have helped an average of 100 - 150 poor people. day in day out. We have fed and clothed them; given them some of the basics of life. There is still much to be done on the second task...'

The Director of the Manna Centre, Paddy Boyle, tells us that now we are an established day centre offering a wide range of services to the homeless and the long-term unemployed". Major renovations were carried out: there is now a large kitchen, and the showers which have been installed are very much appreciated. The visitors find companionship and welcome. Other services developed are clothing, medical care, housing and welfare advice. "On an average week, there are 3 Nurse practitioner surgeries, a weekly dentist service, a weekly chiropody surgery and a weekly opportunity to speak to a Mental health Worker. An optician also comes once a month and a T.B. screening team about once every two months..."



*Nannette French and Ray Towey*

Ray Towey, a consultant anaesthetist at Guy's Hospital, has played an important role in the Centre, including putting together a Constitution and applying for charitable status.

Many volunteers, and people giving generously of time and money have helped tremendously.

It is emphasised that working for social justice to end the causes of poverty and homelessness is vital for the present and future. This ecumenical effort is grateful for any help and donations. Please do respond if you can. Thank you.



## MEDJUGORJE: UNITY IN LIFE AND PRAYER

It is now nearly twenty years since a group of young people from Medjugorje in Bosnia-Herzegovina reported seeing visions of the Virgin Mary to their parish priest. The country was then under Communist control. As we all know, this troubled part of Europe continues to experience ethnic tension and recent warfare, now centring on the Serbia-Kosovo conflict. The small rural community of Medjugorje and its church of St. James has now become a major shrine, attracting pilgrims from all over the world. Most of these are Roman Catholics but among them are many Christians from other traditions.

On returning from my second trip to Medjugorje last summer, I was moving towards baggage reclaim at Gatwick when who should I see going in the opposite direction but Kathleen Dunkley of our South East Unity Commission. We waved delightedly towards each other and realised that as one pilgrimage was ending, another was beginning. I subsequently discovered that Kathleen had made many trips since the early years of the apparitions. It was also interesting to reflect on the fact that we were both working for Christian Unity and we both found that the Medjugorje experience spoke in the same way to us. In spite of the tensions surrounding the place, one can experience a deep peacefulness and spirit of prayer which cuts across any Christian divisions with a message of importance for the world.

The most obvious difference between Medjugorje and other Marian shrines is that the Virgin is said to appear to the visionaries continually. It is not known when the visions will stop. This poses a credibility problem for some who are unsure about authenticity. The official position of Rome on the matter is that, for the time being, nothing supernatural can be proved. It may be proved or disproved in the future. One reason why a definitive judgement cannot be given is that this is not possible while events are still in progress. One way in which Medjugorje is in line with other Marian shrines is in the basic message the Virgin gives to the world. Prominence is given to prayer and reconciliation with God and mankind. There is also an emphasis on the importance of Scripture.

Many priests from different parts of the world have visited the shrine of Medjugorje, sometimes with groups of other pilgrims and sometimes on their own. The Church has encouraged the spirit of pilgrimage and the Pope has spoken of his personal support for the shrine. Records for 1995 show that by that stage over 40,000 priests and 160 bishops had made a pilgrimage, including Archbishop Maurice Couve de Murville of Birmingham and Bishops Thomas McMahon, Ambrose Griffiths

and Cormac Murphy O'Connor.

At the shrine, there is a continuous programme of prayer. Masses are said in different languages. Stations of the Cross are said climbing the high hill. The small hill, where the apparitions first took place, is often the scene where a young peoples' prayer group meets and many individuals pray at the summit. The countryside round about has a rugged beauty. Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament has pride of place as does the Rosary. Talks are regularly given by the visionaries and also the Franciscan priests who run the shrine.

The town itself is expanding to accommodate the pilgrims. Always, there is a genuine spirit of goodwill which is evident throughout the town. In London, people may walk around with mobile 'phones, but in Medjugorje, they walk around with rosaries. People respect each other's need for privacy or prayer. People of all ages can be seen playing a part in everything, including teenagers and young adults. The witness given by the locals is remarkable in terms of reverence and a routine of prayer.

Few, if any, return from the shrine unmoved by the experience. Sometimes, this can be profound. One American writer, having himself become a Catholic, accompanied a group of Protestant ministers well known to him. They were cautious at first, but later testified that their personal faith had been strengthened. Others speak of a healing experience, either physical or spiritual.

The aspect of personal conversion is instructive for all Christians. The Virgin directs us to her Son and to newness of life in Him. The message is about Christian Unity and it is an universal message. It requires the individual to know and understand himself or herself. This honesty leads to a conversion of the heart and a way of praying which comes from within, from the heart. In an often brutal and Godless world, those who unite prayerfully in Christ, in this way, will be seen to be united.

Fr. Michael Lovell

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REPORT ON CCBI ASSEMBLY, SWANWICK APRIL 23-26, 1999

*As someone new to CCBI affairs I attended the Pre-assembly Gathering on the evening and morning prior to the assembly proper. This proved informative and useful. John Reardon, General Secretary of CCBI from its inception in 1990, but now about to retire, welcomed*

the Gathering. After a period of silence and the Pilgrim Prayer which spoke of us as "strangers no longer but pilgrims on the way to your kingdom" he introduced us to staff members, the Assembly Planning Group, overseas guests and the General Secretary' Elect, David Goldbourne.

The purpose of the Assembly, John Reardon told us, was primarily to get to know each other, to share ecumenical experience, to gain inspiration and to offer mutual support and all this in as informal a way as possible. The theme chosen this year was "*Serving the Nations in Partnership*", an appropriate one in the changing political scene with the Scottish Parliament imminent and with Welsh and Irish assemblies and Regional Development Agencies in the offing. How do the Churches ensure an impact on the new political scene and how do they do this in partnership when they are so different in ethos, traditions and size? The programme, procedures and powers of the Assembly were outlined.

In the evening John Reardon reviewed the considerations which led to the CCBI replacing its predecessor the British Council of Churches (BCC). It had become apparent by the 1980's that the latter could make no further progress towards visible unity. It had become a structure parallel to that of the Churches themselves and could not speak with authority for them as the Churches did not own it, nor could they validate its decisions. Overtures to the Roman Catholic Church had come to nothing as the question of authority could not be addressed. Other attempts at closer unity such as the Anglican Methodist talks and the Five Church Unity process had fallen at the final hurdle.

The "Inter-Church Process" during the 1980's led to CCBI, CTE, ACTS and CYTUN coming into being in September 1990. No comparable move forward occurred in Ireland where the situation was more complex and difficult. CCBI co-ordinates across the national bodies. The General Secretaries of the national instruments meet in CCBI and CCBI officers likewise attend meetings of the national bodies.

The Church Representatives of CCBI, fifty or sixty people of senior experience and authority, meets twice a year. CCBI has no programme distinct from those of the national bodies but brings together their representatives in areas of common concern and sets up

and co-ordinates networks of them. Proposals from these come back to the Church Representatives Meeting (CRM) which has, from time to time, to make decisions on them. The CRM appoints six members to the Steering Committee. The Assembly meets every two years at present. It also elects six members of the Steering Committee.

The latter implements the decisions of the CRM and the Assembly, maintains ecumenical enthusiasm, acts as Trustees and general managers of CCBI and oversees the work of its staff.

Of the constituent national bodies CTE is the most structured. ACTS has a central council through which most business is processed and CYTUN has both a central council and an assembly. Ireland has a different structure. All Churches cover both Northern Ireland and the Republic. Ireland did not go through the Inter-Church Process. The Irish Council of Churches does not include the RC Church but has talks with it. These talks have become institutionalised as the Irish Inter-Church Meeting (IICM) which, six years ago, appointed a staff member as Secretary. IICM has gradually been taking over ecumenical activity and may become the ecumenical instrument for Ireland. Only the Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church are full members of CCBI. The RC Church has become an associate member which, however has caused the Presbyterian Church to withdraw! Though there were no formal connections between the Presbyterians and CCBI, contact was maintained in roundabout ways.

Only national churches can be members of CCBI and there are thirty-two of these. They range from the largest to the very small, e.g. some of the black majority ones. There are four Orthodox members. The Pentecostal Churches and some of the very evangelical ones, house churches etc. are not members (though Icthus has joined CTE) but CCBI has dialogue with some of these. The Evangelical Alliance was asked to contribute to the Inter-Church Process and did so to some extent. At that time, however it did not want to give the impression that it had abandoned its strict evangelical stance by aligning itself to a wider and larger body.

The number of representatives sent to the assembly by member churches range from 44 for the C of E and 40 from the RC Church down to two for the smallest churches. In addition there are guests, visitors and delegates from networks, agencies and bodies in association. There are 25 of the last mentioned. They exist to promote

particular ecumenical activities within a national or international body. Examples are Christian Aid, CAFOD. Action of Christians Against Torture and the Association of Inter-Church Families. Some of the associated bodies came into existence because CCBI and the national Instruments had seen the need for them.

Each staff officer of CCBI works with those in corresponding areas of concern in the national instruments. At the international level CCBI often has the connections and expertise to act more effectively than the national instruments, for example in the areas of international mission, racial justice and inter-faith. CCBI can often identify areas where the Churches can best act together or where there is the need for four-nation engagement and co-operation.

After an unscheduled early morning mass and breakfast we heard first from Ruth Harvey who, since 1996 has led the Ecumenical Spirituality Project. This maintains a library and resource centre at Milton Keynes. It acts as consultants for ecumenical worship and liturgy, responds to invitations from church groups, runs workshops, initiates and coordinates projects for ecumenical spirituality and produces a quarterly newsletter and other relevant publications one of which, "*Wrestling and Resting*" should appear in May. It deals with people who are deeply involved in spirituality but have distanced themselves from institutional Christianity, and is moving into the inter-faith sphere. It seeks to serve those who are looking for a spiritual base to empower them in engaging with the challenges and issues of their times.

Mary Houston spoke of her work as Communication's Officer of CCBI. The need for such a post had been seen for some time but only recently has the funding been found for it. In the past individual officers had communicated their concerns but in a sketchy, uncoordinated way. CCBI was not well known nor was its role understood; the general public and the press were almost ignorant of it. She is trying to develop a coherent strategy for the whole organisation. The bulk of her work involved drafting press releases and targeting these to the national or religious press as appropriate. CCBI was getting better known as a reliable source of information and she had, increasingly, to respond to approaches from the press, radio and TV. She had, sometimes, to call press conferences and to plan whole campaigns. 1500 copies of the CCBI Newsletter are issued

regularly and many of these are photocopied and further disseminated. She was responsible for an annual report and was a member of the Churches' Advisory Council on Local Broadcasting. She was concerned with the development of Electronic communication and websites and with electronic conferencing in real time.

From late morning the bulk of the delegates were arriving and our comparatively cosy and comprehend-able group grew to over three hundred. Various denominational and constituency groups met after lunch. In the Catholic one, presided over by Bishop Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, two nominees for the Steering Committee were decided upon. After opening worship organised by the delegates from Scotland and a formal welcome in plenary session we dispersed to our "small Groups". These contained about ten and met on each of the following days. In this way we got to know each other well.

The first main speaker was Angela Sarkis of the Church Urban Fund. Her theme was Partnership: partnership between the Churches and between them and local authorities and government in tackling the ills in our society, especially the problem of social isolation and exclusion.. In our country the width of inequality in wealth and opportunity was second only to that in New Zealand. 85% of the poverty and social exclusion was concentrated in 44 local authorities. Compared with others these had: Nearly two thirds more unemployment, almost 1½ times the number of one-parent families, under-age pregnancies, failing schools, a 30% higher mortality rate, one and a half times the level of vacant housing, housing estates so unattractive that people preferred bed-&-breakfast accommodation, two or three times the level of poor housing, vandalism and dereliction, more young people.

Government policies meant to tackle this had proved ineffective for for reasons such as: too many initiatives, programmes with too many rules, lack of local involvement and co-operation, strategies were not joined up, there were poor links beyond the neighbourhood community, commitment was not harnessed, proven experience was neglected, too much investment in structures and the physical environment and too little in people.

The Churches had been vocal in highlighting these problems and had a good record of speaking to local authorities and government. They

had to maintain concern and encourage all agencies to work more collaboratively and constructively.

Principles of effective partnership included: total commitment, involvement of local people, learning how to get the ear of the authorities, becoming aware of facilities and funding, getting representation on planning groups, having aims that are owned, agreed and understood, being prepared to relinquish control and share power, commitment by all agencies and representation at effective levels, authoritative support, mutual trust between participants, respect for cultural, spiritual and philosophical differences, proper resourcing.

The Churches and their members had to be involved because of the command to love their neighbour. They had to be inclusive and welcoming. They had to take up the challenges in their lives and not just observe and condemn. They could do much more; opening up church buildings for community use during the week, in encouraging community initiatives and credit unions and such like, to empower local people. They had to involve themselves in the provision of voluntary services. Church Urban Fund and other agencies should learn from each other and publicise instances of good practice.

Whilst the Churches had to talk to Government and local authorities they had also to maintain independence and care for the whole community and not sectional interests. They had to tackle the systemic causes of inequality and had to be prepared to swim against the tide of current theories and policies when necessary.

Each day closed with short worship at 9.30pm and began with four options for worship at 7.45am. The choice ranged from the Cherubim and Seraphim Council of Churches through the Salvation Army and Quavers to Catholic Mass. After breakfast came the Bible Studies presented by Fr John FitzSinunons who managed to be both exceptionally amusing and joltingly challenging. Fr John based his studies on the journey narrative in Luke, beginning in Chapter 9 and culminating in Chapter 23. The Churches too were on a pilgrimage but to where and how far had they still to go? The unity we are looking for is not that of an Assembly, Synod or even Holy See but the unity that Jesus prayed for; a Trinitarian rather than an ecclesial model. The "vocational texts", 9:51-62 gave the three basic characteristics of the pilgrimage: Consciousness of what we are undertaking, urgency and perseverance.

Some of the questions he asked us to consider were why we are so reluctant to make the journey together? Why do some regard the Roman Catholic Church as the end of the journey rather than a means of getting there? (Triumphalism in the Catholic Church. he threw in, is not dead - it is merely forbidden.) What part do Word and Sacrament play in the journey? In particular is the sharing of the Eucharist part of the "end-experience" or is it part of the journey itself? Where is the proper place for authority in a Church that sees itself as genuinely "on pilgrimage"?

These questions we discussed, with many side-tracks, in our small groups each day. On the last morning Fr John came nearest to giving an answer - but it was not a comfortable one. The journey, like that of Jesus, had to be through death to resurrection. We were scared of death. Not just of our own death but that of our pre-conceived notions, our structures, all the things we had grown up with, found familiar and congenial or were simply attached to. Until we were prepared to face this were we taking unity seriously?

Each representative had to choose one of the seven "Sub-theme Groups" which met twice each day. The Sub-themes were: Serving the Nations in Partnership;

through Church Life, through Vocation, Daily Life, through Political Engagement,

in the Global Community;

in Ethics and Moral Leadership; through Justice, Reconciliation and Social Action

In Vision for Future Community.

Each group had to produce a statement, up to two sides of A4, which was duplicated, distributed and presented at the final plenary session. That these were coherent, considered and comprehensive says much for the concentrated effort involved and for the capability of the representatives.

The second main speaker was Lord David Steel who dealt with the changes imminent on the political scene and with Scottish Devolution in particular. He briefly reviewed the history of the issues from the Act of Union to the 1913 Bill for the restoration of a Scottish Parliament, defeated by the House of Lords, to the failed attempt at a



bill in the 1970's to the more recent Scotland Act and the referendum. The result favourable to devolution was due to the feeling that Westminster was not reacting to Scottish wishes and needs, that decisions were being made by those with no Scottish responsibilities or particular interests, that the influence of one minister and his three deputies on the Civil Service was less than desirable and that government should be brought nearer to the people.

Election to the new parliament will be by the "added member" proportional representation system. This will produce a parliament of a quite a different shape with no overall majority by any one party. Bills can be carried over from one session to the next and these sessions will have a fixed term of four years. There will be pre-legislative hearings and at this stage, he said, the Churches could have an input. The parliament will have direct representation in Brussels. He expected the Scottish Parliament to have a galvanising effect on the economic and cultural life of the country.

He turned to the reform of the House of Lords. The Royal Commission considering this had been asked to take account of the other political restructuring. He asked if the Church of England should continue to occupy 23 seats. Should the other Churches have representatives? He suggested the Churches get together and make representations to the Commission.

In the ensuing answers to questions he said he did not see how the Prime Minister's powers on the appointment of Anglican Bishops could be altered without first dealing with dis-establishment: that though Scottish secession was theoretically possible he could not see it happening; that religious and ethnic minorities were better integrated in Scotland and that, in any case the electoral system would provide better representation for them. He said that arrangements for parliamentary chaplains had not been worked out but that they would not be exclusive as at Westminster. One question he himself asked was: should the Roman Catholic Church lift the bar on its clergy participating in parliament?

Each afternoon offered two groups of workshops on themes ranging from mental health and community care in the developing world to the painting of icons. The one on "Interchurch Families and Sharing Communion" I found most moving. After Martin Reardon had spoken about the Association in general we heard the experiences of a number

of couples one of whom, in each case, was a Catholic. All found their inability to share Communion with official approval painful in the extreme. Some were strictly obedient to the discipline of their churches, others felt that they had to disobey it. All the latter who regularly received in each other's churches did so discreetly without compromising priests or offending congregations. The obedient ones found the occasions when they had been given official approval for sharing Communion very moving and significant. The children of such couples who (the children) sometimes had joint church membership were often mystified by their parent's inability to share Communion.

Ruth, the Catholic wife of Martin, spoke of her and the Association's first response to *One Bread One Body*. This was mainly welcoming. She was grateful for the clarity of the document, for the Bishops noting that a pressing need for sharing is felt in many mixed marriages and for the permission to share that may be given in some situations. She realised that the Bishops were constrained by Canon Law and the *Directory* but could they have done more? There was a need for continuous and ongoing permission for sharing Communion in some interchurch families and this had been granted by the Catholic Bishops of Germany, South Africa and Brisbane. Some parish priests had made such pastoral decisions, as they had been allowed to do by the provisions of the *Directory*. It was difficult to rescind this. Was "non-refusal" rather than permission a way out?

Martin summed up. These couples were totally committed to each other and shared everything except in this area. They were usually also deeply committed to ecumenism. "You live in your marriage the hopes and difficulties of the path to Christian unity" the Pope had said at York in 1982.

The fact that the workshop led by Bernard Longley on *One Bread One Body* later that same afternoon was scheduled for the main meeting hall indicated the interest that it aroused. It had indeed kept obtruding into my small group all the week. Fr Bernard spoke from the experience of having been involved in the drafting for 18 months. The Document had been launched at simultaneous press conferences in London, Scotland and Ireland. The immediate "Knee-jerk" reaction was almost unanimously negative and this had influenced the atmosphere ever since. The treatment by the media had been

unbalanced. The document had not been considered as a whole; the major part had been almost ignored and all the emphasis placed on the second part. Discussion in the religious press had continued. The Tablet leader had been appreciative of the doctrinal content but had criticised the pastoral recommendations for appearing more restrictive than those of the *Directory*. Of the reactions from three theologians published in the Tablet, that from Leslie Griffiths was the most emotional and critical.

*One Bread One Body's* main purpose was to present what lay at the heart of Catholic doctrine on the Eucharist and as such it provides great help for Catholics engaged in ecumenical dialogue. All the Catholic Bishops in Great Britain and Ireland had been involved. They all agreed that the document was a true and sufficient presentation of Catholic doctrine on the Eucharist. It had required no further or higher authorisation or ratification.

Fr Bernard outlined the document and drew attention to certain points. One was that fundamental principles remain the same but that norms can be developed and changed with time (para 8). There was continuing need for dialogue, study and prayer. The Mass was deeply personal but never private (56). The pastoral recommendations needed to be read in the light of the *Directory*. Probable disappointment was predicted (118) but the degree thereof depended on expectations. That expectations had been unrealistically high had accounted for much of the negative reaction.

Fr Bernard was joined by Bishops Cormac Murphy-O'Connor and Mario Conti in answering questions. "Transubstantiation" appears only in a footnote (to 50) but loomed large for one questioner. For permission to receive in a Catholic church would he have to undergo an inquisition on his acceptance of that dogma? He was assured that he would not need to subscribe in terms of scholastic philosophy but would need to assent in some way to belief in a real presence. Bishop Mario envisaged that there could be circumstances in which he might give an ongoing permission for a non-Catholic partner to share Communion but that this would not be usual or routine.

At the three business meetings during the week there were reports from the Church Representatives' Meeting and the Steering Committee and the recommendations of the review carried out in consultation with member churches were presented. These included

that CCBI should remain a Council of Churches rather than become merely an agent of the national instruments and that some of its work, e.g. Youth Work and the work of the Council of Men and Women in the Church, with its associated funding should be transferred to the national instruments. On the other hand a new post to deal with public affairs would be created at CCBI. As a result of these changes subscriptions to CCBI would be reduced by 16% but this amount would be transferred to the national instruments.

Two changes to the constitution had been proposed and due notice of these had been given. The first, that the name be changed to Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) was agreed. The second, that the Assembly should meet only every four years provoked much discussion. Views from the floor were that this would concede too much to management without the representatives having any check or input and that there would be a lack of continuity and representatives would not get to know each other. This proposed change was heavily defeated.

The Lawrence Report was published during the Assembly and it was felt that the Assembly should issue a comment on it. A draft was prepared, discussed and amended. Nominations for the six members of the Steering Committee chosen by Assembly representatives were made and the election duly carried out.

In the final business meeting the reports of the Sub-Theme Groups were presented and accepted and various formalities were completed. John Reardon then gave a retrospect of his years as General Secretary. He had been disappointed that Irish participation had been so diminished by the withdrawal of the Presbyterians but glad to see Irish Catholics moving nearer. He had been heartened at the inception of CCBI by the huge commitment of the Church leaders, by the focus on Africa, by the Durham Assembly with its sense of commitment and thoughtful worship. He cherished the opportunities he had of preaching at the Catholic Cathedral in Belfast and of seeing the area around it regenerating; of being in Armagh, hearing a reading by a young man who lost a leg, of seeing the churches there committing themselves to maintaining the fragile peace; of attending a variety of Church Assemblies; of co-operating with the Aid Agencies especially Christian Aid and CAFOD and of being sent by them to Guatemala and Mexico; of sitting in the Mass in El Salvador where thousands of

priests had come to concelebrate on the anniversary of the killing of the six Jesuits; of being an ecumenical guest at the Lambeth conference and receiving a gift there labelled "Bishop Reardon", of being invited to preach at the Assemblies of the Welsh Independents and of the Cherubim and Seraphim Churches. CCBI came into existence at a time when there was world-wide talk of an "ecumenical winter" but it had turned out to be something very precious and an inspiration for similar bodies subsequently set up in Australia, Canada and Sweden. He had been particularly pleased to see the increasing presence of the Black Majority Churches and of black representatives of the mainline Churches. Imagination and tact were needed in ecumenical work and coordination was a skilled task. He wished his successor every success in his task. John was given prolonged applause both for his speech and service and after the formal thanks and presentations he was given.

David Goldbourne, his successor, was subjected to a relaxed public interview in which we learnt something of the hopes he has and of the approach he was likely to make to his task. The impression he made was reassuring. Formal proceedings were closed and we moved to the Chapel for the final worship, then to lunch and departures.

John Wilkinson

## The Grace of Jubilee

Christians unite

in celebrating

Millennium 2000

Let all our celebrations :-

highlight anew God's love for humankind:

thank God for sending Christ as Saviour:

emphasise the faith which heals and saves:

promote worthy efforts for peace and justice.

Let true JUBILEE fill our hearts. + C.J.Henderson

THE CATHOLIC ASSOCIATION FOR RACIAL JUSTICE  
PRAYER:

Heavenly God, we praise your name and thank you for your glorious goodness and mercy.

Lord Jesus, we pray a blessing for all those actively involved in the struggle for racial justice.

Holy Spirit, we beseech you to enter into the minds and hearts of those in authority in the Church.

Grant that they may: Hear the voices of those crying out for justice;

Engage in developing a better understanding;

Act to bring about change; Lead and inspire others by their good example.

We ask this through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. We pray for racial justice: in our own lives, in our parishes, in our dioceses, in our land. Amen.

