

The Society for Ecumenical Studies

Annual Report 2003

New Charitable Status

The Society was founded in 1995 and became a Registered Charity, Number 1096515, on 14 March 2003.

The Society's Objects

The Society's objects as a registered charity are the advancement of religion and the education of the public by fostering as widely as possible the Christian Ecumenical Movement, in a way that combines practical experience in social, international and interfaith fields with theological reflection and exploration in regard to divisions between Christian denominations, in particular by providing occasions and a regular forum within which persons and groups of different backgrounds, races and theological convictions can meet for exchange of information, for discussion and to work together on study projects, where appropriate in collaboration with other groups or agencies.

Executive Committee (elected on 12 February 2003)

Dr Martin Conway	President (Chairman)
The Revd Mark Woodruff	Secretary
Sister Fidelis Daly	Treasurer
The Revd Maximos Lavriotes	
The Revd Dr Paul McPartlan	
The Revd Gareth Powell	

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Membership

The Society's membership at the end of 2003 stood at 87, 13 of whom joined and 3 rejoined since the successful conference at St Albans Cathedral on May 17, 'May they all be one.....but how?' Considering that in 2002 the Society undertook a limited programme, the growth of just under 19% since May 2003 is encouraging and indicates that the events and study which the Society can enable respond to a continuing demand.

Committee and Newsletter

During the year the Executive Committee met three times to conduct the Society's business and plan its work. There were three mailings to members, each with a newsletter, reports on events with which the Society was involved, and the texts of related papers. These included:

- Report on the November 2002 Selly Oak Conference : 'Where is the Ecumenical Movement Going' by Martin Conway
- Cardinal Walter Kasper's Keynote Address from St Albans May 2003
- Archbishop Rowan Williams' Keynote Address from St Albans May 2003
- Mark Woodruff: Paul Couturier and the Unity of Humanity in Christ

Website

The website is being developed as a means to disseminate these and other papers to a much wider readership, and it has been possible to place there a greater range of papers than it was possible to circulate with the Newsletter. These include:

- All the previously mentioned papers
- Bishop Joe Aldred: Sermon at the May 2003 St Albans Conference
- David Carter: The Spirituality of Ecumenical Dialogue
- Martin Conway: Marks and Processes of Unity in Christ for the World Wide Church in an Age of Unity-in-Diversity
- Martin Conway: The Open Secret for the Open Society - Unity, Mission and Social Responsibility
- Martin Conway: Can Britain Re-Imagine Itself as a Multi-cultural Nation?
- Martin Conway: Tradition in Eastern Orthodoxy
- Mary Tanner: The Work of the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC in a Broader Perspective (from the November 2002 Selly Oak Conference)
- Michael Ipgrave: Reflections on Conversion in Inter-Faith Contexts (from the 2002 Societas Oecumenica conference at Salisbury)
- St Albans Speakers, May 2003: Transcript of Panel Discussion and Questions
- Elizabeth Welch: Keynote Speech from St Albans May 2003

In 2004 the role of the website as a resource for ecumenical study will be enhanced, with more papers from previous years added, notable material from other ecumenical societies, book reviews and comment from members on ecumenical news and developments.

Couturier Anniversary

2003 was the Fiftieth Anniversary of the death of Paul Couturier, the 'apostle of Christian Unity', and the seventieth anniversary since his re-founding of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. An inspiration to the contacts he made with Anglican, Lutheran and Reformed Christians, to the Taizé and Grandchamp communities, through the Groupe des Dombes, and through his friendship with Dr Visser t'Hooft, his spiritual influence encouraged the fledgling World Council of Churches and signalled the advent of conciliatory relations with the Catholic Church. Likewise, his respect for Eastern Christians through his work among refugees from Soviet Russia won the trust of the Orthodox and laid foundations for future dialogue grounded in mutual respect. In his own Catholic Church, much of his thinking on 'spiritual ecumenism', and the churches' parallel journeys through sanctification until convergence in Christ is realised, found acceptance and even expression in the teaching of Vatican II. Since his vision of unity, the spiritual priorities in ecumenical dialogue and action, needs to be re-received by the churches, the Society was pleased to be actively represented through its members and as a sponsoring body (with the Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Westminster Cathedral, the Catholic League and the Jerusalem Trust) of the three conferences (Westminster, Bruges and Woldingham) in commemoration, as well as the special Solemn Mass at Westminster Cathedral. A book, 'The Vision of Paul Couturier', collecting many of the papers from these events, several by members of the Society, was published in December 2003.

Missisauga Initiative

Members also participated in the Association of Interchurch Families event, the John Coventry Lecture. This was delivered by Bishop Crispian Hollis of Portsmouth on the Missisauga Initiative for building into denominational structures of the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion the strategy for working ecumenically.

'May they all be one'.....But How? - May 2003

The Society's principal event in the year, two years in the planning, was 'May they all be one....but how?', the major conference on 17 May 2003 at St Albans Cathedral. This too was a collaboration with other societies - the Newman Association (Hertfordshire) and the Christian Study Centre of St Albans Abbey itself. This brought together in a packed Cathedral the powerful and persuasive voices of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, the President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting the Unity of Christians,

Cardinal Walter Kasper, and the distinguished former Moderator of the United Reformed Church (and Central Committee member of the World Council of Churches), the Revd Elizabeth Welch. A complete account of the day was placed on our website, with all the speeches, the panel discussion with Bishop Joe Aldred, Church of God of Prophecy, Elaine Applebee, Director of the Bradford Health Action Zone (former adviser to the Bishop of Bradford on Church in Society), Dr Tina Beattie, a Roman Catholic academic from Digby Stuart College, Roehampton and Bishop Angaelos of the Coptic Orthodox Church. A feature of what most speakers said was the urgent need for the reawakening of the spiritual dimension, to inspire closer collaboration and more profound mutual discovery through the shared experience of prayer and service. Rowan Williams called for more time to be spent in silence together; Walter Kasper called not for dry academic consensus, but conversion and a renewed Pentecost; Elizabeth Welch challenged the churches in common to make their sacred buildings available as 'Sacred Space' for the spiritual renewal of the world beyond the Church. Bishop Joe Aldred also challenged Christians in all churches to look beyond themselves to include those at the margins, to embrace the richness of human diversity so that unity can respect the world to which it should bring the hope of God's love and justice. A verse from the specially commissioned hymn by Fred Kaan skilfully united the themes of prayer in Christ's pattern of humility, and unity for the salvation of all the world's people:

*'Pray for a Christlike heart, as we confess;
for confidence that oneness will be blessed;
for earthy, honest faith without pretence
and lives united, freed from wall and fence.'*

A CD and video were produced to record the day. A book of the speeches and other principal contributions will be published in spring 2004.

London Colney Residential Conference - May 2003

Over the same weekend, around 14 members took part in the Society's residential conference at nearby London Colney. Several useful ideas arose, both for the Society and our various churches:

- More collaboration by the Society and other bodies on specific study projects
- Attention to those at the 'ecumenical margins'
- Emphasis on the spiritual expression of the ecumenical vision
- The deliberate opening up of the churches' holy places for the world to realise this
- Ecumenical sustainability, related to developing European society and the environment
- The experience of the Eucharist in ecumenical study, and possibly revisiting the debate on eucharistic sharing.

The last point arose from the conference's direct experience of division at the Sunday Eucharist. It provoked a searching discussion, encompassing loyalty to our churches' discipline, wanting to stretch rules as far as they could go, frustration at separation when so much oneness in faith is shared and understood in such a forum as the Society, and how it might set itself the task of keeping ecumenical study and collaboration steadily focused on this issue, and to maintain the momentum for achieving eucharistic unity. A study session at the 2004 Annual General Meeting will be devoted to this theme: 'Revisiting the Debate on Eucharistic Sharing'.

Pointers from the Holy Spirit - November 2003

In November 2003, at St Peter's, Eaton Square, London SW1, thirty people joined in a study day with leading figures from several ecumenical centres to reflect on the challenges of the May conference and to discern 'Pointers from the Holy Spirit for the next steps on the Ecumenical Pilgrimage'. Speakers included Professor Nicholas Sagovsky of Liverpool Hope University, Dr Tim Macquiban from Sarum College, Dr Kenneth Kearon from the Irish School of Ecumenics, the Revd Noel Davies from the Welsh National Centre for Ecumenical

Studies, Dr Colin March from the Selly Oak Ecumenical Initiative for Study and Action, and Alan and Ione Morley-Fletcher from the Chemin Neuf Community in Somerset. Several strong points for further work emerged:

- The role of distinctive identity, not as a mark of division but as bearing the potential for conflict resolution and as enriching the contribution of each individual (church or person) to the whole - in the church and the secular context, as well as in the relation between the two
- The significance of religious people and groups living ecumenically, for mapping the nature and purpose of civil society, at national and international levels
- The study of 'Religion' as such – why is it so divisive while also intrinsically committed to peace?
- What causes fundamentalism to be opposed to ecumenism and to refuse to enter onto the paths of reconciliation?
- The need not to blur or abandon distinctive traditions in the name of a vague or imposed unity, but to use them as true foundations for the bridges uniting them
- The value of time together, shared in silence, shared in common pilgrimage and making our holy places available as space for the world to find trust in God. The ecumenical movement is not about the various church partners, but so that we 'may all be one, that the world may believe'.

The final act of worship combined prayers written by Paul Couturier and hymns on unity by Charles Wesley during his brother John's 300th Anniversary in 2003.

Work for the Future

During the year, the Society has learned the value of the ecumenical networks which invite different bodies to work with each other on projects of mutual interest. It has applied to become a Body in Association with Churches Together in Britain and Ireland and Churches Together in England, to strengthen these ties and to promote its own contribution to others through study and reflection.

For the future, the members have commended a number of ideas for study, locally and nationally. Other than those already referred to, these include:

- Formal links with other ecumenical societies
- A consultation in May 2004 on the 'Ecumenical Margins' to take up Bp Joe Aldred's challenge
- A course week at Iona for future ecumenical leaders in September 2005
- A possible joint black-white Christian congress, with St Albans, in 2006
- Ecumenical collaboration with reference to the environment and contemporary society
- The ecumenical dimension to the life of the churches in the countryside

It has been a busy year for the Society, seeing extension to numbers, activity and horizons. There seems ample scope for the Society to conduct, and collaborate on, a wide range of programmes of study, all paying heed to the insistent reminder throughout 2003 that it is 'spiritual ecumenism' - given silence, space, heart, regard for all people, humility before creation, and the spiritual treasures we hold in trust for each other - that is the key to our progress in dialogue and ecumenical learning. Thus the theology we study is not, we hope, just words about God, but words from him and to him as well. This work we undertake as one, we trust, is a service we can offer before the world - that it may believe.

Martin Conway, President & Chairman, 23 February 2004

On behalf of the Executive Committee:

David Carter, Fidelis Daly (Treasurer), Maximos Lavriotes, Paul McPartlan, Gareth Powell
Mark Woodruff (Secretary)