Society for Ecumenical Studies

The Ecumenical Margins

Christian Unity for the Edges of Church and Society

A Day Conference

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Contents

Christian Unity for and from those on the margins of society

Foreword from the Chair of the Society for Ecumenical Studies
Dr Martin Conway, President of the Selly Oak Colleges, 1986-1997

Just as I was delighted to welcome a good cross-section of the Society's members to our autumn meeting in Birmingham's splendidly renewed St Martin's-in-the-Bullring Centre in October 2004, so now I warmly welcome the circulation to all our members of this report in 2005. You can here read three first-hand, inspiring testimonies from colleagues who have found themselves reaching out to people all too often overlooked, undervalued, indeed scorned and mistreated, yet who show in these accounts how much they have – when decently valued – to contribute to the kinds of society God intends for us all.

The three story-tellers are very different, as are their accounts. "All theology has to be contextual", as my notes from Garnet Parris's address remind me. None of us stand exactly where the next person stands; we all need to be able to hear and read first-hand testimonies like these for what they say and mean, before ever we allow ourselves to bring our own sorts of evaluation to bear.

Yet, as Mark Woodruff brings out so well in his penetrating reflections, they all bring out various dimensions of what already in the New Testament stories from the life of Jesus we have learned to know as God's purposes:

a) the value of each single human being, however "marginal" or "outcast" in the eyes of "normal society";

b) the importance of listening to one another and discovering how we can work together even where our social placings, our instinctive emphases and our "natural inclinations" may seem to divide us; and

c) above all, the witness that what Jesus expects of us his followers, his continuing earthly body, is not to be totally concerned with ourselves as church, let alone with your or my particular heritage or taste or style of being Christian, so much as with God's purposes for the totality of the people in any situation, the whole of humanity in this inhabited earth, with the astonishing variety of the different contributions each and every one of us, and each and every group of us, can at best together contribute to the quality of life and spiritual growth of all.

So enjoy your reading – don't take it too quickly. Ponder what our four speakers said and meant, and reflect on what they would be saying in your situation, about your opportunities. And then send in to us your suggestions of what our Society might be working on and doing to encourage and enable many more to get involved in comparably productive and forward-pointing service and witness.

Ecumenism of the marginalised

The Revd Jean Mayland, Secretary for the Community of Women and Men in the Church and then Co-ordinating Secretary for Church Life at Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, 1995-2003

People are marginalised for a whole variety of issues including race, colour and poverty. Others are far more competent to speak of those issues than I am. I wish to speak of people who are marginalised for different reasons. I want to begin with five short stories or vignettes.

Story One
It is October 1999 and my secretary, Anne van Staveren, and I are in York for the launch of a book published by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI), entitled *The Courage to Tell*. It tells the stories of survivors of sexual abuse in their own words and is illustrated by pictures from a wall hanging made out of squares of material, which they have embroidered to illustrate their journey and their hope. First we attend a service in York Minister to celebrate ten years of Christian Survivors of Sexual Abuse (CSSA). Then we move over to the Choir School for the launch of the book.

At the launch we are overwhelmed by the pain and the anger of the survivors against the Church. In their pain they hang on to God – but the Church, they feel, has failed them totally and marginalised them completely. Clergy have failed to give adequate pastoral care and, what is even worse, some clergy have actually themselves abused those who have come to them for help.

Story Two
It is late autumn 2000 and I walk through brightly lit streets and past elegant hotels in London's Hyde Park area, searching for the church in the vestry of which I am to meet a group of gay Christians and talk with them about Churches Together in Britain and Ireland's position on the issue. Our position is, of course, that we do not have a position, although we agreed as staff that there should be no place for homophobia in the Church and we see our role as helping the Churches to handle their differences on this issue as lovingly as possible. When I find the church and the vestry, I meet with a band of sad, depressed and in some ways frightened men. As the evening goes on, they tell me of their pain, their love of God, their clinging on to the Church and yet their experience of being marginalised and rejected. One tells me that he had been a churchwarden, but after the Revd Tony Higton (when a member of the General Synod of the Church of England) had carried his private member's motion condemning homosexuals in General Synod, he had resigned from that office, feeling rejected. Other stories were similar - sincere Christian men who believed that their commitment to their partners was acceptable to God, but not acceptable to the Church. Somehow these men had held on to worship and the sacraments, as well as on to God. The sense of rejection and marginalisation, coupled with the faithfulness to the Church and the love of God, made me want to weep; but it also made me angry with the Church.

Story Three

It is Dublin, June 2001. Women from all over the world are gathered for the First International Conference of Women's Ordination World-wide (WOW). Although the origin of WOW was ecumenical, and this still remains the vision of WOW, at this moment in time it is mainly working towards the ordination of women in the Roman Catholic Tradition. There were women present from other Churches but the majority were Roman Catholic women. Again I was struck by the love of God, the loyalty to the Church combined with terrible pain and almost palpable fear. Sister Joan Chittister (one of the main speakers) and Sister Myra Poole, one of the main organisers, had been threatened with excommunication if they attended the Conference. Joan was backed by her Order and came and spoke passionately and prophetically. Myra was not supported by her Order and struggled painfully with the issue for weeks. We assured her of our prayers and our support whatever choice she made. The Conference began and Myra was not there. "She'll never live with herself," I thought; but I understood her terrible dilemma. On the second evening there was a panel of women from developing countries whose fees and travel money Myra had raised. As the evening ended, Myra walked in and the whole place went crazy. Myra wrote afterwards that by the time she left for Dublin, she was nearly paralysed with fear. We all wrote letters of support to Bishops and Cardinals and in the end the Vatican climbed down and a press release was issued by the Pope's press spokesman:

> "While the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life had thought the Sisters' participation 'inopportune' because of the possibility of outside manipulation, the Congregation never considered taking disciplinary measures."

In her book Myra Poole comments,

> "It is interesting to note that there was no formal communication of this decision to those Superiors who had been advised to put both Sisters under 'formal obedience'. All concerned only heard through a press release!"(1)

Story Four

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales have agreed areas of ministry which are open to women, but they have not provided training and finance. Roman Catholic women plan to run a training course in York with the help of a lecturer from that city. They plan to train for the ministries now open to them, but hope and pray that one day those ministries may include priesthood. Peter Stanford, former Editor of *The Times*, attended the first meeting as a speaker and wrote about it afterwards in *The Tablet*. He was struck by the atmosphere of fear and the threats, which a number of the women present had received. He commented on the Pope's ruling that the issue of women's ordination was not even to be discussed:

> "The effect that such a gagging order is having on the Church was all too visible and all too painful at York."(2)

He said later in the article,

> "In an open tolerant society that firmly believes men and women to be equal, the Church cannot try to silence its critics in this fashion without suffering consequence."(3)

Story Five

A trust fund was planned to pay for the training. It was to be called the Theresa of Lisieux Fund and the launch was planned for 1 October 2003, St Theresa of Lisieux Day. The place was Vaughan House, near to Westminster Cathedral. As we welcomed those arriving for the meeting, I was on the door. The atmosphere of fear was again palpable – fear that protests may be made that the fund was for purposes not countenanced by the Bishops. The fear was to some extent justified. The next year the annual meeting was banned from Vaughan House and was held in the American Church in London.

An ecumenism of Fear and Pain

These marginalised groups share an ecumenism of fear and pain together with a love of God and in most cases an amazing loyalty to the Church. They also share an ecumenism of neglect and misunderstanding – even from and by church leaders who should know better. At the Forum of Churches Together in England in July 2003, Cardinal Murphy O 'Connor and Dr Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, stood together in the platform. Cardinal Murphy O'Connor said that they had both suffered recently from bad publicity, he about sexual abuse in the Roman Catholic Church and the Archbishop about the nomination of a gay priest as a bishop in the Church of England. They both commiserated with one another. I was furious. I thought, "How dare you? You are both feeling sorry for one another. Have you no idea of the suffering of those who have been sexually abused, or the mental and spiritual anguish of gay people marginalised for their sexuality?"

A shared sense of being a problem.

Women and gay people always seem to be seen as a problem by Church leaders. They are a problem because they are seen to cause division within and between churches. Women priests have for years found themselves labelled as an "ecumenical problem", rather than as people with skills and possibilities. Gay priests also suffer because of people's opinions of them, while their pastoral gifts and sensitivities are ignored.

Be honest in our ecumenism

These people from the margins challenge us to be honest in our ecumenism. The official Roman Catholic Church castigates the Church of England for having women priests and gay priests and married clergy. All these are said to be serious obstacles to unity. Yet, if the truth were acknowledged, the Roman Catholic Church has many gay priests, many priests who long to be married, many priests who have partners and children, and many women who have an urgent vocation to the priesthood. These issues are issues for all the Churches and we should be absolutely honest about it.

The Anglican Communion is struggling with the issue of gay priests and bishops and the blessing of the unions of gay people. At least it is trying to be honest; and, on the day after the Windsor Report on the issues of homosexuality was published, *The Times* newspaper in a leader congratulated the Communion for its honesty:

> "The schism in the Church, between conservatives from Nigeria to Australia and liberals throughout the West, mirrors divisions in wider society. That the Church reflects such debates is ultimately a matter for celebration, not condemnation or despair." (4)

Within the Anglican Communion, some of the African Churches have threatened to break away. A grouping has been formed within the Church of England to press the need to hold together in its differences and be an inclusive church. Aptly enough, it is called "Inclusive Church". On the day of the launch of the Windsor Report, it issued the following statement:

> "The Archbishop of Nigeria , Peter Akinola, has said two people cannot walk together unless they are in agreement. Inclusive Church disagrees fundamentally. We are totally committed to celebrating the Anglican tradition of inclusion and diversity, which is the gift and grace of the church."(5)

There are deep differences on these issues in and between the Churches. Our ecumenical task is to find a way of walking together, while having these deep differences. The differences involve people – vulnerable people and hurt people - and they challenge us to make our ecumenism real.

Hold together traditional ecumenism and new issues from the margins

The traditional issues discussed in unity talks between the Churches are those of baptism, Eucharist and ministry, use of the Bible, Church tradition and liturgy, etc. There is, however, a whole new raft of issues being raised by Christians on the margins which need to be held together. These issues include those we have already mentioned: women, sexuality, diversity, sexual abuse, etc.

At the end of *The Ecumenical Decade – Churches in Solidarity with Women*, Dr Janet Crawford wrote an article in the special edition of the *Ecumenical Review*, in which she commented on the work of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches and the Women's Desk. She described them as working on parallel lines without ever meeting. She was well qualified to write, as she had served as a member of the Faith and Order Commission and had also worked for a time at the Women's Desk, preparing for the Sheffield Conference and analysing the results of the Study on the Community of Women and Men in the Church.

She pointed out that, at the inaugurating Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Amsterdam in 1948, women insisted that "the question of women's place in the Church was a theological and ecclesiological issue, that

it had to do with the very nature of the Church and their membership in the body of Christ."(6)

She demonstrated that the Faith and Order Commission had worked on a whole range of issues, but had consistently failed to face up to, or even to recognise, the impact of these matters on women and had never encouraged the inclusion of women's perspectives on ecclesiology .The concerns of women expressed during *The Ecumenical Decade – Churches in Solidarity with Women* had no impact upon the deliberations of Faith and Order. Meanwhile the Women's Desk had been following theological issues on a parallel track and had faced up to the issues of women throughout the world, including those of ordination.

Janet concluded:

> "When will women's ecclesiological questions and challenges be reflected with full seriousness in the ecclesiological studies of Faith and Order? Or will there continue to be two 'ecclesiological streams' within the ecumenical movement, a 'women's stream' and a 'Faith and Order stream'? Present indications are that Faith and Order is planning a consultation on *Ministry and Ordination in the Community of Women and Men in the Church* in 2002. This consultation, hoped for since the end of the Community study, called for since at least 1984, and first mooted in this form in 1989 - more than ten years ago! - may provide an opportunity at last for the two streams to flow together and to contribute together to the understanding of *koinonia* and, finally, to the unity and renewal of the Church."(7)

(We are still waiting for this consultation to be held. It is now 2005.)

The failure of the World Council of Churches to give unequivocal support to ordained women surfaced at the end of the Women's Gathering in Harare, which marked the close of *The Ecumenical Decade – Churches in Solidarity with Women* and took place immediately before the WCC Nairobi Assembly. On this occasion, failure was shown even by the Women's Desk. In the final statement of the gathering, there was a sentence which read:

> "We recognize that there are a number of ethical and theological issues, such as the ordination of women, abortion, divorce, human sexuality in all of its diversity, that have implications for participation and are difficult to address in the church community."(7)

Ordained women complained that they were tired of being considered an "ecumenical problem" and asked for this reference to be removed. It was not. I protested vigorously to Aruna Gnanadason, the staff member at the Women's Desk. She said that the sentence was there to please the Orthodox. I was very angry, especially as I knew that the Orthodox woman on the drafting group was herself personally in favour of the ordination of women and had only been putting forward the "party line". Aruna promised me that the Faith and Order Commission and the Women's Desk were going to arrange a

special consultation on the Ordination of Women. As indicated above, I am still waiting!

The unity of the Church and the renewal of Human Community

To be fair to the World Council of Churches, efforts have been made to hold together some of the traditional issues of ecumenical dialogue with newer issues that affect the lives of people today. In 1990 they published a report, entitled *Church & World - The Unity of the Church for the Renewal of Human Community*, which attempted to do just that. When the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland held a consultation on issues of unity at the Quaker Centre at Woodbrooke in October 2001, the Bishop of Bristol made reference to this report. He said,

> "The way ahead must ensure that these two facets of the World Council's agenda and the agenda of all the ecumenical instruments are kept together."

The Consultation, however, did not decide to take these issues forward. Instead they chose to have a new investigation of issues of Initiation. This is a very important issue, but so are those of women and gay people, etc.

In the new structure which is being proposed for CTBI, the issues of the marginalised are likely to have an even smaller place; and so it is vital that groups such as the Society for Ecumenical Studies raise the issues of Christian Unity for the Edges of Church and Society.

A new vision for the Church

Perhaps the most vital contribution, which those at the edge of the Church offer to us all, is a new vision of the Church. The Movement for the Ordination of Women in its campaigning for the ordination of women called for a new vision of the Church – one that was round and inclusive and enabling, instead of a hierarchical pyramid which crushed initiative. Along with this was to go inclusive language in worship and a recovery of the expression of the feminine within the being of God. Sadly, some of this vision and idealism has been lost and some women priests have turned out to be as authoritarian and traditional as their brothers. The positive aspect is the fulfilment that the vision of a new Church needs to be realised by men and women of like mind working together. The campaign for women bishops has revived the bnging for a different kind of Church and has caused the issues to be re-visited.

Roman Catholic women seeking ordination are not eager to be ordained into the Church as it is. They want a very different kind of Church. Myra Poole and Dorothea McEwan wrote as follows in their book, *Making All Things New*:

> "As the nature of the Church is not only institutional, but prophetic and mystical, the author's preferred model of Church is the more fluid concept of the mystical body of Christ. This model has the potential to incorporate the two primary models of Vatican II, that of the People of God and the Church as a Servant, dynamised by the scriptural vision of the Church." (9)

They conclude:

> "The examples in the preceding chapters of women training and being ordained, of women preaching and running priestless parishes, of musicians appointed as music ministers, have led to a much wider interpretation of ministry.
>
> Their work is about 'Making All Things New'. The welcome they get is the encouraging sign that beyond Church-as-Institution the Church-as-People-of-God is living and breathing."(10)

Commitments and Dreams

Two poems which have inspired and do inspire me are, first of all, the statement made at the end of the WCC Assembly at Harare and, secondly, a poem written by a priest in the Diocese of Sheffield used at the final worship service of MOW in Sheffield. He later died of AIDS and his poem was used as part of the worship in Durham Cathedral during the Conference which in Britain and Ireland marked the end of *The Ecumenical Decade – Churches in Solidarity with Women*.

Our Ecumenical Vision

Jesus Christ, who has called us to be one, is in our midst!
As Christians from every part of the world, we give thanks
that the triune God has drawn our churches closer together
in faith and life, witness and service.

We celebrate the 50th anniversary of the World Council of Churches –

'a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour
according to the Scriptures
and therefore seek to fulfil together their common calling
to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.'

Receiving the legacy of those who have gone before us:

We are drawn by the vision of a church
That will bring all people into communion with God and with one another,
Professing one baptism,
Celebrating one holy communion,
And acknowledging a common ministry.

We are challenged by the vision of a church
Which will express its unity by confessing the apostolic faith,
living in conciliar fellowship,
acting together in mutual accountability.

We are challenged by the vision of a church
That will reach out to everyone,
Sharing,
Caring,
Proclaiming the good news of God's redemption,
A sign of the kingdom and a servant of the world.

We are challenged by the vision of a church,
The people of God on the way together,
Confronting all divisions of race, gender, age or culture,
Striving to realise justice and peace,
Upholding the integrity of creation.

Affirming anew that our task is to embody, here and now,
The vision of what God's people are called to be:

We journey together as a people freed by God's forgiveness.
In the midst of the brokenness of the world,
we proclaim the good news of reconciliation, healing and justice in Christ.

We journey together as a people with resurrection faith.
In the midst of exclusion and despair,
We embrace, in joy and hope, the promise of life in all its fullness.

We journey together as a people of prayer.
In the midst of confusion and loss of identity,
we discern signs of God's purpose being fulfilled
and expect the coming of God's reign.

Therefore, this is our vision for the ecumenical movement:

We recommit ourselves in this 50th anniversary year to strengthen the World Council of Churches
as a truly ecumenical fellowship,
fulfilling the purposes for which it was founded –
to the glory of the triune God.

This is a wonderful commitment, which it pays to read over and over again. One feels that if only the Church in Britain had taken it to heart after the Assembly and had tried to pattern its life on it, the situation for the Churches in these islands might be very different today. Instead they have behaved in an opposite direction. They have weakened and undermined ecumenical co-operation, turning in on themselves and withdrawing funding from the ecumenical instruments. Instead of caring about the issues of those at the edge, they have condemned gay people who wish to live together in a sexual relationship, re-emphasized the fact that ordained women are an ecumenical

problem – albeit perhaps a provisional one - and failed to provide adequate pastoral care for those who have been sexually abused. The Churches have approached the government for exemption from human rights legislation in areas of employment and for this have been condemned by the Trade Unions. Some of us feel very ashamed of this.

When I was interviewed for the post of co-ordinating Secretary for Church Life, I quoted the Harare statement and said that I would seek to help the Churches to work together on seeking unity in baptism, eucharist and ministry, but also in reaching out in service to those at the edge. Some of those interviewing did not seem all that keen, but they did appoint me! It was, however, an enormous struggle to get the Churches to consider issues of sexual abuse and sexuality issues. The resistance came most strongly from the large hierarchical Churches and the decision to do work in this area was only initiated with help from the smaller Churches and groups, such as the Quakers. We did manage one consultation on issues of sexuality, albeit a very painful one. With great help from the Methodist Church, we also produced an excellent report on issues of the churches and sexual abuse, entitled *Time for Action*. We maintained links with ordained women and considered the theological issues bound up in violence against women – where the record of the Churches has not been good.

Why stay in the Church?

Sometimes people say, "Why stay in the Church when it is so oppressive and wrapped up in its own divisions and failing to reach out to the edges?" One answers, "Because with all its faults it carries the tradition, which over the centuries has fed and nurtured millions of people." This tradition is capable of renewal and there are people trying to renew the Church and trying to reach out. It is better to stay in and try to change the Church than to leave and go off in despair. We still need to be able to dream our dreams and, having dreamed, to get down to nitty-gritty action to help to make the dream a reality. Here is my dream, as it was Simon Bailey's, and I invite you to make it yours:

I'm dreaming about
a church of sensitivity and openness
a church of healing and welcome.

I'm dreaming about
a community of friends that celebrates differences and diversity and variety,
a community that is forgiving, cherishing, wide open.

I dream of
women and men who minister life and laughter and love;
of men and women who minister healing and harmony and hope;
of women and men who minister to each other and minister to the crying needs of a world that hurts.

I dream against the rough climb still to come,
against expectation

against pessimism and despair;

I dream, I dream of the clear panorama of the vision of light
Right at the top of the mountain.

Notes

1. Dorothea McEwan and Myra Poole, *Making All Things New*, Canterbury Press p. 78

2. Peter Stanford, *Viewpoint - stop this witch-hunt*, The Tablet 27 September 2003, p. 2

3. Ibid.

4. *Don't ask, don't tell*, Leader in The Times, Tuesday 19 October 2004

5. Web site of 'Inclusive Church', http://www.inclusivechurch.net

6. Janet Crawford, *Women and Ecclesiology - Two Ecumenical Streams*, The Ecumenical Review, January 2001, World Council of Churches

7. Ibid.

8. Letter published at the end of the Women's Gathering in Harare to mark the end of the Ecumenical Decade – Churches in Solidarity with Women, *Your story is my story, your story is our story*, April 1999, World Council of Churches, p.92

9. Dorothea McEwan and Myra Poole, op.cit. p. 173

10. Ibid. p. 179

Education and Ecumenism: the story of the Centre for Black Theology

The Revd Dr Garnet Parris, Director of the Centre for Black Theology, University of Birmingham

As we seek to relate to other members of the Ecumenical Family, we are often faced with the problem of an ecumenical epistemology. How do we know what we know about each other?

Very often some Pentecostals may believe what they have heard and have always held closely to their hearts; namely, that the decline of the large mainline churches is a result of *Ichabod.* That "the glory has departed" from these Churches is a generally well held view. Sometimes, the view from the other side is that these Pentecostals have very little substance, they are a happy-clappy people and they hardly have any idea of the glory of God that is conveyed by cathedrals and incense and outer garments, that are often very colourful, depending on the Church's seasons. The problem for us all is that our views of each other are handed down through so many myths and legends, and no one stops to appreciate the diversity of the faith we share and the diversity of the community to which we belong. In addition, most of our black leaders do not always have the time, because of their general busyness, to develop a keener knowledge of other churches' structures, nor do bishops and other church leaders in the various main-line denominations take time to understand what is often seen as a lack of structure in some evangelical organisations. The issue is: how do we move away from positions of sniping and suspicion? I am firmly of the opinion that our foxholes that members of the Ecumenical Family have made for themselves are dug so well and so deeply that we no longer see each other and, therefore, continue to erect false ideas of each other based on ignorance. So firstly, we must be committed to the task of understanding and getting to know the Ecumenical Family.

Personal Vision - Journey and Commitment

My own personal journey is an ecumenical journey. I was brought up as an Anglo-Catholic in Trinidad and Tobago, and can look back to being an acolyte and an officer of the Church Lads Brigade, as well as a choir member. I left the Church; and was brought back to it by an English Anglican girl, who surprised me by her desire to know Christ and to be committed to the faith. However, I later learnt, before we got married, that this was Low Anglicanism, an area of knowledge that I lacked before. I will always be grateful for realising that the presence of High Anglicans meant that there were Low Anglicans, a reality that I thought was an impossibility. Later we joined the Baptists in Trinidad, as she could not cope with my form of Anglicanism in Trinidad - and of course I became more and more involved with evangelical churches when I became President of the University Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship in Trinidad. It was still a shock when, two years later, I was studying at St. John's

College, Nottingham, under Michael Green and others, as it was a Damascus Road experience for me to accept that Anglicans had anything to teach me about being a Christian and, what's more, whether I would later be accepted in Trinidad, as someone who was trained in the Anglican Church to pastor an evangelical church. My own journey has helped in this process, and has been helped by so much of my work with the World Council of Churches and the Conference of European Churches, as the work of the Orthodox was unknown to me, except through Church History and the *filioque* clause. I continue this work and this growing into understanding.

The vision - an organisation committed to the Ecumenical Family

I speak of the now defunct Centre for Black and White Christian Partnership (CBWCP) that was committed to enabling Black Church leaders in their discussions with their ecumenical partners, to ensure that they were not just listeners but active participants and contributors to such discussions. This presented a problem as, in the early days, many of the black-led churches had leaders who worked full-time and could only work in their house fellowships/churches on Sundays or the occasional Bible Study. They were unlettered, but full of enthusiasm for the things of God, and certainly committed to the people of God. They loved the Scriptures and were literalists in their interpretation and application of the Word of God. The Centre saw that it needed to do two essential things in building this ecumenical work: firstly, to create a space where black and white students can work together theologically; and, secondly, to create a space simultaneously where people can "fellowship" together. The curriculum was important and an essential element was the module of church visiting, where over two years students would visit 20 churches and, after the service, meet with the leaders for 20-30 minutes, free to ask questions about their history, their worship, their doctrine *et al.* This module now forms part of an access to theology certificate course at the Centre for Black Theology at Birmingham University. It has been tweaked further, so that, at the end of two years, students can show that they understood various issues by handing in an extended essay which deals with some deeper aspect of reflection on ministry, the Gifts of the Spirit as exercised in some of the Churches visited, the role and ministry of women, views of Communion, baptism, etc. The result of all this is that after 26 years of this kind of teaching, the legacy of the first Centre, and its successor, can look back and see relationships that developed, and have continued, between people who, because of different ecclesiologies, would not have met normally. And students have had life changing experiences; but more of that later. We have also trained people in leadership in various black-led churches, some in lay ministry in main-line denominations and some now doing doctorates, or even having finished doctorates.

Our Commitment to Ecumenical Education

The Centre for Black Theology at the University of Birmingham has also taken this aspect of the old Centre's (CBWCP) work still further, following the merger of the Centre within the University. The course works

nationally and, over the last few years, internationally, as the students are from various churches around the world - from Zimbabwe, Zambia, South Africa, Jamaica and the UK. There are Baptists; Anglicans; some in para-church ministries; house churches; some in African Indigenous Churches; historic Black Churches (e.g. AME Zion); Roman Catholics and Pentecostals. All have developed good friendships and are no longer suspicious of each other. Whether we visit the Aladura Churches, where we have to take off our shoes, or the Christian Brethren, where the women cover their heads, respect is shown and we leave with some greater understanding as a result of that particular experience.

Our modules cover the following:

- Old Testament
- New Testament
- Christian Doctrine
- Church 'Portfolio'
- Study Skills
- Black and Asian Christian Studies
- Introduction to Christian Mission

All of these are looked at through the lens of the black experience, as we view theology as contextual. As a result of this course, which has so developed through the years that its early participants will hardly recognise it, very much has been achieved.

Some Achievements

In terms of academic achievement, many of our past students now have higher degrees that they have taken as a result of this course. They have not done first degrees, just simply moved on from the Certificate to the Master's programme. We currently have one student on the PhD course at Birmingham too. True to our initial purposes, most of our students may never have had an A level, nor any other form of certification. In what is now called *widening participation*, this is how it has always been in the past with our courses. We work with many of the churches in Birmingham, certainly with many of the black-led churches.

In terms of changing individuals, in Ghana, at this moment, a Baptist student who worked as a senior Maths and English secondary teacher has taken one year out and is teaching at a Presbyterian school and helping in the local Presbyterian church. She blames the course for opening up her mind to such possibilities, but she will return with a greater vision of the ecumenical family and one hopes that she would have left her students in Ghana with interesting views of Baptists. She had never been to Africa before, this black British young woman. Some of my students have changed their careers since doing the course. Every year, I have a Roman Catholic ex-student who reminds me that his home is available for any student who may need to spend overnight in Birmingham. His hospitality has meant a lot to students, as well as for him and his wife, as has the fellowship and friendship of many of our students.

In terms of changing ecumenical perspectives, I offer a recent anecdote. I took 16 students in October 2004 to the Coptic Orthodox Church in Hampton-in-Arden. For many of our students, the experience of a service in different languages, incense and movement and activity was overpowering. But I had given a briefing before; and now the proof of the pudding was certainly in the eating. At the end of the service, I was invited to the front to speak to the congregation about the course and to convey and receive messages of unity and fellowship. The priest invited us to sit with him and instead of the normal 15 minutes, my students, who were fed physically and spiritually, did not realise that 40 minutes had passed and they were enjoying all the explanations given by the priest of the Orthodox Church. As we left, one student said,

> "When I went into that Church, I said, 'Here we go again; what have we to learn here?' And now I am ashamed, because I was taught so much by this priest."

Others marvelled at the sense of worship and felt that, as Pentecostals, they had lost a sense of worship that had touched their lives that day. I suspect that for many of my students that day, many myths were put to flight and some new insights were gained about this ecumenical family.

Finally - The Dangers to This Enterprise

This is a project that has been highly sought after and highly subsidised; and 2006 sees our University able to charge substantially higher fees for its courses. I am not sure that, although viable, that this will be a good thing for my course, as the University is not committed to ecumenical outreach. Because of the student numbers, it could be seen as a cash cow, and therefore high fees could represent a major stumbling block for many who would like to attend and have the backing of their church. I still wish that I could have built a bursary fund, but I will continue my quest and by God's Grace we will build the Ecumenical Family of nations and races.

Peripheral Vision: Is it People or Unity that is at the Edge?

The Revd John O'Toole, Director of the Christian Education Centre, Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Southwark

Originally I had planned to come and simply attend this conference. I thought I could stay comfortably at the margins, but now find myself centre stage. This may give us a clue to how we can reach out to those on the margins of church and society. I am speaking now because the Mark (Woodruff, secretary of the Society) asked me to. So personal invitation is key. Jesus didn't ask for volunteers; he invited people.

A priest-colleague of mine, when applying to go to the seminary, had to see his bishop up north. The bishop asked him if he had a favourite Gospel and when Paul said, "Yes; Matthew's", the bishop replied, "Wrong; it should be John." Not very fair! Luke is my favourite Gospel: it tells us of the Prodigal Son, the Good Samaritan, and the Good Thief; or is it because it speaks of forgiveness or those on the margins? Also only Luke's Gospel has the story of Martha and Mary. Should we ask whether there are too many Marys and not enough Marthas in church today? We certainly need to ensure there is always balance. Otherwise, if one kind predominates, the other is pushed to one side. It is the same with women and men: both are called to equal discipleship. Luke applies the same thinking about balance, and the extremes that imbalance leads to, to the poor. His is the Gospel of Good News for the Poor. But who are the poor? Who are the people on the margins of the Church and society today? Mother Teresa spoke of the physical poverty of the East and the spiritual poverty of the West. From a Roman Catholic perspective the people "on the margins" of the Church are the "lapsed" (resting) Catholics; the divorced and remarried; youth. We don't seem to have the time, or the energy, to reach out to them - let alone the homeless, the mentally ill, refugees, the lonely, the unloved or whatever group we see as "the poor" in today's society. So have we ever been on the margin of the Church or society ourselves, or any experience from which we can convincingly speak of it?

Let us look, then, at the experience of parish work. The priest is surrounded for most of the time by the faithful flock and its needs and objectives. Ploughing one's own little furrow takes enough time and energy. In reality, it is ecumenism itself which is at the margins for most priests and parishes. How then can we speak of ecumenism among the denominations, when we have so little time and energy for offering unity in the Church for those who are "on the margins" of Church and society? How often do we even encounter those on the margins or, when we do, what is the quality of that encounter? Sister Ellen Flynn works at the Passage near Westminster Cathedral on behalf of the homeless. She speaks of the four legs of a chair to highlight the basic human needs of the people she meets:

1. Family and friends
2. Health

3. Income
4. A Place to live.

Those people who are broken in body, mind or spirit all have names. My uncle Tommy – went from being the smartest conductor and a happy marriage to string around a battered old brown case in a hostel for single homeless men in Arlington Road, Camden Town. Those on the margins all have names and stories. The Church, at its best, is ideally suited to meeting the person's need by offering access to its life, inclusion and support through the experience of its very unity.

So it is not all bad news. There are some notable exceptions. Fr Michael Hollings had a great ministry to those who were vulnerable and on the margins and wrote a book, called *Living Priesthood*. Allegedly, one of his curates threatened to write another book, called *Living with Living Priesthood*, to argue another side of the case – the sheer costliness of this vision of the Church. The September 2004 edition of *Pastoral Exchange Review* caught my eye. It mentions a retreat given by Fr Jock Dalrymple. He asked a question that could rightly be asked of the members of all the Christian denominations: "Can you think of some text from the teachings of Christ that is being totally ignored by the Church and Christians today?" He had in mind Luke 14:12-14:

> "When you give a lunch or a dinner, do not ask your friends, brothers, relations or rich neighbours, for fear they repay your courtesy by inviting you in return. No, when you have a party, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; that they cannot pay you back means that you are fortunate, because repayment will be made to you when the virtuous rise again."

This text seems to me to be absolutely central to Christians in search of the Church's visible unity and the obligation not to ignore those at the margins and to look to them as a priority.

Have any of you read, or heard of, a document called *On The Threshold*? (Roman Catholic Bishops' Conference 2000). (Do we need a new report, *On The Margins*?). *On the Threshold* is based on those who make the first move and approach us (the "institutional Church") for sacraments. It explores the tension between what people "want" and what we might perceive they "need". The document encourages us to be positive in recognising that God is already active in these people's lives and the address where they live – both physically and metaphorically. So it is about attitudes rather than programmes. It is thus important for us to bear in mind as we approach the margins and bring mainstream and margins together in an ecumenical spirit.

An earlier Roman Catholic document of 1998 is *Valuing Difference*. Its vision of is of including people with disabilities within the life and mission of the Church. Over the years, this particular pathway has been especially important to me, as I have weighed up the relation between unity and ecumenical work

(as a member of the English ARC (Anglican-Roman Catholic Committee) and serving those left at the margins of the Church's concerns).

I had arrived to be parish priest of St Andrew's, Thornton Heath, on September 1, 1999. It is a large and vibrant parish. And you might say there are enough people and enough going on without seeking out those "on the margins" as well. As I said before, ecumenism itself is at the margins for most priests and people. There are very small numbers at any ecumenical meetings, partly because they tend to be deadly dull. One sign of hope was the ministers' fraternal. There were many ministers new to the area, and they were keen to meet as a support group. Then on November 28, the sword-attack took place in our church while many people were there for Sunday morning Mass. Help was immediately forthcoming from the Salvation Army captain, who offered the use of their citadel for the Sunday evening Mass. This was practical ecumenism. People had been seriously injured and the whole of the Catholic community felt very distressed. Our fellow Christians did much to reassure us that we were not alone and that the one Church is a place of healing and redemption.

Then there was the Nativity Play on Christmas Eve. It was not a Disability Play, but an opportunity for people of all abilities to work together - physical and mental disabilities included. Many parishioners remarked, "It makes my Christmas." It was also the making of us as the Church. For it was not a question of doing things FOR people with disabilities, but of doing things WITH them and allowing the gifts of those with disabilities to do something for us.

Then in 2000 I was approached by the diocese via Cristina Gangemi (note once more the personal invitation) and asked if St Andrew's would be one of the pilot parishes to try out a new programme called *Counting Everyone In*, to build on our existing good practice. The programme was set up to raise awareness not only about toilets and ramps, but also about worship and sacramental preparation. We needed specialised help for both adults and children with severe learning disabilities. Cristina's experience here proved invaluable. Other gaps were highlighted. We realised that there are very few people with disabilities on most parish RCIA programmes (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults). The pilot of the programme in our parish generated a certain interest and (good news for me) lay people took on the audit and fundraising to take it forward, thus removing these from the already overburdened clergy and giving lay people a larger stake in the Church's mission to those at the margins. Parishioners gained confidence, and a mum, whose teenage son has Down's Syndrome, ended up giving a talk to the priests and people of another deanery about the benefits of the programme.

Then, in September 2004, I took over as Director of the Christian Education Centre, which these days focuses on the priority of adult religious education and formation. *Counting Everyone In* is part of this wider brief. It makes me think, seeing how effective the training and transformation of lay people and parishes has been, how far do Christian denominations co-operate in the area of adult religious formation, and how much more could they do so with

benefit? The *Counting Everyone In* Project has proved to be a very useful way in, to helping priests and people to look at the life of their parish generally in terms of welcome and inclusion. It is helping the archdiocese of Southwark to be more authentically ecumenical in respect of the people at its margins, and is surely something which can help all our partners in a similar way. And, in turn, united in this kind of outreach to include the poor, we would find ourselves that much more united in "practical ecumenism". Luke wrote not only the third Gospel but also the Acts of the Apostles, where his chief message is that the Risen Lord is the Lord of All Peoples. No one is excluded from the embrace of God's love and the Church is called to continue that embrace. We often fail (*ecclesia semper reformanda*) but it is ideal to strive for. St Luke is a good patron saint both for the marginalised and for the inclusive.

Re-learning Unity – Lessons from the Secular Voluntary Sector

The Revd Mark Woodruff, the Sainsbury Family Charitable Trusts

The Passing of Charity as Faith in Practice?

To look at modern Britain's voluntary sector is to survey the history of how the Christian Church has repeatedly steeled itself, to ensure that (in a Christian humanist sense) everyone is embraced in the Christendom, nobody is excluded from the providence and mercy of God. So grace - free gift, *charis*, charity, unconditional and unmerited - becomes the template for the cohesion of society, from the prosperity of the powerful to the relief of the poor.

But there are problems of perception. The term 'works of mercy', or indeed the very concept of 'charity' - ideas which could at one time unify our society - can sound irredemptibly paternalist in the context of a society, where the main framework is choice and the person in need is no longer a passive recipient of bounty from above, but a client engaging a suitable service provider.

In such a setting, at first sight, it looks as though the traditional idea of Christian philanthropy has been left high and dry, cut off from the world in which it is set and which it feels duty bound to serve. Two reasons suggest themselves.

First, people nowadays are not much in the mood to be grateful, or even responsive, to those who think they are in the position of helping those who are less fortunate than themselves. Conceiving of charitable motives in this way, let along expressing it, does not merely sound patronising or conceited; there are those who detect in this attitude a deliberate policy of maintaining people in dependency. For example, the USA is one of the most Christian and charitable places on earth. Yet, in one of the most beautiful cities in the world, you see a misplaced sense of rights keeping thousands of homeless people rendered immovable from out of unemployment and shelter-style accommodation because, in the first place, the right of the individual to live as a homeless person is accepted and therefore should not be challenged; and, in the second, the duty of the neighbour is to bear the cost of this. In San Francisco, a great liberal city, until May 2004 this thinking was enshrined in a system to keep the residents and the homeless bound in an almost feudal hierarchy of mutual obligation and rights, that has only now been dismantled because it simply can no longer be afforded, not because it failed to offer social development for the poor, or to advance equality. Even where no such system has been formally erected, attitudes can still show a society where the required role for the most vulnerable is not so much that of fellow agents in social development with the rich and powerful, as passive recipients of their *largesse*.

Coming at this from our perspective of twentieth century English social history, where great people consciously believed they were putting the highest Christian humanist principles into practice - the universal suffrage,

the social services, the cross-party consensus, the National Health Service, the state pension, sickness and unemployment benefits - it is strange to hear our expectations of how a humane society should work rejected as socialist. But I reckon that our understanding of society - however much it may nowadays have lost sight of this - is deeply rooted in 1500 years of the doctrine of the Incarnation, which sees all humanity without distinction united in the man Jesus with God the Son in Christ. By the same token, it is all humanity's suffering that is taken to the Cross of Christ; and it is all humanity, all creation, which is restored in the Resurrection - not just the lucky believer.

Even an alternative model of philanthropy, also Christian in origin, actually misses its specifically Christian point. It is a well-meaning assumption that charitable activity is our way of putting our faith into practice, or of exhibiting the integrity of that faith. Without getting into a technical discussion on grace or of the relation of faith to works, this assumption is only half the story: the full story is that to be a disciple is not for the benefit of the believer, but to serve the purposes of Christ. The reason this matters is that there are people who are suspicious of Christians who say that by working in the world, even with no strings attached, they are putting their faith into practice: it sounds like code for covert proselytism. Why should the Christian rely on, or be moved by, faith to do what needs to be done in any case? Why, in other words (and being forgetful of the term's modern historical origins), does humanism need to be Christian or faith-based at all? So it is important to bear in mind that Christian philanthropy or charity is not about my needs or inspiration to express my faith, its quality, or its quantity. Christians in the world may be a cities set on a hill, but what they cannot hide is not their *own* "lightfulness", their *own* identity (classically, the error of a Lucifer); and the purpose of the Christian's belief, presence, activity and business in the world is much more than acts of charity and works of mercy. It is the sanctification of the world and the unity of humanity and creation in Christ. "Father, may they be one, as you and I are one, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me." In other words the entire mission of Christ is the unity of God with all the people of the world.

Christians and their Charity – Not Faith, but Unity in Practice?

A Christianity which calls itself out of the world to go about its own business, however much it serves and relieves the needs of the wider community, has lost its way if it forgets that the reason for its vocation is nothing short of the "unity of all humanity in the charity and truth of Christ." This resounding and telling hope, a phrase of Paul Couturier's, cannot narrowly be about gradually adding to the number of the faithful until as many humans as possible become part of the Church, however much we hope everyone will embrace for themselves the truth that we have realised. It is surely a statement about the cosmic dimension of humanity now united in the person of Christ to the Eternal Creator, by which Incarnation, Atonement, Resurrection and Ascension have not just affected the lives and prospects of believers, but have become facts of life for all creation.

This, radically, means that a philanthropic dynamic that relies on demoting some humans to dependency in order to heighten the achievement of charity in others has been broken, just as much as the Passion of Christ overcame the power of death and established the basis for Resurrection. It nevertheless persists, just as we still cherish our hopes that our works will win God's favour, or that God will side with us because we have been good.

The true motivation for Christian service and mission would accordingly not be about the needs of the donor to assert his virtue, but the way in which works of love are signs, fruits and means of grace, that activity of God in the world, which has the power to draw all people to himself and, because above all this is made visible in the one Christ, to render all humanity one. Against this, a false philanthropy, in order to be sustainable, needs a supply of people who can be envisaged as victims of a social ill, or of misfortunes of their own authorship. Keeping people as recipients of bounty and relief, keeps *you* permanently in the meritorious position of benefactor. It gives you a regular opportunity to give sacrificially, and for those who are "justified by faith alone" you have a steady supply of works to exhibit that your faith bears fruit. But such a system of charity, where donor and beneficiary are not equal partners in a mutually binding contract, is no longer the name of the game. It is a system which actually renders the recipient the object of someone else's power, rather than someone in an authentically spiritual relationship where gift is exchanged.

In a contemporary context where people are no longer deferential to the patronage of the rich, or where the high motivation of people from religious positions is no longer above criticism, people at risk and in need no longer see themselves as cases to be assessed, as suppliants, or as other people's good causes. Indeed this is how they are also coming to be seen by charitable foundations and civil authorities. They have the needs and requirements of recipients, yes; they lack all the resources to cover them. But they increasingly find themselves as consumers of services, people with a say on what is done and how the money is spent and how the solutions are to be arrived at.

A telling observation, at an autumn 2004 conference to celebrate a residential home for ex-prisoners making the transition following release, pulled a government minister up short, when discussing whose say counted over the services provided at the home. In answer to the question, "Who do we provide services for?", the minister replied that it was the government which commissioned and paid for them. A hundred voluntary sector service providers, called back "No!", because the point had been forgotten that it is the people who use the services that are the true clients. The only effective measurement of their usefulness is after all in the extent to which they utilise them. So that is the first reason why Christian engagement with those at the margins may have lost some contact.

Christianity Distrusted as the *par excellence* Model for Humanism

A second reason why traditional ideas of Christian philanthropy may have been neutralised in society is that the attitudes to it have been coloured by a shift in the popular usage and therefore the meaning of the term "Christian". As a result, the venerable Christian tradition of disinterested service to the world, regardless of creed or potential for conversion, but solely out of obedience to the example of Christ, is nowadays highly suspect in secular society. Unfortunately, those who

have confused mission with conversion have given our non-Christian neighbours a picture of a religion which is exclusive, judgmental, in which help comes with strings attached and where services to the wider community are geared to an expectation that the recipient will accept and practice Christianity as a condition. This is stronger than the suspicion of covert proselytism mentioned earlier: this is analysis from a liberal secularist religious standpoint of what Christians are about. When I was a child, "Christian" applied to the whole of society, and to the very best in it; and to be "not very Christian" meant you were unforgiving, uncharitable, intolerant or dishonest. Now the word "Christian" means someone who is distinguished over and against the rest of society for being self-righteous, anti-inclusive, narrow-minded and having ulterior motives, using charity and education as a front for making converts. We have cited so often the words now realigned to cast doubt on our ethics compared with the values of current society which, ironically gave them birth: "By their fruits shall you know them."

Is the Secular World Un-imagining the Role of Faith in Humanity's Advancement?

Both these reasons - the need to re-focus the Christian charitable motive from manifestation of faith to exemplification of the unity of humanity in Christ, and a certain fall in confidence in the goodness of Christian intentions - reflect serious distortions of the truth, of course; and by no means all people present them. But the prestige of Christian charitability is now such that good, self-giving, ordinary people in our society either do not wish to be associated with it, or – whatever government says about the role of faith communities – voluntary and civil policy makers, administrators and budget holders see it as a disadvantage. So how is it that the faith which has shaped our entire civilisation, even down to shaping much of our contemporary political and ethical values and institutions, no longer captures the imagination of some of the best and most active contributors to the good of our society? More to the point, how is it that the Christian vision of the unity of humanity and creation, visible *par excellence* in the life and love of the Church, is actually rejected as a dangerous template, harmful to the rights and aspirations of people at greatest risk in our world? For those who follow the teacher of the parable of the Good Samaritan, this is a stinging rejection. For those whose master came to seek out and to save the lost, it is a disaster that we find ourselves frustrated in following his example unless we do so with such discretion that the face of Christ could never be detected.

Well, I think the position is not, after all, so dire. Partly the task before Christians is advocacy, partly the need to learn a new language. And behind the language there is a need to internalise a fresh discovery of the teaching of Christ.

Over the last year, the Association of Charitable Foundations, which is the membership society for grant-making trusts, has been looking at these issues. A number of foundations recognised that what we call faith-based groups have a long tradition of offering help and solidarity within the local community, as well as at a national level, simply because the need is there. These foundations either recognise the faith motivation behind a practical project and respect how Christians, or Sikhs, or whatever, put their faith into practice, and then help them because of the wider benefit. Or else, they look directly at the

potential effects of the work and reckon that the background motivation is not relevant, it being the work that counts.

On the other hand, there are those who think that funding the work of a religious group necessarily goes to supporting the practice of its core faith, and, even if it does not, could appear to endorse one particular religious viewpoint. I have some sympathy with this second position, as some church groups do themselves no favours. I once had an application from a prominent south London church, keen to do much needed work among disaffected young black youths. Much of the programme was exemplary, except that the project leaders had set, as the cornerstone of their intervention, attendance at a Sunday service as a condition. In other words, it was not to be an act of charity, with the church reaching out to assist and support those at risk, but a means of hitting vulnerable people with heavy handed religious persuasion, again using them as objects in the deployment of power - spiritual as well as financial. To this day it offends me to recall it - for two reasons. First, it so terribly devalued the currency of Christian love in action, through which the left hand should not know what the right is doing - no Christian can attach strings to the unconditional gift of God in Christ. Secondly, it was completely unworthy of a church to go to a largely secular grant-maker, hiding behind the guise of working for youth inclusion, in order to fund evangelisation to which it would not devote its own resources. Relaying this back to the church concerned was not a comfortable truth for them, and I am sure I was much prayed for in a way I would not find pleasing. The frustrating thing was that the work could have been good - dynamic, committed, effective. It could so easily have fulfilled the objectives which that church actually shared with people in the community, who had no particular religious perspective or motivation but who likewise wanted something done. But the introduction of a religious test for accessing help looks to the secular world as sectarian and divisive. And, more truly to the eyes of our faith, it is the instinct of the Levite who does not risk ritual impurity to help those who are damaged, or of the protective ring of disciples that the Lord has to break down in order to insist, “Let the children come to me - do not try to stop them.”

The other side to this, of course, is that there is a degree of anti-Christian secular liberalism at work, which reads into British society a wish list of church and state separation, foreign to our history and constitution. To those of this persuasion, church people should have no organised public role other than the exercise of their religion - they should have no collective involvement in education, social provision, community development or public debate. This leads to the odd situation where you find, say, a children's holiday club organised by a local football team eligible for a grant, yet exactly the same piece of work organised by a church ruled out as a matter of course. I find this discriminatory. It reminds me of the absurdity of the French republic which proclaims liberty - a modern liberal democracy where you can wear what you want, except a Muslim woman's headscarf, a Jewish boy's skullcap, or a Cross on a necklace, and where a priest in clerical dress or a nun in a veil can still be publicly abused. Liberty and equality ought to cut both ways.

Again, I know of one very deserving church which owns a parish hall widely used by local people for community purposes. It won substantial rebuilding funds from the National Lottery, but because the building was also used for church purposes one funder withheld a grant lest it appear to favour one faith over another. The whole rebuilding scheme collapsed because of the resulting shortfall. Supposedly exemplary equality theory achieved nothing, even for itself, as it was the local people who lost out, because Christians were discriminated against, rather than assisted to serve their locality as they had promised without regard to race, age, creed, sex, orientation or ability - classic equal opportunities criteria.

How can social inclusion exclude on the basis of faith?

At the heart of this disastrous assessment was the belief that religion in general and Christianity in particular in the modern world is the reflection and even the agent of what divides the world, generating and perpetuating exclusion and thus delivering inequality. It is as though what Plato could describe as the noble lie - religion disbelieved but retained for its civilising purposes and political benefits - is shorn of its nobility and then reviled for its supposed falsehood.

Yet by excluding religious groups, and Christianity in particular, the secular doctrines of inclusion and valuing diversity actually defeat their own objectives. In whole areas of our cities, the only way of overcoming the exclusion encountered by some very isolated communities (in our own day we could think of Orthodox Jewish women in Hackney, or Somalis in Greenwich or Tutsi refugees in Brent; in the past it might have been Irish people in Kilburn, or Flemish weavers in the East End) is by engaging with them through their religious communities.

A remarkable example of this is Interlink, a charity run by women in Hackney for serving the Chareidi community. It was set up because it found immense barriers for women and children in strict Jewish communities accessing public services. Hackney Council was running on a classic secularist model, refusing to look at people in terms of their spiritual identity and regarding this community (as well as others) as an ethnic minority *tout court*. All its tactics to overcome the social exclusion of some very poor but self-contained groups were thus wasted efforts. Interlink found that the Jewish experience was paralleled in the Somali and other Muslim communities; it was also present among groups of people in need belonging to Christian communities who did not even merit the status of ethnic minority and were thus completely ignored by the council. Interlink forged a network across the faith groups to address the failure of the council to reach the margins in its borough. Still there was resistance to funding 'exclusive' groups, until it was at last conceded that their very exclusiveness was the only route to enabling inclusion in a wider society, which was actually in their terms even more exclusive. I am not sure that Hackney has grasped this even now, but if the social liberal concept of valuing diversity - surely derived from St Paul's analogy of the body of the Church - is to be taken seriously, it has to ensure that faith communities be allowed to develop their full potential.

The Churches Invest Capital in Society, Not the Other Way Round

Current government thinking sees only too well that, not least in the inner cities, it is the faith communities (by which, of course, in the main it means the Christian Churches) which have long term presence, command rooted support and involvement, and effect the strongest forms of cohesion. As providers of services, they are the only ones whose professionals and leaders reside in the area where they operate. Government knows that, if it is to resist forces which put some people beyond society - the mentally ill, the non-readers, the young offender, the disaffected, the young - then Churches and other faith groups are ready made agents for providing support and for altering people's aspirations for the better. A project of which I am particularly admiring is the community chaplaincy being set up through the HMYOI Feltham ecumenical chaplaincy team. When I last visited I saw a boy who had five times tried to commit suicide and at the age of 15 was on constant watch. He had tried a sixth time and the attempt had left him permanently brain damaged. For this child it was too late, but for others to whom the chaplains minister there is now a mechanism that puts young men after release directly in contact with churches near where they live, which will be equipped to welcome him with the support he needs in the critical days and months after release as the challenge of resettlement bites in. Many of these children are from South and West London's black African and Caribbean communities which are monstrously over-represented in the criminal justice system.

Government also knows the cost if the churches and their members were not actively present in wider society. The notable social researchers, Lemos & Crane, recently undertook a survey of the support networks relied on by those who are mentally unwell. Over a quarter throughout the country were church goers, or had close links with a worshipping community. Another side of the coin is that, particularly in the South West, churches are huge suppliers of volunteers. Many charities, not least those which appear to be secular bodies, are actually sustained by help from people who also go to church – volunteers, staff, key workers, trustees and managers. It is not as though the charities themselves are formally part of the Church's work and outreach; it is that, in the context of these specialist charities, individual members of the Church conduct their own service in the world, in accordance, you might say, with the purposes of Christ.

The Voluntary Sector Historically Informed by the Christian Tradition of Alms and Relief

Perhaps it is worth at this point revisiting the point with which I began, namely that to look at modern Britain's voluntary sector is to survey the history of how the Christian Church has repeatedly steeled itself, to ensure that (in a Christian humanist sense) everyone is embraced in the Christendom, nobody is excluded from the providence and mercy of God.

When monasteries were dissolved, so too went schools, hospitals, refuges for the mentally ill and the elderly. Many of these services needed to be refounded with newly endowed institutions. Indeed a few generations after the new landed gentry

received the proceeds of the carve up of Church resources, some were feeling that they should put some of the proceeds back. Not far from here, at Temple Balsall, is the old Templar Church, which came into the hands of the Leveson family. Lady Katherine Leveson set up a foundation which to this day unites an almshouse for the elderly, the village parish community and the junior school, very much a resurrection of the old work undertaken by the monastic knights before her. In more recent times, one can consider the many household name charities established by remarkable people - a high number from Independent church traditions - to bring about reform. It was the awakening Christian conscience in this land that led to the abolition of slavery nearly 200 years ago; Christians, too, who reformed hospitals, childcare and nursing.

The main area of social development with which I am concerned is prison and homelessness. In the mid 19th century, a great prison was built where the Tate Britain Gallery now stands. Arranged with wings like the spokes of a wheel, it was intended to abolish the desperate health conditions in the old communal prisons, to give prisoners work and purpose, exercise and nutritious food. It was also designed to end the association of prisoners with others who could have a bad influence on them. Prisoners for the first time were kept in silence and permanent isolation from each other. The wings arranged like the spokes of a wheel on a hub meant that prisoners were also kept under constant surveillance. The intention was very high minded. It exalted the level of care and supervision. It also was meant to ensure that the prisoner had endless time to reflect. Each was given a Bible; chaplains were appointed to preach to them daily; and the whole exercise was intended to produce inner conversion and outward reformation of life. But only a few humans can volunteer for so Carthusian a way of life, let alone have it enforced upon them. It was not only a complete waste of money, having not the slightest effect on crime, it also severely damaged people who were already so wrecked that they had resorted to crime as the last stage in their journey of alienation from normal society. It was the shocking rise in suicide rates at Millbank prison that led Parliament to close this great exercise in Christian concern for people at the margins down. But, fortunately, the experiment did lead to other kinds of prisons, much more humane. Many of these, like Pentonville or Winchester, are still in use, though the severe overcrowding has made them ripe for reform in their turn.

And it is in work with prisoners, their families and to some extent their victims, that the Church through her people has a remarkable influence at the most acute edges of society. There are over 75,000 people currently in prison, the vast majority of them under 25. The peak age for offending is 18 for men. 9 out of 10 male prisoners and street homeless young people exhibit signs that indicate a degree of reading disability. 20% actually have dyslexia, twice the level in society outside. 70% of prisoners are in prison because of drug-related crime connected to their own use of substances; 70% of prisoners have at least two forms of significant mental health problem.

In other words, in our society we force down a route that leads to penal custody the young people whose failure at school we caused because we did not realise they had reading difficulties. In our society we lock up in

prison our mentally ill. In our society we lock away those who have fallen victim to the malign influence of drugs. As a result, the levels of self-harm (more accurately a form of tension release than a cry for help) and suicide are rising. And for those 75,000 people inside at any one time, actually 105,000 people are committed each year to prison. This means that at least 250,000 partners, children, parents and siblings are directly affected by prison and, alongside the convicted, also serve a hidden sentence.

Most people, when confronted with the facts, realise that prison is completely inappropriate for addressing the needs of damaged, vulnerable people. Only a small number are truly dangerous, and of course it is appropriate that they are deprived of their liberty in proportion to their offence. For the rest, prison makes prisoners worse or, at the least, fails to rehabilitate and resettle them in the time available for a positive, law-abiding life after release. Yet in our society prison remains one of the few tools that exist to meet educational, training, and rehabilitation needs. The work of Prison Fellowship, Time for Families, Alpha in Prisons and the Kainos Community are very effective in helping prisoners through behavioural problems and in learning parenting and relationship skills. One witnesses stories of real change in the lives of people who have been affected by the pastoral care of the Church in prison. Furthermore, a prisoner who has the support and love of his family at hand is six times less likely to re-offend.

PACT (once known as the Roman Catholic-led Bourne Trust) has been pioneering support from befrienders and volunteers in prison visitor centres, and in sustaining links between prisoner and family when contact is in danger of breaking down. Again, the work of Prison Fellowship has been developing programmes of restorative justice - based on Gospel models of forgiveness and reparation, rather than on retribution and retaliation, with significant impacts on re-offending rates. Similarly, Kainos Community invites prisoners to live on a Christian wing in the prison. The support and challenge of a thoroughly Christian environment in prison is radical, and one which the prison service found initially very threatening. Once it realised this was not an exercise in proselytism, it found that re-offending rates after release were typically being cut from 76% to under 35% (after two years). No secular programme was producing anything like this result.

If the Churches can advocate the positive benefits of the Christian faith to the cohesion of human community as a whole, I think we have firm evidence that (at least in some areas) Christianity, ecumenical in its nature, has a unifying effect on society. Thus, if only the world could envisage it, when going beyond the simply internal dimension of what it is to be the Church, it is Christians who are quietly countering the forces that divide humanity and ensuring that those at greatest risk are not being left out. Before the world our life may be hid with Christ in God; but before God the life of the world in all its wholeness must plainly be in us, as we are in Christ.

Re-learning Christianity's own Lessons from the Secular World
I think there is a need for the Churches to give far greater attention and recognition to the active presence and role of individual Christians in the voluntary sector of this country. For years, the winner of the Teacher of the Year award has happened to be a practising Christian more often than not. Time and again, I find that some of the most impressive people working to transform society in pathways outside the official services – trustees, staff, directors, volunteers, mentors, fundraisers - happen to be church goers. This is no coincidence, in view of what we have been discussing this afternoon. But it is a pity that such a significant lay apostolate goes largely unremarked and unsupported from inside the Churches themselves. The voluntary sector has been one of the United Kingdom's great success stories for changing society for the better in the last ten to fifteen years. I am sure that few of the many Christian people who happen to be driving in it see it deliberately as part of the Church's work, but most would warm to a sense of vocation in it and see it as somehow putting their discipleship of Christ into practice. And yet without the Church, as it were, savouring this salt of the earth and recognising its inherent Christian spirit and service – without trying to colonise, direct or organise it, of course, but being content to let it blow where it lists – it could lose heart, with confidence in its value as an expression of Christian faith in action faltering and thus losing its saltness.

There are growing concerns at the declining presence of Christians in vocational employment, from nursing and medicine, to social work and probation, to teaching and work with young people. Not even a hundred years ago, even fifty, the Christians with a sense of their vocation naturally gravitated to such work, many even seeking ordination, the religious life or lay worker posts in order to pursue it more directly. It has been suspected recently that young Christians were nowadays motivated like their peers by contemporary expectations of material success, earnings and career achievement. In teaching, for instance, it was sensed that existing, and even long serving, teachers were pulling out in disillusionment for a variety of reasons, which in turn discouraged new entrants. Among Christians, this meant that seasoned teachers were withdrawing their influence from both classroom and staff room, and younger people looking either elsewhere, or themselves pulling out and opting instead for schools work as purely Christian lay workers, not as professional teachers.

For the last five years or so, the Jerusalem Trust has been looking at this situation carefully. It found that actually a higher proportion among new graduates interested in going into teaching came from a church background. But it also found existing Christian teachers felt completely unsupported in their churches and undervalued as the key agents of the work of the Kingdom they had felt themselves to be when their sense of vocation had taken them into teaching in the first place. The Trust in response developed a programme, *Transforming Lives*, to work out how to alter the present direction, which is otherwise on course for a *de facto* disengagement of the churches from mainstream education other than in their own denominational schools.

It soon realised that, with a renewed vision of vocation and teaching urgently needed on the ground, directing things from denominational HQs would not result in a great difference in the experience of individual teachers and congregations. Equally it was clear that what was likely to evoke people's sense of loyalty, inspiration and motivation would tend to come from a range of networks, bodies, agencies and personal contacts within but also across and beyond the bounds of their churches. Some of them would be secular networks from which a Christian teacher derived support or motivation, regardless of faith considerations. Some of these secular networks might or might nor acknowledge or welcome the identified presence of Christians in their midst, but it is interesting that even without affirming a Christian teacher's faith, such contacts are more relied on for support than the body of Christians. Then again, there is the array of Christian agencies and charities, orders and societies, which do not reflect the hierarchy or structure of a Church denomination, or the congregation or parish to which someone belongs, but which nourish them socially, spiritually and in discipleship. Some call these chains of association the "para-church".

The Parachurch

The aim of *Transforming Lives* over the next few years, as a national programme to promote the Christian vocation to teaching, will be somehow to harness the various distinct Churches, the Christian voluntary sector, the "para-church" organisations (incidentally, the Association of Christian Teachers has pioneered school, FE and university career fairs, bringing together nearly 60 associations promoting a particular profession or trade in terms of Christian vocation) , and the various secular networks together, in support of individual teachers in the present generation and the next. It will require a determined change to the culture of Churches, at the top and at local level, to re-envisage Christians in teaching as vital organs of the Church living and working in wider society, not as short-cut missionaries, or as fodder for running Sunday School or the Children's Liturgy, but as apostles of the Kingdom by their very presence and existence in the world's mainstream. As I said, time and again the Teacher of the Year happens to be a church person: the significance of this is a huge lesson for the Church. For the Church to remain engaged in society it must find some way of sanctifying the lives, faith and discipleship of those who are called to be its leaven.

The *Transforming Lives* process has shown all too clearly that, seeing itself solely as a visible institution in the world, the Church is not reaching where it needs to have an impact, nor those within it needs to affect. Neither, in the British context at least, can any one denomination go it alone. From the outset it was recognised that a concerted effort would be needed. The "para-church" networks, both those formally organised as charities and associations, and those which are personal or more informal, tend to be ecumenical (at least up to a point), or non-aligned with a particular denomination. In just the same way as do many other charities or informal networks throughout the community, they represent Christian people

"defaulting" to solidarity with each other for a given purpose or set of purposes, not so much on the model of the organised Church structures (and adherence or loyalty to these is not at issue) but on the model of the ordinary voluntary sector. To me it is extraordinary that a vital part of contemporary UK society, which once came into being as a result of putting Christianity into practice, but is now largely unconscious of religious origin or ethos, is proving to be a workable model for Christians as circumstances demand they find a way to come together and collaborate to serve their purpose of being Christ in and for the world. In other words, the so-called secular voluntary sector is reflecting back to the Church an image of how the Spirit of Christ is at work in humanity and of how the Church which embodies Christ in the world be more revealing of its Unity, if its discipleship and apostolate are to be authentic and effective. In still further words, "Father, may they all be one, just as you are in me and I in you, so that the world may believe it was you that sent me."

The Ecumenical Principle in the Voluntary Sector?

Three years ago, the Ashden Trust commissioned research on homeless people's "networks". By this was meant their families, friends, peer groups, key-workers, the services they accessed, the homelessness agencies they were involved with and the other agencies they related to, such as public authorities, drug and alcohol rehabilitation and treatment, mental health workers, training programmes and social or leisure groups. Conducted at Thames Reach Bondway, Alone in London and St Basil's, the research studied a wide range of men, women and young people, and those working with them, in London and Birmingham, culminating in the report from Lemos & Crane, *Dreams Deferred*.

What it uncovered was a received wisdom, that people's friends and families were seen as part of the homelessness problem, which just did not hold. It found that restoring links with family and friends contributed towards the process which breaks the cycle of street homelessness and brings more secure integration into regular society. It found, too, that for decades there had been a habit of addressing homeless people's situations mainly just in terms of their need for housing and shelter. In other words, so-called 'clients' were not being treated as clients at all: they were being identified with 'needs' in terms of services this or that agency had to offer – not as people with their own view of their requirements or, indeed, their aspirations. Traditionally this has tilted services for people at risk in the direction either of ideological perceptions about root causes, or a well-intentioned but nevertheless slightly paternalist model in which can fully feel we are more blessed to give than to receive. This latter is all very well as far as it goes – and in its day pioneered what later became modern nursing, the school system, most of the voluntary sector and statutory social services. But without development it relies on leaving the 'needy' continually as passive recipients and so there can be a co-dependency between those whose need is for an outlet for their sense of being generous and 'those who are less fortunate than ourselves'. It is a misreading of 'Blessed are the poor'. I do not think that that in saying 'the poor you have with you always', Jesus meant for this cycle to be perpetual.

The justice he embodies contrasts the elevation of the humble and meek with bringing down the more powerful a peg or two. In other words and contemporary jargon, the poor and at risk need confidence and capacity building; the rest of us need some self-awareness and humility - and to remember that, like the rich who were sent empty away, what we think and have to offer can be utterly beside the point.

Of course, all the best charities involved with homeless people offer a rich range of services, like training, health, or dependency programmes, either to help move people up from the street and its attendant problems, or to provide the same access to normal social life and a purposeful time as the rest of us take for granted. Even so, it was apparent that agencies have been unfamiliar with working with each other in order to widen the range of interventions available. And lying behind this were staff not equipped to take the whole of a user's life, needs and desires into account in the search for putting them in touch with the right solutions.

Dreams Deferred developed a toolkit, based on the experience of workers delighted that the research "gave them permission" to get to know a "client" not as a case, but as an individual with a personality, interests, associations, a history, hopes and a future. This has empowered workers in many charities to put together tailor-made solutions for individuals, suited not to the one-size-fits-all mentality of a top-down service provider, bringing in a variety of partners and other charities according to identified wishes and potential for next steps. For the charities, too, it has meant not operating so much in isolation, ploughing their own furrows, but developing tactical partnerships, aware of each other's distinctive programmes in different fields, complementing one another, avoiding duplication, and arranging between them comprehensive support for a wide range of need, as well as highly specific support to the person seen as a whole. As Gerard Lemos remarks, "Why should someone who has no fixed abode be prevented from joining the Ramblers' Association?" What sense would it be to exclude them from regular life, when you want to include them in the community?

When one considers this kind of movement, terms spring to mind like "united but not absorbed", "not doing apart what we can do together", "unity, not uniformity" and so on. An important part of the secular voluntary sector, through the very process of working with people most at risk, has put them all into practice. If my thesis - that Christian charitability is essentially about revealing the dignity of the human person and the unity of humanity and the cohesion of human society in Christ - holds true, the evidence for it is at the margins of society, where the cutting edge is genuinely ecumenical and has our community's voluntary agencies showing the Churches not only how it can be done, but where and why it is both indispensable and inevitable. Unless the Church learns from the sector which it originally inspired, as Father John O'Toole reminded us, it is the Church which is at the margins of society for most people. Nor are we planning to be ecumenical at the margins for *their* benefit: unless we go

there to find and forge our unity, we will fail in *our* purpose to be Christ in and for the world.

Charity Mergers – Christian Reunion

Of course, there are hundreds of local ecumenical partnerships and national, regional or international programmes which are notable in enacting the Church's unity through common cause in service at the world's sharp edges. What is called of us is not to leave these instances of union at the margins, but to cause them to transform the centre, the mainstream. Again, the voluntary sector in this country, developing in pace with people most at risk, mirrors onto the Christian community its hints of what the Church must do to be true to itself. One thinks not only of the strategic partnerships between charities working with the homeless, but alliances that have formalised into organic unity. London Connection's network of support for people on the streets found a complementary partner in the famous crypt services offered at St Martin in the Fields. Now they are the highly regarded Connection at St Martin's. Alone in London's family mediation and teenager runaway support work has gone in with Circle 33 Housing, thereby strengthening its basis, but also extending its services through a major network of housing associations across South East England. Again, the Dyslexia Institute has merged with the Hornsby Institute, ensuring that DI as a respected nationwide agency can fully benefit from the training programmes pioneered by Hornsby. This may not be 'Reunion all round', but it indicates movement that is instinctively unitive, because, for those at the margins, this is absolutely vital.

We have compared what is happening in the world, the "para-church", the margins and the parts of society where the institutional Church does not easily reach. We have surveyed various patterns for Christian charity and reviewed our Christian purpose in areas where the presence of Christ in his people is crucial. So the Church, for the sake of the Kingdom of God, and his righteousness, cannot afford to maintain itself in its separations. The lesson from secular society is clear and must be re-learned from those to whom the Church originally taught it. Be rich and diverse, but as you are complementary, give maximum effect to it by being one. "Do not stop them; let them come to me." For "I, when I am lifted up, will draw all people to me."

The Society for Ecumenical Studies is committed to the search for Christian Unity through dialogue, study, and mutual understanding.

The Society welcomes members from all different churches and backgrounds, clergy and lay, who are interested to learn more from one another, not least in understanding and practising the prayer of Jesus to his Father on the night before he died 'that they all may be one, that the world may believe.....'

- to foster and advance the Christian Ecumenical Movement in all its dimensions
- to bring together practical and theological experience in social, international and interfaith fields
- to provide opportunities for theological reflection and exploration with regard to the divisions between Christian churches
- to arrange occasions within which persons of different generations, races and theological convictions can meet to exchange information, debate and work together on significant study projects

The Society is always glad to explore the possibilities of working in collaboration with study institutes and groups of churches at local, national and international levels.

The Society organizes seminars, day conferences and other events that explore current issues and challenges within the Christian Ecumenical Movement to provide appropriate historical, spiritual and theological awareness, as well as to stimulate imaginative and creative responses to today's challenges.

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