

The Society for Ecumenical Studies

MINUTES

of the Annual General Meeting on Tuesday 21 June 2005 at Vaughan House, Francis Street, London SW1P 1QJ

Present: Angela Achenbach, Patrick Achenbach, John Bradley, David Carter, James Cassidy, Martin Conway, Fidelis Daly, Frank Davis, Judith Lampard (Items 10-11), Maximos Lavriotes, Paul McPartlan, Judith Maizel-Long (Items 10-11), Hilary Martin, Greta Morgan, Philip Morgan, Alan Rainer, Stuart Wilson (Items 10-11), Mark Woodruff

1. Opening Prayer

The Presiding Officer, Martin Conway, opened the meeting with prayer.

2. Election to the Chair for the Annual General Meeting

Martin Conway was elected to chair the Annual General Meeting.

3. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Hubert Allen, Phoebe Allen, Paul Avis, Brian Beck, John Bradbury, Teresa Burke, Nicholas Latham, Tim Macquiban, Ian McIntosh, Jean Mayland, Richard Mortimer, Mark Nash, Donald Norwood, John O'Toole, Gareth Powell, Ruth Reardon, Mary Tanner.

4. Minutes of the AGM held on 23 February 2004

These were signed as a correct record.

5. Executive Committee's Annual Report

The Annual Report was approved.

6. Financial Statement and Accounts for 2004

The Accounts for the year ended 31 January 2005 were approved. The Treasurer tabled a Statement that as of 21 June 2005 the balance at the Society's bank stood at £2,644-12.

7. Membership and Subscriptions

Membership rates for 2005 were approved as follows:

£10 Individual Members (£5 for retired, students, religious & unwaged)
£12 Married couples (£6 retired, students and unwaged)

8. Election of Executive Committee for 2005-2006

- a) Martin Conway was elected Presiding Officer, Mark Woodruff Secretary and Hilary Martin Treasurer.
- b) Paul McPartlan and Gareth Powell were thanked for their many years of service as members of the committee. Paul McPartlan was congratulated on his appointment to the Catholic University of America. John Bradley, David Carter, Maximos Lavriotes, and Alan Rainer were elected to the Committee.

9. Future Plans

- a) *Breaking Down Dividing Walls in the 21st Century, A week for seeking new ecumenical inspiration on Iona, September 10-16 2005.* Martin Conway's report on the preparations was noted.

- b) *450th Anniversary of Bishop Lancelot Andrewes*. Noted. An autumn 2005 or spring 2006 event at Pusey House is planned in association with ESBVM, to be led by Marianne Dorman. This could explore Andrewes' role in early inter-Christian dialogue as a context for reflecting on ARCIC's latest agreed statement on Mary.
- c) *Ecumenical Conference at Regents Park College, Oxford – Autumn 2005*. An event on theological truth, education and ecumenical involvement in the setting of university learning is in preparation, involving Paul Fiddes, Martin Conway, and Angus Ritchie. Paul Avis and Adrian Thatcher are also to be notified and invited. It had been decided not to focus on Baptism after all in view of the recent thorough coverage which will lead to the joint report of the Church of England and the Baptist Union (expected shortly) and CTBI's planned conference in September 2006 on Christian Initiation in both baptising and non-baptising traditions.
- d) *Christianity and the Environment*. The Society still plans work in this field in support of Operation Noah, led by CTBI and the Christian Ecology Link, and possibly in connection with the Rural Theology Association.
- e) John Bradley reported that 2010 will be the Centenary of the 1910 Edinburgh Missionary Conference. Events leading up to the anniversary have already begun under the title *Towards 2010*. The first papers, by Kosuke Koyama and Andrew Walls, were given in April 2002 and can be found on the centenary website, www.towards2010.org.uk. It is likely the main commemorative event will take place in the southern hemisphere.
- f) Alan Rainer gave notice of the forthcoming completion of his doctoral thesis on the Unity of Faith through Scripture, which had been inspired by Dom Bede Griffiths. As the major religions are both handed down and effective through their adherents' familiarity with their respective Scriptures, it was noted that Christianity's current weakness in Western society was attributable to the absence of adequate study of philosophy and theology in schools. Yet where it is attempted, such courses at sixth form prove engaging and highly popular. It was suggested the Society could have a role in promoting Christian theological study (as distinct from RE) at school sixth form level.

10. **Anglican-Methodist Covenant for Unity**

A paper was read by David Carter, focusing on the spirituality of the covenant relationship as the first principle of ecumenical dialogues and discussions to effect Unity. In the following discussion, it was noted from experience that dialogue within churches was essential first, if dialogue for external unity was not to fail.

It was also noted that a spiritual approach to unity was moving black majority churches to discard their rejection of the older church traditions in favour of a position of respect for their historic position, embedded influence and the different kind of vigour in their church life; likewise the older churches were learning lessons from newer and more vibrant forms of Christianity and looking not to be threatened by them, but to see them as ecumenical partners, thanks to a 'spirituality', rather than an organisational, conception of unity.

David's paper will be circulated to members subsequently.

11. Westminster Diocese's Renewal Programme and its Ecumenical Faith-Sharing Communities

Stuart Wilson and Mark Woodruff outlined the new enthusiasm for Christian Unity among Catholics of the Diocese of Westminster, arising out of the *At Your Word, Lord* programme of spiritual and discipleship renewal at the heart of which are parish core communities of prayer, Bible study and faith sharing.

During the course of AYWL's third year, the communities had been encouraged to embrace friends in other church traditions to enrich the process of faith sharing, not as a means to enlist people to Roman Catholicism, but to promote the exchange the spiritual riches between Christians in the hope of closer collaboration in mission, the service of the world, the worship of God and the movement to Unity. A significant element in promoting this had been the Handbook (previously circulated among members) and the training sessions for parish communities which had stressed that, in terms of both Catholic teaching and history, ecumenism was not an 'add on' to Church life and faith, but of the very nature of Catholicism and its experience of itself as *communio*.

It was noted how the instinct of the lay people for unity with other Christians had always in the past become enmeshed with the structures, which had had the effect of halting it. Yet AYWL had shown the official, ecumenical structures in all churches, originally conceived to facilitate greater Unity, were proving to be impediments, possibly because some were moribund, others had a vested interest in perpetuating the separations to justify their continued existence as 'border crossings', and others because they were deliberately seeking to ensure that Unity could only be taken forward in the interest of one tradition over and against another.

Yet AYWL's emphasis had been on making the regulations, and all the many possibilities they allow, work positively, with hundreds of examples for simple activities - social, educational, cultural, spiritual and liturgical - by which churches can maximise and make visible the Unity the Church already has and which its members, despite their separations, can already enjoy.