

The Society for Ecumenical Studies

Called To Be One: A Briefing Paper for the Theology And Unity Group, Churches Together in England

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Introduction

The Called To Be One Process was initiated by CTE in 1993 in the wake of the general restructuring of the ecumenical instruments which followed the *Not Strangers But Pilgrims* Process of the late 1980's and the resultant series of commitments from the Swanwick Conference of 1987 at the end of it.

The aim of the CTBO process was to help identify the next steps for the ecumenical process in England. All the member churches were asked to respond to a series of questions relating to their understanding of the nature and function of the Church and their understanding of its visible unity. It was hoped this would help the member churches to appreciate the ecclesiological stances of their partners and to identify points of convergence in their understanding as well as points of remaining difficulty.

A working group mandated by the churches and chaired by Martin Reardon, then general Secretary of CTE, met over a period of almost three years to consider the responses provided by the churches alongside material on forms of ecumenical co-operation and local views on unity provided by the intermediate county bodies. After due consideration of all the material before it, the working group produced its report in 1996, which was subsequently republished on the initiative of Martin's successor as General Secretary, Bill Snelson, in 2002. The report analysed the material

received, adding to it a series of suggestions and challenges addressed to particular churches and groups of churches designed to enable their closer rapprochement and the addressing of some of their concerns about the ecclesiology and practice of particular partners. An example would be the challenge to the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches to consider ways in which they might more actively involve the laity in the governance and decision making processes of their churches.

A particularly important challenge addressed to all the churches was to examine the bonds of communion that held them together. It was clear that the working group hoped that such a process would encourage all member churches both to understand their own ecclesiologies better and to be aware of the way in which the ecclesiologies of others operated. A final chapter *The Way Forward Together* made valuable suggestions for the future. Finally, five appendices were added to the report, giving summaries of five key questions on the ecumenical agenda, viz. Church and Mission, Christian Initiation and Church Membership, Eucharistic Communion, Ordained Ministry and Authority and Decision making.

A key feature of the report was the consideration of practical local English experience of ecumenism alongside consideration of theological developments in the understanding of unity at the global level, particularly through the work and statements of the successive WCC assemblies. This showed a desire to relate the essentially practical approach of England to the best theological insights coming to us from the world Church.

Members of the working party were subsequently involved in many local meetings, explaining the approach and methodology of the report. It was then brought to an extended CTE Forum in 1997. The latter made a whole series of suggestions which were then added on to the second edition of the report in 2002.

The whole process involved a very wide range of churches including the Roman Catholic Church and the black led churches, which had only become formally associated with the new ecumenical instruments in 1990. There was also increased participation from the Orthodox, signifying their growing presence on the ecumenical scene. In the rapidly changing church and world scene from the late 1990's, there

was a tendency to lose sight of the report and a failure to build adequately on it as a rich resource for further progress. In this paper, I hope to pinpoint some of the material in it which is ripe for further work and possible reception. I particularly wish to look at thorny issues that have often been the product of past misunderstanding and difficulties. First, I will look at some of the more general issues that form the heart of the report and then at particular issues raised in the final Chapter *The Way Forward* and in the appendices and the 1997 Forum.

The understanding of the Church, Local and Universal

Attention was drawn to the variety of ways in which the term 'church' could be used, i.e. to refer to particular congregations, to denominations, to nationally organised churches, to the Church Universal. It was accepted that, across the spectrum of churches, the term *church* was used to describe both the most local level and the Church Universal. Having said that, there were important differences in understanding the relationship between the two and the necessity or otherwise of the particular bonds to express and safeguard the relationship. The important point was made that the general understanding of the concept of 'local church' by the faithful did not always coincide with that of the theologians-thus, most Roman Catholics and Anglicans would understand their local parish community as local church, whereas for Catholic theology, and increasingly for Anglican theologians, the local church was the diocese. In the ecclesiology of the independent tradition there is no confusion. For theologians and faithful alike, the local church is the gathered community with the right and duty of ordering all its affairs under the guidance of Christ as the invisible head of very local Church as well as of the Church Universal.

It is important to stress that *all* churches, including those in the independent tradition, stress the importance of each local church relating to the wider Church. Since our CTBO work, the Baptist scholar, Paul Fiddes, has produced his valuable work showing how important links of mutual support were to the early English Baptists¹. One might add that most churches in the independent tradition have usually established forms of association, partly to provide services e.g. in ministerial training

¹ *Tracks and Traces. Baptist identity in Church and Theology*, Paternoster Press, 2003. In his masterful interweaving of history and theology, Paul Fiddes is the Congar of the English ecclesiological world.

which can scarcely be organised by individual congregations. They also feel the need for global associations such as the Baptist World Alliance, even though they are careful to state that they have no compelling authority over the participating churches.

Churches in the episcopal and connexional traditions feel the need for ministries and/or councils that exercise a degree of episcopate at a level above the local in the interests of mission and of safeguarding communion and of apostolicity of life and doctrine. They differ however as to how far they see these particular structures as mandated and unalterable. Thus, Methodists believe profoundly in the Connexional Principle but recognise that it can be embodied in varying ways e.g. with an episcopal order as in much of world Methodism or without one as currently in British Methodism. Roman Catholics, Anglicans and Orthodox all agree on the normativity of the historic episcopate but Roman Catholics alone stress the petrine ministry as the essential lynchpin of the college of bishops. Anglicans particularly stress the importance of lay and presbyteral councils that work alongside the bishop at diocesan level and the House of Bishops in the Synod at the national level. Anglicans, Orthodox and Methodists work within the framework of effectively autonomous national churches though the Orthodox continue to stress the final authority of universal councils of the episcopate even though they have not met since the end of the eighth century.

The pattern of relationships between the church at the local level, however defined, and higher levels up to that of the Universal Church is complex- hence the challenge in *The Way Forward* to all churches to examine their bonds of communion and in particular the way in which the relationship between the local church and the Universal Church is understood. One might add that it is important to examine the empirical working of each system as well as the theology that is held to undergird it. In the very late 1990's, the British Methodist Church had a working party on episcopate and episcopacy of which I was a member. When we examined the way in which oversight is actually exercised in contemporary Methodism, we discovered a complexity that cannot just be read off from a consideration of our traditional ecclesiology or from the pages of *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church*.

In the light of the above, it is clear it is clear that it would be helpful to have a conversation about the levels to which our member churches consider it necessary to have formal instruments of episcopate and those at which they are content to use informal structures which lack any constraining power but which may nevertheless, as in the case for example of the Baptist Union and the Baptist World Alliance, have significance as *fora* for mutual consultation and as instruments reinforcing a global sense of denominational identity. It is clear that some Anglicans would wish to give more formalised role in episcopate to the Anglican Communion. Probably most British Methodists would leave the World Methodist Council as a purely consultative body. Both churches might be challenged as to why they restrict formal oversight to national rather than global bodies.

It is, I believe, particularly important to have a conversation with churches of the independent tradition about the values that they attribute to their congregational understanding of local church and to ask whether churches with episcopal or connexional structures should give more autonomy to their particular congregations. On the other hand, churches in the independent tradition might be challenged as to whether in the interests of the mission and unity of the wider Church the complete autonomy of the gathered congregation sometimes needs to be set aside, a point that influenced those Baptists that entered the church of North India and accepted the episcopate. At the same time, the fears of independent churches concerning the power of hierarchies or wider councils need to be addressed. Perhaps here, the experience of churches within their tradition that have entered into wider unions, such as the united Indian churches or the URC, involving the oversight of bishops and/or regional councils, might be useful in the dialogue. Even in interwar ecumenical conversations, it was sometimes said that the shape of the coming Great Church would involve episcopal, presbyteral and congregational elements and this should be re-examined in the light of the considerable progress since made in the ecclesiology of communion.

An issue that is also involved in this discussion is the relationship between concepts of church which lay stress on the gathering of individuals into a church as contrasted to their incorporation into the ongoing stream of the Universal Church. For Baptists

and Congregationalists, covenanting to form a new church was always a solemn process whereas for those in the episcopal traditions, new local churches in the sense of new dioceses are always formed in association with an initiative taken with the concurrence of a section of the universal episcopal college. They stress the importance of the sacramental incorporation of new believers, and the ministers who are to serve them, into the *existing* body of the Universal Church. There are, of course, important and, I would argue, complementary truths enshrined within both traditions. No one in the episcopal traditions would wish to deny the value of a congregation all of whose members take solemnly their duty to be active and responsible members of it. Equally, those in the independent tradition realise that their congregation shares the same Lord and mission with millions of others, past and present.

Even in the most centrally and hierarchically organised church, the Roman Catholic Church, emphasis has been placed in recent years upon the principle of subsidiarity i.e. that authority should, wherever possible be exercised at the local level and subject to as little interference from above as possible. In this context, one remembers the teaching of Paul that the function of ministry is the 'equipping of the saints' and the teaching of Pope Gregory I that his honour was the strength of his brethren in the episcopate. One could argue that a key test of any system of episcopate at a level above the most local is its capacity to enable mature and responsible decision making at the most local level.

It is also worth mentioning the challenge addressed to the episcopal churches to consider the size of their dioceses in terms of the pastoral relationship of the bishop and his people. How meaningful, in practice, can the concept of diocese as local church be to the faithful when the diocese is so large that the bishop may have difficulty in relating sufficiently to all his clergy let alone local lay leaders? Local church, however defined, surely needs to be local enough for the faithful to identify it as such. Traditionally, Methodist circuits have been of such a size, as also were many dioceses in the early Church.

Finally, a word about the challenge of a petrine or universal ministry. Almost all churches, even in the independent tradition, see the value of a focussing pastoral

ministry. Episcopal and connexional churches identify the need for such ministries at regional and national level, though in the latter they do not necessarily involve ordination to a higher degree of ministry. Two churches, the Roman Catholic with the Pope and the Salvation Army with the General, have a universally focussing ministry. In recent biblical scholarship, stress has been placed on the prominent role of Peter as initiator and leader in the early Church. The German Methodist scholar, Bishop Walter Klaiber, has said that there is a petrine ministry witnessed to in the NT even though he doubts whether the Roman Catholic Church could adjust the exercise of the papacy to conform to it². Could the Roman Catholic Church in future prove him wrong?

On a purely personal note, my eyes were opened at a recent meeting where Rowan William was speaking to the possible value of a universal focussing and reconciling ministry. The Archbishop was addressing the movement *Affirming Catholicism* on the subject of Catholics and Evangelicals, two sides of the same coin. In a masterly way, he showed the importance of being simultaneously biblical Christians wrestling with and exploring the Scriptures and being catholic Christians wrestling with the tradition of the whole Church, particularly from quarters that we might find less attractive as well as from those with whom we felt we had most in common. I felt I had been in the presence of a man with a unique talent for taking account of the best in every source and drawing it into a new synthesis which did justice to every rich insight. I felt that he could certainly exercise a petrine ministry in the spirit of boldness that is attributed to Peter in the early chapters of Acts. Archbishop Rowan's positive and reconciling style could influence that ecumenical re-visioning of the petrine ministry which was implicit in John Paul II's appeal in *Ut Unum Sint*.

Unity and Visible Unity

Chapters 3 and 4 deal with these concepts. We are reminded that for some e.g. the Society of Friends, the unity of the Church is seen as spiritual and invisible, that, for others, there are certain demands in terms of allegiance to Scripture and particular doctrines, for yet others, particularly those in the episcopal tradition, the acceptance

² See Wainwright, G. *Is the Reformation Over? Catholics and Protestants at the turn of the Millennia*, Marquette UP, 2000, p.36.

of certain forms of ministry. It is worth remembering that some evangelical churches that have traditionally been suspicious of the Ecumenical Movement do stress the call to visible unity though they assume prior agreement on doctrine as they understand it. At the end of chapter 3, the increased emphasis upon the *Church as Communion* is mentioned as a key unifying ecclesiological concept, though it has to be said that the understanding of the bonds of communion, particularly in terms of ordained ministries, necessary to maintain it continues to vary greatly. Despite the already considerable literature on the subject, more work is needed particularly on the relationship of the ordained ministers to the entire people of God.

Chapter 6 deals with the understanding of the visible unity of the Church as it developed through the statements of successive Assemblies of the World Council of Churches from 1961 onwards. This was followed by a summary of the various models of Unity which have been envisaged. The first mentioned, Uniformity, may now be discounted, as no church envisages it, the Roman Catholic bishops of England and Wales having stated that they no longer hold an ecclesiology of unconditional return; rather that they envisage a common going forward together into a new future. The paradigm of *united but not absorbed*, first used in the context of the unofficial Malines Conversations of the early 1920's between Roman Catholics and Anglicans, helped to give rise to several later related concepts such as communion of communions and, most importantly, unity in reconciled diversity.

Effectively, the two key concepts canvassed since the 1940's have been organic unity and, later, unity in reconciled diversity. The first, espoused in the Indian united churches and more recently in the formation of the URC, has a christological basis in the paschal mystery. Participating churches signified their wish to die to denominationalism and to receive new life within a church which transcended the denominational particularity both of themselves and their partner churches in the new unity. This did not mean the renunciation of all the devotional riches of the previous traditions- the CSI for example, adopted a form of the Methodist Covenant service-but it did mean facing up to a new style that lacked the cosy familiarity of the old.

Certain key ecumenical statesmen, such as Lesslie Newbigin, regarded this paschal approach as being of the essence, costly grace in Bonhoefferian terms and cast a critical eye upon the later enthusiasm for unity in reconciled diversity, a concept that first appeared in the Lutheran context in the 1970's. At first sight, however, the concept seemed very attractive to many of us. It would allow full co-operation between participating churches, including full mutual ministerial recognition and eucharistic hospitality whilst allowing the survival of all that was positive and enriching within the existing denominational traditions, from which others might subsequently learn. Moreover, it might help allay the anxieties of smaller denominations, fearful that they and their valid insights would just be swallowed up within a wider organic unity.

The CTBO Process itself, showed some of the limitations of the idea or, at the very least, of its imperfect reception. I remember that in the Methodist response to the enquiries sent out by the Working Party, it was stated that there were three views within Methodism of what the concept might entail. The weakest one was that it merely endorsed an amiable status quo in which nothing need really change and e.g. that we would continue to be nicer to the Anglicans than in the past and hope that they would reciprocate. Others recognised that it had to involve more than that. Without some real accountability and a real willingness to be challenged by the witness of others, one could not really talk of the diversity being reconciled.

I am still personally convinced that there is mileage in the concept, though it needs refining and tightening up. I would also accept that there are situations in which organic unity may still be more appropriate, particularly at a local level where it makes sense to have only one congregation. Equally, at a slightly wider level, it may make sense for an isolated church of one denomination to join the structure of another as was the case with a small URC church in the area that became part of the Methodist Guildford Circuit.

My own redefinition of unity in reconciled diversity would include the words 'enriching and legitimate' to point to two key fundamentals, that such a unity must be a true unity in communion and mutual learning from each other and the fact that it must compass the key points of the trinitarian faith whilst allowing for diversity of

theological expression and exploration of them. In the conversation that would be necessary to lead to this, each church should explore how it copes with its own internal diversity and the extent to which it manages to learn from and be enriched by it.

A key problem facing any union in reconciled diversity, in which separate denominational conciliar structures are maintained, will be that of mutual accountability both in the positive function of encouraging mutual learning and cooperation in mission and in the negative one of dealing with any new tensions that may arise. Already this is a problem in the Porvoo Communion where the Church of England is unhappy with the Church of Sweden's proposed acceptance of homosexual marriage. How is such accountability to be assured within a form of unity in reconciled diversity?

The \$64,000 question is of course that of the degree of *acceptable* diversity in doctrine. It is clear that, in general, the Anglican and Protestant churches tolerate wider degrees of diversity than do the Roman Catholic and various Orthodox churches. In particular, they are prepared to accept a degree of diversity on matters which Roman Catholics would certainly see as being lower in the hierarchy of truths but which it would nevertheless still rank as part of the deposit of faith. Since CTBO, we have had the development, thanks to the Roman Catholic-Lutheran Joint Declaration on Justification, of the concept of *differentiated consensus* on key matters of doctrine. The concept has also been used in Roman Catholic agreements with the Oriental Orthodox on Christology. Perhaps the British Catholic- Methodist *Mary, Sign of Grace, Faith and Holiness* points towards the possibility of a differentiated consensus on the place of the Mother of Jesus in Christian devotion and thought³. Harding Meyer has also suggested the possibility of a *differentiated participation* in the historic episcopate something which, in fact, has long characterised varying Anglican theologies of the episcopate⁴.

³ The pamphlet was written by Fr. (now Bishop) Michael Evans in the light of our discussions in the Committee. Michael might not fully accept the thesis that I mention here about the possibility of a differentiated consensus on Marian theology.

⁴ I am thinking of the traditional debate in the early twentieth century between those Anglicans who regarded episcopacy as being of the *esse* of the Church and thus as absolutely indispensable and those who saw it as of the *bene esse*, desirable and profitable but not mandatory.

Particularly helpful in such matters was Cardinal Willebrands' sermon of 1970 in which he talked of the existence within the one Church of various *typoi* of Christian life, each one characterised by a particular style of theologising, liturgy, spirituality and discipline/canon law. Mutual understanding of how each church might be able to recognise the same essential faith incarnated as it were in such different *typoi* might be very helpful.

Chapter 6 concludes with a series of nine points entitled *Towards a Common Vision* on which it feels that the churches, with a few noted exceptions, are broadly agreed. They include statements on ministry, authority and baptism and Eucharist on which division has been especially acute. At a later point, I will add some further suggestions on these.

The Way Forward Together

In many ways this is the most important chapter in CTBO, posing some acute challenges to all the churches. First, they are challenged to renew their understanding and living out of what it means to be the local, national and universal church. Interestingly, this recommendation coincided with a Baptist Union report entitled *Core Values* which set out five key kingdom values with suggestions as to how they might be implemented at these three levels. The second challenge was to examine the bonds that held churches 'individually and severally together' and to seek their strengthening. Finally, and arguably most important of all, came the challenge to renew their understanding and practice of evangelisation in the context of caring for the world.

The churches were also called upon to explain their respective histories to each other. This is particularly important in view of the way in which so often there is a failure to understand the basis of each other's inherited hurts. My own eyes were opened to this recently when I attended a *colloque*, involving people from a URC province and a *consistoire* of the French Reformed Church and learnt not simply that the French Protestants had been persecuted by Catholics almost up to the Revolution, a fact of which I was already aware, but that also many of the present members of that church are the direct physical descendents of the martyrs and thus

that the memory is more live two hundred plus years later than one might have expected.

There are, of course, plenty of resentments still alive within the English churches. Some are based on very real memories of discrimination. Some are also based on misconceptions that are now out of date. Over the last fifty years, since the beginning of the original Anglican-Methodist conversations of the 50s and early sixties, the Methodist Recorder has been known to publish letters from people deploring the prelacy of bishops and senior Anglican clerics. Such letters certainly appeared while the proposed Anglican-Methodist Covenant was still under consideration in both churches and bore little sign of any awareness that, by and large, the behaviour of senior Anglican clerics has changed since the more authoritarian days of the 50's when, indeed, the behaviour of certain senior ministers in Methodism could also be rather dictatorial. If it is important for churches to share their histories and their hurts with others, it is also just as important for them to understand how others have changed and are changing. Para 7.4 is clear 'The churches need to talk to one another about these things, to enter into one another's feelings, to confess to one another what was wrong in their past and is hurtful in the present'. One may add that it is important for *churches* to do what we have always maintained *individual* Christians should do i.e. forgive freely and take the initiative in reconciliation.

Para 7.5 calls for re-traditioning, the understanding that each communion is constantly re-receiving the Gospel and seeking to communicate it in changed conditions which include the changed inter-church relationships of the ecumenical era. We need to be aware both of how our own communions are changing and how others are also doing so.

Related to these points are two made subsequently by the 1997 Forum which specified that we should seek to 'integrate denominational heritage with the discovery of our common Christian identity' and 'find a common way of telling the past'. Churches need to identify what it is that God was calling them to do at the time of their original separation from other parts of the Church and how far this involved a witness that must be maintained in the interests of the integrity of the Gospel. Lastly,

they need to consider whether their gifts might not be better diffused for the edification of the whole Church in a context of wider unity. To take a concrete example from my own tradition, Methodism needs to explain to others the missionary imperative that drove the Wesleys and, in the particular circumstances of the late eighteenth century led to separation from the Church of England. It needs to remember that for 1700 years, the Church Universal was able to function without Methodism and to ask itself, whether in the changed circumstances of the early twenty first century, it is necessary for there any longer to be a separate Methodist Church rather than a universal Church in which there is a sharing of the treasures of Methodism with others.

Perhaps the most helpful comment on the record of schism in the second millennium was made by the late John Paul II when he stated in *Ut Unum Sint* that ‘in spite of fragmentation, which is an evil from which we need to be healed, there has resulted a kind of rich bestowal of grace which is meant to embellish the koinonia’⁵. More recently, Archbishop Rowan made a similar point when, in answer to a question put to him, he stated that though God’s original plan and final intention was a single fully united Church, he had nevertheless in his good providence bestowed riches of grace upon the separated Christian communities.

Such divine generosity should not make us complacent with the status quo. Rather it should stimulate us to seek that unity in which there can be the fullest possible sharing of all the gifts bestowed on each. As Paul would say, we should not continue in sin in order that grace may abound!

The goodness of the God who does not cease to bestow good gifts on deserving and undeserving alike is no reason for failing to respond to His call to unity which is an integral part of his fatherly plan to ‘unite all things in Christ.

Para 7.6 issues a highly important challenge to the churches to engage in ecclesiological dialogue, ‘to be prepared to be enriched by one another’s understandings and ways of being church’. Para 7.7 calls upon churches in the

⁵ *Ut Unum Sint*, 1995, para 85.

independent tradition which have traditional fears of episcopacy and hierarchy to discuss with the Church of England its self-understanding and practice as being 'synodically governed and episcopally led'. It calls upon them also to consider whether 'wider councils of the Church which express the truly apostolic and catholic character of the Christian community should not be seen as part of God's purpose'. It is also important for all other churches to respond to the late Pope John Paul II's request to assist him in exploring his role in serving the unity of the worldwide church.

I would argue that the fundamental underlying challenge to each and every Christian communion and tradition is to examine the relationship between the ordained ministry and the entire body of the laity as it is understood and lived out within its own communion. This should then be related to the progress made over recent decades in the understanding of Church as *koinonia*, drawing particularly on the insights of such scholars as Nicholas Lash, with its stress in the entire Church as a learning community and Jean Tillard in his account of the relationship between bishop and local church in the patristic era. The relationship between Scriptural basis, ongoing worshipping life, *sensus fidelium* and teaching office needs to be clarified.

Paras 7.12 and 13 deal with the exchange of gifts, a concept that has become more prominent alongside the closely related one of spiritual ecumenism in the years since the publication of CTBO. A key statement of the 1987 Nottingham Conference in the *Not Strangers But Pilgrims* Process needs re-receiving: 'Unity comes alive as we learn to live in one another's traditions'. There can be no substitute for this experiential appropriation which often leads to those surprising discoveries that, according to John Paul II, the Holy Spirit makes possible.

According to the late J-M. Tillard, the Pauline element in the dual apostolic authority of the Church of Rome attests the unforeseeable action of God⁶. One wonders how far this understanding might be linked to the thinking of the late Pope John Paul II with his stress on the need to recognise the work of the Spirit 'who is at work in our

⁶ J-M Tillard, *L'Eglise Locale*, Paris, Cerf, 1995, p.540.

brethren' and with the development of a way in which the Roman Catholic Church, which has always recognised the independently developed apostolicity of the ancient eastern churches, might also recognise the apostolic content of such movements within the Protestant world as the Wesleyan Revival and from that starting point lay the foundations for a reassessment of the churchly reality of the main Protestant communions.

The issues in the appendices

The five appendices all deal with crucial elements in the ecumenical equation-viz, the understanding of mission, initiation and membership, eucharistic communion, ordained ministry and, finally, one of the most difficult of all, authority and decision making. On each there are important challenges in terms of the churches' really exploring the positions held by each other.

We should note that since CTBO there have been important developments in some of these fields. In initiation, which raises particular problems across the believer Baptist paedo-baptist divide, there has been the excellent work of the Anglican-Baptist dialogue in England, already discussed in CTUG and particularly helped by Paul Fiddes' suggestions concerning the nature of a continuum that can be observed alike in Anglican and Baptist patterns of initiation and Christian nurture. This work deserves to be more widely shared.

On eucharistic communion, there has been the trenchant reassertion of the Roman Catholic position by the British and Irish bishops in *One Bread, One Body*. This has been controversial mainly for the assertion that other western churches do not share 'catholic faith in the eucharist', a point disputed by the Anglican bishops on their own behalf and also by Peter Stephens for Methodism who maintained that while Methodists would not normally use the same language as the bishops, they would affirm the underlying realities. To help us with this, we have not just the 'Lima' Statement but also a recent valuable work by the American reformed theologian,

George Hunsinger, in which he proposes reconciling ways of understanding the real presence and the eucharistic sacrifice⁷.

Of course, the problem of the 'open table' versus more restricted access to the sacrament remains. It is instructive to note that in the US Roman Catholic-Methodist dialogue report *Through Divine Love* (2004) this, rather than any disagreement in basic eucharistic theology, was the key point of contention, the Methodists arguing vigorously for the open table. Of course, the issue is related to a very basic one in ecclesiology, the relationship between Christ and the Church and, to a lesser extent, the issue of how any one communion sees its relationship to the Universal, whether it claims to be a part of the one Church (in which case it accepts that there are others on an equal footing as it were) or whether it claims alone to have the fullness of Church (as do Roman Catholics and Orthodox).

One matter on which there might be more thought is the balance between the many things that we commemorate in the Eucharist as this does affect the issue. If the stress is on the eucharist as a sign of *existing* unity, then a more restrictive discipline will seem right. If, by contrast, it is partly on the commemoration of our Lord's openness to sinners and his table fellowship with them, then the accent will fall on openness to those who are not necessarily of our own communion. This is a point to ponder.

In certain respects, authority remains the thorniest issue of all, involving, as it does, the question of the place and perspicuity of Scripture and the authority of later Tradition to say nothing of the sort of magisterium that is required to enable the Church, as it must, to adapt to changing circumstances. At what sort of level can varying types of teaching office each work according to God's will, universal, national, local and so on and in respect of what sort of issues e.g. local liturgical adaptation etc? All churches have some sort of magisterium, not just the Roman Catholic Church, though sometimes it is exercised through a very complex interlocking process of committees and synods. How far is the authority of Scripture,

⁷ G. Hunsinger, *The Eucharist and Ecumenism*, CUP, 2008. In my opinion, this is an extremely significant book

Tradition, living current magisterium a matter of prescription and how far a compelling invitation to exploration and wrestling? These are profound questions.

Recommendations of the 1997 Forum

The Forum made a whole series of recommendations under four headings. These were

- A common sense of direction for the ecumenical pilgrimage. 'In discerning a common sense of direction for the ecumenical pilgrimage, we move forward in three ways which are bound together: our deep relationships with one another, our practical experience of working together, and our joint theological reflection'. The first, one might argue is the most important and will help bear fruit in the other two.
- The making visible of our mutual commitment. Key points included the renewal of the Theology and Unity Group, enabling the churches to have a permanent forum for doing theology together and to encourage the developing network of bi-lateral and multi-lateral relationships which express the complexities of English ecumenical living'. This is a challenge to us in CTUG in terms of involving the churches more widely in our work. There was also concern for more effective sharing of resources.
- Next practical steps - this was a whole series of suggestions including the support of ecumenically based youth work, mutual prayer for common concerns, regular Sunday intercessions for local partner churches and their ministers, developing relationships with new churches currently beyond mainstream ecumenism.
- Finally, 'issues requiring further reflection and discussion', mostly relating to the issues of mutual understanding and appreciation already raised in CTBO and particularly in the appendices,. Thus e.g. 'eucharistic sharing, can the various positions be explored, explained, resolved?'

All these ought to be revisited, perhaps with particular help from county and denominational ecumenical officers who have a particular perspective on what is happening on the ground.

A further point of comparison

Mary Tanner, also a member of the original CTBO group, has suggested we might find it useful also to look at the 2006 WCC Assembly statement *Called to be the Church*. This can be found at <http://www.wcc-assembly.info/en/theme-issues/assembly-documents/1-statements-documents>

This trenchant document states that 'our continuing divisions are real wounds to the body of Christ and God's mission in the world suffers'. It goes on to stress that the Church is called to manifest its oneness in rich diversity but also points out that while some differences 'express God's grace and goodness' others 'divide the Church' and 'must be overcome through the Spirit's gift of faith, hope and love so that separation and exclusion do not have the last word'.

On the relationship of local and universal, it states that 'each church is the church catholic, but not the whole of it. Each church fulfils its catholicity when it is in communion with the other churches'.

Para 7 is particularly significant and therefore I cite it in full:

The relationship among the churches is dynamically interactive. Each church is called to receiving gifts and to mutual accountability. Each church must become aware of all that is provisional in its life and have the courage to acknowledge this to other churches. Even today, when eucharistic sharing is not always possible, divided churches express mutual accountability and aspects of catholicity when they pray for one another, share resources, assist one another in times of need, make decisions together, work for justice and peace, hold one another accountable to the discipleship inherent in baptism and maintain dialogue in the face of differences, refusing to say, 'I have no need of you'.

Finally, in a manner similar to CTBO, the Statement issues a series of challenges to all the Churches. They are asked where they perceive fidelity to Christ in the faith and life of other churches, the extent to which they believe it is possible (or not) to share the Lord's Supper with others and the extent to which they can learn from the spirituality of others and share in mission with them:

In addressing these questions, churches will be challenged to recognise areas for renewal in their own lives and opportunities to deepen relations with other traditions.

These are sharp challenges which complement, and in some respects, extend those of CTBO.

In conclusion

CTBO marked an important development in the theological progress of the common pilgrimage of the English churches. Though in some respects we have already moved on, it should not be forgotten. The greatest need is perhaps for the continuing deepening of relationships of spiritual friendship between the members of all the partner churches. Rowan Williams in his address at the St Alban's Conference in 2003 summed up the necessary spirituality when he said, 'I can't say it all and there are things that you must say and your tradition must say and do because I can't exhaust it in what I say...I don't expect to be able to give you the complete picture- listen to *us*, rather than to me, listen to *Christ*, rather than to me...the Church is a community in which Christ gives in each to all'