

Fine Nets and Stratagems

Perspectives on the present and future outlook for the ecumenical journey

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Anyone with a taste for ecumenism will soon discover that ecumenism is not high on the menu these days. Indeed, to continue the culinary analogy, ecumenism perhaps is the Prawn Cocktail of theology, popular in another and less discerning age, but now outdated, misplaced, and even embarrassing. Yet, the Prawn Cocktail – and its ecumenical equivalent - has endured and won't go away, and there is always the chance that some theological Delia Smith or Jamie Oliver will re-invent it in a way that enlivens our jaded ecumenical palettes.

With this in mind, this is a good moment to reflect on ecumenism. A year which marks both the centenary of the Edinburgh Missionary Conference and the fiftieth anniversary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity offers an invitation to pause and take stock of the ecumenical scene in general and the work of the Pontifical Council in particular. In this talk, I will take first a general look at the ecumenical scene particularly as viewed by the Pontifical Council, before looking a little more closely at some of the problems we face, and the ways we feel we should proceed. George Herbert spoke of the 'fine nets and stratagems'¹ we employ to avoid falling into error; if I may be forgiven the impertinence of appropriating his imagery, what are the 'fine nets' that threaten to entangle and snare ecumenical endeavour? What stratagems can we discern to move the ecumenical project forward?

A General Overview

1. Celebrating progress

Any consideration of the state of ecumenism is bound to borrow the methodology of the bilateral dialogues themselves, and begin with what we can joyfully affirm: forty years of astounding progress in ecumenical relations since Vatican II. It is sometimes forgotten what a sea-change has taken place in that time, and what tremendous fruits have been harvested. As Cardinal Walter Kasper has noted:

*...many prejudices and misunderstandings of the past have been overcome ...bridges of new mutual understanding and practical co-operation have been built. In many cases convergences and consensus have been found, and old ...differences have been better identified.*²

The scene is transformed, as you can yourselves testify. From a situation of ignorance and prejudice, there is now a real sense of the Christian family. Your own organisation is sufficient proof of this. We used to poke each other to see what would make us yelp; now we clasp hands in warm friendship, and more than that, see in each other a kinship, a common origin and calling. We do things together, rather than acting against each other. Our first ecumenical task is to recall and celebrate these achievements, and to make them better known.

Just how remarkable these achievements are at a theological level has been underlined very recently. The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, under its President Cardinal Kasper, has brought together the results of forty years of dialogues between the Roman Catholic Church and four major Western Churches, treating them thematically in a synoptic manner, published as '**Harvesting the Fruits.**' The results are indeed impressive, demonstrating that in key areas there are large areas of agreement – indeed, that there is no issue on which there is not some agreement,

¹ George Herbert, 'Sin'

² Walter Kasper, Harvesting the Fruits, p 2

no topic on which our five traditions completely disagree. The sheer range of what we share in common cannot but astonish even those used to ecumenical dialogue. As the Cardinal sums it up, we can profess together

*a fundamental common understanding of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, common creedal faith, shared fundamental convictions about the Holy Trinity, and the salvific actions of the persons of the Trinity.*³

And there is much beyond these basic foundations that we profess together. Many classic disputes have been set in new contexts. Agreement - or at least convergence - has been achieved by approaching traditional problems in fresh ways. On Justification, the relationship between Scripture and Tradition, the Eucharist, the nature of the Church and the sacraments, the ability to overcome historic and painful disagreements has been remarkable. This is, in a favourite phrase of Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, 'money in the bank.' We have in common a considerable range of doctrine that is no longer an issue for us, that does not need to be discussed further.

2. The Impact of Events

But the very extent of this achievement raises the first question: if we agree so much as Churches, why does it not feel like it? Why are we not doing more together?

This question focuses the preoccupations of the Pontifical Council at this time. It is a badly-kept secret that the ecumenical movement is looking somewhat weary; eager hopes of imminent unity now seem the fad of a bygone age. Ecumenism has yielded its urgency to interfaith relations, particularly with Islam. A generation that thrilled at the novelty of contact with other Christians has been succeeded by one where a certain level of ecumenical interaction is commonplace, but a deeper commitment is not sought. One senses that things can go no further, or that much-hyped documents and meetings have come to nothing. Perhaps, as one writer has suggested, ecumenism is a victim of its own success.⁴ Perhaps there is a feeling that all that can be done has been done.

One reason for this is the unresolved relationship between the dialogue meetings and the wider church – that is, of aspiration versus hard reality. However lively our own enthusiasm may be for ecumenical convergence, our theological encounters do not always reflect historical mind-sets or new developments within some of our partners' churches. These can constitute formidable, not to say insurmountable, barriers to ecumenical progress.

Thus, with the Orthodox East, discussions are painstaking to the point of immobility. As John Zizoulas recently wrote, '*ongoing theological Dialogue (between the Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches) has yet to span an extremely long course, because the theological differences that have accumulated during the one thousand years of division are many.*'⁵ Recent theological progress between Catholics and Orthodox in their discussion of universal primacy proved highly controversial with some Orthodox faithful, so that progress at the recent ecumenical meeting in Cyprus was agonizingly slow.

In the western traditions stemming from the Reformation, the ecumenical outlook is even more problematic. There are already overwhelming difficulties in the dialogue given our different positions on the ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopacy. The election of Gene Robinson in 2003 caused major problems for relations between the Roman Catholic Church and Anglican Communion, and perhaps even more damagingly convulsed relationships within the Communion. What might be considered an isolated or eccentric event, has, with the affirmation of

³ Ibid p 28

⁴ Ola Tjprhom in *The Heythrop Journal* XLII 2008, pp 841 - 959

⁵ Metropolitan John of Pergamum, Letter to Archbishop of Athens. 26 Sept 2009

the Episcopal Church of admission of candidates for ordination regardless of sexual orientation, followed swiftly by the election of a second bishop in a homosexual relationship, institutionalised the problem. These developments not only represent difficulties for present and future relations, but also call into question the status of existing agreements. Statements that we had thought were agreed on the Church, on ministry, and on human sexuality, appear once again as open issues.

Similar problems have arisen in other dialogues where, as with the Roman Catholic-Anglican relations, recent developments have called into question the status of previous statements. Lutheran agreed statements, for example, with the Reformed Churches seem to contradict what had been agreed in Eucharistic theology in the talks with the Catholic Church, while the (unofficial) introduction by some Methodists of non-Trinitarian baptismal formulae, and lay presidency at the Eucharist, seem to undermine what we had believed to be consensus. Hard-won agreements are now being called into question; what appeared to be solid ground is in fact shifting sand.

Lest I seem to be partisan in apportioning blame, let me recall that the Vatican Council itself acknowledged the Roman Catholic church's own responsibility for divisions among Christians. In recent years Rome has not given out consistent signals on its ecumenical commitment. Many of our dialogue partners have the impression that Rome is retrenching and re-interpreting the spirit of Vatican II. Documents such as *Dominus Iesus*, or the '*Clarifications on certain questions concerning the church*' were received with dismay by many Christians. For Roman Catholics such statements help clarify positions, but from our partners' viewpoint they also can sow seeds of doubt as to our ecumenical commitment. The recent Apostolic Constitution, aimed at groups of Anglicans who were seeking to enter into communion with the Roman Catholic Church in groups, can give the impression that Rome is reviving the theology of 'return', where ecumenical progress was seen in terms of schismatics and heretics returning to the Papal fold.

Where does all this leave the dialogue process? The answer is, to be frank, in not a very good place. Keen ecumenists are, with reason, discouraged and there has been talk of an 'ecumenical winter.'⁶ The atmosphere was caught by the Bishop of Chichester speaking to General Synod in 2008 when he described himself as 'saddened and frustrated' by the 'state of progress towards unity' which was 'at a standstill.'⁷ To sceptical observers of the ecumenical scene – and these are not lacking – ecumenical dialogue meetings are pointless; mere abstract intellectual speculation on unfashionable issues, undertaken by woolly-minded academics, which have small chance of being officially or popularly accepted by the Churches.

Accordingly one increasingly encounters the view that we have come as far as we can, that our task is now to live with our differences, and be content with a 'reconciled diversity'. Four hundred years ago we were butchering each other; now we turn up to each other's Christmas Carol Services. Should we not be satisfied with that? Should we not recognise that we have come as far as we can, and concentrate on evangelising as far as possible together, rather than ecumenical rapprochement with each other?

3. Reaffirming the Goal

It is the strongly held position of the Roman Catholic Church that, whatever obstacles to progress might occur, the goal of ecumenical dialogue is nothing less than full and visible communion. Pope John Paul II affirmed the necessity of advancing 'to the visible unity which is required and is sufficient and which is manifested in a real and concrete way.'⁸ It is the goal which is described by the Vatican Council as 'perfect ecclesiastical communion' when 'all Christians will be gathered, in

⁶ Thus, for example, Lord Carey in the Times, March 11 2006

⁷ Bishop of Chichester to General Synod, quoted in Church Times 22 Feb 2008

⁸ John Paul II, Ut Unum Sint 78; my emphasis

a common celebration of the Eucharist, into the unity of the one and only Church.’⁹ Cardinal Kasper recently described the goal as ‘full visible communion in faith, sacramental life, apostolic ministry and mission.’¹⁰ This affirmation must be underlined in all our ecumenical encounters.

As a goal, it will seem to many unrealistic or undesirable. The biggest obstacle to ecumenism, greater than any particular issue we face, is a mood of indifference or despair: to see the task as so immense, so unlikely, that there is little point (beyond politeness) in continuing.

We fall into that trap if we assume that ecumenism is something we have to construct ourselves. Pope John Paul II called insistently for ecumenism to begin with a change of heart, an interior conversion.¹¹ By this he meant not only a recognition of one’s own failings – of which more in a moment – but a change of direction, or, as the Pope put it, changing our ‘way of looking at things’ to see ecumenism not primarily as the product from human endeavour, but as the fruit of God’s activity and will. Ecumenism is grounded not in intellectual arrogance, but divine imperative.

Outside Rome are the extensive and evocative ruins of the ancient port of Ostia; the extensive mosaic floors are protected by a layer of sand. In each building, a visitor must clear away the sand to reveal the mosaic underneath. This for me is an image of ecumenism; clearing away the sand of human incomprehension, wilfulness and misconstruction, to allow the beauty of God’s design to show forth - a design which already exists as a reality in the perfect oneness of the Trinitarian God. Pope Benedict, speaking to ecumenical representatives in Sydney, reinforced this when he said, ‘We cannot “bring about” unity by our powers alone. We can only obtain unity as a gift of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, spiritual ecumenism – prayer, conversion and the sanctification of life – constitute the heart of the ecumenical movement.’¹²

As Pope John Paul recognised, this change of heart must also include ‘a sense of the need for repentance.’¹³ The generous interpretation (or otherwise) of this phrase is another key issue in the progress of ecumenical dialogue. For Roman Catholics, and for those observing the Roman Catholic Church, this raises the question of what it means to repent and open oneself to change. Some suspect that within the Roman Catholic Church at the moment there is a tendency to take a minimalist or partisan view of repentance, admitting that a change of heart may indeed be necessary for ecumenism to move ahead, but questioning what this means precisely for the Roman Catholic Church. *Who* should really be changing their hearts? After all, it is *the others* who separated from us, be it 500 or 1000 years ago. Can Rome, in which the Church of Christ subsists, be other than it is? Should not our prayer for unity be the time-honoured prayer for return to the fold of Peter?

Vatican II made it clear that all Christians – and that includes Roman Catholics – need to change their hearts. In the history of division within the Church, it says, ‘men of both sides were to blame.’¹⁴ Pope Benedict himself has made it clear that unity does not mean an ‘ecumenism of the return.’¹⁵ Universality and Catholicity, unity in multiplicity, walk together. This means that the Catholic Church must itself move, in some sense become other than it is – or perhaps better, view things from a slightly different standpoint. An element of the change of heart for which Pope John Paul calls is the recognition that we *too* as Catholics need to move forward on the ecumenical journey; and that we can do so without compromising what we believe. This view is expressed

⁹ Unitatis Redintegratio 4

¹⁰ Walter Kasper, *Harvesting the Fruits* p 7

¹¹ *Ut Unum Sint*, 15, quoting Unitatis Redintegratio 4

¹² Benedict XVI, Address in Cologne Aug 19 2005

¹³ *ibid*

¹⁴ Unitatis Redintegratio n. 3

¹⁵ Benedict XVI, loc cit 19 August 2005

these days in terms of ‘refocusing’, or ‘adding emphasis to’, the teaching of the Church. Thus Cardinal Levada, President of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in a much-reported speech made last March, saw one result of ecumenism that

*perennial truths and elements of holiness already found in the Catholic Church are given new focus, or a different stress by the way they are lived by various groups of the faithful who are called by Christ to come together in perfect communion with one another.*¹⁶

Cardinal Levada emphasises that this does not mean anything essential is missing or wrong in the Catholic Church, but goes out of his way to say that unity is a sharing of gifts – he uses the image of different instruments playing in an orchestra, creating together a fullness of harmony.

‘Fine Nets’

Following these general comments on the situation of contemporary ecumenical dialogue, I should like now to consider some of the ‘fine nets’, the particular details, that we see ensnaring the propellers of Ecumenism at the moment.

A. A first set of issues can be classified as methodological

1. What do the agreements really say?

The late Cardinal Avery Dulles probably had it right when he said that in the early years of ecumenical dialogue, we discovered similarities in what we believed was different, but now are discovering differences in what we believed was similar. Recent developments in the communions of our partners, as well as perhaps a greater maturity of the dialogue process, have caused us to re-examine the *detail* of our agreements, to ‘drill down’ on those statements, and acknowledge that their language can conceal important differences of interpretation. The search for new formulae to express old positions can bring progress; but can also paper over cracks. Agreed statements with Lutherans, for example, on the Eucharist present a positive tone, but careful study reveals that they avoid addressing the difficult but essential issues of Real Presence, or Eucharistic reservation.

2. Magisterial imbalance

As they participate in bilateral dialogues, Catholic participants are aware of being able to call upon a vast and systematic Magisterium that provides an authoritative, united Catholic position on theological issues. Our dialogue partners, however, both in East and West, have no such Magisterium, and sometimes no consistent position. I witnessed a vivid example of this at the international Catholic-Methodist dialogue where the Eucharist was being discussed. Catholic delegates were able to draw upon an established body of authoritative material and developed theological reflexion on the Eucharist. Methodists have no such material, and were in fact deducing the Methodist doctrine on the Eucharist from the hymns of Charles Wesley. This material – although indeed rich - is sparse, and there is a real question as to whether all Methodists these days would understand those hymns as expressing their standpoint.

3. Interpretation of basic Church confessions and statements

Following from the last point, we would have concerns about the status of some fundamental texts. The major protestant faiths profess the same Creed, but even at this basic level there can be differences of interpretation - and the questioning of some essential affirmations. Cardinal Kasper notes this especially in the Lutheran communion, where modern interpretations of Credal texts lead some theologians to question or deny the bodily resurrection of Christ, or his divine nature. This also applies to confessional statements of the Reformation churches – Calvin’s *Institutes* or the

¹⁶ Cardinal Levada, speech in Ontario March 2010

Augsburg Confession, for example, are re-interpreted or their status questioned. How likely is it that a contemporary Anglican theologian would base his or her theological position on the 39 Articles?

4. Third-party agreements

A further problem concerns the consistency of agreed positions. In several instances, our dialogue partners have entered into ecumenical agreements with other ecclesial bodies that seem to take them away from what we had understood as an agreed Catholic position. The Lutherans Church in America, for example, have entered into an agreement with the Reformed Churches¹⁷ on Eucharistic sharing which causes us to question their real commitment to a Catholic understanding of the Eucharist. A further example occurred in the Anglican-Orthodox dialogue, where the agreed statement 'The Church of the Triune God'¹⁸ took a stance towards Universal Primacy that was notably less positive than that of the ARCIC statement on Authority.¹⁹

5. Essential and non-Essential

A serious methodological issue relates to the categories of what is *essential* and *non-essential* in professing the Christian faith. While Roman Catholics may reach the point of agreeing with a partner that our different explanation of a particular doctrine is complementary rather than exclusive, there may still remain disagreement over the necessity of that doctrine. Methodists, for example, have shown themselves ready to accept the notion of episcopacy and three-fold ministry, but if pressed, would not say they see these things as necessary, only *permissible*.

This leads to the venerable topic of *adiaphora*, the categories of 'essential' and 'non essential' elements in Church doctrine. Not only is there disagreement over *what* falls under *which* heading; it is not clear in many partner Churches *who* makes the decision – or *how* – as to what is fundamental and what is not to be insisted upon.

Indeed, we would express caution about the whole language of *adiaphora*, of classifying issues as 'non-essential', particularly if it creates the impression that they are thereby untrue or unimportant. Different churches inevitably have different concepts of what is essential and what is non-essential – what is non-essential for me may be central to you. The Roman Primacy, for example, is clearly *adiaphora* for Protestant Churches but can never be so for Roman Catholics. Certain forms of piety may not be essential for some traditions, but cannot thereby be dismissed as merely *adiaphora*, because for other traditions they derive from – and embody – core theological beliefs.

6. Biblical hermeneutics

One of the great ecumenical achievements of recent decades has been a high level of consensus on the relation between Scripture and Tradition. However, it is evident that there is not yet full agreement on the relative role of both. *How far* are binding interpretations of Scripture contained in Scripture? *Who decides* about the binding interpretation of our common apostolic heritage? Cardinal Kasper sees this issue as fundamental,²⁰ and notes with apprehension the re-emergence of 'historical critical' methods of biblical scholarship which seek to remove any divinely inspired aspect of scripture, and call into question certain traditional interpretations of it.

¹⁷ A Formula of Agreement 1997

¹⁸ 2006

¹⁹ Gift of Authority: Authority in the Church III 1999

²⁰ Walter Kasper, *Harvesting the Fruits* p 202

B: A second set of issues concerns Fundamental Theological Issues

1. Theological Anthropology

This topic is perceived by Cardinal Kasper as being at the root of many misunderstandings and unresolved issues, both at a theological and an ethical level. The lack of agreement upon ‘what man is before God’ makes it difficult to progress beyond basic affirmations in such key areas as the Doctrine of Justification. Without agreement of the nature of man, what does it mean to say that man is ‘*simul justus et peccator*’, or in what way can man be said to co-operate in his salvation? It is a question that affects our views of ministry and communion. And increasingly, of course, it is the source of ethical differences on issues such as human sexuality, marriage and family.

2. The nature of the Church

Another fundamental issue we see is a different understanding of the Church itself; indeed, Cardinal Kasper considers it the main issue dividing the churches. It is true that significant progress has been made toward a shared vision, and that the Protestant position encompasses *institutional* aspects, but it is still probably true to say that Protestantism views the Church more as ‘event’ – existing wherever the gospel is correctly preached and the sacraments duly administered. This contrasts with the markedly sacramental Roman Catholic view, wherein the Church of Christ and her whole mystery subsists in a concrete and permanent institutional structure, in communion with the Bishop of Rome and the bishops in communion with him.

Differences in emphasis here result in different opinions on what full church unity means, and indeed on the very goal of the ecumenical movement.

3. Eucharist

A particular and pressing issue, because its influence is felt in the pastoral as well as the theological context, is the nature of the Eucharist. Here again, there has been remarkable agreement, and in this topic above all new approaches have overcome traditional hostilities and prejudices. But much more work needs to be done on this crucial issue. For real ecumenical progress, our dialogues have to tackle the issues of the Real Presence and the Sacrificial character of the Mass. For Roman Catholics, this matter is both essential in itself, and because of its intrinsic link to the issue of ministry – a link perhaps not always understood by our partners.

‘Stratagems’

It is a sobering ecumenical landscape, a mine-field of caveats and dilemmas, so that if not despairing of unity, we may well feel that the goal is so distant as to be virtually over the horizon. In such a situation it is vital that there are ‘stratagems’ in place, charting our course – which we recognise to be a *long* course - towards the future. Inevitably, while the fine nets are generally woven of more specific issues, the stratagems are less tangible and concrete. These are contexts for future dialogue, rather than detailed programmes.

Exchange of Gifts

“Dialogue is not simply an exchange of ideas. In some way it is always an exchange of gifts.”²¹ The words of Pope John Paul developed the ground-breaking insight of Vatican II that “... many elements of sanctification and truth are found outside [the Catholic Church’s] visible confines. Since these are gifts belonging to the Church of Christ, they are forces impelling towards Catholic unity.”²²

²¹ Ut Unum Sint 28

²² Lumen Gentium 8

The notion of an ‘exchange of gifts’ is an exciting one for ecumenists, for it enables previously intractable issues to take on a new and positive aspect. Elements traditionally seen as non-negotiable – for example Primacy, or the Magisterium – can be viewed as a gift to the Church, to be explained, offered, shared.

Of course, our partners will want to know that the exchange is not seen as one way. Cardinal Kasper has said: ‘The Catholic Church also is not perfect and is in need of constant renewal... The path to full communion is not a one-way movement. All parts must move. All parts are in need of repentance and renewal.’²³ From the Catholic Church’s point of view, such repentance does not mean the denial of any of its truths, but a willingness to develop or re-emphasise important elements. Gifts received from dialogue partners have assisted Roman Catholics’ own doctrinal development; most notably, we have rediscovered the importance of Pneumatology from our Orthodox partners, and of the Scripture from our Protestant partners.

This has lately crystallized in the notion of ‘receptive ecumenism’, of considering what, in the traditions of our partners, can enrich our own understanding of the Church. Of all recent initiatives, this offers the rare promise of injecting enthusiasm back into the ecumenical process, by making the goal of unity not merely a distant hope, but an actual reality which can be realised in the life of the churches, if they are attentive to each other and, more importantly, to the will of God.

An ‘Ecumenism of Ecumenism’

After forty years of dialogue, we must be asking not only what we should talk about next, but the *way* we should talk about it. Locking theologians in rooms together has produced great results (the only problem being, as one journalist said, that we allowed them out again), but we are brought back to that troublesome question of why these results are not better known or lived – the thorny problem of reception.

One requirement for ecumenical fruits to be received may be what could be termed an ‘ecumenism of ecumenism.’ Ecumenical dialogue needs to establish more clearly its relationship to other elements and levels of the Church’s life.

In the first place, while maintaining the importance of bilateral dialogues, there perhaps needs to be a greater awareness and co-ordination of what is happening in other dialogues, both internationally and nationally. This would have the double benefit of enabling fruits and best practice to be shared, while avoiding the inconsistencies I mentioned earlier. The value of such a broad encounter was demonstrated earlier this year at the Symposium held at our office in Rome, entitled ‘Harvesting the Fruits’, where we met with representatives of our four major Western dialogue partners. Not only did this meeting enable us all to appreciate our achievements in a new context, it also threw into relief some of the issues yet to be addressed by all our dialogues. Our partners said they had not been aware of the progress in other dialogues: the Reformed, notably, said that the developments in dialogue with the Anglicans were a revelation.

The second area where ecumenism must *itself* become ecumenical is in the way it involves the whole Church. Pope John Paul said the results of the dialogues ‘cannot remain the statements of bilateral commissions, but must become a common heritage. For this to come about and for the bonds of communion to be thus strengthened, a serious examination needs to be made, which... must involve the whole People of God.’²⁴ For sure, theological dialogue has never seen itself as the whole solution to the quest for unity, but unfortunately this has not been followed through in

²³ Walter Kasper, Harvesting the Fruits Symposium, opening address

²⁴ Ut Unum Sint 80

practice. The call for concrete measures to implement the agreements has, as yet, largely gone unheeded.²⁵

Accordingly, the ecumenical dialogue needs to involve all levels of the Church, both at leadership level among those who have the ability to communicate and motivate ecumenical accords, and at grass roots level, among those who often lead the way in forging living bonds of friendship between Churches. Indeed, future bilateral dialogue may need to find a better way to bring into its consideration much of the work done at local level, and not isolate itself in a theological vacuum unaware of progress made in national dialogues.

Spiritual Ecumenism

In its 2003 'Handbook of Spiritual Ecumenism' the Pontifical Council sought to take the ecumenical process beyond the locked rooms and rarified atmosphere of the dialogue commissions, and to give a living heart to what can seem a dry, academic process. This was a response to the statement of the Second Vatican Council that a 'change of heart and holiness of life, along with public and private prayer for the unity of Christians, should be the soul of the ecumenical movement, and merits the name 'spiritual ecumenism.''²⁶ The central importance of spiritual ecumenism has been re-iterated by both Pope John Paul and Pope Benedict. The Handbook attempts to put some flesh on this concept, recommending common reading, meditation upon, and study of, Sacred Scripture. It notes that Christians can learn about and from each other's traditions, such as devotion to Mary, to saints and martyrs. It advocates prayer in common, and public affirmations of shared baptismal faith. The Handbook also speaks of the value of a common Liturgical Calendar.

It is notable that the last major Agreed Statement between the Anglican Communion and Roman Catholic Church devoted its second section to just this, the attempt to 'live and witness together more fully' the common faith expressed in their documents.²⁷ Here liturgy, joint bible study, co-operation in lay and ordained ministries, and in particular shared mission to the world, have an important role to play.

It is clear that Spiritual Ecumenism needs direction from above, and enthusiasm from below. More than academic agreements, it is a barometer of the state of ecumenical progress. Perhaps we need to put the same energy into this, that we have previously given to our traditional theological dialogue.

An Agreed Statement

If we are to promote reception, it is important to stress publicly what we have in common; a shared Baptismal faith. Confessing together the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church helps to deepen the common foundation of our real but still incomplete communion. At the *Harvesting the Fruits* Symposium, there was considerable interest in the idea of expressing recognition of each other's Baptism through some form of joint ecumenical statement. The Apostles' Creed at once suggested itself, being in origin a baptismal confession of faith, and a sign of common recognition of baptism. The Pontifical Council is in favour of a common explanation of, or commentary upon, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, or perhaps the Ten Commandments; texts we already have in common. An ecumenical statement or commentary, formulated in an accessible way, would be a powerful public statement of fundamental ecumenical agreement, and might well help to promote common understanding.

²⁵ It is to be noted, for example, that the second section of IARCCUM's 'Growing Together in Unity and Mission', which is devoted wholly to practical ecumenical initiatives, has received little publicity.

²⁶ Unitatis Redintegratio 8

²⁷ Growing Together in Unity and Mission, Part Two, 96ff

Friendship

If Spiritual Ecumenism is the soul of the ecumenical programme, then its heart is friendship. Without friendship, and bonds of affection, dialogue becomes a chore, positions become entrenched, and issues become intractable. Without the trust that comes with friendship and the frankness that friendship allows, dialogue is not genuine, and agendas are followed away from the conference table.

Friendship allows us to consider everything – including our partners’ motives – in the best light, and places problems in their proper context. At a parochial level, friendship increases confidence and counters the danger of too ‘top down’ an approach to ecumenism. But it is perhaps Church leaders who have provided a significant example of the value of ecumenical friendship. The close relationship that exists between the Archbishop Rowan Williams and Walter Kasper has allowed them to speak honestly to each other about recent developments in both Churches. This has greatly contributed to a realistic assessment of our current situation, and to an honest determination to continue on the path, difficult as that may be. I was struck when the Anglican Primate of New Zealand recounted how, upon first receiving news of *Anglicanorum Coetibus*, he had telephoned his Roman Catholic opposite number - with whom he had a close friendship - and by whom he was reassured about the future direction of Anglican-Roman Catholic relations.

But I leave the last word to a Nigerian Anglican bishop, in Rome recently on an ecumenical course during which he met Pope Benedict, and who puts it well:

It is evident that the man-made gulf between the Roman Catholics and Anglicans is not as terrible as is being portrayed outside... If, at the very top of Roman Catholicism there is a reasonable element of cordiality with other Christian denominations, and especially the Anglican Church, this ought to be replicated at various local levels where there are infightings, acrimonies and suspicions among the Roman Catholics and Anglicans... [My course in Rome] has brought tremendous benefits to my spirituality and perception of real ecumenism devoid of bitterness and suspicion. How I had wished that many more members of the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches would be brought together more regularly in this way!²⁸

We must do everything we can to encourage ecumenical friendship, particularly when problems cast their shadow over the dialogue process. It is friendship that will, in the end, motivate reception, and is therefore one of the greatest prerequisites, and fruits, of the ecumenical process.

We are, indeed, at an important moment in ecumenism, and many of the issues impacting on relations with other Churches are reflections of internal problems affecting our communities. These matters will not be resolved easily, or quickly.

But such moments can also be seen as times of grace, when we are made to look at our dialogues in a new and more mature way, and when truth is not sacrificed to enthusiasm, and there is a real appreciation of the diverse gifts we bring. Above all, we must remember that unity is not the work of man, but the gift of God. Fine nets tend to be the work of human hands, often woven with intense determination; the stratagems are the paths set before us by the Lord, the way he shows towards the vision of Unity that is in him. Therefore, we must not be discouraged, but filled with hope and excitement, as we seek to discern together the will of God for his Church.

²⁸ Reflection of Bishop Michael Frape, Nigeria, April 2010