

South Australian Council of Churches
Standing Committee for Ecumenical Learning



Receptive Ecumenism
Rev Dr Denis Edwards

Outline of Presentation

The Idea of Receptive Ecumenism

The Charism of a Partner Church – Justification

An example: Catholic Reception of the Lutheran Charism – a homily

Durham Cathedral

The Monastery on the Island of Lindisfarne (Holy Island)

St Cuthbert

Arrival at Durham

The Norman Cathedral

The Venerable Bede

Bede's Body Brought to Durham

Durham University

The Castle

The Prince-Bishops

The University

Department of Theology and Religion

Ushaw College -

St Cuthbert's Seminary

Paul Murray

The Centre for Catholic Studies (2005, 2007)

Murray: The Receptive Ecumenism project was:

“Conceived, nurtured, and born into life in the fertile space between Cuthbert, the pastor saint,

And Bede, the scholar saint, that Durham Cathedral represents;

Itself a fitting witness to the distinctive partnership between Church and academy that lay behind the project.”

Historical Context

Modern Ecumenical Movement: Early 20th c.: Protestant communities; Orthodox; Roman Catholics with 2nd Vatican Council (1962-5)

Following the Council: Ecumenical Energy and Optimism

Hope for structural unity

By contrast now: talk of an “ecumenical winter”

Disappointment at results of high profile initiatives

Church of England-Methodist initiatives

ARCIC – Issues such as the Ordination of Women

Contrast: Official slowness, eagerness for progress on the ground

Post-denominational Christianity:

People committed to Christ, but not to a denomination

People moving between denominations

WCC – Konrad Raiser: Prioritizing of “Life and Works” over “Faith and Order” and

Offering the WCC as an adequate representation of unity in diversity of the Church of Christ

Deeper Issues: Secularization

Loss of active clergy and laity – energy drain

Late-modern emphasis on particularity and distinctiveness of tradition

There are positives: relative success of bilateral dialogues; John Paul II on papacy (1995); the

agreement on Justification (1999)

The Result

Do we give up on structural unity?

Postpone it to the eschaton?

What does it mean to live now the call to full communion?

Ecumenical Receptivity – transformational driving – force of ecumenical engagement

The Receptive Ecumenism Project

1st International Conference: “Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning” (Jan, 2006)

Publication of the book by Oxford U. Press, 2008

2nd International Conference: “Receptive Ecumenism And Ecclesial Learning: Learning to be Church Together” (Jan, 2009)

Supported and sponsored by *Churches Together in England* and a number of other ecumenical groups

Regional Project in Receptive Ecumenism and the Local Church – 8 denominations in N.E. England in partnership with Durham University

The Fundamental Concern

First Question:

What do others need to learn from us, if we are to make real progress?

The question is understandable

Commitment to key aspects of one’s own tradition is appropriate

But perhaps there has been too much emphasis here and not enough on learning from the other

The question of receptive ecumenism:

What can we learn, or receive, with integrity, from our various others, in order to facilitate our own growth together into deepened communion in Christ and the Spirit?

Assumption: if we all were asking and acting upon this question –

All might be moving in ways that might open up unforeseeable ecumenical possibilities

The Exchange of Gifts

“Dialogue is not simply an exchange of ideas”

“In some way it is always an exchange of gifts”
John Paul II – *That They May Be One (Ut Unum Sint)*, 28.

Relationship to “Spiritual Ecumenism”

Cardinal Kasper and Arch. Rowan William’s joint advocacy of spiritual ecumenism
“Receptive ecumenical awakening is properly a matter of the heart before it is a matter of the head; a matter of falling in love with the experienced presence of God in the people, practices, even structures of another tradition and being impelled thereby to search for ways in which all impediments to closer relationship might be overcome” (P. Murray)
Builds on spiritual ecumenism, but draws out the interpersonal and structural dimension

The Regional Project

3-Year Regional Comparative Research Project in Receptive Ecumenism and the Local Church

RC diocese of Hexham and Newcastle
Northern Synod, United Reform Church
Northern Baptist Association
Methodist Districts, Darlington and Newcastle
Northern Division, Salvation Army
Anglican Dioceses, Durham and Newcastle

The Regional Project

Collaborative, interdisciplinary study of what each tradition might learn from the others in:

1. governance and finance
2. leadership and ministry
3. learning and formation

Yves Congar on Charisms

Word and Spirit always do God’s work together
Charisms: gifts of nature and grace by which the Spirit builds up the church
Balance between charisms and structural elements of the church
Importance of word and sacrament, ordained ministry, and proper authority
Charisms: part of the church’s constitution and as a principle of its order

It is the operation of the charisms that produces the institution
The charisms give rise to the variety of ministries in the church, including the ordained ministry, which then has a role in the ordering of the charisms
“The Church receives the fullness of the Spirit *only in the totality of gifts made by all her members.*”

The Charisms of an Ecumenical Partner

Throughout his work, Congar suggests that this theology of charisms might be applied to the disunited churches
The suggestion: another church tradition may embody an institutional charism
It is possible that we will be truly open to the Spirit when we are open to the institutional charism of a partner church

Principles for Reception with Integrity

1. It can be recognized by the receiving church as an authentic expression of *biblical and apostolic faith*
2. The proposed institutional charism leads to *Christ*, and to authentic *discipleship*
3. It is not opposed to the *deepest self-understanding* of the receiving church
4. It can be seen as an *organic development* of the faith of the receiving church

Principles for Reception

5. It brings to the receiving church a *renewed energy and life*
6. It is accompanied by the *fruits of the Spirit* – “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Gal 5:22)

The Example of Justification

In Augsburg, on 31 October 1999, official representatives of the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church solemnly signed and confirmed the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*

Countersigning by the World Methodist Council in July 2006

This is not simply an agreement between dialogue teams but an agreement of *the churches*

In the “Official Common Statement,” the two church bodies declare together: “The understanding of the doctrine of justifications set forth in this Declaration shows that a consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification exists between Lutherans and Catholics.”

A differentiated consensus: A basis agreement is declared, while remaining differences are acknowledged

The condemnations of the past no longer apply to the doctrine of partner churches

The Gift Given to the Catholic Church

The positive institutional charism of the Lutheran tradition

The joyful, liberating Gospel that we are saved not by what we do, but by God’s grace alone and in faith

Conditions Met

Conditions: biblical faith; leading to Christ; the church’s self-understanding ; organic development of faith

Evident in that the *Joint Declaration* has been received by proper authorities of RC Church

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, with the Bishop of Rome expressing his approval and joy

Renewed life and the fruits of the Spirit have been experienced by those closely connected to the events

Homilies

If the Lutheran tradition on justification is a gift of the Spirit at this moment for the Catholic Church, then it is to be received not only at the level of proper church authorities, *but also at the level of local communities*

This can happen through many means, but homilies will be crucial

Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A

“God’s justice that was made known through the Law and the Prophets has now been revealed outside the Law, since it is the same justice of God that comes through faith to everyone, Jew and pagan alike, who believes in Jesus Christ. Both Jew and Greek sinned and forfeited God’s glory, and both are justified through the free gift of his grace by being redeemed in Christ Jesus who was appointed by God to sacrifice his life so as to win reconciliation through faith since, as we see it, a man is justified by faith and not by doing something the Law tells him to do.” (Romans 3:21-25.28)

Outline for a Catholic Homily on Justification

In the second reading for today’s liturgy, we find St Paul talking to us about justification. He tells us that we are justified through the absolutely free gift of God’s grace. And that we are justified simply by our faith and not by doing something that the Law tells us to do.

What does this word *justification* mean? It may mean very little to some of us. It is not a common word among Catholics. We more often talk about our *salvation*, or about our *redemption*, or simply about the *forgiveness of our sins*. These are words you hear a lot in Catholic circles, but the word justification is seldom used in our schools or in our Sunday homilies.

Yet this word is extremely important. Just ten years ago, the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation signed the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. This followed many years of intense dialogue in different parts of the world. Justification was the central doctrinal issue that divided Lutherans and Catholics at the Reformation. What was so exciting about the *Joint Declaration*, was that it affirmed a common understanding of justification by God’s grace through faith in Christ.

There are some remaining differences between the two churches. But they now share a consensus on basic truths concerning justification. In the past, the two churches had condemned each other’s doctrine. In the light of the new agreement, both churches have declared that the old condemnations do not apply to each other’s doctrine as it is found in the *Joint Declaration*.

It is truly a joy to celebrate the fact that we have come to such an agreement on what was the central cause of division between the two churches. And what a joy it is, that we Christians no longer condemn each other’s views on the central truth of our faith, our salvation in Christ! This agreement has been endorsed and accepted not only by the Lutheran World Federation, but also by the authorities of the Catholic Church. So we should ponder the work of the Holy Spirit in all of this and give thanks and praise to God.

But what does it mean for us? Obviously, it is important because it is a real step towards overcoming the division between the Catholic Church and the Lutheran Church. Of course, there are other issues that divide us, including the role of the bishop of Rome in the life of the church. But, with the help of God’s grace, we have taken a big step that brings us closer to full communion.

But there is also something deeper here. The Lutheran Church has always given a central role to the

doctrine of justification. Now that we have reached substantial agreement, we Catholics can find that Luther and the Lutheran tradition have something precious to teach us about our life of faith.

Luther lived at a time when theology had degenerated and there was a good deal of corruption in the life of the church. Many people lived in terrible fear of God. They feared final damnation and this was reinforced by popular preaching and piety. As a young Augustinian monk, Luther himself experienced intense anxiety about where he stood before God. He had a deeply troubled soul, and a troubled conscience. Many of those around him also had troubled consciences. By studying the Scriptures, and particularly St Paul, Luther came to a truly *liberating* discovery. We don't make ourselves right before God. We are justified simply by God's grace. It is God who saves us through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Salvation comes to us as an absolutely free gift. We do not earn our salvation. It does not depend on us. It is not a matter of how well we perform. Our response is faith. We entrust ourselves to God. We trust not in ourselves but in God's grace.

Of course, being made right by God, being justified necessarily involves us in living a Christian life of love for others. At the time of the Reformation the Catholic Church emphasized our human cooperation with God's grace, and the reality of our transformation by grace. But what is clear in this new agreement is that we can hold onto these precious truths while also receiving into our own lives what was so precious to Luther and his companions: the discovery that we are justified not by what we do but by God's grace and that what we need to do is trusting in a God of mercy and grace.

What is so liberating in all of this is Luther's discovery of a *gracious God*, a God who reaches out to us in Jesus Christ, bringing healing, forgiveness and peace. We can be freed from a troubled conscience because we no longer depend upon our own efforts, but depend radically on a God of grace and mercy. At the end of his life, Luther reflected on how he felt when he made this discovery: "Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise through open gates."

Luther's discovery was that we don't have to make ourselves right. It is God who makes us right in Christ. And God does this as an absolutely free gift. God justifies us through grace, by faith. Our Christian living flows from this free gift of God.

I believe that this insight is a gift from the Lutheran Church for the Catholic community of our time. Some of us are still caught up with troubled consciences today. Some people are afflicted by a scrupulous attitude to Christian life. Some have a view of God that fills them with fear. They need to hear again the liberating idea that God is a God of grace and mercy, and that it is God who makes us right, not what we do.

But there are other ways in which this insight is important in our society today. We attempt to make ourselves right in all kinds of ways. There is a kind of desperation to prove to ourselves and others that we matter, that we are important. We can try to make ourselves right by the kind of home we have, or by endless expensive home improvements. We can try to make ourselves right by competing for attention, for status, for a better job, for more money. Many of us get caught up in a cycle of more and more work, as if taking on more work, or achieving more, makes us right.

The Lutheran emphasis on the doctrine of justification is a powerful reminder of what is central to the Gospel: that we are made right by God, and by God alone. We are made right by God's love poured out in

the world in Jesus Christ, in his life, death and resurrection. We are made right by a God of love, whose grace and mercy always goes before us and in whom we can trust in every aspect of our life and our death. In entrusting ourselves to the God of Jesus we find true freedom. We are enabled to live in freedom, free of the desperate need to prove ourselves. We are freed to take joy in God, and in God's good creation and to live lovingly and generously with those around us.

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