

## SA COUNCIL OF CHURCHES ANNUAL ECUMENICAL LECTURE 2010

The Most Reverend Dr Jeffrey Driver, Anglican Archbishop of Adelaide

---

### **The Emmaus Journey of Ecumenism**

There might be those who think the form of their church descended from heaven fully formed, like the New Jerusalem of John the divine's vision, but greater modesty recognises that the form of God's church on earth is also shaped by history and culture.<sup>1</sup>

This means that while the essence of the Church should never change, its very nature is that its historical expression is always subject to change. Hans Kung wrote:

Every age has its own image of the Church, arising out of a particular historical situation; in every age a particular view of the Church is expressed by the Church in practice, and given conceptual form *post hoc* or *ante hoc*, by the theologians of the age.<sup>2</sup>

The ecclesiology of Anglicanism, for instance, is clearly shaped by the renewal of nationalism in Europe in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and by the Elizabethan emphasis on national unity in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

From this, at least in part, modern Anglicanism has inherited its emphasis on the autonomy of national churches, as well as its commitment to a comprehensiveness that embraces wide diversity. Those traits of Anglicanism have enabled it to spread and adapt well to local custom and culture.

Our strengths, however, are often at the same time our weaknesses. The world wide Anglican Communion now has 44 autonomous provinces and central instruments that have almost no decisive or coercive power.<sup>3</sup> This means that Anglicanism will always have the risk that its embrace of diversity will lead it into messy conflict and division, as has been evident in recent times.

History shapes us and cannot be denied, but Kung also makes the point all too easily the Church can become a prisoner of the "image it has made for itself in one particular period in history"<sup>4</sup>.

## **History and culture: gift or prison**

Like the churches, the ecumenical movement has been shaped by its own history and culture. With the churches, it faces the challenge of responding creatively to that history and culture, without being imprisoned by it.

Modern ecumenism is about 100 years old.<sup>5</sup> Most writers on ecumenism trace its beginnings to the world missionary conference in Edinburgh in 1910.<sup>6</sup> The establishment of the League of Nations following the First World War provided another inspiration, with a 1920 encyclical from the (Orthodox) Synod of Constantinople suggesting the formation of a “fellowship of churches” similar to that newly established league.

This 20<sup>th</sup> century renewal of ecumenism inevitably reflected the culture and history of its time. Despite the First World War, this was an era that believed in progress and was confident that modernity would deliver a new day. As Peter Conrad puts it, humanity began the 20<sup>th</sup> century convinced that it had outgrown the credulity of the past.

The twentieth century was to be the first in which they freed themselves from the past and its interdictions. Before it began its plot seemed radiantly clear: in the future men would replace God.<sup>7</sup>

While, as Conrad notes, things did not go quite as planned, most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was marked by this defiant belief in human progress and a confidence in society’s institutions. Even the brutal realities of the Second World War and the onset of the Cold War did not dampen this optimism; the defunct League of Nations was replaced with greater expectations by the United Nations and the experience of war in countries like Australia produced, if anything, even higher levels of institutional loyalty.

The post-war period through to the early sixties, the era in which I grew up along with the rest of the baby boomers in newly established suburban backyards resplendent in those great icons of Australian progress, the Hills Hoist and Victa Mower, was the great era of belonging. This was the era in which the pictures of a young queen adorned country halls and classrooms, children marched into school in military style, and the national anthem was played at the end of “bachelors and spinsters balls”. Membership of the CWA, Red Cross, Masons and trade unions flourished. Sunday schools boomed and the ubiquitous church roster ruled supreme.

In this era belonging and community was expressed through community institutions.

It was the era in which the World Council of Churches came into being and flourished. The decision to form a World Council of Churches was made in Oxford in 1937, but the first council

did not meet until after the war, in 1948. At the same time regional councils were being formed around the world, building momentum, so that the World Council of Churches and associated national and regional bodies quickly gathered energy and inspired people with ecumenical vision; that the disciples of Jesus might be one so that the world might believe.<sup>8</sup>

As powerful and as compelling as the movement surrounding the World Council of Churches was, its forms and expressions were those of that great era of institutional belonging. They were powerful products of the time, of their own particular history and culture.

We now live in a different land. It is a land in which those of us who grew in an era when belonging was defined by institutional loyalty and geography can sometimes feel like surprised immigrants.

Popular culture in Australia is dominated by the under forties. For these Australians, loyalty is defined by common interest and by associational networks. Loyalties are experienced in the immediate but, like employment, can be easily changed. Commitments are short term and always open to revision. The great instrument of belonging in modern Australia is the mobile phone. Social networking is a digital phenomenon.

Rosters are a novel idea to this generation and are unlikely to be effective. Long term organisational commitments, committees, groups and regular meetings are likely to be unsupported.

This is much more than behaviour. It is the universe in which under-forty Australians live and move and have their being.

Sometime in our life-time a comet from afar hit planet earth and the landscape was changed. The long term institutional expressions of belonging that were the fabric of the world in which many in this room grew up soon became endangered species; ill adapted to their new environment.

This is the challenge that faces the modern ecumenical movement. It cannot deny the history that has shaped it. Its challenge is to ensure it not imprisoned by that history, but is able to live creatively against its background and to find new ways of expression in a now different world.

This evening I can go no further than make some suggestions about those new expressions. At best I can hoist a windsock to the strength and directions of the breezes of change.

My first suggestion is that to address the future, effective ecumenical expression will need to be clearer about the difference between institutional unity and organic unity.

## **ARCIC: Communion through agreement**

The Churches have tended to blur the distinction between between unity and agreement. This is understandable, given the role of institutions in expressing unity over much of the last century. A biblical truth more attuned to the era in which we live, is that unity is based as much on difference as on sameness or agreement. As St Paul reminded the Corinthians,

But as it is, God arranged the members of the body, each one of them as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be?<sup>9</sup>

For Paul, the unity of Christ's body depends on the complementarity of difference. Let me illustrate what this might mean for ecumenical dialogue, by referring to two dialogues with which churches of the Anglican Communion have been involved.

For Anglicans the first major report of a bi-lateral ecumenical discussion developed around the theme of Communion came from ARCIC. The Anglican and Roman Catholic International Commission had its mandate in the common declaration of Pope Paul VI and Archbishop Michael Ramsey in 1966 calling for a dialogue about all matters that stood in the way of a "restoration of complete communion of faith and sacramental life".<sup>10</sup>

ARCIC set out to produce statements of "substantial agreement". In fact "substantial agreement" was understood as "unanimous agreement" on essential matters establishing principles through which remaining points of disagreement might be resolved.<sup>11</sup>

The argument of ARCIC was that "since the Church is visible its unity must also be visible" and for there to be full visible unity there must be the mutual recognition of sacraments and ministry, together with the common acceptance of universal primacy at one with the episcopal college.<sup>12</sup>

There is wide recognition that ARCIC has produced some substantial agreements and convergences. Its weakness was its inability to approach difference positively as a basis for agreement. Difference was a difficulty.

This point is illustrated by reference to "The Observations of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on the Final Report of ARCIC I", which suggested that it is not always clear how the position represented in ARCIC statements related to traditional Anglican formularies. The difficulty was, as Francis Sullivan points out, that the Roman Catholic Church saw "substantial agreement" as requiring that a statement "fully correspond to the Catholic doctrine and that, to

do so, it must use the language in which the Roman Catholic Church has expressed that doctrine".<sup>13</sup> Not much space for diversity here!

For all its achievements, ARCIC's methodology of "substantial agreement" has probably meant that it has not been able to deal adequately with some of the deep historic differences; what Avis calls the "saga of unedifying conflicts, rivalries, resentments and power struggles"<sup>14</sup> (1990, p. 4), that marked relations between the English Church and Rome before the Reformation, let alone after.

ARCIC has struggled to see difference as more than problem.

### **Porvoo: agreement through Communion**

The Anglican-Lutheran conversations that resulted in the Porvoo Common Statement were much more marked by a sense of journey and discovery. Formal conversations began in Sweden in 1989, involving representatives of the Church of England and Lutherans from Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Norway and Sweden. Delegates from Iceland and Latvia were not present but attended three subsequent meetings and delegates from Lithuania, Ireland, Scotland and Wales also joined in at a later stage. The aim, as articulated by the co-chairs of the conversation, was to "move forward from our existing piecemeal agreements towards the goal of visible unity".<sup>15</sup>

However, while the overall goal of visible unity is maintained, the methodology of the Porvoo dialogue was much different to that of ARCIC. Within Porvoo, both commonality and difference were approached through what was called "portraiture". As Stephen Sykes points out, this differs from more traditional approaches to ecumenical dialogue, which tended to define in advance the essence of church "and in light of that to determine whether or not the partner to the dialogue is genuinely church".<sup>16</sup>

Portraiture, by contrast, suggests that no definitive checklist of features of Christian life and doctrine exist, but that, as with a drawing or character portrayal, there is an interaction between the perceiver and perceived; and that there can take place a disclosure of the one to the other a disclosure which is never finally complete.

Here unity is increasingly approached, not so much as requiring the removal of confessional differences, but through the recognition of sufficient commonality as providing the basis for, and call to, a journey of reconciliation through which the dividing character of confessional differences might be overcome.

In areas of significant difference or difficulty, those differences are neither set aside nor forced into premature resolution. The approach is to affirm such commonality as is present and to seek to “re-frame” differences in a new consensus that enables further development of relationship.<sup>17</sup> This enabled the Porvoo dialogue to deal creatively with the fact that some member churches had not maintained the episcopal succession of ministry and also enabled that sign to be more traditionally expressed in some of the churches.<sup>18</sup>

So Porvoo presents an important contrast with ARCIC. While both dialogues set before themselves the goal of visible unity, their emphases and methodologies are different. The preoccupation of ARCIC is visible and structural union. Its dominant method is the production of agreed statements. Porvoo is strongly missional and its method is to build from what might be called “recognised *koinonia*” to greater agreement and even deeper communion. It takes historical differences seriously and looks within those differences for the unity through which the differences might be re-framed.

In this approach to ecumenical reception, unity is increasingly approached, not so much as requiring the removal of confessional differences, but as calling for reconciliation through which the dividing character of confessional differences might be overcome. A phrase that has been much used in Anglicanism in recent times has been that of “open reception”. This implies a journey begun, but still open ended; a journey, as Paul Avis suggests marked by “gradualness, mutuality, active discernment, responsibility, unpredictability and the real possibility of non-reception”.<sup>19</sup>

This is much more an Emmaus journey; a journey of openness, conversation and disclosure. It is a journey of surprise. This is the Emmaus journey of our ecumenical future.

### **“Institution light, network natured”**

Now my second suggestion; to address the future, effective ecumenical expression will need to be “institution-light”. The long term committees, commissions, monthly meetings and accompanying infrastructure will need to trim down to serve a movement that is network natured and project focused.

Short term facilitation will need to replace long term ownership; projects will need to be more prominent than structures. The ad-hoc and messy will need to be seen as a sign of life, rather than resented as administrative untidiness.

If there is a theological reservoir for such an approach to ecumenism, I suggest it is found in the dynamic relationality of the Holy Trinity, in which the unchanging nature of God is never just static sameness, but an always giving and receiving mutuality of love.

For an ecclesiological motif, I return again to the Emmaus story; the day on the road together, the conversations that include strangers who turn out to be friends, the relational dynamic in which the Christ appears.

The Church itself is provisional, a pilgrim people making an Emmaus journey between its constituting disclosure and the fulfilment of that disclosure in eschatology, continually developing in its appropriation of the apostolic faith as it responds to varying circumstances and moves towards its own consummation.

The willingness to sit lightly to some of our institutions trappings and habits, to embrace a more network approach to our life together, will not take us away from this Emmaus journey, it will place us back on that road, where perhaps once more, our hearts will burn within us!<sup>20</sup>

This leads to my last suggestion, which is that to address its future, effective ecumenical expression will need to be constantly testing itself against the mission of the Church in the world. In the secular West, most of our churches are struggling to adapt to a shift from privileged centrality to the missional margins. We are struggling to learn mission afresh, particularly among those under-aged-forty Australians so disconnected from traditional and institutional expressions of faith.

Since the Church's context is always a mission context, the reception of churches by each other must be an essentially missiological journey. If ecumenism in Australia is to find new energy, I suggest, it will be at the missional edge, where the church engages the world, in joint experiment, in shared risk, in common disappointment and in mutual learning. It will do well for us to remember that when Jesus prayed that his disciples might be one “that the world might believe”, he also uttered these words: “I have sent them into the world”.<sup>21</sup>

The Emmaus journey of ecumenism: a journey of openness, conversation and disclosure; a journey upon which we dare to travel lightly laden; a journey into the risk of mission; a journey from death and grief into surprising life; a journey which one day, pray God, finds us surprised to be breaking bread together with our Lord.

---

<sup>1</sup> Rev. 21:2

<sup>2</sup> Küng, H 1971, *The Church*, (trans.) R. & R. Ockenden, Search Press, London, p. 4

- 
- <sup>3</sup> The Anglican Communion has four “Instruments of Unity”: The Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference of Bishops, the Anglican Consultative Council and the Meeting of Primates. No instrument can make a decision that binds the whole Communion. Their resolutions are of an advisory nature.
- <sup>4</sup> Küng, *The Church*, p.4
- <sup>5</sup> The modern ecumenical movement is commonly dated from the Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910. This was the first really international conference of a multidominational nature.
- <sup>6</sup> Rusch, W. G 1988, *Reception – An Ecumenical Opportunity*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, p.13
- <sup>7</sup> Conrad, P 1998, *Modern Times Modern Places: Life & Art in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, Thames and Hudson, London, p.13.
- <sup>8</sup> John 17:23
- <sup>9</sup> ICor 12:18
- <sup>10</sup> Hill, C & Yarnold, E (eds) 1994, *Anglicans and Roman Catholics: The Search for Unity*, SPCK/CTS, London, pp. 5, 10-11.
- <sup>11</sup> ARCIC The Final Report 1981, p. 17.
- <sup>12</sup> The Final Report 1981, pp. 7-8
- <sup>13</sup> Sullivan, F 1994, "The Vatican Response to ARCIC I 1992", *Anglicans and Roman Catholics: The Search for Unity*, (eds) C. Hill & E. Yarnold, SPCK/CTS, London, p. 305
- <sup>14</sup> Avis, P 1990, *Christians in Communion*, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville Minnesota, p. 4:  
So where is hope to be found? The way forward, I believe, is to dig deeper for a ground of unity that transcends our ideological and historical differences. That ground is our common incorporation into the Body of Christ by baptism – and its corollary that baptism is sufficient basis for admission to Communion. When we are in communion with one another in the one way that has clear dominical authority, our historic differences may well appear in a different light...  
...Full structural unity is bound to be a dominantly political achievement. Its structures will be able to claim little basis in the New Testament. I believe there is a prior imperative – above the political stands the mystical – and that is to explore more profoundly the central New Testament concept of communion (*koinonia*) and the radical consequences it has for ecumenical theology
- <sup>15</sup> Tustin, D 2002, "The Background and Genesis of the Porvoo Common Statement", *Apostolicity and Unity – Essays on the Porvoo Common Statement*" (ed.) O Tjorhom, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids Michigan & Cambridge UK, p. 5.
- <sup>16</sup> Sykes, S 2002, "The Doctrine of the Church in the Porvoo Common Statement", *Apostolicity and Unity – Essays on the Porvoo Common Statement*" (ed.) O Tjorhom, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids Michigan, p. 93- 95.
- <sup>17</sup> The Porvoo Common Statement, 1993, published online at <http://www.porvoochurches.org/statements/index.htm>
- <sup>18</sup> Root, M 2002, "Porvoo in the Worldwide Anglican-Lutheran Dialogue", in *Apostolicity and Unity – Essays on the Porvoo Common Statement*" (ed.) O Tjorhom, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids Michigan / Cambridge UK, p. 28.
- <sup>19</sup> Avis, P (ed.) 2004, *Paths to Unity: explorations in ecumenical method*, Church House Publishing, London, p. 24
- <sup>20</sup> Lk 24:32
- <sup>21</sup> Jn 17: 1-18