

“The Journey to Christian Unity: a personal RC Perspective” is a paper by Margaret Leadox.
It is provided for further study and reflection for Churches Together groups.



Resource Paper

A personal paper for study and reflection

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Abstract

“The Journey to Christian Unity: a personal RC Perspective” was compiled by Margaret Leadox, a religious sister belonging to the Congregation “Salesian Sisters of St. John Bosco.” She is involved with Churches Together in “Battersea Riverside” in South London and also works as a member of the RC Southwark Diocese Unity Commission.

Sister Margaret writes, ‘This text began a few years ago, as personal notes I used when addressing a small group of people from my parish – trying to give them a simple historical background to the concept of ecumenism and hoping to arouse some interest in working for Christian Unity. With the help of further research, my notes gradually developed to this present format in the following five topics:

- 1 Jesus’ desire that his followers should be ONE, and then the efforts of the early Christian Church to stay as ONE.
- 2 The increasing number of differences of opinion and divisions over the centuries.
- 3 Emerging ecumenism.
- 4 Struggles to break down prejudice – joined by the commitment made at Vatican II.
- 5 The ecumenical situation today, and how the Holy Spirit is gradually leading us to the unity Jesus wants.

Hopefully this text will prove instructive not only for Catholics but also for Christians from other traditions, and be of help in bringing about a better mutual understanding’.

THE JOURNEY TO CHRISTIAN UNITY: **A PERSONAL R.C. PERSPECTIVE**

Introduction

When I first set out to put together the contents of the following pages, it was with the aim of producing something to share with my fellow Roman Catholics – especially those from other countries who might be less aware of the historical background to our identity in England – and to encourage an interest in ecumenism. However, after a long but rewarding time of research and great effort to present this material as simply yet as accurately as possible, my hope now is that these pages may prove to be of interest to others from other Ecclesial Communities too!

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Our mutual way forward towards unity *surely has* to be the gaining of a better understanding of the identities of each other’s Traditions – and *to learn* from the good practices that we find there, as I describe later when writing about “Receptive Ecumenism.” Maybe others from different backgrounds could be persuaded to share *their view* of the journey to unity in a similar initiative! I hope so!

When, back in 1962, Pope John XXIII convoked the Second Vatican Council – to open the windows and let some fresh air into the Church - the Holy Spirit certainly blew in plenty of fresh air! As soon as he encountered the observers from other Churches whom he had invited, he straightaway created a new climate by telling them, with a frankness and honesty that won all hearts, “*We do not intend to conduct a trial of the past, we do not want to prove who was right and who was wrong. All we want to say is, “Let’s come together. Let’s make an end to our divisions.”*”

The documents produced by the Council then introduced lots of ideas and resolutions for the future that were totally new at the time - like announcing that one of its *principal concerns was the restoration of unity among all Christians, and that this would involve the whole Church, clergy and laity.* This was a completely new approach for Catholics! Instead of saying “they” have got to come back to “us” if there is going to be any unity, there would now be a serious commitment made to go forward, *together with other Christians,* to seek for that UNITY that Jesus was thinking about when he prayed, “*May they all be ONE.*”

Since then, theologians of the Catholic Church have been holding dialogues with an ever-increasing number of other Christian groups, searching for areas on which they could agree, and jointly signing official statements of agreement whenever they reached a consensus on a particular topic. There is so much more uniting us than dividing us!

Even *more important* than those intellectual, theological agreements, is the fact that a journey from bitter bigotry to greater understanding, and even to fellowship, has already been accomplished! This has happened mainly because *ordinary people,* taking Jesus’ words to heart, started breaking down the barriers and chatting meaningfully with people from other Traditions. As a journey on foot is only achieved by a lot of very small steps, so this journey to *UNITY* will take time, but it can be helped along by each apparently insignificant little chat! This kind of dialogue is vital, but a sense of purpose is important - otherwise there is the danger that we take the divisions between the Churches for granted, and just let them be!

This very brief outline of the development of Christianity is, then, seen from a Catholic viewpoint and focuses principally on Christian life as it has been lived in England over the centuries. Hopefully it will lead to more ecumenical chatting and then sharing in local mission to those in need!

The outline is divided into these five topics:

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1. Jesus’ desire that his followers should “*BE ONE*” had been impressed on the Apostles whom he sent to “make disciples of all the nations,” and so the early Christian Church strove to maintain its *Unity* both in belief and in practice.
2. Throughout the centuries, however, there have been ever-increasing divisions among those professing to be Christian.
3. Gradually Ecumenism emerged, pushed forward by individuals who were intent on trying to break down the walls of prejudice and restore Unity.
4. The Second Vatican Council added great impetus to Ecumenism by declaring the restoration of *Christian Unity* to be one of the Church’s priorities.
5. The work that is being done for unity today – in the context of a changing ecumenical landscape.

TOPIC ONE

THE MISSION OF JESUS AND OF HIS CHURCH

May we all become more aware of Jesus’ desire for Unity and understand better how his Church has struggled to maintain unity over the centuries.

Jesus’ Special Mission from the Father

God the Father sent Jesus into the world with the special Mission of gathering together the scattered children of God and drawing them all together to himself. Sin had fractured the original unity existing between God and mankind at the time of creation, so reconciliation was needed before there could be re-union. Mankind needed “at – one – ment.” According to the Catholic Catechism no.85: Jesus became man, “*to reconcile us sinners with God, to have us learn of God’s infinite love, to be our model of holiness and to make us partakers of the divine nature.*”

Jesus Explains His Mission to the Apostles

To the people in the synagogue at Nazareth Jesus announced that the passage he was reading to them from Isaiah, applied to *him* personally. He was aware that he was the one anointed by the Spirit and sent to bring the Good News and relief to those in need. (Lk.4:17-22)

During the following three years, he described himself and the work he felt called to, frequently starting with the words “*I am.*” We can learn a lot about Jesus’ Mission, and his own understanding of it, if we look at some of those explanations:

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“I am the Light of the world; anyone who follows me will not be walking in the dark; he will have the light of life.” (Jn.8:12)

“I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one can come to the Father except through me.” (Jn.14:6)

“I am the Bread of life. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me and I live in him.” (Jn.6:35, 56)

“I am the Good Shepherd,” that is, the one who leads his sheep, searches for and saves the lost, lays down his life for them, and finally brings them all together into one fold.” (Jn.10:11-16)

“I am the Vine,” ... and we - who are the branches - can remain united with him, bearing fruit in plenty, if we love him by keeping his commandments. (Jn.15:1-12)

In that beautiful example of the Vine, Jesus made it very clear to us how much he wants his followers to be united with him in love, so that His life can flow through us - just like the sap in a vine. But we realise, too, that each branch, connected to a vine, is also connected indirectly with all the other branches. And so it is with us. All faithful followers are connected in some way with each other.

At other times, when Jesus wanted to impress on his Apostles just how much he desires his followers to be united with him, he spoke a lot about his Father and the Holy Spirit too, repeating often that “he” and the “Father” were both ONE ... that they were IN each other ... that he wants us to be IN him ... that he had come to give us Life to the full ... that “he” would send the Spirit – from the “Father”...

That’s not easy language for us to understand because the Gospel writer was really attempting to describe the Blessed Trinity – as theologians have tried to do ever since! Basically Jesus was telling them that if people are united with *him*, then they will *automatically* also be united with the Father and the Spirit. Sharing their Life is possessing the very fullness of Life and Love.

If you’d like to track down the verses from St.John’s Gospel which were referred to above, look up these: (10: 10, 29, 38) (12: 32) (14: 10) (17: 11, 21-23)

Love and Forgiveness are essential for Unity

For us to *stay united* with Jesus we’ll sometimes need *his* forgiveness, and for us to keep united with family members and friends we’ll also have to be ready to give and receive forgiveness from *them*.

Jesus taught how it would be impossible to have Unity without *love and forgiveness*. He taught by his own way of living, for he himself always acted in a loving and respectful way, *caring* for people even when he needed to give them a stern rebuke

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to show them that they were in the wrong. He was ever ready to forgive, even at the moment they were putting him to death.

He also taught this lesson by his parables. “The Prodigal Son” is a good example. The loving father in the story longed for his son’s return and *wanted* to forgive him. He wanted his other son to forgive him too, so that *the family* could be *reunited* again. (Lk.15:11-32)

In his prayer, the “*Our Father*” we see we must be prepared to forgive others who wrong us – just as we hope to be forgiven by God.

He gave his Apostles “*a new commandment*” - to love each other in the same way as they had seen he loved them; and that their love would be a sign to others that they really were his disciples. Lessons for the Apostles were always intended for us too! “*Just as I have loved you, you also must love one another. By this love you have for one another, everyone will know that you are my disciples.*” (Jn.13:34)

Jesus Promises to Remain United by Means of Food

Jesus wanted to have *total unity* with all his followers who were to live throughout the centuries. What is there that could unite more closely than *food*? It nourishes and becomes *one with* the person who eats it. After he had fed the five thousand with ordinary bread, Jesus made a promise that he would give *himself* as food for the life of the world: “*I am the Living Bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this Bread will live forever; and the Bread that I shall give is my flesh for the life of the world.*” (Jn.6:51)

At the Last Supper

At the Last Supper Jesus fulfilled his promise and, in the Eucharist, gave himself as *food*, in the forms of bread and wine. He then asked his Apostles, that is, his followers, to repeat this action as a continual memorial of him. (Lk.22:19/20)
By doing this, Jesus gave also to *us*, the means of having *total union* with him, as well as a recognisable *sign of that union* – distinguishing us as his disciples.
After the meal, while still at table, the Apostles heard Jesus praying to his Father in a long prayer which is the whole of chapter 17 of St.John’s Gospel. He was praying *for them*, and also for all those would come to believe in him *through their words*.

When we read Jesus’ prayer, we are very aware of:

- the loving union that exists between Jesus and his heavenly Father,
- Jesus’ great desire that all his followers should be ONE,

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- that *our union* should be together with the Father and with the Son.

Here’s a small part of that prayer, capturing some of its main points:

*“Holy Father, keep those you have given me true to your name,
so that they may be one like us ...
I pray not only for these, but for those also
who, through their words, will believe in me.
May they all be one.
so that the world may believe it was you who sent me.”*

After the Resurrection: His Final Instructions

After the resurrection Jesus stayed among his disciples for another forty days, giving them further instructions, and during that time He missioned them to continue doing the *same work that he had already started*. Just as *he* had come to reconcile mankind with the Father, now *they* were to spread the “Good News” of this reconciliation and continue the work of “at-one-ment” - bringing light to the world, leading people along the way of truth, and being like shepherds among the flocks in their care:

“As the Father sent me, so I am sending you.” (Jn.20:21)

He instructed them to return to Jerusalem to await the coming of the Holy Spirit, who would give them power from on high and lead them to the complete truth. They were to become his *witnesses* to the ends of the earth:

*“Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you.
And know that I am with you always; yes, to the end of time.”* (Matt.28:19)

The Apostles’ Experiences after Pentecost

After the Apostles’ experience of the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost they were changed men. They were no longer afraid of being recognised as associates of Jesus, but ready for the Mission he’d entrusted to them. They set out with amazing courage, and, as a united group with a clear sense of purpose, they began preaching everywhere repentance for sin and Baptism in the name of Jesus Christ.

The Acts of the Apostles gives a beautiful description of the first Christians:

“These remained faithful to the teaching of the Apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers. The many miracles and signs worked through

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the Apostles made a deep impression on everyone. The faithful all lived together and owned everything in common; they sold their goods and possessions and shared out the proceeds among themselves according to what each one needed. They went as a body to the temple every day but met in their houses for the breaking of bread; they shared their food gladly and generously, they praised God and were looked up to by everyone. Day by day the Lord added to their community those destined to be saved.” (Acts 2:42-47)

In the various letters of St. Paul to the first Christians we see the importance that was being given to *Unity*. Here are two quotes to show this:

“Bear with one another charitably, in complete selflessness, gentleness and patience. Do all you can to preserve the unity of the Spirit by the peace that binds you together. There is one Body, one Spirit, just as you were all called into one and the same hope when you were called.” (Eph.4:2-4)

“I do appeal to you, brothers, for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, to make up the differences between you, and instead of disagreeing among yourselves, to be united again in your belief and practice. From what Chloe’s people have been telling me, my dear brothers, it is clear that there are serious differences among you. What I mean are all these slogans that you have, like: ‘I am for Paul.’ ‘I am for Apollos.’ ‘I am for Cephas.’ ‘I am for Christ.’ Has Christ been parcelled out?” (1 Cor.1:10-12)

St. Paul uses the analogy of the Body to give a lesson on a Christian’s very real unity with Christ. The whole passage is: 1 Cor.12:12-30, but these two verses from it express his main thought:

*“Just as a human body, though it is made up of many parts, is a single unit because all these parts, though many, make one body so it is with Christ
Now you together are Christ’s Body.”*

Celebrations of the Lord’s Supper

The apostles had taken Jesus’ instructions about the Eucharist seriously and, in memory of him, they regularly celebrated the Lord’s Supper with the new Christians. All of them were Jews – Jesus, his apostles, and their first followers – so they would all have been influenced by the common Jewish thought of that time:

- There were close links between a *covenant sacrifice* and a *communion meal*:
- By eating the sacrificial food together *the people were made one*.
- Only those ready to enter *fully* into God’s covenant were allowed *to share together in the communion sacrifice*.
- For them, unity with God, and unity with each other *belonged together*.

St. Paul’s understanding about the Eucharist and its connection with *unity* can be seen in his letter to the Corinthians:

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“The blessing cup that we bless is a communion with the Blood of Christ, and the bread that we break is a communion with the Body of Christ. The fact that there is only one loaf means that, though there are many of us, we form a single body because we all have a share in this one loaf.” (1Cor.10:16-18)

Organising Personnel and Planning for Mission

St.Peter is often seen to have taken the lead, as when he stood up and announced that the disciples should elect somebody to take the place of Judas. After carefully choosing two suitable witnesses, they prayed, and then handed the final decision over to the Lord. *“Show us which of these two you have chosen.” (Acts 1:15-22)*

They organised other personnel too: *elders*, of whom some became identified as *overseers* or as *bishops*; and *deacons* to see to the more practical works of charity for widows and other poor people. In St.Paul’s first letter to Timothy he gave a detailed description of the high standards of character necessary for those becoming elders or deacons. Good leaders would be needed if *unity* was to be preserved.

Whenever disputes arose among the early Christians: “Can Gentiles really become Christians?”... “Don’t they also have to obey the Jewish Law?” etc. the Apostles and Elders would meet together in a *Council* to pray and discuss the issues, and then make known to the “*Church* or the *saints*,” as Christians were often called, what they felt was the decision of the Holy Spirit who was *leading them*.

From the time of the first Christians, the Church has used *Councils* to endeavour to clarify what should be *believed* and *done* – in order to preserve that *unity* for which it was known that Christ had prayed. That is still done today.

Christianity Expands but Suffers Persecution

With all the missionary enthusiasm around at that time, Christianity expanded rapidly. But the Roman Empire was also expanding and the Emperors were suspicious of this strange sect which appeared to be a threat to their Empire, so they began persecutions that continued intermittently for over 200 years.

The Church was forced to become an undercover organisation – each area group meeting for prayer and the Eucharist in the private house of one of the Christians of that locality, so as to avoid being caught. Martyrdoms for the Faith abounded, and we have records of their sufferings – often looked on as an honour to be hoped for, as it made them more like their suffering Saviour. (1 Peter 4:13-15)

Few records, which could have given incriminating evidence, were left by the early Christians for their persecutors to find, other than brief references to their council meetings. The result of that is that we know little of St.Peter’s last years, except that he worked as Bishop in Rome, wrote at least one letter to Christians dispersed throughout Asia Minor, and was martyred in Rome during the persecution of the

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Emperor Nero.

The authority of his successors, the Bishops of Rome, is known to have extended beyond this city and Italy by the mid third century, when we know that one of them - Stephen I (254-257) was involved with controversies concerning Bishops living in countries other than Italy. The status of Bishops of Rome being *the Centre of Unity* developed gradually, and by the end of the sixth century he was commonly called by the distinctive title of “*Pope*”, meaning “*Father*,” in all the parts of the world where Christianity had reached.

Persecutions Cease and the Church Begins to Develop as an Institution

In 324 the persecutions of the Church came to an end. The Emperor Constantine had become a Christian and proclaimed toleration for all Christians living within the Roman Empire. About 50 years later, during the reign of Emperor Theodosius, Christianity then became the one, official, and *obligatory* religion for the entire Empire – which was now so vast that it was divided in two: the East, with its capital remaining in Constantinople, and the West, with its capital once again in Rome.

With the sudden increase in the number of Christians, membership of the Church was now no longer reserved for those who felt specially called to faith in Christ, but for everybody. In this great number of “automatic” or “compulsory” Christians there would have been many who, coming from a pagan background, lacked any real understanding of Christianity. However, some remarkable theologians and teachers were emerging, so now that there was peace for the Church, there was also greater opportunity to carry out the task of teaching the Gospel message and leading the people in their Faith. Monastic communities began to flourish, and, by means of these, Christian instruction was given and the needy helped in a variety of ways.

Facilitated by the spread of the Roman Empire, the Church was now developing as an Institution. In order to avoid the spread of false doctrines of heresy and to preserve *Unity of belief*, the Church now began to hold *Ecumenical Councils* – that is, for the whole of the Christian world, not just for a particular region.

The first of these was held in 325 and took place in Nicea (NW of what is now Turkey). Discussions on the vital Truths of the Faith finally enabled the Bishops at this Council to formulate a *Creed* which could be learnt and recited by even the illiterate. It was intended to be a means of teaching the basics of the Faith to Catechumens, and a constant reminder of the chief points of Christian Doctrine. The wording of this first version of the Church’s Creed was improved on during a second Ecumenical Council, held in Constantinople (now Istanbul) in 381 ... and several centuries later the Creed reached its final form, which is still recited today at our Sunday Masses. We know it as the *Nicene, or Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed*.

Other Councils followed at intervals – when particular needs occurred.

The Middle Ages (400-1500) was a period of great expansion for the Church as her

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teachings spread into many countries, but it was also a time of contraction due to persecutions, invasions from barbarians and from Muslims, and divisions caused by heretical groups - and then the great schismatic split between the Church in the East and West which happened in 1054.

The Arrival and Spread of Christianity in Britain

During the first century AD the Romans came to invade the Celts who were then living in Britain, and Britain became part of their Roman Empire. Later, when Christianity became the Roman Empire’s official religion in the fourth century, Christianity naturally came with them and began to spread. (St.Alban was the first English martyr, and that was in the third century.) However, at the withdrawal of the Romans in the fifth century, Britain was invaded by the Anglo-Saxons who brought their Pagan beliefs and practices with them. The result was that Christianity became mostly confined to the far west and the north, where Anglo-Saxons had not settled, and there it retained many of its typically Celtic characteristics, like a great appreciation of the wonders of nature. Saints Patrick, Ninian, Columba and David are a few of the many notable Christians of that era.

The Gospel message once again reached the southern areas of England when Pope Gregory I, after making enquiries about the English slaves seen in the market in Rome, sent Augustine and a group of monks to evangelise the people of England. They landed in Kent, and worked zealously to spread Christianity, naturally bringing with them the Roman type of organisational Church structure they were familiar with. Within a hundred years the whole country had at least come in contact with Christianity. In “*A History of the English Church and People*,” written by the Venerable Bede – a saintly monk from Northumbria (673-735) - we have our best source of information about the activities of the first missionaries who had helped to spread Christianity throughout Britain.

During the period of the Middle Ages a *parochial system* was gradually constructed throughout England, and by the time of the Domesday survey of 1086 there were already about 9,000 parishes, all networking in union with the Bishop of Rome. Each of these parishes would have had a priest responsible for pastoral care and the celebration of Mass and other services, and a laity that saw to the maintenance of the church building and churchyard where the parishioners were buried. People of each area would have had a real sense of belonging and of responsibility for their local parish - helping the Church to put down the deep and lasting roots which maintained her unity in faith and religious practice all through the Middle Ages.

By the sixteenth century one male out of every 25 in England was an ordained priest, and there were hundreds of deacons, monks, and nuns. Not only had parishes and houses for religious multiplied, but also pious associations, craft guilds and confraternities devoted to charitable works, including offering Masses for the dead in

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the numerous chantry chapels. They had devotion to patron saints, they enjoyed feast day processions, mystery plays for learning about the main Gospel stories, and pilgrimages to places like Canterbury – where St. Thomas Becket had been martyred – and to the shrine of Our Lady at Walsingham.

Any education or training the people possessed in craft skills at that time had been received from the monks, and was then generally used for purposes in some way connected with the Church. Everybody’s lives were then centred so much around Church activities that there was no clear distinction between the religious and the secular. It was a system that worked pretty well on the whole, and the vast majority of the English people appear to have been happy enough with a religion that was somehow connected with Rome and under the authority of the Pope. However, their actual understanding of the Catholic Faith would often have been very lacking or superficial. There was a recognized need for the reform of the clergy – not because most of them were hopelessly corrupt, as has often been suggested - but because their education was not adequate or keeping pace with the gradual arrival of New Learning. The clergy certainly needed a better, more Scriptural preparation for their ministry of preaching the Gospel to the people. Forbidding translations into the vernacular, for fear of them not being good enough, added to this problem. Unfortunately, the Church did not then give enough attention to calls for the reform which would surely have been a great help some years later during the difficult time of the Reformation, when Christianity became more disunited.



*“Father, we thank you for sending your Son Jesus
to proclaim your Kingdom throughout the world
and to show us the Way leading to the fullness of Life.
Jesus, help us to understand more deeply your great desire
to draw all people to yourself in Unity.
May the gift of the Spirit of Love and Truth
continue to guide us along your Way,
drawing us ever closer to you, Jesus, and to each other,
in that unity which you prayed for and still desire for all your followers.”
Amen*

TOPIC TWO

DIVISIONS WITHIN CHRISTIANITY

May looking back over the facts of history help us to reach mutual understanding and forgiveness, so that humbly admitting mistakes that were made in the past, we may

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become more loving in accepting the differences of others, and now be ready to learn from their special insights.

Differences of Opinion: Who WAS and IS Jesus?

When Jesus began his Public Ministry people soon realised that he was teaching *with authority*, and that he was performing actions they had never before seen any ordinary man do... like raising dead people to life and calming storms on the Sea of Galilee. They were astonished and puzzled as to who he could really be.

At the beginning of the Church the early Christians no longer had Jesus there to watch and question, but it was important to them, as Christians, to try to sort out in their minds what they *did* know about this Jesus, and *who* they were really claiming him to be. Not all their debates came to the right conclusions, and some proved to be unacceptable as doctrines of the Christian Church. For example, we know from the Apostle, St. John (1 Jn.4:2-3) that there were already some people, that he referred to as “the antichrist,” who said that Jesus had not really come in the *flesh*, but that he had only *looked like* a man. People who held that view were called Docetists.

At the first Ecumenical Council, held in Nicea in 325, (when the Creed was first formulated) the teachings of a man called Arius were examined. His claim was that the Son, the second Person of the Trinity who became incarnate in Jesus was not of the same nature as God the Father. The Council explicitly condemned this opinion. After the words of the carefully drawn up Creed, it claimed: ‘*and those who say, “There once was when he was not,” and, “Before he was begotten he was not” – these the Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematizes.*’

The word “Catholic” used in the above quotation means “universal”, whereas in other contexts it can be referring to the Roman Catholic Church.

In Greek, the word “heresy” had originally meant “opinion,” but it came to mean “wrong opinion.” People who *continued* to adhere to the teachings of Arius were now considered to be “heretics” and, as such, had cut themselves off from the body of the Christian Church.

There were other heretical groups too which the Church had to contend with, as they militated against her teachings about the oneness of God, and about the Person that Jesus really was. It was important to identify and try to quash them, because her message of the Good News of Christ’s Redemption and of our Salvation was dependent on those teachings.

Two of those heresies were Manichaeism, and Monophysitism.

Manichaeism was a Gnostic idea, which held all use of the human body to be sinful. Its root idea had come from the belief that there are two gods – one good who created and controls spirit, and one evil who created and controls matter.

Monophysitism, instead, believed that in the one Person of Jesus the human and

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divine were so fused that he had but a single nature ... meaning that he would have been neither really human nor really divine.

The Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon, held in 451, finally produced a definition concerning the identity of Jesus, stating that “*Jesus is true God and true man, one Person in two natures.*”

The understanding of the Holy Trinity which emerged in the West led to the belief that the Holy Spirit proceeded ‘from the Father *and from the Son*’ (‘Filioque’ in Latin), rather than just from the Father, as in the Creed agreed at Nicea and Constantinople in the fourth century. As a way of emphasizing the Son’s full divinity within the Trinity and to counter one or other of the heresies which were still a threat in some parts of the West, an addition to the Creed was authorised by some local Councils in the West from the sixth century onwards and, eventually, by the Pope in Rome. However, the ‘Filioque’ formula did not prove to be acceptable to Eastern Christians, who felt in any case that, as the original text of the Creed had been approved by an *Ecumenical* (i.e. ‘universal’) Council, it could not be changed except by another such Council. That was one of the factors which, later, led to the permanent breach between East and West.

East / West: Tensions and Schism

Between the East and the West there had often been tensions. Differences of language and culture had added to the theological issues, but, somehow the largely Greek-speaking East and the largely Latin-speaking West had managed to remain *one Church*, with the special position of the Pope, as Bishop of Rome and Successor of St.Peter, recognized by all.

In 1054 however, there occurred what would turn out to be a permanent breach of unity between East and West, when the following incident brought about a crisis in authority: Pope Leo IX had sent Cardinal Humbert to Cerularius, Patriarch of Constantinople, to try to solve the latter’s wide-ranging criticisms of the Western Church ... or, failing that, to promulgate a Bull of his excommunication. This resulted in *mutual* excommunications – rather complicated by the *timing* of Leo’s death – and then Schism. Although they continued to follow most of the same doctrines as the West, the Eastern Christians (now referred to as Orthodox) no longer recognized the Pope’s universal primacy. Instead they looked to the Ecumenical Patriarch in Constantinople, capital of the Eastern Roman Empire, as the focus of their unity amongst themselves.

Throughout the rest of the medieval period there was hope that this Schism might be healed, but Ecumenical Councils which met in 1274 and 1439 to resolve the issues, failed afterwards to get their agreements recognized by the people of the East.

The Spread of Heresy

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Many different heresies developed over the centuries and some of them spread far and wide – often in their efforts to avoid persecution. Once the Roman Empire had accepted Christianity as its *official* religion, the “targets” for persecution had shifted from *true* Christians to *heretical ones*. From the fourth century and long afterwards, Christian rulers could be just as intolerant towards those believing other faiths – now even demanding *inner assent* – not just *external* conformity as in the case of “Emperor worship.” Life during the Middle Ages being more communitarian and less individual than it is today, opposing an official policy, like a State religion, would have been seen as an affront to the whole community. This explains how Church and State generally *worked together* to eradicate dissidence even to the point of burning people at the stake.

The divisions which had been caused by heresies had a weakening effect on Christians, for when Muslims crossed from northern Africa to southern Spain in the eighth century, Christians were unable to resist and the religion of Islam spread rapidly. Some heretical ideas lasted many years and even resurfaced in different forms in later centuries, reflecting the prevalent ideas and attitudes of that particular age. They could sometimes just permeate people’s way of thinking about God or his expectations of mankind, even if the people concerned didn’t actually break away from *official* teaching to form completely new groups of Christians.

In England: Influences *Before* the Reformation

John Wycliffe (1330-1384) was a formidable intellectual challenge to the Church in the later Middle Ages. Many of his teachings on the need for reform of the clergy and other aspects of church life, his ideas about the Eucharist, indulgences, and predestination all anticipated those of the period of the Reformation over a hundred years later. During Wycliffe’s time the only translation of the Bible used in the Church was Latin, but, as Latin was the language through which reading was taught, anyone who could read also knew Latin and so would have been able to read the Scriptures. However, Wycliffe saw the need for an *English version* so he translated the New Testament, and later, his followers the Lollards, completed and published the Old Testament too. The Church, afraid of heresy, did not give its approval to the translation and the use of the Bible was banned. Possession carried the sentence of being burnt at the stake as a heretic, and over a hundred Lollards were put to death. In the repression of heretics, ecclesiastical and secular authorities cooperated closely because heresy was seen as a threat to both Church and State.

Investigation of heresy by officials appointed by the Pope, in an “Inquisition,” was a method hardly ever employed in England, as the authorities here seem to have been coping satisfactorily with the situation, and felt it unnecessary to appeal to Rome.

William Tyndale (1494-1536) was determined that there should be an *approved* English Bible. He made translations directly from the Hebrew and Greek – instead of from Latin – but, being refused permission to print them in England, he went abroad

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to do so and then smuggled copies back into England. He was caught by the authorities and burnt at the stake near Brussels

This was the time of the New Learning, when great interest was being taken in recently discovered Greek manuscripts. The invention of the printing press was making the publishing of books much easier, so it was unfortunate that the English Church authorities did not seize the opportunity to appoint suitable translators and then organise the circulation of approved copies of the Word of God. The clergy could then have been better prepared for their ministry of spreading the Gospel among the people, giving them a deeper understanding of the Faith to help them face the troubled times ahead. It was awareness of this need for greater knowledge of the Scriptures, as a basis for the desired reform, which motivated those who were later to be called Protestants.

On the Continent: Luther’s Efforts to Reform the Church

The second major break in Christianity, after that of 1054, occurred in Europe at the time of the Protestant Reformation, which is generally dated as beginning in 1517. That year the German Friar, Martin Luther (1483-1546) found himself in serious trouble with Church authorities. He wanted to air issues about Church affairs and many abuses, especially regarding indulgences, and have them debated and remedied by the Church. Expressing his controversial opinions was risky – especially when others in high places might well feel threatened by his wish for Church reform! He expected an exchange of arguments - but that didn’t happen. Instead, he had to face trial. Although he was promised a *fair* trial, he repeatedly received the message from Rome that he either had to recant or be proclaimed a heretic.

Eventually, failing to receive any satisfactory response from Rome, Luther lost all trust in the authority of the Church and turned solely to the Scriptures (he’d already translated them into German himself) for any guidance on religious belief. Apparently he was constantly worried as to whether he had done enough to please God to be saved. He searched for answers to his anxieties in the letters of St. Paul, and from them came to the conclusion that *justification is by faith alone*. The theories he developed were, to the minds of theologians of that time, at variance with what the Catholic Church was teaching about the need to do good works in order to “work for one’s salvation.” Luther had not really wanted to *leave* the Church ... but just to reform it! But he was seen as a heretic and was excommunicated.

Henry VIII’s Act of Supremacy and Break with Rome

The same year that Luther was excommunicated, young King Henry VIII of England produced a text refuting Luther’s attacks on the Church. The text was called, *Defence of the Seven Sacraments,*” and, for doing this, the Pope rewarded him with

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the title of *Defender of the Faith*. However, just over a decade later, Henry broke all ties between England and the Papacy in Rome. This was not because of *doctrinal* disagreements, or any desire to introduce Protestantism into the country, but because Henry wanted to divorce his wife, Catherine of Aragon. She had not given him a son, and Henry convinced himself this was a punishment from God for having married the wife of his dead brother, Arthur - seemingly forbidden in Lev.20:21 - even though the Pope had granted him a dispensation to do so. He now believed the Pope had exceeded his powers - so his marriage had not been a real marriage at all! According to him at that point, Rome had simply to recognise this fact and he'd be free to marry a lady of the court, namely Anne Boleyn who would, hopefully, bear him a male son to be heir for the throne!

There followed lengthy and complicated political efforts to win support for this legally, but without success, so Henry finally took the matter into his own hands and, accusing the clergy of *praemunire* – the offence of introducing foreign authority into England – had them heavily fined. Parliament were then requested to draft a bill stating: “This Realm of England is an Empire, a unitary Sovereign State subject to no higher lawful authority.” Henry had now withdrawn any duty for English people to obey the Pope and he felt free to act independently of Rome. Next, Parliament declared Henry's marriage to Catherine null and void, and his marriage to Anne Boleyn valid. Then, by passing the Act of Supremacy, Henry was able to claim that he was “*the only Supreme Head on earth of the Church of England.*” Any dissent from this opinion was treason - punishable by death, generally by being hanged, drawn and quartered.

When summoned to take the Oath of Supremacy, many acquiesced – even from among the clergy. The Bishop of Rochester, John Fisher, and Chancellor, Sir Thomas More, were among the few who refused to take this oath. For them it was not just a matter of obeying their King – it had deeper implications.

All Henry's diplomatic efforts - especially to get the divorce – had cost him a lot, so he found a way of supplementing his finances by suppressing the monasteries and appropriating their wealth. During his reign a class of “new men” rose to positions of power. They had taken the oath, supported all Henry's moves, profited by the suppression of the monasteries, and now they had reason to remain “faithful” to whatever King or Parliament should ask of them in the future!

Although allegiance to the Pope was forbidden, during Henry's reign other doctrines of the Church remained unchanged. Among the people there was little interest in Luther. With the suppression of the monasteries, however, poor people were deprived of all the help they had been receiving through the charitable works of the monks – who had now also lost their jobs - and education throughout England at that time must have suffered as a result.

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The Development of Protestantism

Meanwhile, on the Continent, the situation was somewhat different. There, breaking with the Papacy had come about as a result of *religious* issues – which afterwards became entangled in politics, whereas in England the break had happened because of the *political* moves of a King who wanted a new wife ... and only later, during the following reign, did it become a *religious* issue!

In the sixteenth century Germany was a loose confederation of sovereign states and cities, each of them, nominally, under the Emperor. In 1529 a number of the ruling princes, who were sympathetic to Luther's cause, issued a *protest* against Emperor Charles V and his Catholic allies – and from that point, Luther and his followers became known as *Protestants*. Luther's influence was great and continues even today in the Lutheran Church. Some years before he died, the second most important character in the development of Protestantism came to the fore.

That other major Protestant figure was the French theologian, John Calvin (1509-1564), who was at first influenced by Luther, but whose own personal anxieties about salvation then led him to develop ideas about *predestination*, and about a salvation that was *only for the elect* – ie: only for people God had already chosen to save before they were even born. For him, good works only *demonstrated* that one was *already counted among the elect*.

In 1536 Calvin published the first edition of his book explaining *his* version of theology, and later editions were to follow as *the* text for all would-be Protestants and Reformed Ministers to study. It was called “*Institutes of the Christian Religion*.” In 1536 Calvin was selected to be Pastor in the new centre of Protestantism, in Geneva in Switzerland. This city was now governed by a theocratic council of elders, which, together with the strong influence of Calvin, brought about a regime of austere, enforced morality – something like what would later be seen in Puritan England.

Protestant England - Under Edward VI

Unknown to Henry, his young son, Edward, had been educated by tutors with extreme Calvinist sympathies, so, after Henry's death, when he became King in 1547 - with his uncle Edward Seymour, Duke of Somerset, as the influential Lord Protector – England suddenly became a Protestant country. Seymour was in correspondence with John Calvin, who had advised him on the best ways to implement Protestantism in England. Now religious images were destroyed, feast days, processions and other devotions were prohibited, and chantry chapels were suppressed. The following year Parliament passed the *Uniformity Act*, and the Latin Mass was replaced by the use of a *Book of Common Prayer*, prepared by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer. There were revolts, especially from those who wanted to keep the Mass, but the majority tried to adapt to the new laws – believing the Sovereign always had the right to establish the religion of the people.

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A Brief Restoration of Catholicism under Mary Tudor

Edward VI died at fifteen, and in 1553 Mary Tudor became Queen. Daughter of Henry and his first wife, Catherine, she had been brought up as a Catholic. During her short reign of only five years there was a repeal of anti-Papal legislation, Cardinal Pole was delegated by the Pope to formally absolve the Realm from heresy, the Catholic hierarchy was re-instated, and the familiar rites and devotions of the Catholic Church were once again celebrated. All this seems to have met with a general enthusiasm from most of the people. However, there were naturally some who had become accustomed to the new laws and were unwilling to change with the tide, and who now refused to give up their Protestant beliefs.

Mary was a typical Catholic of her time and so she did nothing to change the heresy laws condemning heretics to be burnt at the stake. At that time there was no toleration shown for sincere commitment to beliefs other than the one dictated by the ruling power. This would have been taken for granted by the people ... but what a pity Mary showed no mercy for the people who'd undergone such a turmoil of religious changes within the space of a few years! For this she afterwards acquired the name, “Bloody Mary.”

The three most notable Protestant martyrs who were prepared to die for their religious convictions during Mary's reign, were Hugh Latimer, Nicholas Ridley, and Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer. They were condemned, and then burnt at the stake outside Balliol College in Oxford. A large monument in their honour was erected later and still stands in Broad Street.

Records of all those who suffered for their beliefs while Mary was on the throne tell us of about 300 who were burnt at the stake in various places – mainly Smithfield and Stratford in London, Canterbury and Maidstone.

Elizabeth's Reign and the Church of England

After Mary's death in 1558 her half-sister, Elizabeth, came to the throne and reigned until her death in 1603. She was the daughter of Anne Boleyn and her upbringing had been Protestant. While Mary was Queen, Elizabeth had publicly conformed to Catholic practice, but once on the throne, she appointed to her Council a number of convinced Protestants who had been in power under Edward VI – notably William Cecil. Acts of Parliament were passed in 1559 – generally referred to as the “Elizabethan Settlement” – and these stipulated that she was the “Supreme Governor” of the Church of England in matters both spiritual and temporal. Celebration of Mass was again replaced by Cranmer's Book of Common Prayer, and the situation became more or less as it had been during Edward's reign. The Sunday service, the occasion when the Prayer Book was used, was obligatory for everybody, and failure to attend was punishable by a fine of 12d each time ... only avoided by going into voluntary exile. Obstinate clergy were easy to have replaced!

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At the beginning of her reign her royal policy had been one of passively waiting for Catholic clergy, who had not resigned or gone abroad, just to die off, but events took place about twelve years later which caused this attitude to change to one of active persecution.

The Council of Trent and its Effects

In 1545 the Pope convoked the Council of Trent. As well as dealing with reforms needed in the Church itself, the Catholic Church was finally facing the challenge of Protestantism. Due mainly to plague and revolutions, however, the Council had many interruptions and didn't come to an end until 1563 – five Popes later. It had some success in moral reforms, but efforts to understand and deal with Protestant issues didn't get far. It seems that each side was *only* looking at things from their *own* point of view – basically, “Protestants from Scripture” and “Catholics from the Church's authority.”

One of the positive results of the Council of Trent was improved training for future Priests. A seminary was set up in Douay, Flanders. William Allen, a Priest originally from Lancashire, had twice gone abroad to escape the dangers of working in England and now he began this project in Douay. At first he intended to prepare a supply of Priests to have ready to send over once England had been restored to Catholicism, but, with the onslaught of religious persecution, Douay became a place to prepare Priests to return as soon as possible, as “missionaries.”

During the period after the Council, often referred to as the *Counter Reformation*, Pope Pius V hoped to regain the allegiance of the English people – but his approach only caused further antagonism. In 1570 he excommunicated Elizabeth as a heretic, but he also foolishly claimed that she had no right to the throne, and that English Catholics should be encouraged to depose her. Some Catholics now really felt it was their *duty* to plot against the Queen – though some of the plots that took place seem to have been deliberately provoked, and reports exaggerated. Naturally, the Protestants trusted Catholics even less now, and so the Government started a more active persecution for any Priests found exercising their ministry, or even for anybody who helped or provided a hiding place for them. This was now considered to be treason, and the death penalty was to be hanged, drawn and quartered.

In their efforts to hold on to the Mass – even if it did have to be celebrated in secret, and in situations of great danger – Catholic men went abroad to train for the Priesthood and then returned to work in England, but many were caught soon after arrival – and bravely suffered the consequences.

At Tyburn, Marble Arch in London there is a plaque on the pavement marking the site of the gallows where 105 died for their faith. The route between Holborn and Tyburn saw so much suffering at that time that it has been called, “the Via Sacra.” The Tyburn Convent of Perpetual Adoration which is nearby, preserves the memory

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of those martyrs in a shrine in their crypt.

During Elizabeth’s reign, apart from countless people who spent years waiting, and wasting away in prison, about 300 suffered the death penalty. This punishment for holding *religious convictions* not in accordance with those of the State at the time, continued for about another hundred years after that.

How much cruelty and suffering on all sides, and lack of understanding about the Gospel message of love! - And yet how many wonderful people *ready to lay down their lives* for Christ and conscience sake! Visiting any of the sites of execution can be a moving pilgrimage.

Splinter Groups and Dissenters

It was generally agreed that Catholicism should be kept at bay at all costs, but, naturally, even *within* the Church of England, people had preferences as to how they liked their services of worship to be conducted - for example, with *some* liturgical ritual, or totally devoid of it. Those who didn’t want *any* ritual were against it because they felt those externals were all part of the “errors and abuses of the Papists” – which they had been trying to get rid of, but felt had never been completely eradicated. Their doctrines stemmed from the teachings of Calvin, and so they sought total simplicity and great purity of doctrine and worship. At first they remained part of the Anglican Church, trying to continue in what they saw as the necessary “reforming work” of the Reformation – but then they became an unwelcome splinter group known as *Puritans*. In 1620 about a hundred of the Puritans boarded the “Mayflower” to go and settle in America, as “Pilgrim Fathers,” so as to be able to worship freely in peace. Later on this Puritanism developed into a major political force in England, with Oliver Cromwell at their lead.

In 1662, after the Monarchy had been restored, all ministers of religion were required to take an oath consenting to the *full text* of the Book of Common Prayer which had now been revised. Over 200 clergy of the Established Anglican Church were unwilling to take this oath because they found that they didn’t agree with everything in it, and what is known as “the Great Ejection” took place.

These Ministers who refused to conform had now become *dissenters* and, as such, were targets for persecution – similar to Catholics and Jews – and many of them voluntarily went abroad, to follow their consciences and start a new life somewhere else.

Non-Conformist Groups

Some, who chose to separate themselves from the Anglican Church established by the State, rather than try to reform the Church from within, set up independent,

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autonomous Churches and chose their own ministers – without submitting to ecclesiastical authority. Here are some examples of people from those Non-Conformist groups whose spiritual insights about how Christianity should be organised – and how it should be lived – often led them to feel called to make various new beginnings:

- Robert Browne made an attempt to create such a *Congregational Church* in Norwich around 1580, but then, being in trouble with the authorities, he transferred it to the Netherlands, where there was more religious freedom.
- John Smyth, had become a Puritan, but, being persecuted in England for his “unacceptable beliefs,” he left for Amsterdam and in 1608, together with another Englishman, Thomas Helwys, established a *Baptist* congregation there. Their aim was to restore what they considered to be the true Church on an Apostolic model - insisting that Baptism should always be by immersion and never administered to infants, because they were unable to understand and make this choice for themselves, but only to adults who were already *believers*. Considering the Baptism they had already received as babies to have been invalid, they were all re-Baptised. (All Christians holding that particular belief were labelled “Anabaptists” – a derogatory term used by their enemies.) Smyth joined the group of Anabaptists called *Mennonites*. They were known for their emphasis on peace and non-violence.
- Thomas Helwys left Smyth and returned to England a few years later, bringing with him about twelve of his own followers. They set up a congregation in Spitalfields, East London and began to formulate the 27 articles of the Baptists’ earliest confessions of faith. Helwys wrote what is probably the first book in English defending the principle of religious liberty being everyone’s right, but in spite of that, King James I had him thrown into Newgate Prison where he died in 1616 at the age of 40.
- George Fox also went against the established rules. He did not consider consecrated buildings and ordained ministers to be essential for the practice of Christianity as Christ could communicate His inner light to anybody. In 1643 he began touring England and giving sermons as he went – completely disregarding the official Parish boundaries and rules forbidding laymen to preach. He was arrested as a dissenter. When tried, Fox bade his judge to “tremble at the Word of the Lord” – which resulted in his followers acquiring the nickname of *Quakers*. The official name of this new group became the *Religious Society of Friends*.
- John Wesley was born in 1703 – a hundred years after the death of Queen Elizabeth. Both he and his brother, Charles, became Anglican Priests and struggled to bring about the reform they felt was needed in the Anglican Church. Charles was famous for his inspirational hymn writing and John for his preaching

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which really moved his listeners. After a while, however, John’s passionate preaching was found to be so disturbing that pulpits in Bristol were all closed to him, so his response to this was to begin preaching in the open air and to travel anywhere and everywhere, like George Fox had done.

For the Wesleys, a life of holiness and being born of the Spirit was the priority. The emphasis in their teaching was, “*Everybody needs to be saved, everybody can be saved, everybody can know they are saved, and everybody can feel saved.*” The Anglican Church tried to distance itself from the two brothers, but both of them declared they wanted their movement, nicknamed *Methodist*, to remain within the Church of England. However, after their death, it soon became regarded as Non-Conformist.

- Within Methodism there were a number of breakaway schismatic groups over the years – starting in 1797 with the more Calvinistic views of the *New Connexion*. Then in the early decades of the 19th century Hugh Bourne became the catalyst for the formation of another group called *the Primitive Methodists*, who wanted to return to the original spirit of having simple chapels, simple forms of worship, and a focus on their mission to the rural poor – whereas the *Wesleyan Methodists* had become more open to accepting the cultural enrichments of the Anglicans.
- In the early 1830s a group of clergymen – led by John Keble, John Henry Newman and Edward Pusey – launched a movement aimed at reforming the Anglican Church. This came to be known as the *Oxford Movement*, and members were often called *Tractarians* because of the tracts they published to disseminate their ideas. Tractarians laid emphasis on what they saw as the continuity between the Church of England and the undivided Catholic Church as it had been before the schism of East and West and, later, the Reformation. They sought to *recover* the traditional “catholic” elements of the faith which, they felt, had been wrongly discarded by the Calvinists. They set out to defend Anglicanism as the *Via Media (Middle Way)* between what *they* saw as two extremes: the distortions of doctrine and devotion introduced by the Roman Church, and the Protestantism of Luther and Calvin which had abandoned Catholic inheritance. It was their aim to help *recapture* this ideal for the Church of England which they felt had fallen too much under the control of an increasingly secular State. Eventually the Tractarians who remained in the Church of England acquired the name “*Anglo-Catholics*,” and their church buildings and manner of worship became increasingly like those of Roman Catholics. Anglicans could now be distinguished as “High Church” or as “Low Church” people.
- A Methodist Pastor, William Booth, finding that settled ministry didn’t suit him, resigned his post in 1861 and became an itinerant evangelist before then attempting to set up a Christian Mission in East London together with his wife. After a hard beginning there, he found a way of attracting people who were really

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poor and in need of help by giving his Mission a military name and structure. He became the first General of *The Salvation Army*. This idea caught the imagination and after that his work developed quickly. His famous words, “Go for souls and go for the worst!” reveal something of his single-minded zeal with which he determined “to fight till the end!”

After a life lived in the midst of poverty, his funeral in 1912 attracted a crowd of 40,000 people – including Queen Mary.

- After the Vatican Council of 1870, there were groups of Catholics in several European countries who separated from communion with the Catholic Church over the question of papal authority. These formed *the Old Catholic Church* - a communion of Churches which, later claimed Apostolic Succession from the *Old Catholic* Archbishop of Utrecht who had ordained the group’s first bishop. Then, in the early twentieth century, this *Old Catholic Church* became recognised as being in full communion, not with the Catholic, but with the *Anglican* Communion.
- The Society of St.Pius X (SSPX) also effectively broke with Rome in 1988 when its founder, Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, ordained four bishops without the permission of Pope John Paul II – in a deliberate protest against the modernising changes that followed Vatican II.

In the final topic, when we look at the ecumenical landscape of today, we will give attention to some of the more recent breakaway groups, and groups newly founded – all of which have continued to fragment the unity of Christendom.



*“Lord Jesus,
you prayed to your Father that your followers would be one -
united among themselves, and also together in you.
But, over the centuries,
many have brought discord and division into Christianity.
Maybe we, too, have sometimes been less than loving towards
those from a different background
or who hold different opinions on matters of Faith.
Lord forgive us, and lead us all into a true spirit of love and unity.”
Amen*

TOPIC THREE

THE BEGINNINGS OF ECUMENISM

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May we recognize and appreciate the contributions made by those people who, longing for truth and justice, struggled to initiate the healing of divisions caused by mistakes of the past.

Prejudices continue

From about 1700 Catholics in England were no longer put to death by Protestants, but there was still a lot of hatred and fear between both parties, although neither now really knew why. For over a hundred years now Catholics had had little education and few opportunities to better themselves, and the recusancy fines for not attending the prescribed worship enforced by the State had impoverished many who had tried to hold on to their Faith. However, from the end of the 1770s Parliament’s Relief Acts began to make things a little easier for them. In 1829 Sir Robert Peel also pushed through Parliament the Act of Catholic Emancipation – in spite of opposition from those who felt the public safety would be endangered by giving too much liberty to Catholics!

John Henry Newman

In topic two, where there was a description of some division among Christians as result of the Oxford Movement, mention was made of John Henry Newman who had been one of its leaders. Now we are going to focus on him as a character who went on to become influential ecumenically. He had been ordained in the Church of England in 1825 and his first experiences in the parish of St.Clements in a poor part of Oxford involved caring for the sick and dying. There he found he not only taught them, he also learnt from them too. He had been under the impression that people were either good or bad – but the parishioners did not quite fit those categories! That was a helpful consideration as he pursued his thoughts about the reality that was “the Church.” Before long, Newman was made the Vicar of the Oxford University Church of St.Mary the Virgin. His preaching attracted crowds, but his Tractarian approach - clearly advocating reform in the way they lived their lives as Christians and leading his listeners in a *new* direction – made his Anglican authorities wary of him. Then one of the Tracts he wrote (no.90) brought things to a head. He had been *attempting to prove* that the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England *could* be interpreted in a sense that was more consistent with the teaching and practice of the early, undivided Catholic Church – *before* all those errors, he then felt, had later been introduced.

For Tract 90 Newman was immediately condemned by Bishops and censured by the University. Not feeling free to explore doctrine and share his opinions, he left St.Mary’s Church and went to live in the hamlet, Littlemore, three miles away but under the care of St.Mary’s. He spent several years there, praying to the Holy Spirit

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for guidance and studying the history of the early Church. More and more it seemed to him that the “Fathers” of the early Church – St. Basil and St. Chrysostom – could not be identified with the Church of England. He had always maintained that the great argument against the Church of Rome was that it had added to the teaching that Jesus Christ had given. He wrote a book on the development of doctrine. By the time he had finished it, he was convinced that Rome had not *added* anything. It had simply allowed doctrines to develop, like a flower develops from a bulb.

Contrary to all his previous intentions, he decided to become a Roman Catholic, and in 1845 the Passionist Missionary Priest, Dominic Barberi, came to see him in Littlemore and received him into the Church. This event filled Newman with great joy, and yet it was not easy for him as it alienated him from so many of his family and friends, who did not approve of what he was doing. Of the other members of the Oxford Movement, some took the same route as Newman while others, instead, remained in the Church of England, becoming Anglo-Catholic or High Church Anglicans.

Newman went to Rome to prepare for the Priesthood, and while there he felt attracted to join the Oratory of St. Philip Neri – an organisation for Secular Priests with a tradition of working in big cities to teach and foster the Faith among the poor. Commissioned by the Pope, he then returned to England to set up an Oratory in Birmingham. As a Priest in Birmingham, he relished the greater opportunity he had for the pastoral care of souls, for he was a good leader, devoted Parish Priest, and did a lot of good among the poor of the inner city. He was a great intellectual too, producing a massive amount of sermons and essays, and writing letters of counsel for a wide variety of people. Although, especially in the beginning, he was not always accepted by other RCs - who were still sometimes inclined to distrust him – he did start to *change the image* of the Catholic Church in the eyes of Protestant England. He worked tirelessly to fight religious prejudice, and when he died tributes poured in and there were obituaries in the most unlikely papers.

Newman’s influence was great during his lifetime, and still continues to be so. He is now seen to be a beacon lighting the way for others, who also question the way that history had been recorded, and their own personal beliefs. He has much to say to the ecumenical situation in England today.

“The College” in which Newman lived during the time he spent in Littlemore was, in 1987, entrusted by the Fathers of the Birmingham Oratory to the religious community “*Spiritual Family, The Work*”. It now offers visitors “*a place of pilgrimage for all Newman friends and scholars ...a spiritual home to those who are sincerely searching for divine truth,*” and it is well worth a visit!

See the website: www.newmanfriendsinternational.org for more information about the place and to follow the links on Newman.

The Catholic Hierarchy is Re-Instated

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In 1847 the potato famine in Ireland caused many people to come over and settle in England – increasing the Catholic population here. By 1850 the Pope considered that there were enough Catholics living in England for him to restore the Hierarchy. Previous Bishops, called Vicars Apostolic, had been more like missionaries, but now Nicholas Wiseman was made the Archbishop of Westminster. Unfortunately, his tactless jubilation at receiving this honour, alarmed everybody, and it was rumoured that the Papists intended to remove Queen Victoria from her throne, and this caused riots. Here, seemingly, was a missed opportunity for the Catholic Church. If only a more suitable character had been chosen for that appointment!

An Inter-Church Friendship

Towards the end of the nineteenth century we hear of several “lone voices,” both Catholic and Protestant, expressing regret about the great divide between the churches, and feeling that it was simply the result of ignorance and past misunderstandings. This feeling of regret was experienced by Anglican Lord Halifax and Catholic Abbe’ Fernand Portal, who had met by chance and struck up a deep friendship. They shared a longing to break down the religious divide. Abbe’ Portal applied to Rome, requesting that the matter of the *validity* of Anglican Ordinations to the Priesthood be looked into, and a Papal Commission was set up to study the matter. Although neither of them was surprised by the answer, *both* friends were disappointed to hear that Anglican Ordinations were considered invalid because of defects in the text used in the rite of the post-Reformation Ordination service – revealing a different concept of the function of the Priesthood. The majority of the early Reformers had rejected its sacrificial function. Accordingly, in the Church of England, Ministers were ordained to be *Presbyters* - a name taken from the Greek, *Presbyteros* - with the pastoral role of preaching, teaching, and guiding their flocks. Instead, in the Catholic Church, *Priests* - from the Latin, *Sacerdotes* – have always claimed to have received from their ordinations the mediating power of offering the Sacrifice of the Mass. More recently, “High Church” Anglican Ministers are now often called “Priests.”

Information about the negative response received by Halifax and Portal was confirmed in Leo XIII’s Bull, *Apostolicae Curae*. Although their efforts had seemed to be in vain, they aroused the attention of some of the general public and so brought the “ecumenical scene” just a little nearer – which was a good move forward!

Some Important Inter-Church Meetings

- In 1910 a meeting took place in Edinburgh, Scotland, which was the very first *international interdenominational* meeting – though the Catholic Church was not officially represented. It was called a “World Missionary Conference,” and drew

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together missionaries from all around the world, resulting in the immediate setting up of the “International Missionary Council,” and later on, of the “World Council of Churches.” In Western Christendom, movements towards unity – in the case of most denominations – generally *began with missionary-type experiences*. In faraway countries, various groups of missionaries found that their work often brought them into close proximity with Christians of other traditions – more than would have happened had they been in this country – so it was natural that they wanted to meet and share together about their problems.

Participants seem to have been really inspired by that meeting! Here’s a little piece taken from the quantity of material written about the event:

*“A vision of Earth! ... that its inhabitants, for all the differences of tribe and race, become daily more convinced of the unity of their humanity: - one world, waiting surely, for who shall carry to it and place in its empty hands one Faith – the only thing that can ever truly and fundamentally unite it or deeply and truly satisfy it, bringing its one human race into one Catholic Church, through the message of the - “One Body and One Spirit,
One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism,
One God and Father of all, who is over all, through all, and in all.”*

Such was the vision inspired by that Missionary Conference! For many Christians, this marked the starting point for ecumenism in this country.

- Ten years later, in 1920, the Anglican Bishops’ Conference held in Lambeth, produced an unexpected document. It was entitled: *An Appeal to All Christian People*, and it expressed a very clear and apparently heartfelt desire that all the separated groups of Christians should agree to forget things past and reach out towards a reunited, Catholic Church. Here is an extract taken from that document:

“The times call us to a new outlook and new measures. The Faith cannot be adequately apprehended and the battle of the Kingdom cannot be worthily fought while the Body is divided, and is thus unable to grow up into the fullness of the Life of Christ. The time has come, we believe, for all the separated groups of Christians to agree in forgetting the things that are behind and reaching out towards the goal of a reunited, catholic Church.

The spiritual leadership of the Catholic Church in days to come, for which the world is manifestly waiting, depends upon the readiness with which each group is prepared to make sacrifices for the sake of a common fellowship, common ministry, and a common service for the world.

We place this idea first and foremost before ourselves and our own people. We call upon them to make the effort to meet the demand of a new age with a new outlook. To all other Christian people whom our words may reach we make the same appeal. We do not ask that any one Communion should consent to be

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absorbed in another. We do ask that all should unite in a new and great endeavour to recover and to manifest to the world the Unity of the Body of Christ for which He prayed.”

This document was sent, by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Randall Davidson, to the Catholic Cardinal Mercier of Belgium, who then arranged for meetings to be hosted in Malines in Belgium. This finally brought together *official representatives* from both the Catholic and Anglican Churches!

At those *Malines Conversations* ideas were put forward which were influential and bore fruit some years later during Vatican II, when people were more ready for a serious search for unity, but, unfortunately, in the early twenties those on both sides of the divide were still too much afraid of the implications of change. This wonderful document seems to have been amazingly ahead of its time!

- In 1938 over a hundred Churches voted to found *The World Council of Churches*, but the Second World War caused its inauguration to be delayed until 1948. At the meeting of that first Assembly in Amsterdam, it had 147 member Churches – but this number did not, however, include the Roman Catholic Church. More will be said in the fifth topic about the continuing aims of the WCC.

The Catholic Church’s Attitude to Unity in the Early Twentieth Century

The Catholic Church revealed the anxiety she was feeling regarding the subject of Church Unity when Pope Pius XI issued a Bull, *Mortalium Animos* in 1928, stating: “*It is not in any way lawful for Catholics either to support or to work for unity ... There is only one way in which unity may be fostered and that is by their return to the One True Church.*”

Here the stance being taken by the Catholic Church at that time was made very clear. Attending Protestant services, or even praying together with Christians of other Traditions would not be permitted – in fact it, it was to be considered a sin. This attitude became really ingrained into the thinking of the average Catholic, and the expression, “*Outside the Church there is no salvation,*” was believed, in a totally restricting way. If there were to be any moves towards Unity ... then Catholics thought these would first have to be made by *the Protestants* ... for the Catholic Church did not seem to consider that she needed to do any changing!

The Catholic Church today is more aware of Jesus’ claim to have come to save sinners. The Church is for sinners and for saints, and both the Church and her members are ever in need of conversion and reform!

The modern Catholic Catechism now explains for us that, although “*all salvation comes from Christ, the Head, through the Church which is His Body*”... those who do not know the Gospel of Christ and of His Church but sincerely seek God, and follow

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their consciences, can all likewise attain eternal salvation.

The Church is the sign and instrument of the reconciliation of all humanity. (see Cat. nos.171 & 152)

Two Apostles of Unity

- Paul Wattson, was an Episcopalian Priest in New York who, in 1898 and together with Lurana White, founded the Franciscan Friars and Sisters of the Atonement, a Society with the special mission of promoting Christian Unity, reconciliation and healing. By 1908, he and an English Anglican friend had initiated the “Church Unity Octave” in January to pray for unity. The following year he and his community were all received into the Catholic Church. Later he would say that the first fruits of the Octave had been their acceptance into the Church! In 1910 he was ordained a Catholic Priest.

Until his death in 1940, Fr.Paul Wattson worked tirelessly in the cause of Unity. His work is continued through the Society, which has its headquarters in Graymoor, New York, but which also now has some communities in England.

- Paul Couturier is another name which stands out among all those who dedicated their lives to working for Christian Unity during this era of the beginnings of Ecumenism. He was a French Priest (1881-1953), whose interest in the Ecumenical Movement was aroused when he heard about the work Cardinal Mercier had been doing in hosting the meetings at Malines.

Couturier soon discovered how prayer with, and for, other Christians who are equally true to their own confessions, could unlock for everybody the great spiritual treasures of separated Churches, and promote the love, fellowship and understanding that would lead to Unity of faith and life in Christ. He was convinced that Jesus really wants full unity, and he prayed ever more closely Jesus’ own prayer, “*May they all be one ... that the world may believe it was you who sent me*” - always adding the words “according to your will and according to your means.” Prayers for unity are often taken from ones devised by Couturier.

The saying of an Orthodox Metropolitan of Kiev, “*The walls of separation do not rise as far as heaven,*” became one of the principles of Couturier’s idea of ecumenism. He was certain that loving fellowship *must* precede issues of Faith and all the doctrinal discussions of theologians.

He used to go around religious communities of all confessions, enlisting monks and nuns in an Apostolate of Prayer for Unity ... calling this an “Invisible Monastery.” Several of those he enlisted to pray, not only dedicated their *working lives* to the cause of Unity, they even offered themselves up to be willing victims in sacrifice for it. Among them was Sr.Maria Gabriella, a young Trappistine from the Monastery of Grottaferrata, who offered her life and died of a serious illness three years later, in 1939. She was beatified in 1983.

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See the website: www.paulcouturier.org.uk for further information.

Fresh Air for the Catholic Church!

The future Pope John XXIII had lived in Bulgaria and Turkey, and, while there, had learnt to love and respect Orthodox Christians and Muslims. His openness to people of different cultures and beliefs was also seen when, in 1960, he received at the Vatican the first Archbishop of Canterbury to go there since the Reformation. This was Geoffrey Fisher.

The Second Vatican Council was convoked because Pope John felt the need “*To let some fresh air into the Church.*” Initially he had wanted to make it a Council for the *whole of Christendom*, but the Roman Curia did not allow him to do this. However, he *did* manage to invite representatives from other churches to observe the proceedings while Catholic Bishops and theologians from all over the world gathered at the Vatican and discussed all the serious issues then facing the Church. Their discussions naturally led to the compilation of a great number of documents, the volume of which includes those of the Post-Conciliar period until about 1974.

Pope John XXIII died before the Council was completed, but Pope Paul VI took over and brought it to a close in 1965 ... and then the Church was ready to *begin* working on its deliberations! Suddenly the Church began to show herself to the world as a Church *for mankind - not just for Catholics!* The subject of *Ecumenism* became a priority, and there was serious commitment to seek Christian Unity.

A Vatican Document: “Lumen Gentium”

One of its first documents, issued in Nov. 1964, is The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. All Church documents are known by their opening words in Latin, and this one is called *Lumen Gentium*, which means “Light of Humanity.”

The teaching of *Lumen Gentium* on the nature of the Church is set out in eight chapters.

In the first chapter, dealing with the Mystery of the Church, the Council expresses the desire to bring the Light of Christ to *everybody* in the world. Here are various short excerpts from that chapter:

“Christ is the Light of humanity; and it is, accordingly, the heartfelt desire of this sacred council, being gathered together in the Holy Spirit, that, by proclaiming his Gospel to every creature, it may bring to all men that light of Christ which shines out visibly from the Church.” (no.1)

“The Church- that is, the Kingdom of Christ – already present in mystery, grows visibly through the power of God in the world.” (no.3)

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“When the work which the Father gave the Son to do on earth was accomplished, the Holy Spirit was sent on the day of Pentecost in order that he might continually sanctify the Church, and that, consequently, those who believe might have access through Christ in one Spirit to the Father.”

.... Hence the universal Church is seen to be a people brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.” (no.4)

“The one mediator, Christ, established and ever sustains here on earth his holy Church, the community of faith, hope and charity, as a visible organization through which he communicates truth and grace to all men. But, the society structured with hierarchical organs and the mystical Body of Christ, the visible society and the spiritual community, the earthly Church and the Church endowed with heavenly riches, are not to be thought of as two realities. On the contrary, they form one complex reality which comes together from a human and a divine element. For this reason the Church is compared, not without significance, to the mystery of the Incarnate Word. As the assumed nature, inseparably united to Him, serves the Divine Word as a living organ of salvation, so, in a somewhat similar way, does the social structure of the Church serve the Spirit of Christ who vivifies it, in the building up of the Body. (Eph.4:15) This is the sole Church of Christ which in the Creed we profess to be one, holy, catholic and apostolic, which our Saviour, after His resurrection, entrusted to Peter’s pastoral care (Jn.21:17), commissioning him and the other Apostles to extend and rule it (Matt.28:18-20), and which He raised up for all ages as “the pillar and mainstay of the truth (1 Tim.3:15). This Church, constituted and organized as a society in the present world, subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him. Nevertheless, many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside its visible confines. Since these are gifts belonging to the Church of Christ, they are forces impelling towards Catholic unity.” (no.8)

The Decree on Ecumenism: “Unitatis Redintegratio”

Another document, also issued in Nov. 1964, is the Decree on Ecumenism, known as *Unitatis Redintegratio*, meaning “The Restoration of Unity.”

In its three chapters this document deals with the following themes:

- 1.Catholic Principles on Ecumenism
- 2.The Practice of Ecumenism
- 3.Churches and Ecclesial Communities Separated from the Roman Apostolic See.

When we read this document *now*, we may perhaps think it contains nothing spectacular – but it was expressing attitudes which were completely new in 1964!

Here are a few of the new attitudes revealed:

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- Catholics are now *positively urged* to participate in ecumenical activity – instead of just wishing or hoping that “the others would come back to us”!
- Dialogue is seen to be vital.
- There is now open admission that the blame for divisions was not all one-sided, and that repentance and apologies are needed.
- *All* those who believe in Christ and have been properly baptised are *already* in a real, though imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church, and each should aim at a spiritual renewal within their own tradition.
- Prayer for unity was strongly recommended – and Catholics could (and should) now even *pray together with other Christians*.

Such unexpected changes!

Here is the Introduction to the Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*:

“The restoration of unity among all Christians is one of the principal concerns of the Second Vatican Council. Christ the Lord founded one Church and one Church only. However, many Christian Communions present themselves to men as the true inheritors of Jesus Christ; all indeed profess to be followers of the Lord but they differ in mind and go their different ways, as if Christ Himself were divided. Certainly, such division openly contradicts the will of Christ, scandalizes the world, and damages that most holy cause, the preaching of the Gospel to every creature.

The Lord of Ages nevertheless wisely and patiently follows out the plan of His grace on our behalf, sinners that we are. In recent times He has begun to bestow more generously upon divided Christians remorse over their divisions and longing for unity.

Everywhere large numbers have felt the impulse of this grace, and among our separated brethren also there increases from day to day movement, fostered by the grace of the Holy Spirit, for the restoration of unity among all Christians. Taking part in this movement, which is called ecumenical, are those who invoke the Triune God and confess Jesus as Lord and Saviour. They do this not merely as individuals but also as members of the corporate groups in which they have heard the Gospel, and which each regards as his Church and indeed, God’s. And yet, almost everyone, though in different ways, longs for the one visible Church of God, a Church truly universal and sent forth to the whole world that the world may be converted to the Gospel and so be saved, to the glory of God.

The sacred Council gladly notes all this. It has already declared its teaching on the Church, and now, moved by a desire for the restoration of unity among all the followers of Christ, it wishes to set before all Catholics guidelines, helps and methods, by which they too can respond to the grace of this divine call.”

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Here are some other excerpts from the same Decree on Ecumenism:

“In this one and only Church of God from its very beginnings there arose certain rifts, which the Apostle strongly censures as damnable. But in subsequent centuries much more serious dissensions appeared and large communities became separated from full communion with the Catholic Church – for which both sides were to blame.”(no.3)

“All who have been justified by faith in Baptism are incorporated into Christ; they therefore have a right to be called Christians, and with good reason are accepted as brothers by the children of the Catholic Church.” (no.3)

“In ecumenical work, Catholics must assuredly be concerned for their separated brethren, praying for them, keeping them informed about the Church, making the first approaches toward them. But their primary duty is to make a careful and honest appraisal of whatever needs to be renewed and done in the Catholic household itself, in order that its life may bear witness more clearly and faithfully to the teachings and institutions which have been handed down from Christ through the apostles.” (no.4)

“There can be no ecumenism worthy of the name without interior conversion.” (no.7)

“This change of heart and holiness of life, along with public and private prayer for the unity of Christians, should be regarded as the soul of the whole ecumenical movement, and merits the name, Spiritual Ecumenism.” (no.8)

“This Council declares that it realises that this holy objective – the reconciliation of all Christians in the unity of the one and only Church of Christ – transcends human powers and gifts. It therefore places its hope entirely on the prayer of Christ for the Church, in the love of the Father for us, and in the power of the Holy Spirit.” (no.24)



*“Dear Lord,
May all the separated groups of Christians,
each claiming to be followers of Jesus Christ,
agree to forget the mistakes and prejudices of the past
and reach out towards the goal
of a Catholic Church which is reunited
and manifesting to the whole world
the unity of the Body of Christ for which he himself prayed.
Lord, free us from all feelings of prejudice,
and unite us all in love, so that we will be recognizable*

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as your true disciples.”

Amen

TOPIC FOUR

ECUMENISM AFTER VATICAN II

Let's rejoice that there are now many Christians who long for unity and strive to bring it about. May we, too, pray and work to further this cause.

New Inter-Church Relationships

At the second Vatican Council the Catholic Church had *committed* herself to working to bring about Unity among all Christians! There was now world-wide interest in this decision, and the Church lost no time in getting started at putting the commitment into practice. One of its first moves involved a connection with the East:

In December 1965 Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras I of the Orthodox Church of Constantinople together signed a document of *Common Declaration*. Remembering the sad events that had eventually led to the division of the Church into East and West in 1054, these two Religious Leaders now expressed regret for the offensive words, sentences of excommunication and all the mutual hostilities of that period. They both felt called by the Holy Spirit to overcome differences, experience reconciliation, and to commit themselves to the fraternal relationships now begun.

A few months later, in March 1966, people *in England* who were interested in ecumenism received important news! The Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey, had gone to Rome and there he too signed a document with the Pope. This one is known as the *Joint Declaration on Cooperation*, and it committed both the Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion to begin a serious dialogue. Because this marked an important turning point in this country, this document is given here in full:

“In this city of Rome, from which St. Augustine was sent by St. Gregory to England and there founded the cathedral see of Canterbury, towards which the eyes of all Anglicans now turn as the centre of their Christian Communion, His Holiness Pope Paul VI and His Grace Michael Ramsey, Archbishop of Canterbury, representing the Anglican Communion, have met to exchange fraternal greetings.

At the conclusion of their meeting they give thanks to Almighty God who by the action of His Spirit has in these latter years created a new atmosphere of Christian fellowship between the Roman Catholic Church and the Churches of the Anglican Communion.

This encounter of 23 March 1966 marks a new stage in the development of fraternal relations, based upon Christian charity, and of sincere efforts to remove the causes

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of conflict and re-establish unity.

In willing obedience to the command of Christ who bade His disciples love one another, they declare that, with His help, they wish to leave in the hands of the God of mercy all that in the past has been opposed to this precept of charity, and that they make their own the mind of the apostle which he expresses in these words: “Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press towards the mark for the prize of high calling for God in Christ Jesus. (Phil.3:13-14)

They affirm their desire that all those Christians who belong to these two Communion may be animated by these same sentiments of respect, esteem and fraternal love; and in order to help these develop to the full, they intend to inaugurate between the Roman Catholic Church and the whole Anglican Communion a serious dialogue which, founded on the Gospels and on the ancient common traditions may lead to unity in truth for which Christ prayed.

The dialogue should include not only theological matters such as Scripture, tradition and liturgy, but also matters of practical difficulty felt on either side. His Holiness the Pope and His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury are, indeed, aware that serious problems stand in the way of a restoration of a complete communion of faith and sacramental life; nevertheless, they are of one mind in their determination to promote responsible contacts between their Communion in all those spheres of Church life where collaboration is likely to lead to greater understanding and a deeper charity, and to strive in common to find solutions for all the great problems that face the Church in the world of today.

Through such collaboration, by the grace of God the Father and in the light of the Holy Spirit, may the prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ for unity among His disciples be brought nearer to fulfilment, and with progress towards unity may there be a strengthening of peace in the world, the peace that only He can grant who gives, “the peace that passeth all understanding,” together with the blessing of Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, that it may abide with all men for ever.”

An Inter- Church Commission – ARCIC Begins

With the signing of that *Declaration on Cooperation*, both Churches – Catholic and Anglican – now began their preparations for the official dialogue about to be started!

The Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) was set up with a Commission consisting of co-Chairs, co-Secretaries, and a number of specially appointed Theologians from each of the two Churches.

Their joint preparatory meetings were held between 1967 and 1968 and resulted in the issue of the Malta Report: “A Vision for Unity.”

Then the first phase began. This was called “ARCIC I.” It consisted of thirteen sessions of meetings, was held at various venues, and lasted from 1970 to 1981.

Their main objective was to seek to identify common ground of belief so that official

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“agreements” could be reached and accepted by both sides.

At the completion of the ARCIC I meetings, the Windsor Report revealed that the discussions on pre-determined topics had led to the Theologians finding substantial agreements on four particular statements dealing with the following:

- Eucharist
- Ministry and Ordination
- Authority in the Church (1)
- Authority in the Church (2)

Enthusiasm for Unity after the Council

During the years just after the Council the enthusiasm for ecumenism in England continued for some time. Many people felt that Christian Unity must be just around the corner! A National Programme was launched, called “*The People Next Door.*” It proved to be remarkably successful and led to hundreds of local ecumenical initiatives in various parts of the country. One of these was a project, started in Thamesmead in 1968, in which there was a Team Ministry of Anglican, Catholic, Methodist, and United Reformed ministers working together, using the same building. Another initiative, “Lent ‘86” on local radio, received an overwhelming number of response sheets to questions posed.

However, as the years passed, it became more and more obvious that finding *full unity* was going to be a very long process, because the focus seemed to be mainly on the agreements that Theologians were able to make about fine points of doctrine – which, to be honest, were not of great interest, or even comprehensible, to the average lay person! So, feeling unable to push forward those doctrinal agreements, a discouragement began to set in ... and the laity began leaving the work to the Theologians!

ARCIC II and ARCIC III

The second phase, ARCIC II, ran from 1983- 2005 with a further twenty sessions of meetings, resulting in substantial agreement on another five statements on the following topics:

- Salvation and the Church
- Church as Communion
- Life in Christ; Morals; Communion and the Church
- The Gift of Authority: Authority in the Church (3)

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- **Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ**

During the years of the ARCIC II meetings, a separate Commission was also set up – not to look for theological agreements – but to find ways of *putting into practice* the agreements that had already been reached. This new Commission, IARCCUM, stands for: International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission, and in 2007 it issued a document called, “Growing Together in Unity and Mission,” summarizing the nine statements already mentioned.

ARCIC III began in May 2011, and there is no knowing just how long this phase will last! Pope Benedict and Archbishop Rowan Williams, when they met in 2006 to commit to a continuation of dialogue between the two Churches, requested the theologians to reflect further on the *nature* of the Church – as it is understood by both Anglicans and Catholics, and to analyse the means by which the two Traditions arrive at “right ethical teaching.” So that is their special mandate this time.

The work is slow, and there are now new obstacles to be faced – like the Anglican Church’s new legislation about women Priests – which make the journey more difficult. Another difficulty seems to be in finding “consensus,” because in Anglicanism itself there are various trends that may loosely be described as “liberal”, “evangelical” or “catholic,” so the Anglican representatives come from varying points of view. Even when agreements have been reached by Theologians at ARCIC meetings, these have afterwards to be submitted to their respective Churches for consideration and then await a positive response – before there can be said to be any full acceptance by both Churches. The topics of the Eucharist and Authority in the Church, for example, still require a lot more attention.

Archbishop Sir David Moxon - now Director of the Anglican Centre in Rome, which was set up immediately after Vatican II – made these interesting comments when being interviewed concerning his Anglican views of ARCIC discussions: *“The Lambeth Conference at various times has made it clear that the Anglican Communion is provisional; it seeks appropriate reunification with the successor of Peter. Those involved in the Anglican ecumenical movement believe that a pope after the style of St. Cyprian would be a means of offering presidency in love to the whole Church, as long as there was appropriate conciliarity and synodality as well.”*

Conciliarity - As St. Peter and the other Apostles constituted one apostolic college, so the “Pope *together with* the Bishops” give continued existence to this apostolic body which has supreme and full power over the universal Church.

Synodality - The idea of consultation with the grass roots of the laity and clergy in the universal Church.)

Dialogues between the Catholic Church and Other Church Groups

During the time that has elapsed since the end of the Vatican Council in 1965, many other Church groups, both from the East and the West, have approached the

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Catholic Church with a desire either to re-establish broken relationships, or to begin to establish relationships for the first time.

We shall look briefly at a few of these:

- The Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity

In 2006 this Commission completed its fourth phase of dialogues since the Council. For Luther, the most important issue had been that of “the justification of sinners,” so naturally, overcoming division on that particular point was the highest priority for the theologians when they began to try to reconnect. By 1999 they seemed to have finally made a break-through for a Joint Declaration about justification was then signed by representatives of the Catholic Church and of the Lutheran World Federation.

In 2013 those two same bodies issued a report, “*From Conflict to Communion.*” This gives an account which is based on the 1999 Declaration, and it offers: “*a differentiating consensus comprised of common statements along with different emphases on each side, with the claim that these differences do not invalidate the commonalities. It is thus a consensus that does not eliminate differences, but rather explicitly includes them.*”

So - some differences of understanding don't prevent unity!

“*From Conflict to Communion*” makes reference to modern research and how much it has contributed to changing perceptions of the past. Although “the history itself” is not different, it is now “*being told differently*” – “*free of entanglements of theological insights and political interests.*” It also looks ahead to 2017, when we shall be commemorating 500 years since the beginning of the Reformation, which had been triggered by a seemingly insignificant action by Luther. Reformation Day is kept on 31 Oct. – so that date in 2017 will be a special occasion to remember.

- The World Methodist Council

In 1967 the Methodist World Council began dialogues with the Catholic Church and has since then reported at each of its five-yearly meetings. The first of the reports began with the note that there was no formal history of separation between the two Churches and that there were grounds of affinity in the central place given to “holiness.” It is interesting to note that the 1999 Declaration on Justification of the Lutheran Church was also, later, affirmed by the Methodists. In 2010 the World Methodist Council produced a summary of the achievements they had made in their dialogues with the Catholic Church so far, and this document is entitled, “*Synthesis: Together in Holiness.*” Since 1972 the Vatican has held annual theological conversations with representatives of Pentecostalism. These conversations have spanned several phases and achieved a certain measure of mutual understanding. Pentecostalism is a movement or revival within churches rather than the name of a denomination. It was first recorded in North America in 1901, surfacing then in other

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places a few decades later – so this also has no history of formal separation from the Catholic Church.

- The Baptist World Alliance

The Baptist World Alliance has had fraternal dialogue and exchange of Delegates with the Catholic Church since 1984. After the 1990 report, “*Summons to Witness to Christ in Today’s World*,” there was an interruption, due to talks being stalled by the opposition of some of the more fundamentalist of the Baptists, but then, later, a report was issued, called “*The Word of God Alive in the Church*.”

An Encyclical Letter to Revive Enthusiasm

Thirty years after Vatican II, in order to try to “renew Christ’s call to unity” and revive the enthusiasm which was waning, Pope John Paul II issued an encyclical letter, “*Ut Unum Sint*,” meaning those words of Jesus during His prayer to His Father, “May They be One.”

In his introduction to this letter the Pope thanks God for the progress already made along the path of unity and communion among Christians, but then he goes on to focus on the inherited mutual misunderstandings and prejudices which he says cannot be underestimated. These need to be dealt with.

Here is an extract from his letter (no.2):

“The commitment to ecumenism must be based upon the conversion of hearts and upon prayer, which will also lead to the necessary purification of past memories. With the grace of the Holy Spirit, the Lord’s disciples, inspired by love, by the power of the truth and by a sincere desire for mutual forgiveness and reconciliation, are called to re-examine together their painful past and the hurt which that past regrettably continues to provoke even today. All together, they are invited by the ever fresh power of the Gospel to acknowledge with total objectivity the mistakes made and the contingent factors at work at the origins of their deplorable divisions.”

Later in the same letter, the Pope speaks of the scandal of the divisions which block the Church’s mission of evangelisation. He asks how it is possible to proclaim the Gospel of reconciliation without at the same time being committed to working for reconciliation between Christians... and how non-believers could possibly receive the *true* message from missionaries disagreeing among themselves.

Another issue that Pope John Paul raises is that of the role of the Papacy. He affirms that he has been requested “*to find a way of exercising the primacy which, while in no way renouncing what is essential to its mission, is nonetheless open to a new situation.*” He asks that all the Pastors and theologians of our Churches engage

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in patient and fraternal dialogue to seek this *together* - intent only on the will of Christ for His Church.

Throughout the whole of his letter he shows that *dialogue* is vital – even just among *ordinary* Christians of differing Traditions. He tells us, “*Dialogue is not simply an exchange of ideas. In some way it is always an exchange of gifts.*”

This thought about “gifts to be received” has been developed more fully recently and has provided a method found to be very helpful in breaking down barriers and facilitating fellowship at all levels. It will be dealt with in the next section.

A Way to Move Forward: Receptive Ecumenism

Back in 1964 *Unitatis Redintegratio*, in no.4, had already pointed out that we should recognise the riches of Christ already present in other Christians.

All Traditions have such riches to share! These riches take many different forms: insights which the others haven't yet discovered; ways of worshipping, praying and singing; of preaching the Gospel message; of experiencing fellowship and reaching out to those in need. Some Traditions have emphasised Scripture, others the Eucharist, others Baptism, and so on ... and in emphasising one aspect, others can get under-emphasised. A sharing of what is most meaningful to each can be an enriching experience, helping us to learn from the perspectives of others. It's about both “giving” and “receiving.” It is about “learning” something *new*, rather than feeling we are expected to “let go” of something that is dear to us. With this change of attitude, there is no room for defensiveness of what we consider to be *right*, so it makes genuine fellowship possible and each Tradition can also profit by the experience.

Receptive Ecumenism happens when people from one Church, speaking to their ecumenical partners, no longer say:

“*This is what **we** believe; **we'll** explain it. You accept it or reject it.*”

But, instead, they change the words to:

“*What is precious and very important to **you** in **your** Faith? ... Please tell us about it.*”

One of the communiques after ARCIC meetings told how the group was committed to modelling the receptive ecumenism it advocates and was constantly trying to find ways of consulting with the *other* members of the group.

In Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, “The Joy of the Gospel,” we find in no.246 this beautiful reference to the concept of receptiveness:

“*If we really believe in the abundantly free working of the Holy Spirit, we can learn so much from one another! It is not just about being better informed about others, but*

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rather about reaping what the Spirit has sown in them, which is also meant to be a gift for us.”

I think the value of receptive ecumenism is well expressed here: “*I need your faith to make mine whole*” - a sentence found in David Butler’s excellent little book, published in 1996, called “*Dying to be One*”

Another Way to Move forward: Spiritual Ecumenism

For any Tradition to be able to share *its best practice*, there is need for its members first to return to the *roots* of that Tradition, try to recapture its original, Spirit-filled inspirations and special insights, and to experience a *personal renewal* in accordance with that particular Tradition. Then they will become clearer as to what it is they possess that is special and that they would like to share.

The more the Gospel is *lived*, the more Christian Unity is already being practised. The closer we are to the Lord, the closer we will draw to each other. Through Baptism we are, already, *together in Christ*. When aware of this, we feel urged to pray for a unity that is more visible – in prayer that is both personal and together in common with other Christians. Linking personal renewal and prayer for unity, *Unitatis Redintegratio no.8* had already made this statement:

“This change of heart and holiness of life, along with public and private prayer for the unity of Christians, should be regarded as the soul of the whole ecumenical movement, and merits the name ‘Spiritual Ecumenism’.”

This thought has been repeated many times since then – notably in *Ut Unum Sint no.21*, and in the practical little “*Handbook of Spiritual Ecumenism*” of Cardinal Walter Kasper, who was President of the “Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity” at the time it was published.

The Eucharist is seen as a Sign of Full Visible Christian Unity

In Cardinal Kasper’s handbook, we read, “*Eucharistic and ecclesial communion are intrinsically linked to one another. Therefore, as long as fundamental disagreements in matters of faith persist and the bonds of communion are not fully re-established, celebrating together the one Eucharist of the Lord is not possible.*”(no.37)

This is because, for Catholics, the link between *the Body of Christ* which is the Eucharist, and *the Body of Christ* which is the Church, is very profound. For this reason, the Catholic Church considers the *Reception of Communion* to be the sign that full, visible unity has already been achieved. As many non-Catholics view the Eucharist as a *means to attain* unity, rather than as an *expression* of a unity which

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already exists, they often find refusal to be given Communion a very painful experience.

The following three extracts deal with those points. They are taken from a teaching document produced by the Bishops of Britain in 1998, “*One Bread One Body*”:

“In Catholic teaching, full communion of faith is made clearly visible above all at the Eucharist, the celebration of Mass. The simple act of receiving Holy Communion is the highest expression of a living and visible unity of faith and life with the community which celebrates that Eucharist. Full participation at a Catholic Mass through reception of Holy Communion normally implies full communion with the Catholic Church itself. (no.60)

“In the days of persecution, faithfulness to the Catholic celebration of the Mass and faithful communion with the Pope went hand in hand as the key visible signs of the fullness of Catholic faith. In Catholic teaching, receiving Holy Communion cannot be separated from this `ecclesial` understanding of the Eucharist.” (no.62)

“St. Paul uses the image of the human body to express something of the unity of the members of the Church, among ourselves but above all ‘in Christ’, our Head. Sadly, any discussion of sacramental sharing sharply focuses our attention on Christian disunity, and on the need for reconciliation and healing. When there is brokenness in our human body, there is pain. Pain is a keen reminder that there is something wrong, that we need healing. Simply taking the pain away does not in itself bring healing ... This pain can be a powerful stimulus to putting our energy into the real healing of our disunity, moving from the partial communion we already enjoy to the full communion which will enable us to share together the one table of the Lord.” (nos.76 and 77)

During a Eucharistic celebration in a Church which we do not belong to, it is recommended that we approach the altar and request a blessing, instead of receiving Communion. This applies to both non-Catholics at a Catholic celebration, and Catholics at a celebration in another Christian Tradition. For both it can serve as a reminder that full unity has not yet been achieved, and that there is work still to be done!

For What Kind of Unity are we Seeking?

We realize that not *all* Christians see the Eucharist as being central to the achievement of *full unity*. Even the great Catholic ecumenist, Cardinal Suenans, (borrowing a thought from Jean Delumeau) expressed this query in his book, “*Ecumenism and the Charismatic Renewal*”: “*We’ve certainly been sacramentalized ... But are we truly Christianized?*” There are many aspects to the practice of Christianity and individuals tend to prioritize what *they* feel to be most important - so

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are we just seeking *our own personal* idea of a perfect Church? ... Or are we trying to find out what *Jesus wants*? Of course, we know that Jesus said it is by *love of others* that Christians are to be particularly recognized as his disciples, but - apart from that important characteristic - what kind of *visible unity* could Jesus have had in mind for his followers when he prayed for it? Our opinions on that differ!

The spectrum of belief and practice within Christianity is *ever widening*, yet so many people – from various denominations – would like Christians throughout the world to be *more united*, in one way or another! Some wish that Christians everywhere could just “get on,” without bigotry. Some feel we should *all* be able to work together amicably in the Christian Mission of pastoral work, and that “Unity in diversity” is enough. Others are of the opinion that there could be no *real unity* without total structural uniformity everywhere and for everybody!

For the average Protestant, the ideal unity would probably be a kind of federation of Churches, each preserving its own special charisms yet engaged in coordinated action – but not all belonging to *one single* organisation.

For Catholics, the thought of Unity always involves the See of Rome, because the Bishop of Rome is the successor of St. Peter, and as such, is looked on as the *visible Head* of the whole Church. However, the *manner* in which the authority of this role has been exercised is shrouded in traditions of the past. In Pope John Paul’s encyclical, *Ut Unum Sint*, he actually begs Church leaders to give suggestions for other, more *acceptable ways* in which the Primacy could be exercised. The subject of “Infallibility”, as defined at Vatican I in 1870, may be worth mentioning here as it has not always been correctly understood even by Catholics. It doesn’t mean the Pope can’t make any mistakes in his homilies! His exercise of infallibility is very rare. It only takes place when he addresses the whole Church, and, in agreement with the Magisterium of Bishops, proclaims a doctrine pertaining to faith or morals.

Participants in Anglican – Catholic dialogues have been considering the feasibility of a Pope serving as the titular leader of a reunited Church in a manner such as implied by the phrase, “*Primus Inter Pares*” (First among Equals). The Roman Pontiff is already looked on as the “Patriarch of the West” by the Eastern Orthodox Church.

So, to return to the question posed above, “What kind of unity are we seeking?” - At an ecumenical gathering a few years ago there was a discussion about *what people prayed for* when they prayed for Christian Unity. Bishop Paul Hendricks of the Catholic Southwark Diocese gave this answer to that question:

“What I pray for is the day when we can overcome the misunderstandings that have led to the condemnations of the past. I pray for the day when we cannot only recognize the positive affirmations and traditions of each other’s churches, but actively embrace them. I pray for the day when we can all have the sacramental understanding of the Catholics, the liturgical awareness of the Orthodox, the preaching ability of the Methodists, the commitment to personal testimony of the

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Pentecostals, the community service of the Salvation Army. And then one day perhaps we can have a more perfect form of that remarkable combination of traditions which exists in Anglicanism and which in some ways already foreshadows that inclusive future for which I pray.”

The Common Declaration of 2006

The commitment made between the Catholic and Anglican Churches in 1966, when Pope Paul VI and Archbishop Michael Ramsey signed the Joint declaration on Cooperation, was officially renewed by the further signing of documents on a number of later occasions – in 1977, 1982, 1989, 1996 and then in 2006.

In 2006 Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, went to Rome to see Pope Benedict XVI, to mark the 40 years that had elapsed since the original commitment had been made, and while there signed the document of which there is an extract given below. It first details the ground covered between the Anglican Communion and the Catholic Church during the forty years, particularly with reference to the work achieved by ARCIC – and then the last part of it continues as follows:

“In this fraternal visit, we celebrate the good that has come from these four decades of dialogue. We are grateful to God for the gifts of grace which have accompanied them. At the same time, our long journey together makes it necessary to acknowledge publicly the challenge represented by new developments which, besides being divisive for Anglicans, present serious obstacles to our ecumenical progress. It is a matter of urgency, therefore, that in renewing our commitment to pursue the path towards full visible communion in the truth and love of Christ, we also commit ourselves in our continuing dialogue to address the important issues involved in the emerging ecclesiological and ethical factors making that journey more difficult and arduous.

As Christian leaders facing the challenges of the new millennium, we affirm again our commitment to the revelation of divine life uniquely set forth by God in the divinity and humanity of Our Lord Jesus Christ. We believe that it is through Christ and the means of salvation found in Him that healing and reconciliation are offered to us and to the world.

There are many areas of witness and service in which we can stand together, and which indeed call for closer co-operation between us: the pursuit of peace in the Holy Land and in other parts of the world marred by conflict and the threat of terrorism; promoting the respect for life from conception until natural death; protecting the sanctity of marriage and the well-being of children in the context of healthy family life; outreach to the poor, oppressed and the most vulnerable, especially those who are persecuted for their faith; addressing the negative effects of materialism; and care for creation and for our environment. We also commit ourselves to inter-religious

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dialogue through which we can jointly reach out to non-Christian brothers and sisters.

Mindful of our forty years of dialogue, and of the witness of the holy men and women common to our traditions, including Mary the Theotokos, Saints Peter and Paul, Benedict, Gregory the Great, and Augustine of Canterbury, we pledge ourselves to more fervent prayer and a more dedicated endeavour to welcome and live by that truth into which the Spirit of the Lord wishes to lead His disciples. Confident of the apostolic hope that He who has begun this good work in you will bring it to completion, we believe that if we can together be God’s instruments in calling all Christians to a deeper obedience to our Lord, we will also draw closer to each other, finding in His will the fullness of unity and common life to which He invites us.”

With the signing of that document in 2006, yet another small milestone had been reached for the Catholic Church’s relationship with the Anglican Church!



*“Heavenly Father,
we thank you for the wonderful gift of your Holy Spirit,
prompting Pope John XXIII to begin the Second Vatican Council
and foster whatever could promote union
among all who believe in Christ.
Thank you for guiding your Church during that Council,
and for all the inspirations and insights
by which you have continued to lead us forward
towards that goal of Unity desired by Jesus.”
Amen*

TOPIC FIVE

THE WORK FOR UNITY TODAY

May we trust more deeply in the action of the Holy Spirit who knows how to harmonize all diversity and bring it into unity, but also look for practical ways in which we can allow him to work through us.

The Changing Ecumenical Landscape

Ecumenism is not something static. Over the past few decades its focus in England has changed radically. It has become less concerned with the hope of structural unity, and more interested in inter-church friendships and working together on joint

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projects of pastoral care and other initiatives. However, the *expression of Christianity* itself has become more diverse - with *new ways* of expressing it constantly being introduced when new groups put down roots - and this has made the ecumenical situation much more complex. Some people welcome this as a wonderful sign of the action of the Holy Spirit - but others find it confusing, and feel that there are now even more barriers to be broken down before we can find true Christian unity.

What are these new groups, and how did they originate? People who have immigrated have sometimes brought with them forms of Christian worship which were previously unheard-of here in England – for example, Pentecostal; Orthodox, of more than one Rite; and also various Eastern Rites of the Catholic Church. Other newcomers to this country have introduced sects - like the Unitarians; the “Moonies”; the Latterday Saints - known as “Mormons”, and the Jehovah Witnesses. These sects *claim* to be “Christian” but their teachings *differ* – and sometimes considerably - from the beliefs of mainstream Churches. In addition to all these new types of Ecclesial Communities, dissatisfaction with the older and more *established* Churches has continued to lead to subdividing, and sometimes to the founding of totally new groups.

A Closer Look at Today's Diversity

- New companions on the journey:

The presence in England of Churches with a majority of black members only had its beginnings from 1948, so for that reason we can refer to them as our “new companions” on the journey of ecumenism. It was then that the British Government appealed to the people in the colony of the Caribbean Islands to come and help rebuild this country after the devastation of the Second World War. Hundreds came in the ship, Empire Windrush. Many had already given their generous service during the war, and now they settled willingly into jobs – of which there was no shortage. But, as they regarded themselves as British citizens, the Caribbeans were naturally surprised and dismayed when, soon after their arrival, they so often found themselves no longer welcome in British society – *even in a church!*

The result of that feeling of rejection was that *many* of the black people who later arrived, following the independence of African countries, have never attempted to conform to “white Christianity” – with its conventional worship and lack of outward expression of emotion. For them, the Christian faith has always been a religion where the Spirit is given to help believers express their deepest feelings of joy and sorrow, and their religious services are seen as opportunities for vibrant celebration, creating an atmosphere of liberation where song and dance, personal testimony and open prayer can be experienced.

The growth and diversity of the Churches they have brought to London or founded here after their arrival has been phenomenal, as can be glimpsed in this extract from

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a paper written by Rev. Israel Olofinjana:

“The generic term, Black Majority Churches is problematic as it does not address the diversity that exists within these Churches. They are diverse in terms of ecclesiology, theology and mission. Some of them are Churches while others are para-church organizations or agencies. Some of them are independent Churches while others are part of the historic Churches. Some are from Pentecostal, Holiness and Evangelical Tradition while others are Sabbatarians. Some of them are Unitarians while others are Trinitarians. Some of them have embraced Black Liberation Theology while others do preach Prosperity Gospel. Some of them have grown to become Church denominations while others are still independent Churches. Some are Church plants from their denominational Churches back in the Caribbean or Africa while others are Churches that have started here in London.”

The first Caribbean Pentecostal Church, “Calvary Church of God in Christ,” was started in London in 1948. Other Churches soon followed, and an itinerant ministry, which included preaching in shops, pubs, and on buses, was begun in Brixton in the 50s. During the 60s and 70s a number of “African Instituted Churches” were planted here, while retaining their headquarters in Nigeria. Many of them have very colourful names like, “The Cherubim and Seraphim Church” and the “Celestial Church of Christ.” During the 80s and 90s there emerged a new type of Black Majority Church which soon attracted the attention of the media. It became known as “The Newer Pentecostal Church.” According to Rev. Israel Olofinjana, there has been an unprecedented increase in the number of Churches of that type since the year 2000 – making the *Pentecostal Church* now the fastest growing denomination in England.

Some of the characteristics of the Pentecostals can be found among individual members of various denominations. Since the late 60s, when the Charismatic Renewal spread to England from America, they have also been apparent among some Catholics who have organized “Life in the Spirit Seminars,” attended so-called “healing services,” or joined charismatic prayer groups.

- Community Churches:

The interest in ecumenism, aroused among the established Churches in the late 1960s, failed to make the headway expected, and many felt disenchantment with the existing denominational groups where the worship was often dull and pastors seemingly not open to the Holy Spirit. As a result of this situation, some believed the only way to be true to the authentic spirit of Christ was *to start again* with a Christian fellowship which did not belong to any “Denomination”, and so they began meeting in private houses. Such groups came to be known as “*House Churches*.” Their infectious enthusiasm sometimes caused the growing groups to need more space and they then transferred to local community centres.

The inter-church consultation process held in the mid 1980s, wanting to debate the

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nature and purpose of “the Church” in the light of its *mission*, received contributions from many participating Churches.

Here is a contribution from the House Churches at that time:

“The Church would also be seen as a community of God’s people rather than simply a congregation of God’s people. As a community there would be an interaction of life together, as opposed to a church being a place or an event that Christians attended. In these terms church would be seen as anything that Christians did together, worship, eat meals, play games or work. As a community of God’s people the Church is seen as what the believers are rather than what they do or an event which they attend. Christians cannot go to church, they are the Church.”

Since the date of that contribution the tremendous growth of this kind of *Community Church* has been amazing – as has been also the establishment of *Parachurch Organizations* which have the ministry of working “alongside” Churches to support them by providing what they, individually, would be less able to provide on their own.

Here are the names of a few of them:

New Frontiers; Pioneer; Ichthus; and also Ixthus; New Wine; Vineyard; New Ground; The Bear; The Evangelical Alliance; The Congregational Federation, The Apostolic Christian Church; and The Open Episcopal Church.

Their origins make very interesting research. Basically, each one of them developed from somebody’s sense of personal vocation, or from an inspiration felt to be from the Holy Spirit - and so the resulting Movements tend to be both *Evangelical* and *Charismatic*.

Evangelical / charismatic style “vocations” are experienced by people who have started projects *within the orbit* of the Catholic Church too. One example is that of a *Catholic Community*, founded by Damian Stayne in 1990. It now runs retreats, courses, and events in two Centres (Chertsey in Surrey, and Wigton in Cumbria) as well as abroad. The ministry and programme of events offered by this Community called “Cor et Lumen Christi” are shown on their website : www.coretlumenchristi.org

Various Ecumenical Associations which Focus on the Ideal of Unity

- The Focolare Movement

Quite a number of ecumenical associations, each with a particular type of focus on unity, have been started over the past fifty years or so – and the *Focolare Movement* is perhaps one of the best known. It is listed among the “New Ecclesial Movements” of the Catholic Church, yet this Movement is so very ecumenical that it includes Christians of many different denominations, people of various Religious Faith groups, and even those of no faith at all. Among its members and friends there are

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people from all walks of life – bishops, politicians, men and women, single and married - and children as young as four, if they are capable of grasping the essential ideals of the Movement’s special Charism of Unity. The essence of this Charism of Unity is shown in these revealing words of their late founder, Chiara Lubich:

“The Christian world needs to be overwhelmed by a torrent of love. Love, therefore, mutual love among Christians, mutual love among Churches. That love which leads to putting everything in common, each a gift to the others, so that we can foresee the future Church with one truth, one truth alone, but expressed in different ways, seen from different perspectives, made beautiful by the variety of interpretations.”

The “Focolare” had its beginnings in the early 1940s when Chiara started to share on Gospel passages – first, chatting with a few like-minded women - later, networking with people all over the world, producing a monthly passage called “*Word of Life*” – a practice for which the Focolare are still well-known today.

Here are the Gospel texts that, from the beginning, made a particularly deep impression on Chiara’s group and influenced their work:

“Love one another as I have loved you” (Jn. 15:12)

“Where two or three meet in my name, I shall be there with them.” (Matt. 18:20)

“May they all be one.” (Jn. 17:21)

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34)

In England, the Focolare Centre for Unity is in Welwyn Garden City, Herts.

For further information see their website: www.focolare.org

- The Chemin Neuf Community

The Community called *Chemin Neuf* (New Way) is ecumenical, and its members come from various Christian denominations and from all walks of life. They live and work together for the purpose of spreading the Gospel.

It was created from a charismatic prayer group in France in 1973 by a Jesuit Priest, Fr. Laurent Fabre, and it now has 2000 members. It focuses all its work on the principle of unity: unity of Christians - single men and women, married couples and families, and also the engaged, and the divorced. The Community organises “Cana events” for couples, retreats and other events – including things for young people.

In 1993 Chemin Neuf was introduced into England and soon several Communities were set up. They now have a presence in London, West Sussex, Cornwall and Liverpool. In 2013, at the invitation of the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, a little Community of Chemin Neuf came to stay in Lambeth Palace to be, as he has requested, “*a witness and praying presence for the work of Christian Unity and Evangelisation.*”

Since then the Archbishop has requested this Community to be in charge of a group of young adult Christians (20 – 35 year olds) who will choose to come to Lambeth

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Palace to have a monastic-type experience there, and “*to spend a year in God’s time*” as he put it. This latter project, to be called *St. Anselms*, is to start in September 2015.

Their two websites are: www.chemin-neuf.org.uk and www.stanselm.org.uk

- The Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary (ESBVM)

The *ESBVM* was founded in England in 1967 by a Catholic layman, Martin Gillett, when a group of friends from several different Christian churches met to give some form to a need that they felt to promote the study of the place of Mary in the Church and to promote ecumenical devotion. The Society now has members in many parts of the world. Sometimes they achieve their aims simply through music, poetry and visual art forms. The articles about Mary which they have published have done a great deal to further ecumenism in England – making devotion to her more acceptable and doctrinally digestible to Protestants.

- The Association of Interchurch Families (AIF)

This *Association of Interchurch Families* began in 1968. It was started by a young couple who did not belong to the same denomination but who both wanted to continue in the Tradition in which they had been brought up. Their wedding was in Belgium – with a Catholic Priest and an Anglican Priest both taking part in the church service. Since then Ruth Reardon and her husband, Martin, have helped people in similar situations – often involving the Baptisms of the children – and they have set up this Association to offer support to many more.

The term “interchurch marriage” was coined to distinguish it from “mixed marriages,” in which one or both partners are *not* committed to their respective Churches. Ruth and Martin were very concerned to promote Christian Unity, by bringing the Churches together as far as they could. Thus the Association, apart from being a support network, also became a voice in the Churches. Pope John Paul II showed appreciation of what is involved here when he said, “*You live in your marriage the hopes and the difficulties on the path to Christian Unity.*”

For further information, see the website: interchurchfamilies.org.uk

- The Society for Ecumenical Studies

The organisation, the *Society for Ecumenical Studies*, was founded in London in 1994. As its name suggests, it is for the study of the *academic* ecumenical scene, with the aim of advancing ecumenism throughout England. It works in association with “Churches Together” groups when requested, locally or nationally, and welcomes members from many different churches – clergy and lay, who are committed to the unity of the Church of Christ and want to study its nature and

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purpose. As well as facilitating theological exploration with regard to Christianity’s divisions, the reconciliation of the Churches and the visible unity of Christians, the Society also arranges occasions for groups to meet, and organises seminars, day conferences and other events that explore current issues and challenges within the Christian Ecumenical Movement.

To download previously presented talks, and to get information about forthcoming events - as well the opportunity to sign up to become a member of the Society, see its website: www.ecumenicalstudies.org.uk

Church Re-Connections – in a New, “Ordinariate” Way

Anglicans who became Roman Catholics often used to express regret at having left behind some of the Anglican traditions in which they had been nurtured. Pope Benedict was aware of this, and, in 2011, he established a new structure to enable groups in England and Wales, who wanted to become Catholic, to enter into full communion with the Catholic Church – while still retaining some of the beauty of their Anglican heritage. This new structure is called the *Personal Ordinariate* and it has been placed under the patronage of Our Lady of Walsingham.

Since 2011 a number of former Anglican clergy have been ordained as Catholic Priests of the Ordinariate, and some of these are still leading the groups of former Anglican lay people who made the change at the same time – now within the framework of the usual Catholic parish. They are sharing with other RCs some of the elements of the Anglican tradition, consistent with Catholic teaching - like choral evensong, for example – and this adds richness to the diversity possible in our worship.

A Personal Ordinariate is a jurisdiction very similar to that of a diocese. However, those who choose to belong to it are not under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of the area in which they are living, but of the “Ordinary” who has been specially nominated for them. At present, this is Mgr Keith Newton – previously Anglican Bishop of Richborough.

This account, from a parish newsletter, describes one Priest’s experiences when he first joined the Ordinariate:

“Leading a congregation of over seventy Anglicans into the Catholic Church via the Personal Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham has been an exhilarating, if nerve-wracking, process. We did it because we sincerely believe this fresh Papal initiative represents a “prophetic ecumenism” for the twenty-first century; a structure in which unity can be lived out in diversity through shared proclamation of truth.

Making it happen demanded sacrifice, however, and we were called to leave everything behind: buildings, funds, legacies and, for clergy, houses, pensions and guaranteed stipend. We leapt into the unknown hoping that Catholics in England and Wales would be there to welcome us home.

I am delighted to report it was worth it. We follow where our patron, John Henry

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Newman once led. And we discovered that the Catholic Church herself is “the pearl of great price,” and it was worth losing all that we had to find her. It is so good to be home.”

Two years later Bishop Keith Newton wrote, *“The Personal Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham has begun in a small way but it is a concrete expression of the Church’s desire to fulfil our Lord’s command that “they may all be one.” It is a small step towards healing one of the most damaging wounds of our history: the dividing of Christ’s Body, the Church in this land.”*

International Councils, Forums, and Supportive Networks

- The *World Council of Churches*, started in 1948 and mentioned in Topic 3, now has 345 member Churches. The Roman Catholic Church is still not a *full* member (functioning, instead, through the Commissions of ARCIC) but, since Vatican II, it has had “a regular working relationship with it.” The Council’s Assembly, its “supreme legislative body,” meets every eight years. As explained in the Council’s website: *“The primary purpose of the fellowship of Churches in WCC is to call one another to visible unity in one faith and in one Eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and common life in Christ, through witness and service to the world, and to advance towards that unity in order that the world may believe.”* Council statements further insist that it is not, and must never become “a super-church” – as though it were a world Church above the member Churches, and it *“cannot and should not be based on any one conception of the Church.”*
- The *World Council of Community Churches* (ICCC), the result of a merger of councils, was formed in the USA in 1950 and is a member of the World Council of Churches. It is now an international, voluntary association of self-governing churches and ministry centres. Member churches are united in a fellowship of ecumenically-minded, freedom-loving congregations cooperating in fulfilling the mission of the Church in the world. The Council claims to be a “post-denominational movement”, which works for Christian unity, justice, and reconciliation in human society. It seeks to offer mutual support to its members in an array of services to facilitate their ministries.
- The *Global Christian Forum* (GCF) is an organisation that was formed in 1998 as a result of a proposal by the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches. It is a movement of representatives from diverse Christian Churches, organisations and traditions meeting on an equal basis, to foster mutual respect and to address common challenges together – even to confronting discrimination, persecution, and martyrdom. Global meetings have been held in various parts of the world, with participants from all five Continents. It especially promotes

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relationships between and among Christian Churches and traditions which have not been in conversation with each other previously.

A GCF leader, Kim Cain, says, “*The most serious ecumenical challenge of today is to discover ways to build bridges between churches with roots in the Tradition of the Faith – which are largely centred in the global North – with fast growing, highly contextualized, spiritually exuberant churches found largely in the global South.*”

The GCF website shows who they are, what they do, and includes things of interest, like talks previously given at their meetings, and recommended books ...
www.globalchristianforum.org

Networking throughout Local Churches

Within the Roman Catholic Church, each Diocese in England has developed ways of trying to establish a network of people in the parishes to foster ecumenical relationships and further the cause of unity locally. Initiatives, such as inviting speakers to come and share about *their* traditions or planning to attend a service in another Church, can give first-hand experience to help stimulate interest among the Catholic community in the subject of Christian Unity, and the use of the Internet is, of course, invaluable for spreading ecumenical information.

Churches Together (CT) – which replaced the British Council of Churches - offers ideal means for networking and fellowship between the members of different traditions. It dates back to a declaration, and the proposals made at an Inter-Church meeting at the Hayes Conference Centre in Swanwick in 1987. During the mid 80s the Churches in England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales had been trying to discern how best to co-operate in their ecumenical endeavour – and this was the inspired outcome of their discernment, namely: *Churches Together*.

Its basis is as follows:

“Churches Together in England (CTE) unites in pilgrimage those Churches in England which acknowledging God’s revelation in Christ, confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the Scriptures, and, in obedience to God’s will and in the power of the Holy Spirit commit themselves:

1. *to seek a deepening of their communion with Christ and with one another in the Church which is his body;*
 2. *to fulfil their mission to proclaim the Gospel by common witness and service in the world*
 3. *to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.*
- Now, in 2015, there are 43 Churches which are full members, and many other groups and agencies working in association.

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- Throughout England there are 2,600 local Churches Together groups.
- It has six Presidents (representing Anglicans, Catholics, Free Churches, New Churches, Orthodox, and Pentecostal Churches)

Here is a list of typical joint initiatives undertaken by Churches Together groups:

- Helping disadvantaged of the locality
- Coffee mornings and other ways of fundraising for good causes
- Family outings or other fun events
- Pilgrimages to Cathedrals or other places of shared historical/religious interest
- Focusing on Liturgical seasons - organising walks of witness, the giving of appropriate talks etc.
- Hosting groups for Scripture-based discussions
- Praying together and/or sharing about our faith, in small groups
- Prayer services – particularly during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, here described below

The idea of the *Week of Prayer for Christian Unity* developed over the course of the twentieth century – advocated by a number of people – but particularly by Fr. Paul Wattson, who initiated the observance of a Church Unity Octave in 1908, and was mentioned in Topic Three. Paul Couturier furthered this initiative from 1936, once he had been inspired by Cardinal Mercier’s work for ecumenism. It was then called “the Universal Week of Prayer for Christian Unity,” and was intended for all those from any Tradition who felt a longing for a *sense of Unity* among Christians, whether or not they sought a structural type of unity.

Since Vatican II Catholics have been encouraged by the Church to take part in this Week of Prayer. The *Faith and Order Commission* of the World Council of Churches has been collaborating with the *Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity* in producing a common text for world-wide usage during joint services each year. These texts, based on Scriptural themes, are put together by an ecumenical group from a different country each time, and then published as resource material to be made available for all Christian parishes world-wide. Wherever Churches Together groups are active in a locality there may be a number of different events taking place. Generally, in the northern hemisphere, dates for the Week are from 18 to 25 January, that is, from the feast of the Chair of St. Peter until the feast of the conversion of St. Paul. In the southern hemisphere, however, it is more often kept around the time of Pentecost.

Final Reflections and Possible Resolutions!

Over the past centuries there have been many occasions when Christians have fallen *far short* of Jesus’ ideal of unity, but we are now able to admit the scandal

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caused by the disunity. Thank God, we are beginning to learn just how much we have in common and how few are our differences! There is now more reaching out in fellowship between the diverse groups and an effort to learn “good practice” from each other – and this is wonderful because it is a sign that the Holy Spirit is at work among us, gradually bringing about a harmony. *We really do need each other!* Let’s pray that the Spirit will continue to work through his people, and, in his own way and his own time, help us to discover just that kind of unity Jesus still wants!

Maybe the Spirit will ask of us something practical from the following suggestions –

- that we read more often from Scripture and other spiritual books to help us deepen our faith so that we experience a personal *renewal*
- that we find out more about the Traditions of other local churches and get to know some of their members ...
- that we organise little “ecumenical events” - like having coffee together – as an opportunity to share meaningfully about our values and our faith beliefs ...
- that we find ways of responding to a particular local pastoral need - which could be jointly addressed by the Churches Together group - *if we offered to start it!*
- That we spend time praying for Christian Unity – both personally and with groups from various denominations ...



*“Lord Jesus, who prayed that we might all be one,
we pray to you for the unity of Christians,
according to your will, according to your means.
May your Spirit enable us
to experience the suffering caused by division,
to see our sin,
and to hope beyond all hope.*

*Grant that all Christians
may love one another without reserve.
You alone can bring this to pass.
Grant that we may love you with an unbounded love.
The things we have in common -
your Book, your Baptism, our faith in you,
in your incarnation, in your redemption,
and indeed many other beliefs -*

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*all this unites us indissolubly,
making us in you and through you,
children of your Father.
Amen”*