

The Fraternal

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Editorial

Following the Assembly of the World Council of Churches this edition of the *Fraternal* follows the theme of ecumenism, from World Council level to the way it is experienced in the local situation. We have now reached what has been described as 'the long haul of ecumenism', a time that requires commitment and patience. With the emergence of house churches and various secessionist groups we have also entered a new dimension in ecumenical relationships and one that is, in many ways, more painful. We have healed the breaches on one side only to find others opening on the opposite. This is an issue that we have been unable to touch on in this edition, but for many it is the most pressing. The self-inflicted wounds of a fragmenting evangelicalism have left too many of our Baptist churches hurt and weakened.

Vancouver Experience

The World Council of Churches does not enjoy the best of presses. The media tend to present a partial view of its activities: radical political pronouncements, economic boycotts, grants to guerrillas are newsworthy, whereas worship, fellowship and theology are not. Aided by right-wing academics, the Council is accused of politicizing the Gospel in a way, apparently, that the Church of England in the nineteenth century, was not.

1. Image and Reality

Let me then put worship, fellowship and theology back on the agenda as quite crucial to what happened at Vancouver back in the summer. The Assembly spent much time in prayer, praise, confession and intercession. First in the huge worship tent which symbolised the daily dependence of God's pilgrim people on his leading and guidance, rather more effectively than the massive immovability of some of our own Baptist tabernacles. But more than that there was the spontaneous prayer and praise that broke out from time to time in other meetings.

For many an individual the richest experience was those of personal encounter, so profound in terms of Christian fellowship, but so difficult to communicate in frail human words. Personally, I was delighted to find myself in the same small group as John Yoder, author of *The Politics of Jesus*. The variety of the Christian family is so rich: members of mission—founded churches but also those of great independent Churches like the Church of the Lord Aladura, or the Kimbanguists; pentecostalists and catholics, eastern orthodox and oriental orthodox. Where else would you find so harmonious a meeting of North and South, East and West, First World and Third World? The unity of mind and action and commitment of those who acknowledge a common Lordship in Jesus Christ, secured in the 35 years since the Amsterdam Assembly of 1948 cannot lightly be put on one side.

Then there is the theology of the ecumenical movement. When did the press get excited about the Council's work in the unit on Renewal and Congregational Life? When did you read an evaluation of its programme in theological education, properly acknowledged by one evangelical at Vancouver, as offering very considerable help to the evangelical communions of the Third World? Nor were Faith and Order, or World Mission and Evangelism forgotten with two critical documents currently before the member churches, the very important text on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* and the equally important *Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation*. Both of these are documents we should be studying.

2. Representation and Leadership

At the heart of the ecumenical movement there is, and I believe there needs to be, a critical tension between representation and leadership. On the one hand, the concern to shape and implement new, and if need be radical, strategies in the witness of the churches, and on the other, the need to wait in all humility until a sufficient consensus has been achieved among the membership to justify such action. At one extreme you have the possibility of the emergence of a form of ecumenical denominationalism as perhaps seemed possible immediately after Uppsala. The British Council of Churches' *Vision One* said that the critical question for Vancouver lay just here: 'the World Council has to face the prospect of becoming just another denomination alongside all the others of the divided Church'. You can adopt a position in leadership that you are so far off from those whom you seek to lead that they no longer heed or hear you. The opposite danger is simply that of inertia and an uncritical acceptance of the status quo. Put in another way the Council has to listen to churches, but equally the member — churches must listen to what the Council has to say to them. Ought not we who put so high a premium in the life of the local church or the possibility of the will of Christ being discerned by the membership coming together in prayer around the Scriptures and under the guidance of the Spirit, also open our hearts to the possibility of the Living Lord speaking to us through the counsels of those from so many differing traditions and situations offering to us their understanding of what, after equal concern for a prayerful application of the scriptures to our contemporary situation, they discern to be the will of our Lord?

3. Evangelicals and the Ecumenical Movement

For almost a century and a half, Baptists have been pleased to co-operate with other Evangelical Christians through the work of the Evangelical Alliance and its associated agencies. Sometimes this form of inter-denominational activity has been seen as a substitute for wider ecumenical involvement. For my own part I am glad to be both a personal member of the Evangelical Alliance and now to be elected to the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches. Individual evangelicals made notable contributions to the Nairobi Assembly, but Vancouver was remarkable for a corporate attempt by a number of evangelicals both to speak to the

Assembly Agenda, and to let the theme of the Assembly and the work of the World Council speak to the evangelical constituency in a document entitled *Evangelicals at Vancouver: An Open Letter*. This was the document that Richard Lovelace spoke about on the B.B.C.

This was not without its own criticisms of aspects of the Assembly, for example, it regretted that some theological mavericks had been afforded space which could have better been made available to more central Biblical exposition, reflecting the W.C.C.'s own basis as "a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the Scriptures". But these criticisms were outweighed by a positive evaluation of Vancouver's 'overreaching and spiritual orientation'. Here a welcome was given to the central place afforded to worship and Bible Study, the attempts made to interpret the Christian mission in terms of the world today. The trinitarian spirituality of the Orthodox provided a welcome anchor to other activities, whilst the inclusiveness of the assembly in acknowledging the contributions made by the whole people of God, ministerial and lay, male and female, experienced and youthful, disabled and able-bodied was recognised. The letter concluded with a fervent appeal: "We feel pressed to declare publicly our determination to be more actively involved in all efforts seeking the unity and renewal of the Church. Because we have seen evidence of God at work here, we cannot but share our growing conviction that evangelicals should question Biblically the easy acceptance of withdrawal, fragmentation and parochial isolation that tends to characterize many of us. Should we not be trustful of those who profess Christ's lordship? Should we not be more concerned with the peace, purity *and* unity of the people of God in our day? And if God thereby grants the Church the renewal for which many pray, shall this not forever demolish that all too popular evangelical heresy — that the way to renew the Body of Christ is to separate from it and relentlessly criticize it?"

4. Principality and Powers

Representatives of the world—wide family of God meeting together under the theme "Jesus Christ, the life of the World" dared not be blind to so many forces challenging life in the world today. Not for the first time the injustices of the world's divisions, the horrors of the headlines — Sri Lanka broke into civil riot even as we met — the sufferings of so many of God's children led me afresh to wrestle what the Scriptures have to say about the nature of power and how it operates in our world today. Once more I found myself stretched between Romans 13 and Revelation 13, rather more quoted at Vancouver than the former text. There was the tension between the Pauline doctrine of subordination and John's image of the Beast with its totalitarian control over men's lives initiating resistance to its degrading bestiality. As over against that long Lutheran emphasis on obedience to the civil-rulers, there stands that equally venerable Calvinist tradition of exposition which, as long ago as the days of the Huguenots, of the Protestant Guerilla fighters of the Netherlands and of our own Oliver Cromwell, sees Revelation 13, in certain circumstances, justifying resistance and rebellion.

That tension surely reflects the Biblical teaching concerning 'The

Principalities and Powers' which exercise so much influence on men's lives. Paul in Colossians (Chapters 1 and 2) makes it clear that they were originally brought into being by God for the good order of his creation, but that sharing in the corruption of the created order, they have rebelled against His will. Footloose, they have become concerned to dominate rather than to serve. Accordingly, 'War in Heaven' influences the actual context in which finite political power is exercised in our world today: that is why it is important that as Christians we should recognize the theological realities that link behind the headlines. These impersonal rulers of society, operating alike through the formal agencies of government and every agency of informal popular control, conspire now to hold humanity in perpetual thralldom. Having forsaken a providential role, the powers have absolutized themselves, demanding god-like an unconditional loyalty from individuals and societies alike. Instead of helping us to live genuinely free, human, loving lives, they harm and hurt, enslaving us in ways we cannot fully understand. Designed to be our servants, the powers have become our masters, and we, their puppets. In all too many lives they have dethroned God, and treacherously taken to themselves His authority. This is the context in which we live. But, thank God, the Gospel is that these 'principalities and powers' have been disarmed by Jesus' death upon the Cross. In that very moment in which they think to seize Him, He takes them captive. Working through the conspiring contradictions of Jewish religion and Roman politics, they thought to rid themselves of this one Man who had the supreme moral integrity to refuse to kow-tow to their demands, not to play their idolatrous game, to refuse the worship invited in the second temptation. Such a Man had to be extinguished, such resistance had to be silenced. And so the Cross, but on the Cross the tyranny of the powers is smashed: Christ's suffering subordination becomes a revolutionary subordination, making it possible once more for men and women to be free in God's world.

In the first place, this enables me to make sense of the world in which I live, helps me to live stretched between Romans 13 and Revelation 13. But there is more than the resolution of intellectual problems here: more importantly there is an invitation to discipleship — to follow in the footsteps of His suffering subordination, a way that is at once beyond both politics and pietism. It is a pattern that is non-conformist in the best sense of that word, in Phillip's language 'not allowing the world around us to squeeze us into its own mould'. Such a distinctive Christian stance needs in the first place to be worked out with regard to the lingering influence of those principalities and powers with which Paul reminds us we wrestle, not the flesh and blood of actual political rulers. It's there that Christian radicalism needs to *begin* — refusing the lordship of the powers, remembering their new captivity to the crucified Christ. If that resistance brings us into conflict with a state or institution fallen under bestial control so be it. But that is not the only pattern of resistance. For many, resisting the powers will not bring conflict with authority, but rather the call to be mindful of the pressure exercised by the powers as we use the opportunities afforded us by democracy, the call to be a non-conformist in life-choices and life-style.

To many this section may seem irrelevant to the events of Vancouver. The author offers it simply as a witness to the reflexions provoked by his presence in the Assembly and his own need to find some framework of Biblical thinking in which to consider the issues of power-abuse and powerlessness. He hopes that in so writing he may share with others his own way of both proclaiming Jesus Christ as the Life of the World and in that affirmation also being alert to the voice of those whose agony is the life they are not able to live.

5. Peace and Justice

Peace is certainly high on the agenda of consensus of many Christians—more urgently so, would be my impression of many Canadian and American Christians, as of delegates from West Germany and Czechoslovakia, as also of those who came from Japan and the Pacific.

By contrast many Third World delegates seemed to be uneasy about the way that conscience was working out. Some of the Canadians I spoke to found this difficult to take, particularly the members of a Baptist Church in Vancouver who were taking the lead in the peace movement. But Allan Boesak from South Africa, President of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, was most insistent in expressing his concern. For the village people of Africa, the word 'nuclear' was not even in their vocabulary, but 'hunger' was part of their daily experience. He was concerned that the issue of peace will be separated from the issue of justice, making of peace primarily a North Atlantic concern. This should not happen.

First of all because ideologies of militarism and national security are international in character and cause deprivation and the continuation of injustice everywhere, but especially in so-called "third-world" countries. But secondly and more importantly, in the Bible peace and justice are never separated. Peace is never simply the absence of war, it is the active presence of justice ... One cannot use the gospel to escape from the demands of the gospel. And one cannot use the issue of peace to escape from the unresolved issues of injustice, poverty, hunger and racism. If we do this we will make of our concern for peace an ideology of oppression which in the end will be used to justify injustice.

Another way in which this divergence of thinking emerged was in the different ways in which the word 'survival' was used. One of the most telling emphases of the Nairobi Assembly had been its concern to direct the member churches to study the implications of creation theology and to exercise a crucial stewardship of the created order when technological man appeared in danger of creating a world which could no longer be sustained, as the desert drove back fertility, as pollution choked our seas, as fossil fuels were exhausted and population growth spiralled apparently out of control. With the oil crisis apparently behind them, the West Europeans and North Americans seemed much less concerned with that stewardship which failed to capture the imagination at Vancouver. Instead the word 'survival' was limited to a narrow meaning of surviving the bomb. But whilst the rich north was concerned with surviving the holocaust, for the poor south, survival was not something for a may-be tomorrow; it was today's *crisis* with so

many not surviving or only partly surviving.

Or take a small group situation: a pastor from South Korea, whose witness for human rights in a campaign seeking 'freedom of mission, freedom of speech and freedom of democracy' had led to imprisonment and solitary-confinement came out in support of Boesak: "Peace without freedom is slavery, peace without justice", he claimed, "is worse than war. We do not want to live in peace by closing our mouths and plugging our ears for the sake of national security and peace in a divided nation." Perhaps his experience gave him the right to speak so forcefully: from others such talk might have sounded presumptuous. Within the deep fellowship of the small group such a commitment could be proved, challenged, explored, evaluated. It was the pastor from Bavaria who insisted on standing the Korean claim upon its head: "Peace without complete justice", he said, "is better than war." And there you see a divided Christian conscience — there you confront the problems of fallen-ness in a sinful world. We know how to define the *shalom* of Scripture with its wide embrace of both peace and justice — but how do we put that into practice when choices have to be made? Are our consciences more quickly sensitised by the nuclear threat that hangs over our own lives, than by the injustices suffered by our brothers and sisters in South America, or South Eastern Asia, or South Africa? Does our practice as well as our theology declare that God's *shalom* cannot be divided?

6. Fear and Hope

Some of the talk at Vancouver struck me as essentially Old Testament. It was all judgement and precious little Gospel. I even perceived from time to time a kind of conspiracy of fear being manipulated to maximise my guilt. They did not have to try very hard. It did not take much exposition by the men of science to sensitize my conscience as to the dimension of morbidity that man's nuclear arsenals were capable of. For me, it was fear of the bomb, and the day after the bomb ... all so graphic as *tomorrow's* possibilities. Over against that I set the testimony of the woman from the testing zones of the Marshall Islands with cancer in her body *today*, making the point even more eloquently. I was frightened and I *did* feel guilty.

It was the same with the economist with his Domesday forecast. The security of the prosperous North was under threat from the increasing crisis of the poor South. Blindness to the interdependency of rich and poor spelt out our doom. The appeal was not to fraternal compassion but to a selfish neurosis about world stability. Or again there was the testimony of the Bolivian miner's wife who confronted all the force of the international economic order in the politics of her local community which was even more persuasive than the cold analyses of the economist.

How far does my prosperity implicate me as being in part responsible for the oppression of those who produce the commodities I am so eager to purchase at the lowest possible prices? So more guilt ... prosperity at what price?

Then there was fear of untamed technology which still further divides the rich and the poor. Man, in his cleverness, had, in his fidgeting activism, so

intervened in the world to upset its natural balances. Exhaustion of scarce resources, ever-increasing pollution of land, sea and atmosphere, uncontrolled population explosion, the insidious advance of the desert: all spelt out the possibilities of bequeathing a denuded world to the next generation — making our children and their children generations of true paupers.

Another set of threats and fears, and yet more guilt and judgement. And that made me think of the words of the chorus I sang in Sunday School

“He did not come to judge the world
He did not come to blame
He did not only come to seek
It was to save He came.
And when we call Him, Saviour
Then we call Him by His Name.”

All that the experts said was necessary, very necessary. They had to be listened to. These were matters demanding attention. But where was the note of Christian hope in it all?

After all the threatened doom, all the fear — talk, — that manipulation of guilt, more coercive than any Evangelists' energies to bring sinners to the penitents' bench, I was thankful for a young Orthodox woman from the Lebanon who aroused a note of Gospel hope as she told of an Easter celebration in a sulphur-filled cellar in Beirut. No member of the congregation, she testified, had escaped suffering personal loss, and yet still the chorus rang out from their joyful hearts: Christ is Risen. In the midst of the pain and suffering and anguish, Easter had dawned again. 'The taste of death all around you lays bare all illusions. It purges what is mediocre in you. It educates you in an infinite manner. It confronts you like the Apostle Thomas, time and again, with what your mind cannot fully grasp ... Thomas must have experienced what we experience as he reached out with his doubting finger — He must have realised there is a way of knowing that explores what is left unexplained by reason or common sense, a way of being addressed by the power of the Resurrection, of Life overcoming death.' Thank God for that message of hope.

If hope be the only antidote to fear, then every consciousness of guilt created, cries out for the Gospel of forgiveness to be expounded. Without that note of forgiveness, the discussion exists only at a pre-Christian level. Indeed to be burdened with the heavy load of world forgiveness without access to the Cross is to find oneself tied into a vicious paralysis of inadequacy. Only in the forgiveness that Christ gives am I made free to engage with all these issues. Indeed without that experience of being forgiven all my concerns for social responsibility, must exhaust themselves in a shallow and self-defeating activism which can only destroy.

John Briggs

Eight 'C's on the Unity Road

Has the ecumenical movement stopped moving? As another Week of Prayer for Christian Unity comes round, the question needs asking. If it has got stuck, some will no doubt be heartily relieved; others will feel a sense of frustration and failure.

My own conviction is that we cannot have come all this way only to stop here; but that in the wake of the failure of the English covenant, we need to pause and take stock of the road we have already travelled, and of the long haul ahead. Let me suggest some signposts for the road past and future.

A recent conference in Venice (cunning people these ecumaniacs!) on the role of councils of churches identified five stages in the growth of churches to unity.

(1) Competition, the stage where a church sees itself as entirely self-sufficient, and does not in any way acknowledge the role of the other churches, or the need of them (and so has few scruples in inviting Christians to transfer to it from other churches).

We have known more than enough of this in the past, indeed it has characterised much of Christianity in these islands since the Reformation. We have suffered from Catholics, acting on the belief that theirs was the one true church, and outside that Church there was no salvation. If there had been a Barchester Baptist Church, it would surely have been looked down upon or ignored by the local Anglicans. As a 'separatist' church, we have from the beginning done our share of competing, and this attitude lives on in places, even finding new impetus in charismatic house churches, who do not hesitate to invite people from our congregations to come and discover 'the real thing'.

But greater mobility and communication has led even the most dogmatic of Christians to discover that authentic followers of Christ can be found in other traditions; so competition has given way to:

(2) Coexistence — where a church begins to acknowledge that Christ can also be known in other churches, but still takes no initiative about relationships with them. This attitude characterized much Baptist life until fairly recently, and still sums up the position of many of our churches with a strong evangelical emphasis. Few would deny the real Christian experience of their neighbours, whether High Anglicans, or liberal-minded Methodists, or post-Vatican II Catholics; but the fear of diluting the essentials of the Gospel prevents anything more than co-existence. But the nonsense of stopping at 'coexistence' soon becomes apparent to those who can stand back, look at the situation objectively, and compare it with the New Testament models of the church. This has frequently led to:

(3) Cooperation — where there is sufficient warmth in the recognition of other churches to enable *real*, if *limited*, partnership in tasks undertaken together. This was the spirit that gave rise to the famous Edinburgh conference of 1910 — the Missionary Societies beginning to cooperate with each other rather than compete in overseas mission. This is the spirit behind

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Christian Aid, and a thousand local partnerships in caring ministries to people in need in the neighbourhood. It leads to cooperation in evangelism, from 'Mission England' to the joint visitation of the new housing estate. It has led to the formation of Councils of Churches, at every level from local to world — although the constitution of the World Council of Churches goes further, and explicitly speaks of its purpose 'to call the churches to the goal of visible unity in one faith and in one eucharistic fellowship in worship and in common life in Christ'. Most of us now take cooperation for granted, and try to apply the Lund dictum whenever possible, namely 'to act together in all matters, except those in which deep differences of conviction compel us to act separately.'

This kind of cooperation has led many on to:

(4) Commitment — when links through particular projects no longer correspond to the level of mutual recognition between churches, resulting in entry into agreements which are lasting and open-ended to do much of what they do as limbs of the one body. This kind of commitment has given birth to national and regional schemes of organic unity such as those in India and Canada, and in this country has led to the development of over three hundred local ecumenical projects. Baptists are sometimes in the thick of these — one thinks of Swindon Central Church, Blackbird Leys, near Oxford, Grove Hill, Hemel Hempstead as examples; but since less than fifty L.E.P.'s have full Baptist involvement, our experience as a denomination is still limited. But those who are involved are enthusiastic.

The Venice consultation identified the final stage as:-

(5) Communion — understood as the stage when it no longer makes sense to think of the fellowship as consisting of two or more separate entities, and all separation can be overcome. This is clearly a more demanding concept than inter-communion (desirable as that may be) and owes more to the Roman concept of 'communio'. It is clearly ahead of us rather than behind us, and raises plenty of questions about what kind of church pattern nationally and locally is envisaged.

The consultation suggested that 'being able to mark the steps — even small ones — makes it possible to maintain the dynamism, to sustain the pace of advance, along a road which could otherwise seem too long'. There is nothing like a bit of optimism! But without stretching the alliteration too far it is possible to find some other 'C's to mark the road ahead. What about:-

(6) Covenant. This would seem to be a dead-end as far as the English churches are concerned, after the failure of the covenant between the Church of England and three Free Churches in 1982. But the concept may have some life in it yet. Over the border in Wales the Covenant has proceeded more successfully, without admittedly making much impact as yet on the day-to-day life of local churches. And the concept may be useful *locally* in England, for the Roman Catholic church has produced a document giving strong support to the idea of local covenanting. So 'covenanting' in one form or another could still be a way of expressing the further 'commitment' of (4) above. Many local ecumenical projects are based upon a carefully worked out agreement or covenant of this kind.

(7) Convergence. Two acronyms are now part of the common currency of unity-talk — ARCIC & BEM. 'ARCIC' refers to the final Report of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, published last year; and 'BEM' to the Faith and Order paper of the World Council of Churches 'Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry'. Both reflect an amazing and exciting degree of convergence between the churches represented — the latter the more significant because all the major traditions were involved in the work from Orthodox and Catholic through Lutheran, Reformed and Anglican to Baptists and Pentecostals. It is in fact the fruit of 50 years' painstaking work by theologians representing all these traditions, and is now being studied by churches throughout the world, to see if they can recognise in this text the faith of their own church.

Speaking out of the experience of many hours of study in the Bristol Baptist Association, I believe we can see the Lima text (as it is also known), as generally expressing and at many points enriching our experience of the faith, and in particular the crucial areas of Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry. In fact the 'Baptism' section reads as if written by a Baptist! It reflects a remarkable renewal of Baptist theology, and a growing *convergence* here and elsewhere, which is not yet *concensus*, but which is enormously promising and challenging to all the churches at the same time. It is this kind of convergence that leads Jurgen Moltmann to say ('Growing Together Into Unity' p.139):

'After fifty years of concerted theological effort we now have to say quite openly to Christians and church authorities that there are no longer any doctrinal differences which justify the divisions of our churches. To mention only the most important points, we have reached a common understanding of the Eucharist, baptism, the ministry of the church, the relationship of scripture and tradition, grace and justification, church and humanity. Of course much work still remains to be done on each of these central points of the faith, but what remains can only be done together. It cannot, now, be done in a joint committee of separate churches; the basis must be a conciliar fellowship of churches. If there is no longer any justification for our divisions, do they not then stand condemned?'

In the same chapter Moltmann points out that in the early days of ecumenical rapprochement it was said 'Doctrine divides — service unites'. Fellowship was achieved by practical service to the poor, the refugees, the victims of persecution. Divided in 'Faith and Order', the church drew together in 'Life and Work'.

Now the situation is almost completely reversed: 'After many years of patient painstaking work it would be true to say 'Theology unites — praxis divides'. Controversy in the ecumenical movement no longer centres on the Filioque, but concerns instead the Programme to Combat Racism.'

'Theology unites'. This is hardly the way it often looks locally! It is of course the theology of the theologians that unites, and why? Because they have had the patience and commitment to sit down and talk together over a period of years, and instead of scoring points and fighting yesterday's battles over again, have sought and found remarkable areas of agreement. There are lessons here for us all. As Baptists we need to suppress our fear that the theology will only confuse and divide us further, and learn from the theologians that an enriching convergence may be emerging.

But can we build on this convergence? Can we find fresh ideas to capture people's imagination as models of the future church? Moltmann uses one above which seems to be gaining acceptance in the ecumenical movement, namely:-

(8) Conciliar Fellowship. The challenge is to fill out the ideas of organic or visible unity in such a way that they will be strong enough to be worth striving and sacrificing for, whilst at the same time making room for healthy diversity. 'Unity not uniformity' has always been the slogan; but few visions of what that unity-in-diversity could look like have filtered down to us. Organic unity finishes sounding like organisation unity — one pyramid with everybody in his place, usually based on the pattern of the big battalions — bishops, priests and deacons.

The idea of 'conciliar fellowship', which emerged from a consultation at Salamanca ten years ago, can give us some new territory to explore. 'The one church is to be envisioned as a conciliar fellowship of local churches which are themselves truly united.' In 'Growing Together into Unity' Leslie Newbigin has tackled the question, 'What is a local church', and what does it mean for such a church to be 'truly united'. But first he makes clear that conciliarity is not a softer and less demanding alternative to organic unity. 'It is rather a way of describing one aspect of such union' (p.152). Newbigin defines the local church as the church 'for that place', and 'place' must mean the whole secular reality of the place, including its physical, social, cultural and political aspects.

Although it is helpful to Baptists to have a concept of unity that starts from the local church, rather than from the ordained ministry, we have to realise that 'local' here can mean everything from one congregation to a wider family of churches under the care of one bishop; or even a regional or national church united under a single head or under the authority of a common synod. This may seem hard to hold together in one concept, but Newbigin says (p.162) 'The unity of which we are speaking is one reality — whether it is the unity of the congregation in a single village, or the unity which is expressed at the regional or national or world level. At each level and in each place the reality is the same — namely that the risen Lord, Jesus Christ, consecrates the gathered believers to be sent into the world as the sign, foretaste and instrument of the reign of God in the form appropriate to that level of secular existence — that of a village, a city, a region or a nation.'

Within this fellowship there may be 'separation for the purposes of mission', i.e. when needed because of different languages or cultures, but the separations determined not by the future hope but by the past quarrels, and which are not part of missionary obedience, to Newbigin 'seem to be roundly condemned by the language of St. Paul in dealing with the Corinthian factions'. So conciliar fellowship does not envisage the continuation of our denominations in some loose federation.

How then are we to conceive it? It is 'that pattern of common life which provides for the imperfect discipleship of each local congregation both the correction and the support of the wider fellowship.' The idea of conciliar fellowship has emerged from the realisation that through its history the

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We pride ourselves on quick claims service (another ‘Q’) with the minimum of fuss. Of course not all claims can be settled quickly and not all losses are covered. Churches have to decide which risks to insure and which to carry themselves according to their financial resources. Our approach allows them to do this rather than the “package deal” which may be too expensive or provide inadequate sums insured for the premiums which can be afforded.

We receive many letters of appreciation for speedy and fair claims settlements. We make no claim to perfection and welcome constructive criticism if you feel the quality of our service is less than you would expect from the denominational insurer.

Yours sincerely,

**M.E. PURVER
General Manager**

church has moved forward through a variety of 'councils' from the council of Jerusalem recorded in Acts 15, through the great ecumenical councils of the fourth and fifth centuries, up to the Vatican Councils, and the twentieth century development of Councils of Churches. Even our own denomination has its Baptist Union Council! All of these are incomplete — 'pre-conciliar' in the jargon, but represent the struggles of the churches to act and grow together in unity even amidst great diversity. Moltmann poses the question, 'Can these different forms of councils not converge and become one? Can the divided churches not work together towards 'a genuinely universal council'? Can the ecumenical movement not be understood as the anticipation of a future practice of conciliar life, as the place where each church purifies its own approach and prepares itself for that future conciliar event which, one day, may bring together the representatives of all churches and which will proclaim the Gospel in new appropriate ways?' Conciliar fellowship thus becomes simply 'Communion among the churches which are sufficiently closely not to be capable of celebrating such a genuinely universal council'.

All this may seem like a far-off dream. But then so would present relationships viewed from the past. In 1521 Pope Leo X excommunicated Luther and branded him an antichrist. The present Pope praises him for his 'deep religious sense'. Did we not catch a glimpse of the future when the Pope came among us preaching the words of Christ and kneeling side by side in prayer with the Archbishop at Canterbury? Is there not the beginning of a vision here to inspire the next thousand years of the Christian era? And can we not go on turning vision into reality by working for patterns of conciliar fellowship in every local situation?

But it is bound to be a long road; or to change the metaphor — a large field to plough. Let the last challenge come from an earlier Baptist Union Secretary, J.H. Shakespeare, preaching on Christian Unity in Stockholm Cathedral during the Baptist World Alliance Congress just sixty years ago. It is a picture of Shakespeare himself, with his hand to the plough of Christian Unity, refusing to look back:

'It is hard work to be God's ploughman and to endure. It is hard work to maintain the first enthusiasm, the early devotion, sincerity of heart, purity of motive, unbroken courage, and undimmed zeal

We have almost envied the ploughman on the fields, bathed in sunlight, breathing the fresh warm air. But watch him — he is in a lonely furrow, he must go straight and keep his eye fixed on the goal. He must plough deep and the share strikes stones which fling the handle against his side.... The shadows lengthen and he is weary, but he must press on. The essential task of God's ploughman is to penetrate beneath the surface... All around as far as the eye can see, is the bare field. Not even the tiniest blade of wheat is above the surface. But the ploughman labours on...'

Roger Nunn



WEST HAM CENTRAL MISSION

York House, 409 Barking Road,
Plaistow, E13 8AL

Patron: Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother

Dear Fellow Ministers

I write this article as 1983 is nearing its end. It has been a very special year for us at West Ham Central Mission. The visit in April of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother exceeded all our expectations. The beautiful weather, the sense of joy and thanksgiving, and the gracious involvement of Her Majesty combined to make a day that we shall never forget, and for which we are profoundly grateful to God. However, the real test of the Mission is what happens when:

“the tumult and the shouting dies,
the Captains and the Kings depart”

More thrilling than even the most wonderful day is the realisation that day after day, day after day the work continues, as does the indispensable prayer and financial support of our many friends. It is a great privilege to be involved in the work of caring and healing to which Christ has called us. I hope that you, too, count it a privilege to be involved with your people in the support of the Mission's work. I have said on other occasions that, with the ever diminishing availability of Government funding for work such as ours, there will inevitably be a proportionate increase in our dependence upon our fellow believers to provide what is needed to sustain the work. I only wish that I could personally visit all our churches to commend our cause and to enlist the support of the members. This, of course, is physically impossible, and we therefore depend upon you, if you will, to be our advocates wherever you are.

In these days of the undermining and fragmentation of family life, there is a particular and urgent need for the kind of ministry we are seeking to offer at Greenwoods, The Parsonage and, more frequently, at Bodey House, our centre for Family Ministry. The fact that our first course, intended to help Ministers in marriage preparation, was rapidly over-subscribed surely indicates the realisation among us of the relevance of the Ministry of Bodey House. Please pray for Ron Messenger as he develops the work there, and for Russell Warden who carries the responsibility for the therapeutic community at Greenwoods. I do not need to describe in detail our work among the old and the ill at West Ham. Suffice it to say that the Mission is, as ever, trying to respond in relevant and effective ways to the needs that emerge in our society.

Your personal friendship and your fellowship in the gospel mean a great deal to us, and we want to thank you. May the Lord bless you in all your ministry during 1984.

Yours in His service,

Trevor W. Davis
Superintendent Minister

Grass-roots Ecumenism (I)

When I was single I often heard about the joys of married life — indeed I witnessed something of that joy among my friends and relations. I sometimes read articles or books which realistically put over the delights and difficulties experienced by two people uniting, becoming one and promising to work out their relationship with God's help. What books could not do nor long married friends really convey to me was the feeling of wholeness and the complete happiness which I experienced myself when I met my partner and we pledged ourselves to live together under God's guidance. Of course married life does not always run smoothly. Two people have different ideas and opinions, they have different gifts to contribute to the building of a home which might not at first seem to complement each other. But it is the working out, the deciding where priorities lie, the giving and the taking on both sides which makes marriage such fun, such an adventure. The results are not compromise but completeness. I have been married for almost nineteen years and have experienced all these things. We have a partnership which is working itself out in new and exciting ways all the time.

From my position within the active ecumenical scene it seems to me that the marriage relationship can very well serve as an analogy of ecumenism. There is a great deal said about Christians coming together and there are numerous meetings to talk about what could and should be done. We have a good amount of literature lining the bookshelves of our study on various aspects of the Ecumenical Movement. But no-one can write or speak in a meaningful way unless they are doing so from within a truly ecumenical situation. The joy and experience of wholeness can only come from actually uniting with other Christians.

I have been a member of Panshanger Local Ecumenical Project for over four years. To continue to call it a 'Project' is misleading for we are a Church, a body of people who have come together with our common faith in God through Christ and who have pledged ourselves to live together in harmony and to work for the extension of Christ's kingdom on earth. The Project was sponsored by five denominations nearly thirteen years ago. Baptist, Anglican, Presbyterian, Congregational and Methodists gave their blessing and promise of support to a small body of Christians set in a growing new estate to establish a centre of worship. It was, and remains, the only church in Panshanger (except for a small independent fundamentalist group) and it started its life in a school. We now have a small church building built about six years ago but such is the work and witness of this body of Christians that it has long since been outgrown. We are further pledging ourselves to find thousands of pounds so that this one centre of worship can continue to meet the needs of the community and show through deeds as well as words the love of God and the salvation through his son Jesus Christ.

We have one membership and although some move to us from denominational backgrounds there is no distinction when they join our fellowship. Those who come to faith for the first time and who become members either through the witness of Believers' Baptism or by confirming

the vows made for them in infancy become 'common' members. This means, in theory, that their membership is acceptable in any of the parent denominations. I say 'in theory' because, unfortunately, this does not automatically apply in a Baptist situation where each local congregation makes individual decisions on membership. I cannot stress too strongly what our joint membership means for whatever our background, our common allegiance to Christ binds us together and enables us to live and work together for him.

Of course the 'marriage' of five denominations (four since the Presbyterian/Congregational union) does not go through without problems and difficulties. If two married people have to sort out problems how much more will four bodies of people! Four times as much paperwork finds its way on to the ministers' desks. Baptists think they produce a lot but URCs beat us hands down! All this has to be carefully examined and sifted for much of it is valid and useful, URC material especially! There are four lots of meetings to attend or for which to find representatives on the Association/Circuit/District/Deanery level. Consequently there are four lots of reports to be heard. Decisions need to be taken on how the Church will be governed, e.g. in a representative way or total membership way. Any changes of policy need to be approved by the Sponsoring Body so patience is needed while waiting for them to meet!

Just as in a marriage of two people, at Panshanger Church we have all come together prepared to listen and to speak; to give and to take; to learn and to teach. And we do all listen so we have all learnt and we certainly have all received. We have learned that the parochial system is a good one, whereby we see our responsibilities and our challenge within a particular geographical area. But we have also learned that a regenerate membership is vital if it is to mean anything as we continue to work together. We are learning that water baptism is not to be taken lightly by anyone but that as members of the church of Christ we must all be baptised with the Holy Spirit. We are learning together the vital importance of Scripture, the need to relate to the community and the effectiveness of maintaining 'the unity of the Spirit in the bond of Peace' (Eph 4:3). Of course these are things realised by many of the denominational churches up and down our land—but we have realised them *together* and we are working them out together.

We all worship together, there are *never* denominational services but we blend the traditions so that we remain united. We all gather around the Lord's Table together and share the bread and wine no matter what our background or from whom we receive it. Thus you will see that our ministry is mutually recognised. We are in practice doing what the covenanting proposals failed to do. We have a team ministry comprising an Anglican, a Methodist and two Baptists, and just as they are all equal in the sight of God so is their ministry equally valid in the Church and the community. My own role in this team is as Youth Co-ordinator and involves linking together the various groups of Young People in the Church. We have a thrilling Girls' Brigade Company, a Boys' Brigade, Sunday School classes for 0 - 11, Key Cub for 11 - 13s and a discipleship group, ICTHUS for 14+. There is also a Junior Choir and an open Young Peoples' Group, BUZZ. With so many varied activities it is vital that each organisation continues to feel part of the whole Church family expressing mutual concern and interest. An important

part of the co-ordination is to keep the leaders of these groups linked with each other and provide opportunities for training. We are at present engaged in an intensive 3-term Sunday School teachers' training course. I do find my way into the pulpit from time to time both here and in other churches.

Readers may think that we are a church of young radical thinkers for whom such ideals are the process of a programme of philosophy and theology. Not so. We encompass all denominations mentioned plus a few others such as Quakers and Roman Catholics. Our youngest church member is thirteen, having joined us on profession of faith witnessed through Believers' Baptism. Our oldest is in her eighties and comes from a traditional Anglican background. And we have just about everything in between. All are working out the problems and all are experiencing the blessings that our unity has brought.

We are not without differences of opinion, neither do we escape heated discussions! But these are rarely along denominational lines and are the sort of differences and discussion which are found within a single denomination.

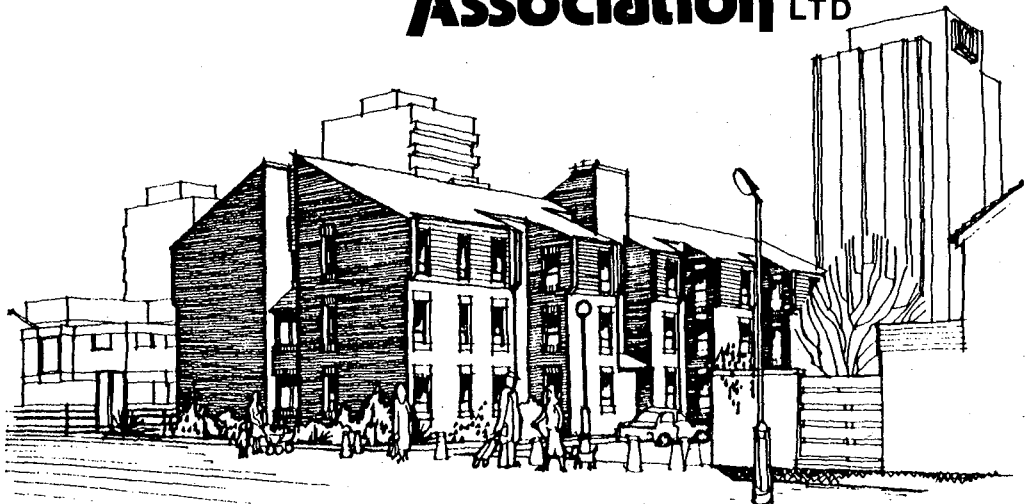
This might sound like a pat on the back for Panshanger Church. Well in one way it is and also for the 300 or more LEPs who are making their 'marriage' work. But it is really a plea. A plea not to dismiss ecumensim as something only to be talked over or written about. It is a plea to banish the idea that such unity will result in wishy-washy and watered down religion. It is a plea to trust in God, to be guided by his Holy Spirit because what we are experiencing here is not wishy-washy religion but a vital, living, working Christianity. What no one can convey by the written or spoken word is the absolute joy and the total feeling of wholeness which results from this 'marriage' of the denominations.

As in the marriage partnership of a man and woman so it is with an ecumenical partnership, there has to be love. Not simply physical attraction for the trappings of denominationalism but love for fellow Christians who are children of the same heavenly Father. Love which will continue 'for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health'. We need to love and cherish each other until death unites us completely.

When I was asked to write this article it was to provide a perspective from grass roots level. This I have tried to do. I have not referred to books or articles for they are numerous and at the end of the day do not really make much difference to the average church member. What does make the difference is our dependence on Scripture. This is the rock on which we build our unity. We endeavour to 'live a life that measures up to the standard God set ... always humble, gentle and patient ... being tolerant with one another'. We strive to 'preserve the unity which the Spirit gives by means of the peace that binds (us) together'. (Eph 4) We don't do this because we seek instant fame or recognition nor because we think we have come up with a good idea. We are united because we believe this is the way God has led us, and is continuing to lead us and we offer our experiences as an encouragement.

'To him who by means of his power working in us is able to do so much more than we can ever ask for, or even think of: to God be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus for all time, for ever and ever. Amen.' (Eph 3:20,21)

Men's Movement
Baptist Housing Association LTD



LLOYD COURT

Lloyd Court in West Gorton, Manchester is this Association's third scheme in the City. It is Warden controlled and consists of 22 flats for the elderly. There is a resident Warden's maisonette, two communal lounges, a laundry, a guest room and a lift serving all three floors.

The situation of this scheme is quite unique as the Health Centre is next door and directly opposite are local shops and a Post Office.

The Official Opening of Lloyd Court took place on the 17th September, 1983, and was performed by Revs. Tony & May Lloyd together with Mr J. Kenneth Cave, Vice-Chairman of the Association.

Lloyd Court takes its name from Tony & May Lloyd who were both former Ministers of the Trinity Baptist Church, Gorton. They have now taken up Ministry at the Immanuel Baptist Church, Southsea. Members of the Trinity Church form the Local Management Committee whose voluntary work in offering pastoral care for the general well-being and happiness of the tenants is an integral part of the smooth running of this scheme.

We have submitted a bid for funding to the Housing Corporation for 1984/85 to build Phase II of this scheme and would ask you to remember this in your prayers.

General Secretary
Baptist Housing Association Limited
London
WC1B 4AB.

Grass-roots Ecumenism (II)

Blackbird Leys is a council housing estate at the edge of the city of Oxford and separated from the rest of the city by a busy dual carriageway road. The oldest houses are about twenty-five years and the estate was virtually completed some fifteen years ago. The population, which has been falling, is now some nine and a half thousand.

An Anglican priest was appointed to the estate in 1960 and a temporary building put up. Building was begun on a permanent church, designed for purely Anglican use in 1964. Meanwhile a group of Free Church people, mainly Congregationalists and Presbyterians had been thinking about Free Church work on the estate. A site had been designated by the city council for Free Church use. While the building of the church was in progress it was agreed that there should not be a separate Free Church building but that the new church should be shared. The church was dedicated in 1965. In the same year a Congregationalist minister was appointed. Separate Free Church and Anglican services were held in the shared building. The two ministers worked closely together, there was a joint set of accounts, a joint officers' group and occasional church meetings.

Gradually united worship began to happen. From Christmas 1968 Free Church members shared in the Anglican communion at major festivals and from 1969 there was a monthly united service. Since Advent Sunday 1971 there have been no separate services, and the church became one, fully united, congregation. The impetus for this came from the local congregation and was not in any way imposed from outside.

In 1974 the involvement of the Baptists and the Methodists was formalised by the appointment of a Free Church minister receiving support from those denominations as well as the U.R.C. The area was also officially recognised as an Area of Ecumenical Experiment — subsequently to be renamed as a Local Ecumenical Project. The only other continuing worshipping group on the estate is the Roman Catholic church with which there is a friendly but not close relationship.

In an attempt to assess the value of the ecumenical project it will be convenient to look at four aspects of the work — Mission, Worship, Theology and Administration.

Mission:

To a Baptist the greatest gain has been in having a defined area of mission — a parish — whose boundaries are clear. There are few worshippers from outside the estate. Those who do come from outside are told plainly that they will not be regarded as a priority for pastoral care and are encouraged to join the church nearest their home.

The church is very closely integrated into the whole life of the community. A city councillor commented that whenever anything happens at Blackbird Leys you find people from the church in the centre of it. The Church has been able to share in setting up such events and activities as a neighbourhood council, festival week and an adventure playground. Church premises are seen as a community facility and this contributes to the generally positive attitude to the church on the estate.

The fact that there is no sense of rivalry between different churches has made it easier to develop a good relationship with statutory authorities. There are excellent relationships with doctors, health visitors, social workers, housing officials and local schools. Representatives of the church are governors of all schools in the area, and the ministers regularly lead assemblies.

The ministers of the church are recognised as the local 'vicars' by the whole community, beginning with the visiting of all new tenants soon after their arrival. There is a neighbourhood centre held on church premises and run by the local Good Neighbour Scheme, whose volunteers include both church and non-church residents. The centre is open five days a week from nine in the morning until five in the evening as a drop-in centre for information advice and friendship and also offers coffee-bar facilities. A Church appointed Community Worker has a leading role in the centre.

The ecumenical nature of the church makes it possible to maintain a very open attitude, so that there is a wide range of contacts and abundant opportunities for christian service and witness.

Worship:

Worship at Holy Family centres round the weekly Sunday morning communion service. The church has developed its own order for the service. Visitors from the Free Churches often comment that it seems very Anglican. An Anglican visitor remarked that it seemed like a Mission Hall service! There is considerable congregational involvement in reading, prayers, notices and so on. The service is much less a ministerial monologue than most Free Church services, but also has a greater place for freedom, especially in the communion prayers, than Anglican orders. It may be that the worship misses some of the heights of both Anglican and Free Church worship, but it is certainly true that most regular worshippers feel unsatisfied by much of the worship that they find in other congregations. They would assert strongly that worship at Holy Family has gained through the ecumenical encounter.

Parents asking for a service for young children are offered the alternatives of infant baptism or infant blessing. Almost all non-church families opt for baptism but a significant proportion of those with close church links have chosen blessing.

Theology:

There have been two main areas in which ecumenical practice has forced a re-examination of denominational attitudes.

The presence of children at the weekly communion has raised questions. The practice of the church has been that children are not normally encouraged to seek full church membership until they are about sixteen. Younger children who in many Anglican churches would have been confirmed or at least admitted to communion at eleven or twelve, and have a faith appropriate to their years, are therefore present at communion, and this poses the question of their place in the service and relationship to the church. The church proposed that such children who have a measure of

faith and are under instruction should receive communion, and be recognised, for want of a better term as 'Junior Members', but not at that stage receive Believer's Baptism and/or Confirmation. This was acceptable to the wider church so far as baptised children were concerned but not for unbaptised children. The local church was unable to accept this distinction and no progress was possible.

The presence in the congregation of people of both Baptist and Paedo-Baptist traditions raised questions. It seemed to many from both Baptist and Catholic traditions that functionally there was a close parallel between infant baptism and infant dedication as also between Confirmation and Believer's Baptism. Equally there is a marked functional distinction between infant and believer's baptism. (This position was set out in an article in *Fraternal* some years ago by Dr Haddon Willmer of Leeds University). There was also a strong agreement that infant baptism or blessing could not be linked primarily with the faith of the parents, as a sort of vicarious faith for the child, but should be firmly grounded in the action of God in Christ and the faith of the church. In the service at Blackbird Leys it is the church which declares its faith and the parents are asked if they wish their children to enter the fellowship of those who share this faith. Promises are made by parents after the blessing or baptism as a response to the free gift of God's love, not as a condition of its sacramental expression.

Administration:

Since the number of worshipping Christians in the area has been small it has been sensible to hold one set of services rather than two or more. The ministers have also found considerable support in working as a team rather than individually. There has, for at least the last ten years, been no issue on which the congregation has divided on denominational lines. Freedom from denominational positions has meant that change has been easier than in many congregations. It has been remarked that continuing change and development has been one of the chief factors in maintaining the unity of the congregation.

There are difficulties in relating to four sets of denominational structures, from fraternal to assemblies, synods and councils. More seriously, there have been great difficulties in developing support for the sort of activity represented by BMS and HMF. It is impossible to create enthusiasm for four sets of denominational funds and mission.

Questions of external authority are not clear. It is plain that ecumenical projects are not intended to be exclusively congregational. External *episcopate* is represented in a Sponsoring Body, but it is not always clear how far this is its own master and how far it is subject to whatever form of *episcopate* exists in the four denominations. There is certainly a danger that difficulties in relating fully to four denominations could take the project close to an isolationist position.

It is easy to argue pros and cons of the project. Perhaps the most important thing to be said is that the project is succeeding to some degree in meeting the needs of a growing congregation and being the serving people of God in its community.

David Rowland.

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93 Gloucester Place, London W1H 4AA

**How SPURGEON'S HOMES is
Moving with the Times
With small family homes and Family
Day Care Centres**

Children coming into care these days no longer need to live "away from it all" in large institutional type homes. Many of them are the victims of broken marriages and they need to stay close to places and schools they know. Spurgeon's have now established a network of small family units in Bedford, Wolverhampton and Luton, each run by houseparents. The children often need us for only a few months and being close to home can see their families and friends. We have also opened Family Day Care Centres at Coventry and Wolverhampton to meet a desperate need for pre-school age children. A 'Preventive Care' unit has been opened at Bedford.

All this work is a step in a wider sphere of service to show practical everyday Christianity to children in need. We hope that you will share in this growing outreach by encouraging your Church to remember our work in their prayers and send a gift of money.

Please send your enquiries and gifts to:-

The Secretary, Peter Johnson,
Spurgeon's Homes, 14, Haddon House,
Station Road, Birchington, Kent, CT7 9DH.
Telephone: Thanet (0843) 41381.

Reg. Charity No. 307560