

SOLIDARITY IN CHRIST
Cathedral of the Holy Trinity, Gibraltar
Ecumenical Service
Friday, January 22nd 2016
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Let me begin my reflections this evening with some journeyings. In 1940, at the age of 25, a young Reformed, Pastor took off on his bicycle from Geneva to settle in Burgundy in a village near Mâcon. Not long after, Geneviève, his sister joined him and they set up a 'safe house' for both Christian and Jewish refugees in this place which was then in 'unoccupied France'. The village to which they had come was Taizé and the young man was, of course, Brother Roger Schutz.

At much the same time, George Bell, then the Anglican Bishop of Chichester in England, was journeying frequently from Britain to Scandinavia and other places in mainland Europe, to meet with his great friend, Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bell famously campaigned against the saturation bombing meted out upon Dresden and Berlin. Both Bonhoeffer and Bell worked for peace between the European nations and also to support the resistance movement in Germany. Eventually, as we know, Bonhoeffer was executed in Flossenberg Concentration Camp on the 9th April 1945, just two weeks before the U.S. troops liberated the camp.

Now I've begun with the journeyings of this trio of 'heroic workers for unity' since all three focused essentially on the unity, or what one might better title the 'solidarity' of humankind. And, indeed it was not by accident that, later on, the trade union movement in Poland, in the late twentieth century, was named *Solidarność*, that is *Solidarity*. For again, it worked for the solidarity and liberation of the Polish people and roots lay in the Christian tradition with its leader, of course, *Lech Wałęsa*, a devout Roman Catholic. So, in all cases, it was their Christian faith which prompted them first and foremost to work for the solidarity or unity of humankind. They did not begin with unity schemes between Christian churches, nor even were they engaged in sophisticated theological dialogue either bilateral or multilateral.

For Schutz, Bonhoeffer and Bell, who, of course, became icons for the ecumenical movement, the Christian gospel was first and foremost about the salvation of the human race. This ought not to surprise us. For, so much of the teaching of St. Paul, for example, is about how humanity is redeemed in solidarity, as 'one lump' so to speak. Our salvation does naturally require of us a personal individual response, but the Christ-event as theologian Rudolf Bultmann called it in rather ugly English, was seen as a total 'salvation occurrence', again in rather clumsy English. In Christ it is humanity which is redeemed, not ones and twos, not Europeans only, not just those who belong to the church; indeed the church as we know it scarcely existed in Paul's time.

So, I've begun here since this indicates the potential impact of the Christian faith for *all humanity*. The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, then, is not a time to focus on narrow issues of the Church or churches only. Unity matters since it means liberation for the whole of human civilisation. Interestingly enough, as we've seen, each of the three I've thus far mentioned made journeys: Schutz from Switzerland into southern France, Bell and Bonhoeffer across Europe and indeed to the U.S.A. too. The entire ecumenical enterprise has involved many journeyings reaching right back to its beginnings in Edinburgh, over a century ago.

So if journeying lies at the heart, and those figures from Hitler's war mark out one milestone, where might one look next for a waymark? Let me move us on a quarter of a century. For, in this past year we have celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the Second Vatican Council. That council was seminal not only for Roman Catholics. It redrew the human, the theological, and the ecclesiastical maps for everyone – and again, I mean everyone – not just Christian believers.

So, first it noted that no longer did the Roman Catholic Church describe itself as identical with God's whole Church, excluding all else. Instead the Church of God was now described as *subsisting in* the Roman Catholic Church. This in itself meant a vast change in attitudes. Reviewing the separation of the churches, Pope Paul VI addressed the ecumenical observers at Vatican II thus:

'If we are in any way to blame for that 'separation', we humbly beg God's forgiveness and ask pardon too of our brethren who feel they have been injured by us . . . for our part we willingly forgive the injuries which the Catholic Church has suffered. . .

As we know there were tragic mistakes. On Sunday I shall preach in Tyburn Convent in London's West End, near the site of the death of many martyrs in the sixteenth century. Those deaths, alongside countless others across Europe, were the tragic result of separation and disunity. Religion can be cruel and furious as we have seen so much in the past twenty years across our world.

I began with journeyings. In its wake Vatican II also brought many journeyings - not only by Popes across the world - but of other leaders to Rome, Geneva and so many other places. In 1960, even before the Council, Geoffrey Fisher, then Archbishop of Canterbury, visited Pope John XXIII. It was historic in an amazing way. For the last Archbishop of Canterbury to visit a Pope was Archbishop Arundel in 1397, almost 600 years earlier. No *Anglican* Archbishop had ever come to meet a Pope and an unreformed Curia was taken by surprise. Conservative forces in the Curia attempted to gag them both but the Pope saw it differently, and the visit opened up into a completely new world.

I'll return to Rome a little later but let me now take us on another journey, this time to South America. Following the Second Vatican Council, there were a number of significant journeyings to Latin America and South America. Pope Paul VI made a memorable journey to Medellin in Colombia where the Conference of Bishops met to hammer out new options for the poor. Later on, however, the World Council of Churches met in Lima in Peru. From that meeting issued an historic agreement affirmed by all the mainstreams churches on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry. It has remained a landmark agreement on so many aspects of the Christian tradition. Alongside that, coming from that same conference, a Eucharistic liturgy emerged, still often used in gatherings between the churches. Here we saw an historic meeting, from which theology also helped shape ecumenical relations.

In March 1990, however, a further and very different milestone was marked, following the impact of Gorbachev's *glasnost* and *perestroika*, and the collapse of the Berlin Wall, a great gathering was convened in Geneva. People journeyed from across Europe. It was organised both by the *Conference of European Churches* and CCEE (the *Conference of European Episcopal Conferences* of the Roman Catholic Church). It was a remarkable event bringing together virtually all traditions: Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican, Orthodox and Roman Catholic. I accompanied Robert Runcie who was then Archbishop of Canterbury. Indeed, it's the only occasion I remember being with the Archbishop of Canterbury in his car and us slowing down to give a lift to an Orthodox Patriarch. This was Alexii, Patriarch of Moscow and all the Russias.

Both CEC and later the Roman Catholic CCEE had always denied the division of Europe into *east* and *west*. The Iron Curtain was de facto there for politicians, but not for the Church of God. The collapse of the Berlin Wall and all that went with it was a vindication of this witness of the churches. Archbishop Robert Runcie gave an inspiring address. The young Bishop Daniel Ciobotea, now Patriarch Daniel of Romania, who'd just finished being a student at Bossey Ecumenical Institute in Geneva, equally spoke with spirit and vigour. Roman Catholic leaders were also upbeat. It was a turning point which, despite occasional setbacks, will never be reversed. It indicated a de facto recognition, across the board, of a mutual recognition of churches as churches.

The reading in the service this evening was, of course, the journey to Emmaus. We all know the story almost by heart. In it we encounter St. Luke, classically, as the ultimate narrator amongst the four evangelists. The story is moving in the way it unfolds, and it concludes, you'll remember, with a veiled account of the eucharist: they broke bread together. Remembering from whence I began, we may begin to see some resonances, for Emmaus is about a journey. It's about the engagement of people in conversation, and ultimately in the 'breaking of the bread.' Pope John Paul II once notably said to Archbishop Runcie, as they lunched together: '*Affective* communion leads to *effective* communion.'

That lies at the heart of what this week is about. In this past half-century, momentous strides have been made. Some very rich theological reflection has emerged, especially focusing on the concept of communion or *koinonia*, as it is in Greek. This has issued from the myriad dialogues that have followed Vatican II and all the other ground-breaking ecumenical developments. But ultimately little, if anything, would have been achieved without the human engagement of individuals and communities.

Let me now take you back to Rome, for a few moments, since – for Anglicans – another key milestone is hovering up on the near horizon. Fifty years ago this year, Archbishop Michael Ramsey's visit to Pope Paul VI marked the first ever *official* visit of an Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury to a Pope. Its impact remains world-changing. Out of it flowed ARCIC, the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, perhaps the single most significant and pioneering theological dialogue between churches. In my five years at Lambeth Palace I was Secretary to any number of meetings of the Commission – in Paris, Windsor, Venice, Jerusalem – and across the Atlantic. From that 1996 meeting too, came the foundation of the Anglican Centre of Rome, whose governors I now chair.

But certainly the most iconic, powerful moment came right at the end of the visit. On the evening before the final meeting in the basilica of St. Paul–Outside-the-Walls in Rome, the Pope sent his Secretary to the Venerable English College where the Archbishop of Canterbury was staying. The Secretary was to talk to the Archbishop's Chaplain. His message was that the Pope intended to take off his episcopal ring and give it to the Archbishop. Should they forewarn Ramsey or should it be a surprise? After only a moment's thought they said in unison: 'Let it be a surprise.'

Surprise indeed it was. It was, as we now say in that popular cliché 'game-changing'. Now our two churches were 'engaged', 'betrothed', as it were. Now talk is never of

separation, but always of 'partial or imperfect communion.' We are all, then, on a journey whose destination we know, but the timing of which will require ultimate patience. Rather like the surprise of the eucharist at the end of the journey to Emmaus, that giving of the ring can be a sign of hope for communion for *all* our churches not just Anglicans and Roman Catholics. But more than that, remembering where we began, it is a sign of hope for all humankind!

Amen.

Reading

Luke. 24. 13-35.