

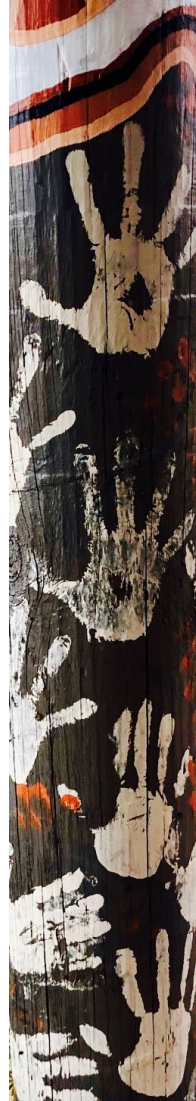


NSW Ecumenical Council  
Theological Reflection Commission

# A Celebration of *Ut unum sint* The 25th Anniversary

Edited by  
Doru Costache and Diane Speed

Sydney  
2020





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# Preface

The present volume is the outcome of an initiative of NSW Ecumenical Council's Theological Reflection Commission (TRC). As we read on the Council's website, 'this Commission provides opportunities for the Council to reflect on issues related to the theological, biblical and historical basis of ecumenism and recommend contemporary ways in which these foundations can be used for building structures through which the churches can achieve the goal of Christian unity'. TRC thus considers matters of local and national interest to the churches and relevant events and publications that might show what can be achieved through ecumenical efforts.

*A Celebration of Ut unum sint: The 25th Anniversary* celebrates the release of Pope John Paul II's significant encyclical on ecumenism. TRC has seized the occasion as an opportunity to make a contribution to rebooting the dialogue of love between Christians of all persuasions.

TRC was initially alerted about this anniversary by the Revd Dr Raymond Williamson, the Council's President. After some discussion, TRC decided in March 2019 to produce a celebratory collection of reflections on the encyclical and its impact. Later in the year, a further decision was taken that, while some of the reflections should offer current responses to the encyclical itself, others should address broader matters of living and thinking ecumenically. While relations between the churches continue to pose particular questions for dialogue,

other questions are emerging about the level of local church interest in the ecumenical movement and what the very idea of ecumenism might mean to ordinary Christians.

TRC has been aware that both national and international experts have or might have been asked to write with authority about either the encyclical or ecumenism generally but, to a significant extent, this collection of reflections has had the more modest aim of recording a range of community responses and insights that might not otherwise have been noted—yet the ecumenical imperative is a matter for the whole church.

Accordingly, this book presents reflections on both *Ut unum sint* and its reception and ecumenism and church unity more broadly. Some contributions are analytical or historical, others reflect on personal journeys or the future of the ecumenical movement.

We are grateful for the assistance of the Very Revd Dr Shenouda Mansour, the Council's General Secretary, who tirelessly promoted this initiative. We are also thankful for the enthusiastic support of our TRC colleagues and for the Council Executive members who wrote essays, as well as for the contributions of interested people from across the ecumenical spectrum, clergy and laity, women and men. Furthermore, we give thanks for the people who regretted not being able to contribute but indicated their support for the undertaking. Last but by no means least, we express our profound gratitude to the Revd Professor Gerard Kelly, who kindly provided an excellent introductory study on the reception and impact of the encyclical.

*The Editors*

## Notes on Contributors

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**Clabon Allen** The Revd Clabon Allen is a retired minister of the Uniting Church of Australia in Sydney and previously the United Reformed Church, within which he served in Malaysia and Hong Kong as well as the United Kingdom. He is also a long-term member of the Wellspring Community and its Council.

**Matthew Attia** The Revd Matthew Attia is a priest at Saint George Coptic Orthodox Church at Kensington NSW and General Vicar of the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Sydney and Affiliated Regions. His professional background is legal.

**Philip Bradford** The Revd Philip Bradford is a semi-retired minister of the Anglican Church in Sydney, still in occasional parish ministry and the Anglican Healing Ministry. He is a strong advocate for women in ministry and a member of the Research Ethics Committee of the Sydney College of Divinity.

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**James Collins** The Revd Dr James Collins is the Rector of St Paul's Anglican Church in Burwood, Sydney, with a professional background in education and a particular concern with Christian engagement with ethnic diversity. He is an Anglican nominee to the NSW Ecumenical Council, of which he is a Vice-President.

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the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture at Charles Sturt University.

**Joseph Meelis Zaia** His Beatitude Mar Meelis Joseph Zaia AM is Metropolitan of the Assyrian Church of the East, presiding over the Diocese of Australia, New Zealand, and Lebanon. He has founded the international Assyrian Church of the East Relief Organization, two diocesan schools, and Nisibis Assyrian Theological College at Horsley Park NSW. He engages in NSW Ecumenical Council activities and undertakes doctoral studies at the Sydney College of Divinity.

# Introduction to *Ut unum sint*

Gerard Kelly

The encyclical *Ut unum sint* was published in 1995, thirty years after the end of the Second Vatican Council. The Council's Decree on Ecumenism had been promulgated in 1964. The encyclical, then, can be read as an act of reception of the Council. Such acts of reception have been common in the history of the church—think of those councils in the fourth and fifth centuries when each would begin its work by receiving the work of the previous council. In this way, we see that church teaching is not static, but that it continues to develop as new situations call for a reception and often a re-reception of a particular formulation of doctrine. In the case of *Ut unum sint*, reception entailed a renewed commitment to Christian unity and the unity of the church, and a more penetrating understanding of the command of Christ that 'they may all be one'. Several factors contributed to this new context for reception, one of which was the experience of bilateral dialogues and their achievements. In fact, the pope engages in a lengthy reflection on dialogue, and most notably calls it an 'exchange of gifts' (28).

We now mark twenty-five years since the promulgation of *Ut unum sint* and are faced with our own receptive moment, aware that we are in a different position from that of 1995, and certainly different from that of 1964. In the years since 1995, the encyclical has been studied widely, even beyond the Roman

Catholic Church. The ecumenical work that has gone on, in both formal and informal settings, may help us to arrive at a more penetrating interpretation of the vision of *Ut unum sint*. It is not unreasonable to speak of a reception of the encyclical beyond the Roman Catholic Church and in the *oikumene* more broadly.

*Ut unum sint* begins with a vision of God's plan for the unity of the whole of creation and situates the unity of the church in this context. The unity of the church is not for its own sake, but for the glory of God; and God is glorified when the creation achieves its purpose as given by God. The church is a sign and instrument of that unity. While ever the church remains divided, the plan of God is less visible in the world. From this we see the urgency Pope John Paul II places on ecumenism. He says it cannot be considered as just some sort of appendix to normal church life, rather it should form an organic part of the church's life and work (20). Twenty-five years on, it seems that this is an insight that needs to be re-received. Christian churches are struggling to give a credible witness to the Gospel of God. At the same time, the divisions in our societies seem to be getting wider. At a time when people and groups are building walls around themselves to keep out other opinions, the churches have an opportunity to show what God's plan may look like when we take respectful dialogue seriously.

In the years since the publication of *Ut unum sint*, the wider ecumenical movement has focussed on ecclesiological issues. One need think only of the work of the World Council of Churches Faith and Order Commission on the nature and mission of the church, and the publication of *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* in 2013. The big ecumenical

question is ‘what will the unity of the church look like?’ For more than one hundred years the churches have struggled to arrive at a common understanding of what unity will look like. In fact, different models of unity are held by the various churches. The Roman Catholic Church speaks of organic unity, but spelling out what that means has not always been easy. People still remember the Roman Catholic reticence to be part of the ecumenical movement right up until the time of the Second Vatican Council. The ecumenism of those decades was an ecumenism of return, with all churches returning to the Roman Catholic Church. The Second Vatican Council’s Decree on Ecumenism shifts this understanding by noting that despite our divisions we already experience a real communion among our churches, even if it is imperfect at the moment. So, future unity will not involve renouncing the spiritual gifts that are flourishing in each church.

*Ut unum sint* takes this a step further. Pope John Paul II speaks of the unity of the church in the first Christian millennium as being a sort of model of how the unity of the church might be realised. This is not a vision of uniformity, but of genuine catholicity. It seems to me that this is a repudiation of an ecumenism of return. This, I believe, is a significant achievement. This is not to suggest that the next steps will be easy. This is why the question of a universal ministry of unity now becomes important. This is what the Faith and Order Conference recognised in 1993. It is why John Paul invites a patient and fraternal dialogue on how this ministry might be exercised in a new situation.

The section of the encyclical that has probably received the most attention is where the pope speaks about the future of the

Roman primacy. Acutely aware that the role of the pope is one of the divisive areas of faith and order for Christians of all ecclesial traditions, the pope called on other churches to engage with him in a patient and fraternal dialogue on reforming the Roman primacy so that it might be exercised in a new situation for the service of the whole church. Significantly, he records that the request for such a study has come from other Christian churches, notably the Faith and Order World Conference in 1993. It is surely a sign of the ecumenical times that the pope is listening to the voice of other Christians calling for dialogue on this topic. The response to this invitation is indicative of the influence *Ut unum sint* has had in the ecumenical movement. While it is true that the reform of the papacy is far from complete, with *Ut unum sint* we can say that it has clearly begun, and that the Roman Catholic Church's ecumenical partners are contributing to the reform.

Twenty-five years on, this encyclical still has the power to encourage further dialogue. May whatever dialogue it generates help us all to take the next steps towards full communion.



Reflecting on *Ut unum sint*



# 1 Clabon Allen

The *Ut unum sint* papal encyclical was an important landmark in a long process of ecumenical discussion and dialogue. I want to concentrate on some of the earlier ecumenical developments, and especially those where I was involved.

One of my clearest memories from my theological training at Mansfield College, Oxford, was to hear firsthand reports from my theological lecturer about Vatican II. Revd Dr George Caird had attended sessions of the Vatican Council as a Protestant Observer (it helped that he had fluent Latin). He came back from his trips to Rome very excited about developments at Vatican II. He believed that the Holy Spirit was creating new possibilities in the whole life of the Roman Catholic Church. In particular, Vatican II statements talked about their irrevocable commitment to the ecumenical movement. As an interesting historical addendum, Dr Caird became the first Non-Anglican to be appointed as a Regius Professor at Oxford University. One of the staff members of the Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity in the 1960s was Father Thomas Stransky CSP. He helped to write the statements on the ecumenical commitment for Vatican II.

Some of the later developments after Vatican II did not fulfil the hopes of the Protestant Observers. There was, however, one good result. At the suggestion of the Protestant Observers, it was decided to set up an ecumenical theological institute in Jerusalem.

Pope Paul VI pushed ahead with this despite a war and conflict in Israel. Eventually in 1972 the Tantur Ecumenical Institute was founded on a Catholic site between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. This began a long tradition of advanced theological research from Catholics, Orthodox, and Protestants. This helped to lay some of the theological foundations that resulted in *Ut unum sint*.

I felt it was a great privilege to spend part of my sabbatical at Tantur in the 1990s. Thomas Stransky was the Rector at the time and he shared some of the developments since Vatican II. As well as lectures and visits to archaeological sites, there was a programme where we heard Muslims and Jews give their understanding of their faith. This was a good use of my sabbatical; I was able to read widely and enter into serious dialogue with Catholics, Orthodox, and Anglicans.

On the Protestant side, the Student Christian Movement (SCM) and the World Student Christian Federation brought students together from different theological traditions. It was one of the factors that helped form the World Council of Churches (WCC) after World War II. There have been close relations between the WCC and the Vatican ever since, with Catholics active on WCC study programmes. I served on SCM staff in the 1960s and that helped to deepen my commitment to ecumenical work. I have served on ecumenical committees in Malaysia, Hong Kong, and Britain.

Over the years there has been a series of meetings between popes, Orthodox patriarchs, and archbishops of Canterbury. These have all contributed to the slow process that created *Ut unum sint*. The ongoing dialogue between the Vatican and the

WCC has also contributed to the very significant achievement of the papal encyclical.

May the ongoing process of ecumenical engagement continue for many years to come.

## 2 Rob A. Fringer

On the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of John Paul II's influential papal encyclical, *Ut unum sint*, I offer these brief biblical and theological reflections as one who is deeply committed to ecumenism while firmly planted in my own tradition (Church of the Nazarene—a Protestant, Evangelical, Wesleyan denomination).

The words of Jesus' 'High Priestly Prayer' in John 17:20-21 —'I (Jesus) ask ... that they (believers) may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me'—are a mandate for unity amongst believers. They are a call to embrace our new eschatological identity as the body of Christ. And as the Apostle Paul reminds us, 'There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all' (Ephesians 4:4-6). Considering these and multiple other scriptural imperatives for unity, it is a sad reality that the church universal remains so divided. Sadder still is the fact that disunity

misrepresents the love of God and prevents us from more fully proclaiming the Gospel through our actions.

Here, John Paul II's words echo loudly:

I think of the grave obstacle which the lack of unity represents for the proclamation of the Gospel. A Christian Community which believes in Christ and desires, with Gospel fervour, the salvation of [hu]mankind can hardly be closed to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, who leads all Christians towards full and visible unity. Here an imperative of charity is in question, an imperative which admits of no exception. Ecumenism is not only an internal question of the Christian Communities. It is a matter of the love which God has in Jesus Christ for all humanity; to stand in the way of this love is an offence against him and against his plan to gather all people in Christ.

There is little doubt that most ecclesiastical bodies take seriously the authority of Scripture and desire to see unbelievers drawn to Christ; so why do so many divisions remain? The answer to this question is complex as there are multiple theological and practical differences amongst the various ecclesiastical bodies. Nevertheless, these differences need not prevent us from being more united than we currently are. A significant step towards unity will be accepting that unity does not mean uniformity. It is highly unlikely that the various ecclesiastical bodies will reunite into a single entity; still, we must be more intentional about finding our common ground while recognising, accepting, and even celebrating our differences. In so doing, we can better embody and exemplify

the love of God to a world that is becoming increasingly more divided.

The biblical accounts of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-21 and Galatians 2:1-10) can provide us with some guidelines as we work toward unity (not all scholars would agree that Galatians 2:1-10 is a reference to the Jerusalem Council; nevertheless, many do, and there are enough similarities to warrant this comparison). This council meeting arose out of divisions that were taking place in the early years of the church regarding the requirements necessary for Gentiles to be saved and to become part of the people of God. From the Acts account we can see that there was rigorous debate with all sides giving input into the conversation. In the end, it was the recognition of what they, Jew and Gentile alike, had in common—namely, the Holy Spirit—that ultimately led to a favourable decision to include the Gentiles with only limited observance of the Jewish law. Furthermore, this decision did not prevent Jews from continuing to adhere to the full requirements of the law. In other words, they were united in Spirit and love without having to act out their faith in the same ways. Hopefully, we can all recognise and acknowledge the Holy Spirit's presence in and at work through the other ecclesiastical bodies. The same Spirit unites us while allowing us room for differences.

The Galatians account provides insight into Paul's interpretation of the events of the Jerusalem Council, which evidence a few differences. Paul does not recount any of the law's requirements for the Gentiles that were stated in Acts. Instead, the Gentiles are simply asked to 'remember the poor'. Furthermore, Galatians highlights more of a division regarding

missional/ministry responsibility. It was acknowledged that God had entrusted Paul with bringing the Gospel to the Gentiles and Peter with bringing the Gospel to the Jews. Galatians 2:11-14 also gives an account of the struggles that existed between the various groups as they sought to live out their shared commitment amid the tensions this new reality brought. Unity takes commitment and hard work to maintain. Peter and Paul, as well as many of the other leaders, had differing theological perspectives both before and after the Jerusalem Council. Nevertheless, they were united in their shared calling to bring the Good News of God to the whole world. Hopefully, we too can recognise that God gives people (and churches) different gifts to meet the challenges of their particular callings in their particular contexts. It is not a competition; we can all share this load together, even if we do so in different ways and with differing theological understandings as the basis for our actions.

It seems fitting to give John Paul II the final word in this short reflection: ‘If Christians, despite their divisions, can grow ever more united in common prayer around Christ, they will grow in the awareness of how little divides them in comparison to what unites them’.

### 3 Philip Kariatlis

The preeminent sentiments expressed in *Ut unum sint*, namely, those in relation to Christian Churches overcoming ‘long-standing misgivings’ and actively responding to Christ’s call



for Christian unity, aptly express the position of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. It is for this reason that the opportunity given by the Theological Reflection Commission of the NSW Ecumenical Council to celebrate this encyclical's twenty-fifth anniversary is most welcome. From an Orthodox perspective, it must be noted that, already at the turn of the twentieth century, there were certain eminent Orthodox hierarchs and theologians who, having a vision of 'transparent walls' and 'degrees of proximity' between the separated Churches, turned their attention to see how there could be some sort of rapprochement and increased understanding. The above phrases belong to Georges Florovsky ('The Orthodox Churches and the Ecumenical Movement Prior to 1910' in Ruth Rouse and Stephen C. Neill, eds, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement*, vol. 1: 1517-1948 (Geneva: WCC, 3rd ed., 1986), 193-211, 217-18). More specifically, even before the emergence of the World Council of Church in 1948, the Ecumenical Patriarchate issued three significant encyclicals in 1902, 1904, and 1920, asking for ways that Christian Churches could begin working together to realise Christian unity; precisely the same appeal discerned in *Ut unum sint*.

In a historically unprecedented manner, the 1920 encyclical issued an invitation 'to all Christian Churches of God on the earth' to form a 'league of churches' (κοινωνία ἐκκλησιῶν), putting forward a rather elementary—but arguably most significant for its time—program for contemporary ecumenism. The word *koinonia*, which appears four times in that text, is also found in the opening paragraph of the first chapter of—and indeed throughout—*Ut unum sint*, depicting the Roman Catholic Church's understanding of unity. As we know, of course, the term *koinonia*—found both in the 1920 encyclical

and *Ut unum sint*—was the prevailing term for understanding unity at the seventh General Assembly of the WCC in Canberra, 1991.

The 1920 encyclical, more specifically, asked the Christian Churches to consider, ‘the removal and abolition of all mutual mistrust and bitterness... [and] that, above all, love should be rekindled and strengthened among the churches, so that they should no more consider one another as strangers and foreigners, but as relatives, and as being part of the household of God and “fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 3:6).’ Similarly, *Ut unum sint* notes: ‘The unity of all divided humanity is the will of God ... On the eve of his sacrifice on the Cross, Jesus himself prayed to the Father for his disciples and for all those who believe in him, that they *might be one*, a living communion’ (6). Both texts undoubtedly helped to shape the ecumenical vision of the respective Churches’ quest for unity; both were timely reminders that the ecumenical imperative constitutes the will and plan of God; accordingly, both can therefore rightly be considered landmarks of the ecumenical vision.

Christ’s high priestly prayer, a verse of which comprises the title of the papal encyclical, is not only a reminder of the absolute necessity in relation to the ecumenical quest for Christian unity, but also—and often this is overlooked—provides a theological paradigm for this. In John 17:21, we read: ‘that that may all be one; *even as* (καθώς) you, Father are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us.’ The conjunction *kathos* is significant here in that it not only identifies unity as a divine command, but it determines the type of unity envisioned

by Christ himself. From this it is clear that the unity between the Christian Churches is to be founded upon the communal relations between God the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ—or more broadly from within the mystery of the Trinitarian life.

Notwithstanding the ontological gap between the divine and created realms—and therefore, by extension, the impossibility for any absolute correlation between God and his creation—the dominical prayer found in the Johannine Gospel does in fact allow for, and indeed validate, some form of relationship between the Trinitarian God and—in our case—the unity or communion of the Christian churches. Reflecting a little further, the claim could be made that, in the same way the particularity of each divine Person, within the Trinitarian paradigm, is not compromised, but is instead preserved, so too, in the case of the unity of the Christian Churches, their fellowship or unity need not necessarily imply uniformity or a quashing of each Church’s particularity; on the contrary, a vision of unity based on the Trinitarian relations would acknowledge—but more so—embrace diversity.

In concluding these preliminary musings, *Ut unum sint* remains a memorable encyclical, one which disclosed the deep conviction of the late Pope John Paul II for the sacred unity of all Christians; indeed, urging for this to take place in a spirit of humility and prayer—a conviction equally shared by His All-Holiness, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, and the Ecumenical Patriarchate more broadly. More than that, however, it was a courageously pioneering text in that it recognised obstacles to unity—indeed, hindrances perceived by other Churches because of the ministry of papal primacy—but, notwithstanding this, it urged all Christian Churches to persist

in ‘dialogue’, ‘mutual exchange ... and enrichment’ in order to discern ways in which this ministry might be seen to be more acceptable and appropriate as a service of unity. Might not this encyclical have paved the way for what today is referred to as ‘receptive ecumenism’, a call towards an openness to learning and receiving from one another in a spirit of shared exploration? Still further, might not Christ’s call for unity and reconciliation be such which will embrace diversity—indeed, a diversity constitutive of unity—as we saw in the case of the Trinitarian mystery?

## 4 Vincent Long

21<sup>st</sup> August marked the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the papal encyclical *Ut unum sint*, meaning that ‘they may be one’. It was the first encyclical ever devoted exclusively to the ecumenical imperative. In this ground-breaking exercise, Pope John Paul II affirmed that the ecumenical commitment made at Vatican II was irreversible and that the quest for Christian unity ought to be sustained both internationally and in the local churches.

The encyclical recalls the conversion of the Ukrainian people in 988 as an example of how accepting, and even encouraging diversity, is essential in the Church. John Paul II called it a key event in the evangelisation of the world. The Church must breathe with her two lungs! In the first millennium of the history of Christianity, ‘ecumenism’ refers primarily to the relationship between Byzantium and Rome.

Praising the evangelical work of the first millennium, St John Paul II called it a period when ‘the development of different experiences of ecclesial life did not prevent Christians, through mutual relations, from continuing to feel certain that they were at home in any church, because praise of the one Father, through Christ in the Holy Spirit, rose from them all, in a marvellous variety of languages and melodies; all were gathered together to celebrate the Eucharist’.

Looking ahead to greater unity between the Orthodox and Catholic churches, St John Paul II reminds us of how diversity was the norm in ancient times:

In each local church this mystery of divine love is enacted, and surely this is the ground of the traditional and very beautiful expression ‘sister churches’, which local churches were fond of applying to one another. For centuries we lived this life of ‘sister churches’, and together held Ecumenical Councils, which guarded the deposit of faith against all corruption. And now, after a long period of division and mutual misunderstanding, the Lord is enabling us to discover ourselves as ‘sister churches’ once more, in spite of the obstacles that were once raised between us.

Let us commit ourselves to the work of ecumenism, growing in unity through diversity, and praying together with united voices. This is the Church breathing through both lungs.

## 5 Erica Mathieson

*‘Ut unum sint!* The call for Christian unity’ (1) acknowledges that the specifically Christian call to unity comes within God’s broader will and purpose that all people be one (6). At both the Christian and universal levels the quest for unity is one of those aspects of human experience that is both gift and call.

We human beings are already one because of our relationship to the Creator God ‘in whom we live and move and have our being’ (Acts 17:28). This is the revolutionary insight of the Genesis stories of creation (Genesis 1:26-27; 2:7, 21-22). We are one because we share the divine image, brothers and sisters to one another whatever our race, religion, or gender.

My sense of this truth first came about at the moon-landing in 1969 when I and some 600 million other people around the world watched, paused, waiting for that ‘one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind’, caught up together in a momentous and technologically amazing event. It dissolved the edges of my identity and opened in me a sense of profound connection, solidarity, oneness with my fellow human beings who were ‘as one’ in that moment. The pictures from Apollo 11 of the blue earth, beautiful, fragile, and tiny, suspended in space, gave a ‘God-like’ view of the human situation that rendered the ordinary daily reality of division and conflict petty.

The COVID pandemic offers a current dramatic expression of the unity of humankind. Shared vulnerability, shared need, shared reliance on one another for our well-being, again it

gives rise in me to a deep sense of my connection to others—all others. The pressing importance of being together, of releasing energy and resources for aid, research, and support to deal with the virus led the United Nations in March 2020 to issue a global call to cease all armed conflict—an opportunity to stand together in solidarity and turn swords into pruning hooks at least for a time. A second call to a global ceasefire came from the UN Security Council in July in its Resolution 2532. But research by the University of Edinburgh reveals that the initial surge in ceasefire agreements was short-lived, and we have returned to conflict-as-usual. Secretary General António Guterres remarked that ‘the fury of the virus illustrates the folly of war’.

The gift of Christian unity is the work of the Holy Spirit and prior to the division that marks the history of the Church; and that division ‘openly contradicts the will of Christ, provides a stumbling block to the world, and inflicts damage on the most holy cause of proclaiming the Good News to every creature’ (6 quoting *Unitatis redintegratio* 4). The text, ‘There is one body and one Spirit ... one Lord, one faith, one baptism’ (Ephesians 4:4-5), oddly absent from the encyclical, makes Jesus’ call for his followers ‘to be one’ a call to ‘become who we are’.

As someone who, for a number of years, has practised silent, contemplative prayer, I find that coming to stillness before utter love connects me with God, the source of love, and allows an inner spaciousness where there is room for others. When Jesus prayed ‘that they may be one’, he defined the unity he intended for us by praying ‘that they may be one as we are one’ (John 17:11), and again ‘that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us’ (John 17.21).

The way Christians are to be one is by coming to participate in divine self-giving, self-emptying, forgiving, life-giving love. As the encyclical says, Christian unity is Trinitarian, grounded in the unity of God and the love of Father, Son, and Spirit (8).

*Ut unum sint* places prayer in a central place (21-27, 102) as the way for the churches to make progress in unity. Following the great twentieth-century ecumenist Lesslie Newbigin's formulation of the church as a sign, instrument, and foretaste of the kingdom, the same imperative surely must inform all movement towards human unity. It may be that there is a new language informed by contemplative practice, by allowing our rigidities and intolerances to be caught up in a larger love, and by solidarity that can allow fresh engagement with the encyclical and among the churches.

## 6 David B. McEwan

When conversations arise about the ecumenical movement and the desire for visible church unity, two common positions emerge. On the one hand, there are those who believe that doctrinal precision is critical and so take a dogmatic approach, limiting the 'true' church to those who agree doctrinally with them. They then refuse to fellowship or collaborate with those groups who do not think as they do. On the other hand, there are those who value inclusiveness above almost anything else and are willing to fellowship and collaborate with anyone who has some sort of 'Christian confession', no matter how vaguely defined. In the first case, doctrinal orthodoxy (as defined by the



tradition) is of the essence of the ‘one true Church of Jesus Christ’, while in the second case the essence of the church is seen in terms of love and inclusion (also defined by the tradition). In almost every case, the dogmatic group will reject the inclusive group on the grounds of doctrinal orthodoxy, while the inclusive group will not extend their inclusiveness to the (in their opinion) harmful bigots who insist on total agreement on every aspect of doctrine. New Testament metaphors point to the basic unity of the church, but does that require the uniformity of a single denomination? Or do such metaphors as ‘the body of Christ’, the ‘new Israel’, a ‘building’, and the ‘vine’ emphasise that there is a diversity of parts that forms the single whole under the headship of Christ?

John Wesley, the eighteenth-century founder of Methodism, was an evangelical Anglican clergyman who greatly valued the early Fathers of the Church (both Eastern and Western), and drew upon a broad range of Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran, and Calvinist writers in shaping his personal faith and that of his emerging movement. In his sermon, ‘Catholic Spirit’ (first published in 1740; see John Wesley, *Sermons II*, ed. Albert C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985) 81-95), Wesley reminded his followers that the second great commandment (James 2:8; Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 19:19) requires us to love our neighbour as a core element of the whole Gospel. This command must be displayed by and towards all who ‘love God’ (81–82). He notes how few do this, being divided by the fact that ‘they can’t all think alike’ and consequently ‘can’t all walk alike’ (82). He then asks the question, ‘although a difference in opinions or modes of worship may prevent an entire external union, yet need it prevent our union in affection? Though we can’t think alike,

may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion?’ (82). The sermon text (2 Kings 10:15) reflected this conviction: ‘Is thine heart right. As my heart is with thy heart? ... If it be, give me thine hand’ (82). At first glance this would put him into the ‘inclusive’ camp—all that matters is that we love each other, and we need not separate over doctrinal opinions, worship practices or forms of church government (83–87).

The critical point is what Wesley meant by ‘Is your heart right with my heart?’ At the close of the sermon he says that a catholic spirit is not ‘speculative latitudinarianism ... an indifference to all opinions’ (92). A person of ‘a truly catholic spirit ... is as fixed as the sun in his judgment concerning the main branches of Christian doctrine’ (93). A ‘muddy understanding’ with no ‘settled, consistent principles’ results in holding a jumble of opinions that are the very opposite of genuine faith. Nor is it a ‘practical latitudinarianism’ that demonstrates utter indifference to the manner and practices of public worship. A person of truly catholic spirit is deeply convinced that their mode and practice of public worship is ‘both scriptural and rational’ (93). Nor is a catholic spirit an indifference to which congregation a person attends, rather, it is a deep attachment to one single congregation (93–94).

In order to have a heart right with God the person must have a loving and obedient relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ, even if the understanding and expression of the relationship varies according to tradition and experience. Every life needs to reflect the character of Christ by loving, praying for, and serving the neighbour. Furthermore, ‘catholic love is a catholic spirit ... rooted in the faith once delivered to the saints’

(94–95). Wesley is convinced that such love is only possible within the framework of certain non-negotiable doctrines that must be held. They are drawn largely from the Nicene Creed and centre on the doctrine of God, the Person and Work of Christ (87-89). These beliefs are like a series of channel markers in a shipping channel that set out the only safe route to take to arrive at the destination. There is reasonable freedom with the confines of the main channel markers for a range of opinions and preferences concerning non-critical beliefs, practices, worship and governance, but to move outside the markers is to depart from the one, true church of Jesus Christ. This allows for differences of opinion on a range of matters, while not rejecting those who differ from us on these issues. Wesley puts the emphasis on worshipping and serving faithfully in one congregation, rather than trying to achieve a narrow confessional and organisational oneness within a single worldwide denomination. We all share in the common life-giving Spirit who unites us all in love and the call is for us all to work together in the mission of God through prayer, witness, and service. We can encourage and fully support each other in this ministry, while speaking the truth in love regarding our differences (89-92).

## 7 Michael McKenna

It is always helpful, on a journey, to pause and mark important milestones: reflecting on where and how we have travelled and asking what might lie ahead. The twenty-fifth anniversary of the publication of *Ut unum sint* comes in a year like no other,

when our routines and expectations have been upended by a global pandemic. The wisest word about the experience of this past year is that we should use the slowdown to evaluate more deeply what we have been accustomed to practise; and to take the opportunity to envisage a future that is not merely a return to the old normal, but a turn to new ways of seeing, judging, and acting. We Christians have a word for that: conversion.

The goal of full communion which Pope St John Paul II puts before us so passionately in this encyclical letter is not, as he sees it, something that Christians may ignore. The work for unity is not only for the removal of a stumbling block that inhibits the preaching of the Gospel: above all it envisages the identity of the Church as a sacrament of unity for the whole human family.

This unity, which the Lord has bestowed on his Church and in which he wishes to embrace all people, is not something added on, but stands at the very heart of Christ's mission. Nor is it some secondary attribute of the community of his disciples. Rather, it belongs to the very essence of this community. God wills the Church, because he wills unity, and unity is an expression of the whole depth of his *agape*. (9)

This central insight of the encyclical's argument is worth remembering in times when we are discouraged by tiredness or uncertainty of direction in our familiar ways of ecumenical endeavour.

More than just a dissatisfaction with particular methods, there has also been a weakening of zeal and even a cessation of effort

among some members of the Church. These ‘dead-spots’ on the road to unity are found, not only in the relations between denominations, but also within them. At one extreme is a hardening of distrust and imperviousness to recognising others’ ecclesial gifts, which collapses hope for a dialogue of conversion. At the other extreme is a complacent mood of post-denominationalism, which has the same outcome.

However, what the Second Vatican Council’s decree on ecumenism called ‘the impulse of God’s grace’ gently and insistently pushes us forward. In *Ut unum sint*, John Paul accepted this responsibility as central to his Petrine ministry; and his successors have continued in that awareness. Pope Francis is writing a new chapter in inviting all Christians to work for human fraternity, building bridges with followers of other religions. His latest encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti* expresses this call clearly. Some of its thinking was anticipated in this year’s document coauthored by the World Council of Churches and the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, *Serving a Wounded World*.

Nowhere more than in working together for dialogue with other religions do Christians rediscover the depths of what unites us already: the person of Jesus Christ. As the letter to the Ephesians puts it: ‘In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God’ (2:21-22).

## 8 Tim O'Hearn

One of the most joyous aspects of the lockdowns and restrictions occasioned by the COVID period has been the refrain that the ABC used:

We are one, but we are many  
And from all the lands on earth we come  
We'll share a dream and sing with one voice  
'I am, you are, we are Australian'.

It may have brought back memories of the Seekers for many; it gave encouragement to all of us, in that we all shared in this crisis, which was beyond our personal control.

Yet, for me, it was about this time that the Theological Reflection Commission was deliberating about the significance of Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Ut unum sint*, 'that they all may be one'. A worthwhile dream? Much more than that: it was a call for Christians to unity. The call appears in the Jewish Testament: 'Hear, O Israel, YHWH is our God: YHWH is one' (Deuteronomy 6:4). The call is also that of Jesus Christ, for all to be one as 'the Father and I are one' (John 10:30) and further in John 17:21: 'As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be one in us'. The call is repeated in Ephesians 4:5-6: 'There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God who is Father of all, over all, through all and within all'.

For all that the encyclical said, the opening phrase laid a tone that suggested a missed opportunity: 'may *they* all be one'.

Why not: *ut unum simus*: ‘that we may all be one’. There is a covert undertone in the document that suggests that if all non-Catholic Christians were to join the Catholic path and understanding of scripture, and follow the sacramental ecclesiastical practices, then we would all be one.

I must point out that the view from the pews is not always the same as that preached from the altars. The Christian lay followers of Jesus are understandably less theological literate than the priests and the ministers. Their ‘oneness’ is often not based on scripture or ecclesiastical adherence; rather, it is based on lived experiences. It is reflected in their relationships with their neighbours, those with whom they share other allegiances: be it football teams, clubs, and often a marriage partner. The oneness that they share might often still be a shared view and belief in Jesus as God, a shared lived experience of trying their best to fulfil the teachings about the common good, the need to focus on the poor, the dispossessed, the hungry the widows, as well as those in their various ‘prisons’.

Pope Francis has taken the earlier encyclical to a better place in his document released after his visit to Mexico this year. In his *Querida Amazonia* (2 February 2020), especially the fourth chapter, he captures the spirit of Jesus in a way that resonates more with our times. For example, consider the following passage:

106. In an Amazonian region characterised by many religions, we believers need to find occasions to speak to one another and to act together for the common good and the promotion of the poor. This has nothing to do with watering down or concealing our deepest convictions

when we encounter others who think differently than ourselves. If we believe that the Holy Spirit can work amid differences, then we will try to let ourselves be enriched by that insight, while embracing it from the core of our own convictions and our own identity. For the deeper, stronger and richer that identity is, the more we will be capable of enriching others with our own proper contribution.

He does not shirk from the fact that the Catholic Church has its doctrines and sacraments and liturgical practices that differ from those of other Christian faiths. For all that, he urges us all to push ahead for ‘the common good and the promotion of the poor’, the concerns of Jesus of Nazareth. Indeed, how can one improve on the words of Francis when he continues, not by denying differences, but by seeing and praying for a way ahead:

108. None of this needs to create enmity between us. In a true spirit of dialogue, we grow in our ability to grasp the significance of what others say and do, even if we cannot accept it as our own conviction. In this way, it becomes possible to be frank and open about our beliefs, while continuing to discuss, to seek points of contact, and above all, to work and struggle together for the good of the Amazon region. The strength of what unites all of us as Christians is supremely important. We can be so attentive to what divides us that at times we no longer appreciate or value what unites us. And what unites us is what lets us remain in this world without being swallowed up by its immanence, its spiritual emptiness,



its complacent selfishness, its consumerist and self-destructive individualism.

109. All of us, as Christians, are united by faith in God, the Father who gives us life and loves us so greatly. We are united by faith in Jesus Christ, the one Saviour, who set us free by his precious blood and his glorious resurrection. We are united by our desire for his word that guides our steps. We are united by the fire of the Spirit, who sends us forth on mission. We are united by the new commandment that Jesus left us, by the pursuit of the civilisation of love and by passion for the kingdom that the Lord calls us to build with him. We are united by the struggle for peace and justice. We are united by the conviction that not everything ends with this life, but that we are called to the heavenly banquet, where God will wipe away every tear and take up all that we did for those who suffer.

110. All this unites us. How can we not struggle together? How can we not pray and work together, side by side, to defend the poor of the Amazon region, to show the sacred countenance of the Lord, and to care for his work of creation?

To return to the opening refrain: we are one, but we are many ... we share a dream and sing with one voice: I am, you are, we are Christian.

## 9 Alex Scutt

The third chapter of the papal encyclical *Ut unum sint* is in the form of a question, *Quanta est nobis via?* ‘How much further is our way?’ I want to hazard a brief answer. I do this mindful of Christ’s prayer ‘that they all may be one’.

In 1995 I was on an ecumenical team that offered chaplaincy services to a major metropolitan hospital in south-eastern Australia. During my tenure, our hospital was the focus of national and worldwide attention for its response to a traumatic mass shooting in which thirty-five people died. In the community response that followed, the churches had no regard to denominational differences—it was simply, automatically, and naturally ecumenism in action and prayer. Now, in the final period of my working life, I lead an ecumenical community of lay and ordained Australian Christians who meet in small groups for worship and learning, many of whom are members of various local groups concerned with justice for refugees, climate action, and Aboriginal reconciliation. Inspired by the Iona Community in Scotland, the Wellspring Community looks for that movement of the Holy Spirit that will ground the church in the Australian culture and landscape, and has travelled the ecumenical road in all its endeavours since a group of Christians in the Blue Mountains began it in the early 1990s. Ecumenism is one of our seven areas of concern. At the same time as *Ut unum sint* was in preparation, Australia as a nation was becoming more aware of the urgency of climate change, of the increasingly multiracial, multi-faith society we were becoming, and of the voices of Aboriginal people. In 1994 the formation of the National Council of Churches of Australia

saw the Catholic Church becoming a full participant. *Ut Unum Sint* gave the ecumenical endeavour in this country extra impetus.

Ecumenical and doctrinal dialogues such as ARCIC were the subject of lively discussion in Australian theological colleges of the 1980s and laid the ecumenical groundwork for my generation of church leaders. In some places in this country theological education was being done ecumenically. Despite pessimism that in the 1990s progress on ecumenism had slowed, it had not stopped completely. Small community groups made up of people from various churches came together to form collectives to serve the interests of refugees, justice for the poor, reconciliation with indigenous people, climate change, and the care for creation. The Wellspring Community was one of these.

These small groups have increased their numbers, more have been formed, and with social media and internet technology widely used by younger as well as older Christians, these groups are finding a voice in the wider Australian political and community sphere. They are ecumenical (and multi-faith) by their nature. Groups of grassroots Christians such as the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change, Equal Voices, the Faith Ecology Network, and Love Makes a Way, are a means for Christians of all denominations to find a common work and goal connecting the thirst for justice and the call to faith. More recently-formed movements such as Common Grace are providing ways for indigenous and non-indigenous Christians to learn from each other and to find new language for their faith. Further, they are providing mentoring and encouragement for young adults and younger Christians in

schools and universities to link that same thirst for justice with their call to faith in Christ—a link which most of the institutional churches have struggled to build.

Now in 2020, with a worldwide pandemic laying waste to millions of lives worldwide and affecting the *oikoumene* in every nation, Pope John Paul II's question is once again posed, *Quanta est nobis via?* What are we discovering about the nature of our connection with those to whom we are bound in Christ?

*Ut unum sint* speaks of the eucharist as one of the areas in need of fuller study before a full consensus of faith can be achieved (79), and now in 2020 many Australian Christians are discovering new ways of nurturing faith and worship, including eucharistic devotion. Unexplored ways of gathering, worshipping, learning, praying, and caring for each other are bringing hope in a time of despair and isolation, the more so because they include people who were hesitant about modern technologies. Pastors and clergy have discovered new ministerial skills not envisaged by even the most progressive of theological colleges. We are discovering the church as a learning community, not just as a teaching institution.

For some ecclesial communities these new discoveries have provided a new hope for what looked like an uncertain future, and an example from the Wellspring Community will suffice: a small group of Christians in Victoria—elderly in the main, one not able to meet regularly with his wife now in a nursing home, another recently widowed—struggled before the pandemic to find a way to meet. We now do so each month via Zoom to

chat, to pray and to study. A group in Queensland does the same thing.

Even when ecclesial communities are once again able to gather for worship and fellowship the lessons learnt and the new discoveries made will continue into the future. Ecumenism will find new impetus similar to that given twenty-five years ago by Pope John Paul II and re-echoed in our current age through the words and actions of his successor Pope Francis, and Christ's prayer that we *all* may be one will be enlivened, lived, and pursued with renewed purpose and vigour.

## 10 Diane Speed

The twenty-five years that had passed since the issuing of *Ut unum sint* on 25<sup>th</sup> May 1995 were marked by a significant letter from Pope Francis. This reflection considers two matters raised in that letter. First, the letter is directed to the President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and, second, Pope Francis wants to 'propose it once more to the People of God'.

The title of the addressee reflects the fact that the declared intention of Pope John Paul II was pursuit of Christian unity. The purpose of Pope Francis is to remind people a quarter of a century on of the former Pope's intention and, presumably, to draw the attention of a new generation to the existence and worth of the encyclical. An implicit question arising is whether

the pursuit of Christian unity means quite the same in 2020 as it did in 1995.

Christian unity is described in *Ut unum sint* as ‘full communion in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church which will be expressed in the common celebration of the Eucharist’ (78) and ‘full communion, of which the Eucharist is the highest sacramental manifestation’ (97); and the encyclical as a whole is, unsurprisingly, articulated from the point of view of the Catholic Church. In my reading, while there is an acknowledgment of real fellowship with other churches and a deep concern for them, and while there is enrichment to be gained from that fellowship (50), the communion that exists by dint of a shared faith in Christ crucified and resurrected is less than full. Essentially, the pursuit of ecumenical relations is designed to find ways to bring them into the fold of the Catholic Church, to achieve the full Christian unity that will come when there can be a sharing of the Eucharist with perfect agreement on its significance.

Areas identified in the encyclical as being ‘in need of further study before a true consensus of faith can be achieved’ (79) are, in abbreviated form:

1. the relationship between Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition;
2. the Sacrament of the Eucharist;
3. the Sacrament of Ordination;
4. the *magisterium* (‘authority’) of the Church entrusted to the Pope and the Bishops;
5. the Virgin Mary.

Both the prominence of sacraments, especially the Eucharist, and the authority of the official Church as purveyor both of those sacraments and of biblical authority have, of course, been major points of difference between the Catholic Church and the ‘Reformed’ Churches. It is significant that the Virgin is spoken of specifically in relation to her perceived dual role as ‘Mother of God and Icon of the Church’.

All texts are products of their time, whether they are in accord with contemporary ideas or arguing against them. It would, in fact, be strange if there were not some evidence of the passage of twenty-five years in the letter of Pope Francis.

Far from departing from the intention of the encyclical, of course, Pope Francis speaks explicitly of awaiting the day when ‘we shall share the Eucharistic table together’. Yet he seems at the same time to speak in a somewhat more nuanced way. He places particular emphasis, for example, on the biblical drive of *Ut unum sint* as being vested in the power of the Holy Spirit and unity itself as a gift of the Spirit, on the advances that have been made in healing ‘the wounds of centuries’, and on the ecumenical journey as the site where unity is already indicated in the companionship of Christians ‘of every tradition’ with each other and with Christ, as at Emmaus, ‘in the breaking of the bread’. Although he specifically exhorts the bishops to be alert to their ecumenical responsibilities, his letter is not as concerned as the encyclical to assert the authority of the church, and he makes relatively much less use of the language of sacrament.

This approach is seen again in his recent ecumenical prayer from his own encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, of 4<sup>th</sup> October 2020,

which is included in this volume as an invitation to us all to pray to the one God as brothers and sisters, living in fraternal love. This is not a change in actual theology since 1995, but in focus.

It seems to me that Pope Francis allows us in 2020 to consider a more open way forward to Christian unity that is not focussed so precisely on the authority of the Catholic Church, while in no way denying a traditional sacramental approach to the ideal. That was inevitably a key feature of Pope John Paul's encyclical, in itself a highly important and influential contribution to ecumenical discussions that built, in turn, on the ground-breaking work of Vatican II. Perhaps *Ut unum sint* might be best celebrated as a key step on a journey rather than an end in itself.

As they stand, the specific areas for resolution listed by Pope John Paul would seem to stand little if any chance of being resolved in the way he was hoping, and more so with the passage of time. In general terms, the effects of post-modernism on all western culture, with the associated deconstructions, let alone other events in the relationship between the universal church and the world, have fundamentally changed ideas about authority itself for oncoming generations.

Amongst the wide reaches of the Reformation and post-Reformation denominations, moreover, and within many of them, there are increasing divisions in conviction and practice, apart from them and the Catholic Church. Some substantial denominations are constituted by separate assemblies working in varying degrees of coordination with each other rather than



under an acknowledged authority with which other denominations might engage. There are large denominations or sub-denominations that place little or no value on the traditional sacraments as such and sometimes do not provide for any form of Eucharistic service. These circumstances have often been in place for a much longer period than twenty-five years. The Eucharist as sacrament is understood by some in terms of the Real Presence, by others in purely memorial terms, arguably non-sacramentally. Again, for a uniform understanding to be reached across the whole Christian church would mean not just amongst educated clergy, if they could ever in some way reason their way into agreement, but also amongst all its members—or else very many Christians would be excluded.

The official sacraments, in fact, lie at the heart of doctrinal differences, by definition catching up also the matter of authority as to who can administer them legitimately. Yet, again, to contemplate removing or demoting them would be unthinkable for a vast number of Christians. A way forward may perhaps lie, as Pope Francis implies, or at least allows for, in an opening up of our understanding of ‘Christian unity’.

As part of such an opening, I suggest, we might give more thought to the larger concept of sacramentality beyond specific rituals, acknowledging the presence of God with us and dwelling within us in the Holy Spirit, never not present everywhere in all his creation, to be realised rather than imparted, though an imparting may be the way we realise his presence at particular moments in time. This is not to become resigned to ignoring difference on a futile journey to Christian

unity, but to celebrate sacramentality as a unified whole that embraces the traditional sacraments in their multiplicity.

## 11 Clayton Spence

(On behalf of the Divisional Commander, NSW/ACT Division of The Salvation Army Australia)

The Salvation Army is committed to ecumenism and in actively pursuing interdenominational harmony and cooperation at every level. This has been part of the Salvation Army spirit from its earliest days, when it began, not as a separate denomination, but as a para-church movement working alongside existing churches. Even as the Salvation Army grew, and its structures and practices made it a separate identity, the Salvation Army engaged in dialogue with other churches in how the Salvation Army might work within the existing structures of these institutions. While the outcome was not successful and the Salvation Army continued as its own independent denomination, it has remained committed to working with all who profess faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as brothers and sisters in shared mission.

In the twenty-first century, dialogue between the Salvation Army and other churches has a focus on cooperation, shared faith and identity, shared service and worship, and the learning experiences of receptive ecumenism.

In 2008 the Salvation Army published the statement *The Salvation Army in the Body of Christ: An Ecclesiological Statement*, which states in summary:

1. The Body of Christ on earth (also referred to in this paper as the church universal) comprises all believers in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.
2. Believers stand in a spiritual relationship to one another, which is not dependent upon any particular church structure.
3. The Salvation Army, under the one Triune God, belongs to and is an expression of the Body of Christ on earth, the church universal, and is a Christian denomination in permanent mission to the unconverted, called into and sustained in being by God.
4. Denominational diversity is not self-evidently contrary to God's will for his people.
5. Interdenominational harmony and cooperation are to be actively pursued for they are valuable for the enriching of the life and witness of the Body of Christ in the world and therefore of each denomination.
6. The Salvation Army welcomes involvement with other Christians in the many lands where the Army is privileged to witness and serve.

The Salvation Army therefore affirms the essence and core message of the papal encyclical *Ut unum sint* that believers in Christ are united in their singular confession of 'the one truth about the Cross'. As part of the ministry of reconciliation that Paul speaks of in 2 Corinthians 5:18, Christians seek the unity of all divided humanity as the will of God, including a restored unity among all Christians.

The Salvation Army affirms with the Roman Catholic Church that our unity is constituted by the bonds of the profession of faith and the communion with the Father and the Son in the Spirit (9). We would argue that differences in the understanding of sacraments are not a cause for disunity; rather, we affirm that the positive elements present in other churches and ecclesial communities ‘come from Christ and lead back to him’ (13). Indeed, the Salvation Army affirms that ‘being together’ should not demand a change or compromise in doctrine (18) or even practice, but that by being united in prayer around Christ we grow in the awareness of how little divides us in comparison to what unites us (22). As such, what should matter is the prayer and the desire of all Christians for unity and reconciliation.

The Salvation Army therefore affirms dialogue and practical cooperation among churches and has valued opportunities for this to happen. Between 2007 and 2012, delegates from the Salvation Army and the Catholic Church met on five occasions for informal dialogue in London and Rome. In recent years, more frequent contacts have been made between the Holy See and the Salvation Army. In 2019, General Brian Peddle, international leader of the Salvation Army met in conversation with Pope Francis. In Australia, the Salvation Army continues its ecumenical involvement through the National Council of Churches, various state ecumenical councils, and numerous local ecumenical councils and fellowships, as well as sharing resources and engaging in cooperative ventures.

## 12 André Van Oudtshoorn

The encyclical *Ut unum sint* remains an inspiring theological reflection on church unity. As a Reformed theologian, I am deeply impressed by its call for church unity to flow from (a) faithfulness to the Gospel; (b) the need for humility, repentance and a renewed mind in all participants; (c) the quest for theological truth rather than theological compromise as a foundation for church unity, and (d) its emphasis on prayer as a necessary spiritual dimension in constructing the dialogue between different denominations and believers. In offering some critical comments, I do not wish to subtract from the document's urgent message but, instead, to expand on its vision and scope.

### 1. The foundation for church unity

*Ut unum sint*, as the title suggests, treats church unity primarily as a future event. While it does allude to Christ as the source of unity between believers, it does not adequately consider the implications of a comprehensive Christological perspective for church unity.

*Ut unum sint* also stresses that the eschatological unity is already present in the here and now, but relates this to the unity found in the Roman Catholic Church. Thus, the elements of this already-given church exist in their fulness in the Catholic Church and, without this fullness, in the other communities, where certain features of the Christian mystery have at times been more effectively emphasised. The encyclical, in fairness, also affirms that all believers, irrespective of their church

affiliation, are brothers and sisters in God's family. Nevertheless, it does not equate this 'family unity' with church unity. The encyclical seems, instead, to envisage church unity primarily as formal, structural unity, preferably consummated under the unifying authority of the pope. The Catholic Church, both in her praxis and in her solemn documents, holds that the communion of the particular churches with the church of Rome, and of their bishops with the bishop of Rome, is—in God's plan—an essential requisite of full and visible communion. In other words, the bishop of Rome must ensure the communion of all the churches. For this reason, he is the first servant of unity.

The document does not consider other possible modes of expressing church unity which may not require the unifying role of a pope. Refocusing on church unity as a Christological given which reaches beyond the Roman Catholic Church may inspire new, creative ways to demonstrate Christian unity across denominational boundaries.

## 2. Repentance

The encyclical stresses the need for all churches to be open for the Spirit to convict them of sins which may obstruct ecumenical unity. The examination of such disagreements has two essential points of reference: Sacred Scripture and the great Tradition of the Church. Catholics also have the guidance of the Church's Magisterium. While the encyclical stresses fidelity to the Gospel, it also views the authoritative interpretation of the Gospel message—contained in the historical pronouncements of the church of Rome—as carrying equal weight in ecumenical debates. The encyclical, thereby,

absolves the church of Rome beforehand of any need to repent of possible false historical interpretations of the Gospel or human additions to the biblical witness which contradict the Gospel message. Genuine openness to repent, as advocated in the encyclical, requires all churches to seriously reexamine those issues which make it difficult, if not impossible, for other believers to join them in worship.

### 3. Theological dialogue

The encyclical calls for a loving and respectful dialogue between various churches in the hope of creating a theological consensus. Of course, there already exists a broad theological consensus on critical aspects of the Christian faith, as contained in the *Apostolicum*, for instance, which is accepted by many Christian churches. Underlying this quest is a modernistic view of truth as something that can be discovered by using the correct methodology and which, once found, demands rational acquiescence by all parties. Theological truths, however, are more than static, logical constructs. They are relativised by the person of Christ, who stands over against all human constructs as ‘the truth’. Theological truths are always provisional. Christians will only know the final truth with the return of Christ. This eschatological dimension means that theological conversations between Christians can never stop. Church unity is not realised when theological disagreements cease. Critical theological battles are, instead, signs that Christians have not given up on each other. As in a healthy family, our disagreements do not annul our sense of belonging together.

Pope John Paul II’s sincere commitment to church unity shines through *Ut unum sint*. Much of its contents will continue to

resonate with believers across all denominations for a long time to come. Sadly, the document never overcomes its Roman-centred and pope-centred orientation.

Starting from the premise that Christians have already been unified in Christ rather than in the Roman Catholic Church may force the church to explore new ways to demonstrate Christian unity. I have argued that the encyclical protects the Roman Church from having to address its own sins which mar the expression of Christian unity. An ongoing critical theological debate that is marked by love, humility and repentance is a potent symbol of the broader Christian community's commitment to God, each other and the truth of the Gospel.

## 13 Paul Weaver

When I first read *Ut unum sint*, I found it a challenging document to work through. The material is concentrated, and there is much that could be seen as 'church jargon'. This is, of course, to be expected of such a serious and significant document.

As I read it, I often found myself thinking: 'But that depends on your understanding of the nature of the church!' I come from a Protestant and Evangelical background, and that naturally informs my understanding of the church, and my approach to understanding the scriptures, and to thinking about Christian doctrine.



I came to see that if I am to genuinely understand and appreciate a papal encyclical, particularly one focussing on ecumenism, I must accept that it will emerge out of a framework that is in places different from my own understanding of the nature of the church. I have learned much from thinking about receptive ecumenism, in which I acknowledge my own understanding, but seek to be ready to understand, appreciate, and learn from different approaches, without automatically rejecting anything that might be different from my own understanding.

My own thinking about the church sees its basic expression as the local congregation gathering in the presence of Christ: to worship, to learn and grow, to encourage and care for one another, and to reach out in love to the community. Each congregation expresses the reality of the church, which will only find its complete expression in the fullness of the Kingdom of God. Christ's call to unity starts with the loving unity which should be seen in every congregation: this unity then develops as Christians and churches reach out to each other beyond their own congregation, finding ways to share in worship, ministry, and activity together. I see the various denominations as providing frameworks and resources for churches to support and connect with each other, furthering the framework of unity. And I am involved in ecumenical activity crossing denominational lines, for these connections further express the unity that I (and also the church I belong to) share with all followers of Christ.

While little of this seems to be incompatible with the principles expounded in the encyclical, there are differences of approach. I acknowledge the special role that Peter had in the founding of

the church, but do not see this as leading to the permanent primacy of the bishop of Rome. To be realistic, I see this issue as an ongoing difficulty as the Catholic and other churches reach out to each other. However, the ecumenical task is a step-by-step challenge. And there is much warmth and openness in the encyclical, and recognition of steps already taken in dialogue and action, and in acts of worship, fellowship, and study together. For instance, I am delighted to see the acknowledgement that there are more helpful and open ways to describe Christians from other traditions than as ‘separated brethren’.

As an Anglican priest, I welcome Christians of all background to share in the Eucharist. My experience is that many though not all Christians from different denominational backgrounds are comfortable about sharing in the sacrament in the churches I have served in. I am glad to be able to share at the Lord’s table or the altar when I visit churches of other denominations. I was pleased to see in the encyclical a reference to denominational lines being able to be crossed at least in particular circumstances. I am aware of many Catholic priests who have welcomed Christians of other churches to share in the sacrament, although my understanding is that this is not officially approved as a regular practice. My hope is that one day, before much longer, non-Catholics will be officially welcome to receive the sacrament in a Catholic church, and that Catholics visiting other churches will feel that it is appropriate for them to participate in the Eucharist. Yes, there may well be differences of understanding about some aspects of the role of the priest, some aspects of the sacrament, and the life of the church: but fundamentally Christian unity is based on a shared faith in Christ and a common membership of his

family. Does disagreement about these things really need to lead to exclusion from the sacrament?

Right now, it is vital for the witness of the church that Christians from different backgrounds continue to seek ways to express their fellowship in Christ, and that they share their different understandings with graciousness and a readiness to learn, as well as to explain and explore differences. This is what the encyclical seeks to do, and I look forward to further ecumenical sharing and progress in coming days and years.

## 14 Ray Williamson

I well remember the year, 1995, in which this papal encyclical of John Paul II, *On Commitment to Ecumenism*, was published. It was a time of ecumenical expectancy in Australia. We were celebrating the first birthday of our National Council of Churches, of which the Roman Catholic Church was a founding member; the first steps were being taken in the National Covenanting process; four of the Roman Catholic dioceses in the NSW Province had become members of the NSW Ecumenical Council, and others were preparing to do so; and I was almost midway through what developed into a long ministry as General Secretary of the NSWEC.

Through those years as General Secretary, and now as President, of the NSWEC, I have always been aware that one of the challenges is to engage the churches in the life of their council in ways other than just formal membership, ways that

will begin to make fundamental differences to their relationship with one another. Often it can feel as though an ecumenical council is just an association—certainly where much good will is experienced and enjoyed—but nevertheless an association of secondary importance to the churches in their separated lives. So, while the existence of an ecumenical council is an expression of the member churches’ commitment to ecumenism, ecumenists frequently speak of the ongoing need for the churches to have a commitment to that commitment so that ecumenism becomes second nature to them.

This papal encyclical made this abundantly clear, and it was a word of hope for all committed to the ecumenical endeavour. In the encyclical. Pope John Paul II wrote: ‘it is absolutely clear that ecumenism ... is not just some sort of “appendix” which is added to the Church’s traditional activity. Rather, ecumenism is an organic part of her life and work, and consequently must pervade all that she is and does’ (Encyclical Letter *That they may all be one—Ut unum sint*, of the Holy Father John Paul II on commitment to ecumenism, Australian Edition (Sydney: St Pauls, 1995) 20).

It was the pope’s call, firstly to his own church, but then to all the churches, to take a completely new look at how they can make ecumenism truly an organic part of their life and work, in the light of a questioning of what it means to be committed to their ecumenical commitment.

In affirming the irrevocable commitment ‘to following the path of the ecumenical venture’, he spoke of embracing this commitment ‘with hope ... as a duty of the Christian conscience enlightened by faith and guided by love’. While

‘during her earthly pilgrimage the Church has suffered and will continue to suffer opposition and persecution’, he wrote, ‘the hope which sustains her is unshakeable, just as the joy which flows from this hope is indestructible’ (*Ut unum sint* 3, 8, 4).

Christian discipleship is never only an individual journey; it involves walking with others. This truth makes disunity a terrible scandal. We need each other, with our differences, different experiences and perspectives, different gifts, and even disagreements, just as we see in the disciples in the New Testament. The long and tragic history of Christian disunity has been, in effect, the history of the disciples of Jesus Christ choosing to walk apart, choosing to walk away from one another. The consequences of these divisions for Christian witness have been disastrous.

Even though this scandal of disunity is an explanation for, one was still deeply moved by, the strong conviction with which Pope John Paul II reaffirmed, that ‘the ultimate goal of the ecumenical movement is to re-establish full visible unity among the baptised’ (*Ut unum sint* 77).

The achievement of that goal requires much work to repair schisms formed centuries ago, as well as new divisions. Pope John Paul II honestly recognised that fact and raised matters that remain contentious sources of division, while also displaying a humble commitment to work at them in partnership with others. Of course, this work happens very slowly, yet already an extraordinary amount has been achieved. That is why, in this papal encyclical, there is a strong emphasis on the responsibility to do together all that is made possible by the degree of communion that already exists between us, and

that the consequences of all the agreements that have been reached through ecumenical encounter and dialogue over the years—‘receiving the results already achieved’—must involve the whole people of God at every level of the Church (*Ut unum sint* 80).

The encyclical also embraces another ‘one of the tasks which constitutes the mission of Christians’. This is the church’s work for justice and peace – work for signs of God’s kingdom in human lives and institutions, signs of new creation in the wider world. It is absolutely important, indeed necessary, for this part of the church’s mission to be done ecumenically. Pope John Paul II spoke of this as ‘solidarity in the service of humanity’, observing that in the ecumenical endeavour, Christian Communities join together more and more ‘in taking a stand in the name of Christ on important problems concerning... [human] freedom, justice, peace, and the future of the world’ (*Ut unum sint* 43).

At the time of its publication, twenty-five years ago, the encyclical was an extraordinary contribution to the ecumenical endeavour. Again, in this anniversary year—at a time when the churches are still rather shell-shocked from the revelations of child abuse, coping with the impact of the COVID lockdown, and tending to be more confined to their denominational silos—the encyclical could well prove to be a significant call to work for the unity that is of the providence of God for us. It can challenge us all with the seriousness of commitment to ecumenism, and with its invitation to enter ‘a “dialogue of conversion”, which constitutes the spiritual foundation of ecumenical dialogue. ... Only the act of placing ourselves before God can offer a solid basis for that conversion of

individual Christians and for that constant reform of the Church ... which represent the preconditions for all ecumenical commitment' (*Ut unum sint* 82). The encyclical remains a powerful challenge. It remains visionary and full of hope.





# Ecumenism Then and Now



## 15 Lex Akers

A Romanian Orthodox Priest and a Wesleyan Methodist Minister walked into a Pub... It sounds like the start of some kind of religious joke, but instead it reflects an insight into an unusual ecumenical friendship. Father Doru Costache and I have been friends since we were introduced four years ago by a colleague while Doru was looking for a place for his small parish church to meet. Prior to our first meeting, I was nervous and wondered how Methodism could work with Orthodoxy but it turns out the answer is 'very well'. My wife and I were recently appointed to the Pittwater Wesleyan Methodist Church and, after praying about the approach by Doru, we felt that a true representation of Christian faith would be to offer the hand of fellowship and share our small worship space. If I had known then what I know now I would not have hesitated. Doru and I have developed a deep and mutually beneficial friendship. We meet almost weekly for a few hours and discuss a wide variety of topics about church life and theology from our different perspectives. We will discuss anything from Patristics to Pentecostal experience, from St Gregory to St Paul, from Maximus the Confessor to John Wesley. What we have discovered is that there is more that connects us than what separates us. There is something about a friendship like this that breathes sustenance into ministry. Outside of the institutions that we are familiar with, we are free to speak of disappointments and celebrations, hurt and frustrations, dreams and visions. And on many more than one occasion we have been surprised by the insights shared by the other and the depth of understanding this creates. Our discussions often bring clarity to difficult situations and our respective views of

theology and the church bring refreshing perspective to well worn thinking.

Of course, for this kind of ecumenical connection to work, you need to have an open mind. Simply defending one's long held position immediately closes off the possibility of enlightenment. Sometimes we agree to disagree, but not often. I am more and more convinced that one of the problems we have in our traditions is the unwillingness to engage in dialogue for the fear that this may corrupt the perfection of our system. But, on the contrary, for me at least, this has been the birth of better thinking or more rounded thinking, and has led me to a deeper understanding of the faith of a fellow minister.

I don't support the idea of some kind of ecumenical blend of every tradition that produces a new colour called 'ecumenical beige', but I do support and encourage more generous dialogue that fosters understanding. For too long we have been adversaries poking the finger at each other and calling out our differences. It is time to sit down together and listen. Who knows, we might actually learn something new, and the kingdom will be better off for it.

## 16 Matthew Attia

Ecumenism was foreseen by our Lord himself as central to the existence of the church.

Before his death on the cross, our Lord Jesus prayed to his Father for the unity of the church, ‘that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be one in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me’ (John 17:21).

His words were echoed by early church fathers: ‘Make efforts for unity, there is nothing better than it is’, wrote St Ignatius of Antioch to St Policarp of Smyrna. These evangelical patristic calls never lose their topicality.

As founding member of the World Council of Churches in 1948, the All Africa Conference of Churches in 1963, and the Middle East Council of Churches in 1974, the Coptic Church of Alexandria has given careful attention to, and has worked tirelessly for, Christian unity.

Over the last five decades, clergy and laity from the Coptic Church have been instrumental in capturing, developing, and enhancing the ecumenical vision constructed upon unity of faith and not unity of jurisdiction.

This has manifested itself in theological dialogue at bilateral and multilateral levels, constructing bridges of love and actively participating in ecumenical organisations at national, regional, and international levels. In all these endeavours, the church fulfils the words of the Scriptures: ‘One Lord, one faith, one baptism’ (Ephesians 4:5).

Even though the road towards Christian unity is filled with obstacles at times, persistence in prayer and reaching out to one

another in love, humility, and wisdom will achieve the full restoration of the divided body of Christ.

May the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, continue to guide our church's comprehensive efforts and bless the future work that lies ahead.

Thus the visible unity of the one, holy, universal, and apostolic church can be fully achieved in Christ.

## 17 Philip Bradford

My experience of ecumenism was greatly enhanced when I became the Rector of the Anglican Parish of Hunters Hill, NSW, in 2000.

Believing the things that unite us as Christians are far more important than the things that divide us, in that year 2000, a group of women from Villa Maria Catholic Parish had a vision for a combined churches event that would bring together all the Christians in the area at Easter time, for a united act of Christian witness. This was the origin of the 'Way of the Cross', a Good Friday procession through the streets of Hunters Hill, reenacting Jesus' journey from his Last Supper with his disciples all the way to the cross. Much planning was required to make the vision into reality. All the churches in the area were approached, and a committee made up of representatives from the Anglican, Catholic, Congregational, Presbyterian, and Uniting Churches was formed. A suitable

route was planned, Council permission was obtained, and volunteers recruited to act the roles of Jesus and his disciples and the other characters from the passion narratives. Other volunteers were organised to provide bus transport for those unable to walk the distance, and the walk was advertised widely through the churches and local media. The response was beyond expectations, and the local police who provided escort for the crowd estimated the numbers at between four and five hundred.

The event has continued each year (apart from this year when COVID restrictions made it impossible) and has grown steadily in popularity. The basic format has remained the same: the first tableaux, the Last Supper, takes place in All Saints' Church and then, following this scene, a drummer leads the actors and the crowd out of the church and into the garden. From there the crowd starts the journey through the streets of Hunters Hill, stopping at several places along the way to enact the next stages of the Way of the Cross journey, and finally arrives in the spacious grounds of Villa Maria (Holy Name of Mary) Church for the final scenes. At each stop an appropriate hymn or song is led by a group of musicians. At the conclusion of the walk, morning tea is served and everyone enjoys conversation together. The event has literally brought people together of all ages—everyone is able to participate from the youngest to the oldest. Children run about with great excitement but also take in the enacted Easter story. Our grandchildren always looked forward to this occasion.

During my fourteen years in parish ministry in Hunters Hill, I enjoyed very good relations with all the other clergy in the area. We had an Inter-Church Council, composed of both clergy

and lay people, and we met regularly. Once a year we took it in turns to have a Combined Parishes Dinner, which was always well attended. Sometimes we had a visiting speaker and at other times we had individual parishioners sharing something about their spiritual journey. In the four years before I left Hunters Hill I developed a strong friendship with the local Catholic Priest, Father Kevin, and not long before I retired from the Parish we took the brave step of exchanging our pulpits one Sunday. I found that to be a very moving experience, which I will never forget.

## 18 Rosemary Bradford

When the Kenyan colony began, there was no momentum to provide universal education for the local population. Although Africans were seen as a source of cheap labour, however, missionaries already in the country began to strongly advocate for education. They began to set up primary schools and, taking a long view, saw that the cost would be prohibitive. In 1913 Dr John Arthur from the Anglican mission in Kikuyu arranged a conference with other Protestant missions to discuss the issue. By 1918 the Alliance of Protestant Missions was formed with the Church of Scotland Mission, the Church of the Province of Kenya, the African Inland Mission (interdenominational), the Friends' Church, and the Methodist Church. The British Government needed to take the initiative in making education available to Africans as a matter of right and Arthur was instrumental in promoting this idea. The Devonshire White Paper came out in 1923 and endorsed the idea that Africans



were as entitled as the British to a good education. Arthur began the work required to set up a new high school for Africans without any government support. The new Alliance High School was begun in March 1926 with the cooperation of the Alliance of Protestant Missions.

The second of these schools was built in Dodoma, Tanganyika, and included the Anglicans, the Africa Inland Mission (Methodists), and the Lutherans. Expatriate and local teaching staff were recruited from each group, including my father John Shellard with his wife Florence. As members of the Church Missionary Society they arrived in 1953 with three children and he began work as a principal of the school. The enthusiasm for education was immense in the local population, and so tests were conducted to select students and a small but, for the families, a significant fee was charged. This was the first boys' high school in the country and it set the high bar of a Cambridge School Certificate O level exam at the end of the four-year course. The staff lived on campus, the students boarded, so a dynamic community was established. The students were not adolescents; most were in their late teens or twenties, politically active, and destined to become the leaders of the nation in the future.

We were in community with Protestant Christians, our playmates were from many nations and denominations, and the happiness of experiencing those different households infused our days. The school fulfilled the needs of the students, and the local school built for government officials' children provided us with our early primary education. Our family was relocated in 1958 to live in the northern area of Tanzania beside Lake Victoria. Musoma Alliance Secondary School was begun with

the first four classrooms. We took up residence in one of them and began a new voyage of discovery. The partners were Anglicans from Australia and New Zealand, Africa Inland Mission, and Mennonites, and those groups provided personnel and also Tanzanian teachers were recruited. The Mennonites ran a school for the children in the highlands and raised their own food, slaughtered the meat, and cooked everything from scratch. We were taught the Bible with earnest enthusiasm, and I couldn't help but be impressed by their way of life and the unity of faith and life. The food was delicious; we worked in the garden, studied hard, and that year of being in the north of Tanzania felt blessed as the new school took shape and grew with its first intake.

My parents were committed to ecumenical life but were suspicious of Catholics and high-church practice, and so they found a school to take us on to the next stage of our education in Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia. It was so far away that my elder brother and I travelled there for a year at a time and attended local schools from a hostel led by Donal Lindsay Glegg, with a fine pedigree in the ecumenical Keswick Convention. On our arrival we declared that we were Anglicans and set off on our bikes to Sunday worship at the nearest church. Nothing had prepared us for the candles, incense, vestments, or the dim religious light. We almost didn't recognise our church. So, heading home, we decided that we would throw our lot in with the Baptists after all. That phase became a buoyant and exciting part of our lives, travelling to events in the hostel bus, going to hear Billy Graham, going on outings and picnics, watching wide-eyed as young people were baptised in an atmosphere of joy and embarrassment.

The school in Musoma grew apace, the students became younger as more attended primary school, and the building program gave way to a dynamic and full school life. A better solution to schooling was found for me in a girls' school in Kenya, which offered Cambridge A Level. I could come home for holidays, and I joined the choir and the Young Farmers Club, among other interests. The daily chapel took us through the Bible, taught us the psalms, and taught me to sing a wide range of beautiful music. Oratorios, music appreciation, and eisteddfods enriched every term. It inspired me in a new way, adding a rich layer to the joyous African church experience, the lovely Mennonite harmonised hymns, and warm hospitality.

The school was opened with great aplomb by President Julius Nyerere in 1960, and it proved to be an asset to the community, taking a new generation to university entrance and national leadership. But my parents found that school fees for their five children were becoming impossible, and a letter of resignation from the position of principal was sent to the Ministry of Education in 1967. Four weeks later an announcement was made over the radio that all school principals' positions were to be nationalised forthwith. Overnight it became a government school and took on a new identity. Nationalisation of banks followed also and, although some staff stayed on to work there, things changed rapidly as the Christian culture of the school changed. Yet an ecumenical legacy still lives on in many hearts and minds.

## 19 James Collins

I have been involved in the ecumenical movement for over forty years now—in Perth in WA (remember ARCIC?), in Tasmania, and now in NSW—and I give thanks to God for all that he is doing in our midst as we continue our journey into the depths of understanding and mutuality that we glimpse only partially, regarding how we are all members of the Body of Christ and how we might all grow more fully into the relationship of love that exists between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and how this love might be lived out and manifest, not only within the Body of Christ, but with all humankind and all creation.

I say that we glimpse this unity only partially, for we seem to be entering a new phase of partisanship around the globe, as fault lines between left and right, liberal and conservative, progressive and regressive seem to be fracturing the global community politically, socially, and religiously. I lament this situation.

As Tim Costello recently pointed out, we need these extremes to be held together as individual freedoms need to be held in balance by concerns for justice and equity.

Fear of the ‘other’ has become a common factor leading to these divisions and the truth of all people being created in God’s image is being lost as the ‘other’ is demonised and pilloried.

Perfect love cast out fear, and the mission of the Body of Christ to bring healing and wholeness and flourishing to all of God's creation seems to be more important now than ever. Sadly, at this precise moment when our witness to the world is crucial, we see many people of faith retreating into their bunkers and echo-chambers, where they live with and listen to only those who share their own views.

Receptive ecumenism helps us to listen to the 'other', and we are able to learn from our engagement with the 'other' and grow because we have been enriched by our encounter with the 'other' and receive the blessing of God as we live into the unity of the Body of Christ and realise more fully our mission in the world to work together to bring healing, wholeness, and, above all else, love.

I would like to have had the time to write more about my rich experience of ecumenism over the past four decades, but life at St Paul's, Burwood, is too full, as we seek to live out the vision of what the Body of Christ might be and do in our world today, as we care for everyone in our community.

## 20 Joy Connor

One of the highlights of the ecumenical Christian year in the Blue Mountains, NSW, is the 6 am Easter Day Dawn Service on the escarpment at the Leuralla Amphitheatre in Leura.

It is a beautiful symbolic time as we walk through the cold dawn lit by small lights on the rough path to the amphitheatre overlooking the mist-filled valley and Mount Solitary beyond. The service is organised by an ecumenical group, Sister Jacinta Schailler of the Good Samaritans, assisted by Reverend Louise Mattay and John Leaney.

Over a hundred Christians from various backgrounds regularly brave the cold for the beauty of the resurrection dawn. We celebrate our hope beginning with the sound of a flute in the still air and an inspiring liturgy, and finally lay the flowers we are given on the central cross as we pray for each other and our world. Each year, in the beauty of the misty mountain resurrection morning, we remember ‘For this reason he sent his Son, so that by dying and rising for us he might bestow on us the Spirit of love’ (John Paul II, *Ut unum sint*).

## 21 Doru Costache

I love gardens, but I am not your garden-variety ecumenist. That is to say, I am not extremely fond of any institutional forms of conversation between Christians of different traditions. In fact, I am not fond of any forms of institutional Christianity either. Rather, day by day I joyfully discover the Holy Spirit’s gift of Christian diversity, which amounts, at least to my eyes, to a ‘heavenly rose garden’—to paraphrase the original title of a sixth-century book, *The Spiritual Meadow*, by John Moschus. And, to continue with the metaphor, I realise the following:

the meadows in spring present a particularly delightful prospect. They display to the beholders a rich diversity of flowers which arrests them with its charm, for it brings delight to their eyes and perfume to their nostrils. One part of this meadow blushes with roses; in another place lilies predominate, drawing one's attention to themselves and away from the roses. In another part the colour of violets blazes out, resembling the imperial purple. In short, the diversity and variety of innumerable flowers affords enjoyment both to nostril and to eye on every side. (*The Spiritual Meadow*, prologue, trans. John Wortley, 1992; slightly altered)

This is how I perceive the landscape of Christian diversity. I don't see a hell of doom and gloom, of orthodoxy and heterodoxy. Suspicion, condescension, and resentment—which still poison the chalice of Christian love—are not what I gather from all around me. What I see are flowers who do their best to praise the Creator by being what they should. I see what Nikos Kazantzakis rendered in what he called a Franciscan haiku, 'I said to the almond tree, "Sister, speak to me of God". And the almond tree blossomed' (*Report to Greco*). What I see are flowers in bloom, 'trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither' (Psalm 1:3).

That said, I realise that, while we all do what we must, we still do it the wrong way. We walk our separate ways as though we're worlds apart. We seem to have forgotten that 'no man is an island', to paraphrase John Donne (*XVII Meditation in Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*). No blade of grass the

meadow, no flower the garden, no tree the orchard. The paradise upsurges from the chaos of conflict and adversity only when all these blades of grass, all these wonderfully scented, colourful flowers, and all these fruitful trees come together in one place, under the Spirit's breeze (Acts 2:1-4). When the islands connect, exchanging good news. This is the truth I discovered in the last fifteen years or so, working with Christians of all colours and scents within the Sydney College of Divinity, as well as in various ecumenical bodies, including the NSW Ecumenical Council's Theological Reflection Commission. This is the truth I discovered in the place where I currently work, St Cyril's, which belongs to a different church tradition from my own.

Patches of the garden in the making gladden the eye of the beholder, for which I am grateful. I never expected, however, to experience the paradise of Christian fellowship and friendship as an immediate reality. But I did, and I do. Let me explain.

More than three years ago, providentially, I met the Revd Dr Lex Akers, who, together with his wife and their congregation of the Pittwater Wesleyan Methodist Church (Mona Vale NSW), found room in their hearts for the little Orthodox mission church I currently guide. Not having any funds to pay the rent, it was very difficult, impossible rather, to find a place we could gather. Those were critical times for our church. No other doors—not even of the Orthodox family—opened to us. Lex, his wife, and their church did open their door, graciously so. I, my wife, and those who pray with us cannot sufficiently express our gratitude for this act of Christian kindness, whose beneficiaries we still are. The story doesn't end there, though. Attuned to the divine providence that mediated our encounter is



a common friend who belongs with yet another church tradition, the Revd Associate Professor Glen O'Brien, to whom I am also grateful. This, I believe, is ecumenism at its best, when Christians help other Christians, regardless of the colour and the scent of the flowers. Such is the work that the Lord wishes us to perform in the garden. There is hope!

Truly the Lord is generous! He keeps pouring grace upon grace in the lives of those who seek him. My encounter with Lex proved to be the beginning of a genuine friendship. Grace upon grace. It has been many years, indeed, since I had a true friend, someone who would be there not expecting any gains from me. The last time it happened was long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away. After my relocation to Sydney, I almost lost hope in this regard, but Lex—a man of another Christian tradition—proved me wrong. Our frequent get-togethers amount to intense Christian experiences. I see our meetings as iterations of the Lord's Supper, as paradisaal events. We talk about our churches, our spiritual traditions, our approaches to prayer and to the scriptural wisdom. We talk about things in heaven and on earth. Our friendship is deepened by our thirst for holiness, as well as by numerous common interests. We are both amazed by the beauty of God's creation. Above all, we both are disposed to learn from one another, and from each other's church traditions. We discovered that there's more we hold in common than what—to many eyes—might seem strong reasons to keep walking apart. And thus we walk together, praying for the day when all the blades of grass, and the variously scented flowers, and the different kinds of fruitful trees will come together in one place, in paradise. Our friendship and cooperation prove that it can be done, no matter how much apart our worlds might be.

Here's my ecumenical journey so far. I am grateful for every bit of it.

## 22 Mervyn Duffy

In a seminal article on ecumenism ('Baptismal Unity in the Divided Church' *Worship* 75:6 (2001): 511-27) Gerard Kelly proposed that progress may be able to be made in ecumenical theology if the focus was put on the mutual recognition of baptism as well as on the different understandings of the Eucharist. He refers to the Canberra Statement's use of the Letter to the Ephesians in presenting a vision of 'a plan to gather the whole of creation into communion with God and with each other', a plan in which 'the Church is the foretaste of this communion with God and with one another'.

Kelly identified a tendency in Western Christianity to think in terms of law and validity. He contrasted a minimal juridic understanding of mutual recognition of the validity of baptism with another understanding which 'belongs to the realm of the sacramental and is an essential aspect of a sacramental ecclesiology'.

A minimal juridic understanding is where the concern is only that the procedures required for the validity of baptism are fulfilled. Baptism must involve the words "I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" and immersing in water or pouring or sprinkling water, with the

intention of doing what Christians do. This treats baptism as if it were a charm or magical spell which ‘works’ when correctly invoked.

Kelly obviously prefers the ‘sacramental’ understanding of what happens when one church community recognises the action of a sacrament in another church community. So, there are at least two layers at work here. One is the action of the community which baptises, and the second is the action of the other community in recognising that baptism is a true sacrament.

Baptism is a sacramental action that changes the status of the recipients of the sacrament. They become children of God, a new creation, and members of the faithful. Baptism establishes a relationship between the neophyte and the Holy Trinity—this relationship, this friendship, we often call ‘grace’. Baptism creates communion, communion with God and communion with one’s fellow Christians. In the light of the letter to the Ephesians, baptism also changes the relationship of the recipients to the whole of Creation. Their way of being in the world and with the world is different because they have been claimed for Christ.

When one Christian community recognises the baptisms done by another community there are numerous implications. Recognition of the baptism of the individual means recognising the power and authority of that Christian community to mediate God’s grace in the world. Accepting their baptism as valid implies accepting their right to speak ‘In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit’.

And so, the act of recognition (and mutual recognition even more so) changes relationships and creates a communion. It brings the two Christian communities into a sacramental communion. The respect for the foundational sacrament they share, necessarily implies a respect for each other. Recognition of Baptism implies accepting the communion and community that sacrament creates. Saying that the community can baptise, involves acknowledging that God is at work among them, that they share in the intention of making disciples of Christ. A community that celebrates sacraments is a sacramental community.

According to St Augustine:

Therefore, whoever the person be, and whatever office he holds who administers the ordinance, it is not he who baptises, that is the work of him upon whom the dove descended. (*Ep.* 89, 5; *PL* 33, 311)

Since we follow Augustine in believing that baptism is the work of Christ, recognition of baptism involves recognising Christ at work. When a Christian community engages in the ecclesial act of recognising the baptism of another Christian community, they are recognising the action of Christ and of the Holy Spirit within that community. They are acknowledging that they share the good news of Jesus Christ and both communities are responding to the command of the risen Christ to baptise and make disciples (Matthew 28:19).

A common understanding of sacrament is that it is the outward sign of an invisible reality. The pouring of water and the invocation of the Trinity is an outward sign of the

invisible reality of the inclusion in the new order of Creation and the family of God. When ecclesial communities engage in mutual recognition of that sacrament, they bring into being a communion between their communities.

Recognition is a sacramental action. It does not bring about full canonical communion, but is a significant step towards it.

## 23 Neil Holm

I taught Aboriginal children and adults for over twenty years, beginning when my wife and I had gone to the Northern Territory in association with the Australian Baptist Home Missionary Society, to be teachers and missionaries. Like many others engaged in Aboriginal-related professions, my overriding objective was to give education, support, and encouragement to the Aboriginal students I taught, to their families, and to their communities. In the process I gained much. These same students and communities shaped me and my philosophy of education. Slowly, I learned the traditional content of Aboriginal culture and its practices and values. The changes were imperceptible but real over many years. However, those understandings remained at the cognitive level and had no impact on me in an affective or spiritual sense.

I suspect those ideas had no effect because I had no understanding of ecumenism or inter-faith. My understanding was limited to a few ideas about Christian denominations. Even then, that knowledge rarely accessed the affective domain. I

suspect that I am not alone in holding to a worldview that regards the ‘other’ as something/someone to be understood, but whose understanding remains compartmentalised within me in a way that holds it separate from my soul or spirit. I suspect that many Christians today understand less than I do about traditional Aboriginal religion and spirituality or the modern Aboriginal Christian faith. They regard the knowledge they hold about Aboriginal culture as useful and helpful information, but quite separate from their own religious and spiritual practice.

What would it be like if we in the mainstream Australian church began to ask the question, ‘In what ways might my Christian life be enhanced by drawing on the religious sensibilities of indigenous Christians and those indigenous people who practice traditional Aboriginal religion?’

Some Aboriginal Christian leaders are leading the way in these explorations. Miriam Rose Ungunmerr, an Aboriginal elder from Nauiyu (Daly River, NT), may have been the first Aboriginal Christian leader to suggest that mainstream Australian Christians adopt a traditional contemplative spiritual practice. In 1988, she presented a paper titled *Dadirri—Inner Deep Listening and Quiet Still Awareness* (<https://www.miriamrosefoundation.org.au/>). ‘This beautifully concise explanation of the spiritual dimension of Aboriginal culture has since been utilised by people working in diverse settings and in private meditations all over the globe’. She describes this practice as the greatest gift her people can give to fellow Australians.

Auntie Denise Chapman is an Adnyamathanha woman from the Flinders Ranges region in South Australia. She is a pastor and outreach and development worker within the Uniting Church. In *Yarta Wandatha* (2014), she pays tribute to Djiniyni Gondara, her teacher at Nungalinga College, Darwin, and a senior Yolgnu elder and retired Uniting Church Minister from Galiwinku, Elcho Island. She argues that for the Gospel to have deep roots for those like her, who are steeped in mainstream Christianity, it must take account of the worldview embedded in the stories, songs and knowledge of the Aboriginal spiritual tradition (see her *Yarta Wandatha* 8).

Through this book, Champion seeks to ‘understand Christ . . . through my own cultural context’ and to help others understand who Christ is through an indigenous perspective (*Yarta Wandatha* 9). Many Aboriginal Christian theologians are concerned to inculturate Christianity into Aboriginal culture. Unlike them and like Ungunmerr, Champion opens the possibility of mainstream Christians incorporating Aboriginal spiritual practices into their own spiritual practices.

Champion describes a spiritual practice called *Anhangha idla ngukanandhakai*. This practice focuses on remembering and imaginatively revisiting a particular place where the events of a special story took place. In the process of revisiting that place and story, the person would invite others to listen, retell that story, the events that occurred, and discuss them with the listeners. In retelling the story, new stories are created around it as well. She summarises this process as having three stages: first, remember; second, indicate a willingness to hear; third, engage in a process of revelation, recognition, showing, or reflection (*Yarta Wandatha* 28). This third stage is important. It

involves action. It is more than merely telling and it has a prophetic element. This practice resembles the two ways of imagining in the Ignatian Exercises.

Champion uses her experience in the task group for the Stolen Generations to illustrate *Anhangha idla ngukanandhakai*. The process allows the Stolen Generation to remember their experiences, creating an opportunity to hear those experiences, and to hear them with close and willing attention. It then provides an opportunity for revelation. Champion's revelation focuses on the story of Nehemiah's night ride surveying the broken walls of Jerusalem and the subsequent decision to engage all the participants in rebuilding the walls. The taskforce reveals the damage that had been caused. The Nehemiah story provides the prophecy and the action by which together we can repair the damage and build a great new city. She also provides another example of the practice by remembering a Dreaming story of an old woman, two lost children, and a bellbird's assistance in finding them. The story requires remembering, attentive listening, and then being open to the revelation. Champion connects the lost children to the Stolen Generation and to the parables of the lost coin, the lost sheep, and ultimately human lostness, with God as the mother figure, the loving parent. This final thought causes her to reflect on the role of women in the church.

I began this piece with some thoughts on understanding Aboriginal culture and religion. I suggested that whatever understanding I have come to me slowly and imperceptibly. It is probably better to say that I developed a feeling rather than an understanding. The great anthropologist W. E. H. Stanner (*On Aboriginal Religion*, repr. 2014) offers an explanation for



my experience. He suggests that even old and senior Aboriginal ‘men of intelligence and stamina’ will respond to ‘inquisitions’ concerning the meaning of Aboriginal religion by replying, ‘it is a thing we do not understand’. They exhibit an ‘uninquiring acceptance’ to the religion. Inquiry based on ‘direct and indirect questions’ leads to the conclusion that ‘it is impossible to ask questions bearing directly on the matter’. Ceremonies do not include explicit teaching, and no ideas or concepts are developed through the form of an argument based on reason. At the same time, ceremonies have great power. They create a sense of the noumenal, a powerful sense of mystery. They provide great ‘emotional appeal’ and ‘aesthetic pleasure’.

Stanner’s interpretation seems congruent with Champion’s process. People come together in a religious context where they remember the great stories, where they are willing to hear, and where there follows a showing, a revelation, a prophetic event that is highly affective, unrelated to reason, a recognition of mystery that leads to action by following up the Dreaming. These elements may benefit those of us in the Christian church within western civilisation in the twenty-first century, even if it only raises the question, ‘To what extent are we active in following up our Dreaming as revealed by Jesus the Christ?’

## 24 Monica Ibrahim

The participation of Orthodox churches in the World Council of Churches (WCC) provided Orthodox women with the opportunity to explore the role of women in the Orthodox

church. In 1976, with support from the WCC, the first Orthodox women's consultation took place in Agapia Monastery, Romania. It was one of a series of consultations and inter-Christian meetings that later coincided with the *Ecumenical Decade — Churches in Solidarity with Women* (1988-1998). Details can be found in Leonie Liveris' *Ancient Taboos and Gender Prejudice: Challenges for Women in the Orthodox Church* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2005), 2. The consultations brought together women, clergy, and theologians, from across all jurisdictions, to discuss and reflect upon women's vocation and ministry in the Orthodox church. Documents from the meetings explored the current roles of women in the church and recognised that women's gifts and work were not always validated. Orthodox women's involvement in the ecumenical movement compelled delegates and participants to formally articulate answers pertaining to the role of women in church and society, and encouraged scholars to publish on these matters.

A landmark moment was in 1988, with the establishment of an inter-Orthodox consultation organised by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Rhodes to discuss the issue of the ordination of women in the Orthodox church; a matter that had caused tension among delegates. For the first time in the Orthodox church, debate on the issue was opened, and it was recognised that the question was not only coming from outside the church, but that Orthodox women inside the church were hardly grappling with the issue. Following the first consultation in Rhodes, significant scholarly contributions on the topic were published, including Elisabeth Behr-Sigel and Kallistos Ware's book, *The Ordination of Women in the Orthodox Church*. Other publications ensued, for example in Romanian, which were

never made available for the English-speaking world. Just recently we saw published *Women and Ordination in the Orthodox Church*, a volume consisting of a series of essays and talks presented by Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant scholars at a conference held in Oxford by the Women's Ministry Initiative in 2018. Orthodox women and theologians continue to be actively involved in assemblies held by the WCC, and more recent Orthodox consultations have concentrated on the issue of the rejuvenation of the female diaconate.

Australian historian and academic Dr Leonie Liveris was a participant in several WCC consultations, and has written extensively on developments in the study and theology of women ministries in the Orthodox church. She emphasises that the ecumenical movement provided Orthodox women with the opportunity for wider service, especially where there was no place for their work and leadership within the Orthodox community. Her own personal experience as a convert in the Greek Orthodox Church in Australia made her wonder about the involvement of women in the church. She could not find any answers in the 'Old World' culture of her local ethnic parish community. Participation in the ecumenical movement helped Liveris explore deeper theological questions about her Orthodox faith and discover a community of people with whom she could share her experiences and questions. Her research is a bold analysis of the Orthodox traditions, taboos, teachings, and practices that continue to discriminate against women. She argues that the findings of the international consultations have resulted in little meaningful change for Orthodox women on a local parish level. Moreover, she concludes that women's voices continue to be silenced by a militant conservatism within the church and an absence of female participation in the

decision-making structures (Leonie Liveris, 'Women, Leadership and the Orthodox Church in Australia: Always Second, Secondary and Seconded', *Studies in World Christianity* 13:1 (2007), 30). In her 'Orthodox Ecclesiology: A Sacred Dignity Afforded by Our Royal Priesthood' (in *Women's Voices and Visions of the Church: Reflections of Orthodox Women*, ed. Christina Breaban, Sophie Deicha, Eleni Kasselouri-Hatzivassiliadi (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2006), 95), Liveris poses the following important questions:

Can it be too bold, too modern that Orthodox Ecclesiology might begin to reexamine and renew many aspects of Church life that do adversely affect women? Can there not be a new alignment of hierarchy, of including women in decision-making in order to meet the new needs of this century, acknowledging many women of faith are competent, qualified, educated and immensely committed to their Orthodox Church? Can not the experiences of women and their knowledge of contemporary society and family better inform the Church hierarchy?

For Orthodox women deeply committed to their church, ecumenical consultations continue to provide an avenue to search for answers to these questions and share experiences with their Christian sisters from other traditions. Paul Murray ('Families of Receptive Theological Learning: Scriptural Reasoning, Comparative Theology, and Receptive Ecumenism' *Modern Theology* 29:4 (2013), 78) employed the term 'receptive ecumenism', an approach which asks participants to dialogue by reflecting on what they might fruitfully have to learn from other traditions in relation to tangible difficulties

within their own tradition. The involvement of Orthodox women in the ecumenical dialogue has embodied this approach by encouraging Orthodox women to reflect critically on adverse practices and teachings that impact on their involvement in the life of the church, and search for answers within their own tradition and beyond.

## 25 Shenouda Mansour

The term ‘ecumenical council’ is not new: it is an ecclesial term that defines churches coming together to discuss certain theological matters or difficulties and concluding with a resolution. This is how the early Church Fathers resolved matters relating to the church. The early Church Fathers valued the ecumenical councils as means to gather, be united and solve matters cordially with love. At the time, the Christian faith was one up to 451 AD. Today, the church is not the same as before 451 AD. The prayer and the words of Jesus in John 17, ‘that they may be one as we are’, challenge the churches today. One of the missions of the ecumenical bodies is to work towards visible unity, though not for organisational unity. The churches have much in common and, according to the World Council of Churches’ Faith and Unity statement, the Lund Principle of 1952, they must work in areas where there are strong shared convictions; where there are areas of difference, the churches are encouraged to work separately. In this light, the use of language, the appreciation for culture and a sense of belonging to a certain church faith tradition has to do with identity and difference. Since the modern settlement of Australia in 1788,

the churches have had their roots in their countries of origin. After a fashion, the churches in Australia are in diaspora. Ecumenism provides a space for churches and individuals with opportunities to meet on shared grounds.

The ecumenical space has vastly changed in Australia over the past thirty to forty years. The NSW Ecumenical Council commenced as a Chapter of the World Council of Churches in the 1940s. The Council formed its own identity in 1982 apart from the Australian Council of Churches and incorporated in 2003. Since those early years, the NSW Ecumenical Council has become something like the spine, the artery, and the veins in a body, fostering, mentoring and nurturing relationships between the Christian denominations. But the Council cannot be an island away from the mainland. As the heart needs other organs in the body in order to function effectively, so, too, the Council needs the churches. Perceiving the Council from a shopfront view and saying that it has to do only with ecumenical relations represents too narrow a take on its activities. And the activities of the NSW Ecumenical Council are the outcome of lengthy process, begun in the first century AD with the Council of Jerusalem and continued through the Ecumenical Councils of the 'golden era', down to the formation of the World Council of Churches in 1948.

Much has changed since the first Council of Jerusalem. The whole world has changed since then. We now live in a global village, many of us in major cities. In Sydney, where I live, the society is cosmopolitan, multi-religious, multi-faith, and pluralistic, where we all come from different lands. We are diaspora communities, the second people to the first peoples of this land, the Indigenous Australians and Torres Strait

Islanders, yet the common thread of humanity draws us together. And because of this, the Ecumenical Council has also gone through enormous transformation to meet the new space it now serves in partnering and networking. Today, indeed, the Ecumenical Council travels into a different space, of multiple identities, building relationships and networking with other like-minded partners. It is no longer a single stream of flow in theological discussions and resolutions.

But let's look at it through a mechanical analogy. The pistons of the Ecumenical Council are its seven commissions and one network. Its commissions are: Interfaith, Middle East, Overcoming Family Violence, Peace and Justice, Theological Reflection, Youth, and Fund Raising. In comparison, Taizé is a network of people and churches coming together in reflective mediative prayer, often led by a Taizé brother from France. The work of the Executive Committee functions as an engine room for the Ecumenical Council.

As the term 'council' suggests, the NSW Ecumenical Council works as a team, a group of ecumenically minded people coming from different church traditions. Our collective and collaborative team entails the efforts of sixteen member churches and an observer of the NSW Council of Catholic Bishops. Together, we build bridges and break barriers between the Christian communities. We embrace our diverse cultures, languages, and identities, living the Gospel and practising it in togetherness. We live the Gospel of Christ through ecumenical relationships. Our aims are our visible unity and not an organisational unity. And, through the interfaith platform, we learn how to love the neighbour outside the fold, whom we will not meet in ordinary circumstances.

To be part of the ecumenical movement is to understand myself together with the other. The more I engage with other church communities, the more I discover my own tradition. This allows me to see the Body of Christ in a way that I would not have discovered if I was not involved in the ecumenical movement.

Today, the ecumenical movement is challenged by a number of obstacles, but there are also opportunities for the future. One of the obstacles is the very word, 'ecumenism'. This word is understood differently in different Christian traditions. But, over and above its many understandings, the language of ecumenism is the ability to engage with the other. Accordingly, we seek ways of engaging with each other. How do we build bridges and break barriers and walls? It is by visiting each other in the space where the other is.

One of the challenges is to nurture the youth of our churches into becoming ecumenical agents. Christian education needs to include an ecumenical formation and understanding of the Body of Christ, cultivating the ability to accept and respect each other as members of the Body of Christ. Through ecumenical formation, young people must be given the opportunity to become future leaders. One way is by having them actively engaged in the life of the Ecumenical Council. This is a real challenge.

As an ecumenist, I neither trade off the values of my church nor discount the teachings of my church, but rather I discover forgotten aspects of my own identity. I see myself in my neighbour's eyes. It's the love that Jesus asked us to nurture—



to love our neighbour. As an ecumenist, I need to be constantly learning about the other. I need to acknowledge that the world is constantly changing around me. I am no longer an island, but part of a larger continent of humanity.

Our work is in the field of ecumenical pastures, hence we are called to be ecumenists. And we are called to be ambassadors of Christ—ambassadors for the Kingdom of God. As ecumenists, we are ambassadors and servants of the Kingdom of God, and the agency of the Ecumenical Council must then be an embassy for the Kingdom of God.

## 26 Marie McInnes

Count Nicholas Zinzendorf has been called ‘the first ecumenist’ and ‘the apostle of unity’. Although he was a Lutheran nobleman, he gave refuge, on his estate in Saxony, to the *Unitas Fratrum* or the Moravian Brethren (descended from the Hussites) who were fleeing Habsburg persecution. He found such a correspondence between his own ecumenical beliefs and theirs that he eventually became a bishop in the Moravian Church. A community of exiles from many denominations was founded; it was called *Herrnhut* (‘The Watch of the Lord’) and was initially treated with great suspicion. Zinzendorf, however, had friendly relationships across a wide circle of Christians, including the Archbishop of Paris and the Archbishop of Canterbury; he also corresponded with the Coptic Pope Mark, in Arabic. A Moravian missionary, Henry Cossart, met Pope Clement XIII in 1758; the pope blessed him and his people.

Zinzendorf's aim was not to replace existing denominations with a super-church. He did not desire an immediate organic union which would dispense with the denominations; he believed that each has 'some jewel peculiar to itself; in fact, variety of belief is something beautiful. It is not gospel-like to prescribe rules, methods and dispositions or require an equality of souls'. The common ground of all denominations he called the Christianity of the heart. The deeper unity in Christ was marred and hidden by a sham unity of nomenclature and architecture (see A. J. Lewis, *Zinzendorf: The Ecumenical Pioneer* (SCM Press, 1962), 138-160). While he believed that denominationalism in Europe was too entrenched to be eradicated, overseas missions might start afresh with apostolic unity. In the Americas and Africa, for instance, converts were not taught the differences that kept Christians apart at home but only about the Saviour: they were baptised, not into the Moravian Church, but into Christ.

Zinzendorf believed that, after *Unitas Fratrum* had performed its ecumenical task, it would fade away. Of course, it continues as one denomination among many. Zinzendorf's movement has been called 'a splendid failure'. His vision was too wide and tolerant for his own time, but probably for our time as well.

The division of Christianity into many denominations is often described as a scandal. But intra-denominational division is surely a greater scandal. It was present almost from the beginning of Christianity: Paul complained that, among the Corinthians, each one would say, 'I follow Paul, or Apollos, Cephas'—or most smugly—'Christ' (1 Cor 1:12). Since that time, schisms great and small have riven the Church. The cause

of these intra- and inter-denominational disputes is failure to see what is already there: our unity in Christ. The unity of the Father and Son as described in John 17 is the model of the unity which we have and actually will always have in Christ Himself. What we call ‘churches’ are only local entities; and so Paul writes not to ‘the church of Corinth’ but ‘to the church of God which is at Corinth’. I am afraid that denominationalism will always be with us and we will have to work our way around it. Our task is to realise the unity that we already have in Christ and make it clear to all around us, so that it will be said of us, as Tertullian imagined a pagan saying, ‘See how these Christians love each other’.

## 27 Alanna Nobbs

The Greek word from which our ‘ecumenical’ is derived refers to bringing together the entire inhabited world. As Christianity spread throughout the Roman imperial Mediterranean (including North Africa and Mesopotamia) in the first three centuries, various doctrinal differences caused tension leading to hostilities. The four earliest ecumenical councils were called with the aim of settling and defining a consensus regarding the status and nature of the Father, Son, and (later) the Holy Spirit within the Trinity.

This article focuses on the first of these, the Council of Nicaea (325 AD). It was followed by the Councils of Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431), and Chalcedon (451).

Its particular significance and the model for the future was the fact that it was convened by the emperor himself. The newly converted and as yet unbaptised catechumen Constantine, influenced by his chosen episcopal adviser Hosius (or Ossius) of Córdoba, was concerned by the lack of unity within his new-found religion. With his imperial authority he summoned bishops from all over the empire to meet at the Council at Nicaea (now Iznik, modern Turkey). Constantine not only presided over the opening session but thereafter participated in the discussions and indicated strongly his wish for a consensus.

The issue in contention at the time is nowadays referred to as 'Arianism', though it was more complex than just the doctrine of the one presbyter, Arius of Alexandria, after whom it has been named. Alexandria was a Greek city, founded as its name suggests by Alexander the Great (third century BC). It was a centre of Greek philosophy and once Christianity was established there, by St Mark as some tradition holds, philosophy continued to flourish alongside Christian teaching and exposition. We have only to think of Clement of Alexandria and Origen. This meant that educated theologians and church office bearers were accustomed to the kind of argumentation and definition based on Greek philosophers. 'Hair splitting', as one used to the less subtle Latin language might have called it.

Arius was a popular presbyter in Alexandria, and influenced by his philosophical education he essentially tried to define the relationship between the Father and the Son. What did 'begotten' mean? Did it imply that there was a time when the Son was not? More subtly, as it was sometimes expressed, 'there was when he was not'. That leaves a bit to the

imagination. If ‘begotten’ meant that the Son was created by the Father from his own identical being, He therefore would have had no beginning. If he was created out of nothing, then he would have had a beginning. That would lead to the conclusion that the Son is in some way subordinate to the Father, and taken further would mean either that he wasn’t divine or all least not properly and fully divine. Hence the discord that was spreading from Alexandria across the Greek speaking East. Arius was particularly opposed by the powerfully argumentative Athanasius, also of Alexandria, after whom our Athanasian creed (later than the Nicene Creed) is named.

Constantine wanted at all costs to avoid schism in the church. To that end, therefore, he invited all the approximately 1800 bishops to attend; estimates in our sources vary. Eusebius of Caesarea author of the first ecclesiastical history and the major source for church history in this period, counted over 250. Other estimates place it above 300. This is striking when we consider the distances to travel, not to mention the danger and difficulty of travelling. It was truly ‘ecumenical’ in the sense of embracing the then known world (that is, mainly the Roman Empire). There were delegates from Britain in the west and from churches in the Sassanid (Persian) Empire to the east. The melee can only be imagined and it’s no wonder estimates of the number attending vary. Each bishop was allowed free travel and lodging for himself with two priests and three deacons. The eastern bishops formed the majority of attendees. There were more of them in any case. These are attested in Syriac sources as well as the Greek Eusebius, a first-hand eyewitness. Athanasius, then a young deacon, was also present accompanying Bishop Alexander of Alexandria.

The influence of the emperor was felt throughout. His purple clothing was resplendent in its imperial grandeur, and as in our modern Olympic Games there was an impressive opening ceremony preceded by less formal but heated consultations among some bishops. The council was held in the imperial palace at Nicaea and followed the lines of the senate.

Constantine, however, acknowledged the role of the bishops by allowing them to be seated ahead of himself. He is referred to as saying he was ‘bishop of those outside the church’.

Arius and his followers believed that their position emphasised the uniqueness of God the Father. However, that did imply that the Son was lesser in some sense, though Arius and others still felt themselves strongly ‘Christian’, as the later church historian Philostorgius, himself a Eunomian (a later version of Arianism), makes clear.

The strong, even violently, opposed views on the matter led to Constantine’s determination to settle the matter, as he hoped, once and for all. Eventually the basis of what is known as the Nicene Creed was assented to by the vast majority of bishops. This stated that the Son was of ‘one being’, not, as the Arians would have it, ‘of a similar being’ with the Father. The difference in Greek is of one letter only, *iota*, but it made a huge difference. Constantine’s will prevailed in the sense that those who dissented were anathematised. The final wording was probably largely the work of his chief adviser Hosius but had the emperor’s backing. Other less violently controversial matters such as the celebration of Easter were also dealt with.

After the council the matter was not wholly settled and continued to inflame the church as it grew under Imperial patronage. Hence the calling of further ecumenical councils to attempt to gain consensus on matters concerning the Trinity. Today, however, Christians retain both the Nicene and the Athanasian creeds as statements of shared belief.

## 28 Raymond Nobbs

Vatican II drew reactions from most parts of Christendom and therefore, while I am not unmindful of the global perspective, I've confined this study to reactions from only two parts of the Anglican Communion—England and Australia (with special reference to Sydney). There are three contemporary seminal works from a general Anglican perspective: Bernard Pawley's *An Anglican View of the Vatican Council* (New York 1962), and also his *The Second Vatican Council: Studies by Eight Anglican Observers* (Oxford 1967), and John Moorman's *Vatican Observed: For Anglicans* (London 1967). With respect to the Australian scene I rely on the local church presses: *The Australian Church Record*, *Southern Cross*, *The Anglican*, and the *St Mark's Review*, but also the *St James Parish Messenger*.

The Council was not called primarily for the furthering of ecumenical relations with other Christian churches. Nevertheless, as far as they were concerned, there was undoubtedly a hope that this would provide an opportunity for the advancing of ecumenism. However, there were some early hints of change before Vatican II. In 1960, for example,

Geoffrey Fisher paid a visit to Pope John XXIII in Rome, but in a private capacity rather than as Archbishop of Canterbury.

John Moorman, Bishop of Ripon, was one of the Anglican observers and he witnessed the whole of every session prior to writing his book mentioned above. For him the result of the Council ‘has been to alter the whole ecumenical pattern and to carry the ecumenical discussion into a new field’ (184). He concludes as follows: ‘Difficult and humiliating though it may be, we must look at all schemes for partial union in the light of possible unity—as the Lambeth fathers urged us to do in 1908’ (205). In 1967, the same year in which this particular book was published (in fact, during his lifetime Moorman wrote no less than fifteen books), he became chairman of the Anglican Commission that led to the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission. He remained a member until 1981.

On the Australian scene three papers or magazines give us some idea of Anglican perspectives on Vatican II: *The Australian Church Record*, *The Anglican*, and *Southern Cross*. The first advertises itself as: ‘An evangelical newspaper in the Reformed Anglican tradition of the historic creeds and the 39 Articles of Faith, and the standard of teaching and practice in the Book of Common Prayer’. It is not surprising, therefore, that over the period that the Council met there is no coverage of events or direct reference to proceedings. Rather, what appears are four articles that are critical either of the Roman Catholic Church in particular or of ecumenism in general. The tone of the *Church Record* is hardly surprising, as the editors at the time were Broughton Knox and Donald Robinson, the principal and vice-principal, respectively, of Moore College.



Moreover, from discussions with Robinson's biographer, and from a reading of the three-volume work *Donald Robinson: Selected Works* (published in 2008 by none other than the *Australian Church Record*), I could not find his having made a single reference either to Vatican II or to ecumenism. (Robinson was vice-principal at Moore 1959-72, Bishop in Parramatta 1973-82, and Archbishop of Sydney 1982-1993.)

What comes as a welcome surprise is the letter in Vol. 2, No. 10, October 1962 of *Southern Cross* by Hugh Rowlands Gough, Archbishop of Sydney and Primate of the Anglican Church of Australia. The Archbishop begins his letter by warning his readers: 'We must always beware of being "inward-looking", for self-centredness can be as dangerous in parochial and diocesan church life as it is in personal life'. Almost half of the Archbishop's letter is devoted to the Vatican Council. But there is a possible slight touch of irony here in that the letter appears in the number of *Southern Cross* that was billed as a special 'Reformation Issue' with half the magazine dedicated to special articles on Martin Luther.

On the broader Australian scene, *The Anglican* carried at least fourteen articles on the Vatican Council between September 1962 and December 1964. The leader-writer's 'Summary and Review of Some Events of A.D. 1962' puts the Council in context as far as many Australian Anglicans were concerned:

For Christendom as a whole, the great event of the year was the assembly of the Vatican Council in Rome, underlined by the presence of non-Roman catholic observers and the heartening expression it produced of

differing emphases from its members. All Christendom should be grateful for this to the Pope, whose catalytic influence enabled these differing emphases to become patent.

I also consulted from 1962 onwards numbers of the *St Mark's Review*, a leading journal of Christian thought and opinion founded in 1955. There are no fewer than twelve articles either on the Council in particular or on ecumenism in general. It is heartening to see that the editorial for No. 30, November 1962, is timely and is entitled 'The Ecumenical Council'. The editor at the time was Cecil Allan Warren (who in 1965 was consecrated Assistant Bishop of Canberra and Goulburn, and then in 1972 was to become its seventh Bishop). It's a balanced piece in which, on the one hand, he hopes that the winds of change 'might sweep through the Council and enable a fresh and realistic approach to reunion with non-Roman Christians', but on the other hand admits that 'it is difficult to imagine that the Council will radically and substantially change the attitude of the Roman Church to the things that divide the Christian world.' Nevertheless, there's a final injunction that 'We should pray most earnestly for the Holy Spirit's guidance for the Council that through its work the love of God in Christ might be fully proclaimed.'

It is worth noting that there was one Sydney Anglican parish in particular that carried as many references and articles on Vatican II in its parish paper as did *The Anglican* or the *St Mark's Review*, viz. the *Monthly Church Messenger* (the forerunner of *Parish Connections*) of St James King Street, Sydney. This is hardly surprising given this church's Catholic sympathies, but also as the then rector, Frank Leslie Cuttriss, in

August 1965 was appointed as one of the Observers to represent the Australian Council of Churches at the final session of the Vatican Council in Rome, which was to commence on 14 September. Cuttriss explained in a sermon of 22 August 1965 that as an official observer he would 'be representing all the non-Roman Catholic Churches in Australia at the great assembly in Rome'. He had chosen as his text that day 1 Corinthians 12:4-6: 'Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God who worketh all in all.'

As Bruce Kaye (formerly the General Secretary of the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia) correctly points out in his book *Anglicanism in Australia*: 'For many Anglican churchgoers the most memorable trend of the 1960s was the lowering of the walls that had kept each denomination largely isolated from its neighbours. Old prejudices evaporated'.

While the response in Sydney might not have been as great as elsewhere, I think it's true to say that most Anglicans in Australia, who had long regarded the Roman Catholic Church with a mixture of envy and distrust, applauded the Council's 'renewal' of Catholic worship and doctrine and, in 1965, the end of the strict rules that had prevented Roman Catholics from attending 'non-Catholic' worship.

I see four particular fruits of the Second Vatican Council as significant for Anglicans and other non-Roman Christian traditions. The first was putting the liturgy into the vernacular: the Mass was no longer a mystery, but something that all could now understand. A second gift was the Three-Year Lectionary,

which Australian Anglicans welcomed in *An Australian Prayer Book* (1977). Vatican II drew Protestants back to reading the Bible shaped by the Gospel. Knowing that congregations across the nation were reading the same scriptures has led to huge shifts in ecumenical openness. Third, Vatican II opened up ecumenical (and inter-faith) relationships, for example, the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC). Fourth, and what has interested me most particularly, theologians formed interdenominational professional associations: the Australian and New Zealand Society for Theological Studies (ANZSTS) in 1966 and the Australian and New Zealand Association of Theological Schools (ANZATS) in 1967. This interaction between theologians then found expression in theological education. Colleges of different denominations in the capital cities first began to share teaching in particular subjects and then to devise a structure—an ecumenical consortium—through which they could combine their resources while maintaining a distinctive identity. The Melbourne College of Divinity (MCD) (now University of Divinity) had already been established as far back as 1910, but theological consortia were established in Adelaide in 1979, in Brisbane and Sydney in 1983, and in Perth in 1985.

My years spent as Dean of an ecumenical theological consortium enabled me to discover (I must confess, at first, to my surprise) that the things that unite us are infinitely bigger and more important than the things which divide us. In a world in which the cause of Christ is fighting for existence, where non-Christian forces are powerful and determined, where materialism is rampant and the danger of self-destruction imminent, I firmly believe that the Christian force can't afford

the luxury of division. Each variant of Christianity has something to offer to the needs of the world.

We should consider praying, as the *Prayer Book* invites us to:

Especially we pray for the welfare of your catholic church, that it may be guided and governed by your good spirit, so that all who profess and call themselves Christians may be led into the way of truth and hold the faith in unity of spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life.

## 29 Terry O'Mara

Born in 1942, I grew up with a firm and consistent education in the Catholic Church about 'the One True Faith'—about how sad it was that anyone who followed any other faith life was obviously doomed. In my youth, the focus of these comments was, of course, the pagans—i.e. the 'Protestants'—since our considerations did not extend to the voluminous ranks of those whose faith life involved a path completely different from our own.

These ideas were strongly and inflexibly applied to all of us. There are myriad similar examples, which generated a growing disillusionment in many. In particular, the then younger generation were having, at last, some experience in an analytical approach to education generally rather than rote learning. The decision to change the Church's teaching on

eating meat on Fridays was for many a milestone, as was the whole dilemma of plenary indulgences.

My aim here is not to presume a theological analysis of what ecumenism is about—nor to seek to justify an opinion on the whole range of issues involved—there are innumerable others far better qualified than I am to do that. Rather, I seek to relate life experiences in a variety of settings, which lead me to a personal view of practical ecumenism based on respect for others and the acceptance of the dignity and validity of the path they take in their search for faith and meaning.

My professional life involved an extensive exposure to community services including work with dysfunctional families, child protection, community development generally and the management of significant natural emergencies. This necessitated a close working relationship with people who shared a common compassion for those less fortunate and a keen desire to make their clients' circumstances better.

They came from all denominations and they consistently demonstrated the high standards of ethical and professional conduct, consistent with the faith values upon which their vocation was founded. My experience with chaplains in the armed services has been similar: the key feature of their chaplaincy was their ministry, not their denomination.

In recent years, many, or possibly all Christian faiths have had to face the consequences of the behaviour of some of their number who have betrayed their stated beliefs by abusing those less able to protect themselves. That fact does not change my experience of the vast majority.

After forty years in government service, I retired and joined a major faith-based community service organisation. They sought someone who understood how government actually works—often a challenge for many. Though I was from a different faith tradition, they were the essence of generosity and acceptance of someone clearly ‘other’. I can recall at the original interview with the panel of sixteen being asked what passage of the Bible gave me guidance in my professional life, so I referred to Micah 6:8.

The next twelve years saw an increasing role for me in facilitating cooperative ventures/understandings between the major denominations on issues of common concern, in the fields cited above. I found consistently that they were all motivated by the same compassion and faith energy even though they chose to worship in their own way. There were so many strong similarities in their values and belief systems, that the areas in which they differed were not of appreciable significance.

Like most lay people, my reading on ecumenism is modest, but it seems to me that the zealots in all faiths seem to be focussed on maintaining division, too often relying on their own certainty about their view of faith, to the exclusion of all others.

Similarly, some seem to believe that the old ‘One True Faith’ hypothesis actually means that those who are on a different faith path from our own must abandon their beliefs in order for unity to be achieved. Such an approach seems unlikely to achieve success in any real way and essentially to be at odds with Jesus’ prayer in John 17:21.

Perhaps some thought needs to be given to the ‘many rooms’ cited by Jesus in John 14:2. There may well be more room for unison rather than unity. Just a thought!

## 30 Neil Ormerod

Though my parents had what used to be called a ‘mixed marriage’—mum a Catholic, dad nothing much at all religiously speaking—we lived in a very ‘Catholic’ world: mass every Sunday, Catholic schools for myself, my two brothers and my sister, most of our friends and relations actively practising. A brother and a sister even entered religious life. Life changed a little when I got to university, where I mixed in some other circles, in my studies, and in student politics. But I still went to the Catholic chaplaincy, attended mass regularly, as well as some Catholic Bible studies, and joined in retreats and reflection days. I met Thea there and we married in the Catholic church. Though at the time I studied and then worked in mathematics, with people from all sorts of backgrounds—often quite cynical in relation to religion—my Catholic bubble was pretty firm.

As life went on, I lost my taste for the mathematics that inflamed my interest as a young adult and started to dabble in theology, undertaking a BD with the Melbourne College of Divinity, while working as a mathematician. There I started to encounter some major Protestant authors, Barth, Moltmann, and Pannenberg, but I still felt more at home with Catholic



authors, Rahner, Schillebeeckx, Küng, and various liberation theologians. I also had a growing interest in the work of Jesuit theologian and philosopher Bernard Lonergan, which began to dominate my thinking. On completion of my BD and in an odd mix of serendipitous circumstances, I found myself offered a job in a Catholic seminary for mature-aged students, many quite old (much older than myself). A little bit green but committed to further study, I started my job, working as the Dean of Studies for the seminary. Part of that role involved attending meetings of the Sydney College of Divinity, then in its relatively early years, as the accrediting umbrella of a number of theological colleges, Catholic, Protestant, Anglican, and Orthodox. I quickly learned that I was no longer in a Catholic bubble!

I will never forget my first meeting of the Academic Board of the SCD, which I attended in my first weeks on the job. It was, I think, held at the Catholic Institute of Sydney, then located in Manly. At the meeting, the representatives of the Baptist-run Morling College were in tears, as they were being forced out of the SCD because it was considered too ‘ecumenical’, which was code for ‘too many Catholics’. The two things that struck me were both the genuine regret and sorrow of the Morling representatives, who clearly valued their association with the SCD, Catholics included, and the ways in which the old sectarian divisions could still arise. The other thing I remember from the meeting was my introduction to a fellow board member, John Chryssavgis, a deacon and lecturer of the Greek Orthodox College, St Andrew’s. In the years that followed, John and I became firm friends, often travelling to and from meetings in various remote locations in Sydney (e.g. Manly,

North Turramurra), sharing conversations about all manner of things in the journeys we shared.

This meeting was an initiation into a twenty-year participation in the life of the SCD, working with fellow academics from all types of Christian backgrounds. There was some degree of coming and going in the SCD, with colleges joining and leaving at various times. Still, in the various meetings I attended, the work I shared, there was a growing bond of fellowship and friendship with them all, Catholic, Protestants, Orthodox, Pentecostal, all working together in a common project of theological education. Some of these friendships have endured over the years even as people have moved to different settings.

Over those two decades of association within the SCD, I witnessed a real easing at all levels of the types of tensions that had forced Morling out of the SCD. I did a lot of work on internal accreditation procedures, and you could identify the shift in terms of the bibliographies that lecturers put together for their units. Increasingly, denominational distinctions faded as they drew upon the breadth of the Christian tradition in their teaching resources, especially in the areas of Biblical Studies and Spirituality. Trust building through interpersonal relationships—leading to the dispelling of stereotypes and prejudices—became a path for reconciliation and recognition of the value of our diverse Christian perspectives.

This approach became the heart of my own modest ecumenical efforts. I have gained immensely from the personal relationships I have formed with people from all possible Christian perspectives as we've grown in mutual respect and

friendship, able to share the strengths and weaknesses of our traditions, laugh at our respective foibles, and be moved by the clear faith of the other in Christ and commitment to following him. A friend of mine who moved from a not dissimilar Catholic background to myself into a Pentecostal church challenged me, ‘Any friend of Jesus is a friend of mine’. I have found it helpful to remind myself of this in the ensuing years.

### 31 Wagdy Samir

In July 2016, I travelled with family and friends to Jerusalem. It was my first visit to the Holy Land. The Church of the Resurrection had, as one would imagine, a deep impact upon me. I was standing proximate to where Christ was crucified, buried, and resurrected! That extraordinary spiritual feeling, shared with my family and friends, is one that will endure.

Yet, whilst in this holy place, something struck me as incongruous. I had explored the Greek, the Catholic, the Armenian, the Coptic, and other sections, each one presenting the onlookers with a ‘piece’ of Christ, as it were. I could not help but feel that the One Body of Christ was divided! Instead of feeling depressed, I prayed that one day all Christians would be united. I sought recourse in happy thoughts, ecumenical thoughts, thoughts inspired by the writings of Fr Matta Al-Miskin (Matthew the Poor), a contemporary desert father (1919-2006) of Coptic (Egyptian) Orthodox descent. It is his views that I outline in what follows.

One of Fr Matta's main traits was his ecumenical fervour. In his autobiography, he lamented the isolation of the Egyptian Church caused by the conflict that arose at Chalcedon. He also deplored the loss of the Greek language and hence the ancestral inheritance of the Coptic Church. Two hundred years after Chalcedon, the Arab invasion deepened our church's isolation from the world and from its roots. Indeed, it led to the loss of the native Coptic tongue, rendering collections of invaluable ancient manuscripts worthless. Against this backdrop, 'separation, fear, and ignorance' led to 'fanaticism [...] and imprisonment of the mind, [...] [limiting and controlling] all our relationships'. As Fr Matta noticed that the other Christian churches had their own reasons for parting ways, he believed that the time had come for all to put behind ignorance and apprehension, and to turn towards one another in love. For him, the lack of Christian unity signified a loss of the church's plenitude.

He reasoned that ecclesial unity could be achieved only if Christians broke away from 'the barriers of hatred, the variance of thought, the discords of the soul, the inventions of the intellect, and the cares of the flesh'. Drawing on the Creed, he suggested that our faith in the 'one catholic church' denounces the current forms of 'sectarian unity'. By the latter he meant the individual churches that think of themselves as 'the whole body', which is but a fanciful illusion. He saw patristic heritage as a common ground to unite different Christian traditions and urged the churches to move from 'dogmatic self-righteousness' to love and mercy. For him, the authentic church tradition was by definition ecumenical. In turn, when we ignore the church's ecumenical vocation the division of Christ's body is unavoidable. There are, and always will be, questions arising

from any theological debates and ecumenical dialogues. However, as Fr Matta observed, love and mercy should be the forces that ignite our imagination.

I am aware that few fellow Copts would share my background. I am a Coptic Orthodox person with a Catholic mother and a Catholic upbringing in Muslim Egypt. I am currently a postgraduate student at a multi-denominational Christian institution and my supervisor is a Romanian (Eastern) Orthodox father and scholar. Thus, I could not help but connect with and relate to Fr Matta's ecumenicism. It is his ecumenical openness that every church, every Christian leader, and, as a matter of fact, every believer, needs right now. May the spirit of ecumenism that permeated Fr Matta's life and teachings enrich the world and bring all Christians to the One Christ.

## 32 Mandy Tibbey

For each of us, we belong: to family, to church, to community, and to each other. The Christian church, in all its variety, has layers of meaning, layers of tradition, layers of devotional and organisational practices. We take those for granted in our own parts of the Christian church and some of them become beloved traditions, with meanings that add a richness to our understanding of who God is and who we are, as God's people.

The ecumenical journey adds further layers and dimensions of meaning and understanding. Our perspectives are broadened, as we realise that there is more than one way to do anything and

that parts of church practice or tradition that one denomination holds dear may be less important in another denomination or part of it, but that other aspects become highlighted: for instance, some churches are focused on the Eucharist, and others are less focussed on it. For some, the melodies of the hymnody of the centuries bespeak poetry, beauty, and the mystery of our interaction with the triune God. For others silence is profound.

When we know Christians from other parts of the Christian tradition and find them to be genuine in their faith, though different from us in some ways, we learn something about God's action in the lives of others and glimpse how God leads us all, but not necessarily all in the same way. There can be unity, where uniformity would be crushing.

Our own cultures and traditions shape how we are comfortable in worship and in living. The ecumenical movement values this and draws out the many ways in which Christians can give glory to God, individually and together.

Through our actions in unity for justice and peace, we can be a blessing in our communities and in the world, including by reaching out beyond Christianity to befriend the stranger and live out the hospitality that we find in God.

May we always be open to see God in others, in other traditions within the Christian church and beyond it, and to acknowledge that each person is made in the image of God and that the whole earth, the *oikoumene*, reflects the glory of God.

### 33 Joseph Meelis Zaia

The Lord has blessed me abundantly since I was selected by the late Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East, HH Mar Dinkha IV, to be member of the Dialogue Committee between the Assyrian Church of the East and the Roman Catholic Church in 1990. His blessings have continued as I have become the Co-Chair of the Dialogue Committee between the Assyrian Church of the East and the Roman Catholic Church.

This dialogue started in mid-eighties and has continued to the present day. As a result of almost twenty-six years of meetings and fraternal discussions, the counterparts signed two important documents that put an end to 1500 years of schism and disagreements between the two churches. Both the Common Christological Declaration signed on 11 November 1994 by HH the late Pope John Paul II and HH Mar Dinkha IV Catholicos Patriarch, and the Common Statement on Sacramental Life of 24 November 2017, signed by me on behalf of the Assyrian Church of the East and HE Cardinal Kurt Koch from the Catholic Church, are considered huge milestones on the path to reconciliation and ecumenism. They are a great illustration of how churches can turn the sad and unfortunate contentious pages of history into a passage towards fulfilling the call of Christ ‘that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be one in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me’ (John 17:21).

In the past twenty-six years, both churches have demonstrated that dialogue, with a sincere fraternal spirit of recognition of past errors, testing political circumstances, and philosophical dialectical debates, can indeed alter negativity into a positive, productive, and collaborative front of missional activities that the world desperately needs.

The call to ‘oneness’ in these crucial times of Christian persecution, marginalisation, challenges, and social liberalism is much more crucial and essential than it was thirty years ago. Ecumenism must be regenerated with new dynamics, taking into consideration the new realities and challenges all churches are facing. It must not remain an abstract aspiration. We must render it into a concrete reality, the foundation of a united Christian front against twenty-first century trials. Ecumenism is a precious gift of the Holy Spirit, who is guiding us while we are travelling towards our ultimate goal of unity.

The Assyrian Church of the East, a martyred church, as HH Pope John Paul II called it, has learned hard lessons since her foundation in Edessa. Her isolation—for centuries, in the mountains of Northern Iraq and Southern Turkey—caused her to live in constant fear of annihilation, disengagement and with no hope of survival, while her sister churches ignored her cries to be saved from the massacres of the Ottoman forces in 1914-1918. Again, recently, the massacres committed by ISIS against the Christians of Iraq, Syria, and other countries should have moved the items of ecumenism and Christian unity to the top of the agenda at our meetings.

We must all realise that our Father has not forsaken us! Our Saviour and Lord has not stopped loving us: as he and the



Father are one, so Christ's people must be in unity. And when we are seen bonded in Christ-like love, the world will believe that Christ is continuously working among his own. Then the world will come to the conclusion that the love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit was, and is, present in this world. Therefore, ecumenism must be considered an extension of divine love, to be practised and longed for.

The objective is clear. We are to be one in the Lord and one with one another. All of our aspirations must be directed towards fulfilling his will. Then we can all come together and jointly praise his name: 'Glory to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, and prior to the beginning *Brasheth*, is now, and ever shall be'.

## In Conclusion



An Ecumenical Christian Prayer  
From Pope Francis' encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*  
4 October 2020

O God, Trinity of love,  
from the profound communion of your divine life,  
pour out upon us a torrent of fraternal love.

Grant us the love reflected in the actions of Jesus,  
in his family of Nazareth,  
and in the early Christian community.

Grant that we Christians may live the Gospel,  
discovering Christ in each human being,  
recognising him crucified  
in the sufferings of the abandoned  
and forgotten of our world,  
and risen in each brother or sister  
who makes a new start.

Come, Holy Spirit, show us your beauty,  
reflected in all the peoples of the earth,  
so that we may discover anew  
that all are important and all are necessary,  
different faces of the one humanity  
that God so loves.  
Amen.

NSW Ecumenical Council  
Theological Reflection Commission  
2020