

## Archbishop Blanch Memorial Lecture 2015

I'm very grateful to the Trustees for the invitation to deliver this lecture here at Hope in memory of Archbishop Stuart Blanch. Grateful, too, to Guy Elsmore for suggesting ecumenism as the field of enquiry. As I stand here in Archbishop Stuart's name and in the role which he fulfilled in the city in so distinguished a manner, I'm aware that in the ecumenical endeavour, as in so many of the emphases of our Diocese, he was a pioneer. This is also, perhaps even more, true of his wife Brenda, with whom Stuart conducted a steady conversation about the relationship between the churches as their letters record, and who in 1944 wrote *"More and more God seems to be training me to see the futility of all these divisions in the church, that in Christ we are not divided. I often feel that I should be a lot happier in a remote mission field where services were simple praise etc. I'm so tired of complicated liturgy, convention, unreality."*

This in 1944 - we're not told what she thought of all that in Stuart's years as a bishop!

Brenda also wrote in the same year: *"It is a pity that the fellowship of the Nonconformists and the sense of worship that the C of E has cannot be combined, isn't it? Neither is complete and satisfying without the other."*

This early example of so-called “receptive ecumenism” - the idea that we come together with our deficits and needs, rather than our riches, at the top of our minds, in a spirit of reception rather than proclamation - is one of many examples in Dick Williams’ biography of Brenda’s keeping the need of the unity of the churches before Stuart - though he himself had a lively awareness of the matter also, and made ecumenism a reality in his parish ministry, as his anonymous contribution to “The Lee Abbey Story” in 1956 indicates. There he said: *“Where new life has come to a parish it has led to a remarkable degree of co-operation between the different Christian bodies in the place”*.

So in following Archbishop Stuart I am treading in the footsteps of a pioneer and an apostle of unity, on whose foundations in Liverpool the great work of Bishop Sheppard and Archbishop Worlock, and the extension of that work by Bishop James and Archbishop Patrick, were constructed.

The conversations, in writing and no doubt much more in the quietness of the home, between Brenda Blanch as an instinctive ecumenist and Stuart Blanch as a builder of coalition - these conversations remind us that like most things in the life of faith, the ecumenical endeavour is one of emotional commitment and human motivation far more than it is one of cool and considered thought alone. It reminds us in short that people are complicated, and that their

experience and formation brings that complication to everything they do and to this endeavour not least.

You'll see from the title that I hope to approach my subject of enquiry through three doors, which I've called blood, sweat and tears. But before I go to those doors, let me begin with a story which some here will have heard before, a favourite story of mine, about a man I knew and revered as a spiritual teacher, which hints at something of the depth and complexity of human motivation.

Alongside its incidental charm I tell this story to set the ecumenical endeavour in the widest possible context - the context of what makes each of us tick, and of how the decisions that change our lives can sometimes be made. And I hope that the moral of the story, if it can be seen in that way, will become clear as I complement it with another story about this same man towards the end of my lecture.

### **Motivations and reasons**

Roland Walls was a successful Anglican priest, a Canon of Sheffield, where he had been crafting and delivering creative training for Anglican clergy, close to what today we would call mixed-mode training, which tried hard to relate the orthodox Gospel to England as it actually is. He had explored a monastic vocation with the Taizé community and he was still unsure what God wanted

him to do and to be. He had no shortage of options. Indeed he had received an offer to be an Oxford College chaplain and another offer to become Master of the Royal Foundation of St Katherine in Limehouse. Each of these would have spoken of “success” and would have kept his feet on the ladder of church preferment. But then alongside these he was offered a tiny and obscure job in the Scottish Episcopal Church, non-stipended, looking after a chapel in a small village in Midlothian. He went to visit, and then on his way home had to decide what to do. He takes up the story:

*I went on that lovely train from Waverley through Carlisle. When I got to Leeds city station I remember I was praying to the Lord, and I was getting mad at him, and I was saying “Now Lord, I don’t know what you’re doing” - because I was 45 - and I said, “Lord, you’ve got me where you want me because I will do what you say as long as you make it perfectly clear to me what it is. I really don’t mind what I do of all these things but I will do anything as long as you make it clear; so jolly well get on with it.” That was the kind of prayer I was saying, when all of a sudden, coming out of Leeds the other way was a big coal train, all of twenty trucks, and on the back, on the guard’s van, it had a big notice, red letters, and it said, “RETURN **EMPTY** TO SCOTLAND. The word **EMPTY** was underlined. I said, “Right, Lord”. This event, on my return from seeing this highly unpromising little chapel, is the only reason we’re at Roslin.*

And he stayed in Scotland as a monk and a teacher for the rest of his long life, dying there last year at the age of 95. As I say, I'll return later to Roland Walls when I speak of his contribution to what I've called the ecumenism of tears. For now let him stand as a patron of this enquiry, a reminder that we do what we do for all sorts of reasons, and we explain them to ourselves afterwards in all sorts of ways.

### **The seasons of ecumenism**

I was born in 1953 in Bradford, Yorkshire. My parents were devout Anglicans and fully involved in their local parish church, as I was also during my childhood.

For the first ten years of my life the ecumenical climate was wintry. In the year of my birth Stuart Blanch as Vicar of Eynsham was forging those links with other denominations which were referred to in the Lee Abbey book mentioned a moment ago. But he was by no means typical. More commonly the Church of England luxuriated in its role as the default religious option for nominal believers. The Roman Catholic Church remained a fortress from which it was not even permissible to pray the Lord's Prayer with other Christians or to enter their places of worship. Sectarianism, here in Liverpool as in so many places, was a hard and sometimes a violent reality. The union schemes of the churches

in South India produced severe strain in the counsels of the Church of England; I received my liturgical education at the hands of a man who had left the C of E over the South India scheme, eventually finding his home in the Orthodox church. Meanwhile the free churches went each in their own way.

Then, relatively suddenly, in the 1960s winter gave way to the spring. The second Vatican Council, called by Pope John XXIII in 1963, brought a fresh approach to that Communion, not least in its decree on ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, passed by a vote of 2,137 to 11 of the bishops assembled and promulgated by Pope Paul VI on 21 November 1964.

In its Introduction the decree said this:

*In recent times more than ever before, He (that is, God) has been rousing divided Christians to remorse over their divisions and to a longing for unity. Everywhere large numbers have felt the impulse of this grace, and among our separated brethren also there increases from day to day the movement, fostered by the grace of the Holy Spirit, for the restoration of unity among all Christians. This movement toward unity is called "ecumenical." Those belong to it who invoke the Triune God and confess Jesus as Lord and Savior, doing this not merely as individuals but also as corporate bodies. For almost everyone regards the body in which he has heard the Gospel as his Church and indeed,*

*God's Church. All however, though in different ways, long for the one visible Church of God, a Church truly universal and set forth into the world that the world may be converted to the Gospel and so be saved, to the glory of God.*

And it went on to say:

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

Documents and thinking such as this brought a wholly new warmth to Roman Catholic relations with other churches. Alongside this the slow commitments to conversation between the Church of England and the Methodist Church began to gather pace. Within the mainstream Reformed churches the foundations began to be laid for what became the United Reformed Church in 1972. Stuart Blanch became Bishop of Liverpool in 1966 and was fully committed to this springtime, building relationships of regular prayer with Archbishop Beck and with the Methodist chair of district Rex Kissack, and in 1971 calling a joint Anglican-Methodist Synod to explore practical working.

Meanwhile in Bradford I was entering my teens, and this ecumenical springtime came into our own front room. The short ecumenical evangelism

and nurture course "The People Next Door" was launched across the churches in 1966. My parents hosted a group to engage with the course in our area. Ten years later that group was still going, and going strong, as ordinary Bradford Christians across the churches continued to learn from one another, to pray together and to dream of a church where all might be one.

Nationally the dream of unity was carried forward by the Anglicans and the Methodists as the 1960s drew to their close. Archbishop Michael Ramsey, himself the child of a Congregational home, lent his substantial weight to the venture. The aim was high - for a fully united church whose ministries would have been reconciled liturgically and sacramentally by a service which depended on its participants bearing with one another in love and saying and meaning words slightly differently for the sake of a future united people.

Already the wider dream of united churches in England was being developed, the dream which would issue in the ecumenical commitment in 1964 that by 1980 the Anglican and the major free churches would have achieved an organic unity. Spring seemed to be turning into summer.

From all this the Roman Catholic church stood apart; yet since the conclusion of Vatican 2 the climate had changed irrevocably here also. As early as 1965 in Portsmouth the newly consecrated Bishop Derek Worlock, who of course had been present at all the sessions of the second Vatican Council as private

secretary to the Cardinals Archbishop of Westminster, was initiating ecumenical conversation and partnership, readying himself as it were for the Liverpool years. And indeed the foretaste of ecumenical high Summer came to Liverpool with the Sheppard/Worlock partnership and with a united witness for the justice of the Kingdom and the friendship of the churches, which spoke to this city region and far beyond it. Archbishop Derek and Bishop David set a bar which remains in the minds and imaginations of a generation to this day. When as new Bishop of Liverpool I attended the Civic Mass at the Metropolitan Cathedral earlier this year, and when Archbishop Malcolm and I stood together to greet the people as they left at the end, I heard several times the whispered phrase “fish and chips” - used constantly of David and Derek in their day - “fish and chips: always together and never out of the papers!” John Newton, the great Methodist thinker and leader, in his time as Chair of Merseyside’s free churches joined them on public platforms, contributed his own wisdom and theological acumen, and was accepted by the city region as the third leg of a tripod of growing unity which provided the platform from which the church’s leadership could offer prophetic advice and practical wisdom far beyond the concerns of the churches for their own unity under God.

In 1975 I received my own vocation to the Anglican priesthood, and after looking at theological colleges in Oxford and Cambridge I decided to train for

ministry at Queen's College Birmingham, the ecumenical foundation established, like Hope, from the coming-together of colleges, in the case of Queens Anglican and a Methodist theological colleges, and set up as a harbinger of a united training to come. So it was that I learned my Anglican church history from the Methodist tutor John Munsey Turner, my liturgics from an Orthodox layman, and my sacramental theology from a young Roman Catholic priest and teacher, at the time vice-principal of Oscott College, called Patrick Kelly.

The achievements of the springtime years were substantial and as I have said, irrevocable. And yet, despite this, nationally over time the temperature began to cool. The Anglican/Methodist unity scheme of 1968 fell in 1969 in the Convocation and fell again in 1972 in the General Synod, on both occasions the councils of the Church of England rejecting the scheme despite Archbishop Ramsey's passionate advocacy. It is still seen as the great failure of his archiepiscopate. Queen's Birmingham, far from being the first-fruits of a united future, became in truth a rather odd anomaly whose graduates were viewed quizzically by other Anglicans. The United Reformed Church indeed came into existence although rump churches remained outside that scheme, as they would have also outside any Anglican/Methodist united church. 1980 came

and went with no further progress towards the unity which was so headily dreamed.

In short, ecumenism became an option rather than a mandate. When my first daughter was baptised by a Methodist minister with whom I'd been at college, my bishop asked for an explanation. When I told him of our shared history at Queen's he simply said, "Yes, we'd been wondering about that place".

The establishment in the new towns of England of shared churches, including as a partner in many places the Roman Catholic church, went ahead in the 1980s with fanfare and great hope; when I was Bishop of Hertford I had to handle the sense in several of the churches of Stevenage, Hatfield and Hemel Hempstead that their brave new world was no longer valued by the wider church communities and that their forty years of faithful experiment would not be repeated. The Anglican/Methodist Covenant of 2003, about which I'll speak later, showed those churches a hopeful and practical way forward, but it was and is a far cry from Ramsey's vaulting hopes of a united people.

All this needs of course to be seen against the background of a rapidly-changing England. The Christendom of the 1950s had slowly been eroded in the 60s and 70s and the churches found that their place at the centre of society had become uncertain and contended. As we meet here today we can

see how far, and how quickly, that process of change has gone and continues to go. It is not a crude secularism - very far from it - but it has made the platform of the churches into a very different thing from that inhabited by Pope John XXIII, or Archbishop Ramsey, or the Sheppard/Worlock partnership, or John Newton or Lord Donald Soper. Post-Christendom is our context now, and in such a world the demands on each Christian denomination to survive and thrive alone can all too easily take priority.

In which season are we now? The good news is that we are not and never will be back in the winter of the 1950s. The foundations laid by Stuart Blanch's generation, the achievements of the 60s and 70s abide; this University of course is one such. But nor are we in the Summertime. Rather to me it feels like Autumn, a season of mists, and not much mellow fruitfulness. For so many Christians today ecumenism has become a backdrop and as I say an option, not a mandate; and yet it also remains true that the prayer of our Lord at John 17:21 has not changed: that we may be one, as He and His Father are one.

And so as I have prepared this lecture, as I have looked at the horizons of ecumenism today I have asked myself, what will drive forward the work of the unity of the churches, in this odd and cool climate? What are the heartbeats of this endeavour for us in our time?

And I have come to believe that there are three modes of living as churches who seek unity, three ways in which we detect the heartbeat of God's desire for a people who are one; and they can be seen as the ecumenisms of blood, sweat and tears.

## **Blood**

From Vatican radio, broadcast on February 16 this year:

*"Pope Francis on Monday denounced the murder of 21 Coptic Christians by ISIL militants in Libya. The Islamist terrorist organization released a video of the killings on Sunday.*

*Speaking in Spanish to an ecumenical delegation from the Church of Scotland, the Holy Father noted those killed only said "Jesus help me."*

*"They were killed simply for the fact they were Christians," Pope Francis said.*

*"The blood of our Christian brothers and sisters is a testimony which cries out to be heard," said the Pope. It makes no difference whether they be Catholics, Orthodox, Copts or Protestants. They are Christians! Their blood is one and the same. Their blood confesses Christ."*

*Pope Francis said that in remembering these brothers and sisters who have been murdered simply for confessing Christ, Christians should encourage one another in the ecumenical goal, noting the “ecumenism of blood.”*

*“The martyrs belong to all Christians,” he said.*

This was the first time I had heard the phrase, “ecumenism of blood”. The Pope has since used it on a number of occasions, as the occasions of Christian martyrdom have increased in his time.

The ecumenism of blood, the red martyrdom of which the Celtic church spoke, is not to be sought masochistically, for its own sake. In the first century St Ignatius of Antioch famously did so seek it, and in his letter to the Romans insisted that he should find it:

*“Pardon me [in this]: I know what is for my benefit. Now I begin to be a disciple. And let no one, of things visible or invisible, envy me that I should attain to Jesus Christ. Let fire and the cross; let the crowds of wild beasts; let tearings, breakings, and dislocations of bones; let cutting off of members; let shatterings of the whole body; and let all the dreadful torments of the devil come upon me: only let me attain to Jesus Christ”;* and later in that letter, and most famously, he said, *“Permit me to be an imitator of the passion of my God”*.

This is a shocking and a challenging example; yet Ignatius' example though debatably admirable is not to be followed. The ecumenism of blood is not indeed something to be sought, but is something given.

The fact of Christian faith places people in a situation which is wider and deeper than their Christian family, or tribe, or denomination. In a situation which can be settled, can be completed, without reference to denomination. Even when denomination is explicit, it is not relevant. It is reported that Father Maximilian Kolbe went to his death in Auschwitz, in the place of Franciszek Gajowniczek, with the words, "I am a Catholic priest from Poland". But he would not have been acquitted by his captors if he had been a Lutheran pastor. It was his status as Häftling, as prisoner, which defined him there. Similarly for the Lutheran Pastor Bonhoeffer in Flossenbürg. The ecumenism of blood does not operate in the arena of doctrinal discrimination, but of faithful witness.

For me all this has a wider application than the dreadful arena of violent death. For me, in the context of this enquiry, the ecumenism of blood stands as a sign of all those situations which are wider and deeper than the specifics of Christian membership or affiliation.

I spoke earlier of the Autumnal nature of the ecumenical endeavour in these days. In the face of disappointments in our structural relating, there has been

both a prescinding and a settling - a prescinding from conversations about doctrinal and organisational/ecclesiological issues, and a settling for practical and social partnership in the service of the Kingdom.

I call this a settling, though in the scales of eternity it is the main thing. The so-called “new ecumenism” in this England is not to be seen in committees of church leaders, nor in the Week of prayer for Christian Unity, but on the street in our foodbanks, our street pastors, our debt advice centres and credit unions, our addiction-recovery programmes and our political agitations. All this is martyrdom in the wide sense of the Greek *martus*, *martureo*, “witness”, “to witness”. It is **Christian** witnessing and almost always it prescinds from denomination.

An example of this from my own life. When I was a younger priest I acted for a while as co-chair of Christian CND and in this role each Ash Wednesday for a number of years I went with Christian friends to the Ministry of Defence, there to mark the building with ash and to pray for the nation, that we together might repent of our commitment to the threat of nuclear destruction, and might bring to our nation the possibility of that repentance and its impact on policy. These issues have not gone away in the decades since and indeed in this year, with the replacement of the Trident system on the political agenda, they have returned sharply. But in sitting down in Whitehall, and in chaining myself

to railings in Northolt, I sought to make a Christian and not an Anglican statement. And in the police cells in Cannon Row and in Watford, after I had been arrested, I sat with Catholics and Quakers indiscriminately; and I was not asked in the magistrate's court whether I was an Anglican; and if I had not been one, I would have been fined nonetheless.

Martyrdom is witness that is costly, and it is ecumenical of its nature. The only exceptions of course, and they are many, are the exceptions of blood martyrdom whereby we Christians have killed one another, or stigmatised or hurt or bitten or devoured one another, in the interests of our doctrines and of that cold truth which crushes human life. We may be proud of our martyrs, those who were killed in the name of Christ by other Christians; but we cannot commend their deaths to the world without shame.

And yet even this can give opportunity for redemption and mutual love and forbearance. Bishop Rowan Williams has written: *"You've... heard the words "martyrial ecumenism," and what they express is, to me, something utterly essential about the life of the Christian Church. From the moment when St. Paul recognized in Jesus the face of his victims, it has been a deep dimension of Christian holiness: to be able to go to one's brothers and sisters in repentance and receive from those whom we have offended or excluded the grace of God's welcome. When our churches learn to celebrate fully and gladly each other's*

*martyrs—as they have begun to do—then that moment of Paul’s conversion comes alive again.”*

So even this kind of martyrdom can occasion for the whole Church repentance and recalling to Christ; and yet in the end it is not what the Pope means when he speaks of the ecumenism of blood, the red martyrdom.

The Celtic church, following indeed St Jerome, spoke also of a white martyrdom and of a “glas” martyrdom - “glas”, a word than can mean blue or green, the colour of flesh under pressure, the colour of the flesh of the saints up to their necks in cold water and reciting the Psalter, the colour of costly witness, another colour of the ecumenism of blood. And yet as we see all these ways, death on the beach or chaining to railings or feeding the poor, as we recognise in them the heart of discipleship (or at least of the foolishness of God), as we reconfirm that they are the necessary and even the main thing, yet we must also recognise that they are not sufficient in the ecumenical endeavour. Because they all prescind from denomination, or settle for partnerships that undergird their co-operation without achieving unity, and they do not resolve the demands of our Lord’s prayer in John 17.21, that we might be one. For this alongside blood there must be sweat, and also tears.

## **Sweat**

The relationship between the ecumenism of blood and that of sweat has, of course, a rich history. In the years since the 1910 Edinburgh mission conference, the ecumenical work of the churches was divided into two streams, Faith and Order on the one hand, and Life and Work on the other. Life and Work has issued in the ecumenism of blood, and indeed Pastor Bonhoeffer was one of the leading lights of Life and Work in the years before the second world war. But it is Faith and Order that is called to enter the ecumenical sweatshop.

I have recently, at the invitation of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, taken a responsibility as Anglican co-chair of the Joint Anglican-Methodist Covenant Advocacy and Monitoring Group, a catchy title I agree. As the name implies, it is a national bilateral body whose task is to advocate for ecumenical furthering, and to monitor its progress in the specific context of the Covenant between the Church of England and the Methodist Church; a Covenant which these churches entered in November 2003.

The Anglican-Methodist Covenant is a solemn agreement, but in keeping with the muted atmosphere of the ecumenical Autumn it is also a modest one. So, the Preamble to the Covenant is pretty robust:

*“We the Methodist Church of Great Britain and the Church of England, on the basis of our shared history, our full agreement in the apostolic faith, our shared theological understandings of the nature and mission of the Church and of its ministry and oversight, and our agreement on the goal of full visible unity, as set out in the previous sections of our Common Statement, hereby make the following Covenant...”*

Modesty comes later. The Covenant document goes on to say that the Covenant is made *“in the form of interdependent Affirmations and Commitments”*. These cover matters such as a mutual affirmation that *“...in both our churches the word of God is authentically preached, and the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist are duly administered and celebrated”*, and a mutual commitment *“to listen to each other and to take account of each other’s concerns, especially in areas that affect our relationship as churches”*.

The subtlety of the choice of words, and in particular of verbs, in the Anglican-Methodist Covenant was the result of long and hard work, as ecumenically agreed documents have been through all the ages and between all the churches. Any one of these documents would illustrate the ecumenism of sweat. So for example two weeks ago the co-chairs of the International Commission for the Anglican-Orthodox Theological Dialogue presented the

Archbishop of Canterbury and the Ecumenical Patriarch with a copy of the latest Agreed Statement, entitled *In The Image and Likeness of God: A Hope-Filled Anthropology*. This document also could have formed the basis of this section of our enquiry, but I've chosen the Anglican-Methodist process because I know more about it and because on the face of it, moving it forward should be a simpler matter. After all John and Charles Wesley lived and died as Anglican priests, and the Methodist Church twice approved unity with the Church of England in the last fifty years. What could possibly go wrong?

From 2003 until this year the Covenant's implementation was overseen by a joint Anglican-Methodist commission called, inevitably, the Joint Implementation Commission or JIC. The JIC went through two incarnations before its life came to a natural end and the group of which I am now the co-chair succeeded it. In the interests of brevity I shall make an acronym of the Joint Anglican-Methodist Covenant Advocacy and Monitoring Group and will call it JAMCAM. Alongside this is another bilateral group, this time including observers from the Roman Catholic, Baptist and United Reformed churches, called the Methodist-Anglican Panel for Unity in Mission, or MAPUM.

Now, friends, I am inflicting these acronyms and committees on you this evening for a purpose. Compared with the death of Christians in Libya, or the feeding of the poor in Liverpool, these committees and their work can seem

extraordinarily rarified and irrelevant. And indeed they can sometimes be so. In any event, relevant or not, the ecumenism of sweat is an exacting business. Longfellow might have been thinking of this when he wrote: "Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small; Though with patience He stands waiting, with exactness grinds He all."

The patience of the Lord, or at any rate certainly the patience of the churches, has been sorely tried in the ecumenical process; and the inevitable temptation is to conclude that God is not interested in church unity if it comes at the price of so much tedium. But I believe that one of the heartbeats of ecumenism is precisely this exacting work of negotiation and theological exploration, and as Bishop of Liverpool I have given, and shall give, a fair portion of what you might call my allocated national working time to this belief, though my membership of the JAMCAM group.

Think with me then, for a moment, in detail, about one aspect of what was done and what might be done in the Anglican/Methodist conversation, as an example of what the work of inter-church negotiation means and as a glimpse into the ecumenical sweatshop.

I said earlier that the fall of the Anglican-Methodist unity scheme is perceived as the great failure of the deeply distinguished archiepiscopate of Michael

Ramsey. The scheme fell primarily because of doubts and questions, not only expressed within the Church of England but prevailing there, about two matters of ministry; the place of bishops in the Church, and the interchangeability of ministries between the Anglican and Methodist churches, in particular the interchangeability of presbyteral ministry. Put in the form of questions, we asked each other: Can Methodists please find a way to have bishops? and, Can Anglicans please find a way to recognise the ministry of Methodists as they are?

Almost fifty years later these remain precisely the questions. When last year the JIC presented its final report to the Methodist Conference and the General Synod, it put the matter, with a refreshing and unusual asperity and frankness for an official report, like this:

*“We are convinced that now is the time for both our churches to make bold initiatives which will break the logjam which is preventing the flourishing of our covenant relationship into... deeper communion. The two initiatives are closely connected and, ideally, would be made together.*

*One initiative is in the hands of the Church of England. The Church of England needs to address the question of reconciling, with integrity, the existing*

*presbyteral and diaconal ministries of our two churches, which would lead to the interchangeability of ministries.*

*Addressing this question would take the affirmations of the Covenant concerning the ministries of our churches out of the realm of abstract theory and embody it in structures and practice... [Such] an initiative for reconciling existing presbyteral and diaconal ministries would be taken with the expectation of the Methodist Church taking a bold initiative in relation to personal episcopal ministry as described below.*

*We also encourage the Church of England to take account of the existing theological agreement in essential doctrine with the Methodist Church and the affirmations about the Methodist Church and its ministries it has made in the Covenant Statement. It is important to recognise that proposals made previously for an act of reconciliation of ministries, which bears a resemblance to ordination, have been problematical not only for Methodists, but also to many in the Church of England..."*

I shall return to this point in a moment.

The JIC report goes on:

*The other initiative is in the hands of the Methodist Church. The Methodist Church needs to address the question of expressing the Conference's ministry of oversight in a personal form of connexional, episcopal ministry (such as a President Bishop), in such a way that it could be recognised by the Church of England as a sign of continuity in faith, worship and mission in a church that is in the apostolic succession.*

*Such a move would be on the basis of the Church of England making a bold initiative in relation to reconciling existing presbyteral and diaconal ministries, as described above.*

These, then, are the questions which the Faith and Order specialists of the two churches are commissioned to explore, and which the JAMCAM group is mandated to monitor.

You will remember that the JIC report made reference to an essential plank of the 1968 unity scheme, namely the mutual reconciliation of ministries at a liturgical service of worship which included a sacramental act which would have been both symbolic and performative.

In an earlier report the JIC noted that:

*[This service of reconciliation] was caught between some Methodists suspecting that what was proposed was re-ordination, and some Anglicans objecting because the act was ambiguous and therefore not sufficient in their eyes to give confidence that the ministry of Methodists was adequately ordered to officiate in the Church of England.*

And it went on to say:

*The JIC recognises, sadly, that after fifty years, the dilemma seems as insoluble as ever. It is therefore keen to avoid raking over old coals...”*

The service of reconciliation would have involved the Methodist President and his senior colleagues as presbyters receiving the laying-on of hands with prayer from the Archbishop and other bishops, and the Archbishop and his colleagues in turn receiving the laying-on of hands from the Methodist President and his colleagues. It was roundly condemned from a number of quarters as a fudge and a disgracefully imprecise fudge at that. The previous Archbishop of Canterbury Geoffrey Fisher in a letter to the Times called it “open double dealing”. So I can understand why in this generation it might be seen as an old coal best left alone.

The ecumenism of sweat may sometimes involve the raking over of old coals, however, and on behalf of JAMCAM I have recently asked the national

ecumenical officers of our two churches to re-examine this service of unity and to assess just how dead a duck it is. I shall also invite our Faith and Order people to do the same.

I have done and shall do this because I reread, in Owen Chadwick's magisterial biography of Archbishop Ramsey, Michael Ramsey's own defence of this service of reconciliation, and in reading it I was frankly inspired. A motif of this enquiry is that we do what we do for reasons of the heart as well as for reasons of analysis; "Return empty to Scotland". For reasons of the heart I have asked us to look again at this service, because speaking to the Diocesan Synod of the Canterbury Diocese in October 1968 Michael Ramsey said this:

*"I know that I am a priest and a bishop in the historic order, referred to in our prayer book as coming down from the apostles' times. I know that Methodist ministers are ministers of the Word and sacrament used by Christ and they have been for many, many years. I know that their ministry is not identical with the historic episcopate and priesthood, but I am unable to define precisely what the relative value of the two is..."*

*"Very well then. In this laying on of hands with prayers I would be asking God through His Holy Spirit to give to the Methodist ministers what He knows that they need to make their ministry identical with ours as presbyters and priests in*

*the Church of God. It would be perfectly clear what was being asked for, the equalization of our ministries. What would be undefined and undefinable is the present relative status. For that there is a great deal of room for variety of opinion... The service asks God to be good enough to our ministries equal, giving to them what grace and authority He knows that we need...*

*“What would I mean receiving that laying-on of hands? I would mean this. I believe that I am a priest and a bishop in the Church of God. Nothing can make me more so. But I do believe that my ministry will have a very new significance and authority as a result of this Anglican-Methodist union, and I pray that God will give me that enrichment and significance through receiving the laying on of hands from the Methodist president and his colleagues.”*

I remain sufficiently moved by this advocacy to ask the Church of England at least to revisit this dead duck and to see whether it might still have something to teach us. Because it points to a liturgical and not a confessional act, and it points to an apophatic confidence that the God whom we cannot understand will, in the mystery of His being and doing and out of His love for us, give us what we do not know we lack. It points in other words to a heartbeat of the spirit, and it can only be accessed in the sweatshop of ecumenical committees.

Finally on this, I quote again from a JIC report:

*“The Anglican-Methodist Covenant is at a decisive moment. The JIC has kept in sight the crucial question as to whether there is evidence that the Covenant is making a difference. We have suggested that the criteria in this are the flourishing of the Kingdom and the greater unity of the Church, which are ultimately intrinsically intertwined. If the Covenant is to make a difference it must honour diversity, be purpose led, and place a high value on the coming of the Kingdom of God. It must assist in the discernment of the movement of the Kingdom and the dynamics of God’s grace; and it must combine the energy and resources of our churches for the sake of mission.”*

All this is true and sets a proper perspective; and if there is to be progress in ecumenical partnership, and in paving a way for the unity of the churches, then the motives must be clear. The churches must be committed to the search for unity in order to see the mission of God and the Kingdom of God come closer. Within and as part of that search, the ecumenism of sweat is essential. On its own however it will never achieve anything, since (as the Roland Walls story at the beginning of this enquiry hoped to suggest) we do what we do, and the temperature of our commitment rises, for all sorts of reasons which include, but are by no means restricted to, committee reports. A key part of our motivation is tied to the emotional longing with which the churches consider change, in this case the change that unity would bring. And we are called to

raise that temperature, if we believe such change to be the will of God. For me this, more than anything else, is the role of JAMCAM and of the ecumenical advocacy more generally. When we sweat it is because our temperature has been raised.

And yet to raise the temperature of the heart and of the churches, and to warm the climate of the ecumenical endeavour, cannot be a matter for sweat, for exhortation. Rather, the world will be changed by weeping. And the final, and the briefest, section of my enquiry speaks of weeping, of tears.

### **Tears**

You have heard now of Roland Walls whose life changed as a result of seeing a train go by. He remained as an Anglican monk in Roslin for twenty years, in a tiny community of three, four or at most five people, which sensed an ecumenical vocation even though they were all Anglican; and then something else happened to him.

Annually, he bought a Roman Catholic diary. In the front is a place where you write your name and that of a contact. The section reads "I am a Catholic. In the event of an accident, please call a Priest".

“I always used to cross out ‘Catholic’”, said Roland, “and I’d cross out ‘Priest’.  
Instead I would write, ‘I am a Christian. In the event of an accident, please call  
another Christian’”.

But in 1979, he said, when he bought his new diary and tried to make those  
amendments, his pen would not write. He thought it was just the pen  
malfunctioning. The following year, he got his new Catholic diary and found  
that, although his pen was working, he could no longer cross that sentence  
out. He wanted it to remain as it was. He then thought, “That’s strange. I must  
somewhere in myself want to die as a Catholic: and if I want to die as one,  
does that mean I ought to be living as one?”

This, together with feeling drawn to pray in Catholic churches while on his  
travels, brought Roland in the end to the doorstep of Cardinal Gray of  
Edinburgh to explore reception as a Catholic. At that doorstep Roland prayed,  
“Lord, if this man talks to me about your Church, I shall know this is not from  
you. But if he talks about you and your Son then I shall know it is of you”.

The Cardinal shared with Roland his sense of the strangeness of this journey  
and then said this: “This is not primarily about you, nor about your Church. It is  
about your Community. I would like you to go back to your Community and ask  
them one question. In their vocation to witness to the unity of the Church, are

they prepared to undergo the pain of Christ at the Church's disunity - the sixth wound we inflict on the body of Christ - which your Community will experience at the Eucharist, like a sword piercing the heart of your Community's life? They must understand this as not just their own pain, but as the pain of Christ. This is a pain which I never feel, nor your own Church, as we all celebrate with our own. But your Community will experience this at each Eucharist."

We are told that the Cardinal went on to say this: "The way forward to full unity will come only when the Church understands this: that the Eucharist is not only a joyful celebration of all that Christ has done and given us, but also displays the cost, the pain, that sixth wound, of which in practice we are not aware, celebrating separately in our own denominations. Yes, ecumenical conferences and dialogues are necessary and important... but they do not reach the heart of the matter, the pain of Christ, in the way your Community will." We are told that the Cardinal then blessed Roland, and that as he rose from the blessing, he saw tears in the Cardinal's eyes.

And Roland went ahead and was received, and then ordained as a Catholic priest, and from that day the tiny Community at every Eucharist in their chapel was divided, as the whole Church is divided, and the pain of Christ was felt there as one or another stood and watched other receive the life of God and were unable themselves to receive.

Years later John Halsey, another member of the Community, said this: "I don't think anyone chooses to experience pain for its own sake. So what has it been for, this pain at the Eucharist? Perhaps in some minute way we were able, through Roland's entry into the Roman Catholic Church and our consequent division, to help the whole Church to move together towards that unity for which Christ prayed and died."

The longing for unity expressed by Jesus in John 17:21 is rooted in tears. And without the heartbeat of tears the churches will never be one. I must say frankly that in these days, we weep insufficiently for Christ's broken body, the sixth wound. The ecumenical Autumn has frozen our tears, and we take for granted the parallel tracks of the church and the parallel contentments that come from a sundered body. In the ecumenism of blood we see the work of God realised as the unity of the church is proclaimed to a world that expects nothing else. But in my own work for unity in the realm of sweat, I know that the temperature of the churches has not risen enough to make the change. We have forgotten how to weep.

Here in Hope University we see the future in stone. The walls that separated the two colleges on each side of this road are down, and the arch of the gospel has replaced them; the wall is down, as Shakespeare's Bottom the weaver says, the wall is down that parted their fathers.

But until the students and staff and visitors here, and in every church, walk through the arch and the door weeping for the broken body of the Lord, then we will not be one. We will settle for less. And so I end this enquiry with a plea for tears, for what the Orthodox call Penthos, for a gift of tears in and across the churches. It is not to be confused with depression, or with frustration, or with despair. It is a gift in the same way as the ecumenism of blood is a gift; a gift that motivates and changes, a gift of the Spirit. And I don't know how to pray for it, because who would ever have thought to pray in Roland Walls' case that his ballpoint pen should break down?

But the motivations of the Christian heart are manifold, and God knows what is best for his Church. So in the end I simply pray that we remain discontented with what we have, and that we long for more; and that as Stuart Blanch did in his day we do what we can to stitch together the gaping wounds of Christ, and that as the present Archbishop of Canterbury says we might learn to disagree well, and perhaps one day to agree. It is those heartbeats for which I pray and for which I long; the heartbeats of ecumenism: blood, sweat and tears, the gifts of God to his people.

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