

**Meeting of Catholic Bishops Conference Committee for
Christian Unity with Diocesan Ecumenical Representatives
January 30th -31st 2009
Hinsley Hall, Leeds**

The first part of the meeting was devoted to reports on events and developments since the last CCU/DER's meeting in June 2008.

The CCU had travelled to Rome in October 2008 during the meeting of the synod on the Word of God in the Life of the Church which had drawn a number of participants who were also active in the field of ecumenism. These included the Catholic Co-Chair of ARCIC and the prior of Taizé as well as Bishop Tom Wright, Anglican Bishop of Durham all of who met with the CCU. There will be potentially an ecumenical resource when the work of the synod is eventually distilled in a post-synodal exhortation by Pope Benedict XVI.

The main event of the Rome visit was the meeting with Cardinal Kasper, head of the PCPCU, along with Msgr. Mark Langham, formerly administrator of Westminster Cathedral, who has succeeded Msgr. Don Bolen at the Pontifical Council. Cardinal Kasper highlighted the recent fruitful dialogue with the Orthodox (i.e. 'Ravenna' statement) and said the Council was undertaking a major review of the bilateral dialogues which had taken place over the last 40 years since Vatican II described as the 'Harvest Project'. From this review a compendium-type document will be published entitled *Ecumenical Consensus/Convergence on some basic aspects of the Christian faith*.

Cardinal Kasper reaffirmed the Catholic Church's unequivocal commitment to the ecumenical movement. However, he highlighted some particular issues. These included the current difficulties in the Anglican Communion and it was stressed that the Catholic Church had no desire to see its break up as this would be detrimental to the cause of Christian unity. At this point Bishop Michael Evans suggested that Catholic communities should occasionally include an intercessory prayer for the Anglicans in their current predicament.

Another high priority for the Pontifical Council is dialogue with the Pentecostal tradition, a rather disparate, but fast growing, Christian grouping. It is not only the significant numbers around the world under the Pentecostal umbrella, but the inroads the tradition has made in what were essentially wholly Catholic areas, especially in Central and South America.

An update on various bilateral dialogues was then given:

English ARC

A meeting had taken place in November 2008 at the Emmaus Centre, West Wickham. The group had visited the Mayday Hospital, Croydon to see the work of the ecumenical

chaplaincy there. The group reflected on the visit of the Anglican pilgrimage to Lourdes led by Archbishop Rowan Williams and the talk he gave there. The 'Ravenna' document was discussed. A report on the Lambeth Conference was given by an Anglican Bishop which was rather negative in tone as he complained about the event being stage managed in order that the major issues of contention were not adequately dealt with due to insufficient time being allotted to them. Also discussed was a joint statement on shared schools. The question was raised about the purpose of English ARC.

British Methodist-Catholic Dialogue

The meeting which had been held was taken up with an exchange on the theology of original sin in the context of baptism, the main topic under discussion where serious divisions in the understanding of this sacrament are starting to emerge. Wesley's teaching on original sin is not consistent as sometimes he takes a Calvinist position whilst at other times it is an Arminian perspective. The Catholic understanding of regeneration occurring at baptism is not universally recognised by Methodism and it emerged that there was not unanimity on the understanding of baptism amongst Methodists themselves. This is particularly the case in the practice of infant baptism.

Methodist Roman Catholic International Commission (MeRCIC)

International discussions had been held at Dublin during November 2008. Although the theme was sacramentality in general the direction was to examine more specifically Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry mirroring the WCC Faith and Order statement of 1982 (Paper No. 111), which the Catholic Church also signed up to although it is not a WCC member. In baptism the theme of regeneration surfaced. Eucharist as sacrifice was examined particularly with reference to Wesley's hymns where eucharist was linked to participation in Christ's sacrifice. The sacrament of orders was reviewed especially in its link with eucharist.

A draft was presented of a synthesis of the last 40 years of agreed MeRCIC statements which is the equivalent to the IARCCUM document on the ARCIC agreed statements.

URC-Catholic Dialogue

Professor David Thomas and Bishop Declan Lang are the co-chairs and a meeting took place at Llandudno in November 2008. Two papers were presented, one from each tradition on how faith is authentically transmitted. The issue of conscience in adult formation was touched upon in which the dichotomy between self-fulfilment and discipline emerged. The next meeting is in May 2009 when the focus will be on conscience, especially informed conscience in relation to authority.

The feeling was that this dialogue remains unfocussed, possibly because of its relative newness. The key feeling was that Catholics were explaining themselves and their teaching to the URC members rather than a mutual exchange of understanding. This

could be a consequence that Catholic doctrine was more extensive and defined than in the URC tradition.

Catholic-Orthodox Dialogue

Although nothing to report on bilateral dialogue it was noted that Metropolitan Kirill had been elected Patriarch of Moscow. His election is thought to be positive for the improvement and advancement of Catholic-Orthodox relations.

Oriental Orthodox-Catholic Dialogue

The Oriental Orthodox, although notionally a single family, have widely differing views on many aspects of faith. There is a particularly close relationship of the Catholic Church with the Syrian Orthodox which dates from a 1984 agreement relating to mutual recognition of baptism, acceptance of valid sacraments and Eucharistic sharing in some circumstances. However, Armenian and Coptic Orthodox do not recognise Catholic baptism and there is clearly tension between Armenian and Coptic Orthodox. Aims and objectives of the dialogue were clarified. Other Oriental Orthodox included in the dialogue, but less prominent, are British, Ethiopian and Indian.

Other reports were given as follows:

CYTUN had been having difficulties with staffing, finance and lack of purpose and direction. Finance issues have been resolved and there had been staff changes which necessitated an awayday for bonding. However, church leadership in Wales was not always ecumenically minded as instanced in launching initiatives without prior recourse to consulting with ecumenical partners.

There had been a joint meeting of the Church of England House of Bishops and the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales in November 2008. There were two inputs from Archbishop Rowan Williams and Cardinal Cormac.

Ushaw had hosted a colloquium in January 2009 on Receptive Ecumenism which had been attended by a number of high profile individuals working in the ecumenical field including Cardinal Walter Kasper.

A report was given on the Lambeth Conference by Msgr Andrew Faley, who had been an official observer from the Catholic Church at this event. The conference proper had been preceded by a three-day retreat led by Archbishop Rowan Williams at which only the bishops were present. The conference had a daily round of morning, mid-day and evening prayer as well as a daily eucharist. There were bible study groups on the I AM sayings of Jesus in John's gospel. A feature was the indaba groups each consisting of around 40 participants. The original African word means to chew over until final resolution. However, the time frame for these groups did not allow for resolution of the issues discussed to be achieved. There were a large number of peripheral seminar-style events

on specialist topics. The one on ARCIC ecumenical dialogue was poorly attended, there being more Catholics, from the observer contingent, than Anglicans present.

The Church of England General Synod in July 2009 had debated the admission of women to the episcopate at which it was noticeable that the Anglo-Catholic movement within the CofE was being painted out of the picture. The synod also debated the Anglican-Orthodox bilateral agreed statement on 'the Church of the Triune God'. There was a discernable anti-Catholic polemic in this document.

On matters Anglican, it was noted that a Primates meeting in Egypt was imminent and is seen as a crucial event towards the resolution of tensions in the Anglican Communion.

SSPX

In view of the recent decision by Pope Benedict to remove the 1988 excommunications of the four SSPX bishops Bishop Michael Evans clarified what practical significance this act had. The removal of the excommunications was a positive gesture to the SSPX and a step to ongoing discussions towards full communion. The SSPX remains in schism with the Catholic Church and the SSPX bishops are still under suspension so that all celebrations of the sacraments by the society continue to be illicit. Full communion is dependent on the SSPX giving full assent to the magisterium of the Church including the teaching of the Second Vatican Council and Pope Paul VI. Given that the basis of the SSPX's existence is its rejection of Vatican II teaching, including the Church's commitment and involvement in ecumenism, Bishop Michael finds it difficult to foresee the SSPX coming into full communion as it will have to abandon its current stance to the teaching of Vatican II.

Ecumenical Instruments

The CTE Forum in Swanwick will take place in September 2009 with Bishop Declan Lang and Val Potter as moderators. Fr. Timothy Radcliffe O.P. will be the keynote speaker and the forum title is *Churches Acting Together: Changing Churches in a Changing Society*.

A 2009 Lent course has been generated by CTBI, in conjunction with the BBC, called *Sense Making Faith* in which broadcasts on BBC Radio 4 will provide input. A question was asked whether material for national Lent courses was now being produced annually as opposed to every other year in view of established practice up until now and given that there was a national course in 2008. No one could answer this question.

Generation of Handbook

Most of the meeting was taken up with exploring the possible content for a proposed handbook of practical resources for local ecumenism for use at the parish level. Ideas were generated from the work of small groups in order that the CCU can expand and produce a draft text.