

**‘Not Strangers but Pilgrims’
The 1980s Inter-Church Process:
From Councils of Churches to Churches Together**

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COLIN:

1982: Success and Failure

1982 was both an ‘annus mirabilis’ and an ‘annus terribilis’ for the churches in Britain and Ireland.

It was the year of the visit in May of Pope John Paul II to England, Wales and Scotland. And in his address in Glasgow the Pope turned to ‘the larger community of believers in Christ’ and said these words:

We are only pilgrims on this earth, making our way towards that heavenly Kingdom promised to us as God’s children. Beloved brethren in Christ, for the future, can we not make that pilgrimage together hand-in-hand...doing all we can ‘to preserve the unity of the Spirit by the peace that binds us together’? This would surely bring down upon us the blessing of God our Father on our pilgrim way.¹

It was the year of the publication of *The Final Report* of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission. This concluded with the conviction that

The convergence reflected in our Final Report would appear to call for the establishing of a new relationship between our Churches as a next stage in the journey towards Christian unity.²

It was the year also of the publication by the World Council of Churches’ Faith and Order Commission of its Lima Report on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* with its invitation to all churches

to prepare an official response to this text at the highest appropriate level of authority,³

an invitation which generated a massive amount of theological discussion and debate at all levels worldwide.

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¹ *The Pope in Britain: Collected Homilies and Speeches*, St Paul Publications 1982, pp 78-9.

² Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, *The Final Report*, CTS/SPCK 1982, p 99.

³ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No 111, WCC Geneva, 1982.

But 1982 was also the year of the failure in July of the proposed Covenant in England between the Church of England, the Methodist Church, the United Reformed Church and the Moravian Church. Its failure to achieve the required majority in the General Synod of the Church of England meant that for the first time since 1954 there were no formal conversations about church union taking place in England. This was a heavy blow for ecumenists, although in Scotland, Wales and Ireland conversations which had also been the outcome of the 1964 Nottingham Faith and Order Conference were then still continuing.

MARTIN:

The Background

In order to understand the effect of these events on the churches we need to look at the background.

In 1982 the British Council of Churches had existed for forty years. At its 40th Anniversary Celebrations its President, Archbishop Runcie quoted the old song:

Forty years on growing older and older, shorter in wind and in memory long,
Feeble of foot and rheumatic of shoulder, what would it help you that once you were strong?

He quickly corrected that sentiment by saying ‘We have never needed the BCC more’, but in fact many people, fully committed to the Council, had begun to question its effectiveness, and the BCC itself had established a Policy Review Group.⁴ Indeed, as early as summer 1982 Dr Philip Morgan, the General Secretary of the British Council of Churches, said publicly that the ecumenical events of that year had meant that the BCC should put its own existence ‘into the melting pot’. He envisaged a time when ‘a different kind of instrument than we have now at the BCC would be required’.

What were the weaknesses limiting the BCC’s ability ‘to promote Christian Unity’?⁵ I list four:

1. Its structure was such that the decision-making bodies of its member churches did not need to take notice of its recommendations, and too often they ignored them. It had engendered good personal relations between the church representatives who met at its meetings; but far from drawing the institutional and decision-making structures of the churches closer together, it had become yet another institution alongside them.
2. Although it had at times (notably at Nottingham in 1964) done considerable and effective work on issues directly concerned with Christian Unity (Faith and Order), its member churches had from the start reserved actual unity negotiations to themselves.

⁴ See for example *After Forty Years: The Church of England and the British Council of Churches*, GS 548.

⁵ *Articles of Amalgamation 1942*.

3. While there were Irish, Scottish and Welsh national Councils of Churches or their equivalent, there was no English Council of Churches. This upset the Irish, the Welsh and particularly the Scots when they had to sit through BCC debates which concerned only England. It also meant that the BCC had not sufficient resources to put into supporting local and regional ecumenism in England. (In this regard it is significant that within days of the failure of the Covenant Proposals in 1982 Archbishop Runcie set on foot plans to permit Church of England local churches to engage more effectively in local unity, plans which led eventually to Ecumenical Canons B43 and B44.)

4. What was perhaps the biggest church in the British Isles as a whole, the Roman Catholic Church, was not a full member of the BCC, but only an active observer. It had in fact been discussing the possibility of becoming a member since 1970, but by 1982 it had effectively decided not to do so.⁶ I am not aware that it ever gave clear and specific reasons for this (except perhaps the cost) but I think that many were similar to the reasons which were beginning to cause unease among the BCC's member churches. Roman Catholics were uncomfortable with the fact that the BCC was not directly answerable to its member churches. The Roman Catholic Church did not take decisions by majority voting, and the places where decisions generally were taken were not at national level, but at diocesan level by the bishop and at international level by the papacy. Moreover, looking at the BCC from the outside, as it were, it could not see that it had contributed much towards the search for a united church, nor discussed much the doctrinal issues that kept churches apart.

The Papal Visit of May 1982 sounded an extremely positive note in what might otherwise have appeared a rather hesitant attitude of Roman Catholics to unity in Britain. In fact the BCC had sought an opportunity for an informal conversation with Pope John Paul II as soon as the visit had been announced on 31st August 1980; and Cardinal Hume and Bishop Cormac Murphy O'Connor wanted it to be an ecumenical visit, not just a pastoral visit to Roman Catholics. In a very important but largely unpublicised meeting in Canterbury with leaders of other churches in England, Scotland and Wales, the Pope issued an invitation to some of them to visit him in Rome to discuss further progress towards Christian unity in Britain. This visit took place in April 1983, led by the Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church, the Rt Rev Alastair Haggart, who was later to play a leading role in the Inter-Church Process as Chairman of its Steering Committee. As the report of the visit stated: 'The question of the Roman Catholic Church in England & Wales and in Scotland becoming a member of the BCC was not directly on the agenda for either Canterbury or Rome. It was unavoidably in the background of all our discussions'.⁷ Then from January 9-12 1984 the Roman Catholic Bishops invited leaders of other churches in Britain to meet and pray with them. In return, the Archbishop of Canterbury, as President of the BCC, invited the Roman Catholic bishops to Canterbury to pray together with BCC member church leaders from April 6-9 1984.

⁶ See *The Implications of Roman Catholic Membership of the British Council of Churches*, BCC 1972.

⁷ *Rome '83: Returning the Pope's Visit*, BCC 1983, p 6.

COLIN:

A New Initiative

Significant and lasting ecumenical progress can only be made when there is a willingness to move forward simultaneously at local, national and international levels. And there is frustration when what is desired at two levels is blocked at the third – most usually either at the local, if people are unready to accept what has been proposed ‘from the top down’, or when a national synod or assembly or bishops’ conference blocks what has been proposed at the international level and/or lobbied for locally.

So it was important that a new initiative was taken at the Spring Assembly of the British Council of Churches March 26-29 1984, which passed the following resolutions:

1 (a) to consult the member Churches and other Christian bodies on their readiness to share in a process of prayer, reflection and debate together centred on the nature and purpose of the Church in the light of its calling in and for the world;

(b) to consider whether the focus of this process should be a major conference by the end of this triennium;

2. to consult the member Churches, national Councils of Churches in Scotland, Wales and Ireland, and other Christian bodies not yet in membership of the BCC about developments to provide an ecumenical instrument more broadly representative of the whole people of God in Britain and Ireland.⁸

In Low Week at the end of April 1984 this initiative was endorsed by the Roman Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales, which added that the 1987 Conference should

consider the nature of the Church in the light of the Lima document on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, the ARCIC Documents on Eucharist, Ministry and Authority and the documents of the Second Vatican Council.

The bishops also welcomed the possibility of

regular meetings with those responsible for leadership in the Churches

and reaffirmed

the importance they attach to work for Christian unity at local level.⁹

⁸ *Not Strangers but Pilgrims: An Inter-Church process on the Nature and Purpose of the Church in the Light of its Mission*, 1985 p 2.

⁹ *Ibid* pp 2 -3.

In the light of generally favourable responses to these resolutions from churches and other bodies, including the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland and a number of the black-led Pentecostal and Holiness Churches, provided there was ‘mutual respect between all the participating Churches’, a meeting on September 18th 1984 at Friends House in London created a Working Party (of which I was ‘volunteered’ as Secretary by Dr Philip Morgan) which brought detailed proposals for what came to be called the *Not Strangers But Pilgrims Inter-Church Process* to a gathering of Church Leaders and Representatives at Lambeth Palace in May 1985. (The name, which occurred to me in the bath one evening, deliberately echoed Pope John Paul II’s words in Glasgow three years earlier.)

The Inter-Church Process was designed to take place in three phases, and at three levels. Phase I, from autumn 1985 to summer 1986 was a time to look at ourselves, our churches and our traditions, and to formulate our understandings of the Church to share with others.

At the Local Level a programme was designed to discover ‘the mind of the people’ through a ‘nationally co-ordinated but locally devised and produced ecumenical Lent Course in 1986’ for local churches working primarily with local radio on the basis of a common outline, with a centrally-provided resource book. This was accompanied by a questionnaire for individuals to complete, which would be analysed and evaluated and the resulting conclusions published.

At the same time a survey of local ecumenism was carried out by Hugh Cross, the BCC’s Ecumenical Officer for England, and by Noel Davies in Wales and Kenyon Wright in Scotland.

The resulting picture from all this was contained in *Views from the Pews* edited by the co-ordinator of the programme, the late Derek Palmer.¹⁰

MARTIN:

Views from the Pews

The idea that the Inter-Church Process should include a wide consultation with people at local level and diocesan or district level was in the minds of everyone, Anglican, Free Church and Roman Catholic. The Process should start from the bottom up. Robert Runcie showed that by his concern for local ecumenical work in 1982. He often said that to be real, work for unity had to be local. Archbishop Derek Worlock was keen to provide a positive follow-up to the Liverpool Pastoral Congress of 1980, through which the Roman Catholic Bishops had consulted their clergy and laity (the official bishops’ response, *The Easter People*¹¹, having been viewed as mainly negative). And although Cardinal Basil Hume would later warn Catholic representatives chosen to attend the 1987 Swanwick Conference not to betray their Catholic tradition, he was keen to get local priests and lay Catholics involved in the Inter-Church Process. For the Free Churches, of course, this was part of their ethos.

¹⁰ *Views from the Pews: Lent ’86 and local ecumenism*, BCC/CTS 1986.

¹¹ *The Easter People*, St Paul Publications 1980.

The only major precedent for an ecumenical consultation of people locally had been the *People Next Door* exercise of 1967.¹² Both Derek Palmer, who had joined the staff of the Church of England's Board for Mission and Unity in 1983, and I had been actively involved in that. Derek had also helped to pioneer the use of local radio stations to broadcast Lent Study and Discussion Courses. Derek, whose job was to encourage local work for Christian Unity in the Church of England, was also seconded to be the organiser of this aspect of *Not Strangers But Pilgrims*. This would be a mammoth task and preparation for it was already urgent even before the church leaders had officially approved such an exercise in May 1985. So before the end of 1984 Derek began to approach those responsible for BBC and Independent Local Radio to persuade them to approve the broadcasting of ecumenical Courses in Lent 1986. I doubt if anyone else could have done this. Derek's persuasive powers have become legendary. Very early on he gained the support of the Director of BBC Local Radio, who unfortunately then went abroad for a long period. Derek proceeded to approach the managers of all the local BBC and ILR stations to gain their support. Someone at the BBC Headquarters heard of this and forbade Derek to proceed on the grounds that the BBC never cooperated with ILR. An anxious wait for the return of the Director of BBC Local Radio followed. Fortunately he reiterated his approval.

Meanwhile I had started writing the book designed to be a resource for group leaders. It had five chapters for the five weeks of Lent, with suggested questions for discussion, and a questionnaire at the end to be completed and returned to Derek. I completed the draft in June 1984, but the group overseeing its publication made three important changes. They changed the draft title from *What is the Church For?* to *What on Earth is the Church For?*¹³ This embarrassed me at first, but I had to concede that it attracted readers. In the same vein they added cartoons and pictures. And they kindly told me that my attempt to write a history of the growth of church divisions in Britain was hopelessly Church of England orientated, and they found a Scottish and a Welsh church historian who between them rewrote that section.

In the event fifty-seven different radio stations broadcast their own versions of the Course, with personalities from their local areas participating. And some 120,000 copies of the book were sold. Between 60,000 and 70,000 local groups followed the Course (some listening to their local radio, some not), and well over 100,000 completed questionnaires were returned to Derek's office in the space of three weeks. Ten per cent of these were analysed by Trumedia in the Oxford Polytechnic Computer, and the results were published in *Views from the Pews*. They were summarised in these headlines:¹⁴

GRASS-ROOTS FIND A VOICE
JESUS HIDDEN BY JARGON
AFRAID TO SHARE
ENJOYING OUR DIFFERENCES
TIME TO BECOME ONE

Trumedia estimated that a million people participated in *Lent '86*. The numbers and the enthusiasm generated surprised everyone – even the ever-optimistic Derek

¹² *Agenda for the Churches*, BCC 1967.

¹³ Martin Reardon, *What on Earth is the Church For?* BCC/CTS 1985.

¹⁴ Op cit p 43.

Palmer. This was about ten times as many as had been involved in *People Next Door* in 1967.¹⁵

COLIN:

Reflections, Observations and Evaluations

At the National Level the participating churches were invited to produce ‘a brief and generally representative response’ to the central question: ‘*In your tradition and experience, how do you understand the nature and purpose of your church (or churches when the national body is a federation of local congregations) in relation to other Christian denominations and, as together we share in God’s mission to the world?*’

26 out of the 32 participating churches responded, and their replies, together with estimated figures of members, ministers and churches taken from the latest UK Christian Handbook, were published in *Reflections: How Churches View their Life and Mission*.¹⁶ This was co-ordinated by Vincent Nichols, then Secretary of the Roman Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales. In his introduction he described it as ‘a unique collection: churches confessing to one another, in charity and honesty, their self-understanding and their reflections on their relationships with each other.’

A third book, *Observations on the Church from Britain and Abroad*,¹⁷ which I co-ordinated and edited, had as its overall aim ‘that our picture of the nature and purpose of the church should be based not only on self-portraits but also on a number of sketches which would show ourselves as others see us’.

This included insights from the International Level, through Christian Aid – I particularly valued its argument that the aim of ecumenism should be to seek to create a ‘community of disagreement’¹⁸, with emphasis on both words - and from the Catholic Fund for Overseas Development, ‘third-world perceptions’ drawn together by the Conference for World Mission, and the ‘key concepts of the church used by various multilateral and bi-lateral international dialogues’.

Responses and reports were also received from a Conference in Liverpool of 170 young people from sixteen denominations, from the Women’s Interchurch Consultative Committee, from an analysis of the replies received from 40 out of the 100+ Theological Colleges to whom a specially formulated questionnaire had been sent, from the Association of Interchurch Families and from the National Centre for Christian Communities and Networks. ‘Some Congregational Independents’ offered their views, as did a member of the House Churches, but both emphasised that these had no greater authority than that of their authors. Both the British Evangelical Council and the Evangelical Alliance made contributions, as did the BCC’s Division of Community Affairs.

¹⁵ *Agenda for the Churches*.

¹⁶ *Reflections: How Churches View their Life and Mission*, BCC/CTS 1986.

¹⁷ *Observations on the Church from Britain and Abroad*, BCC/CTS 1986.

¹⁸ *Ibid* p 77.

Phase II from the autumn of 1986 to the spring of 1987 was a time of prayer, including the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in January and widespread use of a special prayer leaflet, *Pilgrims at Prayer*. It was also a time for gathering up and beginning to reflect together on the *Views from the Pews, Reflections and Observations*, particularly at an Interchurch Meeting of those in leadership in the churches in November 1986. Also, in addition to the three books, a popular broadsheet was published and widely distributed with information about what had and what would shortly happen, and with a summary of the findings so far on The Nature of the Church – what we are called to be, the Purpose of the Church – what we are sent to do, on the Unity of the Church, and on Renewed Ecumenical Instruments. These were taken from the Working Document prepared for the 1987 Spring Conferences in Nottingham, Bangor and St Andrews. (The Irish Churches had decided to be observers rather than full participants in the Inter-Church process, so there was no separate Irish Conference.)

Phase III was designed as a time ‘to evaluate and assess this process of prayer, study and discussion, in order to discern the way forward and to make proposals for the practical and organisational aspects of the churches’ mission and unity.’

Four Nations, Four (or Five) Councils?

Geography matters. Major questions - such as ‘should there be an English as well as Scottish, Welsh and Irish Councils of Churches? And, if so, what would then be the role of a British and Irish Council of Churches?’ - were considered at the spring conferences for England, Wales and Scotland, each with their different contexts and histories, held successively at Nottingham, Bangor and St Andrews between March 27th and April 5th 1987. And what should be the future pattern and structures of any new ecumenical instruments? Other questions were: ‘How do we *now* understand and view one another?’ ‘Do we see our different, distinctive traditions and insights as “held in trust for the rest”’ as the Religious Society of Friends suggested? And, ‘Are we ready to receive whatever God may give us?’

MARTIN:

Ecumenical worship: problem or blessing?

The groups which prepared the three conferences for England, Wales and Scotland, and then for the culminating Swanwick Conference, which brought together representatives from all three nations and observers from Ireland, took great care about planning the acts of worship to be held.

The English Conference was held at Nottingham, and produced much that was good, including the challenge for people to live in each other’s traditions, and a plea to strengthen local and regional ecumenism in England. But it also contained one near disaster. The preparatory group had asked that a rubric be put in the worship book at the point of communion in the Roman Catholic Mass inviting those not communicating to come up for a blessing. Unfortunately, through a misunderstanding, the rubric read:

Catholics present ... approach the altar. The rest of the Congregation may be seated during this time...

Some Anglicans were so incensed by this that in the next plenary session they vented their anger in no uncertain terms on Archbishop Derek Worlock who had presided at the Mass flanked by a phalanx of robed priests. After this session some Roman Catholics had counselled that they should withdraw from the Inter-Church Process. Fortunately Derek Worlock resisted this, but confided to me some time later that he had never been so rudely attacked in public in all his life.

I was a member of the group preparing the Swanwick Conference, the planning for which was virtually settled by this time. We had begun by planning the acts of worship which were to include a Roman Catholic Mass, a Eucharist presided over by the Covenanting Churches of Wales, a service for the Healing of Memories, and a Church of Scotland Eucharist. The rest of the Conference was planned around these and other services, which included 'options' from different traditions in the early morning, mid-day prayers, night prayers in groups, and a service led by members of the black-led churches. I was therefore horrified when we had our last preparatory meeting, after the Nottingham Conference, when the Roman Catholic member of the group proposed that we should cancel all the eucharists. He was immediately supported by the Ecumenical Officer for England. They had been unnerved by the Nottingham experience and thought it unwise to risk repeating it. Others of us argued that we should retain the planned pattern, but make sure there was no mistake over the rubrics this time. It was a very difficult discussion and planning time was short. In the end, since we could not agree, we had to vote. Derek Palmer, in his account of the Inter-Church Process, *Strangers No Longer*, claims that those wanting to retain the eucharists won by only one vote. In his and my view that was a crucial decision.¹⁹

Knowing that Cardinal Hume's briefing of Catholic representatives to the four-nation Conference at Swanwick had seemed to some of them cautious and even negative, I met him and Archbishop Runcie when they first arrived at the Conference Centre. As they met each other Robert Runcie put his arm round Basil Hume's shoulder and said: 'Now we all know that we've come here to get you to join the British Council of Churches!' This, of course, was not by this time the intention, but this rather risky joke by the Archbishop was taken in good part by the Cardinal.

Cardinal Hume presided at the first eucharist and emphasised that we were in real but as yet incomplete, communion; and he sensitively invited all who were not in full communion with the Roman Catholic Church to come up for a blessing. At the communion, virtually all present came up and the Cardinal found himself personally blessing the vast majority of the congregation, including the Archbishop of Canterbury and the leaders of the Church of Scotland and the Free Churches. After the communion there was an unusually long pause. Several people looked up and realised that the Cardinal had been so moved that he found it difficult to complete the service. Equally moving was the next day's communion service, led by the Covenanting Churches in Wales, when Roman Catholics, led by the Cardinal, came up in their turn to receive a blessing from the Presbyterian, Anglican and other presiding ministers.

¹⁹ Derek Palmer, *Strangers No Longer*, Hodder and Stoughton 1990, p 60.

But the conference was not all sweetness and light. It began on a Monday and by Wednesday evening some leading Anglicans started to say that they were going home. Most of the conference up till that time had been in small, inter-denominational discussion groups, which had been very valuable; but by then many feared that no decisions were going to be made. The Archbishop of York, John Habgood, who was chairing the process, got together with Archbishop Derek Worlock and went to see Cardinal Hume to persuade him that the time had come to say something about Roman Catholic intentions.

COLIN:

Transformation and Declaration

On Thursday morning the Conference met in denominational groups. After lunch Swanwick was transformed by Cardinal Basil Hume's words expressing the Roman Catholic Church's commitment to a new ecumenical partnership with other churches in Britain. He said:

'I hope that our Roman Catholic delegates...will recommend to members of our Church that we move now quite deliberately from a situation of co-operation to one of commitment to each other.'

He added: *'Christian unity is a gift from God and in these last few days I have felt He has been giving us this gift in abundance. It is also a process of growth...One step at a time, and Swanwick has been a very decisive one'*.²⁰

The Archbishop of Canterbury and other church leaders welcomed this statement, and he also spoke of the shift from *'ecumenism as an extra which absorbs energy'* to *'ecumenism as a dimension of all that we do which releases energy, through the sharing of resources'*.²¹

The whole atmosphere had changed, and this was spelt out in the words of the Swanwick declaration:

'It is our conviction that, as a matter of policy at all levels and in all places, our churches must now move from co-operation to clear commitment to each other, in search of the unity for which Christ prayed, and in common evangelism and service of the world'.²²

MARTIN:

This Declaration was eventually adopted by acclaim and personally signed by those present at Swanwick, but not before some heart-searching by Baptists. The phrase in the Declaration which concerned some of them was: 'Our earnest desire is to become more fully, in his own time, the One Church of Christ, united in faith, communion,

²⁰ Derek Palmer op cit pp 64 – 65.

²¹ Colin Davey, *Parish Priorities: Ecumenism*, BCC/CTS 1988.

²² *Not Strangers but Pilgrims: Report of the Swanwick Conference 31 August to 4 September 1987*, BCC/CTS 1987, p 4.

pastoral care and mission'.²³ Do Baptists want to be part of 'One Church'? Some Baptists expressed doubts, but Dr Beasley Murray, a Baptist elder statesman present, reassured them. Later in the Declaration its authors had picked up Basil Hume's phrase: 'In the unity we seek ... there will not be uniformity but legitimate diversity'.²⁴ The nature of the unity we seek is still one of the major preoccupations of the churches in Britain.

Working Parties and Proposals

Before he concluded his decisive speech, Cardinal Hume had turned his attention to the nature of the ecumenical instrument that would be required:

'The confusion in my notes mirrors, alas, the confusion in my mind... but I am confident...that there is in this hall a vast experience, skill and wisdom...and that the right instrument will eventually emerge'.

With the Declaration the real work of the *Not Strangers But Pilgrims* Inter-Church Process began. The Swanwick Report was agreed and published by the end of 1987. A first draft outline of proposals for British and Irish ecumenical instruments was produced and sent to participating churches for response during 1988. Meanwhile four Working Parties beavered away putting flesh on the outlines of the four new ecumenical instruments for England, Scotland, Wales and Britain and Ireland and then revising them in the light of comments from the churches as well as from local ecumenical groups.²⁵ (The Irish Churches had remained observers throughout the process, and had an interest in the proposals for the new Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland, while not wishing to make changes to the existing Irish Council of Churches, Irish Inter-Church Meeting - involving the Roman Catholic and other churches, and known popularly as 'Ballymascanlon'- and the Inter-Church Consultative Committee, concerned with 'existing joint schemes'.)

These revised proposals were then agreed by the Inter-Church Meeting, which had been responsible for the whole Process, and sent as a definitive Report (which became known as 'the Marigold Book') *Churches Together in Pilgrimage*²⁶ early in 1989 for decision by the participating churches at their annual decision-making bodies through the spring and summer of that year. It began with the Swanwick Declaration set in the context of the churches' 'pilgrimage' together. That was followed by a number of principles on which were based the actual proposals on Membership, Representation, The Role of Meetings (now that it was clearly stated that authority rested with the decision-making bodies of each member church), and Finance. The bulk of the book then outlined the proposals for the three National Instruments and the Four-Nation Body. A draft Resolution was suggested for each church to use 'rephrased in its own idiom'.

In addition to the establishment of a new national body for England, the Report proposed another new level of ecumenical work there – between the local and the

²³ Ibid p 3.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ *Reports of Working Parties on Ecumenical Instruments*, BCC/CTS 1988.

²⁶ *The Next Steps for Churches Together in Pilgrimage: Including definitive proposals for ecumenical instruments*, BCC/CTS 1989.

national – and called it by the uninspiring name ‘Intermediate Level’. This was particularly important for Roman Catholics, since that is the level at which many significant decisions are made. Some structures for working ecumenically at this level had begun in some places from the 1960s onwards, and in some places ecumenical officers had been appointed, but they were few and far between.²⁷ The Process had made it clear that this gap needed filling, and the person who set about it was none other than Derek Palmer. Scarcely had the Report on *Lent ’86* been finished before he appeared in my office at Church House, Westminster, to say that his contract with the Board for Mission and Unity still had a year to go and he didn’t want to twiddle his thumbs. He proposed to visit all the Bishops of the Church of England to persuade them to establish or consolidate arrangements for consulting or working with the other church leaders in their area, and together to appoint full- or part-time County Ecumenical Officers to enable this to happen, and to encourage and support local Councils of Churches and Local Ecumenical Projects in their area. By 1990 most counties had their ecumenical officers and some structures enabling the church leaders to meet for prayer and consultation. Mgr Michael Jackson, Secretary of the Roman Catholic Church’s Christian Unity Committee, was asked in 1990 what had changed the minds of the Roman Catholic Bishops since 1980 to enable them to join the new ecumenical bodies. He believed that the single most important factor had been their increasing contact and co-operation with the other church leaders in their dioceses.

COLIN:

1990: New Beginnings

1990 was a year of change, from BCC to CCBI (for legal reasons the words ‘Council of Churches’ were retained, and ‘Britain and Ireland’ added as a more accurate description of its geographical coverage). There was a new ‘Churches Together in England’, of which Martin was the first General Secretary, and ACTS (Action of Churches Together in Scotland) and CYTUN (Churches Together in Wales) came into being. There were services of inauguration and commissioning for each of these in early September, in London, Dunblane, Aberystwyth and, for CCBI, in Liverpool. I have a vivid memory of the colourful procession in Liverpool up Hope Street, from the Anglican Cathedral to the Roman Catholic Cathedral, with hymns being sung and friendly words being exchanged between participants, despite the protests of Ian Paisley’s followers with their banners denouncing such closeness between Roman Catholics and other Christians. I also have one of the Prayer cards on which we each expressed our hopes for this new beginning and received from someone else at the end of the service.

On September 1st 1990, the day of the change-over, I had a great sense of freedom, particularly from organisational and management responsibilities. I stopped being Secretary of the BCC’s Division of Ecumenical Affairs. I lost simultaneously a Board and its Moderator, its twice-yearly meetings and its programmes, reports and working groups, and the twice-yearly BCC Assemblies that made decisions and declarations

²⁷ See Roger Nunn, *This Growing Unity: A Handbook on ecumenical development in the counties, large cities and new towns of England*, CTE 1995, pp 2 – 4, where he identifies four different origins for intermediate ecumenical bodies: City and County Councils of Churches; Church Leaders’ Meetings; County/Diocesan Sponsoring Bodies; New Town developments.

by majority voting. I lost a department of ten people and the internal and inter-divisional meetings and responsibilities that went with it. The BCC had done many very good things indeed, from setting up the Community and Race Relations Unit to its Commission on Trinitarian Doctrine Today; from the 1964 Nottingham Faith and Order Conference to the 1974 study of Churches in Eastern Europe entitled *Discretion and Valour*. It had done an immense amount to foster the development of local ecumenism. But, as we have already pointed out, it could not go beyond the limitations of its constitutional structure; and the Roman Catholics would only ever agree to be observers, not members of it as it stood.

As Co-ordinating Secretary for Church Life in the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland I had a different role. I became a member of a staff team in an enabling body, whose task was to encourage the Churches *themselves* to work more closely together in a committed and coordinated way, to decide themselves to share their resources for common actions or projects, and to continue to search for deeper unity and communion. There was a different feel about it all. Its twice-yearly Church Representatives Meeting took longer to reach agreement, which it did by coming to a common mind rather than by taking votes. But any decisions it made were decisions of the Churches themselves, and were the more significant for that, whether it was to do with undertaking a new project together, such as the major exploration of *Unemployment and the Future of Work*, published in 1997; or sending delegations to visit churches abroad in places such as Malawi or Ethiopia or Albania, where it made a great difference that Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Orthodox and others paid such visits together.

The new pattern of working was through existing or reorganised Commissions, such as those on Mission, for Racial Justice or for Inter-Faith Relations. A number of Networks were also created, consisting of those with responsibility in the churches at national level for particular areas of work: those I was most happy to help come into existence were the Liturgical Officers Network and the Network of Church Publishers, and there were others which had already existed for some time such as the Consultative Group for Ministry among Children.

The work of CCBI staff members was primarily with the Churches' own headquarters staff and with the national Churches Together bodies in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. The criterion for such work was that it involved churches in two or more of the four nations, for example preparation for and follow-up to World Conferences, or responding to a request from the Orthodox Church in Albania for opportunities for study in Britain.

Some have felt that CCBI was less capable of being the prophetic and challenging body that its predecessor the BCC had sometimes been (however much it was ignored or resisted as well as welcomed). That may be true. But the change from Councils of Churches to Churches Together has had two major advantages, namely the authority with which it enables the Churches themselves to act or speak together, and the wideness of membership it enjoys. This has been particularly welcomed, not only by Roman Catholics and Anglicans, but also by the Orthodox and by the Black-majority Holiness and Pentecostal Churches, who have participated as equals at every level of the new structures, including the Presidency of six members. The same is also true for Churches Together bodies at national, regional and local level, provided they are

not, like the old Councils of Churches, ‘an extra which absorbs energy’ but rather a means to ‘release energy through the sharing of resources’ for God’s mission to God’s world.

MARTIN:

Churches Together in England

From the start of the Inter-Church Process it had gradually become clear that there were two views about the need for an English ecumenical body. One factor was the different geographical spread of the member churches. Some were structured to cover all four nations (e.g. the Moravians), some three (e.g. the Methodists), some two (e.g. the Roman Catholics of England and Wales), and some England alone (e.g. the Church of England). It would obviously be difficult for the Moravians to send representatives to five sets of meetings, whereas some Anglicans might have been keener to focus only on a national body for England. The decision to create Churches Together in England, however, was as much fostered by the Irish, the Welsh and particularly the Scots, who, as we have already seen, were fed up with discussing purely English issues in the BCC. Many Scots were keen to focus as much as possible on the Scottish ecumenical body. What everyone agreed was that there should be no duplication of work between the four-nation body and the three new national bodies.

We have already stated the very clear principle on which the division of work between the four-nation CCBI and the one-nation bodies was based. In practice, however, the division of responsibilities proved much more complicated. What should be the scope of CTE’s role? Some wanted it to concentrate mostly, if not entirely, on encouraging local and regional (county) work for unity – to be a larger and more effective successor to the Committee in the BCC which had looked after Local Ecumenical Projects in England serviced by the Ecumenical Officer for England, Hugh Cross. Others thought that it should be the primary ecumenical body, responsible for almost everything. The initial staffing of CTE with one General Secretary and two Field Officers (one for the South of England and one for the North and Midlands) suggested that the former view had tended to prevail. If it had, then there would be no danger of the confusion of overlapping agendas between CCBI and CTE. But it was not as simple as that. The Working Group that had produced CTE’s constitution put down under ‘Aims and Functions’ a wide variety of things, only some of which were specifically limited to England. One which was not so limited was ‘to promote the theological reflection necessary to support the ecumenical movement and to enable continuing discussion of Faith and Order issues, especially of the nature and purpose and unity of the Church in the light of its mission’. There was good reason to give this task to the national bodies, since the make-up of the churches in the four nations was very different, and at least since the Nottingham Faith and Order Conference of 1964 it had been proposed that national groupings were the most appropriate settings for covenanting for union. In the event theological reflection was pursued in national groupings, and CTE organised a major consultation - *Called to be One* - on the nature of the unity its member churches were looking for, and some work on Baptism; whereas CCBI monitored links with the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches, including preparation and follow-up to its Fifth World Conference at Santiago de Compostela in 1993, and occasionally

gathered representatives of the four nations to share their experience and insights, for instance on the progress of unity conversations.

Social Responsibility issues initially went to CCBI. It had a staff member responsible for Public Affairs and it was natural that relations with the UK Government of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland should be its responsibility; and anyway CTE did not have the staff to deal with this. However, some public issues such as Education in schools were already managed differently in England & Wales, Scotland, and in Northern Ireland, and these would increase with devolution. I remember one occasion when two senior civil servants asked to see John Reardon, General Secretary of CCBI, and myself on a particular Government project. The first question we asked them was if the project would be confined to England or extend also to the other nations. They were surprised and asked if they could retire for a moment to discuss it, as it was a question they had not considered! In the event, some educational work and some Social Responsibility issues have come to CTE.

The views of certain church leaders have had considerable influence on the balance of the work between the national bodies and CCBI (later re-named CTBI). From the start Cardinal Hume made no secret of the fact that he intended to put virtually all his energies into CTE. He was delighted to become one of its Presidents, as was the Archbishop of Canterbury. The other two Presidents were the Moderator of the Free Church Federal Council, as it then was, and one person representing the other member churches (Orthodox, Lutheran, Quaker, Black-majority Churches). One of my first tasks as General Secretary of CTE was to summon a meeting of these Presidents, which, the Constitution said, should take place at least once a year. When at the end of the first meeting I asked how often they would like to meet, Cardinal Hume said 'Once a month'. The fourth President, who was from the Wesleyan Holiness Church, said he could not possibly do that as he had a local church to run. In the end they agreed to meet four times a year for prayer and discussion together, and they have been remarkably faithful in keeping to that.

For better or worse over the last fourteen years the staff of CTBI has decreased and that of CTE has increased.

Already in 1991 CTE produced what it called 'Suggested Rules of Good Practice' based on the general principle that work is no longer done by the ecumenical instruments on behalf of the churches, but by the member churches with and for one another. The first five rules were as follows:

- (1) Member churches should be ready to share their own vision of the issues which are important and their own programmes of work with the officers of the ecumenical instruments and with one another.**
- (2) When considering embarking on new items of work, or reviewing existing areas of work, member churches should ask themselves whether the principles of working set out in *Churches Together in Pilgrimage* and described above are adequately embodied in the way they propose to proceed.**
- (3) Member churches should take into account priorities established ecumenically when considering their own internal priorities for work.**

- (4) Member churches should be on the look-out for opportunities to share resources with one another by offering to undertake particular pieces of work.
- (5) Member churches should consider carefully the development of methods of working which further ecumenical cooperation.

Whether the churches locally, regionally and nationally are keeping to these rules is a matter for discussion. But they indicate the change-over from Councils of Churches to Churches Together, which the *Not Strangers But Pilgrims Inter-Church Process* aimed to bring about. The spirit of this process of ‘prayer, reflection and debate together on the nature and purpose of the church in the light of its mission in and for the world’ is summed up in what became the much-used ‘Pilgrim Prayer’:²⁸

*Lord God, we thank you
For calling us into the company
Of those who trust in Christ
And seek to obey his will.
May your Spirit guide and strengthen us
In mission and service to your world;
For we are strangers no longer
But pilgrims together on the way to your kingdom.
Amen.*

²⁸ *Not Strangers but Pilgrims: Report of the Swanwick Conference*, p 4.