

Society for Ecumenical Studies



Newsletter 17 July 2022

In this issue

- Message from the Chair of the Society for Ecumenical Studies, Revd. Dr. Elizabeth Welch
- Future events
- Editorial
- Of interest to you

www.ecumenicalstudies.org

Message from the Chair

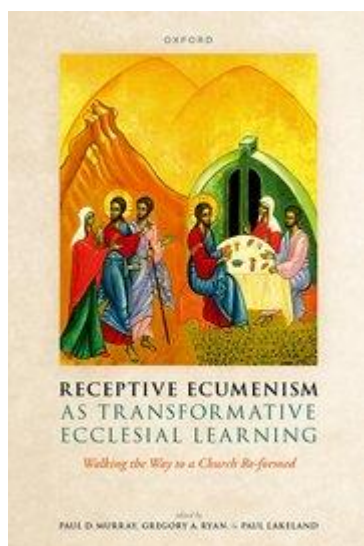
Greetings from the Chair of the Society for Ecumenical Studies, Revd Dr Elizabeth Welch, on this occasion of our last newsletter. The SfES Committee has recently taken the decision to post articles and papers on our website rather than continuing with a newsletter. We are very grateful to David Carter for the enormous amount of work he has put into the newsletter over several years. He now feels that the time has come to retire from the role of newsletter editor. I'm delighted to say that he will continue with writing articles and commenting on international dialogues etc.

Please be in touch with our secretary Revd. Dr. Alison Evans sfes.secretary@gmail.com if you have articles or other contributions you would like us put on the website. We do hope to continue to develop our written input to ecumenism, as well as our webinars and conferences.

The papers from the recent online seminar **Christian Unity – what is the goal?** by Paul Goodliff, Richard Bradbury and Andy Pettman are now available on the SfES website <https://ecumenicalstudies.org/papers/>

Future events

The Prophetic Voice of the Church, a webinar co-hosted with The Tablet will be held on **Wednesday, 14 September at 6 p.m.** The speakers will be the Very Revd. Professor Martyn Percy, Professor Ian Marshall and Revd. Heidi Petersen. **Further details will follow soon.**



On **Saturday 15th October** the Society for Ecumenical Studies and the Centre for Catholic Studies, University of Durham are co-hosting a day event in London ***Receptive Ecumenism as Transformative Ecclesial Learning***. The day will include a number of reflections by distinguished speakers from a range of Christian traditions on the themes of the recently published volume **Receptive Ecumenism as Transformative Ecclesial Learning: Walking the Way to a Church Re-formed** Edited by Paul D. Murray, Gregory A. Ryan, and Paul Lakeland

Oxford, OUP 16 June 2022 ISBN: 9780192845108

Further details to follow

Editorial

News from the SfES Committee

Since my last newsletter, the Committee has held its first post-covid live meeting, at United Reformed Church House in London. We worked further on our webinar plans and now have to record some significant developments.

At this meeting, Rev Dr Alvyn Pettersen and I left the Committee, receiving kind and gracious thanks for our service from our Chair, Revd. Dr. Elizabeth Welch and others. We were both invited to speak about our experience of the Society and our particular concerns for the future development of the Ecumenical Movement.

The Rev. Dr Callan Slipper, who has recently retired as National Ecumenical Officer for the Church of England, was invited to speak to us briefly about his concerns for the ecumenical future. Callan had previously been asked to consider if he felt able to take over as chair when Elizabeth our present Chair, resigns from that position at the 2023 AGM .

John Stayne, a research student at Durham, working on the Roman Catholic theology of charisms, joined us on the committee. We are all delighted to have a new committee member, significantly younger than the rest of us and we feel he will make a very good contribution.

We took the decision that this would be the last newsletter. In future, as well as routine notices from our secretary Alison Evans, there will also be a chance for any member to post something on the website and I would encourage you all to do that where you have interesting ecumenically oriented events, actions or news to record. Please pass on any contributions to Alison sfes.secretary@gmail.com

Ecumenical initiatives in 2022

We may expect some important ecumenical initiatives over the rest of this year in addition, of course, to the forthcoming World Council of Churches meeting in Germany. The official rolling out of the synodality process, which will give Roman Catholic laity a much greater say in the affairs and missional strategy of the Church, is being carried out energetically in the Diocese of Clifton (i.e. the Bristol area and surrounding counties). There will be moves towards synodality at global level. Much interest in this will be taken by the rest of the oikoumene.

Also, this year, the Pontifical Council Promoting Christian Unity will be hosting a conference to look at how much progress has been made on understanding of the Petrine ministry in ecumenical conversation since the famous appeal, in 1996, of the late Pope John Paul II, to other church leaders and theologians to join in a fraternal conversation on how that ministry might be used in the context of greater fraternal co-operation between the churches. The PCPCU have sought information on current thinking on the subject from both

Orthodox and Protestant leaders and theologians. I scarcely need add that evaluation of the teaching and work of the present pontiff will have made a fruitful contribution to reflection both inside his own Church and amongst the others.

There is now much greater sympathy and even enthusiasm for the concept of global spokesman, perhaps one should inclusively say spokesperson, for the Christian world, not just in internal ecumenical terms but in terms of addressing both people of other faith traditions as well as secular power and the rulers of the nations. Speaking personally, I have no difficulty in saying that I see Pope Francis as seeking to do for the world today essentially what Wesley tried to do for eighteenth century England, to commend the joy of the gospel and to encourage Christian service of all, particularly those in most need. In 2020, I wrote an article for 'One in Christ' on 'a wider role for the Petrine ministry', in which I pointed to five key reasons why this should be considered seriously, at any rate by Anglicans, Lutherans and Methodists, who have all given the matter some attention in their dialogues with the Roman Catholic Church.

One knows that moving together towards an agreed form of such a Petrine ministry, to use the modern post-Vatican II Roman Catholic term, is still fraught with complex questions, both theological and practical in terms of how such a leader could be discerned and acclaimed and recognised - it would, with all due respect, be by a wider group than the present body of cardinals in Catholic practice. It will be interesting to see how developing synodality may first adjust this within the Roman Catholic Church whilst also perhaps opening up the issue of how the other churches might contribute.

Report of the international Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue, 'Baptism and Growth in Communion'

Another interesting development is the recently released dialogue report of the international Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue, 'Baptism and Growth in Communion'. As is clearly stated in the Introduction to the Report, it was held up earlier by a concern within the PCPCU that some of its recommendations had, originally seemed to members of the PCPCU not to sit easily with established Roman Catholic ecclesiology. They had asked the Commission to do more work, which it has. However, it recognises that it raises matters for discussion that will need further reflection and work. It also records that one Catholic member has indicated his personal unhappiness with aspects of the document and his dissenting statement is added. The Committee are, however, anxious, to continue their work, particularly in light of the hope that, by the time of the quincentenary of the Augsburg Confession, there could be agreement on future steps towards mutual recognition of the life and ministries of both communions.

To put the matter in a tentative nutshell, the Commission argues that common recognition of the one baptism by separated communities has ecclesiological implications in terms of what baptism means for the communities in which they have been baptised. It calls for a

degree of mutual recognition of those communities as communities since baptism does not just affect the relationship of the individual disciple with Christ but with all others who belong to Christ. Each is baptised by another Christian acting within an established community of the faithful within which the common baptism is lived out with the aid of the ministries of that communion, of other faithful layfolk at the local level. As is asserted in the final section of the Report, the same trinitarian faith is proclaimed and believed, the same two basic sacraments of baptism and eucharist are celebrated and the same service rendered particularly to the neediest. In other words, three recognisable key characteristics are present, kerygma, leitourgia and diakonia, three key activities in and through which Christians in whatever church of Christian community grow in hope, faith and love, three common tasks in which they are nourished through mutual fellowship and the gifts and charisms shared.

Emphasis is placed on the fact that all the distinct Christian communities of New Testament times are seen as being part of the Body of Christ. These are the communities in which baptised Christians grow in faith and care for each other in that context created by the one faith in the Lord and the sharing of gifts. These communities all belong to the one Body of the one Christ and thus they are already committed to seek fellowship and unity with each other.

The Commission accept that such accord does not meet all the essentials for Roman Catholic canonical recognition of full churchly status, though they express the hope that when these essentials of fellowship and mission can be mutually recognised as between their two communions, it may be possible to take further juridical steps.

They end the report by suggesting six major commitments into which the two communions should enter as they search for that fullness of unity that they believe is Christ's will for them. These include first, a statement of the need to strengthen not only the individual consequences of baptism for growth in faith, but also the ecclesial consequences of baptism for growth in communion. Next follows a mutual commitment to acknowledge each other's place as communities in the body of Christ and to commit themselves to growth in recognition of each other's churches. Third, on the foundation of their basic understanding of the eucharist, to commit themselves to increase opportunities for eucharistic sharing. Fourth (and in my view particularly important) to 'mutually acknowledge that the Holy Spirit uses the other's ministries in preserving the community in faith, hope and love and to commit themselves to make progress in the recognition of each other's ordained ministry'.

Fifth is the commitment to receive the results of the earlier dialogues, which, I may add, have a depth and a richness, both at national and international levels, and lessons from which the wider Church as well as the immediately involved partners can learn.

Finally, a very basic mutual acknowledgement, that ‘Lutherans and Catholics have received the grace of God and commit themselves to proclaim the gospel together and to promote human dignity, solidarity, justice and care for creation’.

This is a very inadequate and very provisional assessment of their work, but I hope everyone will feel inspired to turn to the report and have a look at it, particularly members of other traditions whose churches, Anglican, Protestant and Pentecostalist, are still seen, by Roman Catholics officially, as ecclesial bodies rather than churches in the full sense. There is much to reflect on. The Report is now on the Lutheran World Federation website www.lutheranworld.org and I assume will soon be on the PCPCU one.

I hope to do further and much more thorough work on this report, myself. That reminds me that I am always happy to hear of ecumenically relevant work and writing being carried out by any of our members.

Report of the Methodist-Roman Catholic International Commission, ‘God in Christ reconciling’

Since I wrote the above, the latest report of the Methodist-Roman Catholic International Commission, entitled *God in Christ reconciling*, has also been published, after a delay while the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity examined it. It is now, fortunately, ready for the next meeting of the World Methodist Council later this year. It is too early for me to give a considered account but I will note one or two salient points. One is a strong stress on the need for a very balanced view of what unity in reconciled diversity means. It certainly does not mean that anything goes in variety of teaching or practice. Equally however, the Commission state (para 31) ‘A church in which Methodists and Catholics are united would require renewed structures to reconcile our two communions whilst maintaining the rich diversity of our distinctive spiritual endowments’. Chapter 3 is particularly interesting on the distinctive practices of reconciliation in the liturgical and general tradition of both communions.

It is clear the Commission feel they have drawn the understanding of reconciliation, and acts and practices in pursuit of it within the two traditions, closer together. However, as so often stressed in earlier reports, they recognise that there remains yet further ground to be tackled. Close attention is given in chapter 2 to the possible future development of the papacy and Pope Francis’ actions, in particular his stress on synodality and the need for the Church to become an ‘inverted pyramid’, ‘in which those with oversight stand beneath, in humble service of the people of God’, are commended.

Unlike its immediate predecessor, the tenth MRCIC report on ‘The Call to Holiness’, this report does not contain any simpler illustrations to help layfolk, particularly lay leaders in the two communions. My personal question I would like to share with local Roman Catholics and Methodists is, ‘how far can we see Wesley and Francis as similar in their emphases and

actions despite the time and other differences between their very different immediate contexts?' I think a lot can be seen-joyful nature of the Good News, the stress on mission to the poor and advocacy of their needs and interests, the stress on missionary discipleship. Also, the immense energy of the two men well into their eighties!

I have just finished a first draft of a possible article on this report which I think is right to claim that it has edged the degree of accord between the two communions a little further forward.

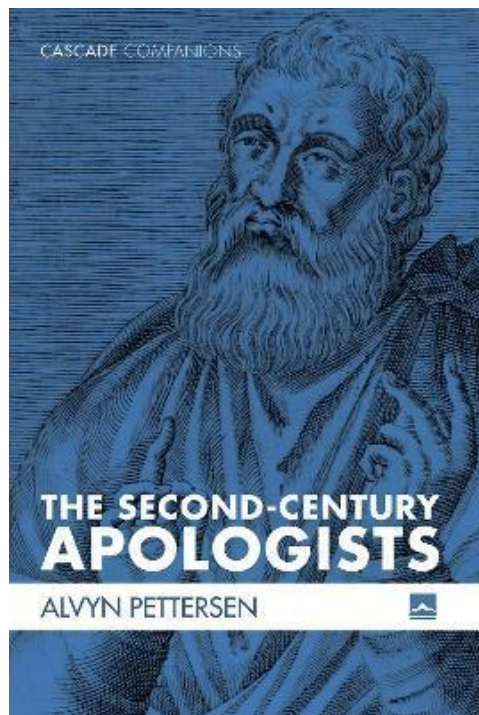
I record my thanks to those who, over the earlier issues of the Newsletter have provided me with material and have also been kind enough to thank me for those issues. I regret that my computer skills (or, rather, lack of them!) have sometimes held things up.

Wishing every blessing on all of you in all your activities, ecumenical and other,

David Carter david@carterbristol.eclipse.co.uk

For your interest.....

Members of the Society will be interested to know that Revd. Dr Alvyn Pettersen, Canon Emeritus of Worcester Cathedral who stepped down from the Committee at our June meeting, has had a recent publication



The Second-Century Apologists

Alvyn Pettersen

Cascade Books £19

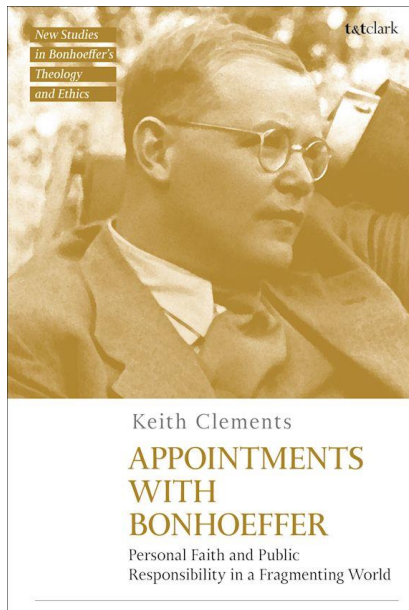
(978-1-7252-6535-6)

31 August 2020

A review by Bishop Christopher Hill appeared in the *Church Times* on 25 March. If you would like to see this, please contact the secretary on

sfes.secretary@gmail.com

Also, we are pleased to be able to pass on details of a forthcoming publication ***Appointments with Bonhoeffer*** by Revd. Dr Keith Clements, a former member of the SfES Committee.



Keith Clements sets out how and why Dietrich Bonhoeffer, more than 75 years after his execution by the Nazis, still speaks cogently to both the churches and society. Beginning with the earlier reception of him as a martyr figure and then as a provocatively original theologian, the book argues his relevance to contemporary engagement with public ethics, ecumenism, truth-telling and reconciliation, the relation between faith and democracy in a time of political extremisms, the issues of national identity signalled by Brexit, and the challenge of finding an ethical response to crises such as the global pandemic.

Bonhoeffer's perception that living representatively on behalf of others is both the key to who God is as known in

Jesus Christ, and the basis of all truly human community – this provides the connecting thread running throughout these chapters on what it means to believe and be responsible in a fragmenting world. Clements also links this thread to the 17th-century spiritual writer Thomas Traherne and the Catholic Modernist Friedrich von Hügel.

Keith Clements, a Baptist minister, theological teacher and ecumenist, was General Secretary of the Conference of European Churches 1997-2000.

To be published by T & T Clark (Bloomsbury) 25 August 2022

ISBN 9780567707055

Available in hardback and as an e-book. For prices and pre-publication discounts please consult the T & T Clark website.