

A Perspective

Major ecumenical concerns must not be detached and left in a layby. Comradely separate development is no substitute, and could be a complacent turn-off. The call to become one, not in any kind of oneness but in such as Jesus Christ had on earth with the Father, is not peripheral to the gospel but central to it.

There is no need to envisage a superchurch, structurally all-embracing. That would be to accept the top-down way of the rulers of the Gentiles. In the early years of the church, people worshipped and grew in faith in small house churches. These gained coherence by meeting and sharing life. When a major matter had to be decided, representatives of the house churches met in the colloquy of A.D. 49, in Jerusalem. They decided that church membership should be open to all, without any required conformity to Jewish customs and rites such as circumcision. Jerusalem did not become a headquarters. It was trusted as a reliable centre of teaching – as Antioch and Alexandria became and later Constantinople and Rome. There was no static headquarters. Headquarters were wherever the Spirit was moving (cf Iona in our day).

Iona may provide a sign of the church unity required. We members are bound together by worship and a rule of life which every member accepts and which every member can challenge if it is seen to become inadequate at any point of time. But members follow a variety of ways of expressing their faith commitment. I hold to the anti-nuclear stance of the Community but have never taken part in Faslane demonstrations. But no other member of the Community (to my knowledge, no one else at all) fought the Poll Tax through the courts to the point when my case was actually provisionally accepted for hearing by the European Court. Then John Major gave in. As in Paul's picture of many members but one body assignments may be undertaken which are distinct from one another yet together build up the body. After all, that is what it is like in the Trinity. There are distinctive assignments. These do not interfere with but reinforce the oneness, enriching it. The Trinity is the great model to guide earthly societies.

Lord God, reach deep into the deserts of this world to release springs of living water to refresh the face of the earth.

We ask it in Jesus Christ's name.

Amen