

## **ECUSA House of Bishops**

### **A Spirituality of Reconciliation Philip Shel Drake**

I am grateful for this invitation to address you twice – today and again tomorrow morning. By way of introduction, I am a professor of practical theology at the University of Durham, England. I was a member of the Jesuit Order for many years, am now married to Susie but remain a Roman Catholic – yet a friendly outsider/insider who has been committed to and engaged with Roman Catholic-Anglican reconciliation for most of my adult life. Academically I have been closely involved since the mid 1980s on both sides of the Atlantic in the development of Christian spirituality as an academic field and also ecumenically with its role in ministerial formation.

Over the next couple of days, I want to speak to you about the complicated but, I believe, vital theme of ‘reconciliation’ – vital for the inner life of the Church not least because it is a vital element of Christian mission at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The world desperately needs to hear a new and powerful word about reconciliation. Today I want to speak directly about ‘a spirituality of reconciliation’ and tomorrow morning to turn to a related and equally important topic of discernment – that special Christian tradition of wisdom that informs how we recognise the ways God is leading us and how we approach choices and decision.

I have noted that the Prayer of Consecration in the rite for The Ordination of a Bishop contains these words:

To you, O Father, all hearts are open; fill, we pray, the heart of this your servant whom you have chosen to be a bishop in your Church, with such love of you and of all the people, that he may feed and tend the flock of Christ, and exercise without reproach the high priesthood to which you have called him, **serving before you day and night in the ministry of reconciliation**, declaring pardon in your Name, offering the holy gifts, and wisely overseeing the life and work of the Church...etc. (p 521).

‘The ministry of reconciliation....’ Over the next two days, I would like to reflect with you about one of the most serious spiritual issues of our age – the vital importance of reconciliation and its centrality to the Christian mission. Why do I believe that reconciliation is so important humanly speaking as well as to what it means to be Christian? This is a theological question for, as the South African theologian John de Gruchy suggests (in his case, strongly influenced by Karl Barth), the doctrine of reconciliation is ‘the inspiration and focus of all doctrines of the Christian faith’ (John de Gruchy, *Reconciliation: restoring justice*, SCM 2002, p 44).

However, here I want to tell you part of my own story. I was brought up as Roman Catholic with mixed parentage – a Catholic mother and an Anglican father. As was common in so-called mixed marriages fifty or more years ago, my Anglican father agreed to my being brought up Catholic but quietly tried to introduce me from an early age to wider realities (especially by taking me on surreptitious visits to local churches during Sunday afternoon walks – something forbidden to Catholics at that time). He represented another religious world which was part of my roots but I was not free to explore until

years later. I was also educated from the ages of 8-18 at a private Catholic boys school where perhaps 25% of day students (and a smaller % of the boarders) were from other religious backgrounds – predominantly Anglican but also including some from the local Jewish community and the odd Muslim or Buddhist. I only discovered after I left school that such a religious mixture was extremely unusual at that time.

I remain close to one of my school friends, an Anglican priest, and we agree that the challenge of this early experience of diversity and dialogue at a time of sharp religious divisions marked us for life. John and I were on opposite sides of the Reformation divide but I discovered two things as we grew up together. First, separations and divisions offer no real answer to the human problem of difference and disagreement. The separation of the Reformation did not produce some form of pure religion. It was a tragedy that for centuries sadly encouraged a dangerous mis-belief that what is contrary to the Spirit of God lies outside ourselves in a demonised or caricatured ‘other’. St Augustine’s *City of God*, often cited as *the* manifesto of Christian separation from a sinful world is no such thing. The tares and the wheat, as Augustine made clear, are destined to remain together until the end of time because we have no means of recognising infallibly which is which. Indeed, we know in our more honest moments that the tares and wheat actually co-exist in everyone of us. Second, we came to believe that the world desperately needs to hear a new word about reconciliation. Christianity is called to speak that word – precisely and unashamedly a theological-spiritual one. But a divided

Church has no credibility in preaching reconciliation to a divided world. There is no point in *speaking* reconciliation unless we commit ourselves to living it in all its pain, ambiguity and incompleteness. This is a counter-intuitive message in our contemporary cultures so driven by the search for quick solutions, simple answers and clear distinctions.

### *The Words We Use*

The words we use are important. So what does reconciliation imply? Is it the same as political models of conflict resolution? Several words are often treated as interchangeable: reconciliation, conciliation and accommodation. Conciliation is associated with pacifying or placating. This lowers the temperature but does not necessarily promote deep change. Many peace negotiations are of this kind but fail to transform people at the deepest level. Accommodation or tolerance enables the establishment of pragmatic arrangements and compromise. However, reconciliation goes far deeper. Interestingly the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines reconciliation not merely as the restoration of harmony but also as 'the reconsecration of desecrated places'. If you like, all those people whose lives are marginalised and disempowered are 'desecrated places' because their unique value and identity as images of God is denied.

### *Costly Reconciliation*

Reconciliation, first of all, implies a complex balance between structural change and spiritual harmony. Secondly, the *process* of reconciliation is

evolutionary and it is important to avoid quick or 'cheap reconciliation'. Conflict always involves issues of power and so reconciliation implies a gradual redistribution of power in ways that cannot just be theoretical.

This leads me to the critical thought that reconciliation can only be *between equals*. Therefore it results from *making equal space for 'the other'*. This is a structural issue but it is also a psychological, theological and spiritual issue. At the heart of reconciliation lies an initial belief that everyone is diminished by the situation we seek to change. So, the quest is for new ways of collaboration that will empower everyone. The foundation must be a genuine attempt to avoid closed judgments.

Reconciliation demands that everyone has to modify their view of the world and to risk the way they identify themselves in that people so often identify themselves 'over against' something or another group. We tend to handle 'otherness' by different forms of exclusion. So, for example:

- We demonise – we fear those who are 'other' and seek to eliminate them. Our desire is that they surrender or die away
- We colonise – we think of as inferior and to be pitied. They become objects of our charity or our bullying.
- We generalise – we take care not to see them as individuals, but only as 'a type'. Our desire is to keep control of the situation and not have to deal with the challenge of personal encounter.

- We trivialise – we ignore disturbing differences and domesticate the strangeness by allowing some to become honorary members of our club. Our desire is not to be challenged by their presence but affirmed as good people for allowing them to join us.
- We homogenise – we say there’s no real difference at all. In a well-meaning way, we make premature pleas for tolerance and closure.
- We ignore – we simply make the other disappear by not acknowledging them at all.

### *Fear and Loathing*

The major problem with conflict and reconciliation is not moral or intellectual disagreement but fear and loathing. Fear is one of the most powerful currents in our contemporary world. On-going religious or ethnic divisions, as well as the ‘war on terror’, suggest how fear and its close associate anger shape our responses and cripple our ability to respond effectively to the deeper needs of fellow humans. The overwhelming imperative then becomes the satisfaction of emotional needs posed by fear and anger. We tend to rush towards emotionally satisfying but actually superficial actions – we detain dissidents, expel illegals or marginalise certain voices without addressing the deeper challenges. In my address tomorrow I will mention how fear and anger are spiritual blocks to effective discernment.

Fear and unacknowledged anger tend to promote evasion, hiding and paralysis and work in three ways:

1. Both provide a narrative structure to answer the question of why we are in a mess. This needs a clear plot and a plausible cast of goodies and baddies. The story line must be big enough to provide a convincing description of our fear which usually means that the threat is greatly inflated. Such narratives offer emotional reassurance on several levels. They affirm that it's understandable that we are afraid; that we are on the side of good versus evil; that good (meaning our perception of good) will prevail.
2. Both respond to our desire for uncompromising clarity. When we are fearful, we want to know who's on our own side and we want loyalty to be unconditional rather than complex. Everyone is assigned a label. Nowadays, there is a growing tendency to escape into willed ignorance – people do not *want* to understand if understanding is not straightforward.
3. Both prompt a desire to bond with the like-minded. There is much talk of standing together and shared values. But the quest for meaningful identity in an over-simple sense is always at risk of buckling under the weight of too many contradictions.

### *Spaces*

Reconciliation involves 'making space' for the other. We have to make historical space for the other. Our histories are never neutral or value-free. All histories are partial in that they are built on what is included and excluded. A critical question for every human community, including the Church, is what

kind of historical sense do we foster? Humans tend to rehearse a particular version of history as the justification for maintaining barriers of separation. We therefore need a new history that enables the emergence of a shared narrative to embrace everyone rather than a select few. A new history liberates everyone, albeit painfully, by relativising cherished myths and allowing the recovery of forgotten voices.

Every conflict leaves scars. A process of reconciliation must make space for *memory*. Reconciliation does not mean forgetting but re-membering in a new way, in a new context where we learn how to remember *together* rather than continue to trade memories in the same way we trade blows. Space for memory enables communities as a whole to begin to come to terms with the truth of the past. To have to speak and to have to listen is profoundly transforming. Reconciliation involves the healing of memories particularly of belittlement, rejection and denial. Part of a process of healing is to realise the incompleteness of any one story when isolated from the other stories. So a space for memory also implicitly celebrates diversity.

### ***The Process of Reconciliation***

Reconciliation is an extended process not a single moment. In the 'foundation stage', there will be *remembering* – all that has been forgotten or buried - and *recognition* – the need to begin with truth-telling. In any movement of reconciliation, everyone needs to acknowledge guilt, selfish attitudes and rigidity. We have to learn, patiently and slowly, how to listen to 'the other'

and to hear their pain. Listening, correct hearing separated from our deep-felt 'rightness' or prejudiced assumptions, is a tough discipline. In the end, spiritual reconciliation requires everyone to recognise the frailty of their own movement towards conversion and an acceptance of redemption. There is no one, no party, no group that is not bound to face the evil within – the hatred and the destructive anger. There is a profound connection between reconciliation and spiritual healing.

In the 'transformation stage' we must be prepared to accept some loss and grief. There needs to be *repentance*: of attitudes and actions, *refusal*: to participate in structures of exclusion and *restitution*: the ethical dimension of reconciliation. Because words and actions of rejection have desecrated the image of God in others, reconciliation demands repentance for attitudes and actions that promote the exclusion or diminishment of 'the other'. There needs to be a serious commitment not to participate in behaviour that violates the other. There is always restitution after repentance. This may involve a variety of things that are not material such as the restoration to others of their identity.

In a 'readjustment stage' there needs to be *reconstruction* – of a vision and of new forms of community; *empowerment* – of all those involved; *forgiveness* – the mutuality that is a long-term hope. True reconciliation is bound up with the reconstruction of a quite different world of discourse and practice. This

consists of identifying what is needed, creating a vision and making that vision a concrete reality.

- All must commit themselves to learning how to listen and to hear without distortion
- All must make the effort to enter other peoples' experience and to leave their own aside
- All must try to see themselves through others' eyes
- There must be a willingness, with the help of others, to disentangle truth and falsehood in one's own perceptions.
- We must be prepared to enter into a process of genuine discernment of what needs to be retained and what must be put aside.
- And, above all, we must accept the equal seriousness of the other.

### *Christian Reconciliation*

There are specifically Christian characteristics to reconciliation – it is not simply a socio-political word with some incidental theological-spiritual gloss. Protestantism has tended to emphasise reconciliation between God and humanity as a result of the Cross (cf. Rom 5, 6-11) and Catholicism has tended to emphasise how the love of God poured out upon us as a result of the divine-human reconciliation creates a new humanity in which the walls of division between people are broken down (cf. 2 Cor 5, 17-20 & 6,1). In practice, both dimensions need to be held in tension. Inter-human reconciliation is not simply a matter of giving each person their due but is really to give God *God's* due, by building a world and a Church that God's all-embracing forgiveness demands.

The Christian narrative of redemption describes the nature and destiny, alienation and glory, of humanity. It speaks of *alienation* (from God, from each other and from creation) but also of how God overcomes alienation, redeeming humanity from the bondage of sin. The Cross offers a new concept of reconciling love that risks everything, accepts death and rejection, and so enables the transformation of the unjust. The paradox is that it is out of weakness, rejection and death new life comes. Yet reconciliation is not yet experienced in its completeness – for the evil of human division remains a reality. For now there is an assurance, a confident hope that God will finally establish justice and peace. The Church, as prolongation of the mission of God, embodies proleptically the ‘story’ of reconciliation.

In addition, ‘reconciliation’ in Paul speaks of the one who is offended (God) as the one who takes the initiative in seeking an end to hostility. This contrasts with human assumptions that reconciliation should be initiated by ‘the offender’ and that an acknowledgment of guilt is an absolute *precondition* of reconciliation. Christian reconciliation also challenges the notion that difference should be viewed purely as part of the human predicament. Trinitarian theology speaks powerfully a God in whom difference is the foundation of existence. Ephesians also relates reconciliation to participation in the Church. A new covenant community becomes the carrier of the vision of a new humanity in which Jew and Gentile are reconciled as members of one body. Precisely by struggling to *live this life* we share in God’s work of

reconciliation. Linking together Ephes 2, 11-22 with Gal 3, 23-29, Paul witnesses to a radical transformation of human status – the walls of enmity are broken down, those far off, even the enemy, are made near.

What is it to ‘be in common’? Communion – existing in common – is an expression of the life of the Trinity. Its roots lie in the Greek word *koinonia*. 1 Cor 1, 9 Paul expresses gratitude for the Corinthians having been called by God into *koinonia* with Christ – often translated as ‘fellowship’ but actual participation in the life of Christ. *Koinonia* (2 Cor 13, 13) is a gift from the Spirit so that our ‘life in common’ derives fully from our *koinonia* with Christ in the Spirit. Early Christian writers later developed the theme that the *koinonia* between believers, brought about by *koinonia* with Christ in the Spirit is a sharing in the very life of God-as-Trinity a *koinonia* of mutually co-inherent relationships in which the unique personhood of each is substantiated in mutuality.

### ***A Spirituality of Reconciliation: 1. The Rule of St Benedict***

In the second part of this address, I want to turn our attention to some elements of what might be called a ‘spirituality of reconciliation’. I want to refer first to the Rule of St Benedict– and as a corollary to the Book of Common Prayer – and second to reflect on the Eucharist.

The impact of the Benedictine spirit on the origins of the Anglican tradition, particularly the emphasis on prayer and life ‘in common’ in the 1552 *Book of*

*Common Prayer* (BCP) and its later revisions, alongside more classical Reformation sensibilities, hardly needs rehearsing. Benedictine spirituality has a great deal to offer in terms of the Christian vocation of reconciliation. I simply want to mention three words.

First, the opening word of the Rule is 'Listen!' - *Obsculta!* This sets the tone for the whole Rule and its approach to the Christian life. At the heart of reconciliation lies a commitment to listening. For this we need to learn silence, to cultivate attentiveness so that we become capable of receiving what we are not and what we do not have. Silence counteracts a rush to angry judgement and destructive words. The Rule, of course, is full of scriptural quotations and resonances and an analysis of the Bible shows that 'listening' or 'hearing' takes precedence over activity. Listening, attentiveness, is associated with true wisdom and this, in turn, is connected not only with our relationship to God but to the notion of obedience – obedience to the Rule but, by implication, to the community and its life together. Listen contemplatively to your brethren for here God speaks; here is the 'school of the Lord's service', a school of discernment and wisdom. Listening implies giving oneself wholeheartedly rather than conditionally to the common enterprise. And, finally, listening implies being silent in order to learn or to be taught. Chapter 6 On Silence, *De Taciturnitate*, reinforces this. The word used is *taciturnitas* not *silentium*. That is, not merely being quiet but being sparing in what one asserts; being the opposite of domineering; keeping one's mouth firmly closed so that the evil thoughts or the lies in our hearts may not issue forth. In a very

different and profoundly challenging context, the same insight is expressed in the extraordinary spiritual diary of the Jewish writer Etty Hillesum just before she was sent to Auschwitz:

Monday 20<sup>th</sup> October 1941:

Sometimes I feel that every word spoken and every gesture made merely serve to exacerbate misunderstandings. Then what I would really like is to escape into a great silence and impose that silence on everyone else. Yes, every word can aggravate the misunderstanding on this too crowded world. (See Klaas Smelik, ed., *Etty: The letters and diaries of Etty Hillesum 1941-43*. Grand Rapids/Cambridge UK: Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2002, p 131)

The spiritual quality of 'silence' is closely related to reconciliation because it implies a refusal to engage in polemic which the Rule considers unchristian. The Rule goes on to say that acceptable speech in community should always be (i) modest, and (ii) reasonable. Other monastic texts talk of 'silence' as a necessary preparation for speech that is meaningful rather than ill-thought out. Do not rush to speak, the texts say, or to assert – above all, avoid speaking out of anger. By implication all *good* speech is informed by contemplation – of God first but also, by extension, in a contemplative attentiveness to the other.

Reconciliation is closely related to another key Christian virtue taught by the Rule - hospitality. RSB 53: *Omnes supervenientes hospites tamquam Christus suscipiantur*. All are to be received as Christ. But notice, the Rule goes on 'for he himself will say, I was the stranger and you took me in'. Christ is the stranger. This implies a deeper theology of hospitality than merely giving food and board to a passing guest. Commentators have always noted the *omnes* – the importance of inclusiveness and its particular link to *strangeness*,

or we might say 'otherness', in contrast to those who are 'like us'. The second word *supervenientes*, 'those who arrive', underlines the point even more. It is those who 'turn up out of the blue' – not merely those who didn't write in advance but those *who are a surprise to us* in broader terms. Close to the surface here is the understanding that the Christian disciple is not to be choosy about whom he or she keeps company with. And *hospites* is a nicely ambiguous word that can be translated as 'stranger' as well as 'guest'. The former sense is reinforced by the Rule's reference to Matthew 25, 35. And finally, *suscipiantur*, is literally 'to be received' but its meaning is *cherished* – the same word is used in monastic profession when the new monk sings *Suscipe* – receive me, cherish me as one of yours and no longer a stranger.

The final word is stability, *stabilitas*, as in e.g. RSB 58. From the earliest days, desert and monastic spirituality have taught the vital importance of *staying put* rather than leaving. One of the anonymous sayings in *The wisdom of the desert fathers* suggests (ed. Benedicta Ward, Oxford 1986, no 68) 'The Fathers used to say, "If a temptation comes to you in the place where you live, do not leave the place at the time of temptation, for wherever you go you will find that which you fled from there before you. But stay until the temptation is past that your departure may not cause offence and may be done in peace, and then you will not cause any distress amongst those who dwell in the place"'. There is much here – for example, the wisdom of not making life-changing decisions while in spiritual desolation (which may manifest itself in a variety of ways in communities such as frustration, dislike and anger). I

will return to the question of desolation and decisions tomorrow when I speak about discernment. But there is also the sense of not leaving the place where there is struggle, affliction or warfare – or, at least, not assuming that the presence of these things is a sign of being in the wrong place or that there is anywhere where such realities are not present. The saying I quoted is immediately followed by the tale (Ward no. 69) of the monk who *did* leave because he was so regularly angry with the brethren. He eventually returns chastened once he learned that ‘everywhere there is warfare, endurance and the help of God’. In this spirit, the teaching on ‘stability’ in the Rule implies rootedness in a place, fidelity to the community and perseverance, endurance and faithfulness – emulating the patience of Christ on the Cross. If reconciliation is the powerful work of God of which the Church’s life is a witness, it can of course only happen if we stay put rather than seek a quieter haven!

### ***Spirituality 2: The BCP***

Turning to Cranmer’s appropriation of the common prayer of the Rule in the BCP, this is more than a matter of liturgy. First, prayer is fundamentally ‘in common’. When we listen *together*, for example, we hear the scriptures in a particular way. This operates on more than one level. On the literal level, we hear prayers and scriptures spoken or sung aloud thousands of times in the course of a life-time and thereby, on a deep level, acquire a tacit understanding that every reading is always qualified and supplemented by

other moments, other readings. Isolated reading – or reading and praying only in the company of the like-minded is to read and to pray inadequately.

But the spiritual tradition of the BCP also embraces the notion that what is defined by and created in common prayer is a mysterious ‘common house’ that transcends easy definition. No, the ‘common house’ of the BCP is the place where all manner and condition of people rub shoulders, often uncomfortably, yet in that to and fro of spiritual negotiation find a common home. Note too, the obvious point that the BCP offers a tradition of common *prayer* as the source of life together. In such a life of prayer we also learn that God’s movement takes place in the *loci communes*, the ordinary places of this world - in the nitty-gritty not in a purified or protected realm set apart.

This is also manifested in the 17<sup>th</sup> century spirituality of George Herbert, so imbued with the spirit of the BCP, where in his famous poem, ‘Prayer’, one of the metaphors is ‘Heaven in ordinary’. This expresses the mundane transfigured by the radiance of divine glory. But it implies more. An ‘ordinary’ in Herbert’s time was also a menu of cheap food, or the part of the inn where this was served, or the common and disreputable people who ate such fare. ‘Heaven in ordinary’! This notion of God’s revelation among people of ill repute echoes another of Herbert’s poems, ‘Redemption’, where God, the ‘rich Lord’, is sought by the speaker yet not found as expected ‘in great resorts’ but shockingly among the ‘ragged noise and mirth’ of the kind of

disreputable people one might encounter in a cheap bar. Such a contrast to the notion of Anglican spirituality as genteel and respectable!

### *Spirituality 3: The Eucharist as place of reconciliation*

The heart of a Christian spirituality of reconciliation is the Eucharist. To live eucharistically is an act of commitment not to succumb to despair in the midst of the world's disharmony but to make our community a laboratory of hope. To celebrate the Eucharist commits us, even more radically, to cross the boundaries of fear and prejudice in an embrace of people in whom we are challenged to recognise the Real Presence of God incarnate.

Reconciled in the Eucharist, the members of the body of Christ are called to be servants of reconciliation among men and women and witnesses of the joy of resurrection. As Jesus went out to publicans and sinners and had table-fellowship with them during his earthly ministry, so Christians are called in the Eucharist to be in solidarity with the outcast and to become signs of the love of Christ who lived and sacrificed himself for all and now gives himself in the Eucharist. (WCC Eucharist 24)

The central Eucharistic narrative, the events of God's revelation and redemptive action in Jesus Christ, offers all human stories their space but at the same time reconfigures them. The redemptive narrative of the Eucharist makes space for a new history that tells a different story from the one shaped by human divisions. There is therefore an uncomfortable tension between this sacrament of reconciliation and efforts by Christians to resist human solidarity. At the heart of Eucharistic theology is the belief that human identities are determined by God rather than by our presuppositions. In the redefinition of human identity brought about in baptism and the Eucharist, Christian

disciples are bound *en Christo* into a solidarity with those they have not chosen and whose presence they have not negotiated. The Eucharist insists that humans find solidarity where they least expect and, indeed, least want it. In the Eucharist God in Christ is freely surrendered into human hands yet worshippers, in surrendering themselves to the Eucharistic dynamic, risk extending the intimate hospitality of food and drink to those who are alien and other.

Twentieth century movements of liturgical renewal, for example the Second Vatican Council, have sometimes been too Church-centred. Liturgical reform has brought about a rich re-engagement of the Eucharist with the theology of the Church. However, there is still a disengagement between the Eucharist as 'Church space' and as 'world space'. However, the Eucharist has fundamentally Trinitarian roots as modern Eucharistic agreements make clear.

It is the Father who is the primary origins and final fulfilment of the Eucharistic event. The incarnate Son of God by and in whom it is accomplished is its living centre. The Holy Spirit is the immeasurable strength of love, which makes it possible and continues to make it effective. (WCC 14)

The Eucharist is to be set firmly within the total action of God in creation as well as redemption. In that sense, the whole world is embraced within the Eucharist.

If we disengage Church space from world space in the Eucharist, the encounter with the risen Jesus may continue to be comfortably limited to what the Bolivian theologian, Victor Codina, calls a 'drawing-room communitarianism' not marred by any sense of solidarity with people unlike

us. A commitment to solidarity, however, is inextricably bound up with the other Eucharistic themes of repentance and reconciliation. These imply a transformation not simply of sensitivities but also of our practice of everyday life. It is perfectly possible, as Codina hints, to limit reconciliation to a magic circle. Christian reconciliation is much more challenging. It pushes us beyond familiar and safe boundaries. By following Jesus' command to 'do this in memory of me', to share bread and wine, the community is drawn into a dynamic of being broken open for the sake of the world.

In receiving Jesus Christ we receive at the same time all that makes up his Body. We find ourselves in the presence of not merely 'the whole court of heaven', a communion of saints that safely represents our past or our future. We also find ourselves in communion with *all who are in the present*. We know from the gospel narratives of the Last Supper that Jesus' action incorporated disciples who would betray him. Those we prefer to exclude from communion with us in the public realm are in fact uncomfortable ghosts at our Eucharistic feast.

### ***Conclusion***

The vocation of reconciliation poses the critical question is how much difference we feel able to live with. Being 'in communion' with one another is paradoxically both less than and more than complete harmony. It is above all else a risky commitment to one another within a single Body of Christ. Being in common implies 'living in the same house'. Being in communion is a

commitment to shared conversation – with each other but within a much deeper shared conversation with God.

Reconciliation is only possible if there's a moral willingness to stand back from anger and distaste in order to discern God's will. The problem is that God's will is assumed to be something fully *known* rather than something that we must patiently, prayerfully and painfully discern. As I'll say tomorrow, Christian discernment is not a programme or method but an attitude of heart and a delicate process of seeking a necessary spiritual freedom. Such freedom begins by knowing our own continual blindness. To be truly capable of discernment and open to God's will, we leave our preferred judgments and differ to the movements of grace. This demands great Christian maturity.

Living in a common house is a commitment to conversation as a virtue in itself. Pascal suggested 'A man does not show his greatness by being at one extremity but rather by touching both at once'. 'Mutuality', the principle of respecting diverse perspectives, involves renunciation – an asceticism, a disciplined 'letting go' of any claim to exclusive insight. Least of all should we pretend to see with the eyes of God for that would be idolatry. This form of self-denial can be painful and costly.

The world of our time desperately needs to hear a new word about reconciliation. Are we capable of speaking it? Are we able or willing to live it - or to attempt to live it - wholeheartedly? Do we have that desire or, at least, to

borrow from the *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius Loyola, do we at least have the desire of the desire?