**Visiting WCC, the Archbishop ABC at WCC 2018**

**of Canterbury's lecture on 'ecumenism of action'**

**From the WCC website:**

**During a visit to the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Geneva on 16 February, Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby spoke on an “ecumenism of action” as he also congratulated the WCC on its 70th anniversary.**

**“Bi- and multi-lateral theological dialogue over the course of the twentieth century bore much fruit but at times it could be appear to be akin to diplomatic renegotiation of borders: the barriers to communion still exist but not where we thought they did,” said Welby. “The underlying problem with these discussions, however, is that they are what I would call negotiation of the frontiers.” The negotiation of the ways in which frontiers are set down, and in which they are crossed, is one of the most difficult aspects of international relations at times of tension, he continued.**

**“Frontiers imply difference,” he explained. “They say that on one side of the frontier there is the ‘other’.”**

**Ecumenism that looks as though it is about the negotiation of frontiers is an ecumenism that is based on theological foundations of sand, he said. “Indeed, one might argue that it is not based on foundations at all,” he said. “Negotiated frontiers start with barriers.” One of the great gifts of the ecumenical movement is that it has allowed Christians from different denominations, who might once have kept separate from one another, to get to know one another, Welby reflected.**

**“There were times before, say, the 1960s, when people of one denomination might never have entered the church building of another,” he said. “In England today, and I am sure it is similar in other parts of the world, many congregations are made up of people who started their Christian life in other denominations.” The result of this is that traditions, ideas and worship styles from one church are brought into the other, he noted. “The wind of the spirit which has brought such movements into reality, is blowing ever more powerfully,” he said. “In many places it is becoming a hurricane.”**

**An ecumenism of action**

**An ecumenism of action says that faced with evil, we come together in love and show that we are one. “There is a great danger that the ecumenism of action turns into the ecumenism of being useful,” he cautioned. “We can easily fall into the trap of believing that if we cannot agree, then we can at least do something together that is nice and useful.” But this is massively to understate and to misrepresent the nature of the ecumenism of action, he said. “The world is crying out in need,” he said. “We can become too pragmatic about this, forgetting its theological foundations.”**

**The ecumenism of action is also based in this reality that need does not wait for theological agreement, but for the compassion of Christ, he added. “When non-believers meet missionaries who do not agree among themselves, even though they all appeal to Christ, will they be in a position to receive the true message?” he asked. “It is not the case that an ecumenism of action leaves theology outside the room.”**

**One of the genius characteristics of the WCC was, from very early on, to hold together the theological, diaconal and evangelistic ecumenical movements, Welby concluded. “Theological dialogue and discussion brings people closer together and sets up the framework for joint action,” he said. “Joint action brings people closer together, and sets up the relationship that enables theological dialogue and discussion.”**

**Receptive Ecumenism**

**One of the most important of recent ecumenical developments has been the concept of ‘Receptive Ecumenism’. This concept, based predominantly on the work of Professor Paul Murray at Durham University, takes as its premise that no single church or denomination within the divided body of Christ can be wholly without need of the gift of the other churches and denominations. Much of the ecumenism of negotiated frontiers is based on drawing up a list of red lines (a phrase that we heard the whole time in the Brexit negotiations – and that is the only time I will mention Brexit in this lecture…) over which you will not cross. Receptive Ecumenism looks beyond those frontiers and asks what it is that we can receive from another church or tradition. It turns negotiated frontiers into open borders.**

**As pointed out above the experience of the church in England at least is that people are less constrained by denominational boundaries than in the past. Boundaries between churches are more fluid. When a Christian family or individual moves to a new area, particularly in towns and cities, the church to which they go is normally a choice. It is as likely to be a choice based on style, music, children’s work, accessibility, where their friends go or where they fit in socially, as it is to be based on the denomination of the church concerned.**

**As a bishop conducting confirmations I regularly confirm those who have been adult members of non-episcopal churches, and receive into the Communion of the Church of England adults who have been confirmed in the Catholic or Orthodox churches. My friend and colleague the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster does exactly the same thing the other way round. And as we receive people we receive their traditions, their stories and their spirituality, and this affects and improves our own.**

**So looking forward, what I pray for is an ecumenism of action theologically underpinned.**

**Video from the lecture of Archbishop Justin Welby on YouTube.**

**Read the notes from the website of the Archbishop of Canterbury**