

For many of us, the significance of Pope Francis' visit to the little town of Lund in the south of Sweden on All Hallow's Eve. Indeed, perhaps we did not even know he had gone there. I might not have unless I had had two seemingly insignificant experiences. The first was sitting opposite the then bishop of Lund at the enthronement service of Bishop John Neill. She was gloriously apparelled in medieval vestments, the oldest in Europe and only taken out on the most important occasions. This time it marked the link between Lund and Cashel & Ossory which had been formed to mark the establishment of the Porvoo Communion in 1995. The other was actually visiting Lund in 2002 when Susan and I spent a few days in nearby Copenhagen. We took the train over the then new Oresund bridge and visited Malmo and Lund. There I began to understand something of the role played by Lund in the Christianisation of Denmark and Sweden.

Lund is about the same size as Waterford. It is primarily a university town, but is dominated by its huge cathedral which for a 700 years was the spiritual capital of Denmark until Sweden invaded Skane in 1664 and reduced it to a bishopric under Uppsala. In the mid 16th century the Scandinavian churches, like the Church of England, retained their historic bishoprics but reformed their structures and theology along Lutheran lines. It was also the place where the Lutheran World Federation was formed, their equivalent to the Anglican Communion.

Luther was traditionally portrayed by Roman Catholicism as the bogeyman *par excellence*, who had split the unity of the Church and was directly or indirectly responsible for many of its troubles. You were pretty sure that you were not going to meet him in heaven! But last weekend the Pope travelled to one of the holiest places in Lutheranism to embrace Martin and make it clear that he regarded him as a reformer whose protests were justified. The question that haunted Martin Luther about God's mercy is "**the decisive question of our lives,**" while the doctrine of justification "**expresses the essence of human existence before God,**" in other words Luther was not wrong in what he tried to do.

It was a recognition that both sides missed something at the time of the Reformation. In the emotional heat, the Roman Catholic Church missed ways of reforming itself. Luther and those around him pressed Rome in a way that just couldn't be taken on board, so, in a way, both sides misspoke. The Pope was acknowledging that Luther never set out to split the Church. His great rival, Calvin, trained as a lawyer, believed that the Church was so rotten that it needed a root and branch reform in its very structures, and as the Papacy was at the very core of its being and its problems, that the Pope was the personification of that New Testament bogey man, the anti-Christ. The problem with Calvin's thinking, was that it embraced a black and white view of all things. The form in which it occurred in the Westminster Confession of 1646 has

rendered dialogue impossible for the only path is submission to Calvinist ideas. The phraseology is pretty daunting: **There is no other head of the Church but the Lord Jesus Christ.** Well, we can accept that but can we accept what follows? **Nor can the Pope of Rome, in any sense, be head thereof; but is that Antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalts himself, in the Church, against Christ and all that is called God.**

It is rather hard to have meaningful ecumenical dialogue with those who espouse this when, as in Ireland, Calvinist ministers have to publicly sign this on ordination (In England, Scotland and many other countries, they simply assent to it as a historical document)

Luther and the Anglicans pursued a different path. Exasperation often led Luther to express his theological frustrations in rather earthy language, but his concerns were for the Church as he had experienced it. He could see so many faults which had to be dealt with: the need to restate of the priority of the scriptures, to stress personal faith and God's grace, and so forth. Luther passionately wished for the Church's reformation. What he desired was a root and branch re-examination by the Church of the Church, and it was not his fault that instead of doing this, the German bishops fled to the south and new structures for Church life in the German lands had to be put in their place. But the Augsburg Confession of 1530 never mentions the Pope, but simply states the teaching of Luther and his colleagues.

The symbolic significance of Lund, in Denmark and Sweden is that the ancient catholic episcopal succession was preserved intact and the bishops are the spiritual successors of their medieval predecessors, the same claim made by Anglicans, hence the significance of the medieval robes of Lund.

Coupled with the fact that last year the Pope met the Archbishop of Canterbury twice, Lund marks a great step forward in real ecumenical relations between Anglicans and Lutherans on the one hand, and Roman Catholicism on the other. Ecumenism is essential to effective witness, not the ecumenism of words and ceremonies but mutual living of the Christian life together. Already, episcopal Lutherans and Anglicans have joined together for all intents and purposes: it is not impossible that a Swedish or Icelandic priest could be elected as a bishop in our own Church of Ireland (the other way round is less likely simply because while their English is generally fluent, I am not to aware of Irish or English clergy who speak fluent Icelandic or Swedish!)

When Pope Francis was elected, it was interesting that the first commendation in the media came from the strongly low church and evangelical Anglican Bishop of Argentina who wrote that he was both a man of personal faith and humility, , and also that he had always treated him as a bishop of the Catholic Church and invited him to special events. Now, Luther, and by implication the English reformers who shared his intentions like Cranmer, Latimer and Ridley who died under the Marian persecution, can no longer be regarded as bogeymen to be

shunned, but as men who sought to reform the Church where they were from the massive corruption which threatened to overwhelm it.

Luther was not the only man to be appalled at the corruption and moral depravity of Rome when he visited it on the business of his Augustinian order in 1510, and the corruption that existed was referred to by the Pope.

"With gratitude we acknowledge that the Reformation helped give greater centrality to sacred scripture in the (Catholic) Church's life," he said, and referred to Luther as **"an intelligent man"** who was rightly upset by the corruption, worldliness, greed and lust for power that existed in the Catholic Church at the time.

And so we can move forward on the path of witness of the Lord's Prayer: **your will be done on earth as in heaven**, remembering Paul's teaching that the God we proclaim: **'There is no distinction between Jew and Greek: the same Lord is Lord of all and generous to all who call upon his name'** (*Romans* 10 v12) and in *1 Cor* 3 v 9 **'we are God's servants working together'** which follows this challenging text **'As long as there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations? For when one says, 'I belong to Paul', and another 'I belong to Apollos, are you not merely human'.**

After Lund it is impossible to say, as Francis' predecessor did, that Anglicans and Lutherans are 'ecclesial communities', and refuse to call them churches. The Pope has acknowledged the basic rightness of the forces that drove Luther to do what he did, and that the blind rejection of his righteous anger by a corrupt and greedy Church was the major factor that led him and his supporters to act as they did.

We may now move on: Lund was not about solving theological arguments, but ensuring they can now be discussed in love and mutual respect now that Rome has effectively accepted that it too has sinned and come short of the glory of God. To throw insults across the divide, call the other Anti-Christ or other epithets, is simply utterly untenable in the face of facts. And so we rejoice, and we need to put Lund into action, go to the other, acknowledge that we too have not always been perfect but the way forward is not to say 'You are wrong but I am right', but living and learning together, to work together with God for the building of his kingdom in human hearts and minds. If there is **a man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalts himself, in the Church, against Christ and all that is called God**, it is the person who insists not in reconciling but in trying to dominate others with his or her views, and is convinced he or she knows better than all others the mind and face of God, instead of going, meeting, discussing in love and moving on the kingdom of God's love in Jesus.