

## 35. Faith and Order Committee Report

<b>Contact Name and Details</b>	The Revd Nicola Price-Tebbutt Secretary of the Faith and Order Committee Price-TebbuttN@methodistchurch.org.uk
<b>Resolutions</b>	As set out in the Report

### Summary of Content and Impact

<b>Subject and Aims</b>	To provide a report on the work of the Faith and Order Committee
<b>Main Points</b>	Part A: General Report Part B: Response to Encountering Christ the Saviour
<b>Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)</b>	<i>Encountering Christ the Saviour: Church and Sacraments</i> (Report of the International Commission For Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council) <a href="http://worldmethodistcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/final-version-dialogue-book-from-Clark.pdf">http://worldmethodistcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/final-version-dialogue-book-from-Clark.pdf</a>

### **Part A: General Report**

The Faith and Order Committee offers theological consultation for work being conducted throughout the Connexion, and theological scrutiny for the work of the Conference and the Connexional Team. A Connexion-wide network of Methodist people, who volunteer their skills and expertise, supports the Committee in its work. The Committee drafts, scrutinises and comments on reports from its own members or from other parts of the Methodist Church, makes recommendations to the Council and the Conference, offers advice on issues related to the faith and order of the Methodist Church, and reports to the Conference.

In this report, the Committee outlines the main areas in which it has been working during the present connexional year.

#### **1. Ways of working**

- 1.1 The Committee continues to review its ways of working in order to provide a theologically rich, robust and also cost-effective way of fulfilling the remit of the Committee under Standing Order 330. The 2013 Conference agreed changes to the Committee's ways of working and the implications of these are being worked through. Re-establishing and building up the broader network of Methodist people who support the work of the Committee is a current priority.
- 1.2 The Committee has met three times since the 2013 Conference: in September for an afternoon meeting to establish items for consideration through the year; in November for a 24-hour residential meeting in London; and in March for a 24-hour residential meeting in Leeds.
- 1.3 The Liturgical Sub-Committee has been appointed and has met twice since the 2013 Conference. It will meet according to need, and utilise electronic ways of working.

- 1.4 In September 2013, the Committee held a joint meeting with the Church of England's Faith and Order Commission. The meeting explored current issues of relevance to both committees and each was able to comment on the other's items of business. The meeting offered an excellent example of joint working and reflection.
- 1.5 All reports, questions and communication to the Committee should be sent in the first instance to the Secretary to the Committee.
- 1.6 The appointment of the Faith and Order Committee is the responsibility of the Methodist Conference. The Committee expresses its thanks to Dr Jocelyn Bryan, the Revd Dr John Emmett and the Revd Alison Tomlin who will be standing down from Committee membership at this year's Conference.

## **2. Responses requested by previous Conferences**

The Faith and Order Committee has been working on a number of responses to specific Conference resolutions relating to the work of the Committee:

### **2.1 *Equality and Diversity***

The Committee continues to work with the Equality and Diversity Adviser in the Connexional Team and resource groups to provide a theological underpinning for this work. The Committee will bring a report on this to the 2015 Conference.

### **2.2 *General Secretary's Report 2011: sections 31-45 (resolution 2/3)***

The resolution directed the Ministries Committee, in consultation with the Faith and Order Committee, to consider the issues relating to ministry that were raised in the *General Secretary's Report 2011*. These were explored in a joint meeting of representatives of the two committees in September 2013, during which it was acknowledged that there were wide ranging questions about ministry in the Methodist Church which needed addressing as a matter of urgency. These arose from many areas of the Church's life including: work of the Ministries Committee on local pastoral ministry and Pioneer Pathways; as a result of questions regarding stationing, itinerancy and the nature and availability of presbyteral and diaconal appointments; as part of ecumenical conversations, particularly with regards to episcopacy; and in relation to some of the current work of the Faith and Order Committee such as the theology and ecclesiology underpinning the diaconate. Both Committees agreed that there was a need for a piece of theological work on ministry in the Methodist Church which explores the breadth of these and other questions relating to both lay and ordained ministry. A resolution to this effect is set out below.

### **2.3 *General Secretary's Report 2011: sections 61-64 (resolution 2/5)***

The resolution directed the Faith and Order Committee, in consultation with the Ministries Committee, to establish a working group to consider the issues raised in the section of the *General Secretary's Report 2011* entitled *God's 'worship' and our worship*. This was discussed in the joint meeting of representatives in September 2013. It is being taken forward by the Faith and Order Liturgical Sub-Committee in consultation with others, which is continuing to explore these issues and considering the production of resources for the whole Church.

### **2.4 *Memorial M13 (2011): Communion Mediated through Social Media***

A working party has been established to bring a report on the issues raised in this memorial, and this will be brought no later than the Conference of 2016.

## 2.5 ***Statement on Pastoral Care***

2.5.1 The 2011 Conference, under SO 129(3), directed that paragraphs 1-30 and the first two sentences of paragraph 31 of the report *The Theology of Pastoral Care* were to be treated as a draft Conference Statement and sent out for consultation, with comments to be sent to the Secretary of the Faith and Order Committee no later than 15 January 2013 “so that a revised Statement can be presented to the 2013 Conference by the Faith and Order Committee”. (2011 Agenda, p117)

2.5.2 The 2013 Conference varied its previous instructions to allow for the proper processing of this item and for a report to be brought to the 2014 Conference.

2.5.3 As a result of further work, the Faith and Order Committee recommends that the Statement on Pastoral Care does not become a Conference Statement in pursuance of SO 129, but instead is adopted by the Conference according to SO 131(17)(iii). It therefore requests that the Committee be permitted to undertake some further revision of the document in order to bring it to the 2015 Conference.

## 2.6 ***Liturgy for the Reaffirmation of Baptismal Faith***

The 2012 Conference received the liturgy for the *Reaffirmation of Baptismal Faith including the use of Water* and commended it to Local Churches and Circuits for experimental use according to SO 330(9). The liturgy, and feedback received, will be reviewed during the next connexional year and brought to the 2015 Conference.

## 2.7 ***Encountering Christ the Saviour: Church and Sacraments***

The Faith and Order Committee brings a response to this report of the International Commission for Dialogue Between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council in Part B of this report.

## 2.8 ***The Liturgical Role of Deacons (resolution 35/4, Conference 2012)***

The Faith and Order Liturgical Sub-Committee in consultation with the Methodist Diaconal Order and the Ministries Committee has undertaken work exploring the liturgical role of deacons within the Methodist Church. This will be taken forward and given further consideration as part of the work on the theology and ecclesiology underpinning the diaconate (as set out in paragraph 2.13), and be brought to a future Conference as part of that report.

## 2.9 ***Hospitality Between Orders of Ministry and Different Forms of Church (resolution 35/5, Conference 2012)***

2.9.1 The Committee has given some consideration to the issues listed in this direction from the 2012 Conference. The questions that arise relate to two further pieces of work and will continue to be explored as part of these.

2.9.2 The ways in which the Methodist Church can promote further hospitality, collaboration and mutuality between our orders of ministry, and issues relating to the role of the superintendent, will form part of the Committee’s work on ministry in the Methodist Church as proposed in paragraph 2.2 of this report.

2.9.3 The ways in which the Methodist Church can promote further hospitality, collaboration and mutuality between new and established forms of church will be given further consideration as part of the Faith and Order Committee’s work in relation to the ecclesiology of fresh expressions as detailed in paragraph 2.15 of this report.

2.10 ***The Church: Towards a Common Vision***

The Committee continues to discuss this convergence statement from the World Council of Churches Commission on Faith and Order, and will bring a full response to the 2015 Conference.

2.11 ***Joint Implementation Commission (JIC) Report***

The Faith and Order Committee explored the issues raised in both the short and long reports of the JIC, and submitted its response to the Commission in early January 2014.

2.12 ***Issues of Connexionalism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (resolution 35/10, Conference 2013)***

In accordance with the directions of the 2013 Conference, the Faith and Order Committee continues to consider issues relating to the nature of connexionalism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It has appointed a working party to undertake further work which will be carried out in consultation with the 'larger than circuit' coordinating group. A report will be brought to the 2015 Conference.

2.13 ***The Theology and Ecclesiology Underpinning the Diaconate (resolution 44/11, Conference 2013)***

The Faith and Order Committee has appointed a working party to undertake work on the theology and ecclesiology underpinning the diaconate in Methodism, its place within our Connexion and its place within the universal Church. This work will be carried out in consultation with the Methodist Diaconal Order, and incorporate the Committee's previous work on the liturgical role of deacons.

2.14 ***Diaconal Presidency at the Lord's Supper (resolution 46/2, Conference 2013)***

In 2012 the Faith and Order Committee made a report to the Conference regarding authorisations to preside at the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. This report included some exploration of the appropriateness of such authorisations being granted to deacons. The Committee therefore refers the Conference to this report and to the guidance contained within part 3 of book 6 of CPD: *Criteria for Authorising Persons other than Presbyters to Preside at the Lord's Supper*. The Committee would further draw attention to the word 'exceptional' in paragraph 6 of this guidance:

"6. Authorisations may be granted to probationers and other lay persons, and to deacons. They will be granted to deacons and diaconal probationers, however, only in exceptional circumstances (because of the understanding of the nature of diaconal ministry which is developing within the Methodist Church) and the Warden of the Methodist Diaconal Order will be consulted in each case..."

It should be noted that authorisations are granted solely by the Conference.

2.15 ***NM 103 (2013): the ecclesiological implications of the way we record fresh expressions***

The Faith and Order Committee is considering the issues raised in this Notice of Motion and will bring a report to the 2015 Conference.

2.16 ***NM 205 (2013): resource on cohabitation***

Following a resolution from the 2010 Conference, the Faith and Order Committee undertook some work to assist the production of a resource exploring cohabitation. If a resource were to be produced which enables different age groups throughout the Methodist Church to engage with the issue of cohabitation, then further work would be required and resources would need to be allocated within the Connexional Team workplan. In the context of the work being proposed by the working party exploring the issues arising from recent legislative changes regarding marriage, the Faith and Order Committee would be willing to give further consideration to its consequences for the issue of cohabitation, and to work with those responsible should any appropriate resource be required.

### **3. Scrutiny and consultancy work**

The Committee has engaged with the following issues, projects and Council papers, offering specific responses to paperwork, continuing involvement in the support of a working group, or commentary on the development of reports. Where appropriate, specific responses have been sent either to the relevant member of the Senior Leadership Group, or directly to the authors of specific reports, or to those providing the lead in these areas of work:

- A Generous Life
- Working Party on Marriage
- Navigate Bible resource
- Closure of Church Buildings report
- Pioneer Ministry Pathway
- Local pastoral ministry
- Recommendations from the Commission of the Covenanted Churches in Wales
- Liturgical resources throughout the year
- Presumed consent relating to organ donation
- Projects - in development or under review
  - Practice Based Formation
  - Local Preachers/Worship Leaders pathway
  - Equalities and Diversities Toolkit
  - Positive Working Together

### **4. *Work being brought to the 2015 Conference***

The Faith and Order Committee's report to the 2015 Conference is expected to include the following major pieces of work:

- Equality and diversity;
- The Theology of Pastoral Care;
- Liturgy for the Reaffirmation of Baptismal Faith;
- Response to the World Council of Churches statement *The Church Towards a Common Vision*;
- Issues of Connexionalism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

### **\*\*\*RESOLUTIONS**

**35/1. The Conference received Part A of the Report.**

**35/2. The Conference directed the Faith and Order Committee in consultation with the Ministries Committee to undertake work on the theology and nature of lay and ordained ministry in the Methodist Church. The Conference further directed that an interim report should be brought to the 2016 Conference, and a final report with any recommendations should be brought no later than the 2018 Conference.**

**35/3. The Conference varied the directions made in 2013 in respect of the draft Conference Statement, the Theology of Pastoral Care, as set out in paragraph 2.5.3 of the Report.**

## Part B

### A Response to the Report of the International Commission for Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council

#### Encountering Christ the Saviour: Church and Sacraments

##### 1. Introduction and Background

1.1 This is the ninth report of the Commission, following:

Seoul	<i>The Grace Given You in Christ</i> , 2006
Brighton	<i>Speaking the Truth in Love: Teaching Authority among Catholics and Methodists</i> , 2001
Rio	<i>The Word of Life. A Statement on Revelation and Faith</i> , 1996
Singapore	<i>The Apostolic Tradition</i> , 1991
Nairobi	<i>Towards a Statement on the Church</i> , 1986
Honolulu	<i>Towards an Agreed Statement on the Holy Spirit</i> , 1981
Dublin	<i>The Dublin Report</i> , 1976
Denver	<i>The Denver Report</i> , 1971

1.2 The ninth report discusses the sacraments of Baptism, the Eucharist, and the sacramental character of ordination. It also deals with the sacramental nature of the Church itself. It is the product of much hard work, accomplished in an atmosphere of “friendship and mutual understanding”, the result of honest dialogue which precludes “any compromise or ambiguity” (Preface).

##### 2. Chapter One: *The Paschal Mystery of the Death and Resurrection of Christ*

2.1 The Report begins with a meditation on Philippians 2:1-11 before moving to its first chapter, “The Paschal Mystery of the Death and Resurrection of Christ”. If they are to achieve full communion, Roman Catholics and Methodists must be able to give a united answer to the fundamental question: “How do Christians live “in union with Christ’s death and resurrection”?” (§13)

2.2 Agreement here runs deep: “Our life in Christ begins sacramentally in Baptism; and the Eucharist.... nourishes, strengthens and sustains that life.” (§15) “Methodists and Catholics hold this scriptural and patristic teaching in common, as a precious shared heritage.” (§17) This consensus finds expression in the 1999 Conference Statement on the Church, *Called to Love and Praise* (CLP), in a paragraph which draws on the 1985 Methodist response to the Lima Statement, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*:

“Methodists ‘recognize the centrality of the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist. They proclaim in word and sign the whole Gospel of creation and redemption.’ Both are powerful expressions of the gospel of Christ. Both anticipate and celebrate in the life of an individual and of the Church God’s purpose of salvation for all people.” (CLP 2.4.8)

2.3 This first chapter goes on to recognise both the “social” and “bodily” nature of salvation (§17 and §18). “Proclaiming the word, celebrating the sacraments and living in charity” are the Church’s fundamental activities as the body of Christ (§19), and within that perspective neither tradition polarises word and sacrament, but, instead, “see[s] the profound commonalities between them” (§20).

2.4 Roman Catholics place a greater emphasis on the objective value of the sacraments, whilst Methodists tend to stress the “subjective experience of salvation”, reflected in Methodist teaching on assurance. But the Report recognises that the two different emphases are complementary, rather than contradictory. (§23)

2.5 Finally, this first chapter asks whether there is a divergence between Roman Catholics and Methodists in their answers to the question “where exactly the Church is to be found” (§24). Again, there has been a difference of emphasis which may be seen as complementary, rather than contradictory, Roman Catholics moving from the community to the individual, Methodists at times beginning with the individual. Both traditions recognise the need for “continual reformation in the Church” (§24), whilst differing in their emphases and understandings of continuity and discontinuity. Chapter one goes on to acknowledge the most difficult questions remaining, commented upon here in the following paragraphs.

### 2.6 **Comment on Chapter One: *The Paschal Mystery of the Death and Resurrection of Christ***

2.6.1 The wide and deep agreement summarised here can be gladly welcomed and affirmed. This includes the recognition in the penultimate paragraph (§26) of the utter centrality of God’s grace in the life of the Christian and of the Church. It might have been helpful to British Methodist readers to acknowledge that “the Paschal Mystery,” helpfully explained in paragraph 11, is not a phrase familiar to most Methodists, even though what the words denote is central to the faith of both traditions.

2.6.2 Many British Methodists, however, will find difficult some of the content of paragraphs 24 and 25. Paragraph 24 notes the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church that “the order of bishops... succeeds the college of apostles” and that “the Church that Christ founded... subsists in the Catholic Church... governed by the successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him.” The sentence which immediately follows is troubling for British Methodists: “In that light, it is indeed notable that Catholics and Methodists nowadays see the opportunity of setting Methodist ministry within a more recognisable framework of apostolic succession.” It is a pity that these words (quoted again later in this Report in §147), which come from *The Seoul Report*, 2006, are taken out of their context in that earlier report. Sensitive issues are easily misunderstood.

## 3. **Chapter Two: *Baptism: Participation in Christ’s Death and Resurrection***

3.1 Chapter two, *Baptism: Participation in Christ’s Death and Resurrection*, begins with a “basic common affirmation” and the glad recognition that in many parts of the world Roman Catholics and Methodists “formally and explicitly recognize each other’s baptisms.” (§29) Both traditions also practise infant baptism. (§30c)

3.2 Here too, there are differences of emphasis which are not necessarily contradictions. This chapter addresses three of them: Baptism and faith, Baptism and new life, and Baptism and the Church.

3.3 On “Baptism and Faith”, there are differing emphases, but no discernible contradictions. Both “hold together personal belief and the faith of the community” (§39); Roman Catholics tend to emphasise the “objective”, Methodists the “subjective”. Yet for both, faith “is always personal but never private, because faith incorporates the believing individual into the community of faith” (§38). Consequently, the two traditions have much to learn from each other in exploring, for example, the relation between believing and belonging (§43).

- 3.4 Similar conclusions are drawn in the discussions of “Baptism and New Life” and “Baptism and the Church”. Both traditions need to explore together the relation between Baptism and new birth (“regeneration”) (§45), even whilst recognising the different language which each employs (§49). Roman Catholics tend to stress the objective effectiveness of Baptism, whereas Methodists tend to share Wesley’s own ambivalence about the relationship between Baptism and regeneration. At the same time, Roman Catholics recognise that “pastoral experience can appear to be at odds with this belief in the objective change brought about by Baptism” (§57).
- 3.5 Here, too, there is an opportunity for Roman Catholics and British Methodists to learn from each other, not least in their pastoral experience (§61).
- 3.6 The section on Baptism and the Church (§§62-66) raises an important question addressed in the *Comment* below. It expresses, together with the conclusion of chapter two (§§67-72), a welcome emphasis on Baptism as “vocation” (§68). This concluding section, “Baptized into the Life and Mission of Christ”, accords well with Methodism’s understanding of its origins as a movement raised up by God for mission, and, indeed, of the whole *ecclesia* as essentially missiological (and, of course, doxological). Particularly welcome is the conviction that “Baptism as a call into ongoing life and mission in Christ is a theme which deserves further reflection by our communities.” (§71)
- 3.7 **Comment on Chapter Two: *Baptism: Participation in Christ’s Death and Resurrection***
- 3.7.1 As with chapter one of this Report, there is a great deal to welcome and affirm here. Yet chapter two acknowledges a fundamental, outstanding issue: “... if, through Baptism, we are one in Christ and in his Church, it would seem that being united at the Eucharistic table would follow.” But it goes on to acknowledge “our varied understandings of the importance of visible, organic unity for the Eucharist...” and the need for “further study from a broader ecclesiological perspective.” (§64)
- 3.7.2 Many others, in different ecumenical contexts, have expressed the underlying question here: given the widespread recognition of each other’s Baptisms, why has more ecumenical progress not been made? Here is a question which needs an urgent answer. Its challenge is even more acute in the light of the New Testament, where Baptism is far more prominent than the Eucharist in Acts and the Epistles (though not, of course, in the Gospels).

#### 4. **Chapter Three: *The Eucharist: Presence and Sacrifice***

- 4.1 The subject of chapter three of the Report is “*The Eucharist: Presence and Sacrifice*” (§§73-134). Here the Report builds on the agreement expressed in *The Seoul Report* of 2006, including the crucial conviction that “when the Eucharist is celebrated... we encounter Christ anew in a way which ensures the living presence of Christ at the heart of the Church” (§73).
- 4.2 *The Seoul Report* also noted four outstanding issues which would need to be addressed in the future. Two of these are addressed here: “the particular way in which Christ is present in Holy Communion” and “the precise meaning of the Eucharist as the ‘sacramental’ memorial of Christ’s saving death and resurrection” (§74).
- 4.3 The Report notes “important differences of approach”, Roman Catholics preferring to speak of “‘offering’ Christ’s sacrifice”, Methodists (sometimes) of “‘pleading’ that sacrifice” (§74). Other differences are noted: both affirm the presence of Christ in the liturgical celebrations of his people, but Roman Catholics affirm also his presence “in the person of his ordained minister”, whilst Methodists prefer to speak of Christ present “in the faithful human heart” (§80).



- 4.4 Another difference is explored in the section headed by a quotation from *The Seoul Report*: “We encounter Christ anew in a way which ensures the living presence of Christ at the heart of the Church” (§§78-88). This important section begins and ends on a note of consensus: both traditions agree that Christ is present in his sacraments, and uniquely present in the Eucharist (§81), and that “the meaning of the Eucharistic banquet is most fully signified when Holy Communion is received under the forms of bread and wine” (§86). Roman Catholics, however, choose to speak of “transubstantiation” to describe the change of “substance” of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ (§83), whilst Methodists “seek not to define the mystery” of that transformation (§84).
- 4.5 The Report goes on to explore how “we enter together more deeply into the saving mystery of Christ” through the Eucharist (§§89-96). Here the two traditions seem to speak with one voice. Especially welcome are the acknowledged link with Baptism, and the emphasis on mission: “The Church is thereby anointed anew and empowered by God’s grace for its mission ...” (§91). The section ends with a recognition in all of this of the centrality of God’s grace (§§95-96).
- 4.6 In the remaining sections of chapter three, the Report acknowledges more common ground between Roman Catholics and Methodists. Whilst the language sometimes differs, there is unity about fundamentals. For example, British Methodists will be reassured by the statement that “Catholics firmly believe that Christ offered one, perfect and all-sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the world, and that there can be no repetition of or addition to that sacrifice” (§97). This should make it easier for British Methodists to interpret the words of the Council of Trent, quoted later (§108), however strange to them the Council’s language might seem: “In this divine sacrifice which is performed in the Mass, the very same Christ is contained and offered in bloodless manner who made a bloody sacrifice of himself once for all on the cross” (§108). Here, as the Report notes, the Council of Trent was echoing the teaching of the Letter to the Hebrews.
- 4.7 In the section “The risen Christ’s eternal priesthood”, there is an especially fine summary of the heart of our shared faith: “the innermost reality of Christ’s ‘Grand Oblation’ is an eternal mystery at the very heart of the Holy Trinity... Jesus’ death on Calvary can be understood as the ‘sacrament’... of this eternal self-giving of God the Son to God the Father in the love of the Holy Spirit, and of the Father’s ready welcome and acceptance of that self-giving.” (§103)
- 4.8 The sections on Christ’s oblation and priesthood are followed by further sections on our participation in the Eucharistic sacrifice, which implies the uniting of the Church with Christ’s self-offering (§§110-120).
- 4.9 Three further sections follow on the Eucharist as a “memorial” and on the Holy Spirit as the “Remembrancer Divine” (298 *Hymns & Psalms*) (§§121-130). Again, whilst our language sometimes differs, there is substantial agreement. So whilst, for example, British Methodists might be startled by the Roman Catholic belief that “the sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are one single sacrifice” (§123), they need not be when these words, quoted from the Catechism of the Catholic Church, are set in the context of the whole argument of this Report.
- 4.10 Chapter three concludes with a brief discussion of “The Holy Eucharist as it implies a Sacrifice” (§§131-134). We warmly welcome the statement that the Church’s “eucharistic sacrifice”, precisely because it represents Christ’s sacrifice, “is present with all its power for the salvation of humanity” (§133). At the same time we note the Report’s recognition of the issue raised here about purgatory and prayer for the dead.

#### 4.11 **Comment on Chapter Three: *The Eucharist: Presence and Sacrifice***

- 4.11.1 As with the earlier chapters, the far-reaching agreement between Roman Catholics and Methodists about the Eucharist is welcome and heart-warming. However, some reservations need to be registered here, not all to do with the differences between our two traditions.
- 4.11.2 First, many British Methodists will struggle to identify with some of the references to their tradition in this chapter. The early Eucharistic hymns of the Wesley brothers are quoted. In Methodist tradition these hymns are very precious, yet many are hardly known amongst Methodists today. Admittedly, Methodists worship books in use around the world differ, yet selected quotations from some of those worship books, alongside the Wesleyan quotations, might have enabled Methodists to recognise and own their tradition as it is presented here. A similar point applies to the references to Methodists sometimes speaking of “pleading” the sacrifice of Christ (§74). It is language derived from the *Book of Common Prayer*. This, too, is language which many British Methodists will struggle to identify with.
- 4.11.3 It is also a pity that the emphatic link, made in chapter two between Baptism and mission, is not developed further here in the discussion of the Eucharist. References to the wider world are quite few in chapter three. It would have been good to include a paragraph on an understanding of the Eucharist at the heart of the world, developing the reference to “humanity” in §133. In this connection, perhaps more might have been made of the important Pauline concept of ‘the fellowship’ (*koinonia*) of Christ’s sufferings (Philippians 3:10, cf. Colossians 1:24).
- 4.11.4 Finally and briefly here, the question may be raised of whether the word “transubstantiation” (the word, not the truth to which it points) is essential to the Roman Catholic understanding of the Eucharist. Might it not be that the word is the cause of misunderstandings amongst both Roman Catholics and the Methodists?
- 4.11.5 Generally, the argument and substance of this chapter are welcome, and, like the Report as a whole, it offers substantive theological content which makes demands of the reader; a point to which this response returns below.

#### 5. **Chapter Four: “*Ordained Ministry as Service to the Baptized*”**

- 5.1 Chapter four is devoted to questions of ministry. Like the earlier chapters, it maps out extensive areas of agreement: the New Testament is the starting point for understanding ministry (§135 cf. §147); Christ’s own priestly and intercessory ministry is the foundation of all subsequent Christian ministry (§§135-136); the apostles were chosen and commissioned by Jesus to continue his mission and ministry (§§137-138) and, quoting *The Rio Report* of 1996, “the whole people of God has been sent by Christ into the world to witness to the love of the Father in the power of the Spirit” (§140). Thus “Catholics and Methodists already share to a great degree a common practice of ordained ministry” (§142 cf. §148).
- 5.2 Yet the Report also acknowledges that there are difficult differences between the two traditions; more than those recognised in the earlier chapters on Baptism and the Eucharist. Particularly difficult for British Methodists are three sentences (abbreviated in the quotation below) in §143:  
“In Catholic teaching... ‘true succession of ministry is guaranteed only by episcopal laying-on of hands in historical succession and authentic transmission of the faith within the apostolic college’ [*The Dublin Report* of 1976, §85]... For an ecclesial community or tradition fully to be recognized as ‘Church’ there must be an episcopal succession from the apostles.”

- 5.3 The grounds for these assertions are not set out here, no doubt because that is not this Report's main focus. But it is perhaps worth pointing out that British Methodists need have no problem with the sentence which comes between those quoted above:  
 "The succession of bishops serves, symbolizes and guards the Church's overall apostolic continuity." (§143)  
 British Methodists have affirmed "that there already exists a basis for agreement on the principles of episcopal oversight as a visible sign and instrument of the communion of the Church in time and space" (Affirmation 7 of *An Anglican-Methodist Covenant*, 2001). (See also §59 of *An Anglican-Methodist Covenant: Common Statement of the Formal Conversations between the Methodist Church of Great Britain and the Church of England*, 2001; and §114 Guideline 4 of *Episkope and Episcopacy*, 2002.)
- 5.4 More sentences difficult for many British Methodists follow in §146 and are commented on below.
- 5.5 Happily, there is much more in chapter four about which Roman Catholics and British Methodists can wholeheartedly agree: for example, "the particular calling of the ordained ministry is to build up the body of Christ for the sake of its apostolic mission" (§153) and "both our communions reject a purely functional view of ordained ministry" (§154). There is one word, however, in an earlier description of ordained ministry, which must be queried in the light of the importance attached by Methodists to the ministry of the laity (see *Comment* below).
- 5.6 There are other differences, but not contradictions. Methodists, for example, tend not to speak of the indelibility of orders (§§157-158). There is an important recognition that "a difference in nomenclature... need not be significant" (§172). It refers here to the fact that Methodists do not call their ministers "priests", but the point has a much wider application.
- 5.7 The section "*Ministerial Priesthood and the Common Priesthood of the Faithful*" (§§161-172) is especially important for Methodists, and there is much in it to be welcomed. The Report points out how attitudes and discussions have moved on from the polemics of the Reformation (§168). The essential difference between the two priesthoods in Roman Catholic teaching is described in the words of the Vatican II document *Lumen Gentium* as follows: "the ministerial priest, by the sacred power that he has, forms and rules the priestly people; in the person of Christ he effects the eucharistic sacrifice and offers it to God" (§166). Most British Methodists will find the words "power" and "rules" in this context difficult, although there are more general references to apostolic "rule" in the New Testament.
- 5.8 Two sections on "Ordination as an Effective Sign" and "the Ministry of Oversight" follow (§§173 – 179 and §§180-183 respectively). The first, in discussing the liturgies and hymns of the two traditions, states that "the idea of 'intention' is central to securing full agreement between our two communions concerning the effect of ordination" (§§174 and 177). (This is an important point developed further in the *Concluding Comments* of this response.)
- 5.9 Methodists and Roman Catholics agree on the necessity of a ministry of oversight, but "identify differently the agents and instruments of authoritative discernment and proclamation" (§181). These differences are set out in §§182-183, but this section ends on a welcome note of convergence: "... the shared conviction that 'to maintain God's people in the truth is the loving work of the Spirit in the Church'" (*The Honolulu Report*, 1981).
- 5.10 Three outstanding issues about ordained ministry are briefly noted in Section VII: first, whether the historic threefold ministry is "the only permissible structure of ordained ministry" (§184); second, who may ordain on behalf of the Church (§185); third, who may preside at the Eucharist (§186).

## 5.11 **Comment on Chapter Four: “*Ordained Ministry as Service to the Baptized*”**

5.11.1 We return to paragraphs of chapter four noted earlier. First, paragraph 146:

“Although our respective ordained ministries will have to be reconciled if Catholics and Methodists are to enjoy full communion in sacramental life, nevertheless, ‘we joyfully affirm together that the ministries and institutions of our two communions are means of grace by which the Risen Christ in person leads ... and sanctifies his Church...’”

The paragraph goes on to say (quoting again *The Seoul Report* of 2006, and noted earlier in this response): “Catholics and Methodists ‘nowadays see the opportunity of setting Methodist ministry within a more recognizable framework of apostolic succession’”. This is clearly a major issue to which this response returns once more in the concluding comments below.

5.11.2 There is a further detail in chapter four to be noted. In paragraph 147 it describes ordained ministers as “the authorized and authentic public representatives of Christ’s ministry in the Church.” The word “authentic” here sits somewhat uneasily with Methodist tradition, as it appears to put a no-doubt unintended query against lay witness and ministry. It is hard to reconcile with the 1990 Report to the British Methodist Conference, quoted in *Called to Love and Praise*:

““The ministry of the people of God in the world is both the primary and the normative ministry of the Church”, for the Church is as much itself “in the world” as it is “in the church”.” (CLP 4.5.4)

5.11.3 Finally, there is the potential for misunderstanding in the final paragraph (§188) of Section VII (“Theological Issues Requiring Further Study”). The wording here might suggest that the question of the ordination of women is another example of the “objective” and “subjective” emphases of the Catholic and Methodist traditions. But British Methodists would want to say that their conviction that women may be validly ordained is in keeping with a dynamic view of scripture and tradition, based on our Lord’s promise that the Spirit of truth will lead the Church into all the truth (John 16.13).

## 6. **Conclusion of the Report**

The “Conclusion” (§§190-197) rightly notes the substantial achievements of this dialogue between Catholics and Methodists, noting areas for further work. The final sentence deserves to be quoted in full:

“Catholics and Methodists can be very grateful to God that their relationship in dialogue has so deepened that the most profound matters which shape their respective identities are now able to be discussed.” (§197)

## 7. **Concluding comments**

7.1 This Report is to be welcomed. The areas of agreement on Baptism, the Eucharist and on the ministry of the Church are encouraging in both their depth and their scope. There is solid ground to build on in the future, as the two Churches explore remaining differences, difficult though some of them will be. Roman Catholics and Methodists have travelled a long way together, particularly over the last half century, and for that we give thanks. The questions and aspirations expressed in the paragraphs which follow will, we trust and pray, further this shared ecumenical journey.

7.2 First, can more of our differences be seen as complementary, rather than as differences to be resolved? A welcome, recurring feature of this Report has been the recognition that many

differences in language and emphasis between Roman Catholics and Methodists are indeed complementary. Are there more? In particular, can there be a convergence on the words “indefectibility” and “infallibility” (§183)? Is the substance behind the word “infallible” inseparable from the word itself, or might recent research into the context and significance of the dogma of infallibility make it possible for Methodists to receive the substance, if not the word itself?

- 7.3 Second, two details of this Report merit greater attention. One is the dictum of the Methodist who was an early pioneer of this dialogue (the Revd A Raymond George): “Whatever is *properly* required as necessary for the unity of the Church must, by that very token, be the will of God for his Church.” Here, much hinges on the word ‘properly’. Methodists are increasingly coming to the view that a ‘universal primacy’ is a ‘proper’ requirement (*The Nairobi Report*, 1986 §58). *Called to Love and Praise* acknowledged that it is in keeping with Methodist connexional ecclesiology. Yet what other features of a universal primacy are ‘properly’ required? This needs further, urgent exploration.
- 7.4.1 Third and finally, the deepest question for us all is, quite simply, the will and purpose of God for his Church ‘at such a time as this’. What is the Spirit saying to the Church?
- 7.4.2 We should not doubt, after all these years, that the modern ecumenical movement has been the work of the Spirit. Yet it is difficult to avoid a sense of disappointment and impatience at the slow rate of progress since the World Council of Churches at Amsterdam in 1948. If we look back at the recent history of the Church and the world, we may say that the progress has been remarkable and, by the standards of change in preceding centuries, remarkably speedy. If, however, we look at the ever-increasing rate of change in the world at large, our ecumenical ‘pace’ looks rather different.
- 7.4.3 The question will rightly be raised: should the Church measure its ‘pace’ by reference to the world? Yet both scripture and Christian history show that sometimes the Spirit speaks from the world, rather than from the Councils of the Church. In the Acts of the Apostles, the call of the Spirit came to Peter not only through his God-given vision, but through the request to hear the Gospel from a Gentile centurion. *The Nairobi Report*, 1986, acknowledged the “fresh urgency” in furthering Christian unity in a world often “highly critical” of our divisions (§57). But those words were written some 30 years ago. The present state of the world underlines the urgency. The growing ecological crisis, not to mention the still-present nuclear threat, raises the question of whether catastrophe will engulf the world before we have resolved our remaining differences.
- 7.4.4 There is a general theological observation to be made, and it has been made many times. Given the widespread agreement between many Christian traditions about many fundamentals of the faith, and particularly about the centrality of Christ, Baptism, and the meaning of both the Eucharist and of Christian ministry, what holds us back? The problem between us (and by ‘us’ here we include most Christians) seems to centre on the ordained ministry and the exercise of authority and power.
- 7.4.5 The next stage of ecumenical dialogue will be not only urgent, but perhaps the most difficult thus far. It may be that all Christian traditions have yet to exploit fully the ecumenical potential of “intention” and of the “exchange of gifts” envisaged by Pope John Paul II in his encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* (1995).  
“Communion is much more than co-existence; it is a shared existence. Mutual sharing is at the heart of a life of holiness (*Called to Love and Praise*, 3.1.8). Communion involves holding in common the many gifts of God to the Church. The more of these gifts we hold together, the more in communion we are with each other. We are in full communion when we share together all those essential gifts of grace we believe to be entrusted by

God to the Church. Methodists and Catholics are not yet fully agreed on what constitutes the essential gifts, in the areas of doctrine, sacraments and structures. We joyfully reaffirm together, however, the words of Pope John XXIII that 'what unites us is much greater than what divides us', (Quoted by Pope John Paul II in *Ut Unum Sint* §20) and that our continuing dialogue is not simply an exchange of ideas but in some way always an 'exchange of gifts' (§28 *Ut Unum Sint*)." (§63 *The Seoul Report*, 2006)

- 7.4.6 In all of this we shall need to trust the God who guides us on "our providential way" (459 *Singing the Faith*), and seek to grow closer still to our brothers and sisters in Christian traditions different from our own. The word "one" in the prayer of Jesus in John 17 is crucially important. If God is One, and the Father and the Son are One, and if disciples are called to be one "as we are One" (John 17:21-3), what might this implicitly Trinitarian understanding of unity mean with reference to diversity within any future unity? Does it not also mean that we cannot grow closer to God without drawing closer to one another? Will it not also mean that we cannot grow closer to our brothers and sisters of one Christian tradition without also growing closer to those of other traditions?
- 7.4.7 We hope and pray that the unity which is already a reality in Christ will be effected and made visible more and more as we travel together towards the glory of Christ promised in the Scriptures.

### **\*\*\*RESOLUTION**

- 35/4. The Conference adopted part B of the report as its response to the Report of the International Commission for Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council "Encountering Christ the Saviour: Church and Sacraments".**