

World Methodist Council: Seoul 2006

Report from the Coordinator of Ecumenical Dialogues - Dr Geoffrey Wainwright

## I. The International Dialogue between the WMC and the Roman Catholic Church

This is our longest-running dialogue. Its establishment was approved by the WMC at London in 1966, in response to an invitation from the Holy See, following the Second Vatican Council (at which the WMC had official observers).

The Joint Commission presents a Report simultaneously to the WMC and to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity at five-yearly intervals. The “Seoul Report” is, therefore, the eighth in the series.

We aim to engage in both what has been called the “dialogue of truth” and the “dialogue of love”. That was exemplified in the very title of our “Brighton Report” in 2001: *Speaking the Truth in Love*.

In the Seoul Report, that same pair of concerns could be phrased in the words of Pope John Paul II in his 1995 encyclical letter, *Ut Unum Sint*: the “exchange of ideas” and the “exchange of gifts”. The fundamental truth and the fundamental gift are expressed in the very title of the Seoul Report: “The Grace Given You in Christ” (a quotation from 1 Corinthians 1:4). You have in hand a printed copy of this Report issuing from the Joint Commission and its latest round of work.

In this report, the Commission revisits a promise made in the Nairobi Report of 1986, which was entitled *Towards a Statement on the Church*. The sub-title of the Seoul Report is, in fact, “Catholics and Methodists Reflect Further on the Church.”

Pursuing the “exchange of ideas,” the Commission lays a solid theological foundation for an “exchange of gifts.” The Report shows a “very considerable” or “extensive” agreement between the partners on the doctrine of the Church; and then moves on to “the concrete reality of one another”: “It is time ... to look one another in the eye, and with love and esteem to acknowledge what we see to be truly of Christ and of the Gospel, and thereby *of the Church*, in one another” (paragraph 97). After engaging in that sober and affectionate gaze, the Commission then proposes a series of what Pope Benedict calls the “concrete gestures” that are essential for ecumenical progress (paragraph 139).

Very practical proposals are made that (a) will “make more evident the degree of shared belief between Catholics and Methodists about the nature and mission of the Church, as registered in chapter two”; (b) are “based on what Catholics and Methodists already recognize in each other as being truly of the Church, as affirmed in chapter three”; and (c) are “for the sake of the mutual exchange of ecclesial gifts and endowments between Catholics and Methodists that was identified as desirable in chapter three” (paragraph 146).

I shall bring (at the end of this report) a three-part resolution regarding the continuation of the WMC/RCC dialogue and practical proposals from the Joint Commission. Meanwhile let me tell you some of the more personal episodes that have occurred in the last five years. In 2003, our commission met at York in England and since it was the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of John Wesley's birth, it was an especially appropriate opportunity to make a pilgrimage to the village of Epworth in Lincolnshire from which John Wesley hailed. When we continued on to London, we visited Wesley's Chapel and Wesley's house in City Road, and it was a particular delight to be guided through Wesley's house by the local Catholic priest. In 2004 the commission met in Krakow, Poland, where Pope John Paul II had been archbishop before assuming the papacy. There we had confirmed for us stories of the friendship between Archbishop Wojtilla and the then local Methodist pastor, Lucien Zaperty. In 2005, we were able to hold a colloquium at the Southern Methodist University, where we introduced the work of the dialogue to a wider local and national constituency. In April, 2005, Dr George Freeman and I attended the funeral of John Paul II, and Karen Westerfield-Tucker accompanied Dr Freeman three weeks later to the installation of Pope Benedict XVI. In December, 2005, an official delegation from the WMC visited the Vatican. The delegation consisted of six members: (1) His Eminence Sunday Mbang, chair of the WMC; (2) Dr. George Freeman general secretary of the WMC; (3) Bishop William Oden; (4) Bishop Walter Klaiber; (5) Mrs. Gillian Kingston; (6) Dr. Geoffrey Wainwright.

We were received in special audience by Pope Benedict and had privileged places at the papal Mass in St Peter's for the feast of the Immaculate Conception. We spent more time under the care of Cardinal Walter Kasper and his associates at the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (notably Monsignor John Radano, head of the western section; and our beloved Father Donald Bolen, who occupies the Methodist desk at the PCPCU - "our man in the Vatican"). We engaged in substantive conversations at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, under its new head Archbishop (now Cardinal) Levada; and at the Council for Inter-Religious Relations, and its then president, Archbishop Fitzgerald. Ecumenical services of worship were held (first) at the Ponte Sant'Angelo Methodist Church, where His Eminence Sunday Mbang preached, and (second) at the basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere, where we were the guests of our old friends in the Community of Sant'Egidio (the recipients of the WMC Peace Prize in 1999), who kindly invited me to preach.

Informally, we talked at the PCPCU about the possibility of setting up a "pastoral commission" to stimulate practical relations between Methodists and Catholics in different parts of the world, and no doubt follow up on some of the concrete proposals coming from the "theological commission".

## II. The Proposed Methodist Association with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification

At its Hong Kong meeting in September 1999, the executive committee of the WMC expressed its joy at the achievement by the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church of their Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification and resolved to congratulate the two partners on the impending signing of their agreement. Dr. Joe Hale in fact represented the WMC at the solemn ceremony that took place in Augsburg on October 31, 1999, and brought the letter

of congratulation. The Hong Kong meeting also resolved to explore with the LWF and the Catholic Church the possibility for the WMC and its member churches to become officially associated with their doctrinal agreement in the matter of justification.

All these actions were reported and confirmed at the full meeting of the WMC in Brighton in July 2001. Meanwhile the LWF and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity had responded favorably to the WMC's proposal for the exploration mentioned. Accordingly, a consultation was held in Columbus, Ohio, in November 2001 among representatives of the WMC, the LWF and the Catholic Church, with participation also by representatives of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. It became clear that the best prospects existed for an association between Methodists and the JDDJ.

This was reported to the WMC officers' meeting in March 2002, which charged Bishop Klaiber and me with drafting a Methodist Statement. Our work was helped by discussion in the Dialogues and Ecumenism Committee at the Oslo meeting of the WMC Executive in September 2002. All along, we have worked in close consultation with the Lutheran and Catholic bodies, as had been recommended by the Columbus meeting. Regular reports have been made to the WMC Officers' Meeting, which has given strong encouragement to the project. The Methodist Statement - which you have in front of you - sets out Methodist teaching on justification in a clear and positive way, while being able to declare and demonstrate its consonance with the JDDJ. The Statement has twice been circulated to all member churches of the WMC and has met with very positive, even enthusiastic endorsement, in all the responses received at Lake Junaluska (I have copies of those responses here). We have every reason to believe that this Methodist Statement, as now formulated, meets with acceptance by the Lutheran and Catholic partners. I shall, therefore, be bringing a resolution, that authorizes the signing of an Official Common Affirmation of Methodist Association with the JDDJ, in company with our Lutheran and Catholic partners, represented here by Dr. Ishmael Noko, general secretary of the LWF, and Cardinal Walter Kasper, president of the PCPCU.

July 18, 2006

#### Resolution on the Methodist-Catholic International Dialogue

The Council receives with gratitude the Report of the Joint Commission for Dialogue between the World Methodist Council and the Roman Catholic Church: *The Grace Given You in Christ: Catholics and Methodists Reflect Further on the Church*.

The Council encourages member churches to study closely the theological foundations laid in the Report and to explore in their own circumstances the practical possibilities for the exchange of gifts recommended in chapter four, reporting from time to time to the Executive Committee on developments.

The Council authorizes a further round in the dialogue with the stated final aim of "full communion in faith, mission, and sacramental life."

Resolution authorizing the Association of the WMC and its member churches with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification

The World Methodist Council, in accordance with positive judgments rendered by member churches, approves the Methodist Statement as the affirmation of fundamental agreement with the teaching expressed in the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification signed at Augsburg on 31 October 1999 on behalf of the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church.

Accordingly, the World Methodist Council authorizes His Eminence Sunday Mbang, as Chair of the Council, and the Reverend Dr. George Freeman, as General Secretary of the Council, to sign on its behalf the related Official Common Affirmation in company with representatives of the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation.

The resolutions were adopted with complete unanimity by the Council on July 18<sup>th</sup>, 2006.