

METHODIST CONFERENCE 2003 REPORT

International Roman Catholic/Methodist Conversations 1967-2001

1. Introduction

a) Background

Representatives of the World Methodist Council (WMC) and the Roman Catholic Church have been meeting in five-yearly Commissions since decisions to do so were taken following the Second Vatican Council and at the 1966 World Methodist Council. The most recent report is Speaking the Truth in Love, the fruit of the work of the Commission which met from 1997-2001. A brief response to this latest text can be found in section 6 of this present Conference report. In order to put both the current report and the response in context, brief summaries of the content of the earlier work, and a digest of, and comment on, the major topics considered are supplied. Though reference has been made in past Conferences to the dialogues (e.g. 1996 Minutes p8), the content has not thus far been considered directly.

The results of the earlier conversations are found in reports from Denver (1971), Dublin (1976), Honolulu (1981), Nairobi (1986), Paris (1991; received at the WMC in Singapore 1991), and Baar (1995; received at the WMC in Rio de Janeiro 1996). The full texts of the reports for 1971 to 1981 can be found in Growth in Agreement: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level ed. H.Meyer and L.Vischer (New York: Paulist Press/Geneva: World Council of Churches 1984), pp307-387. The full texts of the 1986-1995 reports are contained in Deepening Communion: International Ecumenical Documents with Roman Catholic Participation eds. W.G.Rusch and J.Gros (Washington D.C.: Paulist Press 1998), pp233-320, and in Growth in Agreement II: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level, 1982-1998 ed. J.Gros, H.Meyer and W.G.Rusch (Geneva: World Council of Churches/ Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2000), pp583-646. From here on, the dates of the reception of the documents by the WMC (in bold text above) are used throughout.

b) The British Methodist/Roman Catholic Committee

The content of many of these earlier reports has been considered in Britain in the context of a joint Methodist/Roman Catholic Committee. The British Methodist-Roman Catholic Committee was established in 1972 as a joint initiative by the Catholic Episcopal Conference of England and Wales and the British Methodist Conference. The committee exists to promote greater understanding among Methodists and Roman Catholics about each other's faith and life, and to explore and affirm ways in which the Methodist Church and the Roman Catholic Church can recognise the ecclesial character of each other.

During the past thirty years, the Methodist/Roman Catholic committee has made a substantial contribution to ecumenical dialogue between Methodists and Roman Catholics. Two of its early

documents, Roman Catholic/Methodist Statement on the Eucharist (1974) and Roman Catholic/Methodist Statement on Ministry (1975) were subsequently incorporated into the Dublin Report (1976). Other significant documents published by the British committee include Joint Statement on Justification (1990), Can the Roman Catholic and Methodist Churches be Reconciled? (1992) and Mary, Sign of Grace, Faith and Holiness (1995).

Within the British context, the Methodist/Roman Catholic committee works assiduously to remove misunderstanding and overcome theological obstacles to full communion between Methodists and Roman Catholics. Whilst considerable work remains to be done, the committee is sustained by its ecumenical vision for the future and by its solid achievement in identifying areas of convergence and agreement between Methodists and Roman Catholics.

c) Building on the Response to Ut Unum Sint

The Conference adopted two responses (in 1997 and 1998) to the 1995 Roman Catholic document Ut Unum Sint. This present report constitutes action in response to implication 2 of the second adopted report (1998): 'Priority should be given to making better known the agreed statements which have been published and the remaining issues between the two churches.'

2. The Contents of the 1971-1996 reports

In the summaries to follow, the numbers refer to the paragraphs in each report.

Denver 1971

1-25 provide the background to the setting up of the conversations, and introduce likely areas of discussion. The 'final prospect' is acknowledged to be 'if not of full organic union, at least of sharing Holy Communion' (14).

26-50 seek to identify the contemporary context within which the report is offered. Aspects of 'secularization' are highlighted as a challenge to churches (28), together with a recognition that there are positive signs of interest throughout society in 'spirituality' (31) and 'community' (32). Seven basic points of agreement between Methodists and Roman Catholics are noted (35-48). These are: Jesus Christ as final authority; the Bible as God's living word; the possession of a total theistic world-view; the situation of human beings today; human dignity; responsible living; the importance of Christian spirituality.

51-68 dwell on 'spirituality'. Common ground is recognized between Methodists and Roman Catholics in their concern for 'holiness' and the search for 'Christian perfection'. 62-67 identify issues which should not be dodged: the role of Mary in Roman Catholicism; different approaches to scripture and the eucharist; the emphases upon hymnody and koinonia in Methodism.

69-78a examine the topic of 'Christian home and family'. Basic agreements in the understanding of marriage are acknowledged (71), though the difficulties in inter-church marriages are noted (72-4). Note is made of agreements and disagreements on divorce (75), contraception (76) and abortion (77).

79-86 consider the eucharist. Three extended paragraphs record points of agreement, disagreement and matters for further study in relation to the nature of Christ's presence at the eucharist, the question of sacrifice, and intercommunion.

87-98 deal with ministry. 88-96 highlight striking areas of agreement, including Jesus Christ's final authority in ministry (89) and ministry's 'connectional' character i.e. the facts that ministry is directly and concretely related to a community of believers, and a body of ministers (94). Significant differences are, however, found in relation to the ministry of the laity (97.1), the criteria for recognition of ministry as authentic (97.2), the nature of 'prophetic and special ministries' (97.3), the sharing of ministries (97.4), and the number and definition of the orders of ministry (97.5).

99-118 begin to acknowledge the 'deep "crevasses"' which exist between the Roman Catholic and Methodist Churches on the subject of authority. Note is taken of the fact that much work will need to be taken on this topic. The potential value of the concept of a 'hierarchy of truths' (some things really are more important than others) is mentioned (101). The sometimes tense relationship between conscience and authority (103-104), or the individual's private judgment and the Church's authority (109-116), is acknowledged.

119-131 concentrate on the logistics of how the Commission will undertake its future work.

One striking statement from para 129 bears quoting in full: 'It is because...we have become aware of the exceptional affinities between Roman Catholics and Methodists in that religion of the heart which is the heart of religion, that we believe in the future of Roman Catholic-Methodist relations.'

Dublin 1976

The Dublin report builds directly upon the explorations and conclusions of Denver 1971, and largely follows a similar structure (dealing with the contemporary world, spirituality, home and family/moral issues, eucharist, ministry and authority). It locates itself in relation to many other worldwide discussions about the Church and its mission (especially the 1972 WCC Conference on Salvation Today, and the 1974 Synod of Bishops of the Catholic Church, which focused on Evangelisation). The RC/WMC Commission agreed a number of points (para 11) emerging from these broader conversations which affected its own work. These were:

- witness to God's saving work as fundamental to the Church's being;
- witness needing to be integrally related to the Church's unity;
- salvation as possessing both individual and social dimensions;
- God's saving work as not confined to Christians, but extending to non-Christians and creation as a whole;
- salvation needing re-interpretation for today;
- the fact that there remains an evangelistic imperative for the Church.

12-16 begin the process of identifying how the concept of salvation needs fresh exploration in today's world. Six 'underlying realities' common to both Roman Catholics and Methodist are identified (17-24): i) awareness of the reality of sin; ii) the reality and glory of the grace of God; iii) social concern; iv) a strong missionary impulse which must find new expression; v) a concern for sanctification, not only in individual terms; vi) the call to unity. The focus of such exploration is resulting action: 'We do not want to accumulate paper for our files, but we want to stimulate one another to common action, so that the world which is starving for lack of good news may not through our unnecessary divisions be prevented from receiving the food of the Gospel.' (25)

26-34 repeat the common ground of 'holiness' shared by each church tradition. The report recognizes that it offers not major, substantive additions to what was said in Denver on this topic (29), but records examples of a number of initiatives in progress. The desire to try and discover 'the essential characteristics of ecumenical spirituality for our time' out of such initiatives (33) is worth noting. Work undertaken jointly on this topic for the Commission by Rev. Gordon Wakefield and Fr. Emmanuel Sullivan S.A. was published as 'Towards a Spirituality for Today' in Epworth Review in January 1977 (pp61-7).

35-43 pick up the question of inter-church marriages, noting that serious, practical, pastoral issues remain. No significant developments since Denver 1971 could be reported. The Commission did, however, want to offer a reminder of the agreements about marriage and family life, and note that the common ground was under increasing cultural pressure.

44-46 note the, at that point, unfulfilled hope of addressing issues in moral theology. Agreement could, however, be reached in opposition to voluntary euthanasia, a discussion begun in relation to a British Methodist statement offered from the Division of Social Responsibility, and accepted by the British Conference of 1974.

47-74 supplies a substantial section on the eucharist, building on Denver 1971, and informed both by the findings of the 1971 Anglican/Roman Catholic statement on the eucharist, and work undertaken on the topic by the British* Roman Catholic/Methodist Committee. Five affirmations of essential agreement are offered (52). The eucharist is agreed to be: a) the fullest presentation of God's self-giving love; b) the commemoration of Christ's sacrificial death and resurrection; c) an expression of our individual and corporate response to God's initiative; d) a renewal of our role as Christ's body in the world; e) an anticipation of Christ's future, final triumph. Three lengthy sections then address thorny issues: the presence of Christ (54-61), the sacrifice of Christ (62-67) and eucharistic sharing (68-72). Under the first heading, '(T)he chief point of difference concerns the question of the transformation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ' (59). Crucial here, is the question whether the 'significance' of something can be equated with its 'inner reality' (60). Pressing beyond Denver (where no disagreements re. the sacrifice of Christ were noted), the Dublin report notes 'certain differences in language and emphasis' (62). In noting changes in language through time, the report observes: 'it is important to recognise that in both our churches our belief is not completely reflected in our traditional language or in our practice and piety' (64).

[*Strictly speaking, British for Methodists and, at that point, English for Roman Catholics.]

75-105 took up the topic of ministry, again with reference to other discussions: Ministry and Ordination, a 1973 Anglican/Roman Catholic Agreed Statement on the Doctrine of Ministry, and work undertaken within the British Roman Catholic/Methodist Committee. Many points of agreements about ministry - by which, here, ordained ministry is meant - are noted (it is Christ's, a gift, lifelong and collaborative; 77-80). The apostolic nature of ministry is examined (81-91) and significant points at issue emerge: whether a three-fold order should be adopted, the place of episkopé (including its relation to episcopacy), the question of the authentic transmission of apostolic faith in relation to ministry. The significant (episcopal) role of the Conference in British Methodism is acknowledged (91). Common ground in the understanding of priesthood (93-97) is believed to be obscured by evident differences of emphasis between the two traditions (92).

No developments were reported on the topic of authority, though its importance was again stressed (106-7).

108-110 make brief mention of efforts being made by Methodists throughout the world towards Church union.

Honolulu 1981

The 1981 report begins by noting that unlike the two previous reports, which published findings only at the end of a five-year period of study, the 1976-81 Commission chose to disseminate working papers for comment at earlier stages. The Holy Spirit became a central topic for the Commission throughout the 5-year period, with authority taken up as a topic at the end of the quinquennium. Through being focused on a doctrinal topic, much of the early part of the report is quite different in style and tone from its predecessors.

The Holy Spirit was taken up as a topic because of the essential agreement noted between Roman Catholics and Methodists in relation to 'spirituality, the life of the Spirit' (7). An exposition of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit follows, stressing the necessity of a trinitarian framework for Christian thinking on the Spirit (8-11). The work of the Holy Spirit in creation, justification and regeneration, in community-formation and in the Kingdom of God is acknowledged and expounded (12-22). Of particular note is the similarity between the 16thC Council of Trent and the thought of John Wesley in relation to the 'pre-venience' of the Spirit's work i.e. God always takes the initiative (14). The content of the section is substantiated throughout with reference to Scripture.

23-32 offers a reading of the Holy Spirit's work in relation to Christian experience. Surprisingly and strikingly, this section begins: 'Christian experience is a rich field largely unexplored at least in ecumenical dialogue.' Convergence is noted between Methodist and Roman Catholic spirituality with respect to the role of experience in the Christian life (26), spurred on especially by developments in Roman Catholicism since the Second Vatican Council of 1962-5 (27). The similarity between development of centres of spirituality and spirituality groups in Roman Catholicism and the purpose and function of Methodist class meetings is noted. The important relationship between individual

experience of the Spirit's working in a human life, and an authoritative, corporate voice (of Church or society) is acknowledged (29).

33-38 explores the relationship between the Spirit's leading and the Church's authority. The vitality of the Holy Spirit in the Church is acknowledged, in such a way that Scripture and Tradition are seen not in opposition but in creative relationship (34). It is suggested that potentially difficult topics between the two traditions - e.g. infallibility, papal authority - can be viewed differently when seen within a common understanding of the Holy Spirit (35).

39-47 examine how understanding of the Holy Spirit relates to Christian moral decision-making. The interplay between individual conscience and the Church's moral authority (noted in Denver 1971, 103-4) is again acknowledged. It is stressed that 'freedom of conscience' does not mean indifference to external authorities (44). No final conflict is held to exist between an approach to moral decision-making based on natural law, and one based on an ethic of revelation (45). Note is taken of the way in which the two traditions offer moral guidance, and of the different weight which tends to be attached by Christians in the two traditions to official statements (47).

48-56 re-affirm the content of the 1971 and 1976 reports in relation to marriage. These paragraphs add reflections on the agreed sacramental nature of marriage - Roman Catholics considering marriage as a sacrament, Methodists not (49).

In looking to the future, this third report concludes with a concrete proposal: that the fourth Commission address 'The Nature of the Church'. Detailed suggestions are then offered as to how that topic should be approached (57-60).

Nairobi (1986)

The report received at the World Methodist Council in Nairobi in 1986 focused on the nature of the Church. The origin of the Church in 'the redemptive act of God in Christ' is recognised from the outset; 'the church is not a self-appointed, self-initiated community' (3). The Church is dependent upon the Holy Spirit for its continuing life, can be characterized by many images (4), is diverse (5), undergoes regular spiritual renewal (7) and lives 'between the times' as 'sign, sacrament and harbinger of the kingdom of God' (8).

11-16 consider the sacraments: 'effective signs by which God gives grace through faith' yet whose 'efficacy should not be conceived in any mechanical way' (15). The difference between the number of sacraments recognized in the two traditions is acknowledged, though it is also seen that in accepting two sacraments Methodists 'do not thereby deny sacramental character to other rites'. As focal points of the self-giving of Christ within the drama of salvation, sacraments bear fruit in the form of 'our sanctification and the building up of the body of Christ' (16).

The meaning of 'church', in derivation from New Testament terms, is examined in 17-18, and the multiplying of 'churches', at cost to Christian unity, is then considered (19-20). Echoing words from Denver 1971, the report states: 'we are committed to a vision that includes the goal of full communion

in faith, mission and sacramental life' (20). Visible unity is sought, but this visible unity 'need not imply uniformity, nor the suppression of the gifts with which God has graced each of our communities' (21).

'Koinonia', 'as a concept and an experience', is identified as 'more important than any particular model of church union that we are yet able to propose' (23). Though hard to grasp, the attempt is made to articulate the meaning of the word in terms of communion, community, participation in God through Christ in the Spirit, and deep fellowship. The diversity of ecclesial traditions within the one Church is explored in 24-27, though it is also recognised that diversity cannot be limitless (28).

Substantial differences in practice are evident in the structures of ministry and the exercise of oversight (29-38). It is recognized that for Methodists 'the concept of primacy is unfamiliar, even if historically John Wesley exercised a kind of primacy in the origins of the Methodist Church' (37). These considerations lead inevitably to the need to examine more closely 'the Petrine office'.

The role of Peter in the New Testament is examined (41-47), prior to the concept of primacy itself being viewed in the light of Peter's role in early Christianity (48-60). The relationship between leadership and unity in the Church is recognized in both its local and universal forms (48-50). Factors instrumental in the association of Peter with Rome, and in Rome's emerging significance as a Christian centre in the earliest Christian centuries are logged (51-54). A crucial paragraph then notes the different weight attached in Methodism and Roman Catholicism 'to long and widespread tradition' (55), given that 'the primacy of the bishop of Rome', whilst not derived from scripture alone, 'is not established from the scriptures in isolation from the living tradition'. The possibility of the bishop of Rome as a focus of the unity of the future Church is then considered (56-60), though the scope and form of the pope's jurisdiction (61-62), the function of councils (65-68) and the question of papal infallibility (69-75) remain matters on which more work needs to be undertaken. The association of Roman Catholic understanding of infallibility with Methodist understanding of assurance is striking (74-5).

Singapore (1991)

The 1991 report seeks to offer an understanding of 'The Apostolic Tradition' in the widest possible sense of the term. Rather than focus on specific expressions of the nature of apostolicity (e.g. apostolic succession, teaching the faith), the report seeks to provide a framework within which both traditions could address such questions.

The report opens by declaring its commitment to a dynamic understanding of 'tradition' (5) and to the trinitarian nature of the life and mission of the Church. The priority of the word of God, a message about an incarnate Word, for the Church, is acknowledged (10-14), as is the difficulty of relating scripture to tradition (21).

The close relationship of Spirit and Word in the Church is then explored in New Testament times (22-32) and in continuing Christian history (33-38). A major task for the Church is to 'cooperate with the Spirit' in every age, acknowledging that contexts and cultures affect how this cooperation takes shape in 'the expression of the faith' (36-37). The common ground found by Roman Catholics and Methodists in the Nicene Creed is emphasized (38).

The Christian life is then expounded in terms of ‘new life’. This new life is understood as a gift (39-40) and a challenge (41), and it brings people into communion with others (42-45, 49-52), to be nurtured (46) and enabled to undertake good works and evangelism (47-48). The danger of polarizing Roman Catholic emphasis upon the centrality of the eucharist and Methodist emphasis upon the preaching of the word is acknowledged (45).

In examining ministry and ministries in the Church, the report goes on to note: ‘An arrival at a common mind over Christ’s purpose for ministry would...have a far-reaching effect in the promotion of unity throughout the Christian churches’ (57). The dynamic nature of the church is also examined. As a community, the church ‘is a living organism, not a collection of individuals; it is a place of meeting where people exchange things old and new, not a museum where things are looked at’ (62). Baptism and worship, especially ‘the holy meal of the community’ unite and inspire the worshipping fellowships in each tradition (63-69). Ordained ministers lead and represent the communities of faith, and act in Christ’s name (70-71). It is in and through communities as a whole (‘the whole assembly of the faithful’ 76), however, over which the ministers exercise oversight, that the Spirit works (72-77).

The next section of the report focuses upon ordination (78-98). Despite differences in understanding how ordination is authorized in the respective traditions (81-82), Methodists and Catholics are seen to ‘share a fundamentally important perspective on ministry, affirming that the ordained ministry is essentially pastoral in nature’ (86). Divergent views about ordination are, however, acknowledged in relation to ordination’s ‘sacramentality’ (Methodists deeming ordination not to be a sacrament; 88-91), episcopate (exercised in Methodism via conferences rather than the episcopate, even in those Methodist Churches which have bishops; 92-94) and the question of who may be ordained (Methodists ordaining both married and unmarried people, and women; 95-97).

Rio De Janeiro (1996)

The sixth series of discussions in the Joint Roman Catholic/World Methodist Council Commission devoted itself to the topic of revelation and faith, producing a report entitled ‘The Word of Life’. Again, the hope is expressed that the Commission’s work will contribute towards the seeking of ‘full communion in faith, mission and sacramental life’.

The report opens with a basic conviction: ‘God’s revelation and the human response to it constitute the substance of the church’s faith, mission and sacramental life; and the more common the account we can give of these things, the closer we may come to one another in our understanding and practice of them and so be readier for full communion between us’ (1). The focusing in Christ of the self-revelation of the God of Israel becomes the starting point of the exposition (2). In and through Christ, God’s triune nature is perceived and it is this revelation of the triune God which ‘is the source of the church’s faith, the church’s mission and the church’s sacramental life’ (4; cf. 24-26). The unfolding revelation in the history of the people of Israel, in Christ, and as attested through scripture, is then noted (5-8; further expounded in 14-18). ‘Catholics and Methodists are in full agreement on this christological and trinitarian dimension of revelation and faith’ (8). Paragraph 10 notes ‘a certain measure of ecclesial communion’ in relation to baptism and the faith signified thereby, but expresses too the hope that the

dialogue will ‘increase and deepen our relationship until we reach sufficient agreement in the Christian truth that our common baptism can without equivocation be completed in our mutual participation in the meal to which the one Lord invites us and all his followers’.

Revelation is seen as essential for any knowledge of God (11). God is revealed in history, in Christ, and through words and actions (14-23). Historical events (even within the history of the people of Israel) are recognised as not in themselves constituting revelation. Interpretation of events is always needed. Furthermore, God’s presence in history is not confined to such special events, given that God is the God of the whole of history (15). Words and actions are to be seen as directly linked not only in the life of Christ (17-18, 21) but also in the Church’s life (22-23).

As the act in which revelation is responded to in the life of the believer, faith can be viewed in three ways (27-72): as the condition of reception of revelation (‘the faith by which we believe’ 28-31), as a framework of belief (‘the faith which is believed’ 32-36), and as a way to live (‘the fruitfulness of faith’ 37-72). ‘While it is entirely God’s gift, faith is inseparably a free act and an attitude of grateful reception of God’s grace and revelation and of self-commitment to the living Lord...’ (31). Faith also has a cognitive content to it. ‘The faith that receives God’s revelation...is more than a dimension of human feeling...Thus what is believed is an integral part of faith...’ (32). ‘The faith by which we believe and the faith which is believed come together in the life of faithful obedience’ (33). The function of creeds (which are not merely ‘collections of propositional statements’) is acknowledged here (34-36). Faith must, however, bear fruit, and on this both Catholics and Methodists agree: ‘...what is believed and affirmed in common must be embodied in the life both of the believer and the community of faith’ (36).

The ‘fruitfulness of revelation’ is evidenced in the way the Church functions as a living body, in constant dialogue ‘not only with our contemporaries but with our predecessors in the faith’ (38). The church is needed for revelation to be seen to be fruitful (39). However, the Church comprises human beings, and Christians are in dialogue with the wider world seeking to ‘discern the signs of the times’ (40-42). Forms of revelation’s fruitfulness include confession (i.e. the declaration of faith; 43-45), personal, devotional life (46-48), corporate worship (49-51) and the service of others (52).

Cooperation with the Spirit requires believers to listen to the Spirit in seeking to discern what is, and what is not, of God (53). Scripture is a central guide (54-55). The harmony between a believer’s conviction and the church’s teaching (‘a kind of spiritual instinct’) can also be a good guide over and above mere rational assent to particular beliefs (56-58). Actual acceptance (reception) over time of new insights is a further test (59). And holiness - walking in Christ’s way - is itself a sign of the Spirit at work (60-61).

The use of such means of discernment are seen to operate in many realms of the life of the people of God: amongst the whole people (63), through the witness of prophets (64-66), through complex wrestling with doctrinal matters in a pastoral context (67-71) and in the service of hoped-for convergence and unity (‘the upbuilding of the whole people of God under the lordship of Christ himself’; 72). In the discernment of true and false prophecy, a christological criterion must be employed (65). In the handling of doctrinal teaching, there is a clear difference between Methodism and Roman

Catholicism, the former looking to its Conferences as authoritative, the latter to bishops in unity with the bishop of Rome (69-70).

A third main section of the report (73-93) considers ‘mission’. Mission is identified as having its source in the triune nature of God (73-75). Those baptized into the triune name of God are enabled and committed to word and witness in the world through their participation in the body of Christ (76). Following the paradigm of Jesus, the church’s mission - expressed as witness, service and worship - is a unity of words and actions (77-80). It is recognized that both traditions fail to live up to what they achieve at their best (80). The communal dimension of the church’s mission, and thus the decisive role of Christian community, is emphasized (81-83), as is its ‘apostolic’ nature (84-88). The specific roles of the ordained within the church’s apostolic mission - different in each tradition - is mentioned (88). The church’s disunity is considered to be ‘a serious obstacle to mission’ (89), and the hope is expressed that the overcoming of differences will lead to a stronger witness. Finally in the section on mission, the ‘inculturation’ of the Gospel is noted, as an analogy with the incarnation i.e. though transcending all cultures, the Gospel is always found enfleshed in specific contexts, with all the strengths and weaknesses that such embodiment brings (90-93).

The role of the sacraments in the life of the church is examined in 94-107. Particular note is taken of the way that Methodists, whilst acknowledging two, rather than seven, sacraments affirm the presence of God’s spirit in those practices which Roman Catholics also call sacraments (106). Furthermore, following Wesley, Methodists deem many other practices of the Christian life as ‘means of grace’ (107).

The final main section explores further the meaning of ‘koinonia’ (108-130). The koinonia (communion) enjoyed within the church entails participation in the communal nature of God (the three persons of the trinity; 108-109). Again, note is taken of the way that church disunity restricts the extent of enjoyment of this koinonia (111). A unity in faith between the two traditions is acknowledged (112-113), alongside significantly different distinctive teachings (114-115). A reminder of Methodist ‘essentials’ (as opposed to ‘opinions’) is provided: ‘the three-one God; the divine creation of the world and the vocation of humankind to holiness and happiness; the incarnation and atoning work of God the Son; the work of the Spirit as source of all truth, renewal, and communion; the need of fallen humankind to repent and to believe the Gospel; the divine provision of grace through word and sacrament and the institution and gathering of the church; the summons to love of God and neighbor; and the promise of a final judgment and victory, where all the redeemed will share in glorifying and enjoying God forever’ (115). Roman Catholicism supports the notion of a ‘hierarchy of truths’ (see also Denver 1971, 101), but expects its members to see the church’s teaching as an organic unity (116). Similarities in understanding and practice of elements of worship are also noted (117-118), though the absence of agreement and shared practice especially in relation to the eucharist and to ordination is acknowledged (119-120). Common ground in the rootedness of all sacramental life in Jesus Christ is, however, also recognized (121). Mutual support by Christians of each other, including in small groups, is seen as a strength of Methodism (122). Unity in mission, whilst it has not always been practised (124), is also acknowledged to be an expression of the church’s koinonia (123-125). The church past, present and global is seen to constitute the universal church (126-128), a reality in which both traditions participate and to which both are committed, despite their differing structures (129-130).

In conclusion, the Commission looks back over thirty years of discussion and is able to state: 'a considerable commonality of outlook has been established in the areas of pneumatology (1981 report), ecclesiology (1986 report), the apostolic tradition (1991 report), and now revelation and faith (1996 report)' (131). Note is taken of the deeper, more demanding work yet needed on the issues which continue to vex and divide the traditions (132).

3. A Digest of the Main Concerns 1971-1996

[In the distillation of main concerns to follow, dates refer to the respective years of the WMC reception of the Joint Commission's reports, and appended numbers to the paragraph numbers in those reports.]

Common Witness

Much of the work of the Joint Commission has been concerned to identify areas of common witness i.e. the many areas of substantial agreement in thought, belief, feeling and concern which exist between Methodists and Roman Catholics. It is acknowledged that there is one Gospel. Whatever differences may need working on, a credible witness to the non-believing world 'entails a common understanding of the Gospel and the ability to recognize in each other's lives and confessions an authentic witness to the faith' (1991: 3). Key areas of common ground include: Christ as the final authority (1971: 35, 89 and 1995: 121), the Bible as God's Living Word (1971: 36), the importance of Christian spirituality and the Holy Spirit (1971: 54-6 and 1981: 8-11 and *passim*), holiness (1971: 52 and 1976: 26-34). In addition, despite many and significant differences, common ground is also noted with respect to a number of aspects of the eucharist and ministry (e.g. 1971: 88-96; 1976: 49, 52, 77-80; 1991: 78-86).

Spirituality

The common ground with regard to the seeking of holiness and Christian perfection finds the Methodist view of 'entire sanctification' meeting the Roman Catholic view of continuous growth in perfection (1971: 52-3). Though written in 1971, the report which explores these themes also notes the contemporary possibility of rediscovering out of Christian resources contemplation, compassion and community, in the service of the world (1971: 59).

Eucharist

The lack of a history of explicit disagreement about the eucharist is acknowledged to be a major plus point in Methodist/Roman Catholic dialogue. The areas of agreement and disagreement are, however, substantial in each case and can be found summarized in the 1971 report (83-4). Many points of agreement about the nature of Christ's presence in the eucharist were able to be affirmed, including the efficacy of the bread and wine as signs of the body and blood of Christ, the need for faith on the part of the communicant, yet the fact that it is not the experience of the communicant which makes a eucharist real. It is Christ's presence which must be affirmed above all. Both traditions affirm that the eucharist is a celebration of Christ's sacrifice, though unlike Roman Catholics, Methodists do not refer to the eucharist itself as a sacrifice, except as 'a pleading of that [once-for-all] sacrifice here and now...our

offering of the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, and...our sacrifice of ourselves in union with Christ who offered himself to the Father' (1976: 65).

The most crucial area of difference concerns the precise nature of the presence of Christ in relation to the elements of bread and wine. For Methodists the presence of Christ in the eucharist 'is not fundamentally different from the presence of Christ in other means of grace, e.g. preaching' (1971: 84), whereas for Roman Catholics, whilst the 'externals of the bread and wine remain unchanged', a transformation of their inner reality occurs. Further reflection in the 1976 report led to the concern that any contrast drawn between the nature of Christ's presence in the eucharist and in other means of grace should not be overplayed. Both traditions affirm 'that wherever Christ is present he is present in his fullness' (1976: 56).

Ministry

The agreements and disagreements mapped out in the 1971 report (89-96) are taken up in various ways in later reports. Dublin 1976 addresses three areas directly: apostolic ministry, priesthood and ordination (81-102).

The agreement between both traditions 'that the church's apostolicity involves continuous faithfulness in doctrine, ministry, sacrament and life to the teaching of the New Testament (1976: 84) is both striking and significant. The disagreement about the nature of 'apostolic succession' is where the traditions diverge. Manual transmission ('episcopal laying-on of hands in historical succession') within a three-fold order of ministry was clearly supported by Roman Catholics. At that juncture, British Methodism possessed only one order of ministry. It is, however, noteworthy that discussion of apostolicity, despite the basic point agreement, should be construed so directly in terms of orders of ministry.

The centrality of presidency at the eucharist for the priest/presbyter is acknowledged (1976: 97). The wording of the 1976 report, however, considers this 'the central act of the ordained ministry' per se. In the light of developments in the diaconate in British Methodism, as a result of which deacons are now both an order of ministry and members of a religious order, such a claim is in need of revision.

The questions of having bishops and of ordaining women both feature in discussions on ordination (1976: 102, 1986: 35, 1991:96-7). Many Methodist churches do express episkopé through bishops. British Methodism has long declared itself ready to move towards an episcopal order of ministry if and when deemed appropriate by the Conference. It will be important to note whether, and if so how, the reflections in these RC/WMC reports can illuminate current discussions in British Methodism concerning the form and timing of introducing an episcopal order of ministry. The Methodist practice of ordaining women indicates a major difference between the two traditions.

Authority

In many ways, comments on 'authority' in the reports from 1971 are preamble, on a number of fronts, for the 2001 report Speaking the Truth in Love, which makes authority its focal point.

1971 makes clear that there are hierarchies of truths (101), There are also differing hierarchies of authorities operating in the two traditions, which it would be worthwhile each tradition identifying and comparing (102).

1981 acknowledges that the Church has a teaching role, and that the content of that teaching is constantly being re-worked under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (1981: 34). Appeal to the authority of the Holy Spirit relativizes doctrinal disagreements which are present between the two traditions, without removing the fact that these disagreements are real and often substantial (1981: 35-36).

Appeal is also made by both traditions to the authority of the early ecumenical councils of the Church (1996: 68). Difference between the two traditions then occurs in determining who has the authority to tease out the content of those councils and the ensuing, evolving interpretation of their fundamental insights (1996: 69-70). At its simplest, the disagreement focuses upon concentration upon episcopal authority (of those bishops ‘in unity with the Bishop of Rome’) versus Methodism’s concentration upon the teaching office of its Conferences.

The Church and the Petrine Ministry

The common ground of a shared vision for a united Church reverberates throughout the three decades of the dialogues. It is especially apparent in the 1986 report, which made the topic of the Church its main focus. The divisions of the Church are recognized as contrary to the will of Christ and ‘a vision that includes the goal of full communion in faith, mission and sacramental life’ is shared by both traditions (1986: 20). The importance of the concept and experience of ‘koinonia’ challenges both traditions to careful scrutiny of their self-understanding and practices (1986: 23-28; 1996: 108-130).

In the midst of many differences in understanding of the Church and its ministry, this shared vision is maintained, together with a realism that the ‘New Testament documents do not present us with an unattainable ideal but describe the actual life of a real society brought into being by Christ’ (1991: 2).

A long section in the 1986 report considered the ‘Petrine office’, thus recognizing the role of the Bishop of Rome as a crucial question in the two traditions’ respective understandings of authority and structure in the Church (1986: 39-75; see also 1996: 69-70). From here, and from ensuing discussion of the nature of authority in the Church (2001), it can be hoped that further dialogue on forms of authority, ministry and structure might bear rich fruit in both traditions, and for a vision of a future Church.

Tradition and Revelation

It is significant that discussion about the role of the Bishop of Rome is located within a recognition that his primacy is established in relation to the living tradition within which Scripture is interpreted (1986: 55). This feature of tradition runs like a thread through all of the reports. The 1991 report focused on the apostolic character of that tradition, and on the way in which it functions as a ‘given’ within the lives of the different traditions and communities which bear witness to it and embody it, as ‘Church’. The apostolic character of the mission in which both traditions participate is also recognized (1996: 84-8).

The complex yet decisive relationship between scripture and tradition is seen as the cause of both creativity and division, given the differing understandings of the way the two relate (1991: 21).

The grounding of tradition, however understood, in the prior action of a self-revealing God is affirmed by both traditions, as is the crucial role played by the Holy Spirit in the reception and interpretation of that revelation (1981: 33-38, esp. 34; 1991: 8, 11; 1996: 53-61).

Faith and Mission

Of all the reports so far, the 1996 report devoted most attention to the content of belief and the disposition of the believer both within the Church as the identifiable people of God, and beyond it. Insights from both traditions into the non-cognitive aspects of faith are especially significant here (1996: 56-8). Discernment is seen to work on many levels and in many contexts. Whilst including thoughtful adherence to a body of belief, the prophetic and pastoral dimensions to the task of corporate discernment of the will of God for Church and world prove richer than mere attention to what is of the mind (1996: 32, 62-8).

4. Reflective Comments on the 1971-1996 reports

Three decades of dialogue is a long period to review in a short space. Much has changed in the intervening time. In seeking to encourage the Conference to receive these reports with gratitude, however, the Faith and Order Committee is also offering reflective comment on and constructive critique of their content. The Committee does so in the knowledge that it examines their content in the light of a range of current discussions, inside and beyond British Methodism, which can be fruitfully informed by insights from the reports being considered.

Ministry

The agreements and disagreements about ministry can be seen for what they are: expressions of differences about the way in which the Church and its structures are viewed in the respective traditions. With hindsight, however, some of the discussion conducted in each tradition can be re-visited in the light of further developments. The discussions about ministry do appear to have been dominated by the question of ordination to such an extent that the question of lay ministry, or an understanding of ministry as a ministry belonging to the whole people of God, have received scant attention (1971: 97; 1991: 72-77). Only in 1996 did the beginnings of a broader view truly come to the surface (1996: 63). This indicates that it may be a future task for each tradition, in its own way, as well as for both traditions together, to review the way/s in which lay ministry is perceived and valued alongside ordained ministries.

Episcopacy

British Methodism has, since the early days of the dialogues, moved to a two-fold order of ministry (deacons and presbyters) and continues to consider a third (bishops). The ever-present reminder of the episcopal function of the Conference in Methodism (1976: 91) can be used to argue against the episcopate, or in favour of a particular (new) understanding of what it might mean for bishops to

function collegially (with each other and along with lay representatives). In this regard also, the 1976 confinement of episkopé to the ordained alone (1976: 88) invites reconsideration in the light of British Methodism's insistence that episkopé is shared not only amongst the ordained. This has always been a feature of Methodist practice and is re-stated in recent British Methodist discussions of the Church (Called to Love and Praise 1999: 4.5), episkopé and episcopacy (2000 and 2002). This collegial element remains at the forefront of discussions about the role of teaching within 'pastoral discernment' (1996: 68-70) and could be a crucial area in which Methodism has something to learn from other traditions, whilst also a major contribution to make to the future understanding and structure of the episcopate.

Apostolicity

Reflections on apostolicity quite early in the dialogues (1976: 84) could be held to have anticipated developments which would later prove decisive in 'The Porvoo Common Statement' resulting from conversations between the British and Irish Anglican Churches and the Nordic and Baltic Lutheran Churches. Common to the statement and the Methodist/Roman Catholics is the recognition of the many ways in which apostolicity is carried within Christian traditions. If the nature of 'apostolic succession' remains a sticking point, the dialogues keep alive the challenge to both traditions constantly to revisit their own understanding of apostolic continuity, especially with respect to the extent of their faithfulness to the New Testament (1976: 84).

Faith and Morals

It is striking that there has recently been less direct attention to moral questions in comparison with earlier reports (see 1971: 69-78a; 1976: 35-46; 1981: 39-56). However this may be accounted for, this evidence invites the reflection that whilst the world in which the mission of the Church takes shape has far from been ignored (1996: 73-93), the dialogue shows that the relationship between belief and morality is perhaps viewed differently from 20 or 30 years ago. The question of what are the major moral questions of the day may itself be differently posed and answered. It may, however, also be true that the primary focus is now upon how the Church, in its variety of communal forms, shapes people for contemporary, moral Christian living. It is, therefore, less the case that traditions focus upon disagreements about the direct guidance to be given to Christians in response to contemporary moral questions.

Inclusive and Exclusive Language

It would be remiss to avoid commenting upon the extent to which awareness of issues of language has grown throughout the period of the dialogues. The exclusive language of the first two reports (1971 and 1976) seems dated now. The development in this respect invites both traditions to continue in their growing awareness of how language reflects thought and belief. This point pertains to the inclusion of both women and children alongside men.

Reports and the Dissemination of their Insights

The 1971 report contains a telling section referring to the concern to ensure that the Methodist/Roman Catholic dialogue not remain the preserve of a few, but that its results be widely shared (1971: 121). This is a concern we share three decades later, and this present set of summaries and reflections are intended as one way of making the results of both that and the ensuing six reports more widely available.

5. The 2001 Report

Speaking the Truth in Love: Teaching Authority Amongst Catholics and Methodists (2001)

1-6 locate the topic of the report in relation to the passage of scripture from which the title comes: Ephesians 4.1-16 (esp. 4.15). Emphasis is placed upon the ‘sevenfold unity that is recognised within the Church and upon which it depends for its existence’ (Eph 4.4-6; para 2).

Part One of the report comprises paras. 7-84, and deals with the theme ‘The Church as Communion in Love and Truth’. 7-28 expound the Church as a Communion living out of love and truth. 7 identifies ‘the central content or object of the Church’s teaching and the ultimate source of the authority to teach’ as ‘God revealed in Jesus Christ’. On this basis, 8-9 present Christology and the Trinity as the most essential content of Christian doctrine. Recognition of the primacy of the Word, the Eternal Logos, in the Church (16) prefaces two paragraphs which clarify how that Word is witnessed to, in Scripture and Tradition (17-18). 19-24 explore the ways in which the Church is ‘maintained in truth’, by the Spirit (20).

Distinctive emphases of the respective traditions are acknowledged in 20-21, the role of bishops in upholding a concern for truth and fidelity in the Roman Catholic Church being highlighted (20), alongside a Methodist emphasis upon ‘godly individuals’, ‘providential events such as the Reformation’ and on ‘the early Councils and the Methodist Conferences’. 22-24 explore the need to ‘teach the truth’, whilst recognising that tradition is dynamic and that doctrine needs interpreting. 24 addresses the need for ‘the reception of doctrine by the people of God’ and the crucial function and significance in Methodist understanding of the Methodist Conference as an authoritative interpreter of doctrine is stressed here. Theology, worship, mission and ecumenism are then presented as, in effect, fundamental components of the purposeful framework within which the exploration and teaching of the truth take place (24-28).

29-47 takes further the Church’s role as the anointed community. As a body ‘anointed with the Spirit of truth’, it is the Holy Spirit which ‘will lead all believers to the truth’ (29). In addition to being ‘anointed in the truth’ (30-35), the Church abides in the truth (36-38), is preserved in the truth (39-42), works together in the truth (43-45) and is called by the truth (46-7). The report acknowledges that ‘Catholics and Methodists teach that absolute authority belongs properly only to God who has revealed himself supremely in the Word incarnate, Jesus Christ’ (38). Frank honesty does, however, lead the Commission to note: ‘Methodists and Catholics believe that the Spirit preserves in Christ’s Church the revelation given for our salvation, although we are not yet completely agreed on what doctrines are essential’ (39). 40-41 indicates that it is in the extent of the recognition of human fallibility in the Church in its carrying of an authoritative tradition which distinguishes Roman Catholics from Methodists. Methodists trust that God’s witnesses are maintained faithful enough by God (40), whilst Roman Catholics believe that a

gift of infallibility is shared by Christ with the Christian community as a body, on the basis of which protection from error can be claimed (41).

48-84 examine the ‘means of grace’ and ‘the servants of Christ’ in the Church. The dependence upon God recognised in both traditions prefaces the enquiry (49). Diversity is acknowledged (50), including diversity in understanding of episkopé (that exercised by bishops in the Roman Catholic tradition being exercised by the Conference in Methodism, 51).

Both traditions acknowledge that God uses ‘trustworthy channels’ (53) through which to be revealed and to communicate God’s grace in the world. The report sees fit, however, to develop further earlier reports’ statements on ‘sacraments’, as ‘particular instances of the revelation of the divine mystery’ (55). Whilst the two traditions differ on the number of sacraments, each tradition has an understanding of other ‘means of grace’ through which God works, Catholics speaking of ‘sacramentals’ (prayers, actions, blessings), Methodists, following John Wesley, of ‘ordinary channels’ (prayer, reading scripture, fasting, charitable actions), also termed ‘instituted means of grace’. (58). The Methodist emphasis upon hymnody and ‘Christian conference’ (in the widest sense) - considered ‘prudential means of grace’ by Wesley - is highlighted in this context (59). Other Methodist practices (ordination, prayers for healing, forgiveness of sins, marriage, confirmation may also be considered ‘prudential’ (60). Whilst there is much convergence of thinking, significant difference is noted in the way in which any channel of grace is deemed ‘trustworthy’. The questions of criteria of validity and attention to the fallibility of human agents involved both come into play (61).

Sections on ordained ministry (63-8), teaching and preaching (69-70), and apostolic oversight (71-76) are prefaced by the recognition that all Christians ‘are called to serve Christ in the world to the glory of God’ (62, taken up also in 77). As in previous reports, the differences in understanding of ordination and of who may be ordained are spelt out (65-66) alongside areas of common ground (64 and 67-8). Teaching and preaching are seen as the responsibility of the whole church (69-70), though oversight of these and other aspects of the Church’s life must be exercised (71-3). The functional equivalence of Conferences within Methodism with ‘the college of bishops united with the Pope’ is noted (75). Striking is the statement: ‘Both Methodists and Roman Catholics have a strong sense of the corporate nature of the ministry of oversight’ (76). The significant difference between the two traditions in the nature and scale of lay participation in teaching and discernment is, however, acknowledged (77-8). The nature of appropriate authority in the Church is taken up in para 83. The statement ‘The ministry of authority should always seek the growth of those over whom it is exercised.’ forms a summary of the paragraph.

Part Two of the report (85-116) looks at each tradition’s handling of the task of ‘authoritative discernment and proclamation of the truth of the Gospel’ (85). 86-98 presents an interpretation of ‘Methodist understanding and practice’ on the topics being considered. 94-6 examines the central role of Conferences in Methodist understandings of authority, even if the formulations used may sometimes be unfamiliar (‘Methodists regard all Christians as a ministerial and priestly people’ 95). 99-116 offers an equivalent Roman Catholic section, with extended sections on the role of bishops (101-110) and the bishop of Rome (111-116).

A concluding section (117-122) reaffirms the need to recognise the Church's dependence upon the Holy Spirit (117) and the corporate nature of belief (118-9). Again, the parallel but marked distinction between the two traditions' reliance upon bishops and conferences is noted (117), together with the related impact of this upon ordination and criteria of discernment (120-1).

6. Response to the 2001 Report

1. In considering the summary of the work over the period 1967-2000 of the Joint Commission for Dialogue Between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council, the Conference is examining directly for the first time an important international conversation extending across four decades. In responding here to the most recent report offered by the Commission, the Conference is responding directly for the first time to the Commission's work. Though the English, and later British, Methodist/Roman Catholic Committee has long since considered and commented on Commission reports, responses have not previously been offered by the Conference.
2. This seventh report is clearly best read in the light of its six predecessors. Likewise, the Conference's own response is best read in the light of the comments offered to the Conference by the Faith and Order Committee upon those past reports. The response offered below functions nevertheless independently as a considered reaction to the content of a specific text and can therefore be read as a separate document.
3. Like the previous six, this report is an open and honest attempt to locate both agreements and disagreements between the two traditions. With regard to agreement, there are nearly fifty occasions in the reports which it is noted that 'Methodists and Catholics agree...'. There are also instances of explicit disagreement, expressed in the form of questions which each tradition would put to the other. This approach - conversational as well as challenging - has, in our view, more potential for creative and ongoing dialogue than a dialectical or confrontational approach. We applaud it as an approach.
4. We are grateful for, and challenged by, the report's repeated emphasis upon the Holy Spirit (3,7, 20, 27, 29-33, 35-8, 40, 43-7, 75, 82-3, 87, 94, 106, 110, 117-8, 120-1). This emphasis calls both traditions, and all Christians within them, to continue to attend to the way in which God's Spirit is at work guiding the Church as it seeks to remain faithful to the Gospel it has received, in the world in which it is placed. Exploration of the norms and authority operative in the respective traditions in this light has reminded us that our traditions are themselves dynamic, but that we are accompanied intimately by God in working out our respective ways of remaining faithful. God accompanies our appointed leaders, our recognised teachers and our communal gatherings as they undertake their work of teaching and discernment. Despite the divergences in the detailed understanding of how leadership, teaching and collegiality are practised, the fundamental agreement at this point is crucial.
5. With respect to some of the key divergences noted in the report, the following can be said.

The repeated observation of the similarity in function between the Methodist Conference and the college of bishops in communion with the bishop of Rome is a point well-made. The crucial significance, from a Methodist perspective, of lay involvement in the Conference (and of the Faith and Order

Committee which offers this response) should, however, be pressed. Both traditions affirm that the Holy Spirit is at work through the whole Church. The practice of ongoing discernment of the will and purposes of God, in and by the Spirit, will surely happen best, then, if the whole Church is appropriately represented in the discernment process. This remains so despite the existence of those ‘called and set apart by God for special service in the community of believers’ (63). Methodist commitment to the importance of a manner of ‘conferencing’ which includes the laity rests, in short, precisely upon an emphasis on the work of God’s Spirit which this report so strongly emphasizes.

6. With regard to the differing degrees to which the two traditions acknowledge the impact of human fallibility upon teaching and discernment, Methodist commitment to ‘conferencing’ again suggests a closer alliance between the work of the Spirit and the communal discernment of the purposes of God. The significance of conferencing in Methodism resides not, then, solely in the fact that the laity are included alongside the ordained. The manner in which Methodism supports dispersed authority and communal discernment arguably leaves greater scope for the respecting of human fallibility. It is here where the Methodist reluctance to invest individuals with significant power takes shape, even though it proves both a strength and a weakness of Methodist practice and operates despite the noted Methodist emphasis upon ‘godly individuals’ (20).

7. Given British Methodism’s current, continuing discussion of models of episkopé and episcopacy, the Conference is pleased to be challenged by the report to think afresh about Roman Catholic understanding of the role of a bishop. It was gratifying to read: ‘The first task of bishops, especially when together as the college of bishops, is to proclaim the Gospel in its integrity to all’ (65) and ‘Pre-eminent among the duties of a bishop is the proclamation of the Gospel’ (106). It is to be hoped that each tradition here represented may have new things to offer ongoing ecumenical discussions about the episcopacy, and therefore also the possible form in which British Methodism might receive the historic episcopate into its system, should it eventually decide to do so.

8. With respect to the basic disagreement between the two traditions as to what constitute the ‘essentials’ of Christian faith (despite 8-9 in the report itself), we appreciate nevertheless the clear affirmation of the Scriptures as the ‘primary and permanent norm’ for all doctrine, ‘to be interpreted authoritatively by the living voice of Tradition’ (39; cf. also 18). We do this acknowledging three things. First, the ways in which Scripture is in fact used in order to function as such a norm are very diverse, as the discussion of the British Methodist Faith and Order Committee’s report *A Lamp to My Feet and a Light to My Path* (1998) made clear. Second, we recognise that the living voice within the Tradition is none other than the voice of the living Word, the Eternal Logos (16). Third, we acknowledge that the different means of receiving and appropriating Tradition (18) in our respective communities (traditions), as considered above, has a direct bearing on the way we handle the Tradition.

9. We welcome the summary of points for ‘further exploration’ and, along with the Commission, trust that these will be worked on in future, alongside other matters outstanding from previous reports. In the present climate it may not be easy to envisage a future united Church. There are those who do not see this even as a desirable goal. This latest offering from a patient, long-standing conversation does, however, signal that willingness to listen and talk, to agree and disagree and to proceed in faith,

whatever the actual structural shape of the Church, is a crucial feature of the Church's future and its mission in and for the world.

10. Finally, we appreciate the extent to which resources from the British Methodist Church and the English (later, British) Methodist/Roman Catholic Committee are acknowledged and used in the report (e.g. pp9, 19, 22-4).

RESOLUTIONS

1. The Conference receives with gratitude sections 1-4 as a report on, and summary of, the past work of the Joint Commission for Dialogue Between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council.

2. The Conference receives with gratitude section 5 as a summary of the recent work of the Joint Commission for Dialogue Between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council. In so doing, it acknowledges that a precedent is thereby set for the future receipt by the Conference of such reports from the Commission.

3. The Conference adopts section 6 above as its response to the Report of the Joint Commission for Dialogue Between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council 'Speaking the Truth in Love: Teaching Authority Among Catholics and Methodists'.