

ENCOUNTERING CHRIST THE SAVIOUR:

CHURCH AND SACRAMENTS



**Report of the International Commission
for dialogue between the
Roman Catholic Church and
the World Methodist Council**

PREFACE

The Commission's members are:

Catholic:

Bishop Michael Putney (Co-Chair), Australia
Rev Mark Langham (Co-Secretary), Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity
Bishop Michael Evans, England
Sr Dr Lorelei F. Fuchs, USA
Rev Dr Gerard McCarren, USA
Rev Dr Paul McPartlan, England/USA
Bishop Joseph Osei-Bonsu, Ghana
Dr Clare Watkins, England

Methodist:

Rev Dr Geoffrey Wainwright (Co-Chair), USA
Rev Dr George Freeman (Co-Secretary), World Methodist Council
Bishop Paolo Ayres Mattos, Brazil
Rev David Chapman, England
Rev Dr Young-Ho Chun, Korea/USA
Rev Dr James Haire, Australia
Bishop Walter Klaiber, Germany
Rev Dr Karen Westerfield Tucker, USA
Administrative Staff:
Mrs. Roma Wyatt, World Methodist Council office, Lake Junaluska, North Carolina

The Status of this Document

The Report published here is the work of the International Methodist-Catholic Dialogue Commission. Commission members were appointed by the World Methodist Council and the Holy See's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. This is a joint statement of the Commission, not an authoritative declaration by the Roman Catholic Church or by the World Methodist Council, which will study the document in due course.

PREFACE

List of abbreviations:

BDUMC	<i>The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church</i> (2008).
BEM	<i>Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry</i> (Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches, 1982).
BWS	<i>By Water and the Spirit</i> (The United Methodist Church, 1996).
CCC	<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i> (2nd English-language edition, 1997).
HLS	John and Charles Wesley, <i>Hymns on the Lord's Supper</i> (Bristol: Felix Farley, 1745; facsimile repr. Madison, N.J.: The Charles Wesley Society, 1995).
HPMF	<i>His Presence Makes the Feast</i> (British Methodist Conference, 2003).
JDDJ	<i>Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification</i> (Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, 1999). The World Methodist Council associated with the <i>Declaration</i> in 2006.
LG	<i>Lumen Gentium</i> (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Second Vatican Council, 1964).
SC	<i>Sacrosanctum Concilium</i> (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Second Vatican Council, 1963).
THM	<i>This Holy Mystery</i> (The United Methodist Church, 2004). The format used here is: www.kintera.org/atf/cf/%7B3482e846-598f-460a-b9a7-386734470eda%7D/THM-BYGC.PDF
UR	<i>Unitatis Redintegratio</i> (Decree on Ecumenism, Second Vatican Council, 1964).
WJW	<i>The Works of John Wesley</i> , vols. 1-3: Sermons, ed. Albert C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984-86).

Abbreviations for the reports from the International Commission for Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council:

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

Quotations of Vatican documents, the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, and the *World Methodist Council Statement of Association* are taken from the Vatican website at www.vatican.va.

PREFACE

This Ninth Report of the International Dialogue between the World Methodist Council and the Roman Catholic Church was the result of five years of work by the Joint Commission. The members participated in week-long meetings in the Monastery of Bose in Northern Italy, in Dublin and Boston, and finally in Fulda in Germany. In each place contact was made where possible with the local Methodist or Catholic communities. The members of the dialogue prayed together each day and a Methodist eucharist and a Roman Catholic eucharist were celebrated during the week.

This report deals with the sacraments of the Church and indeed the sacramental nature of the Church itself. This topic has been dealt with in passing in many previous sessions and was raised again in the last report of the dialogue, "The Grace Given You in Christ", which in some way harvested the fruits of previous discussions on the Church and related issues. With this last report as a secure foundation, the Dialogue Commission was able to deal with the question of the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist and the sacramental character of ordination. In its first chapter it also dealt with the sacramental nature of the Church itself. All of these were discussed in the light of the paschal mystery of Christ, his death and resurrection for the salvation of all, which is always at the heart of sacramental reality.

During the week-long meetings of the dialogue, the participants grew in friendship and mutual understanding. This friendship has in many cases developed over fifteen years. The mutual understanding is the result of serious, honest dialogue which, being authentically ecumenical, does not involve any compromise or ambiguity.

It is always the hope of those who participate in the dialogue that the Report will be recognized by Methodists and Catholics as an adequate and accurate expression of their own faith. It is also hoped that many may have the joy experienced by the participants in the dialogue of discovering that their faith in these sacramental realities is to a large extent a shared faith. There are many questions still remaining to be studied, but once again, this Report is submitted to the World Methodist Council and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity with the hope that it will be accepted as a further step along the way to full communion between Methodists and Roman Catholics.

Professor Geoffrey Wainwright
Methodist Co-Chair

Bishop Michael Putney
Catholic Co-Chair

Pentecost 2011

SCRIPTURAL MEDITATION

Philippians 2:1-11

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, ² make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. ⁵ Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, ⁷ but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, ⁸ he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.¹

This text “offers so much in so few verses”; it is, in fact, “a little compendium of Pauline testimony”.² St Paul compactly presents the entire sweep of the drama of salvation won through the incarnation of Christ Jesus, the Son of God, and the paschal mystery of his death and exaltation. He does so in the context of urging the Philippians to be loving and selfless in their relations with one another. The decisive point is that the single “mind” that he urges them to have is the very mind that was “in Christ Jesus” (v. 5), and the way in which they will have the mind of Christ is by living “in Christ” (v. 1), in accordance with the teaching that Paul consistently gave to his communities (e.g. Rom 6:11; 1 Cor 1:30; Gal 3:28; Eph 1:3-10; Col 1:14-18). Living in Christ will instil in them the very attitudes and behaviour of their Lord; his loving humility and selfless obedience will sustain theirs, and by sharing his cross they will also share his resurrection (cf. Rom 6:3-4).

In vv. 1-4 Paul uses his rhetorical skills to encourage the Philippian church to strive for unity. In fact, Paul’s call to unity is based on the experience of the Philippians with Christ in the fellowship of the Spirit, the Christian community. Such fellowship is already given in Christ Jesus, and Christians (those who are “in Christ”), in every place and time, are called to manifest it. Thus, in four successive clauses, each governed by the opening “if”, he powerfully impresses upon the Philippians that they are indeed the recipients of Christ’s encouragement and love, members of an extraordinary fellowship created by the Spirit of God, and objects of God’s affection and compassion. As a result, they should pay attention to God’s appeal through him to strive for harmony and humility. Paul is not seeking after uniformity of opinion here. He does not ask that the Philippians all think alike. Rather he asks that they strive for an inner regard for each other that is full of love. He asks that they all possess a common spirit, share a common affection for each other, have a common desire to live together in harmony by renouncing a party-spirit that is coupled with vain conceit and self-interest, and adopt a humble attitude that regards others as better than themselves. In short, he asks that they have “one mind” (v. 2), namely the same mind that was “in Christ Jesus” (v. 5). With a shared love and a common mind, unity thrives, the Church grows, and the individual Christian is strengthened in faith.

Verses 6-11 are generally regarded by commentators as an early Christian hymn about Jesus. This is suggested by the way the passage begins, the rhythmic cadence of its words, the strophic patterning of its sentences, the uniqueness of its vocabulary, etc. The source of its ideas is to be found in the words and deeds of Jesus as preserved in the gospel tradition (see especially John 13:3-17; Matt 16:25-26; 18:4; 23:12; Luke 14:11; 18:4). The heart of this hymn is the very gospel of Jesus Christ.

1 New Revised Standard Version. Unless otherwise noted, all subsequent scripture citations are from this version.

2 Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1962), p. 4

SCRIPTURAL MEDITATION

The Philippians had been acting in a spirit of ambition, thinking themselves better than others, believing that they were above serving their fellows, concerned about how they might promote themselves and get ahead without giving adequate attention to the welfare of their neighbour (vv. 1-4). The Christ depicted in this hymn, however, challenges every one of those false values of the Philippians. He becomes, therefore, for Paul the ultimate guide to authentic living. This Christ-hymn (vv. 6-11) presents Jesus as the supreme example of the humble, self-sacrificing, self-denying, self-giving service that Paul has just been urging the Philippians to practise in their relations with one another. Although the hymn originally may have been composed for christological or soteriological reasons, Paul's motive in using it here is primarily ethical and ecclesiological. The Philippians are to behave in a Christ-like way, and they will do so by living "in Christ" and having the mind of Christ.

The hymn begins by describing Christ before the incarnation—he shared the nature of God and was equal with God. Contrary to what one might expect, the true nature of God is not to possess all things and to hold them to himself, but rather to give them generously for the enrichment of others. This is demonstrated by Christ, who did not cling to the high position that was his by right, but rather stepped down from it. That is to say, he deliberately placed himself in the humblest of positions: he who was in the form of God took human form and became a fully human being—a slave, even—so that he might serve others.

In the self-humbling act of the incarnation, God became man and set himself wholly to seek the advantage and promote the welfare of his fellows. It was never the intent of Christ to fight for his own honour and rights, but through self-surrender, self-renunciation and self-sacrifice to strive for the honour and rights of others. To obey, as a slave must obey, was his delight. So radical was his obedience that he did not withdraw it even when he was faced with death—the most cruel of deaths, death by crucifixion. On the cross Jesus was completely powerless, in a total state of emptiness. Like the Suffering Servant (cf. Isa 42:1-7; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12), whose image stands in the background of this hymn, Jesus freely laid down his life out of obedience and fidelity to God, making himself truly a man for others. Like the Servant, also, he was ultimately upheld by God, "highly exalted" (v. 9), and established as "a covenant to the people" and "a light to the nations" (Isa 42:6).

Jesus established the Eucharist as the celebration and renewal of that covenant (cf. Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24), new and everlasting, by means of which his followers would enjoy communion (*koinonia*) in his body and blood (1Cor 10:16), and thereby truly live in Christ (cf. John 6:56). Baptism is the sacrament which first imparts this incorporation in Christ. The baptized must consider themselves as "dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom 6:11). This present report considers in detail how Catholics and Methodists understand Baptism and Eucharist as giving and sustaining life in Christ, and more particularly as giving and sustaining a participation in Christ's saving death and resurrection. It also considers how Catholics and Methodists understand the nature and role of ordained ministers in the Church, those who go out in mission to preach the gospel and baptize (Matt 28:19), and who also lead the people of God in the celebration of the Eucharist (cf. Luke 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24-25). It is by the Word, Baptism and Eucharist that the members of the body of Christ live in him. These questions are vital for unity, peace and reconciliation in the Church today, because what Paul teaches the Philippians is still true, namely that it is by living in Christ and in his paschal mystery that the Church finds its unity and peace.

In the divine economy, it is by giving that a person receives, by losing his life that he finds it, by dying that he lives, by humbling himself that he is exalted. This is Paul's message to the Philippians, and he delivers it so eloquently in the form of a hymn. The final statements of the hymn (vv. 10-11) are of great christological significance, and they also suggest that it is, in fact, by living in Christ and in his paschal mystery that Christians give true worship to Christ. It is by letting the same mind be in them

SCRIPTURAL MEDITATION

that was in Christ Jesus, as Paul has just urged (v. 5), that the Philippians will truly bend the knee to Christ, as he now insists that they and all creatures must (v. 10). These final verses confirm what Peter had preached (Acts 2:36), that God made Jesus, whom men crucified, both Lord and Christ. He is to be served by all, the object of universal worship. It is possible that some beings might refuse to yield to Christ as king, might refuse to own his sovereignty over them. But whenever anyone does confess openly and gladly that Jesus Christ is Lord, the Father is glorified (v. 11), and his purposes are fulfilled. Ultimately, all things are to be subjected to Christ, “every knee . . . in heaven and on earth and under the earth” is to bend at his name (v. 10), and all things are to be united in him, “things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph 1:10), all of them reconciled to God through Christ, who brought peace “through the blood of his cross” (Col 1:20). Then, “when all things are subjected to him, . . . the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all” (1 Cor 15:28).

CHAPTER ONE

The Paschal Mystery of the Death and Resurrection of Christ

“Go into all the world and proclaim the Good News to the whole creation” (Mark 16:15). From these parting words of Jesus at his ascension, Christians believe that the whole world needs to hear the good news, the gospel of Jesus Christ, which St Paul summarized as “Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David” (2 Tim 2:8). In other words, Jesus not only preached the good news, he is the good news, the saviour (cf. Luke 2:11), the one who “takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Christians believe that it is sin that has brought death into the world (cf. Rom 5:12), because God is the source of all life (cf. Gen 1-2) and sin rejects God and cuts us off from him. Left to ourselves, human beings cannot break free from the cycle of sin and death. “I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. . . . Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” (Rom 7:18-19, 24). To this heartfelt question, St Paul cries out the answer he has been graced to discover: “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Rom 7:25).

To save us and to reconcile us to himself (cf. 2 Cor 5:18), God sent his own Son, “who in every respect [was] tested as we are, yet without sin” (Heb 4:15; cf. 1 John 3:5), “a lamb without defect or blemish” (1 Pet 1:19). Truly divine but truly human too,³ “a descendant of David”, he died in solidarity with sinful humanity, “obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross” (Phil 2:8). God then raised him from the dead, “highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:9-11). The cycle of sin and death is therefore now broken. In the gracious plan of God, the Son took our human nature “so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death” (Heb 2:14-15). Christ “loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Eph 5:2), and the Father raised him up in the Spirit (cf. Rom 8:11). “Christ is risen!”—this is the very core of the good news—and through his death and resurrection we are freed from our bondage so as to live in the fullness of life for which God made us. Jesus said: “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10).

In the New Testament, the word “mystery” refers to “God’s hidden plan of salvation now revealed in the incarnate Christ”.⁴ Since that plan centres on the death and resurrection of Christ, and since the early Christians applied to the events of Easter the term *Pascha*, which originally referred to the Jewish Passover, Christ’s death and resurrection and the wonderful way in which our salvation was won thereby is often called the “paschal mystery”. “The Church did not create itself: ‘It originated in the redemptive act of God in Christ; and it lives in union with Christ’s death and resurrection, comforted, guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit’. As members of Christ’s Church, in communion with Christians throughout the ages, we believe that we continue even today to share in the life and paschal mystery of the incarnate Son, upheld by the Spirit of God”.⁵ The relationship that each Christian and the Church at large has to the paschal mystery of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is the subject of this present joint study by Catholics and Methodists.

St Paul expressed the heart of Christian living when he said: “it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20). To this Christ he had surrendered, such that quite simply his life now was Christ: “For to me, living is Christ” (Phil 1:21). More specifically, he made it plain that it was Christ crucified who was living in him.

3 Compare the definition of the Council of Chalcedon. 4 Seoul §48; cf. Rom 16:25-27; Eph 1:3-10; 3:8-10; Col 1:25-27.

5 Seoul §52, incorporating a quotation from Nairobi §3.

CHAPTER ONE

Indeed he said: “I have been crucified with Christ [literally: co-crucified]; . . . the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:19-20). But the Christ who was crucified has been raised, and Paul knew that the resurrection was also at work in him. All the baptized have been “raised with Christ” (literally: co-raised; Col 2:12; 3:1). As a result, they must consider themselves “dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Rom 6:11). This new life, lived in intimate union with Christ and with his death and resurrection, is already the beginning of eternal life; the “mystery” long hidden but now revealed is “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col 1:27).

How do Christians live “in union with Christ’s death and resurrection”?⁶ This is clearly a fundamental question, and one to which Catholics and Methodists must be able to give a united answer if we are to establish between us the “full communion in faith, mission and sacramental life”⁷ that we seek. Full communion must necessarily be a full communion in Christ and in the “paschal mystery”. Already we can agree that Christian faith is fundamentally faith in Christ who loved us and gave himself for us (cf. Gal 2:20); that Christian mission is the preaching of “Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2), “Jesus Christ, raised from the dead” (2 Tim 2:8); and that by means of the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist we participate in Christ and in his death and resurrection. Christians are baptized “into his death . . . so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:3-4), and in the Eucharist we receive, as Jesus taught, his flesh “for the life of the world” (John 6:51), and his blood “poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matt 26:28).

First of all, it is important to recognize that union with Christ is of itself union with his death and resurrection. To live a life “hidden with Christ in God” (Col 3:3) is of itself to share in his paschal mystery. We do not need to look elsewhere than to Christ himself in order to find his death and resurrection. They are not only in the past while he is in the present. Though they were accomplished in the past, his death and resurrection are now embodied in the living Lord of our faith. The scriptures make it plain that it was “necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory” (Luke 24:26), and that the risen Lord bears the marks of his sacrifice for evermore (cf. John 20:20, 27; Rev 5:6). He has now taken his place as high priest in the heavenly sanctuary, bearing the blood by which he secured an eternal redemption, and interceding henceforth “to save those who approach God through him” (Heb 7:24-25; cf. 5:10; 8:1-2; 9:11-12; 12:24). The song of the saints in heaven is and always will be a celebration of his victory: “Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing!” (Rev 5:12). In other words, Christ and his sacrifice and his victory are one and inseparable. Any encounter now with the living Lord is therefore immediately an encounter with the mystery of his death and resurrection, as the apostles discovered on Easter evening when the risen Jesus appeared among them and showed them the marks of his wounds (cf. John 20: 19-29). To live in union with Christ is to live in union with his death and resurrection. Participating in Christ we participate also in the paschal mystery, “always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies” (2 Cor 4:10). St Paul showed the way for all Christians when he said: “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead” (Phil 3:10-11).

That desire is expressed at our Baptism and renewed every time we celebrate the Eucharist. Our life in Christ begins sacramentally in Baptism; and the Eucharist, in which we receive “the flesh of our Saviour Jesus Christ, which suffered for our sins, and which the Father in his goodness raised up again”,⁸ nourishes, strengthens and sustains that life.

6 Seoul §52; Nairobi §3. 7 Nairobi §20; Seoul §98, §144.2. 8 Ignatius of Antioch, *Smyrnaeans*, 7.

CHAPTER ONE

The Eucharist is therefore, as St Ignatius of Antioch said, “the medicine of immortality, the antidote against death, by which we live in Jesus Christ for evermore”.⁹ John Wesley regarded human sin as a disease and admired the idea of St Ignatius,¹⁰ St Clement of Alexandria¹¹ and other Fathers, that Christ is the physician who heals humanity, both body and soul.¹² In one of his hymns, Charles Wesley wrote: “Let thy blood the med’cine be”.¹³

The Church is the communion of those who, having heard the Word and responded in faith (cf. Rom 10:14-17), live in Christ for evermore, through the washing of Baptism and the sustenance of Word and Eucharist. Some Church Fathers saw Baptism and Eucharist as signified in the water and blood, respectively, that sprang from the side of Christ on the cross (cf. John 19:34), and taught that the Church was formed from the side of Christ as Eve was formed from the side of Adam.¹⁴ The Church is thus Christ’s bride, for whom he gave himself up, so as to wash her and take her to himself (cf. Eph 5:25-27). The Church is also Christ’s body (cf. 1 Cor 12:12-30), as Paul discovered on the road to Damascus, when the risen Jesus spoke from heaven and said to him: “Why do you persecute me?” (Acts 9:4-5). He discovered that Christ is present in his followers; he lives in them and they live in him as Jesus himself taught in St John’s gospel: “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them” (John 6:56). St Augustine later spoke of the head and the body as forming *unus Christus*,¹⁵ the *totus Christus*.¹⁶

Methodists and Catholics hold this scriptural and patristic teaching in common, as a precious shared heritage. Together they affirm that we are saved by participating in the death and resurrection of Christ, and that the Church is the communion of those who, being members of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 6:15; 12:27), are also members one of another (cf. Rom 12:5). This membership is given by Baptism and renewed in the Eucharist, and these sacraments are the ordinary means of grace and salvation (cf. Mark 16:16; John 6:53). The Church is the body and the bride of Christ,¹⁷ the communion of salvation.

As well as being essentially social, salvation is also essentially bodily, as the abundant references already made to Christ’s bodily nature and his suffering, death and resurrection amply show. It is not just our souls that are saved; Christians believe in the “resurrection of the body”, too, and St Paul instructed the Corinthians not to denigrate the body: “glorify God in your body” (1 Cor 6:20). Sacramental acts are bodily celebrations of the salvation Christ has won for us, using physical elements of creation (e.g., water, bread and wine, oil), and always with a proclamation of the word.

9 Ignatius of Antioch, *Ephesians*, 20.

10 Cf. Ignatius of Antioch, *Ephesians*, 7.

11 Cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Paidagogos*, 1, 2 (PG 8, 255B).

12 For example, in the sermon “The Trouble and Rest of Good Men” (Sermon 109), John Wesley wrote, “The whole world is indeed, in its present state, only one great infirmary: all that are therein are sick of sin, and their one business there is to be healed. And for this very end the great Physician of souls is continually present with them, marking all the diseases of every soul, and „giving medicines to heal its sickness” (WJW, vol. 3, p. 533).

13 Charles Wesley, *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, vol. 1 (Bristol: Farley, 1749), Hymn 153, st. 4; cf. Hymn 159, st. 2: “How costly was the medicine, Lord, / The medicine which thy wounds supplied! / That I might live, to health restor’d, / My Lamb, my Good Physician died”.

14 Cf. John Chrysostom, *Catecheses* 3, 13-19 (see also Roman Breviary, Office of Readings, Good Friday).

15 Augustine, *On Merits and the Forgiveness of Sins*, 1,31,60 (PL 44:144-145).

16 Augustine, *Sermon* 22, 10 (PL 38, 154). Cf. HLS, Hymn 129, st. 2: “Christ and his Church are one, / One Body and one Vine, / For us he uses all his powers, / And all He has, or is, is ours”. This is developed further below in Chapter Three.

17 Cf. Seoul §§55-57.

CHAPTER ONE

The Church will remain forever as the body and the bride of Christ (cf. Eph 1:22-23; Rev 21:2, 9-10). In this ultimate sense, the Church is eschatological and invisible, it belongs to the kingdom of God. But Catholics and Methodists believe that the Church is also a present and visible reality, as present and visible as the water of Baptism and the bread and wine of Eucharist, as present and visible as the preacher of the good news and the gathered Christian community. The Church is thus a “complex reality”,¹⁸ both present and future, earthly and heavenly, “that place where the first signs of the reign of God are identified and acknowledged in the world”.¹⁹ “Filled with the power of the Spirit”, the Church on earth is empowered “to serve as the sign, sacrament and harbinger of the Kingdom of God in the time between the times”.²⁰ Proclaiming the word, celebrating the sacraments and living in charity are its fundamental activities as the body of Christ. Both Catholics and Methodists believe that when the scriptures are faithfully proclaimed and preached it is Christ himself who speaks, as he expounded the scriptures to the disciples on the road to Emmaus before breaking bread with them (cf. Luke 24:13-35); that when the sacraments are celebrated it is Christ himself who is the minister (cf. Luke 24:31, 35); and that the love that Christians practise is “the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:39), the love now “poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Rom 5:5).²¹ The proclamation of the word and the celebration of the sacraments are therefore actions of Christ in and through his body, the Church, so as to build up his body in love and constantly draw new members to it.

Within this perspective, Methodists and Catholics no longer polarize word and sacrament, placing them in separate categories of Christ’s presence and action, but rather see the profound commonalities between them. “We believe that the incarnate Word is sacramental, the Scriptures are sacramental, and that the sacraments . . . are all proclamations of the Word (cf. 1 Cor 11:26)”.²² As just seen, we agree that the Church itself, the body of Christ, is sacramental,²³ in that while being other than Christ, and at times wayward, it has nevertheless been taken by Christ to himself so that in and through it he may be present and active in the world: “Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me” (Luke 10:16; cf. Matt 10:40; John 13:20). By the same token, the Church itself is a proclamation of the Word, “a letter of Christ, . . . written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts” (cf. 2 Cor 3:3).

The early church came to realize the fallen state not just of humanity but of the whole of creation. The fact that God wants everyone to be saved (cf. 1 Tim 2:4) shows that all need salvation. The doctrine of “original sin”, which was gradually developed, is the “reverse side” of the good news that Jesus Christ is the saviour of all and that salvation is offered to all through him.²⁴ Adam came to be seen in counterpoint to Christ, the second Adam: “as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ” (1 Cor 15:22). But there is also a cosmic dimension to salvation in Christ: all things were made “through him and for him” (Col 1:16), and all things are to be united in him, “things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph 1:7-10). However, the creation has been enduring its own “bondage to decay”, suffering at the hands of sinners, “groaning in labour pains” and waiting “with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God” (cf. Rom 8:19-22).

18 LG §8.

19 BDUMC ¶101, section 1, “Our Doctrinal Heritage”, p. 44.

20 Nairobi §8; Seoul §77.

21 Cf. SC §7; THM, Part Two: “Christ is Here: Experiencing the Mystery”.

22 Seoul §104.

23 Cf. Seoul §102.

24 CCC §389. Catholics and Methodists agree that this is a salvation by faith, which is “productive of all good works and all holiness” (WJW, “Salvation by Faith” [Sermon 1, III.1], vol. 1, p. 125); also Sermon 85, “On Working Out Our Own Salvation”; cf. CCC §§161-62). On 23 July 2006, the World Methodist Council officially associated with the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (1999) by the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, and an Official Common Affirmation of this association was signed by all three partners in Seoul.

CHAPTER ONE

The whole creation needs Christ, the only Son of God, and those who become children of God, “joint heirs with Christ”, by the work of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:16-17), mediate his presence not just to humanity but to creation also. Both for Catholics and for Methodists, therefore, Christ is a “cosmic Christ”, who has taken the Church to himself as his body and acts through it for the benefit of the whole of humanity and for creation at large.

As the body of Christ, formed by the word of God and by the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist, the Church is caught up in the twofold movement of Christ himself. It participates in the outward-going ministry and service of Christ, who was sent into the world because of God’s love for the world (cf. John 3:16-17), and also in the priestly offering of himself that Christ made (cf. Heb 7:27; 9:26) and in his praise of the Father in the Holy Spirit (cf. Luke 10:21). In Christ, therefore, the Church is essentially “a community both of worship and of mission”.²⁵

In face of his impending death, Jesus looked forward to the sending of the Holy Spirit and said to the apostles: “the Holy Spirit . . . will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you” (John 14:26), “the Spirit . . . will guide you into all the truth” (John 16:13). Then, at his ascension, he said to them: “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt 28:20). Placing all their hope in these promises of the presence of Christ and the guidance of the Spirit, Christians trust the sacraments that the Church celebrates, and know that most deeply they are actions not of the Church alone but of Christ himself in the Spirit. The sacraments therefore have an objective value, which Catholics sometimes stress with the phrase *ex opere operato* (“by the act performed”), meaning that the grace of God is unfailingly offered when they are rightly celebrated. However, they also enable the individual to have a subjective experience of salvation as the grace offered is recognized and embraced, and this aspect is more prominent in Methodist teaching on “assurance”. As objective and subjective aspects of the same reality, respectively, Catholic and Methodist approaches not only can be reconciled but have much to gain by being drawn together to complement one another in this area. There is no need for Catholics and Methodists to regard this particular difference between them as divisive.

Is there a divergence, however, between Methodists and Catholics with regard to where exactly the Church is to be found; what identifies it? Here again, a difference of approach has been evident. Catholics have tended to go from the community to the individual, while Methodists have tended at times to go in the other direction.²⁶ Nevertheless, this difference also must not be exaggerated; John Wesley said: “The gospel of Christ knows of no religion but social; no holiness but social holiness”.²⁷ Methodists understand the Church to be the community of the faithful “in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments duly administered”.²⁸ For Methodists, it is also important for the Church to be in faithful continuity with the early church, especially in mission.²⁹ This description centres upon the objective realities of word and sacraments, but it is also coloured by a Methodist understanding of Christian history in which there have been faith-filled risks and discontinuities at various points.³⁰ Methodists understand such discontinuities to be embraced by the reforming, renewing and indeed recreating power of the Holy Spirit as the Church journeys through history.

²⁵ *Called to Love and Praise: The Nature of the Christian Church in Methodist Experience and Practice* (British Methodist Conference, 1999) §1.4.1; cf. Seoul §98, §124.

²⁶ Cf. Seoul §§99-100.

²⁷ John Wesley, Preface, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (London: Strahan, 1739), p. viii.

²⁸ BDUMC ¶103, section 3, Article XIII “Of the Church”, p. 62; also British Methodist *Deed of Union*, §4.

²⁹ Cf. John Wesley, Sermon 74, “Of the Church” and Sermon 4, “Scriptural Christianity”.

³⁰ Cf. Seoul §99, §106.

³¹ UR §5; cf. LG §8, also LG chapters 2 and 7.

³² LG §22.

CHAPTER ONE

The Catholic Church, too, places great emphasis on the objective realities of word and sacraments, and recognizes that the Church needs “continual reformation” as it makes its pilgrim way.³¹ Nevertheless, it also stresses the importance of visible continuity in the Church’s life; it teaches that “the order of bishops . . . succeeds to the college of apostles”,³² and that the Church that Christ founded and entrusted to Peter and the apostles after his resurrection, “constituted and organised in the world as a society, subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him”.³³ 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”.³⁴

However, the bishops whom the Catholic Church understands to be in apostolic succession are considered as “high priests” of their flocks,³⁵ who offer the eucharistic sacrifice,³⁶ “the fount and apex of the whole Christian life”,³⁷ and these priestly and sacrificial connections have historically been problematic for Protestants. Equally, Catholics have generally considered these aspects of ordained ministry to be wanting among Protestants.³⁸ One of the purposes of the present text is precisely to address these important issues in the hope of furthering the reconciliation of Methodists and Catholics.

It should be noted that this text concentrates on the ways in which Christians live “in union with Christ’s death and resurrection”³⁹ through the *sacraments*; the importance of the *word* for our life in Christ has been treated in an earlier text of this dialogue.⁴⁰ Furthermore, it is important to state at the outset that we pursue this joint study with the clear understanding that “all persons depend completely on the saving grace of God for their salvation”.⁴¹ We live in union with Christ’s death and resurrection purely by God’s grace and totally dependent on Christ’s prior offering of himself for us. “In justification the righteous receive from Christ faith, hope, and love and are thereby taken into communion with him. This new personal relation to God is grounded totally on God’s graciousness and remains constantly dependent on the salvific and creative working of this gracious God, who remains true to himself, so that one can rely upon him”.⁴² At the same time, it must also be borne in mind that “a key point of agreement between Methodists and Catholics is the need for graced, free and active participation in God’s saving work”.⁴³

The following chapters seek to clarify our joint understanding of the sacramental realities of Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, with particular attention to questions that historically have been problematic between Catholics and Methodists. This opening chapter has laid foundations for what follows by emphasizing our common understanding of scriptural teaching on the priestly nature of Christ, on the unity between Christ and his sacrifice, offered once for all but enduring forever, and on the unity of Christ and the Church, his body and his bride.

33 LG §8.

34 Seoul §106.

35 Cf. SC §41; LG §21.

36 Cf. LG §26.

37 LG §11.

38 Cf. Seoul §130.

39 Nairobi §3.

40 Cf. Rio.

41 JDDJ §19.

42 JDDJ §27.

43 Brighton §52.

CHAPTER TWO

Baptism: Participation in Christ's Death and Resurrection

I. Our Basic Common Affirmation

"Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom 6:3-4).

It is the common scriptural faith of Catholics and Methodists that, in Baptism, we are made sharers in Christ's paschal mystery. Baptism, properly celebrated, joins the baptized to Christ, and therefore to one another, in spite of continued historical divisions among Christians.

In accordance with the Second Vatican Council's understanding of Baptism as "the sacramental bond of unity",⁴⁴ and following the recommendation regarding the recognition of Baptism that was made in the World Council of Churches' document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*,⁴⁵ Catholics and Methodists in many parts of the world formally and explicitly recognize each other's baptisms. As stated in the Seoul report: "Our common Baptism in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is our sacramental bond of unity, the visible foundation of the deep communion which already exists between us and which impels us to ever deeper unity with each other and participation in the life and mission of Christ himself".⁴⁶

Methodists and Catholics share certain baptismal practices which embody our common faith:

a. In both the Catholic Church and the Churches of the World Methodist Council, people are baptized with water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In both traditions Baptism may take place by immersion or by pouring, and there is no inclination to accept only one of these modes as valid.

b. Methodist and Catholic rites of Baptism use the key scriptural and traditional language of Baptism, such as: the fatherly love of God; the saving work of Christ and incorporation into his body; the power of the Holy Spirit; repentance and forgiveness of sin; faith and rebirth into new life. In this way, our language testifies that Baptism brings us into participation in the life of the Trinity.

c. In both communities there is awareness that the original form of Baptism was the baptism of adults who were able to confess their faith when they were baptized. Catholics and Methodists believe that God's saving love in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ precedes our articulation of belief, and therefore baptize infants as well as adults. "Both the Methodist and the Catholic Churches consider it right to baptize the infants born to believers. They encourage their members to take the opportunities presented to them to renew the vows that they made, or that were made for them, in baptism".⁴⁷

From this fundamental baptismal faith and celebration arises that strong sense of mission and the call to "holy living" common to both Methodists and Catholics.

44 UR §22.

45 BEM, Baptism §15.

46 Seoul §78.

47 Singapore §63.

CHAPTER TWO

Through Baptism we participate in the paschal mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. There are different emphases, however, between Methodists and Catholics, especially with regard to three issues: the relationship between Baptism and faith; between Baptism and new life; and between Baptism and the Church. In what follows these three themes are dealt with in light of one overarching conviction: all that happens through Baptism is the work of God's grace in Jesus Christ. Through Baptism, God gives his grace and love, and what Baptism creates and achieves in the life of the Church and of the individual is the fruit of what God has done in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and of what he works in us through the Holy Spirit.

II. Baptism and Faith

"When you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead" (Col 2:12). This verse speaks powerfully of our baptismal participation in Christ's death and resurrection. In doing so it seems to relate Baptism especially to the death of Jesus, and faith to his resurrection. This is not so much a sharp distinction between Baptism and faith as ways of participation in Christ, rather it highlights their inseparable connection: Baptism asks for faith as faith asks for Baptism. The New Testament witness to this is both consistent and complex.

In Acts we see an apparently simple connection. Peter closes his sermon at Pentecost with the summons: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit". Then it is stated: "Those who welcomed his message were baptized" (Acts 2:38-41). Similarly, the jailer at Philippi who asked the apostles, "What must I do to be saved?" was told "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household"; and after hearing the word of God, "he and his entire family were baptized without delay" (Acts 16:30-34). In other places the emphasis seems to be more on prior teaching and personal conversion, but the sequence of believing and being baptized is still clear: "Crispus, the official of the synagogue, became a believer in the Lord, together with all his household; and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul became believers and were baptized" (Acts 18:8).

The Pauline Epistles offer a double perspective on Baptism and faith. It is *faith* that saves, for "we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ" (Gal 2:16); and, "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom 10:9). But when Paul is speaking to the believers about grounding their life in Christ, there is a different emphasis—on *Baptism*: "But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor 6:11). At some places faith *and* Baptism are mentioned together: "For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ" (Gal 3:26-27). Faith and Baptism are closely related and together are integral to our being included in God's salvation through Jesus Christ.

While there is clearly a complementary relationship between faith and Baptism in the New Testament, this is not a relationship which can be simply drawn, or described definitively in a linear fashion as one preceding the other. In a missionary situation, becoming a believer will normally precede Baptism; but there are other instances, notably infant baptism, where being baptized calls for the faith which embraces what has been received in Baptism. In Baptism, as something which happens to us, we receive what God has done for us in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; faith describes our personal acceptance of what is fundamental for our life. In the New Testament, faith and Baptism describe two different, but inseparable, aspects of our single participation in the paschal mystery.

CHAPTER TWO

The centrality of faith for Baptism is clearly evidenced in the rites used by Catholics and Methodists. In a characteristic Methodist liturgy, candidates for Baptism (if able to answer for themselves) are called upon to answer “I do” when asked, “Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Saviour, put your whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as your Lord?”⁴⁸ Similarly, adult candidates for Baptism in the Catholic Church are asked to affirm their creedal faith before being baptized.⁴⁹

However, in spite of this common belief, there are differences in the interpretation of the relationship between faith and the Church, which may also be significant for our understanding of Baptism. In the Catholic Church “the faith of the Church” is of great importance. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that those who are baptized know that: “It is the Church that believes first, and so bears, nourishes and sustains my faith. . . . It is through the Church that we receive faith and new life in Christ by Baptism”.⁵⁰ Methodists would accept that those who are baptized owe their faith to the preaching of the Church. In Methodist baptismal rites the whole congregation professes the faith of the universal Church into which the baptized—be they adults or infants—are received.⁵¹ Nevertheless, Methodists would tend to see faith primarily as a personal decision to believe in Jesus Christ and to trust God for Christ’s sake through the power of the Holy Spirit. This dimension is not lacking in the Catholic Church. The confession of the Church will lead those who are baptized to the conviction that “with her and in her [the Church], we are won over and brought to confess: ‘I believe’, ‘We believe’”.⁵² A basic agreement between Catholics and Methodists is evident here, but also a difference in emphasis in understanding this relationship.

There is nevertheless common ground in an understanding of faith which holds together the personal and the communal aspects of believing: “Faith is always personal, but never private, for faith incorporates the believing individual into the community of faith. Such faith is both a personal conviction and a sharing of what is held by the community of believers. Faith is neither merely an intellectual assent to what the Church teaches nor a purely emotional personal conviction: to believe in God and the salvation which he has wrought for us is the living response of the whole life of the believer, and changes our lives in every respect; it is personal, living faith”.⁵³

This statement indicates three important common points in Catholic and Methodist understandings of faith:

- * Faith is directed to the transformed living of the whole of life: faith has the power to change everything in the believer’s life.
- * Both Methodists and Catholics recognize that faith is neither merely intellectual assent to the Church’s teaching, nor only the emotion, or experience, of personal conviction. Faith involves both assent to the message of the gospel and a personal or affective response.
- * Both Methodists and Catholics hold together personal belief and the faith of the community.

48 *The United Methodist Book of Worship* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1992), pp. 88, 96, 100, 111.

49 “Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults” §§ 223-225, in *The Rites of the Catholic Church*, vol. 1 (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1990), pp. 157-59.

50 CCC §168.

51 So, for example, in British Methodism’s *The Methodist Worship Book* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1999): “The ministers says to every one present: „Do you believe and trust in” (pp. 66-67, 80, 91-92); and in *The United Methodist Book of Worship*: “Let us join together in professing the Christian faith” (pp. 89, 96).

52 CCC §168.

53 Brighton §37.

54 See Chapter 1, §15 above.

CHAPTER TWO

There is a tendency among Methodists to emphasize the “subjective” whereas Catholics tend to underline more the “objective”.⁵⁴ This has a direct implication for the assessment of the relationship between faith and Baptism. Whereas Catholics tend to describe Baptism as the root and fundament of Christian life, Methodists would be inclined to point to the importance of faith—both, of course, without denying the crucial role of the other.

During the history of the Church there has been a constant struggle to “balance” the roles of faith and Baptism. In different ways, our two communities have both worked to avoid either of the extremes described in the United Methodist document *By Water and the Spirit*: “The United Methodist Church does not accept either the idea that only believer’s baptism is valid or the notion that the baptism of infants magically imparts salvation apart from active personal faith”.⁵⁵ In particular, the second concern—about the need for a personal active faith—is rooted in the missionary experience of Wesley and other early Methodist evangelists.

Experience in both our communities demonstrates that the fact of being baptized does not ensure active personal faith (although we would all wish to exercise a proper reserve in judging too quickly what “active personal faith” might look like). It is for this reason that the widespread Catholic practice of baptizing infants is dependent not only on a communal understanding of faith, but also on the “well-founded hope”, discernible by the minister of Baptism, that the infant is to be raised in the faith of the Church.⁵⁶ In the Latin Rite for the Baptism of a Child, the celebrant addresses the parents in this way: “You have asked to have your child baptized. In doing so you are accepting the responsibility of training him (her) in the practice of the faith”.⁵⁷ Baptism of infants assumes a continuing catechesis in the home as well as in the life of the Church community. Similarly, *By Water and the Spirit* states: “The baptism of infants is properly understood and valued if the child is loved and nurtured by the faithful worshipping church and by the child’s own family. . . . If a child has been baptized but her or his family or sponsors do not faithfully nurture the child in the faith, the congregation has a particular responsibility for incorporating the child into its life”.⁵⁸ For both of our communities, a serious question arises then about how we attend to the ongoing growth in faith of those baptized. Both Methodists and Catholics recognize that our churches, in many contexts, have much work still to do both in pre- and post-baptismal preparation and catechesis.

Methodists and Catholics share a fundamental sense of the necessary relationship between faith and Baptism, and of the complexity of this relationship. There is much common ground between us here. On the basis of this agreement we can learn from each other’s different emphases. Therefore, we are encouraged to engage in further mutually enriching conversation, concerning: the personal and corporate dimensions of baptismal faith; how such faith is to be discerned and nurtured pastorally; and specifically the relationship between believing and belonging—*both* of which are presented, with varying emphases, as true aspects of faith in our traditions. Shared reflection on faith and Baptism opens up questions of mission and evangelization of concern to all who seek to be Christ’s disciples in contemporary cultures. The process of mutual learning between Catholics and Methodists may well help towards a deeper understanding of the interrelationship between Baptism and faith as God’s ways of sharing with us what he has done for us in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

55 BWS §38.

56 *Code of Canon Law* (1983), canon 868 1/2.

57 “Rite of Baptism for One Child” §77, in *The Rites of the Catholic Church*, vol. 1, p. 395.

58 BWS §36.

59 Rio §27.

CHAPTER TWO

These reflections suggest the importance of some sense of journey in relation to faith. The prayer: “I believe! Help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24) witnesses to the ongoing human sense of being called to deepen faith. Personal faith is not a “thing” received all at once. Faith is something which matures and grows in Christian living.⁵⁹ The rediscovery of the importance of the catechumenate as the proper approach to Baptism, embodied for contemporary Catholics in the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA), emphasizes this sense of the journey of faith. That Methodists similarly emphasize the importance of preparation for Baptism indicates that our communities are coming together in an understanding of the *process* of faith.

Such an understanding of faith has consequences for how the relationship of faith and Baptism is understood. For both Catholics and Methodists, Baptism can be celebrated for a person only once; but, if we see faith as a process and a journey, it is easier to accept that this one Baptism, as the sacrament of faith, may be celebrated for different individuals at different points in this journey of faith. This would be true within our respective communities as well as between them. The gospel shows Jesus on his way from his baptism in the Jordan to his “baptism” in his death on Calvary (cf. Mark 10:38). This makes it clear that Baptism is the call to follow Jesus, a vocation to share his life and his suffering, just as it is a sharing in God’s saving acts in Christ’s cross and resurrection. Our faith is the openness to live from what God has done through Jesus for us.

III. Baptism and New Life

Christians share in eternal life through the giving up of God’s Son for us (John 3:14-16). This demands, according to the gospel, that we be “born again”. As Jesus tells Nicodemus: “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit” (John 3:5; cf. John 3:1-16). This gospel teaching has been understood by Christians through the ages as linking new birth both to Baptism and to the action of the Holy Spirit. Being born again “by water and Spirit” refers us both to a sacramental act and to the mysterious freedom of the Spirit: “The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8). Scripture thus presents us with a perennial question in sacramental understanding, about how the action of God and ritual are related to one another. Specifically, these verses raise the issue of how Baptism relates to new birth—or “regeneration”. This question needs to be explored by Catholics and Methodists together in light of our respective traditions.

Both Methodists and Catholics believe that we are changed in Baptism. In faithfulness to scripture (e.g., Rom 6:3-4), we say together that “baptism is an action of God by which the baptized begin their life with Christ the Redeemer and participate in his death and resurrection”.⁶⁰ Baptism makes the baptized into members of Christ’s Church, and so opens a way for them to share in God’s holiness.⁶¹ Baptism is an irrevocable and divine act: “As Christ is received in faith, original sin is erased, sins are forgiven, the baptized are justified in the eyes of God and become a new creation; with all believers they share the communion of the Spirit; and they are called to seek perfection in hope and in love through faithful response to God’s continuing gifts of grace”.⁶²

New life can only begin and grow when the old life that impedes the grace of God is ended. Baptism refers both to new life in the Spirit and to the casting off of the old life of sin. Both these aspects of God’s salvific work are deeply rooted in the biblical teaching about Baptism. John the Baptist had proclaimed “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Mark 1:4). In the light of Jesus’ death and resurrection, Peter tells the people after his sermon at Pentecost: “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins are forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

60 Rio §101; cf. BEM, Baptism §3. 61 Singapore §§64-65. 62 Rio §101.

CHAPTER TWO

Both our traditions explicitly recognize this pattern of repentance and new life in Baptism. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* names the “two principal effects” of Baptism: “purification from sins and new birth in the Holy Spirit”.⁶³ The British Methodist *Worship Book* describes in similar words what happens in Baptism: “God claims and cleanses us, rescues us from sin, and raises us to new life”.⁶⁴ Similarly, in the “Thanksgiving over the water” the minister prays: “Pour out your Holy Spirit that those baptized in this water may die to sin, be raised with Christ, and be born to new life in the family of your Church”.⁶⁵

Catholic teaching maintains that, in Baptism, *all* sin is forgiven, and in doing so includes both “original sin” and “personal sins”.⁶⁶ Although the topic of original sin in Wesleyan and Methodist teaching may not be as explicitly connected with the theological understanding of Baptism as in the Catholic tradition, the doctrine as such belongs to the basics of Methodist belief.⁶⁷ It is the clearest expression of the truth that “before God all persons are lost, helpless to save themselves, and in need of divine mercy and forgiveness”.⁶⁸ Baptism is the sacrament of God’s unconditional grace through which he heals everything that separates us from him and gives us new life in Christ by the power of the Spirit.

This shared belief raises a sharper question concerning how Methodists and Catholics understand the relation of the event or celebration of Baptism to “regeneration”, being “born again”. Is regeneration a necessary effect of being baptized? Does new birth into Christ’s resurrected life always require baptismal celebration?

In responding to these questions, our respective traditions employ different languages. Much of the classical Catholic language about the sacraments has used scholastic formulation, drawing on scripture and the Fathers. Much Methodist understanding comes from the foundational experiences of Wesley in mission and preaching as well as from the historic Anglican legacy. This different provenance of language about Baptism requires us to be careful in questioning each other’s understanding. Linguistic differences *per se* need not necessarily indicate substantial or community-dividing differences of belief.

Methodists recognize in John Wesley’s own preaching a certain ambivalence as to the relationship of Baptism and regeneration. This ambivalence can be illustrated by his adaptation of Article XXII of the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England for the composition of Article XVII of the Methodist Articles of Religion. Here Wesley retains the language of Baptism as a sign of an internal reality, differentiating the Methodist position from that of the Baptists (as he understood it), which sees Baptism only as an act of confession by the baptized. “Baptism is not only a sign of profession and mark of difference whereby Christians are distinguished from others that are not baptized; but it is also a sign of regeneration or the new birth”.⁶⁹

63 CCC §1262.

64 *The Methodist Worship Book*, p. 63.

65 *The Methodist Worship Book*, p. 66.

66 CCC §1263.

67 Cf. “World Methodist Council Statement of Association with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification” (Seoul, 2006) §4.1.

68 BWS §16.

69 BDUMC ¶103, section 3, Article XVII “Of Baptism”, p. 63.

CHAPTER TWO

In principle, John Wesley shared the Anglican doctrine of baptismal new birth. In a hymn written for the early Methodists, Baptism is referred to as a “seal” that makes the baptized heirs of redemption: _____

So too in his sermon “The Marks of the New Birth”, Wesley assumed that regeneration is “ordinarily annexed to baptism”.⁷¹

However, Wesley’s experience of preaching to those who lived no Christian life, but claimed that their baptism meant they were saved, made the question of the relationship between Baptism and regeneration sharper for him. Confronted by the experience of people’s refusing the invitation to a personal faith with the excuse that they were already baptized, John Wesley went so far as to describe such a routine appeal to Baptism as a leaning “on the staff of that broken reed, that ye *were* born again in baptism”.⁷² In a later sermon, he made it explicitly clear that “baptism is not the new birth” itself, for it is the “outward and visible sign” of the “inward and spiritual grace”, which is “death unto sin” and “the new birth unto righteousness”. “For what can be more plain [in speaking of Baptism and regeneration], than that the one is an external, the other an internal work?”⁷³

This distinction lies behind a stanza of one of Charles Wesley’s baptismal hymns, which declares: _____

Wesley’s ambivalence over whether Baptism was itself regeneration, whether rebirth was effected by the celebration, has been carried over into contemporary Methodism. The language of “sign” and “symbol” is used in the Articles of Religion,⁷⁵ holding open the question of effect. Today Methodists seek to express their understanding of this matter in terms such as: “Baptism is the sacramental sign of new life through and in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Various identified as regeneration, new birth, and being born again, this work of grace makes us into new spiritual creatures (2 Corinthians 5:17). We die to our old nature which was dominated by sin and enter into the very life of Christ who transforms us. Baptism is the means of entry into new life in Christ (John 3:5; Titus 3:5), but new birth may not always coincide with the moment of the administration of water or the laying on of hands. Our awareness and acceptance of our redemption by Christ and new life in him may vary throughout our lives. But, in whatever way the reality of the new birth is experienced, it carries out the promises God made to us in our baptism”.⁷⁶

Eternal Spirit, descend from high,
Baptizer of our spirits thou,
The sacramental seal apply,
And witness with the water now.
Oh! That the souls baptiz’d herein,
May now thy truth and mercy feel,
May rise, and wash away their sin—
Come, Holy Ghost, their pardon seal.⁷⁰

Let the promis’d inward grace
Accompany the sign,
On her new-born soul impress
The glorious name divine:
Father, all thy love reveal,
Jesus all thy mind impart,
Holy Ghost, renew, and dwell
Forever in her heart.⁷⁴

70 Charles Wesley, *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, vol. 2 (Bristol: Farley, 1749), Hymn 181, sts. 5-6.

71 WJW, “The Marks of the New Birth” (Sermon 18, 1), vol. 1, p. 417.

72 WJW, “The Marks of the New Birth” (Sermon 18, IV.5), vol. 1, p. 430.

73 WJW, “The New Birth” (Sermon 45, IV.1), vol. 2, p. 197.

74 Charles Wesley, *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, vol. 2 (Bristol: Farley, 1749), Hymn 182, st. 2.

75 See Methodist Article XVII, quoted above in §23. See also Article VI of the Confession of Faith of the Evangelical United Brethren Church: “Baptism signifies entrance into the household of faith, and is a symbol of repentance and inner cleansing from sin, a representation of the new birth in Christ Jesus” (BDUMC ¶103, section 3, Article VI “The Sacraments”, p. 68).

76 BWS §31.

CHAPTER TWO

This text does describe regeneration as the true effect of Baptism, while recognizing the pastoral reality which might mean that this effect is not immediate or even inevitable with regard to personal conversion and transformation of life.

Contemporary Methodist rites of Baptism declare a relationship between Baptism and new birth. So, the newly baptized are welcomed by the congregation with the words: “Through baptism you are incorporated by the Holy Spirit into God’s new creation and made to share in Christ’s royal priesthood”. As the pastor prays for the gift of the Spirit over the baptized, he or she refers to them as those “having been born through water and the Spirit”.⁷⁷ There is a tendency here to identify Baptism and new birth, seeing regeneration as an effect of grace always associated with Baptism. This is not, however, to say that new birth is causally effected by the celebration of the baptismal rite. Wesley’s observation that there are many who are baptized who are not (apparently) “born anew”—an observation confirmed still today—makes a strict causal link problematic.

Methodism recognizes that many people, especially those baptized as infants, will still need, at a later date, “to claim the faith of the Church proclaimed in baptism as her or his own faith”.⁷⁸ This touches the root of Methodist belief. On the one hand, Baptism, including the baptism of infants, is seen as a strong sign of prevenient grace which works in our lives even before we are able to believe and to profess our faith. On the other hand, there is the strong conviction that grace works toward a personally claimed faith and that people should be invited to profess their faith publicly by word and deed. This double conviction concerning Baptism and its effect finds a certain structural expression in the distinction, in many Methodist communities, between baptized and professing/confirmed members of the Church.

Catholics emphasize the effectiveness of Baptism. Baptism forgives sins, makes the baptized a new creation, incorporates them into Christ, marks the baptized with “an indelible spiritual mark” or “sacramental character”, and bestows divine grace.⁷⁹ This language reflects the more “objective” Catholic emphasis on the effectiveness of sacraments *ex opere operato*.⁸⁰ At the same time, it bears a striking similarity to the language of *By Water and the Spirit* quoted above.

Catholics recognize that pastoral experience can appear to be at odds with this belief in the objective change brought about by Baptism. Sometimes the reality of the sacramental character given in Baptism appears not to be matched by a clear sign of personal regeneration—new life—in the actual living of the baptized. In such cases, Catholics can recognize as their own the concerns of Wesley and of Methodism today, described earlier: How can the new birth be simply identified with Baptism, when there are baptized people who seem not to be living the new life in Christ? This is a question of the subjective effect of this sacrament.

This shared pastoral concern does not contradict the Catholic understanding of the effectiveness of baptism ex opere operato. For Catholics, Baptism is always effective as God’s act in making the baptized a member of Christ’s body, the Church. The “indelible spiritual mark” of Baptism can be seen as an ecclesial effect; the baptized are unfailingly incorporated into the Church. At the same time, the grace imparted in Baptism—the grace of new birth—bears spiritual fruit in the life of the baptized as they grow in faith and in maturity. The work of this grace can be impeded by our human sin and weakness; but the reality from which it flows—God’s act—can never be wiped out by such

⁷⁷ “Baptismal Covenant I”, §§11-12, *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, pp. 91-92.

⁷⁸ BWS §48.

⁷⁹ CCC §§1263-74.

⁸⁰ See Chapter 1, §15 above.

CHAPTER TWO

failings. This understanding affirms both the necessary effectiveness of Baptism as a divine act, and the necessity of growth in the life of grace begun in this act. Such growth is needed if the proper end of Baptism, which is regeneration, is to be fulfilled in the life of the baptized. As the Second Vatican Council taught: “Incorporated in the Church through Baptism, the faithful are destined by the baptismal character for the worship of the Christian religion; reborn as sons of God they must confess before men the faith which they have received from God through the Church”.⁸¹

Catholics also recognize that baptismal grace can be effective *apart* from the rite itself in certain circumstances. The ancient traditions concerning “baptism of blood” in the case of martyrdom for Christ without ritual baptism, and concerning “baptism by desire” for catechumens who die unbaptized, illustrate this. Indeed, contemporary Catholic teaching explicitly extends these notions to include those people who seek truth and do God’s will who are not yet baptized, supposing that they would ask explicitly for Baptism if they understood its necessity.⁸² So, when Catholics affirm the effects of Baptism, they are not saying that the rite is the single or simple cause of such effects. New birth is a proper effect of Baptism, but it may precede Baptism or even be present in a person’s life without their being baptized at all. The Second Vatican Council taught: “All this holds true not only for Christians, but for all men of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way. For, since Christ died for all men, and since the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one, and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery”.⁸³

The Catholic naming of Baptism as one of three “sacraments of initiation”⁸⁴ makes clear that the baptized person is called into an ongoing and deepening participation in the paschal mystery, which is the heart of the sacramental life of the Church. The Western Catholic pastoral practice of separating in time, for many, the celebrations of Baptism, Confirmation, and first reception of the Eucharist, suggests a journey from Baptism towards a deepening life in the “new creation”, ultimately oriented towards heaven, where our true life is “hidden with Christ in God” (Col 3:3). The promise of Baptism is real and effective; but it is a promise which expects a future—a sacramentally formed life of commitment, repentance, reconciliation, communion and mission: “[O]f itself Baptism is only a beginning, an inauguration wholly directed toward the fullness of life in Christ. Baptism, therefore, envisages a complete profession of faith, complete incorporation in the system of salvation such as Christ willed it to be, and finally complete ingrafting in eucharistic communion”.⁸⁵

Methodists and Catholics share a common context for their mission in the world today. John Wesley’s instinctive Anglican convictions about the effectiveness of Baptism as God’s act were challenged by his pastoral experience in evangelism. It is no less the case that both Methodists and Catholics face challenges of a similar kind today in many parts of the world. Our mission within a shared cultural context provides us with a fresh impetus for our common calling to preach the gospel by word and deed. The request for the Baptism of a child for reasons of social and familial pressures presents both our communities with a pastoral challenge. The tension between baptism as a cultural “rite of passage” and baptism celebrated as a sacrament of faith in Christ and of continuing conversion towards him calls for a fresh articulation of the relationship between Baptism and regeneration for our own time.

81 LG §11.

82 CCC §§1258-60.

83 *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Second Vatican Council, 1965) §22.

84 CCC §1212; RCIA, Introduction §1-2.

85 UR §22.

CHAPTER TWO

The different traditions of Methodism and Catholicism have led not only to differences of language pertaining to the effects of Baptism, but also to differences of emphasis. At the same time, it is clear that for both our communions the celebration of Baptism and the effect of regeneration or new birth are held together. Our shared faith encourages us to see our different emphases as opportunities to learn from each other, and, in particular, to recognize a common cultural and missiological concern with the pastoral practice of Baptism. For both Catholics and Methodists pastoral experience prompts reflection on the tension between Baptism as God's sure act and necessity of a personal response for the faithful living of Baptism. Sharing such reflections is a potential opportunity for mutual enrichment.

IV. Baptism and Church

As the initial sacramental act by which God draws believers into the paschal mystery of Christ's death and resurrection, Baptism not only brings them into communion with Christ, but also incorporates them into Christ's body, the Church. "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body" (1 Cor 12:12-13a). Catholic and Methodist affirmation of this shared biblical faith provides the foundation for a growing convergence in our understanding of the relationship between Baptism and our incorporation into the Church as the body of Christ. Certain statements of *By Water and the Spirit* accord remarkably with statements from the Second Vatican Council:

Christ constitutes the Church as his Body by the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12: 13, 27). The Church draws new persons to itself as it seeks to remain faithful to its commission to proclaim and exemplify the gospel. Baptism is the sacrament of initiation and incorporation into the Body of Christ".⁸⁶

By communicating His Spirit, Christ made His brothers, called together from all nations, mystically the components of His own Body. In that Body the life of Christ is poured into the believers who, through the sacraments, are united in a hidden and real way to Christ who suffered and was glorified. Through Baptism we are formed in the likeness of Christ: "For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body".⁸⁷

For both our communities, Baptism is incorporation into Christ's body, the Church.

Previous reports have already indicated a level of agreement on the following points:

* Baptism is a divine act by which the baptized begin life in Christ the Redeemer and participate in his death and resurrection. In Baptism, "original sin is erased, sins are forgiven, the baptized are justified in the eyes of God and become a new creation; with all believers they share the communion of the Spirit; and they are called to seek perfection in hope and in love through faithful response to God's continuing gifts of grace".⁸⁸

* "Our common baptism in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is our sacramental bond of unity, the visible foundation of the deep communion which already exists between us and which impels us to ever deeper unity with each other and participation in the life and mission of Christ himself".⁸⁹

86 BWS §28.

87 LG §7, quoting 1 Cor 12:13.

88 Rio §101.

89 Seoul §78.

CHAPTER TWO

* By Baptism one is received into the community of faith. “While it is received in the context of a local church and in a specific Christian community, it introduces people into the universal Church of Christ and the gathering of the saints”.⁹⁰

* “Because Christ’s faithful are incorporated into him through baptism, they share in Christ’s priestly, prophetic and royal office, together as a community of faith and individually each in their own way”.⁹¹

The fact that we share a common Baptism raises for many the question of eucharistic sharing between Catholics and Methodists. On the one hand, if, through Baptism, we are one in Christ and in his Church, it would seem that being united at the eucharistic table would follow. On the other hand, our varied understandings of the importance of visible, organic unity for the Eucharist, would suggest that eucharistic sharing will be a part of our life together only when that visible, organic unity is achieved. This is an issue which demands further study from a broader ecclesiological perspective. One of the ways in which the question can be approached is from the perspective of Baptism considered in terms of the concept of “communion”.

The Second Vatican Council advanced an ecclesiology of communion (*communio, koinonia*). The Council teaches that communion among Christians can be understood in terms of “degrees” of communion in the body of Christ. Baptism with water, “in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit”, administered with proper intention, joins people to Christ’s body, to his death and resurrection, and provides a sacramental bond between all Christians who have been reborn by it. Baptism is an initial step on the way towards the fullness of life in Christ. “For men who believe in Christ and have been truly baptized are in communion with the Catholic Church even though this communion is imperfect”.⁹² Baptism is ordered to the “full communion” which finds its most profound realization in eucharistic communion.⁹³ The Ecumenical Directory states: “Baptismal communion tends towards full ecclesial communion. To live our Baptism is to be caught up in Christ’s mission of making all things one”.⁹⁴ Affirmation of our common Baptism joins Methodists and Catholics on a shared journey towards their goal of “full communion in faith, mission and sacramental life”.⁹⁵

Both our traditions understand participation in the Christian life in terms of *process*. That Baptism is a beginning is something both Methodists and Catholics recognize, albeit in different ways. For Catholics this might be illustrated by the way in which those baptized as infants often journey in a process of catechesis and faith formation for a number of years before receiving the remaining sacraments of initiation—Confirmation and Eucharist. For Methodists, the distinction in some areas between baptized members and professing/confirmed members suggests that something of a journey into fuller communion is called forth from Baptism. These examples are not identical with the understanding of “degrees” of communion spoken of in *Unitatis Redintegratio*; however, recognition of these stages, by which the degree of communion intensifies, might help Methodists and Catholics to understand both the real and incomplete nature of the communion which is expressed in our mutually recognized Baptism.

90 Rio §101.

91 Brighton §36.

92 UR §3. This translation is taken from the Vatican website. Other widely used English translations add some qualifying word to “communion”, for example: “are in *some* communion with the Catholic Church” (Austin Flannery). Such qualifications reflect the Latin “*quadam*” in the text: “Hi enim qui in Christum credunt et baptismum rite receperunt, in quadam cum Ecclesia catholica communione, etsi non perfecta, constituuntur”.

93 UR §22.

94 *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* (1993) §38.

95 Nairobi §20.

CHAPTER TWO

V. Conclusion: Baptized into the Life and Mission of Christ

Being baptized is a living, continuing reality. Baptism, in incorporating men and women into the Church, does not simply make us members of an institution or even simply bring us into a wider family of belief. For Methodists and Catholics this ecclesiological incorporation is an incorporation into the ongoing life of Christ's body: the baptized participate in the paschal mystery of Christ's death and resurrection, and so begin life anew in the Spirit. As the sacrament of faith and new life, Baptism calls us also into mission together, a *koinonia* of service to God's kingdom.

For both Catholics and Methodists, Baptism is a *vocation*—a continuous call into a life of pilgrimage toward the kingdom. Remembering the Wesleyan tradition's emphasis on personal and social holiness of life, *By Water and the Spirit* speaks of Baptism as “the doorway to the sanctified life. The sacrament teaches us to live in the expectation of further gifts of God's grace. . . . Baptized believers and the community of faith are obligated to manifest to the world the new redeemed humanity which lives in loving relationship with God and strives to put an end to all human estrangements”.⁹⁶

Within the Catholic Church this vocational, living sense of the sacrament of Baptism was given special attention in the Second Vatican Council's teaching on baptismal incorporation into Christ's mission and his offices as priest, prophet and king.⁹⁷ Being baptized does not so much place us statically in a particular community; rather it commissions us as disciples for mission in service of the coming kingdom.

It is in this context of baptismal living that we recall that, in the Catholic Church, Baptism is orientated towards the sacrament of Confirmation. It is especially Confirmation which gives expression to the missiological vocation of Baptism: “Confirmation perfects baptismal grace”.⁹⁸ It brings about “an increase and deepening of baptismal grace”, drawing the confirmed deeper into divine filiation, and strengthening them in the Spirit for the work of witness and mission.⁹⁹ It is significant that, when Confirmation is celebrated separately from Baptism, it begins with the confirmand's renewal of his or her baptismal promises and profession of faith.¹⁰⁰

Confirmation is not customary in all Methodist Churches; often a rite of “Reception into Full Membership” will, in effect, take its place. In neither case is the rite named as a sacrament. In both cases, for those who were already baptized as infants or young children the renewal and “appropriation” of the baptismal vows is central. These rites in Catholic and in Methodist practice demonstrate that both our traditions are united in the conviction that Baptism is performed with a purpose, and that it seeks fulfillment in the life and mission of those who are baptized.

Baptism as a call into ongoing life and mission in Christ is a theme which deserves further reflection by our communities. This more active and explicitly missiological understanding of Baptism might provide a fresh and potentially fruitful context for our reflection together, and allow our call to unity to be explored in the context of a call to holiness and shared mission, and the service of grace in the world. Fundamentally, Baptism as participation in Christ's saving death and resurrection emerges throughout these conversations as a *call*—to discipleship and to the daily taking up of the cross for the sake of the kingdom (Matt 16:24).

96 BWS §32.

97 E.g., LG §§10-17.

98 CCC §1316.

99 CCC §1303.

100 CCC §1298.

CHAPTER TWO

The perspective of Baptism as a vocation—specifically the call to grow in holiness and mission through participation in the paschal mystery—provides the framework for understanding a number of points of convergence between Methodists and Catholics in this area.

Catholics and Methodists together firmly believe that Baptism incorporates those who are baptized into the paschal mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In spite of differences of emphasis, they agree that Baptism and faith belong inseparably together. Faith asks for Baptism and Baptism asks for faith. Personal faith is not a “thing” received all at once. Faith is something which matures and grows in Christian living. For both our communions there is a recognition that, for different people, their one sacramental Baptism may occur at different points in their journey of faith. The relationship between faith and Baptism is not simple or linear.

Methodists and Catholics also agree that Baptism and regeneration are deeply connected. Together they are aware that the sacramental reality of new birth is a gift which has to be claimed anew in different phases of the believer’s growth in the baptismal life. Whilst Catholics may be more inclined to emphasize the objective reality of God’s act in Baptism, they share with Methodists a concern for the subjective fruitfulness of Baptism in the lives of Christians. Methodists, for their part, would also hold that the effect of Baptism is not only a subjective matter.

Catholics and Methodists are of one mind that Baptism makes those who are baptized members of Christ’s body, the Church. Baptism brings us into a fundamental communion with one another in Christ; this communion, though incomplete, is the firm foundation for our shared journey into full communion.

CHAPTER THREE

The Eucharist: Presence and Sacrifice

In the 2006 Seoul Report, *The Grace given you in Christ*, the Joint Commission affirmed: “Methodists and Catholics are already agreed . . . that when the Eucharist is celebrated, we hear afresh the Word of God spoken to us; we enter together more deeply into the saving mystery of Christ; we encounter Christ anew in a way which ensures the living presence of Christ at the heart of the Church; we are anointed by the transforming love which is God’s Holy Spirit and become more truly the Body of Christ; we are sent forth together in Christ to share more deeply in God’s work in our world; and we share together a foretaste of the heavenly banquet. As we celebrate the Eucharist, called together by the Father, the Risen Lord makes us more fully what he wills his Church to be, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Together these affirmations already provide a rich foundation from which we can face the remaining issues in the hope that one day Catholics and Methodists will be able to gather together in full communion around the table of the Lord”.¹⁰¹

The Seoul Report noted that there remained major issues which need to be further examined together and resolved. These included the particular way in which Christ is present in Holy Communion, the precise meaning of the Eucharist as the sacramental “memorial” of Christ’s saving death and resurrection, the link between eucharistic communion and ecclesial communion, and the nature and validity of the ministry of those who preside at the Eucharist.¹⁰² This chapter in its two parts seeks to explore further only the first two of these issues, with the primary focus on the Eucharist as entering together more deeply into the saving mystery of Christ who is present among us. Particularly in the use of the language of “sacrifice” about the Eucharist, there are important differences of approach between Catholics, who often speak of “offering” Christ’s sacrifice, and Methodists, who sometimes speak rather of “pleading” that sacrifice. The intention here is to seek to go beyond these apparent differences and to explore what we can further affirm together.

In this undertaking, much use is made of the *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper*, the collection of 166 eucharistic hymns published in 1745 under the joint names of John and Charles Wesley.¹⁰³ They are a source of deeper reflection for Catholics and Methodists together. Recent Methodist liturgies and statements on the Eucharist already draw heavily on these hymns; indeed, the United Methodist Church in its 2004 document *This Holy Mystery* stated that “John and Charles Wesley’s 166 *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper* are our richest resource for study in order to appreciate the Wesleyan understanding of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist”.¹⁰⁴ Yet not all Methodists will adhere in full to the teaching contained in the hymns,¹⁰⁵ and Catholics will not find in them the fullness of their doctrine on the Eucharist. Nevertheless, these texts provide a deep well-spring of truth as we seek further common understanding. We invite Methodists to consider afresh these fundamental sources of their tradition,¹⁰⁶ and Catholics to find in them a rich complement to their own eucharistic teaching and spirituality.

101 Seoul §94.

102 Seoul §94.

103 The hymns were first published with a preface from John Wesley which was an abridged version of *On the Christian Sacrament and Sacrifice* by Daniel Brevint (1616-1695), a “high church” Caroline Divine who was an important influence on the Wesleys. Much of the content of the hymns is drawn from Brevint’s text.

104 THM, p. 12; the document cites the hymns several times in support of its teaching on the eucharist (e.g., pages 11, 12, 21).

105 HPMF §72.

106 HPMF §73.

CHAPTER THREE

The Denver Report of the Joint Commission in 1971 viewed the *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* as offering a "basis and hope" for doctrinal discussion on the Eucharist. The 166 hymns are divided into six sections:

- (a) As it is a memorial of the sufferings and death of Christ
- (b) As it is a sign and a means of grace
- (c) The sacrament as a pledge of heaven
- (d) The Holy Eucharist as it implies a sacrifice
- (e) Concerning the sacrifice of our persons
- (f) After the sacrament

The hymns focus on the intimate union of Christ with his people at the Lord's Supper, a union by which Christ himself draws his disciples into his sacrifice. "The Wesleys taught an understanding of the eucharistic sacrifice as one in which the offering of the obedient hearts and lives of the communicants was united by grace to the perfect, complete, ever-present and all-atoning sacrifice of Christ".¹⁰⁷ Catholic teaching holds that the Eucharist "is the heart and summit of the Church's life, for in it Christ associates his Church and all her members with his sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving offered once for all on the cross to his Father; by this sacrifice he pours out the graces of salvation on his Body which is the Church".¹⁰⁸ It is these ideas above all that this chapter explores, seeking deeper convergence between Catholics and Methodists.

I. "We encounter Christ anew in a way which ensures the living presence of Christ at the heart of the Church"¹⁰⁹

Christ declared that he would be present in the midst of two or three gathered in his name (Matt 18:20), as well as in the "least" and needy neighbour (Matt 25:35-40), and he promised to be always with his faithful followers until the end of time (Matt 28:20). At the Last Supper and after the resurrection he revealed to his disciples another and distinctive form of his presence: in the breaking of the bread (Matt 26:26; Luke 24:30-31, 35). The one crucified, risen and ascended is the host of his Supper and is present there in the fullness of his being, both human and divine.¹¹⁰ Christ invites his disciples to participate in this heavenly banquet in remembrance of him and to encounter him as individuals and as his body, the Church. His presence "makes the feast":

Jesus, we thus obey
Thy last and kindest word;
Here, in thine own appointed way,
We come to meet thee, Lord.
The way Thou hast enjoind
Thou wilt therein appear,
We come with confidence to find
Thy special presence here.
Our hearts we open wide,
To make the Saviour room;
And lo! The Lamb, the crucified,
The sinner's friend is come!
His presence makes the feast;
And now our bosoms feel
The glory not to be exprest,
The joy unspeakable.¹¹¹

107 HPMF §1. 108 CCC §1407. 109 Seoul §94. 110 Cf. Denver §83.I.1-5; Dublin §54.

CHAPTER THREE

Christ gives this gift of his presence to the Church—a presence not dependent upon the experience or faith of the communicant or of the gathered assembly. Yet only through the eyes of faith may his presence be truly discerned.¹¹²

Christ is always present in the liturgical celebrations of his people and makes his presence known in various ways: in the midst of the assembly (Matt 18:20), in the proclamation of the word, in preaching, in song, and in the prayers.¹¹³ Catholics teach that Christ is also present in the person of his ordained minister;¹¹⁴ Methodists affirm that Christ may be present in the faithful human heart.¹¹⁵ In each of these ways and modes, Christ is believed to be present in his fullness.¹¹⁶

Christ is present in his sacraments. Christ's eucharistic presence, however, is unique—a “distinctive mode or manifestation”.¹¹⁷ Catholics and Methodists agree not only that “Christ is present and active, in various ways, in the entire eucharistic celebration”,¹¹⁸ but also that his presence is mediated through the elements of bread and wine and these become the “sign par excellence of Christ's redeeming presence to his people”.¹¹⁹ The faithful thus come to Christ's table confident of his “special” and certain presence, and aware that there his “closest love unites the members to their Head”.¹²⁰

Christ's presence in the Eucharist cannot be perceived by our natural senses, yet by his presence we are able to be in communion with him and to become one body with him. The bread and wine, while remaining to all outward appearances bread and wine, sacramentally become through Christ's words and the Holy Spirit's power the body and blood of Christ and are able to convey the gift of his grace. The one through whom all things were made and who makes all things new (John 1:3; Rev 21:5) utilizes elements of his own creation to give himself to that creation. The eucharistic bread and wine are thus efficacious signs whereby the faithful are invited to “feast on the Incarnate God”.¹²¹

Catholics identify the presence of Christ in the Eucharist as a “substantial” presence.¹²² By the words of Christ and the action of the Holy Spirit in the eucharistic prayer, the bread and wine—in a way “surpassing understanding”¹²³—become Christ's body and blood through a change of inner reality (substance): “Because Christ our Redeemer said that it was truly his body that he was offering under the species of bread, it has always been the conviction of the Church of God . . . that by the consecration of the bread and wine there takes place a change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood. This change the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly called transubstantiation”.¹²⁴ Through the eucharistic prayer, what was once bread becomes the body of Christ, and what was once wine becomes the blood of Christ, fulfilling the words of Christ himself: “This is my body . . . This is my blood”.

111 HLS, Hymn 81, sts. 1-2.

112 Cf. Denver §83.I.2-3.

113 Cf. SC §7; Pope Paul VI, *Mysterium Fidei* (Encyclical on the Holy Eucharist, 1965) §36; THM, pp. 10-11.

114 SC §7; See also chapter 4 below.

115 “Only do Thou my heart prepare / To find Thy real presence there” (HLS, Hymn 66, st. 2).

116 Dublin §56.

117 Denver §83.I.4.

118 Dublin §55a; cf. HPMF §172; BEM, Eucharist §13.

119 Denver §83.I.6-7.

120 HLS, Hymn 60, st. 1.

121 HLS, Hymn 71, st. 2.

122 CCC §1374; cf. Catholic Bishops' Conferences of England & Wales, Ireland, and Scotland, *One Bread One Body* (1998) §§50-51; *Mysterium fidei* §§38-39.

123 CCC §1333.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodists likewise recognize the significant role of the Holy Spirit in the Lord's Supper, and they speak of Christ's real presence in a spiritual sense. Yet Methodists seek not to define the mystery of the transformation of the bread and wine, and trust that the presence of Christ and the gift of his grace are "sure and real" while the manner remains unknown.

O the depth of love divine,
Th' unfathomable grace!
Who shall say how bread and wine
God into man conveys?
How the bread his flesh imparts,
How the wine transmits his blood,
Fills his faithful people's hearts
With all the life of God!
Let the wisest mortal show
How we the grace receive:
Feeble elements bestow
A power not theirs to give:
Who explains the wondrous way?
How thro' these the virtue came?
These the virtue did convey,
Yet still remain the same.
Sure and real is the grace,
The manner be unknown;
Only meet us in thy ways
And perfect us in one,
Let us taste the heavenly powers,
Lord, we ask for nothing more;
Thine to bless, 'tis only ours
To wonder, and adore.¹²⁵

In Catholic and in many Methodist eucharistic liturgies, the Holy Spirit is invoked both upon the gifts of bread and wine that they may become the body and blood of Christ and upon the recipients of the holy meal that they may become the body of Christ.¹²⁶ This twofold invocation of the Holy Spirit, on the elements and on the people, makes explicit the connection between the body of Christ that is the eucharistic bread and the body of Christ that is the Christian community: "The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor 10:16b-17; cf. 1 Cor 12:27). The community as the body of Christ thus recognizes itself in what it receives, and becomes what it sees and tastes.¹²⁷ As believers eat and drink what the Lord gives, they continue to be transformed more fully into the likeness of Christ and are thus sustained on their journey into his life, death and resurrection. Those who gather at the Lord's table and partake of the spiritual "medicine" are also knit more closely together as Christ's body, the Church, and are thereby empowered to be Christ's agents to redeem and heal a broken world.

124 Council of Trent, Session 13 (1551), Chapter 4 (quoted in CCC §1376).

125 HLS, Hymn 57, sts. 1-2, 4; cf. Hymn 92, sts. 5-6.

126 E.g., Eucharistic Prayer 2, Roman Missal, 3rd ed., English trans. (2011) ("Make holy, therefore, these gifts, we pray, by sending down your Spirit upon them like the dewfall, so that they may become for us the Body and Blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ"); the basic Great Thanksgiving in *The United Methodist Book of Worship* (p. 38: "Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here, and on these gifts of bread and wine. Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood"); and the "Thanksgiving for Ordinary Seasons (1)" in *The*

CHAPTER THREE

Catholics and Methodists agree that Christ in his wholeness is present as the sacrament is shared. The meaning of the eucharistic banquet is most fully signified when Holy Communion is received under the forms of both bread and wine.

The consecrated elements are to be treated with respect as fruits of the earth become sacramental gifts of God. Catholics hold that the eucharistic presence of Christ persists “as long as the eucharistic species subsist”.¹²⁸ Methodists do not make such a claim, but reverently consume, distribute to the unwillingly absent or return to the earth the remaining elements.

Although they differ in the way they express and explain it, Methodists and Catholics affirm together the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. For both, Christ is present for us here and now, uniting us with himself, in remembrance of his saving death and resurrection, and as a foretaste of the heavenly banquet “as we await the blessed hope and the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ”:¹²⁹ “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Cor 11:26).

II. “We enter together more deeply into the saving mystery of Christ”¹³⁰

Christ is present in the Eucharist so that his disciples can be one with him, and be drawn more deeply into his saving mystery. There are a number of beliefs which Methodists and Catholics hold in common which suggest that a profound degree of agreement can be reached on the Eucharist as the sacramental memorial of Christ’s saving death and resurrection, “the Holy Eucharist as it implies a sacrifice”.

The saving mystery of Christ is entirely God’s gift to us: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life” (John 3:16). Eternal life is a participation in the life of God, made possible for us by the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and by the sending of the Holy Spirit: “Because God so loved the world, he sent his Son and the Holy Spirit to draw us into communion with himself. This sharing in God’s life, which resulted from the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit, found expression in a visible *koinonia* of Christ’s disciples, the Church”.¹³¹ Through the life of the Church, and particularly through the celebration and living out of Baptism and the Eucharist, disciples are called to enter more deeply into the paschal mystery of Christ and so into eternal life.

By our Baptism, we are already united with Christ as his body by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Eucharist is always the celebration of the baptized, priestly people of God. It is first and foremost Christ who presides at and offers the Eucharist; he comes to meet us there to unite us more closely with himself, each personally and within the communion of the baptized. The risen Lord, united with the Church as head to his body, presents his saving sacrifice before the Father, and his members receive the fruits of that sacrifice in faith. The Church is thereby anointed anew and empowered by God’s grace for its mission to present and proclaim to the whole world the Good News of God’s saving love in Christ.

Methodist Worship Book (p. 194: “Send down your Holy Spirit that these gifts of bread and wine may be for us the body and blood of Christ”).

127 Cf. Augustine, *Sermons* 227 and 272.

128 CCC §1377.

129 Roman Missal (2011), prayers before Holy Communion. The United Methodist liturgy uses similar language: “until Christ comes in final victory and we feast at his heavenly banquet” (*The United Methodist Book of Worship*, p. 38).

130 Seoul §94.

131 Nairobi §1.

CHAPTER THREE

The Church “lives in union with Christ’s death and resurrection, comforted, guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit”.¹³² The Eucharist is God’s gift to the Church for its sustained participation in the death and resurrection of Christ.

The Eucharist is the celebration of Christ’s full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, offered once and for all, for the whole world. It is a memorial which is not a mere calling to mind of a past event or of its significance, but the Church’s effectual proclamation of God’s mighty act in Christ. In this celebration we really share in Christ’s offering of himself in obedience to the Father’s will.¹³³

Some important beliefs about the Eucharist are affirmed by both Catholics and Methodists. Firstly, the Eucharist is always a free gift of God’s grace to his Church. The Eucharist is always God’s initiative and Christ’s saving act. We can only give to God what we have already been given by him; we can only “offer” what we have first received.¹³⁴ “It is God alone who is the giver of every good gift, the author of all grace”.¹³⁵ The Eucharist is a sacrament of salvation, and that salvation is from God alone.¹³⁶ Any communion or participation in the saving mystery of Christ is itself an effect of God’s grace, and totally dependent on Christ’s prior offering of himself for us.¹³⁷ Everything that Catholics and Methodists affirm together on the Eucharist as a “means of grace” is always dependent on God’s unfathomable grace and entirely the work of that grace. “Neither faith nor love are the achievement of human efforts, but by God’s call to faith and by the outpouring of God’s love we as human beings are included in the reality of God’s salvation”.¹³⁸

Secondly, it was by God’s gracious and merciful love that Christ gave himself and offered himself to the Father for us, and it is always the offering by Christ “for us”, once-for-all upon the cross, that is celebrated and made present in the eucharistic memorial. It is humankind that needs Christ’s sacrifice to the Father, so that we can be drawn “in Christ” into communion with God. In his merciful love, God “did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for the sake of us all” (Rom 8:31; cf. 3:24-25). Christ is the high priest who “offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins” (Heb 10:12), and that sacrifice was “the sacrifice of himself” (Heb 9:26), his life given as “a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Indeed, Christ is in person the atoning sacrifice, giving himself in love to his Father on our behalf: “In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4:10; cf. 2:2). “Therefore”, we are urged, “be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Eph 5:1-2).

132 Nairobi §3.

133 Cf. Denver §83; Dublin §63.

134 Cf. Eucharistic Prayer for Masses with Children 1, Roman Liturgy (1975): “Then we can offer to you what you have given to us”; and Eucharistic Prayer for Masses with Children 2, Roman Liturgy (1975): “He put himself into our hands to be the sacrifice we offer you”.

135 WJW, “The Means of Grace” (Sermon 16, II. 3), vol. 1, p. 382.

136 Cf. citation from JDDJ §19 at note 41 above.

137 Cf. citation from JDDJ §27 at note 42 above.

138 “World Methodist Council Statement of Association with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification” §4.3.

CHAPTER THREE

Thirdly, although salvation in Christ is wholly God’s loving gift—a work of free and unmerited grace—“a key point of agreement between Methodists and Roman Catholics is the need for graced, free and active participation in God’s saving work”.¹³⁹ Methodists and Catholics affirm together that God calls us to enter into the mystery of salvation, to participate under grace in what God has done for us in Christ, and to “live in union with Christ’s death and resurrection”.¹⁴⁰ By our communion with Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are made a priestly people, sharing the one priesthood of Christ himself: “let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 2:5). St Paul appeals to Christians “by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Rom 12:1). We are called to be a sacrificial people, in communion with Christ’s sacrifice in a way that transforms our life into one of humble and self-giving love for God and for our fellow human beings: “Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God” (Heb 13:15-16).

The “Grand Oblation”, offered once-for-all by Christ

Following the Letter to the Hebrews, Catholics and Methodists affirm together that Christ, the great high priest (Heb 4:14f; 7:1f), offered himself once-for-all as a single sacrifice for sins (Heb 7:27; 9:12, 26; 10:10, 12, 14). Since the Reformation, many Christians including Methodists have feared that Catholic teaching on the Eucharist involves a repetition of or addition to Christ’s unique sacrifice. 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. The Council of Trent taught that Christ “was to offer himself once to God the Father on the altar of the cross”.¹⁴¹

Likewise, the Wesleys’ *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper* understand the Eucharist as sacrificial, but not in any way which undermines the uniqueness and completeness of Christ’s offering of himself on the cross, his “Grand Oblation”¹⁴²—the “all-sufficient Sacrifice” which “remains eternally alone”:

Angels and men might strive in vain
They could not add the smallest grain
T’augment thy death’s atoning power,
The sacrifice is all-compleat,
The death Thou never canst repeat,
Once offer’d up to die no more.¹⁴³

The risen Christ’s eternal priesthood

Christ, “being raised from the dead, will never die again” (Rom 6:9), and yet the Letter to the Hebrews teaches that Christ “holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently he is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them” (7:24-25). Once Christ had “offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins” (10:12), he “entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf” (9:24). Catholics and Methodists are united in understanding the “offering” and “pleading”¹⁴⁴ of Christ’s unique sacrifice—of his blood—as fundamental to his heavenly intercession (cf. Heb 12:24).

139 Brighton §52.

140 Nairobi §3.

141 Council of Trent, Session 22 (1562), Chapter 1.

142 HLS, Hymn 123, st. 2.

143 HLS, Hymn 124, st. 2.

144 See §2 in this chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

We come to the Eucharist to “proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Cor 11:26).

There have been times when both Catholic and Methodist thinking on the Eucharist has given inadequate focus to the resurrection of Jesus, perhaps moving too quickly from Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross to his heavenly intercession at the right-hand of the Father. The Eucharist has been understood as a memorial only of the past passion and cross, or simply as our anticipation of the future heavenly banquet.

Recent teaching has focused more clearly on the full mystery of salvation, understanding the Eucharist as the memorial of his death and resurrection and as an anticipation of the future heavenly banquet. It is the risen, ascended and exalted Christ who meets us in the Eucharist, and he comes to us with the past and future made present in himself. “Christ’s Passover includes not only his passion and death, but also his resurrection. . . . The Eucharistic Sacrifice makes present not only the mystery of the Saviour’s passion and death, but also the mystery of the resurrection which crowned his sacrifice”.¹⁴⁵

In St John’s Gospel, when the risen Lord appeared to his disciples, he continued to bear the marks of his passion—the wounds in his hands and side (John 20:27); he invited Thomas to enter into those wounds, and “not doubt but believe”. In the Book of Revelation, at the heavenly liturgy, the Lamb still bears the marks of having been slain, “standing as if it had been slaughtered” (5:6). When the risen Christ is present, he comes as the one whose body was given for us, whose blood was poured out for us, the one who has given his life as a ransom.

This sacrificial self-giving of Christ is something “made flesh” once-for-all in human history on the cross, but the innermost reality of Christ’s “Grand Oblation” is an eternal mystery at the very heart of the Holy Trinity. God the Father eternally begets the Son—who is true God from true God—and the Son eternally responds to the Father in total self-giving. Jesus’ death on Calvary can be understood as the “sacrament”—the making tangibly, visibly available to all humanity for our salvation—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.

Issues of time—of past, present and future—cannot be ignored when discussing the Eucharist, but it is the Holy Spirit who brings together past and future in the present, and spans “the years between”.¹⁴⁶

The Church is “the bride, the wife of the Lamb” (Rev 21:9), and we are “invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Rev 19:9). God the Son, made flesh and living among us, comes in the Eucharist to unite us with himself so that we can be one with him in his eternal giving of himself to the Father, and share the eternal welcome his Father gives him. This above all is the deepest reality of Christ’s priestly sacrifice and intercession.¹⁴⁷ Christ is the Way to the Father—“No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14.6)—and the only entry into the eternal life of God. We do not simply follow after Christ, but enter into the Way which is Christ himself.

145 Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (Encyclical Letter on the Eucharist in Its Relationship to the Church, 2003) §14; cf. THM, p. 7.

146 HLS, Hymn 5, st. 3.

147 The central dynamic of the Eucharist, of Christ uniting us to himself in his giving of himself to the Father, is expressed simply and succinctly in Eucharistic Prayer for Masses with Children 1 (1975) in the Roman liturgy: “Jesus brings us to you; welcome us as you welcome him”.

CHAPTER THREE

Ultimately, this is the mystery of God's Love, and the Eucharist is rightly called the sacrament of love. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* sums up the perfect love which is God's being. This perfect love is offered to all human beings as the gift of salvation and in a special way through the Eucharist which is the sacrament of God's saving love:

St John . . . affirms that "God is love". God's very being is love. By sending his only Son and the Spirit of Love in the fullness of time, God has revealed his innermost secret: God himself is an eternal exchange of love, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and he has destined us to share in that exchange.¹⁴⁸

These reflections may enable Catholics and Methodists to grow in deeper agreement on the Eucharist as sacrifice, especially on the basis of continued joint reflection on the *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*. Both Catholics and Methodists insist on the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ on Calvary, and yet both also understand the Eucharist as in some way making present and available for us that one same sacrifice, so that Christ's Church can be one with him in his offering. By the power of the Holy Spirit, the whole of God's saving action in Christ becomes present here and now for us. As St Thomas Aquinas put it, the Eucharist is the sacrament "in which the whole mystery of our salvation is contained".¹⁴⁹

Echoing the Letter to the Hebrews, the Council of Trent taught that Christ's "priesthood was not to be eliminated by death".¹⁵⁰ Accordingly, he left his Church a visible sacrifice: "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". It is only the manner of offering that is different: "it is one and the same victim offering himself . . . who then offered himself on the cross".¹⁵¹

Again following Hebrews, the Wesleys understood Jesus' one sacrifice on Calvary as being at the same time "ever new".¹⁵² He presents everlastingly his sacrifice in heaven:

The offering still continues new,
Thy vesture keeps its bloody hue,
Thou stand'st the ever-slaughter'd Lamb,
Thy priesthood still remains the same.¹⁵³

Participants, not just bystanders

The Eucharist is a great act of thanksgiving, thanking God for the gift of Christ, and "inseparably linked to Christ's offering of thanks to the Father" at the Last Supper,¹⁵⁴ and to Christ's offering of himself for us to the Father on Calvary. The Church's thanksgiving is always a graced response to God's gift. We can respond only through grace, because God has empowered us to act. Taking part in the Eucharist should lead to God's baptized, priestly people being transformed by the Holy Spirit ever more truly into the likeness of Christ, and to a more radical following and imitating of Christ, but also to a deeper participation in Christ and in all that he has done for us, so that we "enter together more deeply into the saving mystery of Christ".¹⁵⁵ The Church is a "holy priesthood", called to "offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 2:5).

148 CCC §221. 149 *Summa Theologiae* III,83.4.

150 Council of Trent, Session 22 (1562), Chapter 1. 151 Council of Trent, Session 22 (1562), Chapter 2.

152 HLS, Hymn 3, st. 2. 153 HLS, Hymn 5, st. 2.

154 HPMF §148. 155 Seoul §94.

CHAPTER THREE

St Paul's understanding of the mystery of salvation included the dynamic of graced participation by those touched and transformed by the risen Lord. Christian discipleship involves dying and rising with Christ (Rom 6:3-11), from the celebration of Baptism onwards, throughout the life of the baptized. Taking part in the Eucharist is a "communion" in Christ's blood shed for us and body given for us (cf. 1 Cor 10:16). Paul appealed to the first Christians: "present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (Rom 12:1). This can only take place by the power of God's grace, by the Holy Spirit who makes us one "in Christ" and thereby a people who "know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death" (Phil 3:10).

The Wesley hymns highlight the presence of the cross for those who come to the Lord's Supper, and their grace-filled and active participation in their Saviour's sacrifice. Christ includes his people in himself and unites their sacrifice of themselves with his great sacrifice.¹⁵⁶

Would the Saviour of mankind
Without his people die?
No, to Him we all are joined
As more than standers by.¹⁵⁷

Christians do not merely receive the benefits of Christ's sacrifice: they are united with it, and can say to Christ:

We jointly before God appear
To offer up ourselves with Thee.¹⁵⁸

Christ unites his Church with his self-offering

"There is . . . one historical unrepeatable sacrifice, offered once for all by Christ and accepted once for all by the Father. In the celebration of the memorial, Christ in the Holy Spirit unites his people with himself in a sacramental way so that the Church enters into the movement of his self-offering".¹⁵⁹ Pope Benedict XVI has expressed the heart of the Eucharist as follows: Christ's death on the cross was "love in its most radical form"; "Jesus gave this act of oblation an enduring presence through his institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper. . . . The Eucharist draws us into Jesus' act of self-oblation. More than just statically receiving the incarnate *Logos*, we enter into the very dynamic of his self-giving".¹⁶⁰ Through the Eucharist we become sharers of God's inmost life, because "Jesus draws us into himself".¹⁶¹

It is Christ himself who makes the offering, and we are drawn into it by him. It is Christ who pleads his sacrifice before the Father: we can only participate by grace. Jesus unites us with himself. This intimate unity of Christ and his Church lies at the very heart of our common understanding of the Eucharist. Methodists and Catholics find this teaching in St Paul: "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ" (1 Cor 12:12).

156 Cf. Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum caritatis* (Apostolic Exhortation on the Eucharist as the Source and Summit of the Church's Life and Mission, 2007) §70.

157 HLS, Hymn 131, st. 1. 158 HLS, Hymn 141, st. 7.

159 Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, *Eucharistic Doctrine: Elucidation* (Salisbury, 1979) §5; cf. Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, "Windsor Statement on the Eucharist" (1971).

160 Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (Encyclical Letter on Christian Love, 2005) §§12-13.

161 *Sacramentum caritatis* §11; cf. §70; quoting his homily at the Marienfeld Esplanade, 21 August 2005.

CHAPTER THREE

Christ the Head and his Body the Church remain distinct, as the Divine Bridegroom and his Bride, and yet “the innermost reality of the Church is its invisible communion with the Risen Lord by the power of the Holy Spirit”.¹⁶² What we say together in general of Christ’s unity with his body is true in a special way when Christ draws us into his death, resurrection and eternal life in the Eucharist. When we ask the question “Who offers the eucharistic sacrifice?”, our answer together as Methodists and Catholics is “Christ our Head united with his Body, the Church”.

In this, we echo the understanding of St Augustine that “the whole redeemed city, that is to say, the congregation and fellowship of the saints, is offered as a universal sacrifice to God through the great High Priest, who offered himself in his passion for us, so that we might be the body of so great a Head”, and that the Church itself “is offered in the offering which she makes to God”.¹⁶³ Central to Augustine’s teaching is St Paul’s teaching on the unity of the head and his body.

In the Wesley hymns, Christ the high priest unites his Church so closely to himself that it is united with his sacrifice, and offers itself in him, “Ourselves presenting with our Head”.¹⁶⁴ We come to the Father as those “who in thy Jesus stand”,¹⁶⁵ and we can say to Christ that “we now with thee in heaven appear”.¹⁶⁶ When Christ presents and offers himself to the Father, he does so united with his people, for Christ is “never without his people seen”.¹⁶⁷

For us He ever intercedes,
His heaven-deserving passion pleads
Presenting us before the throne;
We want no sacrifice beside,
By that great offering sanctified,
One with our Head, for ever one.¹⁶⁸

With Him the Corner Stone
The living stones conjoin,
Christ and his Church are one,
One body and one vine,
For us he uses all his powers,
And all He has, or is, is ours.¹⁶⁹

Because of this God-given unity of head and body, Catholics would readily echo the Wesley hymns in saying that in the Eucharist the Church in Christ “presents” Jesus death and “offer[s] up the Lamb to God”,¹⁷⁰ and that therefore “We . . . with thy sacrifice ascend”.¹⁷¹ Our sacrifice is united with Christ’s sacrifice, and in Christ we “plead”, “present” and “offer” that one sacrifice of Christ to the Father.

With solemn faith we offer up,
And spread before thy glorious eyes
The only ground of all our hope,
That precious bleeding sacrifice,
Which brings thy grace on sinners down,
And perfects all our souls in one.¹⁷²

162 Seoul §80.

163 Augustine, *City of God*, X,6 (PL 41, 284).

164 HLS, Hymn 140, st. 3. 165 HLS, Hymn 121, st. 1. 166 HLS, Hymn 117, st. 1.

167 HLS, Hymn 129, st. 1. 168 HLS, Hymn 117, st. 2. 169 HLS, Hymn 129, st. 2.

170 HLS, Hymn 118, st. 4. 171 HLS, Hymn 136, st. 4.

CHAPTER THREE

The eucharistic prayers in the Roman Missal stress that the Church becomes one with the risen Christ as he gives himself to the Father, and that we offer Christ's one sacrifice. United with Christ, we lift up our hearts to the Father and give him thanks and praise, offering to God "this holy and living sacrifice".¹⁷³ "Through him, and with him, and in him . . . in the unity of the Holy Spirit", the Church becomes "an eternal offering to" the Father,¹⁷⁴ and "a living sacrifice in Christ to the praise of [the Father's] glory".¹⁷⁵

Methodists emphasize that in the Eucharist "we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ's offering for us".¹⁷⁶ The Thanksgiving Prayers of the British Methodist Church express this understanding in various ways. United with Christ at the Eucharist, the community prays to the Father: "Through him we give ourselves to you";¹⁷⁷ "Accept, through him, our great high priest, this, our sacrifice of praise";¹⁷⁸ "Through his offering for us all, we offer our whole life to you in thanks and praise";¹⁷⁹ "Join our prayers and the prayers of all your people on earth and in heaven with the intercession of Christ, our great high priest".¹⁸⁰

How are the "Grand Oblation" and our "mean offering" combined? They are "mingled in a common flame",¹⁸¹ so that the Saviour and his people form a single offering:

Both in a common flame arise,
And both in God's account are one.¹⁸²

The sav'd and Saviour now agree
In closest fellowship combin'd,
We grieve, and die, and live with Thee,
To thy great Father's will resign'd;
And God doth all thy members own
One with Thyself, for ever one.¹⁸³

"Do this as a memorial of me"

Christians can enter into the movement of Christ's self-giving, united by the Holy Spirit with Christ's own "Grand Oblation", only if that sacrifice is present in some way here and now. As a complementary way of expressing this understanding, Catholics and Methodists with many other Christians use the biblical and patristic concept of anamnesis or "memorial" (cf. Luke 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24-25).¹⁸⁴

172 HLS, Hymn 125, st. 2; cf. Hymn 124, st. 3.

173 Eucharistic Prayer 3, Roman Missal (2011).

174 Eucharistic Prayer 3, Roman Missal.

175 Eucharistic Prayer 4, Roman Missal.

176 *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, p. 38; cf. "Thanksgiving for Lent and Passiontide", *The Methodist Worship Book*, p. 155.

177 "Thanksgiving for Christmas and Epiphany", *The Methodist Worship Book*, p. 138.

178 "Thanksgiving for the Easter Season", *The Methodist Worship Book*, p. 170.

179 "Thanksgiving for the Ordinary Season (2)", *The Methodist Worship Book*, p. 206.

180 "Thanksgiving for the Ordinary Season (3)", *The Methodist Worship Book*, p. 217.

181 HLS, Hymn 141, st. 8.

182 HLS, Hymn 147, st. 4.

183 HLS, Hymn 133, st. 5.

CHAPTER THREE

In its 2003 document on the Eucharist, *This Holy Mystery*, the United Methodist Church stated that such “remembrance, commemoration and memorial” is much more than simply intellectual recalling: “This dynamic action becomes re-presentation of past gracious acts of God in the present, so powerfully as to make them truly present now”.¹⁸⁵

The Catholic Church teaches that “when the Church celebrates the Eucharist, she commemorates Christ’s Passover, and it is made present: the sacrifice Christ offered once for all on the cross remains ever present”.¹⁸⁶ Therefore “the sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are one single sacrifice”.¹⁸⁷

In the context of this shared understanding of the meaning of “memorial”, Catholics and Methodists echo the World Council of Churches’ “Lima Document” on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*: “The Eucharist is the sacrament of the unique sacrifice of Christ, who ever lives to make intercession for us. It is the memorial of all that God has done for the salvation of the world”.¹⁸⁸ Pope John Paul II wrote: “When the Church celebrates the Eucharist, the memorial of her Lord’s death and resurrection, this central event of salvation becomes really present”.¹⁸⁹ Much of the understanding of the relationship between Christ’s once-for-all sacrificial self-offering and the Eucharist outlined in this chapter can be succinctly expressed through the concepts of “sacrament” and “memorial”. As he intercedes in heaven for humanity, the risen Christ “pleads” his sacrifice, “presenting” to the Father his offering on the cross.¹⁹⁰ Christ himself is the sacrifice that is offered. It is Christ who “pleads”, “presents” and “offers” himself to the Father, and who draws his priestly people into his “pleading” and “presenting”, into the movement of his “offering”. As the British Methodist Church put it, in the Eucharist “Methodists plead the completed and eternal sacrifice of Christ, and we offer ourselves anew in and through the eternal sacrifice, but we do not in any way offer the sacrifice again. At Holy Communion what Methodists do is to make a memorial of and participate in the offering of Christ”.¹⁹¹ The Eucharist is the “sacrament” and “memorial”—the making present here and now—of Christ’s pleading and offering of himself for our salvation.

“The memorial of the things to come”

The Eucharist is the memorial of the once-for-all death and resurrection of Christ, but also “the memorial of the things to come”.¹⁹² The Eucharist makes present here and now not only the past, but also the promised future heavenly banquet (cf. Isa 25:6-9; Rev 19:9).

The Wesley hymns understand the Eucharist as a “transporting feast” which brings heaven into our present as “our heaven begun below”.¹⁹³ “Even now the marriage-feast we share”,¹⁹⁴ and our nourishment is “his richest love”¹⁹⁵ and “the wine of thy eternal love”.¹⁹⁶

184 Cf. §21 above.

185 THM, p. 8.

186 CCC §1364.

187 CCC §1367.

188 BEM, Eucharist §8.

189 *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* §11.

190 Dublin §65; Rio §102.

191 HPMF §171.

192 Cf. The Divine Liturgy of St John Chrysostom, where the priest says “Remembering, therefore, this command of the Saviour and all that came to pass for our sake, the cross, the tomb, the resurrection on the third day, the ascension into heaven, the enthronement at the right hand of the Father, and the second, glorious coming, we offer to you these gifts from your own gifts in all and for all”.

CHAPTER THREE

To heav'n the mystic banquet leads,
Let us to heaven ascend,
And bear this joy upon our heads
Till it in glory end:
Till all who truly join in this,
The marriage-supper share,
Enter into their Master's bliss
And feast for ever there.¹⁹⁷

The Eucharist is not only a pledge of future glory, but gives us here and now a share in God's gift of eternal life: "Those who feed on Christ in the Eucharist need not wait until the hereafter to receive eternal life: *they already possess it on earth*, as the first-fruits of a future fullness which will embrace [humankind] in [its] totality".¹⁹⁸ "In the earthly liturgy we take part in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the holy city of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God, a minister of the holies and of the true tabernacle (cf. Rev 21:2; Col 3:1; Heb 8:2)".¹⁹⁹ "To participate is to receive a foretaste of the future, a pledge of heaven „until Christ comes in final victory and we feast at his heavenly banquet"".²⁰⁰ An ancient prayer says of the Eucharist: "O sacred banquet in which Christ is received as food, the memory of his Passion is renewed, the soul is filled with grace and a pledge of the life to come is given to us".²⁰¹

The Holy Spirit, "the Remembrancer Divine"

All of this is possible only by the power of the Holy Spirit, who is the "Remembrancer Divine" and the "True Recorder of his Passion".²⁰² Christ gives the Holy Spirit, as he said, to: "remind you of all that I have said to you" (John 14:26). It is by the Spirit that the words of Jesus at the Last Supper become effective in the Eucharist, making present the crucified and risen Lord who now reigns eternally. The Spirit is "the Church's living memory":²⁰³ "Christian liturgy not only recalls the events that saved us but actualizes them, makes them present. The paschal mystery of Christ is celebrated, not repeated. It is the celebrations that are repeated, and in each celebration there is an outpouring of the Holy Spirit that makes the unique mystery present".²⁰⁴ The Holy Spirit unites the head and his body, and so the self-offering of Christ's people with Christ's eternal self-giving.

It is by the power of the Holy Spirit that the community of faith "proclaims and participates in all that God has done, is doing, and will continue to do for us in Christ".²⁰⁵ It is in the Holy Spirit that past, present and future come together here and now as we celebrate the Eucharist: "In terms of the congregation's appropriation of the reality of Christ's presence, the *anamnesis* (memorial, remembrance, representation) means that past, present and future coincide in the sacramental event.

193 HLS, Hymn 158, st. 2. 194 HLS, Hymn 93, st. 4.

195 HLS, Hymn 93, st. 2. 196 HLS, Hymn 108, st. 2.

197 HLS, Hymn 99, sts. 3-4. 198 *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* §18. 199 SC §8.

200 THM, p. 9, quoting *The United Methodist Hymnal*, p. 10.

201 Quoted in CCC §1402; attributed to St Thomas Aquinas and once included in the Roman Missal as an antiphon on Corpus Christi.

202 HLS, Hymn 16, sts. 1-2.

203 CCC §1099.

204 CCC §1104.

205 THM, p. 16, citing BWS §55.

CHAPTER THREE

All that Jesus means in his person and redemption is brought forth from history to our present experience, which is also a foretaste of the future fulfilment of God's unobstructed reign. And this presence is made to be a reality for us by the working of God's Spirit, whom we "call down" by invocation (*epiclesis*), both upon the gifts and upon the people".²⁰⁶ At the Eucharist, we are united with the past and the future by the Spirit of God.

Through Baptism and participation in the Eucharist, we are made participants in the Holy Spirit and led to resurrection, for "if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through the Holy Spirit in you" (Rom 8:11). We become people who eat and drink with Jesus after he rose from the dead (cf. Acts 10:41).

III. Conclusion: "The Holy Eucharist as it implies a sacrifice"

The points above, very much embedded in the Wesleys' *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*, provide a firm foundation for further common reflection and agreement between Methodists and Catholics on the sacrificial nature of the Eucharist, a dynamic for growing convergence. Both Catholics and Methodists can fruitfully ponder more deeply what it means to come to the Eucharist, to be drawn by Christ himself into his life, death and resurrection, and to enter the movement of his self-offering to the Father.

There remain important aspects of this sacrificial understanding of the Eucharist which require further discussion together. The rich theology of the *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* has not always been as central to Methodist theology and spirituality as John and Charles Wesley might have wished. There remain a variety of opinions among Methodists on this issue, but a sacrificial understanding has never been completely lacking in Methodist eucharistic thinking and devotion. This chapter suggests that Catholic language of a eucharistic "offering" of Christ's sacrifice and Methodist language of "pleading" that sacrifice can be reconciled, and that reflection on the *Wesleys' Hymns on the Lord's Supper* can lead us to new insights together as we see previously divisive issues in a new light.

Catholics offer the eucharistic sacrifice not only for those present but also for all the living and the dead. If the eucharistic sacrifice is indeed the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ, then that sacrifice is present with all its power for the salvation of humanity. There are issues involved here which will need to be addressed in the future regarding purgatory and prayer for the dead.

At the heart of our common understanding of the eucharistic sacrifice is the intimate union between Christ and his Church, between the high priest and his priestly people. It is the risen and ascended Christ himself, by the power of the Holy Spirit, who unites his once-for-all yet eternal self-giving and ours as one single offering, pleaded and presented to the Father and accepted by him. We come to the Eucharist to enter into Christ's self-gift to the Father, and are taken "through him, with him and in him", in the unity of the Holy Spirit, to the Father.

²⁰⁶ "United Methodist Church [USA]", *Churches Respond to BEM: Official Responses to the "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry"* Text, vol. 2, ed. Max Thurian (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986), p. 188.

CHAPTER FOUR

I. Ministry in the New Testament

The starting point for understanding ministry in the Church is the New Testament, whose many images elucidate the ministry of Jesus as priest, prophet and king, and the subsequent gift of this ministry through the apostles to the Church. According to the New Testament, Jesus is priest, the mediator between God and humanity; he is prophet or teacher and exemplar; he is king in the manner of a servant, the Good Shepherd who rules and leads his people by his sacrificial service. The Letter to the Hebrews highlights the priestly ministry of Jesus, whose intercession finds its ultimate expression in his crucifixion and exaltation: “like his brothers and sisters in every respect” and “tested by what he suffered”, he was “a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people” (Heb 2:17-18). Throughout the gospels Jesus teaches by “proclaiming the good news of God” and inviting the people to accept the kingdom of God by conversion of heart (Mark 1:14-15). He uses parables in order to teach the people to see things as his Father sees them and to act accordingly. With regard to his kingly ministry, Jesus “came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

Jesus’ earthly ministry culminates in the paschal mystery of his saving death and resurrection in which his threefold office as priest, prophet and king is completely fulfilled. Every aspect of his earlier ministry points, at least implicitly, towards this event and his passage through death to the risen life beyond, as pioneer and perfecter (cf. Hebrews), a forerunner for all who would find eternal life by participation in his own death and resurrection. In the words of the Second Vatican Council’s *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, “He achieved His task principally by the paschal mystery of His blessed passion and resurrection from the dead, and the glorious ascension, whereby „dying, he destroyed our death and, rising, he restored our life”²⁰⁷ Charles Wesley’s Easter hymn “Christ the Lord is Risen Today” similarly expresses the power of Christ’s paschal mystery and our participation in it:

Soar we now, where Christ has led,
Following our exalted head,
Made like him, like him we rise,
Ours the cross—the grave—the skies!²⁰⁸

Already in the New Testament, Jesus points toward the time when the apostles whom he had chosen (Matt 10:1-2; Mark 3:14-16; Luke 6:13) would continue the ministry begun in his life, death and resurrection. The apostles’ mission includes the proclamation of the gospel and other forms of teaching: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you” (Matt 28:19-20). In John’s Gospel the risen Lord similarly empowers the apostles to participate in his priestly mission. “‘As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’ When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, „Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (John 20:21-23). Imparting his royal mission of service, the risen Lord commissions Peter to continue Jesus’ own ministry, instructing him to “Feed my lambs”, “Tend my sheep” (John 21:15-16; cf. v. 17). The royal or kingly ministry of shepherding the people takes the form of service in imitation of Jesus.

207 SC §5, quoting the Easter Preface to the Roman Missal (1962).

208 Originally published as “Hymn for Easter-Day” in John and Charles Wesley, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (London: Strahan, 1739).

CHAPTER FOUR

On the eve of his passion Jesus told the disciples: “So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example that you also should do as I have done to you” (John 13:14-15). This is imitation of the one who was obedient even unto death. Jesus said to James and John, “The cup that I drink, you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized” (Mark 10:39). Where service is sacrificial it is priestly in character. Paul, the latecomer among the apostles, is the recipient of divine grace in order “to be a minister of Christ Jesus . . . in the priestly service of the gospel of God” (Rom 15:15-16). Such ministers are “ambassadors for Christ” (2 Cor 5:20), who is priest, teacher and servant.

After Pentecost the apostles drew others into a share in their apostolic ministry. As they had received the threefold office from Christ, so the apostles charged others to exercise one or more aspects of the same ministry. Thus, the Acts of the Apostles witnesses to the apostles appointing assistants: “It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word” (Acts 6:2-7; also Acts 13:2-3). While it might appear from this passage that these seven were appointed solely to a ministry of service, in fact they also exercised other aspects of the apostolic ministry: Philip, for example, proclaimed Jesus as Messiah and baptized (Acts 8:5-6, 12-13, 35-38, 40); Stephen proclaimed the gospel in face of his persecutors (Acts 6:8-60). The Pastoral Epistles similarly testify to the apostles’ orderly transmission of their ministry to others (1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6; Titus 1:5, 7-9). Whatever their particular task, all those appointed to share in apostolic ministry in the New Testament participate in some way in the ministry of the crucified and risen Christ who is priest, prophet and king.

II. Apostolic Ministry in the Church

There is a widespread ecumenical consensus among Christians today, based on a convergence in reading the New Testament, that “the Holy Spirit bestows on the community diverse and complementary gifts. These are for the common good of the whole people and are manifested in acts of service within the community and to the world. They may be gifts of communicating the gospel in word and deed, gifts of healing, gifts of praying, gifts of teaching and learning, gifts of serving, gifts of guiding and following, gifts of inspiration and vision. All members are called to discover, with the help of the community, the gifts they have received and to use them for the building up of the Church and for the service of the world to which the Church is sent”.²⁰⁹

Catholics and Methodists agree that “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 Holy Spirit. In this sense it is apostolic. All its members are gifted by the Spirit, and there is no gift without its corresponding service. Within that service of the whole there has been, from the beginning, a ministry uniquely called and empowered to build up the body of Christ in love. This is ‘apostolic’ in the specific sense because it began with Christ’s choosing from among his disciples, the twelve „whom he named apostles’ (Luke 6:13)”.²¹⁰ The ministry of the apostles is affirmed by the risen Lord, who sent them to make disciples of all the nations (Matt 28:19-20).

Apostolic ministry in the Church did not cease with the death of the Twelve but is necessary in every age. “Apostolic communities need people to do for their own time what the apostles did in theirs: to pastor, teach and minister under the authority of the Good Shepherd and Teacher, the Servant Lord”.²¹¹

209 BEM, Ministry §5. 210 Rio §84. 211 Rio §86.

CHAPTER FOUR

Apostolic ministry exists in the ministry of those individuals and corporate institutions that the community of faith recognizes and acknowledges as continuing the work of the apostles. Both our communions particularly identify apostolic ministry in the Church with ordained ministers, believing that “as Christ chose and sent the apostles, Christ continues through the Holy Spirit to choose and call persons into the ordained ministry”.²¹²

Catholics and Methodists already share to a great degree a common practice of ordained ministry. “In the Methodist and Catholic churches some receive by ordination a special calling, and are consecrated and authorized to proclaim and teach the Gospel of God’s love in Jesus Christ, to lead the worshipping community to the throne of grace and administer the sacramental gifts of God, and to guide the life of the Church, its care for the needy and its missionary outreach”.²¹³ In the Catholic Church these tasks are entrusted primarily to the bishops ordained in the apostolic succession, along with their presbyters and deacons.²¹⁴ Methodists also have an ordained ministry comprising bishops (in many cases), elders/presbyters and deacons. Moreover, “in the Methodist tradition, following Wesley, ordained ministry is held to be in succession to the apostles, though not dependent in the same way on the succession of bishops”.²¹⁵

While Catholics and Methodists agree that the orderly transmission of apostolic ministry belongs to the essence of the Church, significant differences remain between us in understanding ministerial succession. In Catholic teaching, the apostles’ office of “shepherding the Church” is “a charge destined to be exercised without interruption by the sacred order of bishops”.²¹⁶ “True succession in ministry is guaranteed only by episcopal laying-on of hands in historical succession and authentic transmission of the faith within the apostolic college”.²¹⁷ The succession of bishops serves, symbolizes and guards the Church’s overall apostolic continuity. For an ecclesial community or tradition fully to be recognized as “Church” there must be an episcopal succession from the apostles. An ecclesial community that does not possess such a ministry lacks something essential, though Catholics recognize that the one Church of Christ may still be “effectively present” in it.²¹⁸

Methodists believe that “in ordination, the church affirms and continues the apostolic ministry through persons empowered by the Holy Spirit. As such, those who are ordained make a commitment to conscious living of the whole gospel and to the proclamation of that gospel to the end that the world may be saved”.²¹⁹ Accordingly, “Methodists . . . preserve a form of ministerial succession in practice and can regard a succession of ordination from the earliest times as a valuable *symbol* of the church’s continuity with the church of the New Testament, though they would not use it as a *criterion*”.²²⁰ That said, in effect Methodists treat continuity in the ordained ministry as both a sign and instrument of apostolic succession in the Church. Methodists attach great significance to ministerial succession through the Conference as evidence of their continuing faithfulness to the apostolic tradition.

Apostolicity is not a case of all or nothing. Like communion, it has different degrees. One of the insights of recent ecumenical dialogue is that apostolic succession has several other strands besides ministerial succession.²²¹ As a result, Catholics and Methodists are able to recognize in one another very many of the characteristics of the Church.

212 BEM, Ministry §11. 213 Rio §88. 214 Cf. LG §21, §§28-29. 215 Rio §88.

216 LG §20. 217 Dublin §85.

218 Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint* (Encyclical Letter on Commitment to Ecumenism, 1995) §11.

219 BDUMC ¶1303.1. 220 Dublin §87, emphasis in the original.

221 On the broadest ecumenical front, see BEM, Ministry §34.

CHAPTER FOUR

As Catholics and Methodists have affirmed, “the Church’s apostolicity involves continuous faithfulness in doctrine, ministry, sacrament and life to the teaching of the New Testament”.²²² Such “continuous faithfulness” is not to be confused with mere historical endurance. Rather, it is the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit with the people of God in each of these ways which makes the Church apostolic. Ministry, mission, faith, worship and witness are all interconnected as aspects of apostolic continuity, and all stem from the work of the Holy Spirit among the people of God. Whereas Catholics particularly tend to emphasize the importance of continuity in apostolic ministry, Methodists traditionally emphasize the importance of continuity in apostolic witness and mission.²²³

Catholics and Methodists agree that the Church needs an ordained, apostolic ministry. Such a ministry “is one of the ‘ecclesial elements’ that we each look for as we seek to affirm as fully as possible the churchly character of one another’s community of faith”.²²⁴ 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, guides, teaches and sanctifies his Church on its pilgrim path”.²²⁵ In particular, “Methodists and Catholics can rejoice that the Holy Spirit uses the ministries and structures of both Churches as means of grace to lead people into the truth of the Gospel of Christ”.²²⁶ As a result of our convergence in valuing ministerial succession as a sign and instrument of the Church’s apostolicity, Catholics and Methodists “nowadays see the opportunity of setting Methodist ministry within a more recognizable framework of apostolic succession”.²²⁷ Such an eventuality would not be for its own sake but for the sake of building up the Church for its mission in the world. The mutual recognition of ordained ministries will follow from “a fresh creative act of reconciliation which acknowledges the manifold yet unified activity of the Holy Spirit throughout the ages. It will involve a joint act of obedience to the sovereign Word of God”.²²⁸

III. The Nature of Ordained Ministry

Catholics and Methodists agree that Christ is the source of ministry, that the whole Church participates in his threefold ministry as prophet, priest and king²²⁹ and that ordained ministers act as Christ’s representatives within the Church, as signs and instruments of his grace and power enabling the baptized to be strong in Christ and to serve as he wills. According to Catholic teaching, “Christ is himself the source of ministry in the Church”, and in the ecclesial service of the ordained minister “it is Christ himself who is present to his Church”.²³⁰ Methodists likewise teach that “ministry in the Christian church is derived from the ministry of Christ”.²³¹ Catholics and Methodists affirm together that “the fundamental ministry [in the Church] is Christ’s own ministry, whose goal is to reconcile all people to God and to each other and to bring them into a new community in which they can grow together to their full freedom as children of God. This ministry was focused in Christ’s life and death and resurrection. It did not end with his life on earth, but by the power of the Spirit continues now in and through his church. Christ still chooses and equips people for his ministry, just as he did in the beginning”.²³² Ordained ministers are the authorized and authentic public representatives of Christ’s ministry in the Church.

222 Dublin §84.

223 Cf. Seoul §101.

224 Seoul §91.

225 Brighton §68.

226 Brighton §81.

227 Seoul §106.

228 Singapore §94.

229 Cf. BDUMC ¶125, ¶301.1; *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, Second Vatican Council, 1965) §2.

230 CCC §874, §1548.

231 BDUMC §301.1.

232 Dublin §77.

CHAPTER FOUR

Methodists and Catholics already share to a significant degree a common understanding of the nature of ordained ministry in the Church. According to one authoritative Methodist source: “Christ’s ministers in the church are stewards in the household of God and shepherds of his flock”.²³³ Similarly, according to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, bishops are “chosen to shepherd the Lord’s flock” and are “servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God”.²³⁴ Thus ordained ministers are pastors among the people of God. They exercise “stewardship” of the Church’s life, witness and service. As pastors, and by their ministry of word and sacrament, ordained ministers enable the people of God to participate more fully in the ministry of Christ as priest, prophet, and king.

Just as the first apostles were chosen from among the wider group of disciples, the call to ordained ministry is distinct from, yet contained within, the common calling of the people of God. “It is a special calling within the general calling given to all”.²³⁵ This “special calling” distinguishes the ordained ministry from the baptismal vocation to service while simultaneously affirming the close relationship between the two.

Since it is God who calls people individually to discipleship, the exercise of ordained ministry is neither a human right nor a matter only of ecclesial organization, appointment or delegation. Among the people of God, “sharing in Christ’s ministry is a gift, for it depends entirely on God’s initiative in calling and enabling and not on human choice and capacity”.²³⁶ Such a gift is not given for its own sake, but for service among the people of God in order to build up the Church for its mission in the world. Accordingly, the institution and transmission of the ordained ministry stems from the divine will and purpose for the Church.

While the call to ministry ultimately depends on God alone, the Church has its proper role in discerning the authenticity of that call. “The experience of Paul, who according to his own words received the call to be an apostle direct from the risen Christ, attests to the freedom and movement of the Holy Spirit to call persons at will into ministry. This call may be experienced in several ways: as an internal compulsion that we feel bound to obey; through the convergence of several external factors all of which indicate its possibility; through the influence of the Church and its people which exercises a claim upon us; or through the indication of a need and the ability under God to fulfil that need. Whichever way the call is experienced it does not remain an inward compulsion but is tested by the Church and finally confirmed before the candidate is ordained”.²³⁷

The ordained ministry is “exercised from within the church, which itself tests and confirms the call, prays for the gift of the Spirit, and sets apart the person called for this ministry”.²³⁸ In so doing, the Church acts in the name of Christ, who ultimately identifies and authorizes ministry.²³⁹ “Methodists and Roman Catholics agree that by ordination a person is irrevocably called and set apart by God for special service in the community of believers, but this does not involve being separated from that community”.²⁴⁰ Ordained ministry should be exercised in active collaboration with the people of God and in fellowship with the community of believers.

233 British Methodist *Deed of Union*, §4.

234 LG §21; cf. LG §28 for priests.

235 Brighton §63.

236 Dublin §78.

237 Singapore §79.

238 Dublin §78.

239 Cf. Denver § 89.

240 Brighton §63.

CHAPTER FOUR

Ordained ministry is not to be confused with service undertaken by the people of God by virtue of their baptismal vocation. As a special calling within the general calling of the people of God, there is a distinction between the exercise of ordained ministry and the service of all the baptized. Moreover, whereas the general calling of the people of God is fulfilled in daily discipleship and Christian service in the world, the particular calling of the ordained ministry is to build up the body of Christ for the sake of its apostolic mission.

Possessed of their special calling to be stewards among the people of God, ordained ministers are associated with the exercise of particular functions. Catholics and Methodists can affirm that “the chief responsibility of the ordained ministry is to assemble and build up the body of Christ by proclaiming and teaching the Word of God, by celebrating the sacraments, and by guiding the life of the community in its worship, its mission and its caring ministry”.²⁴¹ However, both our communions reject a purely functional view of ordained ministry. As the British Methodist Church says, “it would be inadequate to confine the special calling [of the ordained ministry] to a collection of functions”.²⁴² Likewise, the Catholic Church encourages the priest “to safeguard with vigilant love the ‘mystery’ which he bears within his heart for the good of the Church and of mankind” instead of yielding to the temptation to reduce ministry to “activism”, “provision of impersonal services”, or “a businesslike function”.²⁴³

Ordained ministers serve in their ministry the general calling of the people of God. “Ordained ministers have the special responsibility of exercising and holding together the functions of proclaiming the Gospel, calling people to faith, feeding the flock with word and sacrament and making Christ known through the ministry of servanthood to the world”.²⁴⁴ Ordained ministers are a sign of the gospel and of the unity of Christ’s Church, both to the Church itself and to the world.²⁴⁵

Ordained ministers are representative persons in the twofold sense that in exercising their ministry they represent both Christ to the Church, and also the people themselves before God and the world. “Entrusted with the pastoral care of the community, they act in Christ’s name and person as they lead the people in prayer, proclaim and explain the Word, and administer the sacraments of faith”.²⁴⁶ At the same time, “chosen from among the people, the ordained ministers represent the people before God as they bring together the prayers of the community”.²⁴⁷ Catholics and Methodists therefore can affirm together: “As heralds and ambassadors, ordained ministers are representatives of Jesus Christ to the community, and proclaim his message of reconciliation. As leaders and teachers they call the community to submit to the authority of Jesus Christ, the teacher and prophet, in whom law and prophets were fulfilled. As pastors, under Jesus Christ the chief shepherd, they assemble and guide the dispersed people of God, in anticipation of the coming Kingdom”.²⁴⁸

Methodists and Catholics describe the permanence of ordination in different ways. Catholics affirm that orders are indelible. Through the sacrament of orders, the ordained minister is sealed by the Holy Spirit with a special character and so is configured to Christ the Priest in such a way that he is able to act in the person of Christ the Head.²⁴⁹

241 BEM, Ministry §13.

242 *Ordination*, British Methodist Conference (1974), §13.

243 Pope John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day, 1992) §72.

244 Singapore §86. 245 Cf. Dublin §98.

246 Singapore §71. 247 Singapore §71.

248 BEM, Ministry §11. 249 CCC §1563.

CHAPTER FOUR

Bishops and priests receive a permanent gift which empowers them “to preach the word of God with authority, to preside at the Eucharist and to absolve sinners in the name of the church”.²⁵⁰ The idea of a sacramental character imprinted on the soul by Baptism, Confirmation and Ordination, respectively, has a complex history in the Church. Nowadays Catholics tend to interpret the sacramental character of ordination as signifying an irreversible consecration to serve God and the people of God. This involves a further fundamental determination of the baptismal vocation, shaping the whole of a person’s life. “This configuration to Christ and to the Church, brought about by the Spirit, is indelible; it remains for ever in the Christian as a positive disposition for grace, a promise and guarantee of divine protection, and as a vocation to divine worship and to the service of the Church”.²⁵¹

“Methodists do not normally speak of the indelibility of ordination”.²⁵² Even so, ordained ministers who resign from full connexion with the Conference, or who are suspended or dismissed, and are later authorized to resume ministry, are not re-ordained, and their orders are in this sense irremovable.²⁵³ The fact that, according to Methodist polity, a person may be ordained only once to the same order of ministry rests on an unarticulated theological conviction that this event (like Baptism) is so significant for the individual and for the community as to be unrepeatable.

Despite their different ways of describing its effect upon an individual, “Catholics and Methodists agree that by ordination a new and permanent relationship with Christ and his church is established”.²⁵⁴ The new and permanent relationship created when the Church “sets apart” an individual for ministry affects the whole of a person so that the state of ordination principally entails “being” a minister, and not just the exercise of particular ministerial functions. Ordained ministers who no longer carry out ministerial duties, as a result of retirement or for some other reason, do not thereby cease to be ordained ministers.

What ordination does for an individual is connected to a more basic theological question of whether ordination is a sacrament. Whereas Catholics understand ordination to be a sacrament of the Church, Methodists describe only Baptism and the Eucharist as sacraments. Whether and how it is possible for Catholics and Methodists to agree about the sacramental nature of ordination will be considered below.

IV. Ministerial Priesthood and the Common Priesthood of the Faithful

Among the most serious of Reformation controversies was the dispute centring on the concept of priesthood. The polemical slogan “the priesthood of all believers” was coined against what was perceived to be the teaching of the Catholic Church that ordained ministers mediate between God and people as sacrificing priests. To the Reformers’ way of thinking, the “sacrifice of the Mass” undermined the once-for-all nature of Christ’s sacrifice on Calvary and denied the freedom of Christians to approach God directly for justifying and sanctifying grace. As a result, those Churches influenced by the Reformation have been reluctant to attribute to ordained ministers priestly powers beyond those conferred by Baptism. Methodists, too, have emphasized the royal or common priesthood of the faithful (1 Pet 2:9) and rejected the notion of a distinct ministerial priesthood. However, when the question of priesthood in the Church is situated theologically in the context of Christ’s priestly ministry, it becomes evident that Catholics and Methodists have much more in common than has generally been supposed.

250 Dublin §99.
252 Dublin §100.
254 Dublin §98.

251 CCC §1121.
253 Cf. Dublin §100; BDUMC ¶366.

CHAPTER FOUR

The real possibility of significant convergence or full agreement between Catholics and Methodists in this area stems from our common affirmation that there is only one priesthood in the Church, that of Christ himself, in which the whole Church participates as his body.²⁵⁵ When the Church exercises its priestly ministry it does so only by virtue of participating in the priesthood of Christ, who alone is priest of the New Covenant in the truest or fullest sense.

It is in the celebration of the Eucharist that the priestly ministry of Christ is most visible in the Church. Here, too, the representative nature of the ordained ministry is most clearly seen as the visible focus of the communion between Christ and the members of his body, the Church. “In the celebration of the eucharist, Christ gathers, teaches and nourishes the Church. It is Christ who invites to the meal and who presides at it”.²⁵⁶ In the Catholic Church, and normally in Methodist Churches, Christ’s presidency at the Eucharist is signified and represented by an ordained minister, who also signifies and represents the communion of the eucharistic assembly with other such assemblies.

Chapter Three of this report shows that, properly understood, the Eucharist can be described as a sacrifice or offering in which the Church participates in the sacrifice of Christ. In the Eucharist, Christ’s sacrifice is sacramentally present together with all its saving benefits for the people of God. In the eucharistic prayer the Church prays and offers “through Christ, with Christ, in Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit”.²⁵⁷

Catholics teach that every liturgical celebration is “an action of Christ the Priest and of his Body, which is the Church”.²⁵⁸ There are two proper sharings in the one priesthood of Christ within the Church, which are “ordered one to another”, namely the common priesthood of all the faithful and the ministerial priesthood of those faithful who are called and ordained to represent Christ himself in the midst of his people, acting in the name and person of Christ to effect the eucharistic sacrifice and offer it to God in the name of all the people.²⁵⁹ “Catholics believe that, as there is only one sacrifice, so there is also only one priest, namely Christ. Those who are called ‘priests’ are only ever representatives of Christ the priest in the midst of the priestly people. Through them, Christ the priest is sacramentally present to minister to his people”.²⁶⁰

The priesthood of the ordained ministry and the common priesthood of the faithful in Catholic understanding are distinct but related. “Catholics affirm that in the way the ordained minister represents Christ to the body of the faithful he is a priest in a sense in which other Christians are not”.²⁶¹ At the same time, ministerial priesthood cannot be understood apart from the royal priesthood of the people of God. “Though they differ essentially and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are nonetheless ordered one to another; each in its own proper way shares in the one priesthood of Christ”.²⁶² The essential difference is described 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 in the name of all the people”.²⁶³ This essential difference between the common priesthood of the people of God and the ministerial priesthood is reflected in the way each is exercised: “While the common priesthood of the faithful is exercised by the unfolding of baptismal grace—a life of faith, hope and charity, a life according to the Spirit, the ministerial priesthood is at the service of the common priesthood.

255 Cf. Seoul §132. 256 BEM, Ministry §14.

257 *The Methodist Worship Book*, p. 194.

258 SC §7. 259 Cf. LG §10.

260 Seoul §132. 261 Dublin §97.

262 LG §10. 263 LG §10.

CHAPTER FOUR

It is directed at the unfolding of the baptismal grace of all Christians. The ministerial priesthood is a *means* by which Christ unceasingly builds up and leads his Church".²⁶⁴

Methodist teaching concerning priesthood and the eucharistic sacrifice has not been officially formulated, though an authoritative source is the Wesleys' *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*. In keeping with the sacramental theology of the Church of England at that time, the Wesley brothers taught that the Eucharist is a memorial of Christ's death, a means of present grace, a pledge of future glory, and a "commemorative sacrifice".²⁶⁵

Regrettably, Reformation disputes tended to force a choice between the priesthood of the ordained and the priesthood of the people as the primary datum when considering priesthood in the Church.²⁶⁶ Echoes of earlier disputes can be found in the doctrinal standards of British Methodism which maintain that ordained ministers "hold no priesthood differing in kind from that which is common to all the Lord's people". Again, "the [British] Methodist Church holds the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers and consequently believes that no priesthood exists which belongs exclusively to a particular order or class of persons".²⁶⁷

Whatever their original target, these and similar statements are not necessarily irreconcilable with current Catholic teaching about the nature and exercise of priesthood in the Church. Methodists and Catholics can agree that the only "kind" of priesthood in the Church is that which "belongs exclusively" to Christ. For Catholics, this affirmation is not inconsistent with maintaining a qualitative distinction between ministerial priesthood and the common priesthood of the faithful, both of which participate in Christ's priestly ministry. Without disavowing past controversies, Catholics and Methodists can now recognize that developments have taken place which enable us to place the contentious issue of ministerial priesthood in a new and more favourable light.²⁶⁸

Methodists and Catholics share a common conviction that the special calling of the ordained ministry is to speak and act both in the name of the people of God and also in the name of Christ himself in relation to the community. In acting and speaking in the name of Christ, as his representatives, ordained ministers do not receive their authority by delegation from the people of God. Likewise, the priesthood of the ordained ministry is not derived from the common priesthood of the people of God. Thus ordained ministers participate in the priesthood of Christ in a way that is proper to their distinctive ministry, and not solely as baptized individuals.

Some differences emerge between Catholics and Methodists in the relative significance each attaches to the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial priesthood. While *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* affirms that bishops and presbyters "may appropriately be called priests because they fulfil a particular priestly service by strengthening and building up the royal and prophetic priesthood of the faithful through word and sacraments, through their prayers of intercession, and through their pastoral guidance of the community",²⁶⁹ this usage is much more normal for Catholics, who tend to think primarily of priesthood in terms of the ordained. Methodists, however, tend to speak of priesthood in the Church primarily with reference to the people of God as a whole and are not accustomed to referring to their ordained ministers as "priests".

264 CCC §1547.

265 See Chapter Three.

266 Seoul §132.

267 British Methodist *Deed of Union*, §4.

268 Cf. Seoul §§132-33.

269 BEM, Ministry §17.

CHAPTER FOUR

A difference in nomenclature itself need not be significant. What must be considered is whether and how the different forms of participation in the one priesthood of Christ can be said to constitute an “essential difference” between ministerial priesthood and the common priesthood of the faithful. In particular, they must consider whether and how it is possible to regard the ordained ministry as the *means* through which Christ makes his priesthood present and effective among the people of God at the celebration of the Eucharist. The basis for further convergence must be the shared conviction expressed above that the ordained minister represents Christ to the Church. Since it is Christ as Head and Shepherd of the Church who invites his people to the Eucharist and who himself presides over the assembly, then the ordained minister, acting in the name of Christ, can indeed be said to be the means through which Christ makes his priesthood present and effective among the people of God. Nevertheless, the capacity of the ordained minister to act in the Church on behalf of Christ depends also on the particular effect that ordination has on an individual.

V. Ordination as an Effective Sign

In their respective ways, Catholics and Methodists formally set apart ministers for service to the baptized by the liturgical means of ordination into a particular order of ministry. For Catholics, in the sacrament of order those ordained are sacramentally configured to Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit so as to exercise ministry in one of the three orders of ministry (bishop, presbyter and deacon). In the absence of formal Methodist teaching on the subject, authorized ordination rites are a valuable source for understanding what Methodists believe about ordination. The first Methodist ordinal was John Wesley’s 1784 revision of the ordinal in the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*, and was initially intended for use in the United States. Although the Wesleyan legacy remains important, contemporary ordination rites in Methodism have been considerably shaped both theologically and liturgically by the ecumenical insights of the modern liturgical movement.

According to the Seoul Report, the ancient principle *lex orandi, lex credendi* (as we pray, so we believe), can usefully be applied in Catholic-Methodist dialogue since “much of Methodist belief is actually to be found primarily in the liturgy and in hymns . . . and has not received extensive articulation in other forms. In some cases, it remains implicit”.²⁷⁰ As a result of the twentieth-century liturgical movement, Methodists and Catholics now “share a strongly liturgical methodology in formulating our statements of belief and in the teaching of doctrine”.²⁷¹ Applying this liturgical methodology to ordination rites within our two communions, it is evident that there is substantial theological agreement between Methodists and Catholics concerning the nature of ordination. The idea of “intention” is central to securing full agreement between our two communions concerning the effect of ordination.

The present ordination rites in the Catholic Church stem from liturgical reforms following the Second Vatican Council. Within the revised liturgy of ordination, “the essential rite of the sacrament of Holy Orders for all three degrees consists in the bishop’s imposition of hands on the head of the ordinand and in the bishop’s specific consecratory prayer asking God for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and his gifts proper to the ministry to which the candidate is being ordained”.²⁷²

The central feature in Methodist ordination rites is the imposition of hands by an ordained minister on behalf of the Conference together with an invocation of the Holy Spirit to confer the appropriate gifts for ministry in a particular order. For example: “Lord, pour upon *Name* the Holy Spirit for the office and work of an Elder [a Deacon]” (United Methodist Church); and “Father, send the Holy Spirit upon *N* for the office and work of a Presbyter [Deacon] in your Church” (British Methodist Church).

270 Seoul §98.

271 Seoul §98.

272 CCC §1573, with reference to Pope Pius XII, *Sacramentum Ordinis* (Denzinger-Schoenmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum* §3858).

CHAPTER FOUR

The clear intention in both Methodist and Catholic ordination rites is to ordain individuals into the apostolic ministry of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. Moreover, Methodist and Catholic ordination rites are constructed so as to signify the conferral of the particular ministerial *charism* by the invocation of the Holy Spirit. This common intention and liturgical form suggests a basic theological agreement that ordination is sacramental.

Historic differences between Methodists and Catholics concerning the precise number of sacraments need not be regarded as constituting an ecumenical impasse. The category of “effective sign” enables the sacramental economy to be described in a way that goes beyond Baptism and the Eucharist. Methodists and Catholics affirm together that “the sacraments are effective signs by which God gives grace through faith”.²⁷³ Catholics and Methodists agree that “the Church has authority to institute other rites and ordinances which are valued as sacred actions and signs of God’s redeeming love in Christ”.²⁷⁴ Within the sacramental economy, Methodists and Catholics “look upon ordination as an effective sign by which the grace of God is given to the recipient for the ministry of word and sacrament”.²⁷⁵

Methodists, while using the term “sacrament” only of the two rites for which the gospels explicitly record Christ’s institution, do not thereby deny a “sacramental quality” to other rites.²⁷⁶ For Catholics, ordination is a sacrament of the Church. Methodists and Catholics agree together that ordination is sacramental in nature, a rite that contains and confers the grace it signifies. In conferring the appropriate gifts for ministry, ordination places the ordained minister in a new and permanent relationship to Christ and the people of God. Catholics refer to this state as being “sacramentally configured to Christ”. Although such language is new to Methodists, they can affirm its meaning in relation to ordination.

VI. The Ministry of Oversight

From the very beginning, there has been a ministry of oversight in the Church.²⁷⁷ Broadly stated, this ministry exists “to ensure that the community remain one, that it grow in holiness, that it preserve its catholicity, and that it be faithful to apostolic teaching and to the commission of evangelization given by Christ himself”.²⁷⁸ “Without the exercise of this gift of oversight, disorder and therefore disunity are inevitable. *Koinonia* and *episcopate* imply one another”.²⁷⁹ Whilst the ministry of oversight encompasses a variety of functions, “central to the exercise of *episcopate* is the task of maintaining unity in the Truth. Thus teaching is the principal part of the task of *episcopate*”.²⁸⁰ Methodists and Catholics affirm together that “pastoral oversight has always included authoritative teaching and preaching, for unity in love and unity in truth belong together”.²⁸¹

With regard to the exercise of the ministry of oversight, “Methodists and Catholics affirm together the place within the community of believers of authoritative servants of communion and connection in love and in truth, authorized agents of discerning and proclaiming the truth of the Gospel”.²⁸² Within both our communions the ministry of oversight is exercised in ways that are personal, collegial and communal. However, Methodists and Catholics identify differently the agents and instruments of authoritative discernment and proclamation.

273 Nairobi §15.

274 Nairobi §13.

275 Singapore §88.

276 Brighton §60.

277 Cf. Brighton §71.

278 Singapore §74.

279 Singapore §92.

280 Singapore §93.

281 Brighton §51.

282 Brighton §51.

CHAPTER FOUR

In the Catholic Church it is the bishops who are the authoritative servants of communion. The Second Vatican Council teaches that “the bishops have by divine institution taken the place of the apostles as pastors of the Church, in such wise that whoever listens to them is listening to Christ and whoever despises them despises Christ and him who sent Christ”.²⁸³ Catholics believe that “the bishops of the Church enjoy the special assistance of the Holy Spirit, when, by a collegial act with the Bishop of Rome in an ecumenical council, they define doctrine to be held irrevocably”.²⁸⁴ The Second Vatican Council refers to the bishops teaching infallibly when, in communion with the Bishop of Rome, the successor of St Peter, they teach authoritatively and unanimously on matters of faith and morals even when they are dispersed throughout the world; this is called the “ordinary universal magisterium”.²⁸⁵ It also repeats the doctrine of the First Vatican Council that the Pope himself teaches infallibly when “as supreme pastor and teacher of all the faithful . . . he proclaims in an absolute decision a doctrine pertaining to faith or morals”.²⁸⁶ In the particular circumstances indicated, the teaching of the Pope and the bishops is believed to be preserved from error since it is an exercise of “the Church’s charism of infallibility”, a gift of the Spirit with which the Church is fundamentally endowed by Christ himself.²⁸⁷ Although the Catholic Church does not believe reception of doctrine to be a necessary criterion of its truth, a doctrine that is not received by the people of God in the practice of their faith does not achieve its intended effect in the life of the Church. Thus circumscribed, reception of doctrine is undoubtedly important for Catholics.

Within Methodism the ministry of oversight is exercised communally by the Conference and also personally and collegially by bishops or superintendent ministers.²⁸⁸ “In all Methodist Churches, it is the Conference that authoritatively discerns the truth of the Gospel for the church”.²⁸⁹ Methodists do not claim a *charism* of infallibility for any ministry or institution but instead rely on the indefectibility of the Church. Methodists have confidence in the guidance and faithfulness of the Holy Spirit, without investing any particular agent or institution with a sure charism of authoritative discernment. “Methodists are accustomed to see the guidance of the Holy Spirit in more general ways: through reformers, prophetic figures, Church leaders and Methodist Conferences, for example, as well as through general Councils”.²⁹⁰ Doctrinal statements made by Methodist Conferences do not claim to be free of error. The assent of the people of God is an integral part of the process of authoritative teaching so that reception by the ordinary faithful confirms the decisions of those charged with the exercise of authority in the Church. In Methodist understanding, the exercise of authority in the Church is necessarily provisional and subject to revision under the guidance of the Holy Spirit who leads the Church into the truth.

There are clearly, therefore, certain differences between Methodists and Catholics concerning the ministry of oversight and the exercise of teaching authority. Nevertheless, “Catholics and Methodists are agreed on the need for an authoritative way of being sure, beyond doubt, concerning God’s action insofar as it is crucial for our salvation”.²⁹¹ The framework for theological convergence between our two communions concerning the ministry of oversight is provided by the shared conviction that “to maintain God’s people in the truth is the loving work of the Spirit in the Church”.²⁹²

283 LG §20.

285 Cf. LG §25.

287 Cf. LG §25.

289 Brighton §74.

291 Nairobi §75.

284 Nairobi §68; cf. LG §25.

286 LG §25.

288 Brighton §74.

290 Nairobi §72.

292 Honolulu §34.

CHAPTER FOUR

See the Gospel Church secure
And founded on a Rock!
All her promises are sure;
Her bulwarks who can shock?
Count her every precious shrine;
Tell, to after ages tell,
Fortified by power divine,
The Church can never fail.²⁹³

As a result of the Spirit's work, the Church is understood to be indefectible by Methodists, infallible by Catholics.²⁹⁴ Our differences relate to how this basic characteristic of the Church is embodied in the ministry of those who authoritatively exercise *episcopate* or oversight.

VI. Theological Issues Requiring Further Study

Methodists and Catholics are not yet agreed about the structure of the ordained ministry and the significance of the gradual development within the early church of a threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon. Catholics regard this threefold structure of ordained ministry as divinely instituted²⁹⁵ and the transmission of priestly orders in continuity with the apostolic community as required for full ecclesial identity.²⁹⁶ Methodists do not regard a threefold ministry as the only permissible structure of ordained ministry in the Church, even though many Methodist Churches have an ordained ministry comprising bishops, presbyters and deacons.

Methodists and Catholics have different understandings of who may ordain on behalf of the Church. Within the Catholic Church only bishops can ordain bishops, presbyters or deacons. With respect to the ordination of bishops in the Catholic Church, only bishops in hierarchical communion with the Pope, authorized by a papal letter of appointment to the ordinand, may ordain both validly and licitly. In Methodism, it is the Conference that ordains by means of its nominated representatives, either bishops (in the United Methodist Church and most other Methodist Churches) or presbyters (in Great Britain and certain other Methodist Churches). This divergence emerges from our respective understandings of the exercise of the ministry of oversight and should not obscure a shared conviction concerning the nature of oversight itself. It is significant that in both of our communions it is the principal agent/instrument of oversight that ordains.

Methodists and Catholics do not yet fully agree about who may preside at the Eucharist. In the Catholic Church only those ordained to the priesthood (bishops and presbyters) can preside at the Eucharist and render Christ's own priesthood present and effective among the people of God. In Methodist polity, bishops and presbyters preside at the Eucharist, although in exceptional cases of deprivation, Conferences and/or bishops may authorize other individuals to preside at the Eucharist in a specific place for a limited period. This significant difference between our two traditions needs to be addressed.

Methodists readily affirm that it is normative and fitting for a bishop or presbyter, as the one who represents Christ as Head and Shepherd to the Church, to preside at the principal liturgical events in the Church, including the Eucharist.

²⁹³ Stanza 9 of Charles Wesley's hymn "Great is our redeeming Lord", first published in *The Arminian Magazine*, vol. 20 (1797), p. 616.

²⁹⁴ Brighton §84.

²⁹⁵ Cf. LG §20.

²⁹⁶ Cf. UR §15, §22.

CHAPTER FOUR

The thrust of this present report suggests that Methodists may wish to reconsider whether their current practice in providing for presidency by others is, in fact, compatible with their understanding of the bishop and presbyter as Christ's representative to the community and of ordination as an effective sacramental rite by which these ministers are equipped with the necessary gifts and power to act in his name.

Methodists and Catholics do not yet fully agree about who may validly receive ordination in the Church. "Catholics do not ordain women, believing that they have no authority to change a practice that belongs to the sacrament of order as received in the Tradition of the Church".²⁹⁷ "Methodists ordain women because they believe that women also receive the call, evidenced by inward conviction and outward manifestation of the gifts and graces and confirmed by the gathering of the faithful".²⁹⁸

VIII. Summary Conclusion

In this chapter, attention has focused on the role of the ordained ministry in enabling the people of God to participate in the ministry of Christ in the Church and in the world. A number of positive affirmations have been made which are here set out in summary form. Catholics and Methodists affirm together that: (1) all ministry in the Church is ultimately that of Christ and is only ever exercised by individuals as his representatives; (2) the ordained ministry is both sign and instrument of Christ's ministry; (3) a rite of ordination (involving the imposition of ministerial hands and the invocation of the Holy Spirit for the appropriate gifts for ministry) is itself sacramental in nature; (4) by virtue of their ordination, individuals are enabled to represent Christ to the Church and to represent the Church before God; (5) the ministerial priesthood and the common priesthood of the faithful participate in distinct but related ways in the priesthood of Christ; (6) in the celebration of the Eucharist, the ordained bishop or presbyter represents Christ the priest in the midst of the priestly people of God; (7) the orderly transmission of the ordained ministry is a sign and instrument of the apostolicity of the Church.

²⁹⁷ Singapore §97.

²⁹⁸ Singapore §96.

CONCLUSION

The Seoul Report, "The Grace Given You in Christ: Catholics and Methodists Reflect Further on the Church", harvested the fruits of Methodist-Catholic dialogue on the Church itself over the previous forty years. In the light of what had been achieved it was able to recommend practical ways in which there could be a mutual exchange of gifts between the two communions that would further the aim of full communion in faith, mission and sacramental life which was early declared as the goal of this dialogue.

In the Seoul Report it was also recognized that some matters remain questions of significant divergence between the two communions. One of these was the sacramental nature of ordination and the understanding of the ordained ministry as priesthood. Related to this was a sacrificial understanding of the Eucharist. This present document has addressed those questions, and in addition, looked for the first time in an extended way at the approach of each communion to the theology and practice of Baptism. It has done this in the context of the larger question of the sacramental understanding of the Church which has emerged consistently in reports of the dialogue over the preceding decades, and also of the paschal mystery of Christ, the way in which members of the Church participate in the death and resurrection of Jesus through the sacraments.

A more sacramental understanding of the Church and an increasingly shared understanding of Eucharist and ordination have been some of the great achievements of this dialogue over many years. Nonetheless, because some issues remained, a number of those have been able to be addressed in a more effective way in this report.

The first chapter has gone a long way towards revealing a common understanding of the priestly nature of Christ, the unity between Christ and his sacrifice which he offered once and for all but which endures forever, and the unity of Christ and his Church which is his body and his bride. This common understanding provides the basis for the particular agreements reached on the questions of Baptism, Eucharist and ministry in succeeding chapters.

The second chapter deals with the different emphases of Methodists and Catholics and their understanding of Baptism. Each holds together Baptism and faith, Baptism and new life, and the relationship between Baptism and the Church in different ways. The difficult question of the relationship between the sacramental celebration of Baptism and the effect of regeneration or new birth is dealt with, without minimizing the tension between the different emphases which are often present between Catholics and Methodists in this regard. The missiological understanding of baptism which grows from seeing it as a call to discipleship was seen as a theme worthy of further discussion between Methodists and Catholics.

The chapter on the Eucharist moves towards a convergence of understanding about the sacrificial nature of the Eucharist by exploring the Catholic understanding of "offering" Christ's sacrifice and the Methodist preference for speaking of "pleading" that sacrifice. The conclusion of the chapter is that this language can be reconciled and that reflection on the *Wesleys' Hymns on the Lord's Supper* can draw Methodists and Catholics even closer together. This does not mean that there are not issues requiring further study, one example of which would be the Catholic practice of offering the sacrifice not only for those present, but for all the living and the dead.

CONCLUSION

Concerning ordination, this report moves further along the pathway to full agreement between Catholics and Methodists by affirming quite positively that both agree that ordination is sacramental in nature, a rite that contains and confers the grace it signifies. For both it places the ordained minister in a new and permanent relationship to Christ and the people of God. Many theological questions are noted which could become the material for further stages of dialogue between Methodists and Catholics.

At the conclusion of this phase of the dialogue, there seems to be an issue that would benefit from further dialogue between Catholics and Methodists. It is the whole question of the experience of salvation and the response of the believer to the gift of God's grace. Catholics and Methodists have different emphases in the way they speak about this, which seem to underpin a number of other matters upon which they often diverge. 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.



Published by
The World Methodist Council
PO Box 518, Lake Junaluska, NC
28745 USA

