

THE GRACE GIVEN YOU IN CHRIST. SOME REFLECTIONS.

Last year, Ken Loyer, a research student at Southern Methodist University, published an excellent paper in this journal devoted to two significant recent developments in Methodist ecumenical endeavour, the first being the Methodist accession to the Joint Declaration on Justification, the second being the most recent report of the international Roman Catholic-Methodist Commission, *The Grace Given You in Christ-Catholics and Methodist Reflect Further on the Church*¹.

There is no need for me to add to Ken's extremely thorough review of the contents of the Report but it may be helpful to draw out the deep significance of some aspects of this particularly fruitful dialogue document which, I would argue, has important implications for ecumenical dialogue right across the oikoumene and not simply for the future of the Catholic-Methodist relationship. It needs to be set in the context of the developing ecumenical vocation of both churches. It is particularly important to recognise the parallels as well as the differences between Roman Catholic and Methodist ecumenism.

Common features include the practice of an all-round ecumenism, albeit from somewhat varying angles. The Roman Catholic Church starts from the belief that unity subsists in it and that it alone has preserved the final coping stone of unity, viz-the petrine ministry. It holds to this belief whilst recognising what the Pope John Paul II called the rich embellishment of the koinonia that has resulted from the work of the Spirit in the many churches and ecclesial communities despite the objective sin of schism².

Methodism makes no exclusive claims for itself, though it most firmly asserts that 'it claims and cherishes its place in the Holy Catholic Church which is the Body of Christ'³. Methodism also holds that it was raised up, at a particular period, 'to spread scriptural holiness throughout the land', first England, then her newly independent American former colonies. Methodists have always recognised a provisionality about their existence as a body, this being encapsulated in John Wesley's own definition of his preachers as 'extraordinary ministers, designed to provoke the ordinary ministers to jealousy'. His intention was never to replace historic church structures, never, indeed, to leave the church of his birth and ordination, the Church of England simply to re-energise it and recall it to faithfulness in living the apostolic life. The Joint Commission balances a recognition of the essential claim of Methodism with a desire to integrate it more fully into the traditionally received structures of the Church of the first millennium and a half when it asserts

'Methodists affirm, and Catholics readily acknowledge, the graced and fruitful nature of Methodist ministry from the outset. We both, nevertheless, nowadays see the opportunity of setting Methodist ministry within a more recognisable framework of apostolic succession as we pursue the goal of full, visible communion of our churches'⁴.

Both churches, however, are agreed upon the goal of unity as being in accordance with Christ's will for His Church and as belonging to its divinely appointed nature and purpose. Both rejoice in a generous recognition of the activity of the Spirit in other Christian communities. Both accept that their own developing catholicity is wounded by the extent to

¹ Published by World Methodist Council, Lake Junaluska.

² Ut Unum Sint, para 85.

³ The language used in the Deed of Union of the Methodist Church of Great Britain, 1932.

⁴ Grace, para 106.

which they lack communion with other churches and reception of the authentic riches that the Holy Spirit has given to them. These points were made, on the Catholic side, in the Decree on Ecumenism and in the subsequently reinforcing remarks of the late Holy Father, John Paul II, particularly in *Ut Unum Sint*⁵. On the Methodist side, they are implicit in the practice of the Wesleys in the appropriation of the riches of so many Christian communities for the spiritual developments and training of their preachers, a point that is very clear when one examines the sources of their *Christian Library*⁶. They are also explicit in the teaching of many of the Wesleyan fathers, William Shrewsbury (1785-1866), Alfred Barrett (1808-76) and John Scott Lidgett (1854-1953) being particular examples.

Both churches understand the catholicity of the Church as essentially developing. The Church is increasingly enriched from age to age as new forms of spirituality, Christian service and theological expression are developed. The British Methodist ecclesiological statement of 1937 begins thus.

‘The Church of Christ is the home of the Holy Spirit, and is, therefore a family with a unique and developing life. It is a life of distinctive quality, a life which under the guidance of the Spirit should be richer as time goes on, with fresh manifestations as new nations and races are added to the church, and new apprehension of divine truth is given’⁷.

The Decree on Ecumenism states

‘Whatever is wrought by the grace of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of our separated brethren can contribute to our own edification. Whatever is truly Christian never conflicts with the genuine interests of the faith; indeed, it can always result in a more ample realisation of the very mystery of the Christ and the Church.

Nevertheless, the divisions among Christians prevent the church from effecting the fullness of catholicity in those of her sons who, though joined to her by baptism, are yet separated from full communion with her. Furthermore, the Church herself finds it more difficult to express in actual life her full catholicity in all its aspects’⁸.

Anyone who has followed the progress of the Catholic-Methodist dialogue through its many stages since its inauguration in 1966 will realise how faithful the succeeding Commission memberships have been to the teaching of the two churches as expressed in the statements cited above and others of similar import.

The joint understanding of catholicity as a developing phenomenon, one that will only reach its fulfilment at the end of time and in the final and definitive inauguration of the Kingdom, is particularly well expressed by two scholars. From the Catholic side, Yves Congar spoke of the need for a double loyalty to catholicity, to the catholicity of past development, but also to the catholicity that comes, as it were, to the Church from the eschatological future⁹. Rex

⁵ Decree on Ecumenism, section 4.

⁶ For an excellent treatment of a key aspect of the immense range of sources used by the Wesleys, see the article by J. Orcibal ‘The Theological Originality of John Wesley and Continental Spirituality’ in Davies, R.E. and Rupp, G (eds) *History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, vol 1, (1965) pp. 83-111. The *Christian Library* was a collection of sources on the spiritual life edited by the Wesleys for the education and edification of the early preachers.

⁷ *Statements of the Methodist Church on Faith and Order*, vol 1, 1933-1983. (1984), p.7

⁸ Decree on Ecumenism, section 4.

⁹ In his *Christians in Dialogue*, (1964), p.349.

Kissack complemented this teaching from the Methodist side when he talked of the search for unity as the ecclesiological consequence of the doctrine of Christian perfection¹⁰.

This understanding of the catholicity of the Church is linked to the joint understanding of the Church as communion, so strongly stressed both in the present report and in the fourth one *Towards A Statement on the Church*¹¹. It was this understanding that allowed such a sea change in Catholic approaches to unity after Vatican II, a change that can be illustrated from the response of the Catholic bishops of England and Wales to the ecclesiological project *Called To Be One* initiated by Churches Together in England in the early 1990's. They stated that the road to unity was not a road of return for non-Catholics to the Catholic Church; rather it was a road of common convergent pilgrimage towards a *new* future that God would give to the *whole* Church.

The realisation that an understanding of the Church as communion lies deep within the *sensus fidelium* in both churches has played a powerful role not merely in the work of the International Commission but in the development of fruitful grassroots relations between Catholics and Methodists at the local level. Only recently, Fr Michael Robertson, ecumenical officer for the diocese of Clifton (England) told me of his growing fascination as he listened, for the first time, to a senior Methodist minister expounding the Methodist understanding and practice of connexionalism. He came to realise that this was precisely the ecclesiology of communion transposed into a Methodist key. The Methodist revival was a rediscovery of lived communion within the context of an evangelical revival; as James Rigg put it, it was as much a revival of apostolic church life as of apostolic doctrine. This rediscovery of lived communion is celebrated constantly in the hymns of Charles Wesley in such striking verses and couplets as

The gift which he on one bestows,
We all delight to prove:
The grace through every vessel flows,
In purest streams of love.

We all partake the joy of one,
The common peace we feel,
A peace to sensual minds unknown,
A joy unspeakable¹².

What is experienced in daily Christian life through the presence of Christ in the midst of his people is celebrated in praise: the vision celebrated in common worship reinforces the communal experience of the Church.

It is also witnessed to in the comment of the greatest later Wesleyan ecclesologist, Benjamin Gregory on the Greek term *proskaterountes* as found in Acts 2:42.

‘What is meant by giving themselves to the apostles’ doctrine is very plain. They devoted themselves to the learning, to the experimental realisation and to the assiduous practice of those truths which it was the principle work of the Apostles to teach’¹³.

¹⁰ Kissack, R. *Church or No Church* (1964), p.145.

¹¹ cited in Gros, J., Meyer, H, and Rusch, W. (eds) *Growth in Agreement II*, (2000), pp. 583-596

¹² *Hymns and Psalms*, the official hymnal of the British Methodist Church, (1983), no. 753.

¹³ Gregory, B. *The Holy Catholic Church* (1873), p. 76.

In this we see the apostolicity of the Church interpreted in terms of the co-ordinate emphases within the Wesleyan tradition upon orthodoxy, orthopathy and orthopraxy, the three constituting a seamless whole¹⁴.

The second section of the report, *Together in Christ*, is largely dedicated to building on the basis of earlier agreement on the nature of the Church as communion. It records an ever closer appreciation by Catholics of the connexional ethos and structures of Methodism as representing the Methodist typos and reception of this understanding. Thus, we read in paragraph 60 that ‘The Church is by nature a ‘connectional society’, ‘a vital web of interactive relationships’¹⁵. Both Methodists and Catholics have an essentially ‘connectional understanding of Christ’s call to discipleship, to holiness and to mission, always as God’s gift and rooted in our sharing in the invisible *koinonia* that is the life of the Holy Trinity’.

Later in this section, the question of the sacramental nature of the Church and subsequent possible agreement on the Church as sacrament is raised. In the past Methodists have tended to think in terms of the communion of the Church as being constituted by the immediate action of the Spirit upon the community, upon the members as given in Christ to each other in love and fellowship rather than on the Church as being primarily constituted by its celebration of and renewal through the eucharist. However, the two ways of understanding the constitution of the Church as communion have their common root in the action of the Spirit, a point implicitly made in paragraph 77 in the statement ‘Only the presence of the Holy Spirit makes it possible for the Church to be a sign or sacrament of the Risen Christ for our whole world’. The understanding is further succinctly developed in paragraph 102 which asserts

‘The idea of a sacrament is ideally suited to holding together internal and external, visible and spiritual, and both Catholics and Methodists have begun to speak of the Church itself in a sacramental way’. Quotations from both British and American Methodist contemporary documents are adduced in support of this statement and the paragraph concludes with the statement that

‘Moreover, Methodists and Catholics agree on the constituent dimensions of sacramentality: “As agent of God’s mission the Church is sign, foretaste and instrument of the kingdom.”’¹⁶

One of the overall features of the Catholic-Methodist dialogue since its inception has been a growing acceptance that many of the contrasting emphases of the two churches are complementary rather than contradictory. This seems to be a fulfilment of the promise that one can derive from the theology of the late Johannes Adam Mohler, who, like the Wesleys, was a key figure in the rediscovery of the ecclesiology of communion. Mohler argued that, within the bonds of communion, it is possible to hold in fruitful balance and tension contrasting theological insights. Once, however, communion is sundered, contrasting emphases tend to become exaggerated and hardened to the point of contradiction¹⁷. From this, one may reason that, as a degree of communion becomes progressively re-established with greater mutual knowledge, love and communication flowing between any two ecumenical

¹⁴ The three terms adopted by Ted Runyon in his *The New Creation*, (1997), pp. 147-149.

¹⁵ citing the United Methodist *Book of Discipline*.

¹⁶ This para cites the most recent (2004) report of the American Roman Catholic-Methodist dialogue, *Through Divine Love* (2004) and the most recent ecclesiological statement of the British Methodist Church, *Called To Love and Praise* (1999), reproduced in *Statements of the Methodist Church on Faith and Order*, vol 2, pp. 1-63

¹⁷ Y. Congar, *Diversity and Communion* (1984), pp 149-152 for a brief account.

partners, so it becomes increasingly easy and possible to identify legitimate contrasting approaches to varying aspects of the one Great Tradition of the Church. This has already proved the case in terms of the Joint Declaration on Justification and in christological agreements with the Oriental Orthodox churches.

It is thus a sign of their growing, albeit still imperfect and incomplete, communion that Catholics and Methodists are able to see certain aspects of their separate lives as complementary rather than contradictory. For example, in paragraph 99, we find an extended discussion of the contrast between the Catholic emphasis upon the community and the Methodist one upon the individual.

‘Catholic ecclesiology goes from the community to the individual...each individual is saved by being taken up into the greater whole...On the other hand. Methodism tends to reflect the focus upon the individual which characterised many of its sources and to say that the Church is constituted by a particular collection of individual believers...Catholics have a instinct for the whole and an emphasis upon the confident actions of the Church as Church, while Methodists have an instinct for the individual and an emphasis upon the assurance that each individual has. *Far from being conflictual, these respective emphases should be regarded as being necessarily complementary*’ (my italics in last sentence).

The paragraph concludes with the reconciling theological observation that undergirds the previous italicised statement.

‘The Church needs precisely those structures that enable individual Christians and local churches to achieve their true identity in and through communion. The one and the many, the individual and the community, achieve their identity simultaneously in the life that is patterned after the Trinity’.

One may also argue that it is as a result of that ‘searching together with the separated brethren into the divine mysteries...with charity and with humility’ as commended in the Decree on Ecumenism that Methodists and Catholics, Catholics and Lutherans, Catholics and Oriental Orthodox but other pairs of dialogue partners have come to recognise the complementarity of contrasting emphases.

It is further stressed, in paragraph 101, that despite the old contrast of emphasis between Methodist stress on mission and Catholic stress on apostolic succession, ‘both churches are now concerned with structures *and* with holiness and mission, and indeed with the relationship between them’.

A key reason for the growing convergence between the two traditions lies in the extensive joint study of each other’s official and magisterial texts. Throughout the report there is a beautiful weaving together of quotations from the most recent British Methodist ecclesiological statement, from the most recent report of the American Catholic-Methodist dialogue and from some key statements of the Catholic magisterium since Vatican II plus constant reference back to the seven earlier statements of the international Commission. It is clear that both churches are increasingly able to receive major elements of each others’ authoritative teaching as authentic, if expressed in a rather different idiom from their own. A key question relating to the future progress of the dialogue and its reception hinges upon the extent to which this process will be taken up, deepened and applied at all levels by the

theological teachers, pastors and preachers of both churches. Already, some members of the Commission such as Bishop Michael Evans have made signal contributions in this respect¹⁸.

Even now, well before any possible fulfilment of the ultimate aim of the dialogue in terms of full communion in faith, life and sacraments, Methodists and Catholics on the Commission are beginning to live partially in one another's traditions¹⁹. A key question for Catholics in following up the work of the report will be to see whether they can take their affirmation of Methodism even further and perhaps, even in advance of being able fully to recognise the apostolicity of the Methodist ministry, find themselves able to regard Methodism as a legitimate *typos* of the one apostolic faith with its own distinctive pattern of theological expression, worship and discipline²⁰.

Mention of the question of mutual ministerial recognition reminds us that despite the very real progress made, both in the earlier stages of the dialogue and, most significantly, in this latest stage, there remain unresolved issues of difference. This has always been honestly admitted since the dialogue has consistently wished to respect the co-ordinate claims of truth and love. Indeed, as the title of the seventh and immediately preceding dialogue report testified, they wish to follow Paul's injunction to 'speak the truth in love'. The honesty of the dialogue has, however, always been subject to Benjamin Gregory's reminder, following Paul's teaching in Colossians, that the order is not to understand in order to love, but to love in order to understand²¹, a point so beautifully underlined when section three begins with the striking statement that

'It is time now to return to the concrete reality of one another, to look one another in the eye, and with love and esteem to acknowledge what we see to be truly of Christ and of the Gospel, and thereby *of the Church*, in one another'.

Part of the reality is that there are still unreconciled tensions in our differing ways of understanding the priesthood of the ordained ministry in relation to that of Christ and the royal priesthood of all the faithful. There are also differences over the sacrificial aspect of the eucharist. In paragraph 130, the Catholics invite Methodists to 'look afresh at those doctrines which, in the turmoil of the Reformation, became obscured in Protestant thought and life instead of simply being reformed of their excesses'. In the light of the progress made on these issues in overall ecumenical dialogue over the last forty years or so, this is a fair challenge. Methodism, in the light of its own ecumenical vocation, should be only too happy to respond, not just within the continuation of the formal dialogue, but also in a process of ensuing reception of new and reconciling insights at every level in the connexions.

The Catholic challenge is accompanied by regret for past popular distortions within their own tradition such as 'regret any impression they may have given of a repetition of Christ's sacrifice in the Mass'²². They acknowledge the great care with which British Methodists analysed priesthood in their most recent ecclesiological statement whilst also arguing that the statement on the relationship between ordained ministry and the priesthood of all believers

¹⁸ Particularly in articles he has written for *Priests and People*, an English journal.

¹⁹ c.f. the statement of the Nottingham English ecumenical conference of 1987, 'Unity comes alive as we learn to live in one another's traditions'.

²⁰ following the teaching of Cardinal Willebrands in a famous sermon in 1970 in which he set forth this concept.

²¹ Gregory, op cit, p. 172, commenting on Col 2:2.

²² Grace, para 131.

‘seems to Catholics to be marked by a Reformation rivalry between the royal priesthood and the ministerial priesthood’²³.

This question will need particularly careful handling on account of popular Methodist sensitivities. The statement in the Deed of Union that ‘the 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’ is, in fact marked less by the legacy of the Reformation than it is by the legacy of internal nineteenth century Methodist disputes and reactions to renascent Catholicism, both Anglo-Catholic and pre-Vatican II Roman Catholicism. The theology and, even more, the ministerial practice associated with the classical Wesleyan doctrine of the pastoral office led to a reaction amongst many of the Methodist laity and the splintering off of various groups whose concept of ministry was more of hired agency than oversight in the traditional Wesleyan understanding. As British Methodism moved towards reunion, in the context of an increasingly democratic age, the doctrine of the pastoral office became attenuated even within the Wesleyan Church. At the same time, there was a vigorous repudiation by all Methodists of any concept of grace that saw it as being exclusively mediated through the sacraments, those of episcopally ordained priests alone having any validity. Methodists continued to affirm that grace was also mediated through other biblically instituted means of grace and also, following Wesley’s teaching, in the prudential means of grace. Above all, they insisted that it was the privilege of every Christian believer, to have access to the Father through the Son in the Spirit in prayer.

Catholic teaching at and since Vatican II has asserted as firmly as any Protestant teaching that all Christian priesthood is derived solely from that of Christ and is a participation in his priesthood²⁴. Catholic scholars also agree with Protestants that the only forms of priesthood mentioned in the New Testament are those of Christ and the royal priesthood of all the faithful as a corporate body. Methodists are sometimes inclined to forget that the priesthood of all believers is, first and foremost, a corporate one. That, however, does not exclude the understanding that all the faithful have, individually as well as corporately, the duty and privilege of a ministry of praise and intercession to be fulfilled in the privacy of the home as well as in the great congregation.

In particular, many Methodists are unaware that the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is a universally held doctrine, held as firmly in the Catholic and Orthodox as in the Protestant churches. Nor is it incompatible with receiving the sign of the episcopal succession. However, old prejudices and forms of misunderstanding die hard in Methodism as elsewhere. There is still in parts of British Methodism a tendency to think that the priesthood of all believers means that anyone can do anything in the Church, including presidency at all acts of worship. Such a view, of course, conflicts with the actual practice of all churches and, indeed, with current British Methodist discipline. Whatever their ecclesiology, all churches expect, to use the words of the Deed of Union, that those who minister in holy things should be prepared and trained so to do. They hold to this regardless of their theology of ordained ministry.

A way towards convergence on the understanding of ordained presbyteral ministry might be found in terms of revisiting the Wesleyan concept of the pastoral office and seeing it as representing the ministry of the Great Shepherd through those under-shepherds who are

²³ Grace, para 133.

²⁴ albeit that Catholics continue to insist that, though orientated to each other, the two forms of participation, by all the faithful and by bishops and presbyters, are distinct.

solemnly set aside, not for an *exclusive* cure of souls, a point that would contradict the Deed of Union, but for leadership and co-ordination of oversight and the cure of souls²⁵.

It is certainly also time that the understanding of the eucharist, last addressed in any detail in the Denver and Dublin reports, be re-examined, particularly in the light of the 1982 BEM report and more recent reassessments both within British Methodism and the American Catholic-Methodist dialogue²⁶.

The most significant achievement of all in this report is in terms of the exchange of gifts. Its fruitfulness will ultimately depend on the extent to which the exchange suggested within the last two sections of the report is faithfully carried out, deepened and extended at every level within the two communions.

The exchange of gifts is at the heart of ecumenism, a point repeatedly emphasised by the late Pope John Paul II, particularly in *Ut Unum Sint*, and also by Sam Kobia, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches and himself a Kenyan Methodist minister. Kobia argues that the disunity in the Church can be traced largely to an incapacity to engage fully in the exchange of gifts²⁷.

A theology of the exchange of gifts is necessarily implicit in any understanding of Church as communion, as constant circulation of love and insight and as unimpeded mutual giving and receiving. It received an interestingly variant expression in the report of the sixth round of the dialogue, *The Word of Life*. This stressed that for both churches faith is not simply a matter of doctrinal content, *fides quae creditur*, and act of trust, *fides qua creditur*. It also, thanks to the Holy Spirit, results in continual fruitfulness in terms of constant development of new forms of praise, devotional life and styles and forms of Christian service.

The present report builds on this understanding by stating an affirmation of the American Catholic-Methodist dialogue, 'we dare not lose any of the gifts with which the Holy Spirit has endowed our communities in their separation'. It then adds, 'The Holy Spirit is the true giver of the gifts we are seeking to exchange.' In its final section on practical reception, it further specifies

'Catholics and Methodists each have gifts to share with the other. These gifts are not owned by anyone but are held in trust for the sake of the one, holy catholic and apostolic Church and its mission to the world. In exchanging gifts with each other, Catholics and Methodists would be receiving them as from the Holy Spirit'.

The Commission's work of identifying such gifts represents from the Roman Catholic side new stage in the implementation of the call contained in the Decree on Ecumenism which stressed that 'whatever is wrought by the grace of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of our separated brethren can contribute to our own edification. Whatever is truly Christian never conflicts with the genuine interests of the faith; indeed, it can always result in a more ample realisation

²⁵ I have tried to develop this train of thought in an article 'Pastoral Office or Sacrificing Priesthood. Towards reconciliation in Presbyteral/Episcopal Ministry' in the *Bulletin of the Methodist Sacramental Fellowship*, no 127 (1998). pp. 31-48.

²⁶ For the Denver and Dublin reports, the first two of the dialogue (1971, 1976), see Meyer, H. and Vischer, L. (eds), *Growth in Agreement* (1984), pp.308-66 (for the eucharist, specifically, pp. 325-8, 351-6). *Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry* was, of course, published in 1982. The British Methodist survey of eucharistic faith and practice is *His Presence Makes the Feast* (2003).

²⁷ Kobia, S. *Called to the One Hope* (2006), p.13.

of the very mystery of Christ and the Church'. From the Methodist side, it represents a return to the practice of the Wesleys who did not simply receive riches from variety of traditions. They practically looted them in the interests of building up their preachers and people. British Methodists will discern within this commendation of the exchange of gifts faithfulness to the call to 'new ventures in fellowship' enshrined within the classic 1936 Covenant service.

Particularly significant within chapter three *Deepening and Extending our Recognition of One Another* is the way in which both communions are prepared not merely to challenge each other but *to be challenged by each other*. Thus, for example, the Methodists record that, as a result of their bilateral dialogue with Roman Catholics, they are now better able to appreciate certain endowments of the Roman Catholic Church which had previously been the subject of dispute between Protestants and Catholics and, moreover, 'are increasingly open to receiving these ecclesial elements as gifts from the Roman Catholic Church'. In this and the succeeding paragraph, Methodists mention a more developed theology of the eucharist, certain devotional practices, such a veneration of Mary and the Stations of the Cross, sacramental ministry to the sick and dying, individual forms of episcopate and even the petrine ministry as things that might be profitably received²⁸.

The willingness of the all communions to be challenged by each others' witness as well as to challenge each other is central to the future of the ecumenical quest. It is only when all churches are prepared to follow the example pioneered in this dialogue of recognising that the time has come to 'return to the concrete reality of one another, to look each other in the eye, and with love and esteem to acknowledge what we see truly to be of Christ and the Gospel, and thereby of the Church, in one another'²⁹, that real progress can be made. It is only then that churches will be able to prove experientially, in the best Wesleyan tradition, the communion nature of the Church as a constant giving and receiving of gifts, perceived to be true gifts out of the Holy Spirit's unceasing abundance for the building up of the Universal Church. The exchange of gifts is none other than a mutual act of gracious response to the unlimited generosity of the Holy Spirit to the Church. It is, in itself, a doxological act in the spirit of one of Charles Wesley's greatest hymns, inspired by the latter part of Psalm 116.

What shall I render to my God
For all His mercy's store?
I'll take the gifts He has bestowed
And humbly ask for more.

The sacred cup of saving Grace
I will with thanks receive,
And all His promises embrace,
And to His glory live³⁰.

This exchange of gifts demands, in both churches, of the faithful and their pastors alike, generosity in giving and humility in recognition and reception. It is recognised by the Commission, with its forty year long record of combining idealism and realism, that this demands a long and careful process of reception at all levels of the Church's life. From this

²⁸ *Grace*, paras 111-113. Note, in particular, the concluding sentence of para 113. 'Methodists may be prepared to receive a Petrine ministry exercised collegially within the college of bishops as a final decision making authority within the Church, at least as far as essential matters of faith are concerned'.

²⁹ *Grace*, para 97.

³⁰ *Hymns and Psalms*, op cit, no. 703.

perception flow the very detailed proposals in the final chapter. These are targeted alike at those with particular ecumenical responsibilities, such as church leaders and seminary teachers and at local congregations, the latter, in particular, being summoned to experience and share in each others' worship to the extent allowable in the current discipline of the two churches and also to co-operation in practical acts of Christian witness and service. It is clearly the Commission's hope that the process of mutual discovery through which they have been themselves and which has so thrilled and energised them should be experienced far more generally and widely within the two churches. From this the should flow the mutual growing understanding and recognition of which they speak in paragraph 105

'When Catholics and Methodists explain the way on which their respective structures relate to the Church's fundamental interconnectedness, then we are able to recognise what is meant by one another's terminology and titles. 'Now I understand is the reaction to this latter type of recognition, and it is the essential prelude to the more formal type of recognition, in which an evaluation is given of what is now understood'.

The Grace Given You in Christ is of immense significance for the future of ecumenism as a whole. No previous international dialogue report has majored so thoroughly on both the exchange of gifts and its practical reception at all levels of the Church. It is important, of course, to remember that some of the challenges presented by each side to the other are of immense difficulty. Methodists ask Catholics to examine how the Methodist experience of ordained ministry might contribute to their own understanding of the Church's ministry. It is quite clear from the immediately preceding sentence of the same paragraph that this effectively includes an appeal to think about the potential for women's ministry, an extremely delicate and serious matter in the light of the pronouncements of the magisterium over the last thirty years³¹. No-one, least of all the Commission, imagine that all the problems on the road to unity between Catholics and Methodists have been solved.

The Commission, nevertheless, reiterates a hope expressed in an earlier phase of the dialogue that the ultimate attainment of full communion 'will also depend on 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'.³² One might add that nothing less would do justice to the richness with which God has endowed the Church Universal through the way his Spirit has graced the two communions.

No one can currently foretell what form such a creative act will take, even less when it might take place. However, the faith common to both traditions of the power of the triune God to save to the uttermost and to usher in the new creation, marked by constant and uninterrupted communion in that same trinitarian love, means that Catholics and Methodists will continue to 'press on to full salvation', knowing that it has an indispensable ecclesial element, the full unity of all the baptised in Christ.

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³¹ Of course this can be construed as applying to lay and diaconal ministries exercised by women, not just the question of their presbyteral ordination; however, the latter remains a disputed question as between Roman Catholics and Methodists as previous reports have frankly admitted.

³² Para 144, citing *Apostolic Tradition* (fifth dialogue report, 1991), para 94.