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ADDRESS FOR ALL CORRESPONDENCE
Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity
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POPE FRANCIS AND ECUMENISM
July – December 2017

MESSAGE OF POPE FRANCIS
TO THE GENERAL COUNCIL OF THE WORLD COMMUNION
OF REFORMED CHURCHES ON THE OCCASION OF ITS ASSOCIATION
WITH THE JOINT DECLARATION ON THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION

5 July 2017

On July 5, 2017, within the framework of an ecumenical liturgy held in Wittenberg, Germany, representatives of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) signed a formal act of association with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ), in the presence of delegates from the Lutheran, Methodist and Catholic Churches. The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity was represented by the Secretary, Bishop Brian Farrell, and Reverend Avelino Gonzalez, of the Western Section of the Dicastery.

Originally signed by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Roman Catholic Church in 1999, the JDDJ describes an agreement on what was one of the more significant church dividing issues at the time of the Reformation – Justification, or how we are made righteous before God. In 2006, the World Methodist Council and its member churches signed a statement of association with the JDDJ. The Anglican Consultative Council in 2016 passed a resolution that welcomed and affirmed the substance of the JDDJ. This step was marked liturgically in Westminster Abbey on 31 October 2017 at the close of the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation.

We publish below the ‘Official Common Declaration’, final section of the document ‘Association of the World Communion of Reformed Churches with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification’ issued at the end of the gathering in Wittenberg, followed by a brief introductory greeting of Bishop Brian Farrell and by the Message of Pope Francis.

OFFICIAL COMMON AFFIRMATION
In this Statement the World Communion of Reformed Churches affirms fundamental doctrinal agreement with the teaching expressed in the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification signed at Augsburg on 31 October 1999 on behalf of the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church. The World Methodist Council affirmed their fundamental doctrinal agreement on 23 July 2006.

The signing partners of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification join together in welcoming the above Statement of the World Communion of Reformed Churches which declares and demonstrates Reformed agreement with the consensus on basic truths of the doctrine of justification as expressed in the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification.

Building on their shared affirmation of basic truths of the doctrine of justification, Catholics, Lutherans, Methodists and Reformed commit themselves to strive together for the deepening of their common understanding of justification in theological study, teaching and preaching.

The present achievement and commitment are viewed by the four parties as part of their pursuit of the full communion and common witness to the world which is the will of Christ for all Christians.

* Sources of the texts are: www.vatican.va and ORE: L'Osservatore Romano, weekly edition in English. If texts come from other sources this will be noted. When translation is undertaken by the Information Service it is indicated by the abbreviation: IS.

BRIEF INTRODUCTORY GREETING BY BISHOP BRIAN FARRELL
Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

We are gathered here – together – in Wittenberg, conscious of what all that happened in this place signifies in the history of the Church and of the world in the last five hundred years. Being here helps us to realize again that the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification opened the way towards a new era of dialogue, friendship and growing trust between the Churches.

We are now on the necessary and exciting path of healing and reconciliation, rediscovering how much in fact we share. Practically all the historical Churches are now in agreement on the Doctrine of Justification, a fundamental issue of the conflict at the time of Reformation. And agreement on Justification provides the basis for a more profound common witness. The abiding Methodist concern with holiness of life and the Reformed emphasis on the pursuit of justice, with which Catholics and Lutherans fully concur, point to our shared calling to Christian discipleship. We now have a stronger reason for walking together and working together – and not in isolation – in addressing the critical social and ethical questions affecting our world.

Let us look forward to a more intensive witness to the hope that is in us through Christ Jesus (cf. 1 Pt 3:15), in the Spirit who renews and transforms us.

In this hope and commitment I am very pleased to read the Message of Pope Francis to this gathering.
MESSAGE OF POPE FRANCIS

To the General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches

As the General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches assembles in Wittenberg, I send warm greetings and the assurance of my closeness in prayer to all present.

I am especially happy that, in this year commemorating the five-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation, you have gathered to sign a formal act of association with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. This highly significant ecumenical event will take place in the presence of the original signatories – the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church – as well as representatives of the World Methodist Council, which has also associated itself with the Declaration.

The process of study and prayerful discernment that led to this step will now bear fruit in an eloquent sign of our commitment to walking together, as brothers and sisters in Christ, on a journey from conflict to communion, from division to reconciliation. It is likewise an invitation to continued trust in the power of the Holy Spirit, who guides the followers of Jesus towards a shared vision of righteousness, growth in holiness, and increased missionary zeal for the spread of the Gospel and the salvation of the world.

Together with great joy, today’s formal act also brings new challenges and responsibilities in our pursuit of fidelity to the Gospel and unity in truth. May it mark a new stage of fellowship and cooperation in the service of justice and peace in our human family. Let us not be afraid to seek together creative ways of bearing witness to the saving power of the Cross, which is the source of our reconciliation and all our hope (cf. Col 1:21-23).

Dear brothers and sisters, I join you in thanking God for this day of grace. Upon all present, and all who have contributed to its celebration, I cordially invoke a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit’s gifts of wisdom, joy and peace.

From the Vatican, 29 June 2017

FRANCIS

MESSAGE FOR THE OPENING OF THE 25TH INTERNATIONAL ECUMENICAL CONFERENCE ON ORTHODOX SPIRITUALITY

Monastery of Bose, Italy, 18 August 2017

On the occasion of the opening of the XXV International Ecumenical Congress on Orthodox spirituality, I wish to send to you, organizers and participants, my cordial greeting. In particular, I wish to convey a warm embrace of peace to His Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch, my dear brother Bartholomew, and to His Beatitude Theodore, Patriarch of Alexandria: your important presence honours the 25 years of the Congress, organized by the Monastery of Bose in collaboration with the Orthodox Churches, and confirms its contribution to the shared path to full unity. This year’s theme “The Gift of Hospitality” is suggestive and current. It is true, hospitality is a gift, a gift above all that we have received: we are guests of a world created for us and which must be protected, but we are passengers here below, foreigners on earth, since we are invited guests, expected in heaven, where our citizenship is to be found (cf. Ph 3:20). In the meantime, as pilgrim disciples, we are called to fix our gaze on that which does not disappear, on charity that will never end (cf. 1 Cor 13:8), on welcoming each other as gifts of the Lord, on fostering mutual care and affection, on “having compassion, sharing in the pain of those who suffer, considering as evil the specific misfortunes of others” (N. Cabasilas, La vita in Cristo, VI, 8). I hope that this call can be revived through humble and sincere listening and through the reflections of these days, so that sentiments of fraternity may grow ever more and an authentic “hospitality of the heart” may mature, so that while we walk together towards the Kingdom, we will be encouraged to take more courageous and concrete steps to full unity.

With these sentiments, I invoke upon you and on the work of the Congress the abundance of the gifts of the Spirit, while I ask you to remember me in your prayers.

From the Vatican, 18 August 2017

FRANCIS
JOINT MESSAGE OF POPE FRANCIS AND ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW ON THE WORLD DAY OF PRAYER FOR CREATION

1 September 2017

The story of creation presents us with a panoramic view of the world. Scripture reveals that, “in the beginning”, God intended humanity to cooperate in the preservation and protection of the natural environment. At first, as we read in Genesis, “no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up – for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground” (2:5). The earth was entrusted to us as a sublime gift and legacy, for which all of us share responsibility until, “in the end”, all things in heaven and on earth will be restored in Christ (cf. Eph 1:10). Our human dignity and welfare are deeply connected to our care for the whole of creation.

However, “in the meantime”, the history of the world presents a very different context. It reveals a morally decaying scenario where our attitude and behaviour towards creation obscures our calling as God’s co-operators. Our propensity to interrupt the world’s delicate and balanced ecosystems, our insatiable desire to manipulate and control the planet’s limited resources, and our greed for limitless profit in markets – all these have alienated us from the original purpose of creation. We no longer respect nature as a shared gift; instead, we regard it as a private possession. We no longer associate with nature in order to sustain it; instead, we lord over it to support our own constructs.

The consequences of this alternative worldview are tragic and lasting. The human environment and the natural environment are deteriorating together, and this deterioration of the planet weighs upon the most vulnerable of its people. The impact of climate change affects, first and foremost, those who live in poverty in every corner of the globe. Our obligation to use the earth’s goods responsibly implies the recognition of and respect for all people and all living creatures. The urgent call and challenge to care for creation are an invitation for all of humanity to work towards sustainable and integral development.

Therefore, united by the same concern for God’s creation and acknowledging the earth as a shared good, we fervently invite all people of goodwill to dedicate a time of prayer for the environment on 1 September. On this occasion, we wish to offer thanks to the loving Creator for the noble gift of creation and to pledge commitment to its care and preservation for the sake of future generations. After all, we know that we labour in vain if the Lord is not by our side (cf. Ps 126-127), if prayer is not at the centre of our reflection and celebration. Indeed, an objective of our prayer is to change the way we perceive the world in order to change the way we relate to the world. The goal of our promise is to be courageous in embracing greater simplicity and solidarity in our lives.

We urgently appeal to those in positions of social and economic, as well as political and cultural, responsibility to hear the cry of the earth and to attend to the needs of the marginalized, but above all to respond to the plea of millions and support the consensus of the world for the healing of our wounded creation. We are convinced that there can be no sincere and enduring resolution to the challenge of the ecological crisis and climate change unless the response is concerted and collective, unless the responsibility is shared and accountable, unless we give priority to solidarity and service.

From the Vatican and from the Phanar, 1 September 2017

POPE FRANCIS AND ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW

AUDIENCE WITH THE DELEGATION OF THE CHURCH RELATIONS COMMITTEE OF THE UNITED BIBLE SOCIETIES

5 October 2017

“Let us walk together to spread the word. Let us pray together”, the Holy Father said in an address to the Delegation of the Church Relations Committee of the United Bible Societies, whom he received in audience on Thursday morning, 5 October.

The following is the English text of the Pope’s address, which be delivered in Italian.

Dear brothers and sisters,

“Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love undying” (Eph 6:24). With these words of Saint Paul I am happy to welcome the members of the Church Relations Committee of the United Bible Societies, and I thank Cardinal Onaiyekan for his presentation. It is my hope that the grace of the Holy Spirit will be with you, and with all who strive to make the Gospel known by making the Bible more easily accessible in diverse languages and today’s wide variety of communication media.

We are servants of the word of salvation, which never returns to the Lord empty. Allowing ourselves to be “wounded” by the word is indispensible for expressing verbally that which overflows from the heart. For the word of God “is piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and
Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I thank Bishop Abrahams for his kind words and I offer all of you a warm welcome on this fiftieth anniversary since the commencement of the Methodist-Catholic theological dialogue. The following is the English text of the Holy Father’s address delivered after greetings from Bishop Ivan Abrahams, General Secretary of the World Methodist Council.

AUDIENCE WITH A DELEGATION OF THE WORLD METHODIST COUNCIL

19 October 2017

“We cannot speak of prayer and charity unless together we pray and work for reconciliation and full communion”.

Pope Francis emphasized this in his address to a Delegation of the World Methodist Council, whom he received in audience in the Consistory Hall on Thursday morning, 19 October, marking the 50th anniversary since the commencement of the Methodist-Catholic theological dialogue. The following is the English text of the Holy Father’s address, delivered after greetings from Bishop Ivan Abrahams, General Secretary of the World Methodist Council.

Audience with a Delegation of the World Methodist Council

19 October 2017

“We cannot speak of prayer and charity unless together we pray and work for reconciliation and full communion”.

Pope Francis emphasized this in his address to a Delegation of the World Methodist Council, whom he received in audience in the Consistory Hall on Thursday morning, 19 October, marking the 50th anniversary since the commencement of the Methodist-Catholic theological dialogue. The following is the English text of the Holy Father’s address, delivered after greetings from Bishop Ivan Abrahams, General Secretary of the World Methodist Council.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I thank Bishop Abrahams for his kind words and I offer all of you a warm welcome on this fiftieth anniversary of the inauguration of the Methodist-Catholic theological dialogue.

In the Book of Leviticus, the Lord proclaims the fiftieth year as a special year that calls, among other things, for the setting free of slaves: “You shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants” (Lev 25:10). We are grateful to God because we can say that, in certain sense, we too have been freed from the slavery of estrangement and mutual suspicion. The Lord also told Moses that in the fiftieth year “everyone shall return to his property and... to his family” (ibid.). As a result of these fifty years of patient, fraternal dialogue, we can truly say to one another in the words of the Apostle Paul: “you are no longer strangers” (cf. Eph 2:19). Yes, we are no longer strangers, either in our hearts or in our belonging to the Lord, thanks to the one Baptism that has made us true brothers and sisters. We are, and we feel ourselves to be, “members of the household of God” (ibid.).

We have come to this realization as the result of dialogue. The Second Vatican Council continues to encourage the growth of knowledge and esteem between Christians of differing confessions by means of a dialogue carried out “with love for the truth, with charity, and with humility” (Unitatis Redintegratio, 11). True dialogue gives us the courage to encounter one another in humility and sincerity, in an effort to learn from one another, and in a spirit of honesty and integrity. We are brothers and sisters who, following a long separation, are happy once more to see and learn about one another, and to move forward with open hearts. So let us advance together, knowing that our journey is blessed by the Lord. It began from him, and it leads to him.

“You shall hallow the fiftieth year”, God said to Moses. The latest document of the Commission spoke precisely about holiness. John Wesley sought to help his neighbours live a holy life. His example and his words encouraged many to devote themselves to reading the Bible and to prayer, and in this way to come to a knowledge of Jesus Christ. When we see others living a holy life, when we recognize the working of the Holy Spirit in other Christian confessions, we cannot fail to rejoice. It is impressive to see how widely the Lord sows his gifts; it is impressive to see brothers and sisters who embrace in...
Jesus our own way of life. But other “members of God’s household” can also help us grow closer to the Lord and spur us to bear more faithful witness to the Gospel. Let us thank the Father, then, for all that he granted us, even before the last fifty years, in bygone centuries and throughout the world, in our respective communities. Let us strengthen one another by our witness to the faith.

Faith becomes tangible above all when it takes concrete form in love, particularly in service to the poor and the marginalized. “You shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants”: after fifty years of our dialogue, this ancient summons of the word of God remains ever timely. As a call to life in communion with God, the call to holiness is necessarily a call to communion with others too. When, as Catholics and Methodists, we join in assisting and comforting the weak and the marginalized – those who in the midst of our societies feel distant, foreign and alienated – we are responding to the Lord’s summons.

As we look to the future, beyond the past fifty years, one thing is certain: we cannot grow in holiness without growing in communion. This is the journey that awaits us in the new phase of the dialogue, devoted to reconciliation. We cannot speak of prayer and charity unless together we pray and work for reconciliation and full communion. May your discussions about reconciliation be a gift, and not only for our communities but for the world. May they be an incentive to Christians everywhere to be ministers of reconciliation. The Spirit of God brings about the miracle of reconciled unity. He does so in his own way, even as he did at Pentecost, awakening a variety of charisms and ordering everything in a unity that is not uniformity but a communion. We need, then, to remain together, like the disciples awaiting the Spirit, and as brothers and sisters on a shared journey.

I thank you for your presence. I am grateful to the Dialogue Commission for its work, past and yet to come, and I thank the World Methodist Council for its ongoing support for the dialogue. The blessing of the past fifty years resides in the grace we have discovered in one another, which has enriched both our communities. But the task is not yet ended, and we are called to look ahead as we continue our journey. We have learned to see one another as brothers and sisters in Christ; now is the time to prepare ourselves, with humble hope and concrete efforts, for that full recognition that will come about, by God’s grace, when at last we will be able to join one another in the breaking of the bread. I would ask you to pray for this, as together we ask the Father for the daily bread that can sustain us along the way: Our Father…

**AUDIENCE WITH HIS BEATITUDE THEOPHILOS**

**GREEK ORTHODOX PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM**

23 October 2017

On Monday morning, 23 October, in the private library of the Apostolic Palace, Pope Francis received in audience Greek Orthodox Patriarch Theophilos III of Jerusalem. The Pope expressed his hope that “all those involved” might “intensify their efforts to achieve a stable peace based on justice and recognition of the rights of all”. The following is the English text of the Holy Father’s address.

Your Beatitude,

Dear Brothers,

With great joy I welcome all of you to Rome. I reciprocate with gratitude and fraternal affection the warm welcome Your Beatitude offered me during my visit to Jerusalem. Still fresh in my mind is the attentiveness with which you accompanied Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and myself in the Basilica that preserves the places of the Lord’s crucifixion, burial and Resurrection. I am still moved when I think of our moment of prayer in the aedicule of the empty Tomb, and I again express my pleasure at the restoration of that most holy place. It has not simply secured the integrity of a historical monument, but also enabled the empty tomb to continue to testify that: “He has risen, he is not here; see the place where they laid him” (Mk 16:6). I rejoice that the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land have worked together in such harmony on this project, as they also did for the Basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem. I thank Your Beatitude very much for your own efforts in this regard.

Our meeting allows me to renew my closeness to all those suffering from the conflicts that for decades have beset the Holy Land. The uncertainty of the situation and the lack of understanding between the parties continue to create insecurity, the restriction of fundamental rights, and the flight of many people from their land. I invoke God’s help in this, and I ask all those involved to intensify their efforts to achieve a stable peace based on justice and recognition of the rights of all. To this end, any kind of violence, discrimination or displays of intolerance against Jewish, Christian and Muslim worshipers, or places of worship, must be firmly rejected. The Holy City, whose Status Quo must be defended and preserved, ought to be a place where all can live together peaceably; otherwise, the endless spiral of suffering will continue for all.

I would offer a particular greeting to the members of the various Christian communities in the Holy Land. It is my hope that they will continue to be recognized as an integral part of society and that, as citizens and believers in their own right, they can continue tirelessly to contribute to the common good and the growth of peace, striving to further
reconciliation and concord. This contribution will be the more effective to the extent that there is harmony between the region’s different Churches. Particularly important in this regard would be increased cooperation in supporting Christian families and young people, so that they will not be forced to leave their land. By working together in this delicate area, the faithful of different confessions will also be able to grow in mutual knowledge and fraternal relations.

Here I would reaffirm my heartfelt desire and commitment to progress on our way to full unity, in obedience to Jesus’ fervent prayer in the Cenacle “that they may all be one... so that the world may believe” (Jn 17:21). I know that past wounds continue to affect the memory of many people. It is not possible to change the past, but, without forgetting grave failures of charity over the centuries, let us look to a future of full reconciliation and fraternal communion, and take up the work before us, as the Lord desires. Not to do so today would be an even graver fault; it would be to disregard both the urgent call of Christ and the signs of the times sown by the Spirit along the Church’s path. Inspired by the same Spirit, may we not let the memory of times marked by lack of communication or mutual accusations, or present difficulties and uncertainty about the future, prevent us from walking together towards visible unity, nor hinder us from praying and working together to proclaim the Gospel and to serve those in need. In this regard, the ongoing theological dialogue between Catholics and Orthodox, in which the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem participates actively and constructively, is a comforting sign of hope on our journey. How good it would be to say of Catholics and Orthodox living in Jerusalem what the Evangelist Luke said of the first Christian community: “All who believed were together... one heart and soul” (Acts 2:44; 4:32).

Your Beatitude, I thank you and the distinguished members of your entourage most cordially for your visit. I reaffirm my closeness to our Christian brothers and sisters in the Holy Land, and my affection for our friends of the other great religions who live there. I hope and pray that the day of a stable and lasting peace for all will soon come. “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem! May they prosper who love you! [...] For my brethren and companions’ sake I will say, ‘peace be within you!’” (Ps 122: 6-8).

[I would like us now to pray together for this, in the words of the “Our Father”]

AUDIENCE WITH THE MODERATOR OF THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

25 October 2017

On 26 October 2017, the Holy Father Pope Francis received in audience an ecumenical delegation headed by the Right Reverend Dr Derek Browning, Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.

We publish here below their addresses.

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS

Dear Moderator, Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I offer you a warm welcome and I thank the Moderator for his thoughtful remarks, and also for our meeting [private, which took place previously]. Your presence affords me the opportunity to offer a warm greeting to all the members of the Church of Scotland.

Our meeting takes place during the fifth centenary of the Reformation, which I joined in commemorating last year in Lund. Let us thank the Lord for the great gift of being able to live this year in true fraternity, no longer as adversaries, after long centuries of estrangement and conflict. This has been possible, with God’s grace, by the ecumenical journey that has enabled us to grow in mutual understanding, trust and cooperation. The mutual purification of memory is one of the most significant fruits of this common journey. The past cannot be changed, yet today we at last see one another as God sees us. For we are first and foremost his children, reborn in Christ through the one Baptism, and therefore brothers and sisters. For so long we regarded one another from afar, all too humanly, harbouring suspicion, dwelling on differences and errors, and with hearts intent on recrimination for past wrongs.

In the spirit of the Gospel, we are now pursuing the path of humble charity that leads to overcoming division and healing wounds. We have begun a dialogue of communion, employing language befitting those who belong to God. Such language is essential to evangelization, for how can we proclaim the God of love if we do not love one another (cf. 1 Jn 4:8)? It was in Scotland itself, in Edinburgh, more than a hundred years ago, Christian missionaries had the courage to set forth once again with renewed vigour the firm will of Jesus that we be one, “so that the world may believe” (Jn 17:21). They understood that proclamation and mission are not fully credible unless they are accompanied by unity. This remains as true now as it was then.

I have learned that the emblem of the Church of Scotland depicts the burning bush before which Moses encountered the living God. I am struck by the fact that in this great biblical text the Lord calls himself by a name that will echo down the centuries: “the God of your fathers” (Ex 3:15). In this way, he calls us too, as sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, to enter into a history of prior relationships and to live the life of faith not as isolated individuals and in theory, but within a concrete community, a “we”. For no one becomes a Christian by himself and no one can live as a Christian
without others. We belong to the family of believers, of so many of our brothers and sisters who have begun to walk in newness of life through Baptism (cf. Rom 6: 4) and who accompany us along that same path.

My thoughts turn in a particular way to those Christians who in our day face grave trials and sufferings, enduring persecution for the name of Jesus. So many of them bear a heavy cross as they profess their faith, many to the point of martyrdom. Their witness impels us to persevere, with love and courage, to the end. Our dialogue directed to full unity, our witness and our shared service, our commitment to pray for one another and to overcome the wounds of the past: these are also a response that is owed to them, within this great “we” of faith.

It is my prayerful hope that the journey to visible unity will continue daily and bear rich fruits for the future, as it has in the recent past. The Catholic Church, especially through the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, has engaged for decades in a fruitful cooperation with the Church of Scotland and the World Communion of Reformed Churches, and desires to continue on this path. With gratitude for your presence here and on the ecumenical journey, I ask the Holy Spirit to strengthen our fellowship in Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father. And to Him we turn together in prayer for each other: “Our Father…”

ADDRESS OF RIGHT REVEREND BROWNING

Your Holiness,
I greet you in the Name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

It is also my privilege and delight as Moderator to bring you greetings in the name of the General Assembly from your sisters and brothers in the Church of Scotland.

Hospitality is the distinctive mark of the Christian Church. We are born out of hospitality and our faith spread because of hospitality. If we are in a position of privilege, it is better to build a longer table than a higher fence. In the Church of Scotland we ask of ourselves, and all our sisters and brothers, who is at our table? How do we share the message of forgiveness, mercy, hope and love with an increasingly secular world that no longer knows what we believe, or mistrusts us because of our past errors and narrowness?

My Church seeks to ensure that the ministry of our Church continues to reach out to every area of Scotland’s life, and to reaffirm that the strength of our Church, is to be found at the local, parish level. Prayers connect us to God and the faith we profess; practical compassion, motivated by an honest and robust engagement with civil and other authorities empowers us to speak out for the poor, refugees and migrants, for the marginalised in all our communities, and for the better stewarding of the creation that is entrusted to our care.

Next year the Church of Scotland celebrates fifty years of women ordained to the ministry of Word and Sacrament; two years ago we celebrated fifty years of women being ordained to the eldership; and women have been set apart as deacons for one hundred and twenty-nine years. The ministry of the diaconate in the Church of Scotland is a collaborative ministry, which seeks to build bridges between church and community. Our diaconate works not only in parishes but also in chaplaincies, counselling, with asylum seekers, and meeting spiritual needs. Now ordained since 2002, deacons, both women and men, play a welcome part in the courts of our Church sharing their experience and wisdom. Your Holiness, we note in your Church the commission you have encouraged to study the issue of women deacons and their ministry in the Early Church, and we look forward with interest to its conclusions.

The Church of Scotland will continue to advocate models of gender justice and crusade against violence and discrimination against women, and celebrate the contributions and place of women, alongside men, in our churches and communities.

The Church of Scotland maintains its active concern about issues relating to human trafficking and modern day slavery, and continues to express concern about the fate of migrants and refugees, fleeing from their home countries, and finding a mixed welcome in countries where they seek new homes away from persecution, war and hunger.

In this year of the 500th anniversary of the German Reformation, the Church of Scotland recognises its roots in the many European Reformations. We acknowledge openly our doctrinal and governance differences, but gladly note the complementary dimensions of our shared faith within the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, especially in the documents Together towards Life, and Evangelii Gaudium, and the call to participate in the mission of God. We ask that where relations between our Churches have become less focussed at local and national levels, Your Holiness would join with me to call our Churches to work together for the common good, particularly in the face of national and international anxiety expressed in sectarianism, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia.

A wise man recently told me: “When we speak, we must speak the truth. Then we must speak the truth in love. But first, we must speak.” Your Holiness, in our speech together, may truth and love shine out, not only in our words, but also in our actions. We would also be bold to ask that if it were possible you might make a visit to Scotland at some time, where you would be welcomed with open arms.

As you continue ministering in the name of Jesus Christ, we continue to pray that God will bless and use you generously. May God’s richest blessings be upon you, and the light of Christ illuminate your path, and the gentleness of the Holy Spirit encompass you day and night.
ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I extend a warm welcome to all of you. I thank you for your visit and Metropolitan Meelis Zaia for his kind words on your behalf. Through you I convey my fraternal greeting in the Lord to His Holiness Mar Gewargis III, recalling with joy our cordial meeting a year ago, which marked a further step on our journey towards deeper growth in mutual solidarity and communion.

Our meeting today offers us the opportunity to look with gratitude upon the progress made by the Joint Commission, established following the historic signing of the Common Christological Declaration here in Rome in 1994. After professing the same faith in the mystery of the Incarnation, the Commission planned two phases of dialogue: one on sacramental theology and one on the constitution of the Church. I join you in thanking the Lord for today’s signing of the Joint Declaration which brings to a happy conclusion the phase regarding sacramental life. We can now look to the future with even greater confidence and I ask the Lord that your continuing work may help bring about that blessed and long-awaited day when we will have the joy of celebrating, at the same altar, our full communion in Christ’s Church.

I would like to emphasize one aspect of the new Joint Declaration, where the sign of the cross is referred to as “an explicit symbol of unity among all sacramental celebrations”. Some authors of the Assyrian Church of the East have included the sign of the cross among the sacred mysteries, convinced that every sacramental celebration depends precisely on the Pasch of the Lord’s death and resurrection. This is a beautiful insight, because the Crucified and Risen One is our salvation and our life. Hope and peace come from his glorious cross, and from the cross flows the unity of the sacred mysteries we celebrate, as well as our own unity, for we were baptized into the same death and resurrection of the Lord (cf. Rom 6:4).

When we look at the cross, or make the sign of the cross, we are also invited to remember sacrifices endured in union with Jesus and to remain close to those who today bear a heavy cross upon their shoulders. The Assyrian Church of the East, along with other Churches and many of our brothers and sisters in the region, is afflicted by persecution, and is a witness to brutal acts of violence perpetrated in the name of fundamentalist extremism. Situations of such tragic suffering take root more easily in contexts of great poverty, injustice and social exclusion, largely caused by instability, often fuelled by external interests, and by conflicts that have also led in recent times to situations of dire need, giving rise to real cultural and spiritual deserts, within which it becomes easy to manipulate people and incite them to hatred. Such suffering has recently been exacerbated by the tragedy of the violent earthquake on the border between Iraq, the homeland of your Church, and Iran, where your communities have also long been established, as well as in Syria, Lebanon and India.

As a result, particularly during periods of greater suffering and deprivation, large numbers of the faithful have had to leave their lands and emigrate to other countries, thus increasing the diaspora community, with the many trials it faces. Arriving in some societies, émigrés encounter challenges stemming from an often difficult integration, and a marked secularization, which can hinder their efforts to preserve the spiritual riches of their traditions, and even prevent their witness of faith.

In all of this, the constant repetition of the sign of the cross is a reminder that the Lord of mercy never abandons his brothers and sisters, but embraces their wounds within his own. By making the sign of the cross we recall Christ’s wounds, which the Resurrection did not eliminate but rather filled with light. So too the wounds of Christians, including those still open, become radiant when they are filled with the living presence of Jesus and his love, and thus become signs of Easter light in a world enveloped by so much darkness.

With these sentiments, both heartfelt and hope-filled, I invite you to keep journeying, trusting in the help of many of our brothers and sisters who gave their lives in following the Crucified Christ. They, who are already fully united in heaven, are the heralds and patrons of our visible communion on earth. Through their intercession, I also pray to the Lord that the Christians of your lands may continue to labour in peace and in full respect for all, in the patient work of reconstruction after so much devastation.

In the Syriac tradition, Christ on the cross is represented as the Good Physician and Medicine of life. I pray that he will completely heal our wounds of the past as well as the many wounds that continue to
be caused by the havoc of violence and war. Dear brothers and sisters, let us continue together on the pilgrimage of reconciliation and peace, on which the Lord himself has set us! With gratitude for your commitment, I invoke the Lord’s blessing upon all of you, along with the loving protection of his Mother and ours. And I ask you, please, also to remember to pray for me.

ADDRESS TO A DELEGATION OF THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION
7 December 2017

Dear Brother,
Dear Archbishop Musa,
I extend a warm greeting to you, to Dr. Junge, the General Secretary, to the Vice Presidents and to the Delegates of the Lutheran World Federation. In expressing gratitude for your kind words, I offer my congratulations on your recent appointment as President.

Today we can join in commemorating, as Scripture teaches, all that the Lord has accomplished in our midst (cf. Ps 77:12-13). We think in particular of the ecumenically significant moments of the recently-concluded Year that marked the fifth centenary of the Reformation. I am especially happy to recall 31 October 2016, when we prayed at Lund, where the Lutheran World Federation was founded. It was important for us to meet first and foremost in prayer, for the gift of unity among believers takes root and blossoms not as a result of human projects but by the grace of God. Only by praying can we care for one another. Prayer purifies and strengthens us; it illumines our path and enables us to move forward. Prayer is like the fuel of our journey towards full unity. Indeed, the love of the Lord, which we experience in prayer, sets in motion the charity that draws us closer; it is the source of our patient expectation, the motive of our efforts at reconciliation, and the power that enables us to go forward together. Prayer is in fact “the soul of ecumenical renewal and the yearning for unity”, the “basis and support” of all dialogue (cf. Ut Unum Sint, 28).

By praying, we can constantly see one another in the right perspective, that of God our Father, whose loving gaze rests on each of us, without preferences or distinctions. In the Spirit of Jesus, in whom we pray, we realize that we are brothers and sisters. This must be our continual starting point. From it, we can also look to the past and thank God that the painful divisions that kept us distant and in conflict for centuries, have brought us in recent decades to a journey of communion, the path of ecumenism awakened by the Holy Spirit. This has led us to abandon old biases like those having to do with Martin Luther and the state of the Catholic Church in that period. A significant contribution has been made in this regard by the dialogue between the Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, initiated in 1967. Today, at a distance of fifty years, we can recall that dialogue with gratitude, and acknowledge certain particularly important texts, such as the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification and, most recently, From Conflict to Communion.

With a purified memory, we can now look with confidence to a future unburdened by past conflicts and preconceptions, a future whose only debt is that of mutual love (cf. Rom 13:8), a future which calls us to discern the gifts coming from the different confessional traditions and to receive them as a common patrimony. Prior to all disagreements, differences and past hurts, there is the present, foundational and permanent reality of our baptism, which has made us children of God and brothers and sisters of one another. Henceforth we will never again allow ourselves to be adversaries or rivals. Although the past cannot be changed, the future challenges us: we can no longer refuse to seek and foster greater communion in charity and faith.

We are also called to be on the watch against the temptation of halting along the way. In the spiritual life, as in ecclesial life, whenever we halt, we are always turning back. To be self-content, to pause out of fear, indolence, weariness or convenience in the midst of our journey to the Lord in the company of our brothers and sisters, is to refuse his invitation. In order to advance together towards him, fine ideas are not enough; there is a need for concrete steps and outstretched hands. That means, above all, spending ourselves in charity, looking to the poor and the least of the Lord’s brethren (cf. Mt 25:40): they represent precious signposts to us along our way. It will do us good to touch their wounds with the healing power of Jesus’ presence and with the balm of our service.

By this simple, exemplary and radical way of acting, we are called, today in particular, to proclaim the Gospel, the priority of our Christian life in the world. Reconciled unity between Christians is an indispensable part of that proclamation: “How indeed can we proclaim the Gospel of reconciliation without at the same time being committed to working for reconciliation between Christians?” (Ut Unum Sint, 98). Along the way, we are spurred on by the example of all those who have suffered for the name of Jesus and are already fully reconciled in his Paschal victory. How many there are, even in our own day, who are suffering for their witness to Jesus! Their
heroism, shown in meekness and peace, urgently summons us to an ever more authentic fraternity.

Dear Brother, I cordially invoke upon you every blessing of the Lord. I ask the Holy Spirit, who unites what is divided, to pour out upon us his gifts of wisdom, meekness and courage. And I ask each one of you here present, please, to pray for me.

Thank you.

AUDIENCE WITH A DELEGATION OF THE TAIWAN NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

7 December 2017

Pope Francis urged a Delegation of the National Council of Churches of Taiwan to train young people in the “art of dialogue” so that they “can become protagonists of a much-needed culture of harmony and reconciliation”. The Pope received the group in audience in the Consistory Hall on Thursday morning, 7 December. The following is the English text of the Pope’s address.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I offer a cordial greeting to you, the officers and members of the National Council of Churches of Taiwan, and I thank you for your kind words of greeting.

As you know, I have just returned from a visit to Myanmar and Bangladesh. There I was thus able to experience the vitality and the enterprise that mark the peoples of Asia, but also the suffering face of a humanity all too often deprived of material prosperity and social well-being. There are many areas in which we, as Christians, are called to work together to promote the dignity of each human being and to support those who are less fortunate than ourselves. I am encouraged by what you have told me: “Without love, peace is not truly peace; without love, the world descends into chaos”. As Christians, we are bound above all to practise the Lord’s command: “Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples” (Jn 13:34-35). The love of God, made incarnate in life, is thus our royal road, and the basis of our common responsibility before the world to account for the hope that is in us (cf. 1 Pet 3:15).

The Catholic Church, through the Chinese Regional Bishops’ Conference, has been committed, from the establishment of the National Council of Churches of Taiwan in 1991, to promoting greater unity between believers in the Lord. The strengthening of relations between the Christian confessions, and the shared proclamation of Jesus, also through works of charity and educational projects aimed at the young, will prove beneficial to society as a whole. Building a better future for all requires, in a particular way, educating the younger generations in the art of dialogue, so that they can become protagonists of a much-needed culture of harmony and reconciliation. This will encourage them to pursue, with God’s help, the path that leads from conflict to communion, a path that has shown itself so fruitful in the ecumenical journey.

I thank each of you for your commitment to pursuing this path by strengthening fraternity and cooperation among your communities. Let us continue to journey together in the primacy of charity towards that day when Jesus’ prayer will be realized: “that they may all be one… so that the world may believe” (Jn 17:21). I ask God to bless you, your dear ones and your communities, and I ask you to remember me in your own prayers, and I invite you to recite the Lord’s Prayer together.

[Recital of the Lord’s Prayer]
MESSAGE OF POPE FRANCIS

Though away from Rome on my Pastoral Visit to Myanmar and Bangladesh, I wish to extend my fraternal best wishes to Your Holiness and to the members of the Holy Synod, the clergy, the monks, and all the faithful gathered for the Divine Liturgy in the Patriarchal Church of Saint George for the liturgical commemoration of Saint Andrew the Apostle, brother of Simon Peter and first-called of the Apostles, the patron saint of the Church of Constantinople and of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. When the deacon invites those gathered during the Divine Liturgy to pray “for those who travel by land, sea, and air”, I ask you, please, to pray also for me.

The Delegation I have sent is a sign of my spiritual solidarity with your prayer of thanksgiving and praise for all that our Almighty and Merciful God has accomplished through the witness of the Apostle Andrew. In like manner, the Delegation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate welcomed in Rome last June demonstrated its spiritual closeness to us as we celebrated the wonderful deeds that God, the source of all good, accomplished through the Apostles Peter and Paul, patron saints of the Church of Rome.

The Apostles proclaimed to the ends of the earth, through their words and the sacrifice of their lives, what they themselves had seen, heard and experienced - the Word of Life, our Lord Jesus Christ, who died and rose for our salvation. Making our own this proclamation enables us to enter into communion with the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit, which is the very foundation of the communion that already unites those baptized in the name of the Most Holy Trinity (cf. 1Jn 1:1-3). Catholics and Orthodox, by professing together the dogmas of the first seven Ecumenical Councils, by believing in the efficacy of the Eucharist and the other sacraments, and by preserving the apostolic succession of the ministry of bishops, experience already a profound closeness with one another (cf. Unitatis Redintegratio, 15). Today, in thanksgiving to the God of love, in obedience to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ and in fidelity to the teaching of the Apostles, we recognize how urgent it is to grow towards full and visible communion.

It is a source of joy to learn that on the eve of the feast of Saint Andrew, during a meeting attended by Your Holiness, the fiftieth anniversary of the visit of Pope Paul VI to the Phanar on 25 July 1967 was commemorated. That historic moment of communion between the Pastors of the Church of Rome and the Church of Constantinople brings to mind the words of Patriarch Athenagoras in welcoming Pope Paul VI to the Patriarchal Church of Saint George, where you are gathered today. I believe that these words can continue to inspire the dialogue between our Churches: “Let us join together what was divided, wherever this is possible, by deeds in which both Churches are involved, giving added strength to the matters of faith and canonical discipline which we have in common. Let us conduct the theological dialogue according to the principle [of] full community in the fundamentals of the faith, liberty both in theological thought, where this is pious and edifying and inspired by the main body of the Fathers, and in variety of local customs, as was favoured by the Church from the beginning” (Tomus Agapis, Vatican-Phanar (1958-1970), pp. 382-383).

I offer my heartfelt gratitude to Your Holiness for the generous and warm hospitality extended by the Metropolis of Leros of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, under the pastoral care of His Eminence Paisios, to the members of the Coordinating Committee of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church. I wish to encourage anew this theological dialogue. The consensus reached by Catholics and Orthodox on certain fundamental theological principles regulating the relationship between primacy and synodality in the life of the Church in the first millennium can serve to evaluate, even critically, some theological categories and practices which evolved during the second millennium in conformity with those principles. Such consensus may enable us to envisage a common way of understanding the exercise of the ministry of the Bishop of Rome, in the context of synodality and at the service of the communion of the Church in the present context. This sensitive task needs to be pursued in an atmosphere of mutual openness and, above all, in obedience to the demands that the Holy Spirit makes of the Church.

Your Holiness, beloved brother in Christ, in recent months I have followed with great interest your participation in significant international events held throughout the world regarding the care of creation, peaceful coexistence among peoples of different cultures and religious traditions, and the presence of Christians in the Middle East. Your Holiness's commitment is a source of inspiration, support and encouragement for me personally for, as you well know, we share these same concerns. It is my fervent hope that Catholics and Orthodox may promote joint initiatives at the local level with regard to these issues, for there are many contexts in which Orthodox and
Catholics can already work together without waiting for the day of full and visible communion.

With the assurance of my continued remembrance in prayer, it is with sentiments of warm affection that I exchange with Your Holiness a fraternal embrace of peace.

GREETING OF PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW

Your Eminence and beloved brother in Christ, Kurt Cardinal Koch, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity,
Dear members of the Official Delegation of the sister Church of Elder Rome,

It is with fraternal love that we greet your presence here at the Phanar. These visits are not simply formalities, but rather opportunities to communicate face to face. Today, our meeting in and of itself constitutes a contribution to the dialogue of our Churches.

Some four decades have passed since the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue commenced its deliberations between the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Church, and we rejoice in the dialogue's progress. Hitherto the dialogue has focused on what unites us. The Chieti statement clearly formulated what we confess with one mouth and one heart as a common legacy on essential matters, such as primacy and synodality, according to the first millennium of the Church's historical journey. “Throughout the first millennium, the Church in the East and the West was united in preserving the apostolic faith, maintaining the apostolic succession of bishops, developing structures of synodality inseparably linked with primacy, and in an understanding of authority as a service (diakonia) of love.” (§20). This common heritage constitutes a central point of reference and a source of inspiration for Orthodox and Roman Catholics on our journey towards unity that we so deeply desire today.

However, it appears that the time has come for us to be diligently concerned with the obstacles related to the restoration of full communion between our Churches, not in order to return to the futile conflicts of the past, but rather together to analyze these issues and be steered toward solutions acceptable to both sides. For this reason, we congratulate the Coordinating Committee of the Theological Dialogue, which convened and deliberated last September on the island of Leros, reaching a conclusion in formulating the central theme for the next phase of the dialogue, namely: “Toward Unity in Faith: Theological and Canonical Challenges”, while proposing to draft a text entitled: “Primacy and Synodality in the Second Millennium and Today”. We commend the efforts of the Co-Chairmen and members of the Joint International Committee for Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Church, and we express our appreciation to the participants for all that they have offered and continue to offer.

For an entire millennium, the Church was united in faith, in the Holy Chalice of the Eucharist, in piety, in holiness of life and in ministry. It is this unity that we strive to rediscover through the dialogue of truth in love, which began thanks to the blessed initiative of our memorable Predecessors and has already borne fruit in a variety of ways, advancing in a spirit of mutual trust, without reductionist outbursts that do not serve the work of unity. We express our joy and satisfaction for the fact that the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church that convened in Crete raised its “common awareness of the necessity for conducting inter-Christian theological dialogue” (Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World, §23), wherein “the common goal of all is the ultimate restoration of unity in true faith and love” (§12). “This dialogue should always be accompanied by witness to the world through acts expressing mutual understanding and love” as well as by the effort of “all Christians, inspired by common fundamental principles of the Gospel, to attempt to offer with eagerness and solidarity a response to the thorny problems of the contemporary world, based on the prototype of the new man in Christ” (§23). Common witness and common initiatives, in the face of the numerous challenges of our contemporary world, always aspire to the benefit of humankind and the peace of the world, while reinforcing our journey toward unity.

It is in this spirit that, last April in Cairo, we participated with His Holiness Pope Francis in the International Conference on Global Peace, organized by the Islamic Al-Azhar University and the Muslim Council of elders, where we stated the following: “We are convinced that the contribution of religions remains definitive in our common search for peace. After all, for religions, genuine peace in the world is not simply the absence of military conflict, but essentially the presence of freedom, justice and solidarity. Religions must guide people to the depth of this truth, to a change of mind and life, as well as to mutual understanding. This is indeed the core of our religious traditions. For this reason, humanity is entitled to expect from us more than we are presently giving. The greatest challenge for religions is to develop their potential for love, solidarity and compassion. That is what humanity expects from religion today.”

Our visit to Egypt and our prayer for peace, justice and reconciliation, demonstrated that violence constitutes a denial of the fundamental principles of religion, and that religious faith does not excuse humanity from its responsibility for a more compassionate world, for the protection of people’s dignity and of God-given freedom.
More recently, on the occasion of the World Day of Prayer for Creation on September 1st, we issued a Joint Message with Pope Francis, where we highlighted our concern for the common household of humanity, as well as for the negative social consequences resulting from a degradation of the natural environment – for all people in general, but especially for the more vulnerable inhabitants of our planet. The Joint Message concludes as follows: “We urgently appeal to those in positions of social and economic, as well as political and cultural, responsibility to hear the cry of the earth and to attend to the needs of the marginalized, but above all to respond to the plea of millions and support the consensus of the world for the healing of our wounded creation. We are convinced that there can be no sincere and enduring resolution to the challenge of the ecological crisis and climate change unless the response is concerted and collective, unless the responsibility is shared and accountable, unless we give priority to solidarity and service.”

Our Churches are obligated to function as a positive challenge for the world, providing answers to existential questions and keeping the gates of heaven open. Modern man believes that it is possible to attribute his own desired meaning to life. While we do not consider it appropriate for us to judge contemporary culture exclusively on the grounds of “sinful criteria”, as if ours is the supreme period of disdaining values, we wish to underline that the contemporary effort, especially in the secularized West, to alienate oneself from God – dismissing faith in God as lack of freedom and identifying rejection of faith or even God with supreme independence – constitutes a modern expression of the original sin, which was the attempt by Adam and Eve to discover freedom far from or without God. For us Christians, true freedom and blessedness are achieved through faith in God and the observance of His commandments. There is no true meaning outside of the liberating Truth. “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (Jn 8:32). Christ is the Truth; and the life in Christ is “speaking the truth in love” (Eph 4:15).

With these thoughts and fraternal sentiments, we wholeheartedly welcome you to the feast of our Sacred Center of Orthodoxy. We express our sincere gratitude to His Holiness Pope Francis of Rome for sending his venerable Delegation to Phanar for our Thronal Feast. We entreat our Lord Jesus Christ, through the intercessions of the founders of our Churches and brother Apostles, Saints Andrew and Peter, the unswerving preachers of faith and imitators of His passion, to bless the Gold-pleasing ministry and work of the Churches of Elder and New Rome, for the glory of our benevolent God who is worshiped in Trinity.
On Friday afternoon, 1 September, Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor died at the age of 85. He was the Archbishop emeritus of Westminster and the Catholic Primate emeritus of England and Wales. Upon hearing of Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor's death, Pope Francis sent a telegram to Cardinal Vincent Nichols, the current Archbishop of Westminster.

The following is the text of the Holy Father's telegram.

Deeply saddened to learn of the death of Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, Archbishop Emeritus of Westminster, I hasten to offer my heartfelt condolences to you and to the clergy and faithful of the Archdiocese. Recalling with immense gratitude the late Cardinal's distinguished service to the Church in England and Wales, his unwavering devotion to the preaching of the Gospel and the care of the poor, and his far-sighted commitment to the advancement of ecumenical and interreligious understanding, I willingly join you in commending his noble soul to the infinite mercies of God our heavenly Father. To all who mourn his passing in the sure hope of the Resurrection I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of consolation and strength in the Lord.

FRANCISCUS PP.

VISIT OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE
CARDINAL PIETRO PAROLIN TO RUSSIA
21-24 August 2017

During his recent visit to the Russian Federation, 21-24 August, Cardinal Pietro Parolin met with the highest representatives of the Russian Orthodox hierarchy, Patriarch Kirill and Metropolitan Hilarion, with whom he discussed various important topics. We publish below an excerpt from the interview of Cardinal Parolin with Alessandro Gisotti of the Secretariat for Communications of the Holy See.

[...]

Question: What were the main issues that arose during your meeting with Patriarch Kirill?

We spoke of a new climate, this new atmosphere that reigns in the relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church. Those relations had gained significant momentum after Pope Francis’ encounter with the Patriarch in Havana, Cuba. Our Orthodox interlocutors were touched by the faith and religiosity of the people who gathered in hundreds of thousands to venerate the relics of Saint Nicholas of Bari which had been sent to Moscow and Saint Petersburg. It was noted that many non-practicing Russian Orthodox re-approached the Church on this occasion, some 2.5 million faithful turned out to pray before the relics. We also discussed how to further the progress made thus far in relations, and determined that efforts should be made to collaborate on cultural, academic and particularly on humanitarian issues, and in areas affected by conflict. We further examined slightly thorny issues … respectfully and at the same time frankly, regarding relations between the two Churches, and I had a positive sense … that both sides are prepared to explore common paths for dealing with and for seeking to solve these problems. […]
Catholic Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima during the centenary celebrations.

The role of culture, religion, and dialogue in peace-building and the challenges and opportunities for ecumenical cooperation concerning migrants and refugees were discussed in depth at this meeting in light of the teachings of Jesus Christ according to the Gospel. During the current mandate (2014 – 2021), the 20-member JWG is chaired by the two co-moderators Metropolitan Nifon of Targoviste from the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin and Primate of Ireland, Diarmuid Martin.

The JWG formed two theme groups on peace-building and the concerns of migrants and refugees. These groups work both between and during plenary meetings to address the issues before them, identify possibilities for greater partnership and practical recommendations for collaboration. Their work is accompanied by staff of the Holy See and the WCC with particular expertise in these areas of work.

The goal of the peace-building group is to identify the positive contributions churches can make together to the resolution of conflicts and prevention of violence. The group recognizes the fact that culture, religion and even dialogue can be misused to spark violence and conflict. There is a growing awareness among faith communities that peace-building needs the constructive involvement of the churches. It is important to build on already existing successful examples of ecumenical cooperation and to identify new possible ways in which the churches can witness to just peace.

The current situation of migrants and refugees is a significant “sign of the times.” It requires a common response by all churches and their cooperation with others working in the field. Churches are called to strengthen their collaboration in welcoming, protecting, integrating and empowering refugees and migrants. While migration has always been part of human history, the current reality of forced migration, the rejection of refugees and racist attitudes in many places are of growing concern for churches. The churches are committed to strengthening a culture of openness and inclusiveness.

The JWG will present pastoral recommendations for the Roman Catholic Church and the WCC on both issues. The aim of these recommendations is to bring the churches to greater unity in addressing areas of vital concern.

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LUTHERAN, MENNONITE, CATHOLIC TRILATERAL DIALOGUE COMMISSION ON BAPTISM

Strasbourg, France
15-19 September 2017

A group of theologians met in Strasbourg, 15-19 September, to finalize the report “Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Church” of the trilateral dialogue between Lutherans, Mennonites and Catholics.

The drafters, Professors Theodor Dieter (Lutheran), William Henn (Catholic), John Rempel and Fernando Enns (Mennonite) will present a final report to the respective Christian world communions. This will conclude the current phase of the work of the dialogue commission, which met five times between 2011 and 2017, discussing study reports on baptism.

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), the Catholic Church and the Mennonite World Conference set up the trilateral dialogue to discuss the theme “Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Church”. During the five years of dialogue, the Commission has discussed issues such as the relation of baptism to sin and salvation; celebration of baptism and its relation to faith and to membership in the Christian community; and how baptism is lived out in Christian discipleship.

The Commission is made of five members each from the three partners, including staff members and co-secretaries. The final report on baptism is expected to be introduced to the LWF at its June 2018 Council meeting.

The team drafting the final report from the trilateral dialogue, and colleagues supporting them during the meeting in Strasbourg: Prof. Theodor Dieter (Lutheran), Prof. John Rempel, Rev. Dr. Larry Miller and Prof. Fernando Enns (Mennonite) and Rev. Avelino Gonzalez and Prof. William Henn (Catholic).
To His Excellency, Archbishop Felix Machado,  
Bishop of Vasai (India),  
Chairman – Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC)

Your Excellency,  
On the occasion of the Asian Consultation of the Bishops’ Commissions for Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue, I send warm fraternal greetings and prayerful good wishes on behalf of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, to you and to the other participants and guests gathered in Bangkok, Thailand from October 16-20.

Since the first Asian Bishop’s Meeting in 1970, when blessed Pope Paul VI gathered with 180 bishops of Asia in Manila, Philippines, the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC) has promoted an all-encompassing vision of being Church in Asia. Part of this vision included the collaboration of the member conferences in ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. Since 1974, this collaboration and dialogue has been the specific task of the Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (OEIA). This Council follows with particular interest the efforts of the FABC-OEIA in the unique context of Asia, where the Catholic Church is a small minority in the massive continent of great ancient religions.

I am pleased to know that fourteen Bishops’ Conferences from sixteen countries, and the Diocese of Hong Kong, will be represented in the present Consultation. The in-depth discussions you will have describing each conference’s ecumenical situation, activities, challenges, reception and plans for the future, will no doubt provide valuable and concrete insights on how to carry out more effectively the mission of the Church, which Pope Francis has said “impels us to undertake a constant pilgrimage across the various deserts of life, through the different experiences of hunger and thirst for truth and justice” [Message of Pope Francis for World Mission Day, 4 June 2017].

Finally, I am encouraged by your proposed plans to bring religious leaders together with the Catholic Bishops at Ayutthaya, Thailand, in 2018, to pray for peace and harmony in Asia. In a world marked by confusion and uncertainty, disappointment and frustration, terror and violence, such gatherings of ecumenical and interreligious leaders is a powerful sign that those who love God journey in the world with what Pope Francis has called a “logic of hope”, following the radical pattern of the Lord Jesus: “I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves” (Mt 10:16) [cf. General Audience, 28 June 2017]. With hearts overflowing with love we overcome the world and experience God’s peace even in the worst of times (cf. Jn 16:33).

I join you in giving thanks to Almighty God for the ecumenical progress that has already been made through the grace of the Holy Spirit and the good work of the OEIA. I pray that your gathering in Bangkok will be a fruitful sign of hope and encouragement to all those who strive for reconciliation through justice and peace. Upon all, I cordially invoke the Holy Spirit’s gifts of wisdom, knowledge and counsel.

With my personal prayers and best wishes, I am  
Sincerely yours,  
Cardinal Kurt Koch  
President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity
JOINT STATEMENT BY THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION 
AND THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY 
ON THE CONCLUSION OF THE YEAR OF THE COMMON COMMEMORATION OF THE REFORMATION 

31 October 2017

On 31st of October 2017, the final day of the year of the Common Ecumenical Commemoration of the Reformation, we are very thankful for the spiritual and theological gifts received through the Reformation, a commemoration that we have shared together and with our ecumenical partners globally. Likewise, we begged forgiveness for our failures and for the ways in which Christians have wounded the Body of the Lord and offended each other during the five hundred years since the beginning of the Reformation until today.

We, Lutherans and Catholics, are profoundly grateful for the ecumenical journey that we have travelled together during the last fifty years. This pilgrimage, sustained by our common prayer, worship and ecumenical dialogue, has resulted in the removal of prejudices, the increase of mutual understanding and the identification of decisive theological agreements. In the face of so many blessings along the way, we raise our hearts in praise of the Triune God for the mercy we receive.

On this day we look back on a year of remarkable ecumenical events, beginning on 31st October 2016 with the joint Lutheran - Catholic common prayer in Lund, Sweden, in the presence of our ecumenical partners. While leading that service, Pope Francis and Bishop Munib A. Younan, then President of the Lutheran World Federation, signed a joint statement with the commitment to continue the ecumenical journey towards the unity that Christ prayed for (cf. Jn 17:21). On the same day, our joint service to those in need of our help and solidarity has also been strengthened by a letter of intent between Caritas Internationalis and the Lutheran World Federation World Service.

Pope Francis and President Younan stated together: “Many members of our communities yearn to receive the Eucharist at one table, as the concrete expression of full unity. We experience the pain of those who share their whole lives, but cannot share God’s redeeming presence at the Eucharistic table. We acknowledge our joint pastoral responsibility to respond to the spiritual thirst and hunger of our people to be one in Christ. We long for this wound in the Body of Christ to be healed. This is the goal of our ecumenical endeavours, which we wish to advance, also by renewing our commitment to theological dialogue.”

Among the blessings of this year of Commemoration is the fact that for the first time Lutherans and Catholics have seen the Reformation from an ecumenical perspective. This has allowed new insight into the events of the sixteenth century which led to our separation. We recognize that while the past cannot be changed, its influence upon us today can be transformed to become a stimulus for growing communion, and a sign of hope for the world to overcome division and fragmentation. Again, it has become clear that what we have in common is far more than that which still divides us.

We rejoice that the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, solemnly signed by the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church in 1999, has also been signed by the World Methodist Council in 2006 and, during this Commemoration Year of the Reformation, by the World Communion of Reformed Churches. On this very day it is being welcomed and received by the Anglican Communion at a solemn ceremony in Westminster Abbey. On this basis our Christian communities can build an ever closer bond of spiritual consensus and common witness in the service of the Gospel.

We acknowledge with appreciation the many events of common prayer and worship that Lutherans and Catholics have held together with their ecumenical partners in different parts of the world, as well as the theological encounters and the significant publications that have given substance to this year of Commemoration.

Looking forward, we commit ourselves to continue our journey together, guided by God’s Spirit, towards the greater unity according to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ. With God’s help we intend to discern in a prayerful manner our understanding on Church, Eucharist and Ministry, seeking a substantial consensus so as to overcome remaining differences between us. With deep joy and gratitude we trust “that He who has begun a good work in [us] will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6).
COMMISSION FOR RELIGIOUS RELATIONS WITH THE JEWS

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO THE DELEGATION OF RABBIS FOR THE PRESENTATION OF THE STATEMENT ‘BETWEEN JERUSALEM AND ROME’

Thursday, 31 August 2017

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I offer a cordial welcome to all of you, and in a special way to the representatives of the Conference of European Rabbis, the Rabbinical Council of America, and the Commission of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel in dialogue with the Holy See’s Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. I thank Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt for his kind greeting in your name.

In our shared journey, by the graciousness of the Most High, we are presently experiencing a fruitful moment of dialogue. This is reflected in the Statement Between Jerusalem and Rome which you have issued and which you present to me today. This document pays particular tribute to the Second Vatican Council’s Declaration Nostra Aetate, whose fourth chapter represents the “Magna Charta” of our dialogue with the Jewish world.

Indeed, the ongoing implementation of the Council’s Declaration has enabled our relations to become increasingly friendly and fraternal. Nostra Aetate noted that the origins of the Christian faith are to be found, in accordance with the divine mystery of salvation, in the Patriarchs, in Moses and in the Prophets. It also stated that, given the great spiritual heritage we hold in common, every effort must be made to foster reciprocal knowledge and respect, above all through biblical studies and fraternal discussions (cf. No.4). Consequently, in recent decades, we have been able to draw closer to one another and to engage in an effective and fruitful dialogue. We have grown in mutual understanding and deepened our bonds of friendship.

The Statement Between Jerusalem and Rome does not hide, however, the theological differences that exist between our faith traditions. All the same, it expresses a firm resolve to collaborate more closely, now and in the future. Your document is addressed to Catholics, speaking of them as “partners, close allies, friends and brothers in our mutual quest for a better world blessed with peace, social justice and security”. It goes on to say that “despite profound theological differences, Catholics and Jews share common beliefs” and also “the affirmation that religions must use moral behavior and religious education – not war, coercion or social pressure – to influence and inspire”. This is most important: may the Eternal One bless and enlighten our cooperation, so that together we can accept and carry out ever better his plans, “plans for welfare and not for evil”, for “a future and a hope” (Jer 29:11).

On the occasion of your welcome visit, I would like to express to you and to your communities beforehand my best wishes for the Jewish New Year which will begin in a few weeks. Shanah tovah! Once more I thank you for coming and I ask you to remember me in your prayers.

Finally, I would invoke upon you, and upon all of us, the blessing of the Most High for the shared journey of friendship and trust that lies before us. In his mercy, may the Almighty bestow his peace upon us and upon the entire world. Shalom alechem!

BILATERAL COMMISSION MEETING OF THE DELEGATIONS OF THE CHIEF RABBINATE OF ISRAEL AND THE HOLY SEE’S COMMISSION FOR RELIGIOUS RELATIONS WITH THE JEWS

JOINT REFLECTIONS ON THE DECLARATION ‘BETWEEN JERUSALEM AND ROME’

Jerusalem, 12-14 November 2017; Mar Chesvian, 23-25, 5778

1. The 15th meeting of the Bilateral Commission opened with a welcome dinner hosted by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation which continued its generous facilitation of the meetings in Jerusalem. The following morning, members of the respective delegations were treated to a guided tour of the recent archeological excavations at the City of David, of profound significance to both faith traditions. Later in the day, after a welcome by Rabbi Rasson Arussi, Chairman of the Chief Rabbinate’s delegation, briefings on the current situation of Christians in the Middle East were provided by representatives of the Israeli Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Interior.

2. Cardinal Peter Turkson, Chairman of the Catholic delegation, opened the formal deliberations of the bilateral commission which focused on the
Orthodox Jewish document presented on 31st August 2017 to Pope Francis in the Vatican, entitled “Between Jerusalem and Rome”.

3. The Catholic analysis of the unique significance of the document opened with a reiteration of its statement that “Despite irreconcilable theological differences, we view Catholics as our partners, close allies, friends and brothers in our mutual quest for a better world blessed with peace, social justice and security”; and accordingly the Catholic side affirmed that “The patrimony of faith, shared by Catholics and Jews is well capable of sustaining common commitment to the service of all humanity.”

4. The Catholic reflection also highlighted “…that the bond that the Church recognizes with Israel on the basis of divine election is unique, and so strong that the document of the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, ‘The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable’, published on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration Nostra Aetate (10th December 2015), does not hesitate to affirm: ‘The dialogue with Judaism occupies a unique position for Christians; Christianity is by its roots connected with Judaism as with no other religion.’”

5. The Jewish presentation provided an historical, cultural and theological overview of the various reactions to Nostra Aetate (Number 4), acknowledging that even prior to 1965, “many Jewish leaders were skeptical of the sincerity of the Church’s overtures to the Jewish community, due to the long history of Christian anti-Judaism.” However “over time, it has become clear that the transformation in the Church’s attitudes and teaching are not only sincere but also increasingly profound, and we are entering an era of growing tolerance, mutual respect, and solidarity between members of our respective faiths.” Pope Saint John Paul II’s contribution to this process, building on the pioneering role of Pope Saint John XXIII, was emphasized, as impacting profoundly on the Jewish world in general and in Israel in particular. The establishment of bilateral relations between the Holy See and the State of Israel following the signing of the Fundamental Agreement in December 1993, served to substantiate the transformation.

6. While previous Jewish statements had acknowledged this new reality, “Between Jerusalem and Rome” is the first ever official statement from the leadership organizations of Jewish Orthodoxy worldwide, to express appreciation for this transformation and to affirm the partnership between the Catholic Church and the Jewish People in combating the violent scourges that afflict our world today, and in working together for a better world for all humanity.

7. With this increasing appreciation within the Jewish world of “the strategic importance of the relationship with the Catholic Church, and even of the theological as well as moral imperatives for deepening this mutual relationship, the opportunity to work together for the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth” becomes our common imperative.

8. The bilateral commission reiterated its repudiation of the instrumentalization of religion for violent ends, and reaffirmed the obligation that our religions demand to preserve the sanctity and dignity of human life. In this regard, religion must not be part of the problem but must be part of the solution.

9. The need to make the achievements in the field of Catholic-Jewish relations and the work of the Bilateral Commission more widely known was stressed. Accordingly various proposals were put forward to this end, in particular the collaboration with institutions of higher education and the mass media.

10. In giving thanks to Our Father in Heaven for the gift of our friendship experienced within the Bilateral Commission, the prayer was expressed that such fraternity will extend throughout our world and He will instill His full Blessing of Peace within us, making us instruments of His Peace for all.

Jerusalem, November 14, 2017–MarCheshvan 25, 5778

Rabbi Rasson Arussi
(Chairman of the Jewish Delegation)
Rabbi David Rosen
Rabbi Prof. Daniel Sperber
Rabbi Prof. Avraham Steinberg
Rabbi Moshe Dagan
Mr Oded Wiener

Peter Cardinal Turkson
(Chairman of the Catholic Delegation)
Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa O.F.M
Archbishop Bruno Forte
Bishop Giacinto-Boulos Marcuzzo
Msgr Pier Francesco Fumagalli
Msgr Marco Formica
Fr. Norbert J. Hofmann S.D.B.
DOCUMENTATION SUPPLEMENT

THE CALL TO HOLINESS:
FROM GLORY TO GLORY

REPORT OF THE JOINT INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION
FOR DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE WORLD METHODIST COUNCIL AND
THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

2016
TENTH SERIES
PREFACE

This report has been prepared by the Joint International Commission for Dialogue between the World Methodist Council and the Roman Catholic Church for presentation to the World Methodist Council, meeting in Houston, Texas, USA, in 2016, and to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. It is the tenth such report to be published in the fifty years since the Commission was established in 1967, following the Second Vatican Council (1962-65). Each report investigates historically divisive issues in Christian doctrine in order to identify the degree of convergence between Catholics and Methodists, and to name areas where further dialogue is necessary. The Commission’s work has been published for study within and beyond our two communions, and to record the deepening communion in faith between Catholics and Methodists.

In its recent reports, the Commission has adopted the convention of referring to ‘Methodists’ and ‘Catholics’ (rather than ‘Roman Catholics’) without implying that Methodists are not catholic Christians. Except where quoting directly from other documents, including its earlier reports, the Commission has once again adopted this convention. Here ‘Methodists’ and ‘Catholics’ denote members of our two world communions, some of whom would describe themselves in other terms, such as Wesleyans or Nazarenes, Latin rite Catholics or Eastern rite Catholics. Nevertheless, since the term ‘Catholic Church’ is ambiguous, and since the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity appointed the Catholic members of the Commission, this report refers to the ‘Roman Catholic Church’.

The present report builds on theological foundations painstakingly laid in previous reports and ideally will be read in conjunction with these earlier texts, all of which were originally published in printed form (and subsequently reprinted by the World Council of Churches) in collected volumes of the reports of bilateral dialogues at a world level under the series title Growth in Agreement and are now available on the Vatican website and on the World Methodist Council website.

The initial phase of the dialogue was exploratory, recording areas of basic agreement in two short reports: The Denver Report (Denver, 1971) and Growth in Understanding (Dublin, 1976). A second phase began a more detailed investigation of core theological topics: Towards an Agreed Statement on the Holy Spirit (Honolulu, 1981); Towards a Statement on the Church (Nairobi, 1986); The Apostolic Tradition (Singapore, 1991); The Word of Life: A Statement on Revelation and Faith (Rio de Janeiro, 1996); and Speaking the Truth in Love: Teaching Authority among Methodists and Roman Catholics (Brighton, 2001). Since then, the Commission has concentrated its attention on the Church and sacraments, recording significant convergence in two substantial reports: The Grace Given You in Christ: Catholics and Methodists Reflect Further on the Church (Seoul, 2006); and Encountering Christ the Saviour: Church and Sacraments (Durban, 2011). In each case, the place of publication denotes the location in which the World Methodist Council was meeting at the time of the report’s approval.

In 2011, the Commission published a synthesis text, Together to Holiness: 40 Years of Methodist and Roman Catholic Dialogue, summarizing the state of consensus and convergence on a range of topics in Christian doctrine, as recorded in its first eight reports. The synthesis text provides a useful overview of our bilateral dialogue between 1967 and 2006 but is not intended to replace the original reports.

The convergence registered in the present report is the result not just of bilateral conversations since the Durban report (2011), but of nearly fifty years of dialogue between Catholics and Methodists at a world level, as indicated by the numerous references to previous reports of the Commission. By custom, these are cited by the location associated with that particular report and paragraph number – thus (Nairobi §20).

Members of the Commission, appointed in equal number by the World Methodist Council and by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, include professional theologians proficient in relevant fields of study, as well as those with expertise and experience in ecumenism, and those who exercise a ministry of oversight as bishops and church leaders. In appointing members, account has been taken of the need for a diversity of geographical representation.

In order to learn from the regional variations in ecumenical relations, ecclesiastical culture and the social setting of Methodists and Catholics, the Commission met in a variety of locations: Buenos Aires, Argentina (2012); Atlanta, USA (2013); Assisi, Italy (2014); and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (2015). A drafting subgroup met in Boston, USA, in March 2015,
and then again in Rome, Italy, in March 2016, in order to finalise the text for publication.

The nature of ecumenical dialogue means that much of the available time was absorbed in theological conversation. Yet, the spiritual dimension must not be overlooked, since dialogue is never solely an intellectual exercise, but always involves personal encounter. As members of the Commission met together, spiritual ecumenism led to a deepening experience of the real, but imperfect, communion that already exists between Methodists and Catholics through our baptism into the body of Christ. Each day, wherever the Commission happened to be meeting, dialogue took place in the context of shared prayer and in a setting that enabled members to interact with the local Methodist and Catholic communities.

In the conclusion to the Durban report (2011), the Commission signalled its future intention by outlining a new topic for investigation: ‘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’ (Durban §197). The present report fulfils this intention.

Since grace and holiness are central to the Christian life, a theological study is usefully illustrated by practical examples of holy living. Accordingly, the report is illustrated by reference to the lives of exemplary figures from the Catholic and Methodist traditions.

This report is dedicated to two outstanding ecumenical statesmen and former Co-Chairs of this Commission. Bishop Michael Putney (+2014) of Townsville, Australia, served as Catholic Co-Chair from 1996 until his diagnosis with terminal cancer in 2012. Reverend Professor Geoffrey Wainwright, Professor of Christian Theology at Duke University, North Carolina, USA, served as Methodist Co-Chair between 1986 and 2011. We thank God for their colleagueship and for their dedicated service to ecumenism.

The Commission’s members are:

**Catholic:**
Bishop Donald Bolen (Co-Chair), Canada (from 2013); Bishop Michael Putney (Co-Chair), Australia (2012); Reverend Mark Langham (Co-Secretary), Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (2012); Reverend Anthony Currer (Co-Secretary), Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (from 2013); Sister Dr Lorelei Fuchs, USA; Reverend Dr Gerard McCarren, USA; Bishop Joseph Osei-Bonsu, Ghana; Reverend Dr Jorge Scampini, Argentina; Bishop John Sherrington, England; Dr Clare Watkins, England.

**Methodist:**
Reverend Dr David M. Chapman (Co-Chair), Great Britain; Reverend Dr Karen Westerfield Tucker (Co-Secretary), USA; Reverend Dr Young-Ho Chun, Korea/USA; Reverend Dr Edgardo Colón-Emeric, USA; Reverend Dr James Haire, Australia (2012-13); Reverend Dr Trevor Hoggard, New Zealand; Bishop Chikwendu Igwe, Nigeria; Reverend Dr Reynaldo Ferreira Leão Neto, Brazil/Great Britain; Reverend Dr Priscilla Pope-Levison, USA (from 2014).

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### 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 or by the Holy See’s Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. The authorities who appointed the Commission have now allowed the Report to be published so that it may be widely discussed. It is a joint report 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.
JESUS AND ZACCHAEUS
(Luke 19.1-10 NRSV)

He entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.' So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, 'He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.' Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, 'Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.' Then Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.'

The encounter between Jesus and Zacchaeus in Luke’s Gospel is a story of divine grace and the call to holiness. Zacchaeus, an undeserving figure, is nevertheless graciously accepted by Jesus and drawn into a saving relationship with the Lord, which transforms his previously self-centred and selfish existence into holy living. On receiving Jesus’ summons, Zacchaeus instantly resolves to make reparation for his sinful past by promising to give half of his possessions to the poor and repay fourfold all whom he had defrauded.

The background details of this Gospel story reinforce the drama of divine grace at work and its powerful salvific effect. Jericho, being a border city, was an important customs station and one of the wealthiest cities in Palestine, that benefitted economically from its location in the most fertile part of Judea and politically as the site of a Herodian palace. Altogether, the opportunities for imposing customs duties and raising other taxes were extensive. As a chief tax collector, Zacchaeus was responsible for the collection of tax and customs revenue and the supervision of subordinate officers. In such a position of power, Zacchaeus had ample opportunity to amass personal wealth through cheating and exploitation.

Zacchaeus may have possessed wealth and official status, but he was a social outsider since Jews generally despised tax collectors as traitors to Israel, defiled by a hated occupation and corrupted through greed. In the eyes of his Jewish compatriots, Zacchaeus’ shortness in stature was more than physical: he was a nonentity, not worthy of the company of respectable Jews. From his lonely vantage point in the sycamore tree, Zacchaeus would be able to see Jesus unnoticed by the crowd.

Despite the intention and prior action of Zacchaeus, the real initiative in the story belongs to Jesus. In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus has an uncanny insight into the secret affairs of others. Thus, Zacchaeus does not remain hidden from Jesus, who engages his anonymous observer in a life-giving personal encounter. By inviting himself into Zacchaeus’ home, Jesus does something startling and significant: no matter how high their social status, Jews would not normally invite themselves into someone else’s home. Moreover, scrupulous Jews such as the scribes and Pharisees would never enter the home of a tax collector and eat his food (implied in the offer of hospitality). By receiving Jesus as his guest, Zacchaeus is no longer an outsider.

The onlookers are scandalized at the social recognition conferred by Jesus upon such an obvious sinner. However, Jesus’ gracious acceptance produces a deep change in Zacchaeus’ situation as his life is transformed inwardly and outwardly. Zacchaeus’ response is to dispose of half his fortune towards meeting the needs of the poor and to make generous provision for putting right his past injustices in a very practical form of holy living. Thus, his restitution goes far beyond Pharisaic law, which required fourfold or fivefold restitution only for stolen oxen and sheep, and then only if slaughtered or sold in the presence of the requisite number of witnesses. In contrast, Zacchaeus’ extravagant restitution reflects ancient accounts of discipleship in which a radical response with possessions was a sure sign of newly acquired devotion to the teacher. In this way, Luke vividly affirms that Zacchaeus has been drawn into a saving relationship with Jesus.

Throughout his Gospel, Luke equates the presence of Jesus with the coming of the kingdom of God and immediate salvation even for outsiders such as Zacchaeus. In Jesus, ‘[God] has raised up a mighty saviour for us in the house of his servant David’ (Lk 1.69). At the synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus announces that Isaiah’s prophecy of salvation has been fulfilled ‘today’ (Lk 4.21). Fittingly, Zacchaeus, the archetypal outsider, has received salvation ‘today’. Where grace abounds, holiness enters in.
INTRODUCTION

1. The story of Zacchaeus in Luke’s Gospel illustrates beautifully how a loving God graciously calls all people to respond to an invitation to holy living in a familial relationship with God. From a Christian perspective, such a relationship is made possible by the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ and by the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit. Catholics and Methodists describe the Christian response to this invitation in similar terms of growth in grace and holiness through an ever-deepening relationship with Jesus Christ (Denver §55).

2. This agreement concerning the Christian life – an agreement that will be consolidated and developed in the present report – is encapsulated in the evocative idea of ‘the call to holiness’. For Catholics, this idea echoes the teaching of the Second Vatican Council concerning ‘The Universal Call to Holiness in the Church’ (LG, Chapter 5); for Methodists, it is consistent with the historical mission of Methodism ‘to spread scriptural holiness on the land’.

3. The call to holiness is relational, dynamic, and holistic: it relates the God who calls and the people, individually and corporately, who respond to God’s call in their particular historical and cultural context. The call to holiness relates the God who speaks to the world and those who hear and receive the divine word. In the book of Deuteronomy, God invites the people of Israel to ‘choose life’ that they might live fully (Deut 30.19), uniting in friendship a holy God and ‘a people holy to the Lord’ (Deut 14.2). The call to holiness is a transformative summons to life in a new community, joyfully living and proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ: ‘you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light’ (1 Pet 2.9).

4. Entitled The Call to Holiness, this report considers how Catholics and Methodists understand the nature and effect of divine grace upon the human person and the implications for the Christian life. In so doing, it investigates grace and holiness not simply as theological concepts, but in relation to their central place in the Christian life. For the God of grace calls people to holy living in a relationship of communion or fellowship (koinonia) with the Holy Trinity and with one another.

5. The call to holiness is also a call to unity in the Church, the body of Christ. Jesus prayed for his disciples to be sanctified in the truth that they might all be one (Jn 17.17, 21). Holiness and Christian unity belong together as twin aspects of the same relationship with the Trinity such that the pursuit of either involves the pursuit of the other. The goal of dialogue between Catholics and Methodists remains that of full communion in faith, mission and sacramental life (Nairobi §20).

6. Among the theological foundations of the report, three are particularly noteworthy. The first is the trinitarian mission in salvation history as recorded in scripture and tradition. The Honolulu report (1981) established significant agreement in understanding the person and work of God the Son in relation to the person and work of God the Holy Spirit, in the design and purpose of God the Father in creation and redemption. Second is the Methodist Statement of Association with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation (MAJDDJ) (2006/1999), which is an agreed statement concerning certain basic elements of the nature and effect of divine grace and its relationship with works of mercy and piety. The third is the theme so fruitfully explored in the Durban report (2011): the common participation of Christians in the paschal mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

7. The present report is divided into three sections. The first section, comprising Chapters One and Two, outlines a shared Christian anthropology and understanding of the nature and effect of divine grace and holiness in relation to the human person, noting certain aspects where Methodists and Catholics continue to differ in significant respects. The second section, comprising Chapters Three and Four, then draws upon a shared understanding of grace and holiness to investigate particular elements of holy living in the communion of saints. The third section, comprising Chapter Five, offers a summary of this report’s convergences and divergences, and asks how the fruits of dialogue might have a transformative effect in Catholic and Methodist communities. An appendix contains a select number of appropriate prayers from our two traditions.

8. To aid the reader, it may be useful to outline the content of each chapter. Chapter
One, ‘The Mystery of Being Human’, articulates a Christian anthropology as the theological basis for the chapters that follow. It considers: what it means for human beings to be created in the image and likeness of God in relation to the rest of creation; the fall and its effect upon humankind and creation; the longing for reconciliation; and the person of Jesus Christ as the full measure of human being. Catholics and Methodists can say much together about humankind in the plan and purpose of God.

9. Christian anthropology is necessarily bound up with the study of salvation or soteriology. Chapter Two, ‘God’s Work of Re-creating Humankind’, describes the saving work of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit in the mediation of divine grace before focusing on three particular aspects: the grace that enables, the grace that justifies, and the grace that sanctifies. The chapter also addresses the historically divisive issues of the ‘merit’ accruing from good works of mercy and piety, and Christian assurance.

10. Just as Christian anthropology leads to soteriology, consideration of the saving work of Christ is inseparable from ecclesiology, since the experience of grace and holiness is always oriented towards the formation of relationships in the Church and the transformation of the world. Chapter Three, ‘God’s Holy People: The Saints Below’, considers the personal and ecclesial effect of grace and what it means to be called by God to holy living in the Church and in the world. The chapter describes the pilgrim Church itself as a household of grace. Holy living is described in relation to the sacraments, witnessing to the Gospel, devotional practices, and service in the world.

11. Since the living and the departed are joined together in love and praise within the household of grace, Chapter Four, ‘God’s Holy People: The Saints Above’, considers the eschatological effect of grace, and what this means for a communion among the saints which transcends death. The chapter explores a number of related topics: death and the hope of resurrection; judgement; purification and growth in grace beyond death; prayer for the departed saints; the intercession of the departed saints and Mary, the Mother of Jesus; the Lord’s return; images of final salvation; and the fulfilment of God’s design and purpose for humankind in a new heaven and a new earth.

12. The final chapter, ‘Growing in Holiness Together: Openings for Common Witness, Devotion, and Service’, reflects upon the close relationship between holiness and unity. The work of reconciliation between our world communions is itself a Spirit-led response to the summons of holiness. Tracing how the dialogue between Methodists and Catholics over the past fifty years has led to significant consensus and convergences, the text notes that each step towards greater communion in faith should translate into fruitful engagement in terms of common prayer, joint witness and mission, a renewed commitment to reconciliation, and a deepening relationship in the Lord. The chapter ends with a creedal summary of what Catholics and Methodists have been able to say together in this document, and raises a series of questions to be discussed at a local or regional level about the practical ecclesial implications of our agreements and convergences in faith.

13. The report’s subtitle, From Glory to Glory, reflects the transformative nature of the divine call to holiness, as attested by St Paul: ‘And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another’ (2 Cor 3.18). Charles Wesley drew on this same phrase in composing the hymn ‘Love divine, all loves excelling’, a hymn that is still frequently sung by Methodists and Catholics today. The final stanza’s summary of life in Christ anticipates the final consummation of the call to holiness:

Finish then thy new creation,
Pure and sinless let us be;
Let us see thy great salvation
Perfectly restored in thee;
Changed from glory into glory,
Till in heaven we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before thee,
Lost in wonder, love, and praise.

2. WJW 7:547; first published in Charles Wesley, Hymns for Those that Seek and Those that have Redemption in the Blood of Jesus Christ (London: Strahan, 1747), no. 9.
CHAPTER ONE
The Mystery Of Being Human:
Created By God And
Re-Created In Christ For Being In
Communion With God

14. Human beings are a mystery to themselves. Without communion with God, the human is unfulfilled. As St Augustine famously said, ‘our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you’. Humans are created with a desire for God, but the power of sin has corrupted this desire in unholy ways. The sin-sick heart is sought out by the Holy Spirit who intercedes ‘with sighs too deep for words’ (Rom 8.26) and witnesses to the human longing for God by crying, ‘Abba! Father!’ (Rom 8.15-16). Methodists and Catholics affirm that ‘The Father’s overflowing love created humanity for communion with himself, and that same creative love gathers together the followers of his Son into the visible community of the Church’ (Seoul §54).

15. Humans are made in the image of God. This affirmation is the point of departure in reflecting upon the dignity of every human being and the call to holiness. Even if it is not possible to find in the Bible a fully developed systematic anthropology, scripture offers profound insight into the human person. Its testimony to the mystery of the human starts with creation and finds its fulfilment in the mystery of Christ, truly God and truly human. The Holy Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead (Rom 8.11) and spoke through the prophets (Eph 3.5) plays a crucial role in the completion and revelation of this mystery. In this way, the plan of God, revealed initially in the gift of creation, is confirmed and re-created in the mysteries of the incarnation and redemption.

16. The starting point for this chapter is that humanity is created by and for God. This consideration is followed by an assessment of the effects of sin on human nature and concludes with a reflection on humanity as re-created in Christ. The re-creation of the first Adam into the new is God’s gift, but a gift that can only be received by means of repentance and conversion. The re-creation of the human does not mean the annihilation of human nature. The new creation is not out of nothing (ex nihilo) but out of the old (ex etero). The old creation is not discarded but transformed. God does not say, ‘Behold I make all new things,’ but rather, ‘Behold, I am making all things new’ (Rev 21.5). Ultimately, the origin and destiny of the human being are connected to who God is. This is why, even in the light of revelation, the topic for this chapter is treated not as a puzzle to be solved, but as a mystery to be approached with humility and reverence.

17. The account of creation in Genesis (Gen 1.1-2.4) declares the uniqueness of human beings with respect to all other creatures: with humanity, God completes his work of creation. The special place and mission of human beings finds its foundation in the fact that they are created in the image of God (imago Dei) (Gen 1.26-27). Being created in God’s ‘image and likeness’ is a gift and responsibility. The human being has been created to exist in relationship with God, to be addressed by God and to hear and receive God’s word, and so to live in communion with him. Holiness is another name for this communion. The mystery of what it means to be made in the image of God is only fully revealed in Christ (cf. 2 Cor 4.4; Col 1.15; Heb 1.3; Phil 2.6). While it is true that humans have been created out of nothing (ex nihilo), it is also possible to affirm that they have been created out of the fullness (ex plenitudine) of Christ himself.

18. From the very beginning, humanity has been created male and female (Gen 1.27). Genesis tells of how God gives to Adam a ‘partner’, Eve, because it is not good for him to be alone (cf. Gen 2.8, 20-24). Human beings are social beings created for relationship. The contemporary interpretation of gender is a controversial subject among Christians, one that this document does not address. As far as the call to holiness is concerned, it is important to underscore that human relationality finds expression not only in marriage, but also in friendships and in the realms of economics, politics, and culture. Sexual differentiation is a fundamental but not exclusive manifestation of the social dimension of human existence.

19. In the Christian vision, this social dimension is essentially grounded in the Trinity of Divine Persons, revealed in Christ. God is not a solitary being, but rather a perfect communion of Persons, who exist eternally in relationship with one another. By analogy, human beings, created in the image of the triune God, also find their identity in relation to God, one another, and the world. Only in the exercise of their social dimensions, and particularly in communion and interpersonal self-giving, can human beings truly be themselves. In the encounter with the other as person, humans find themselves before an image that has not been fashioned by human hands. The language of personhood refers not only to the identity of each individual, but also to the essential relationship with others that lies at the foundation of human community. No person as such is ever alone in the universe. Each person is always constituted with others and is called to form with them a community. Human beings find fulfilment to the extent that the essentially social nature of one’s humanity is fulfilled within the relationships of family, community, and society. This is the reason why

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3. Confessions, Book I, Chapter 1.
Christian ethics and morality cannot be reduced to the individual aspects; rather, responding to everything that pertains to the human being, morality attains to the social dimension as well. It is on the basis of this anthropological reality that John Wesley said: ‘The gospel of Christ knows of no religion but social; no holiness but social holiness’. Life in community is integral to the life of grace and holiness.

**Created for relationship with creation**

20. According to the scriptures, God placed humanity in relation to creation. God both plants the Garden of Eden and assigns to Adam the task of naming the animals (Gen 2.9, 19-20). These stories yield a rich anthropology: humans are made for communion with each other and they are called to care for creation. But they will live only if they maintain their relationship with the God who has created them and given them his very life, and if they remain faithful to God’s commands. The prohibition against eating ‘of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil’ spells this out, ‘for in the day that you eat of it, you shall die’ (Gen 2.17). That tree symbolically evokes the insurmountable limits that the human being, as a creature, must freely recognize and respect with trust. This means that the relationship with God is essential for the human person, as the one absolute dimension from which every other dimension takes its point of reference. The human being was made to be in harmony with God, creation, and neighbour. Another name for this original harmony is holiness, and one of the chief obstacles to holiness is humanity’s refusal to embrace its creaturely limits as gift.

21. Humans need the world that surrounds them for their own subsistence. That is a fundamental experience. But that same relationship of dependence upon the world allows humans to perceive their transcendence of the world. Humanity’s work is a new phenomenon in the cosmos. The human being can be called ‘co-creator’ because with the creation of humans and their ability to transform the reality that surrounds them something new comes into being: new possibilities are found in nature which otherwise would never have been attained. These possibilities in nature, in turn, become new possibilities for humans themselves. Even as they are immersed in the world, human beings show by their very actions that they transcend the world; they are not simply cogs in a machine. Moreover, humans experience a persistent dissatisfaction with their accomplishments, between what they have and what they still desire. Thus, they can hardly expect the world to provide them with the ultimate meaning of life. The world cannot satisfy the longings of the human heart nor provide a satisfying meaning for human existence. Nevertheless, the world is filled with God’s grace, and in caring for it as commanded by the Creator, human beings begin to live their vocation oriented towards communion with the Creator.

22. The witness of Francis of Assisi is confirmation that ‘the dignity of the human race is that it is made in the “image” of God to be the royal representative of the ruler of creation by exercising “dominion” over the world (Gen 1.26). This “dominion” is not a license to exploit the earth, but to nurture and care for it, [even] as God does’ (HEFG §16). The Garden of Eden is named as the first space appointed for the living out of this vocation; it was a place of intimacy with God and harmony with creation (Gen 2.8). Humans now live estranged from this reality. At the same time, they long for the restoration of this original harmony. This longing lies at the root of the call to holiness. According to Pope Francis, ‘It is significant that the harmony which Saint Francis of Assisi experienced with all creatures was seen as a healing of that rupture’ (Laudato si’ §66).

**The human being: body and soul**

23. Human beings are constituted body and soul. Being embodied, humans are subject to space and time and are therefore finite and mortal. Being ensouled, humans transcend the world and are called to immortality. This immortality makes no sense except in communion with God, guaranteeing the continuity of the personal subject between the present life and the fullness of the resurrection, in full conformity to the risen Christ. Thus, any authentic Christian understanding of holiness eradicates all forms of dualism or reductionism. An account of perfection that expects the soul to escape its embodied existence is incapable of recognizing the integrity of the human being in its rich and complex reality.

24. The human being is a mysterious unity. Scripture describes in various ways the embodied and ensouled dimensions of the human being, all of which are necessary to testify to the elusiveness of the reality that these seek to describe. Nevertheless, the human being in its entirety is created in the image of God, and therefore being embodied is essential to personal identity. This perspective excludes interpretations that situate the image of God only in one aspect of human nature or in one of its qualities or functions.

25. Christian theology affirms the goodness of the body. The body is also created by God and subject to final transformation in the resurrection. The negative views of embodiment, which have from time to time clouded the Christian witness to the gift of materiality, need to be eschewed. At the same time, the body is currently weak, fallen, and in need of transformation. In the words of St Paul, ‘we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies’ (Rom 8.23).

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The Fall and Its Effect upon Humankind and Creation

The gift of freedom

26. Created in God’s image in order to share in the communion of the divine life, human beings are constituted with the capacity freely to accept this communion. Humans receive the gift of freedom so that they can love. This freedom, like all aspects of human existence, is finite and limited. Freedom means not only the possibility of choosing between various specific goods or possibilities, but also, and above all, the ability to determine oneself according to one’s own choices. In spite of the obvious creaturely limitations that condition human beings, the power of self-determination is real. Methodists and Catholics believe that ‘there is a real moral order grounded in God; human dignity and freedom are real and crucial; [all people] are called to responsible living in community as well as individually’ (Denver §40). One should speak, therefore, not only of freedom from impediments or restrictions, whether internal or external, but also of freedom for responding to God’s invitation to be holy.

27. Yet with the gift of freedom also comes the possibility of freedom’s own failure. Instead of accepting the supreme good of sharing in the divine life, humans transgressed the limits that were constitutive of their creaturely existence. The human being, made by God in a state of freedom for holiness, abused this liberty at the urging of the Evil One (Gen 3). While a venerable line of theologians has not hesitated to identify ‘pride’ as the first sin, the origins of sin are mysterious. Using figurative language, scripture’s account of the fall affirms a primeval event, a deed that took place at the beginning of human history. Revelation declares that the whole of this history is marked by the original fault freely committed by the first parents of the human species, Adam and Eve. Indeed, this is the world as we encounter it, marked by goodness but also stained by human beings repeatedly turning away from or distorting their relationship with God, others and creation.

The failure of freedom: the reality of sin

28. Scripture portrays vividly the tragic consequences of this first disobedience. Adam and Eve immediately lose their original holiness (Gen 3). The harmony in which they had found themselves is now destroyed. They fear God whom they conceive to be jealously guarding his divine prerogatives. They are estranged from the creation in which God set them and experience even their own bodies as a source of shame. As a result of that first sin, the world is marred by sin. There is Cain’s murder of his brother Abel and the corruption that follows in the wake of this act of violence. Likewise, sin frequently manifests itself in the history of Israel, especially as infidelity to the God of the covenant and as transgression of the Law.

Human estrangement from God

29. The reality of sin, which divine revelation discloses, resonates with human experience. Examining their hearts, humans find that they have inclinations towards evil and are engulfed by manifold ills which cannot come from the good Creator. When human beings refuse to acknowledge God as their Creator, they disrupt their proper relationship to their own ultimate goal as well as their relationship to themselves, other humans, and all created things. Therefore, humans are internally split. As a result, human life entails an unavoidable struggle between good and evil, between light and darkness. Indeed, humans find that they are incapable of battling the assaults of evil successfully on their own and feel as though they are bound by chains (Rom 7.15ff).

30. Methodists and Catholics do not consider the fall as causing the destruction of the image of God. Catholic tradition has always insisted that sin can disfigure or deform God’s image in the human being, but it cannot destroy it. Methodists similarly teach that the fall of Adam and Eve marred, but did not destroy, the image of God. The sinful person is still a human being made in the image of God.

Not without hope

31. God did not abandon human beings after the fall. On the contrary, according to Genesis 3.15, God continues to address his creatures, and in a mysterious way heralds the coming victory over evil and humanity’s restoration from this fall. Catholic tradition reads Genesis 3.15 as the first proclamation of the Gospel (Protoevangelium): the first announcement of the ‘New Adam’, of a battle between the serpent and the woman, and of the final victory of a descendant of hers. The Wesley brothers too heard in this verse an announcement of the redeemer, ‘the woman’s heavenly seed’, ‘the bruiser of the serpent’s head’, who would ‘crush the fiend that crushed us all’. Methodists and Catholics alike hold that God’s saving purposes for humanity are evident from the beginning.

32. God’s love for his fallen creatures is made concrete in salvation history. Methodists can affirm with Catholics that ‘through the patriarchs, and after them through Moses and the prophets, He taught this people to acknowledge Himself the one living and true God, provident father and just judge, and to wait for the Saviour promised by Him, and in this manner prepared the way for the Gospel down through the centuries’ (Dei Verbum §3). In choosing Israel as his own people, God’s call to holiness assumes historical and social particularity. Israel is called to be holy, as the Lord is holy (Lev 11.44). The people of faith named in Hebrews 11 give an eloquent witness to how God has been at work throughout the history of Israel, but also outside it in people such as Rahab (Heb 11.31). These

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persons lived in hope of the coming of one who would be 'the pioneer and perfecter' of their faith (Heb 12.2).
33. The incarnation of the eternal Word and the sending of the Spirit overcome the human estrangement from God, creation, and self, suffered in the fall. Scripture teaches that the remedy for sin has a greater effect than sin itself: 'where sin increased, grace abounded all the more' (Rom 5.20). In the profound words of Pope Francis, God 'does not want anyone to be lost. His mercy is infinitely greater than our sins, his medicine is infinitely stronger than our illnesses that he has to heal.'6 Thanks to God's work of redemption, says John Wesley, 'Hence will arise an unmixed state of holiness and happiness far superior to that which Adam enjoyed in paradise.'7 On account of the triune God's work of salvation, the fall of the first Adam turns out to be a felix culpa, a happy fault,8 because what is gained is greater than what is lost.

Christ, the New Adam, fully reveals the Mystery of the Human Being

Created as image of God and called to be image of Christ

34. The created image (imago Dei) marred by sin is made a new creation in the image of Christ (imago Christi). The theme of the image of Christ is most clearly expressed by St Paul, who proclaimed Christ to be the image of God. Being re-created in the image of Christ does not replace the image of God. Men and women are called to put on Christ and become members of the one body of Christ by accepting his offer of salvation through faith (Gal 3.27-28). God the Father has made human beings to be conformed according to the image of the Son by the power of the Spirit, so that the Son might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters (Rom 8.29). Just as the human being bears the image of the first Adam, moulded from the earth and filled with the breath of the Creator, so too are we made to bear the image of the heavenly Adam, Jesus Christ, in the sharing of his risen body (1 Cor 15.45-49). Christian hope looks to the return of Christ, who 'will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory' (Phil 3.21). Human destiny, therefore, is to be changed from the glory of the first Adam to the glory of the second (2 Cor 3.18). The Christian vocation to holiness is to be conformed to Christ and clothed with his image.

35. In his earthly life, Jesus lived out his eternal relationship as the Son of the Father, as he worked with his hands, loved with his heart, and thought with his mind. In the person of Jesus, all dimensions of human existence became places where his divine relationship with the Father was lived; thus, he hallowed all that it is to be human. The first Adam is a figure of the last Adam. In Christ, the dignity of the first Adam is affirmed, renewed, and elevated. Together, the mystery of creation and the mystery of redemption are the proper foundation for a true understanding of humanity.

36. Being re-created in the image of Christ has an eschatological orientation. Since orientation to Christ is the final goal of human existence, this must have been so from the beginning. The goal of creation and goal of salvation exist in an intimate relation. All has been made through Christ, and all is directed towards him (1 Cor 8.6; Col 1.15-20; Eph 1.3-10; Jn 1.3, 10; Heb 1.2-3). Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end of everything (Rev 1.8; 21.6; 22.13). From this perspective, salvation is above all liberation from sin and reconciliation to God.

The Christian life as a gift already received and as a call to be realized

37. Christian life begins with the recognition of many gifts received: forgiveness, adoption, grace, virtues. These gifts give rise to responsibility; the giver calls the receiver to draw closer. The sisters and brothers of Christ are called to grow to the stature of Christ. Growing to the stature of Christ involves sharing in his divine sonship, that is to say, in the unique relation that Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, has with his Father. This relationship is possible only through the gift of the Holy Spirit in whom all have access to the Father through Christ (Eph 2.18). In other words, holiness consists in living into one's baptismal identity. The holy ones are those who lead lives of constant repentance and conversion in gratitude for God's bounteous gifts and mercies.

38. In Christ, the true vocation of every human being is revealed. Since 'all things have been created through him and for him' (Col 1.16), everything finds in him its direction and destiny. By the Holy Spirit, the vocation of every human being can be realized. The Holy Spirit will bring to completion the final conformity of Christians to Christ in the resurrection of the dead on the final day. But even now Christians share in the glory of the Risen Lord. In time and in history, the end is near, even though not fully here.

In Christ, All the Aspects of Human Existence are Re-created

39. The drama of human existence unfolds in history between the creation and its final consummation. The full meaning of humanity's present existential situation can be found only in Christ. Christ is the one who gives the image of God to the human its true and definitive form: 'through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross' (Col 1.20). In the midst of their sinful existence, humans are pardoned and, through the Holy

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8. Cf. the Exsultet or Easter Proclamation.
Spirit, they know the saving love of God and grow in conformity to Christ.

40. In Christ, human freedom attains its goal – freedom in the Spirit. The Spirit breaks the bonds of sin and self-centredness that enslave humans so that they can enjoy the freedom of the children of God. Jesus reveals the true nature of this freedom. In him, freedom manifests itself as receptivity to the Father and openness towards all people in an attitude of service, mercy and love. 'For freedom Christ has set us free', says St Paul (Gal 5.1). Freedom from sin means freedom for God in Christ and the Holy Spirit; freedom from slavish observance of the law means freedom for joyful obedience; freedom from death means freedom for leading a new life in God. Many saints in the history of the Church have witnessed to this freedom, particularly the martyrs, who freely offered their own lives out of love.

41. In Christ, human existence receives a new and deeper meaning; the whole creation is restored. The human being, as 'co-creator', is called to participate in this work of re-creation of the whole universe. It should not seem strange that from the first centuries, and following the example of the apostolic community (cf. Acts 2.42-44), many Christians have shared a fraternal life in community, placing in common all of their goods, and giving mutual encouragement in discipleship. In these ruled forms of life, which feature in both Catholic and Methodist traditions, Christians praise the Creator and defend the dignity of the human and the integrity of creation. 'In reality, the name for that deep amazement at [human] worth and dignity is the Gospel' (Redemptor hominis §10). St Francis is an excellent bearer of this Gospel: 'He was a mystic and a pilgrim who lived in simplicity and in wonderful harmony with God, with others, with nature and with himself. He shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace' (Laudato si’ §10). But it is not only in consecrated life that Christians participate in the renewal of the face of the earth. By living into their baptismal identity in the ordinary tasks of daily affairs, Christians contribute to the re-creation of the universe. In mutual self-giving and receiving within families, the Church, and wider society, people from all walks of life find the path to their own human fulfilment in love and their sanctification in Christ.

42. 'The glory of God is the human person fully alive, and the life of the human person is the vision of God', writes St Irenaeus of Lyon.9 Human existence and the call to holiness need to be understood together. Being ‘changed from glory into glory’ does not diminish the human. Holiness humanizes. By the grace of Jesus Christ and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, humans are embraced in the love of God, and both discover and realize their true call. This assertion does not empty human life of its mystery. In the words of John, ‘we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is’ (1 Jn 3.2).

Saint Mary of the Cross MacKillop

Mary Helen MacKillop (1824–1909) was born in early colonial Melbourne, Australia, to Scottish parents. Although her father provided for her education, the family was never comfortably off, and Mary had to start work in her teens to help provide for her family. She took work as a governess and so began a life-long ministry in education.

In 1866, Mary and her parish priest Father Julian Tenison Woods fulfilled their dream to found a congregation of religious sisters that would serve the needs of the poor and provide education for children in remote areas. The Rule of Life that Woods and MacKillop produced for the community emphasized a commitment to poverty; depending on divine providence, the sisters were not allowed to own any personal possessions. The Josephites, as they became known, were unusual in that they lived alongside the communities they served, rather than in secluded convents. As well as schools, the order also ran other social institutions such as orphanages and homes for the elderly and sick, but all of its work was united by an unwavering desire to serve the poor, and the order refused to educate the children of affluent families. The order’s principal focus remained that of educating the poor and, as the need was great, both the order and their schools grew rapidly.

During her lifetime, Mary encountered opposition and false accusation, and suffered tribulation at the hands of certain church leaders and even some of her own sisters. For a brief time, she was even excommunicated by her bishop. Her deep faith and especially her devotion to the cross of Christ gave Mary the strength and courage she needed to continue her work, a work that often entailed travelling vast distances. Mary’s vision had no boundaries and she enjoyed the support and friendship of people of all Christian traditions and faiths. She was even buried in a vault paid for by a lifelong Presbyterian friend. The Sisters of St Joseph and their companions who work in many parts of the world continue Mary’s legacy by striving to bring dignity and love to all peoples.

John Sung (Song Shangjie)

John Sung (1901–1944) was the premier Chinese revivalist of the twentieth century, responsible for leading more than 100,000 people, or approximately 10% of all Chinese Protestants, to confess faith in Jesus Christ. As a young man, Sung had himself converted to Christianity after his life deteriorated because of mental illness. When, in the chaos of his mind, he found a way to name Jesus as Lord, his whole life became reordered around his Saviour.

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This experience of divine healing shaped his proclamation of the Gospel. Travelling through China and Southeast Asia as a National Evangelist of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Sung preached a holiness message that emphasized full salvation: Jesus delivered people from both sin and sickness. Total restoration, he emphasized, was the result of entire sanctification, for only the Holy Spirit could cleanse hearts and restore bodies.

Those who responded to Sung’s invitation to enter a holy life were to expect moral integrity to blossom in their lives, for God’s Spirit would lead converts in paths of righteousness. Sung did not preach sinless perfection, but a vivified conscience. His own life provides an example. On one occasion he realized that a series of sermons inexplicably lacked power, until the Holy Spirit reminded him that in days past he had not given to a person who had asked of him (Matt 5:42). Sung tracked down the offended party, confessed his sin, and made restitution. Thus purified from unrighteousness, Sung rejoiced that God began once again to work through his preaching.

In some ways, Sung’s understanding of holy living could sound puritanical, for he demanded that Christians avoid movies, smoking, novels, dancing, plays, and even picnics. Sung, however, explained his position differently. Religion was not the opiate of the people, he argued, but rather these mind-numbing and time-consuming forms of leisure. Instead of using their free time to indulge themselves, converts should spread the Gospel. He organized evangelistic teams everywhere he went, and charged them to save the nation by eradicating sin.\(^{10}\)

\(^{10}\) Material on John Sung drawn from Daryl R. Ireland, ’John Sung: Christian Revitalization in China and Southeast Asia’ (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 2015).

CHAPTER TWO
God’s Work of Re-creating Humankind

43. Having given a shared account of humankind created in the image of God, it is now possible to consider what Catholics and Methodists can say together about God’s work of re-creating humankind. This work reveals the full depth of God’s love because it involves overcoming humankind’s estrangement from God as a result of sin. A central concept in this second chapter is that of ‘grace’. Human salvation is possible only because a loving and merciful God undertakes the work of re-creating humankind through the paschal mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Beginning with a brief summary of the grace of God in the person and work of Christ and the Holy Spirit, this chapter explores the nature and effect of divine grace in its personal and corporate aspects. The chapter concludes by investigating two related issues that have been contentious between Catholics and Protestants: the merit accruing from good works of mercy and piety, and whether it is appropriate to speak of an ‘assurance’ of salvation.

44. It is convenient for purposes of presentation to consider the effect of grace under three sub-headings: the grace that enables, the grace that justifies, and the grace that sanctifies. However, these are not separate effects, as if the work of grace was simply a linear process, but rather related aspects of God’s work of salvation and the call to holiness. In addressing the subject of grace, the Methodist Statement of Association with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification is an important source of basic agreement between Catholics and Methodists (and Lutherans) concerning theological questions that have divided Catholics and Protestants since the Reformation.

The Grace of God in Jesus Christ

45. Catholics and Methodists describe ‘grace’ in similar terms. For Catholics, grace is ‘favour, the free and undeserved help that God gives us to respond to his call to become children of God, adoptive sons [and daughters], partakers of the divine nature and eternal life’ (CCC §1996). For Methodists, grace is ‘God’s sovereign love and favour, freely given to undeserving and hostile people’ (CPM §10). The mystery of salvation is the work of a gracious God through the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ: ‘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’ (Jn 3.16).

46. God’s grace, then, is not an abstract idea but is saving love revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh and the one ‘full of grace and truth’ (Jn 1.14). Christians confess that ‘Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners’ (1 Tim 1.15), and his grace towards humankind is revealed in that ‘he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross’ (Phil 2.8). The grace of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 13.13) is directed towards the salvation of humankind, and it is ‘from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace’ (Jn 1.16).

47. In the mystery of salvation, the grace of Jesus Christ transforms the human nature and its condition, for ‘if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation’ (2 Cor 5.17-18). Being re-created as human beings ‘in Christ’ constitutes a new way of living in the world, reconciled to God and to one another. St Paul urges the members of Christ’s body, the Church, to ‘let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus’ (Phil 2.5). In growing conformity with the mind of Christ, the Christian life is consciously patterned on his earthly life so that those ‘in Christ’ follow his example of holy living.  

48. The saving love of God, which Christians proclaim for all people, is not confined to humankind as if the rest of creation were merely a stage for the drama of human salvation. While the focus of this present report concerns grace at work in human beings...
and communities, the full implications of the biblical view of salvation as new creation are that the work of Christ leads to the fulfilment of God’s purpose for the whole created order and not just for humankind. Consequently, holy living involves Christians witnessing together to the responsibility of humankind for stewardship of the earth (Gen 2.15b), which is God’s good creation (Dublin §22; cf. HEFG).

The Grace of God and the Holy Spirit

49. Luke–Acts describes how the Holy Spirit is constantly present and active in the person and work of Jesus Christ. It is by the power of the Holy Spirit that Mary conceives (Lk 1.35). The Spirit descends upon Jesus at his baptism ‘in bodily form like a dove’ (Lk 3.22). As a result, he is ‘full of the Holy Spirit’ (Lk 4.1) and ‘filled with the power of the Spirit’ (Lk 4.14). The Spirit anoints Jesus to proclaim good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to set the oppressed free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour (Lk 4.18-19).

50. Jesus promises that God the Father will give the gift of the Spirit to those who ask (Lk 11.13). The Spirit will teach the followers of Jesus what to say in a time of trial (Lk 12.12). The risen Lord tells the apostles, ‘you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you’ (Acts 1.8). On the day of Pentecost, the apostles are together ‘filled with the Holy Spirit’ (Acts 2.4), empowering Peter to proclaim that those who repent and are baptized ‘will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’ (Acts 2.1-21). The gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost establishes the Church as a worshipping community of faith (Acts 2.42-46) and not merely a collection of individuals.

51. The Holy Spirit continues to be present and active in the Church throughout the ages, testifying on behalf of Jesus (Jn 15.26), teaching the community of faith and reminding them of his words (Jn 14.26), and guiding the Church into the fullness of the truth revealed in Christ (Jn 16.13). The Holy Spirit is ‘the Spirit of grace’ (Heb 10.29), who makes the grace of Christ present and active, drawing people into a deepening relationship of communion or fellowship with God and with one another. The effect upon the human person is profound: ‘The grace of Christ is the gratuitous gift that God makes to us of his own life, infused by the Holy Spirit into our soul to heal it of sin and to sanctify it’ (CCC §1999).

52. The diverse gifts of the Holy Spirit are always a gift of grace in one form or another. The Spirit bestows these gifts individually for the common good of the Church (1 Cor 12.7; LG §12). There are varieties of spiritual gifts and corresponding services for building up the Church, but the same Spirit (1 Cor 12.4). Besides those spiritual gifts that are associated with the sacraments and authorised ministries, Catholics and Methodists attest the freedom of the Holy Spirit to bestow particular gifts or charisms ‘just as the Spirit chooses’ (1 Cor 12.11). In both Catholic and Methodist traditions, charismatic renewal among the baptised has been a recurring feature.

The Grace that Enables

53. Catholics and Methodists ‘confess together that all persons depend completely on the saving grace of God for their salvation’ (JDJ §19). As sinners, they are incapable of attaining salvation by their own efforts or even of turning by themselves to God to seek deliverance. Living under God’s judgement, they are saved solely as a result of God’s mercy. The initiative in salvation, therefore, rests with God, whose grace precedes and facilitates the human response. In all aspects of God’s work of salvation, the initiative, the agency, and the consummation are the work of the Holy Spirit, who brings Christ to us and leads us to faith in him (Honolulu §15).

54. The Holy Spirit is at work even before individuals come to faith in Jesus Christ since the preparation of people for the reception of grace is already a work of grace (CCC §2001). It is only by God’s grace that human beings have the ‘capacity to respond to salvation offered us through Jesus Christ’.11 Such enabling grace, universally at work in human beings, is what the Council of Trent called ‘prevenient grace’ – a term later used by John Wesley in his account of salvation (Honolulu §14). Since human beings are never without enabling grace, there can be no radical separation of ‘nature’ and ‘grace’; thus, God’s work of salvation in Jesus Christ involves ‘grace upon grace’ (Jn 1.16).

55. Enabling grace is just that, however: it does not remove the need for a free human response to God’s initiative in salvation. Catholics and Methodists reject the idea of universal salvation where this is interpreted as meaning that all will be saved whether or not they freely consent. For Catholics, enabling grace arouses and sustains human collaboration in God’s work of salvation, but still requires a free response (CCC §§2001-2). Likewise, in Methodist understanding, enabling grace ‘assists’ but does not ‘force’ the human response.12 Catholics and Methodists agree together that the ‘person who is saved is saved by grace with free consent’ (in the case of an adult) but not saved by free consent (JCS, p. 89). St Augustine expressed this eloquently: ‘God, who has created human beings without them, will not save them without them’.13

56. The positive human response to God’s saving love is what the New Testament calls repentance. At the outset of his ministry, Jesus proclaimed: ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news’ (Mk 1.15). For Methodists, ‘Repentance is turning in sorrow away from sin and turning to God to seek forgiveness and

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new life in Jesus Christ’ (CPM §4). Similarly, for Catholics, ‘moved by grace, [a person] turns toward God and away from sin’ (CCC §1989). Catholics and Methodists often refer to this first work of the grace of the Holy Spirit in terms of conversion.

57. The person of Mary, the Mother of the Lord, beautifully illustrates enabling grace at work to uniquely powerful effect. ‘She embodies in a special way the freely-given, unmerited grace of God. Mary can be said to be a sign or icon of “grace alone” (vola gratia). By grace alone she was enabled freely and courageously to say her “Yes” to God’s call to her: “I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word” (Lk 1.38). By grace alone, Mary’s poverty of spirit received the gift of becoming the mother of her Lord’ (MML §8).

The Grace that Justifies

58. One of the major controversies of the Reformation concerned the doctrine of justification. A foundational biblical text for the Reformers was Ephesians 2.8-9: ‘For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing: it is the gift of God – not the result of works so that no one may boast.’ For Catholic theologians at that time, the Reformers’ emphasis undermined the necessity for good works in the Christian life: ‘faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead’ (Jas 2.17). These contrasting perspectives became entrenched in seemingly irreconcilable doctrinal differences concerning justification.

59. Given the history of controversy between Catholics and Protestants concerning justification, it is of immense significance that today Catholics and Methodists together confess: ‘By grace alone, in faith in Christ’s saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works’ (JDDJ §15). Even faith is not a human achievement since ‘faith is itself God’s gift through the Holy Spirit who works through word and sacrament in the community of believers’ (JDDJ §16).

60. The New Testament describes in various ways what it means for sinners to be ‘justified’ before God. Justification means liberation from the dominating power of sin and death (Rom 5.12-21) and from the curse of the law (Gal 3.10-14) through the forgiveness of sins (Rom 3.23-25; Acts 13.39; Lk 18.14). Justification unites a sinner with Christ and his death and resurrection (Rom 6.5). Justification means being accepted into a relationship of communion (koinonia) with God – already now, but then fully in God’s coming kingdom (Rom 5.1f; JDDJ §11).

61. Although good works do not contribute to justification, they are its inevitable consequence. Faith in the saving action of God in Christ is always and necessarily active in love and thus results in good works of mercy and piety. Nevertheless, ‘whatever in the justified precedes or follows the free gift of faith is neither the basis of justification nor merits it’ (JDDJ §25).

62. Justification occurs through the reception of the Holy Spirit and incorporation into the body of Christ (Rom 8.1f, 9f; 1 Cor 12.12f), of which the sacrament of Baptism is the effective sign. New birth, cleansing, regeneration, and conversion are all terms used to describe the process by which people are brought by God from the state of sin into the new life in Christ (CPM §15; CCC §§1214, 1987).

63. The grace of justification re-creates the human person, though not necessarily in a permanent state of being. Catholics and Methodists reject the idea that the justified will always persevere in grace to the end. It always remains possible for the justified to depart from grace and fall back into a state of sin, though, even then, the grace of God makes it possible to repent afresh and receive the grace that justifies.

The Grace that Sanctifies

64. Justification is not an isolated event in the Christian life but one aspect of a process of sanctification or being made holy through a deepening relationship with Christ in his body, the Church (Honolulu §13). ‘Justification and sanctification go together as two sides of one coin: distinct but belonging together’ (JCS, p. 88). Having received the grace of justification, the process of sanctification involves a deepening experience of sanctifying grace as the Christian grows in the image of Christ and is drawn more deeply into participation in the divine life of the Trinity (Seoul §110).

65. Sanctifying grace is not only interior to the human soul, but also involves a commitment to holy living in every sphere of human life (cf. Rom 12.1). Catholics and Methodists confess together that good works of mercy and piety are the fruit of justification and an obligation of holy living (JDDJ §37). As such, they belong to God’s victory over sin and death. For Catholics, ‘sanctifying grace is an habitual gift, a stable and supernatural disposition that perfects the soul itself to enable it to live with God, to act by his love’ (CCC §2000). Similarly, for Methodists, sanctifying grace is an habitual disposition such that ‘faith working through love’ (Gal 5.6) produces good works in the lives of the faithful.

66. Holy living itself leads to growth in sanctifying grace. For Catholics, ‘good works, made possible by grace and the working of the Holy Spirit, contribute to growth in grace, so that the righteousness that comes from God is preserved and communion with Christ is deepened’ (JDDJ §38). For Methodists, ‘works of mercy and piety also help the believers to live their lives in communion with God and to be “co-workers with God” (1 Cor 3.7) in the field of God's mission and in ministry to the poor and to those who need the love of God most’ (MAJDDJ §4.7; cf. BDUMC/ART 10).

67. Being committed to holy living should not make Christians complacent about the state of their lives. As noted above, justification is not necessarily a permanent state. Christians must be constantly aware of the danger of backsliding and being caught by the
power of sin (cf. 1 Jn 1.6-9; MAJDDJ §4.4). At the same time, awareness of the ever-present danger of sin should not lead Christians to doubt the effect of sanctifying grace in their lives.

The Universal Call to Holiness

68. The grace that enables, the grace that justifies, and the grace that sanctifies are aspects of God’s saving love and call to holiness. As such, they are always and necessarily related directly or indirectly to the Church: the people of God, the body of Christ, and temple of the Holy Spirit. For the Church itself is a fruit of God’s grace, and its nature and mission belong to the mystery of God’s loving plan for the salvation of all humanity (Seoul §49).

69. Catholics affirm the ‘universal call to holiness in the Church’: since Christ is holy, ‘in the Church, everyone whether belonging to the hierarchy, or cared for by it, is called to holiness’ (LG §39). The call to holiness similarly lies at the heart of Methodism, whose providential mission has been ‘to reform the nation, particularly the Church, and to spread scriptural holiness over the land’.14

70. The call to holiness is addressed to people in their cultural, social, and historical contexts and is thus personal and collective, transcending but not eradicating those contexts. In the Old Testament, God calls the people of Israel to be a light to the nations (Deut 7.6). In the New Testament, the Great Commission is to ‘go therefore and make disciples of all nations’ (Matt 28.19). As the visible community of those who have responded to the call to holiness, the Church in the New Testament already comprises Jews and Gentiles, ‘a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people’ (1 Pet 2.9).

71. As the people of God, ‘The Church is called to be an effective sign to the world of the saving and gathering purpose of God for all humanity, and a foretaste of our final gathering by God in heaven’ (Seoul §62). While elements of grace and holiness exist beyond the visible Church as a result of the work of the Holy Spirit, these are always and necessarily directed ultimately towards incorporation into Christ. All recipients of grace are thereby related or ‘ordered’ to the Church in some way.

72. As God’s chosen agent and instrument of the call to holiness, the Church on earth is essentially missionary, oriented towards the transformation of all things into the new creation in Christ. The work of evangelisation is directed towards bringing all peoples into the community of faith, and developing relationships and social structures that conform to the new creation in Christ.

Perfection in Love and Holiness

73. Jesus exhorts his disciples to ‘be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect’ (Matt 5.48). While absolute perfection belongs to God alone, Catholics and Methodists agree together that ‘sanctification is a process that leads to perfect love’ (Honolulu §18) as Christians grow in grace and devote themselves to the love of God and neighbour. The culmination of holy living and personal growth in grace is perfect love, which Methodists call entire sanctification or Christian perfection (cf. 1 Thess 5.23; Seoul §66).

74. For Methodists, Christian perfection is loving God ‘with all your heart and all your soul and with all your mind’ and ‘your neighbour as yourself’ (cf. Matt 22.37-39; 1 Jn 2.5; MAJDDJ §4.4). Such love ‘does not imply an exemption either from ignorance, or mistake, or infirmities, or temptations’.15 Those who receive sanctifying grace will continue to struggle against temptation and sin. ‘But in this struggle they are strengthened by the promise of the gospel that in Christ God has broken the power of sin.’ Christian perfection is always God’s gift and the work of grace and never the result of human merit or achievement (MAJDDJ §4.4).

75. Although Catholic theology generally does not refer to Christian perfection or entire sanctification as such, Catholic teaching affirms that ‘all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity [...]’. In order that the faithful may reach this perfection, they must use their strength accordingly as they have received it, as a gift from Christ. They must follow in His footsteps and conform themselves to His image seeking the will of the Father in all things. They must devote themselves with all their being to the glory of God and the service of their neighbour. In this way, the holiness of the People of God will grow into an abundant harvest of good, as is admirably shown by the life of so many saints in Church history (LG §40).

76. Catholics and Methodists affirm in their respective ways that perfection in love is possible before death. Catholics emphasise the difficulty in conquering sin because of temptation and self-deception (cf. 1 Jn 1.8). Nevertheless, ‘all the faithful, whatever their condition or state, are called by the Lord, each in his own way, to that perfect holiness whereby the Father Himself is perfect’ (LG §11). Methodists similarly recognize the reality of sin, but emphasise the possibility of perfection in love in the present life since there is no limit to the power of God’s grace. For Wesley, such perfection, which is as much a process as a final state, is the deep desire and goal of holy living – the grace-enabled anticipation in time of the Christian’s sanctification. An historical difference of emphasis between Catholics and Methodists should not obscure this substantial agreement concerning Christian perfection. The lives of the saints in the Catholic tradition and the lives of exemplary Christian persons in the Methodist tradition bear witness to the possibility of perfection in love.


77. Being brought into a final state of perfection in love and holiness is the work of grace. For Catholics, this final state of perfection is for most people attained through a post-death experience of purification, which is traditionally called 'purgatory'. Methodists take seriously those passages in scripture that suggest a process of purification from the effects of sin, but do not accept the Catholic doctrine of purgatory as it was understood and rejected by the Reformers (cf. BDUMC/ART 14). This subject will be addressed in Chapter Four.

Good Works and Merit

78. The question of whether and how Christians acquire 'merit' before God by virtue of their good works of mercy and piety has been controversial between Catholics and Protestants since the Reformation. The Reformers interpreted Catholic teaching on merit as contrary to their core theological conviction that justification is by grace through faith alone. Methodists inherited this perspective; for example, 'we are accounted righteous before God only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for our own works or deservings' (BDUMC/ART 9).

79. Today, however, Catholics and Methodists agree together that 'by grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works' (JDDJ §15). Good works of mercy and piety in the Christian life do not contribute to justification but are its fruit.

80. For Catholics, the possibility that good works in the Christian life acquire merit arises because God has freely chosen to involve human beings in the work of grace. The merit of good works is to be attributed primarily to the grace of God, and only in a derivative way to the faithful (CC §2008). When Catholics affirm the "meritorious" character of good works, they wish to say that, according to the biblical witness, a reward in heaven is promised to these works, which are motivated by love of God and neighbour and not calculated to obtain benefit. Their intention is to emphasize the responsibility of persons for their actions, not to contest the character of those works as gifts, or far less to deny that justification always remains the unmerited gift of grace' (JDDJ §38).

81. Methodists similarly affirm that individuals freely cooperate with the work of grace in such a way that they are fully responsible for their actions. Insofar, then, as good works motivated by love of God and neighbour are 'pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and spring out of a true and lively faith' (BDUMC/ART 10), a gracious God will reward them corresponding to the 'merits' of the human actions involved. Thus, Jesus refers to a 'reward' from God the Father in response to almsgiving, prayer, and fasting (Matt 6.4, 6, 18).

82. Where Catholics and Methodists continue to differ concerns the possibility that the merit arising from the good works of Christians might aid the sanctification of others. For Catholics, such merit denotes the just recompense accruing to a community according to the benefit or harm done to it by one of its members (CC §2006). In the Church, the merit of Christ is shared and celebrated by all. Since the Father's saving love enables Christians to become co-heirs with Christ (Rom 8.17), their prayers for undeserved reward will not go unanswered: 'Moved by the Holy Spirit and by charity, we can then merit for ourselves and for others the graces needed for our sanctification, for the increase of grace and charity, and for the attainment of eternal life. Even temporal goods like health and friendship can be merited in accordance with God's wisdom' (CC §2010).

83. While Catholics affirm the sufficiency and all-embracing value of God's saving action in Christ, nonetheless the bonds of love between Christians make possible a 'wonderful exchange' whereby 'the holiness of one profits others, well beyond the harm that the sin of one could cause others' (CC §1475; Indulgentiarum doctrina §5). The 'treasury of the Church' comprises the infinite value of Christ's merits, together with the 'prayers and good works' of the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the saints of God (CC §§1476-77; Indulgentiarum doctrina §5). By virtue of its power of binding and loosing granted by Christ, the Church 'intervenes in favour of individual Christians and opens for them the treasury of the merits of Christ and the saints to obtain from the Father of mercies the remission of the temporal punishments due for their sins' (CC §1478; Indulgentiarum doctrina §5). The Church's intervention, known as granting an 'indulgence', is on behalf of the departed saints being purified of their sins.

84. Methodists ask why, if Catholics affirm that it is sufficient to rely on the infinite value of Christ's merit to aid individual Christians in their struggle against sin, it should be necessary to maintain the concept of a treasury of merit accruing from the prayers and good works of the people of God. Recognizing the undeserving nature of prayerful appeals to God, Methodist prayers for God's mercy often refer to 'the merit of our Lord Jesus Christ'. To the Methodist way of thinking, any idea that the reward for good works might somehow supplement Christ's merit to the benefit of specific individuals undermines the sufficiency of his saving death and risks creating a mechanistic and transactional view of such works.

85. Nevertheless, the bonds of love between Christians lead Methodists to believe that the prayers of the faithful are mutually beneficial. Fervent intercessory prayer has always been at the heart of Methodist worship, whereby Methodists pray for the application of God's love and mercy for particular
situations and people. Similarly, prayer meetings, in which the ordinary faithful gather to pray for specific concerns, have been a notable feature of Methodism and remain an integral part of congregational life in many Methodist churches. The efficacy of such prayers stems from the belief that God responds graciously and mercifully to interceding by the Church. In that sense, Methodists accept that good works of piety may benefit particular individuals.

86. Some Methodists would further accept that the prayers of the departed saints and the prayers of the saints on earth may also be mutually beneficial, albeit in ways that cannot be identified precisely in terms of their salvific effect. Following John Wesley’s example, authorised liturgies in a number of Methodist churches make provision for a general prayer of intercession for the faithful departed. Further theological reflection on the implications of the bonds of love within the communion of saints may lead to greater convergence between Catholics and Methodists concerning the possibility of an ‘exchange’ whereby the holiness of one benefits others.

The Assurance of Faith and Salvation

87. ‘Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things unseen’ (Heb 11.1). The Letter to the Hebrews urges that ‘since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water’ (Heb 10.19-22).

88. What the Letter to the Hebrews calls ‘the assurance of things hoped for’ or the ‘full assurance of faith’ stems from God’s promises in Christ. Catholics and Methodists ‘confess together that the faithful can rely on the mercy and promises of God. In spite of their own weakness and the manifold threats to their faith, on the strength of Christ’s death and resurrection they can build on the effective promise of God’s grace in Word and Sacrament and so be sure of this grace’ (JDDJ §34).

89. Being sure of God’s grace stems from the trustworthiness of God’s promises and is confirmed by the interior work of the Holy Spirit: ‘Christian religious experience includes the assurance of God’s unmerited mercy in Christ, the inner witness of the Spirit that [Christians] are indeed children of God, pardoned and reconciled to the Father (Rom 8.12-17)’ (Honolulu §24). Such experience of the ‘full assurance of faith’ is part of the Catholic and Methodist traditions. Famously, on 24 May 1738, John Wesley’s heart was ‘strangely warmed’ in an experience of ‘assurance’ that God had taken away his sins and freed him from sin and death. In the Catholic tradition, there are lives of saints recorded that manifest this same joyous assurance of faith (e.g., Philip Neri).

90. But how, and in what sense, might it be possible to speak of an ‘assurance of salvation’? In the past, when Catholics heard Methodists speak of having the assurance of salvation they considered this to be a presumptuous assertion based on subjective experience. For their part, when Methodists heard Catholics question such experience, they considered this to reject the work of the Holy Spirit. In fact, the difference is one of emphasis and does not constitute a substantial disagreement between Catholics and Methodists in understanding the nature of Christian assurance. The objective work of salvation and the subjective awareness of that salvation coalesce in dynamic personal experience.

91. For Catholics, to have faith is to trust in God. No one can have faith in God and at the same time consider the divine promise untrustworthy. Recognizing their own weaknesses, shortcomings, and failures, believers may yet be certain that God intends their salvation (JDDJ §36). ‘Reflection on God’s blessings in our life and in the lives of the saints offers us a guarantee that grace is at work in us and spurs us on to even greater faith’ (CCC §2005). Having confidence in an assurance that saving grace is at work in them should not lead Christians to suppose they are thereby assured of salvation in any sense that denies the possibility of falling away from grace.

92. For Methodists, the assurance of salvation comes ‘through the promises given us in the Bible, by the inner assurance given us by the Holy Spirit, by the evidence in our actions of God’s working within us, and through the encouragement of fellow Christians’ (CPM §18). The experience of assurance is a treasured feature of Methodist piety, not as a guarantee of perseverance, which removes the need for hope, but as the Holy Spirit’s endowment of an inner conviction of having received saving grace (Seoul §120). As such, ‘assurance of faith and assurance of salvation have always belonged to the core of Methodist preaching. Such assurance is not seen as the certainty of possession, but as the reliability of a relationship which is founded in God’s love. This relationship is lived by using the “means of grace”, especially searching the Scriptures and receiving the Lord’s Supper’ (MAJDDJ §4.6). The assurance of salvation does not amount to an assurance of final salvation since it remains possible to fall from grace.

Phoebe Worrall Palmer

Phoebe Worrall was born in New York City in 1807 to devout Methodist parents, who nurtured her in the Christian faith through prayer, Bible study, and twice-daily family worship. From childhood, Phoebe desired to experience the emotional and datable conversion attested by others, but her spiritual longing would persist until 1837, ten years after her marriage to the Methodist physician Walter Clarke Palmer. On July 26, what she subsequently would describe as the ‘day of
days’, she perceived that the Holy Spirit was leading her into an absolute and unconditional covenant with God.

Motivated out of heartfelt love for God and the aspiration to promote holiness, Phoebe held weekly prayer meetings for women – a practice that soon spread beyond her home and eventually permitted men. A powerful public speaker and preacher, she appealed for her hearers to place everything upon God’s altar that they might become perfect in love. Teaching that holiness necessarily issued forth in service to society and neighbour, Phoebe was an example by her support of the temperance movement and the abolition of slavery, and by her involvement with the Methodist Ladies’ Home Missionary Society. She is credited with being a founding director of the Five Points Mission in the slums of Lower Manhattan.

Several publications bear her name, among them: The Way of Holiness (1843, which went through multiple printings), Entire Devotion to God (1845), and Faith and its Effects (1848). She was a regular contributor to Guide to Holiness, and at the end of her life was the publication’s editor. Because of her life example and her literary contributions, Phoebe is often described as the ‘mother of the holiness movement’. Phoebe Palmer died in New York City on 2 November 1874. She continued to hold Tuesday prayer meetings right up to the time of her death.

### Blessed Frédéric Ozanam

Blessed Frédéric Ozanam combined his family life and professional life with a deep love for the poor and a dedication to relieving their suffering. His example has inspired many men and women within the Society of St Vincent de Paul throughout the world to be active in the care of the needy. The Society is well known and respected for its practical spirituality and ministry.

Born in Milan in 1813 and brought up in Lyon, Frédéric became a lawyer. He contributed to French Catholic intellectual life through his writings and association with leaders of the neo-Catholic movement of the early nineteenth century such as François-René de Chateaubriand, Jean-Baptiste Henri Lacordaire, and Charles René de Montalembert. He was also deeply involved in a discussion group with students, which often focused on the social teaching of the Gospel.

It was in this latter context that one of his adversaries pressed him regarding his Church’s engagement with the poor of Paris. Stung by this challenge, Frédéric and a friend began to visit the tenements of Paris. Moved with compassion for the destitute they found there, in May 1833 Frédéric founded the Society of St Vincent de Paul. This association of laymen served those in need, inspired by the example of St Vincent de Paul (1581-1660) and under the influence of Sister (now Blessed) Rosalie Rendu, Daughter of Charity, who was prominent in her service of the poor in the slums of Paris. During a cholera epidemic, his newly founded society assisted the sick and became living examples of Christian faith in action in the 12th arrondissement of Paris.

Ozanam combined the intellectual and academic life of the university with his service of the poor and destitute. He died from consumption at the age of forty in 1853. Under his inspiration, the Saint Vincent de Paul Society has grown and is now present in countless parishes in many different countries. The practical spirituality of this organisation has helped many Catholic lay people to find a life of holiness serving the needs of those less fortunate than themselves.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### God’s Holy People: The Saints Below

93. The life of holiness for the Christian is fundamentally a walking with the risen Christ. In Luke’s Gospel, the first encounter with Jesus after the resurrection takes place on a road – where bewilderment, anxiety, and doubt are transformed on recognising Jesus’ presence (Luke 24.13-35). Through conversations about the scriptures, and through fellowship and the breaking of bread, Cleopas and his companion meet their risen Lord, their hearts ‘burning within them’. It is this encounter that turns them around on their road to go back to the disciples in Jerusalem. Here they share the good news of Jesus’ resurrection and abiding presence, and move the apostolic household another step along the road of mission in and to the world. It is this same journey into holiness and mission to which this chapter now turns.

#### The Church: A Holy People

94. Catholics and Methodists affirm the social nature of holy living. ‘Being a Christian has necessarily both a personal and a communal aspect. It is a vital relationship to God in and through Jesus Christ in which faith, conversion of life, and membership in the Church are essential. Individual believers are joined in a family of disciples, so that belonging to Christ means also belonging to the Church which is his body’ (Nairobi §11). It is this belonging together as Christ’s body that characterises the communal practice of holy living for Methodists and Catholics. We are called to be holy together, as Church.

95. Previous reports from this Commission reveal a substantial common understanding of the nature of the Church despite some obvious differences in our respective ecclesial practices. A shared conviction that the Church is essentially missionary, and a common commitment to the life of grace and holiness as socially embodied, are key beliefs: ‘both Catholic and Methodist churches are now concerned with structures and with holiness and mission, and indeed with the relationship among them. We agree that the Church’s structures must effectively serve both the holiness of its
members and the mission of the Church’ (Seoul §101; cf. CLP §4.7.10).

96. The holiness of the Church is that of a people on the road, on pilgrimage, and so has the quality of both a present reality through the presence of the risen Jesus, who walks with us, and of a promise of holiness towards which disciples travel, step by step. The Church on its pilgrim way is still possessed of the sins and failings of its members, yet unmistakably oriented towards its future fulfilment in God. It is in this sense that Catholics and Methodists confess together, in the words of the Nicene and Apostles’ Creeds, their belief in the church as holy.

97. The eschatological orientation of ecclesial life gives a theological context in which to locate and resolve some historically divisive issues, such as whether the Church itself is sinful. Catholics emphasise that the Church as an eschatologically present reality in the world is without sin, even though its individual members may be sinful. The Church is sancta simul et semper purificanda – ‘at the same time holy and always in need of being purified’ and so ‘always follows the way of penance and renewal’ (LG §8). The eschatological reality of the Church in Christ, however, does not find sinless expression in the fallen world, where church members, along with some church processes, bear the marks and weakness of sin.

98. Methodists, whilst also affirming the holiness of the Church, emphasise that ecclesial structures can themselves be affected by sin. The Methodist reluctance to claim that the Church is sinless reflects a sensitivity to the risks in such a proposition, which can lead to a failure to repent and reform when sin occurs in the Church. Holiness can never simply be reduced to a possession or an unquestioned characteristic of the Church, but must always be understood as God’s action and free gift.

99. These contrasting emphases are not mutually exclusive, though they have implications for the way that Methodists and Catholics respectively speak of the Church, its institutional forms, and the possibility and limitations of authoritative discernment. The implications are significant and underlie many persisting differences and divisions among Christians, especially concerning the relationship between the Church ‘visible’ (its historical, institutional reality) and ‘invisible’ (its spiritual reality in Christ). Although Catholics and Methodists each understand these realities to be related to one another, they differ in the way they describe that relationship. For Methodists, the correlation between the visible and the invisible Church is less theologically precise than it is for Catholics. Whilst such basic ecclesiological differences are not addressed here, they shape the context in which Methodists and Catholics respectively practice holy living.

100. The idea of the pilgrim journey lies at the heart of all aspects of the Church and Christian life. The risen Christ appears on the road from Jerusalem, and in the gathering of disciples in Jerusalem (Lk 24.36ff), but his message is always the same – to move his friends from fear and doubt to faith and joy, so as to send them out into the world as witnesses to his resurrection (Lk 24.48-49). There is a proper sense in which Christian communities can be understood as ‘households’ of grace and holiness. As such, they are places of sending out and return, equipping the people of God for God’s mission in and for the world. Thus, mission and service are characteristic of the call to holiness.

101. The Church, as the household of grace always preparing to set out on the road, is holy in that it communicates assuredly the blessings and graces of Christ’s paschal mystery. This common belief in the Church as holy should never mask the realities of the Church as the home of sinners and a place of human brokenness or, to use the words of Pope Francis, as a ‘field hospital’. For the Christian community, holiness is lived through the practices of love despite, and in, our woundedness. As a people shaped by the Lord’s Prayer, Methodists and Catholics together know themselves to be a people totally dependent on God, the Father, who provides for all the needs of his children, and a forgiven people called to forgive and embody God’s loving plan for a broken world. The holiness of the Church is not the product of Christian endeavour, but rather a free gift of God, which calls for gratitude, humility, and a desire to share this gift with all.

102. The language of sacrament provides an approach for a shared understanding of the nature of the Church. This language is especially strong for Catholics, for whom ‘the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race’ (LG §1). As the body of Christ, the Church is not simply one means of grace among others, but is the essential means of grace for the world. At the same time, it is not that the Church is a sacrament, in the same way as the Eucharist, for example; rather, the Church is like a sacrament as a visible, concretely realised, and assured means of grace in the world.

103. Methodists also affirm that the Church is a means of grace. The Church itself, as sign, instrument, and foretaste of the kingdom of God, is grace-filled and instrumental in conferring grace (CLP §1.4.1; §3.1.7; §3.2.1; cf. Seoul §102). Again, as the ‘redeemed fellowship’ in Christ, the Church is grace-filled; as the ‘redeeming fellowship’, it is a means of grace (BDUMC/CON 5). Methodists agree with Catholics that the Church is sacramental in character, although they reserve the term ‘sacrament’ to describe Baptism and the Eucharist alone (cf. Seoul §102).

Building on this common sense of the Church as the sacramental and missionary means of grace for the world, the sections that follow explore the ecclesial practices of the Church that seek to nurture the holy living and mission of God’s pilgrim people. Beginning with the liturgical celebration of sacraments and rites in our churches, the following sections move on to shared thinking around practices of social justice, ethics, and personal and public devotions before reflecting on our traditions’ approaches to dying and death as the end of the Christian’s pilgrimage on earth.

The Household of Grace: Holy Living and the Sacraments

Just as Jesus, the incarnate Word, communicated with people through the senses, so in the Church Christians meet Christ in ways consistent with our human existence as embodied and social beings. The economy of salvation is sacramental in nature; God uses particular sensory experiences (sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste) in order to mediate grace assuredly, inviting men and women into a deepening relationship of communion or fellowship with God and one another, and calling them to holy living. Liturgies and worship practices, and especially the sacraments and preaching, are public ecclesial ways of nurturing holy living in the world.

For both Catholics and Methodists, the sacrament of Baptism is ‘a vocation – a continuous call into a life of pilgrimage toward the kingdom’ (Durban §68); ‘being baptised is a living, continuous reality’ (Durban §67). As a lifelong sacramental gracing of the Christian’s journey, Baptism is that participation in Christ that enables our hearts to burn with the Spirit as we hear God’s word, and brings us to communion with Christ in the breaking of bread, consecrating us for the holy work of God’s mission.

Despite certain differences in belief regarding the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, Methodists and Catholics affirm together that ongoing participation at the Eucharist renews the faithful for mission and holy living. In the breaking of the bread, Christ is truly present, and believers are sent out on the road to bear new witness to him. The Eucharist is food for the pilgrim journey which transforms disciples more and more into the likeness of God’s own Son (cf. Seoul §94). For Catholics, the Eucharist is the ‘source and summit of all the Christian life’ (SC §7; LG §11). For Methodists, the Lord’s Supper is among the chief means of grace.18

For Catholics, Baptism and Eucharist, along with confirmation, constitute the sacraments of initiation. Methodists regard Baptism as the single sacrament of initiation, but agree that Baptism usually culminates with participation in the Eucharist. Methodists may also have a supplementary rite of confirmation or some other liturgical form of reception into ‘full membership’ of the Church, which for some Methodists may be like a sacrament in character. Rites of confirmation, for Catholics and for Methodists who practise them, deepen the bonds of relationship that bind persons to the Christian community and strengthen growth in holiness for mission, through the power of the Holy Spirit (Durban §70).

Catholics identify four further sacraments: matrimony, holy orders, penance and reconciliation, and the anointing of the sick. Methodists recognise a sacramental character to these rites without naming them as sacraments. Such rites call upon the Lord to confer grace for the holiness of the individual Christian and that of the household of faith. The two principal rites of vocation for adults – marriage and orders – give structure to the household. Prior to each rite there is a strong tradition of discernment, a prayerful questioning: to what is God calling me, and where do I belong within the Christian community? These questions properly belong together. The grace given and the holiness sought in married or ordained life is always rooted in the context of the community of faith, but lived in service to the world beyond. Sacramental grace is always conferred upon the individual, but destined for the gracing of the wider community.

In addition to the married and ordained states, many Christians have felt called to holiness in the single life or in various forms of consecrated and community life. Historically, for Catholics, consecrated modes of life have often been inspired by a charismatic founder. In some cases, the emphasis has been a particular approach to prayer. In other cases, the charisma has been a mode of evangelical life that reinvigorates the spiritual life of the Church. Still more communities were established to respond to particular needs such as poverty, education or health. For Catholics and Methodists alike, community life and emerging forms of consecrated life continue to be discovered and lived with integrity as Christians prayerfully discern how God is calling them to respond to the Gospel and the needs of the world. There is no hierarchy between the various states of Christian life: all are called to avenues to, and expressions of, holiness (cf. LG §39).

In all forms of life – and often very publicly in ordained ministry and married life – there are tragedies of sin, weakness, and human frailty. The earthly pilgrimage into holiness is marked not only by Christ’s presence but also by weakness and sin. Here, too, the ecclesial celebrations of our communities seek to nurture the holy life. Catholics and Methodists stand together in their commitment to a vision of the Church as a community close to those in want; close particularly to those whose sin, weakness, and marginalisation leaves them in need of compassion, accompaniment, and the binding of wounds. Holiness is not primarily about success in being good, but rather about being open in all the brokenness and giftedness of human life to God’s transforming grace.

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112. In response to the reality of sin, weakness, and frailty, Catholics recognise two sacraments of healing: penance and reconciliation (commonly called ‘confession’), and the anointing of the sick. Whilst Methodists do not name such rites as sacraments, they count them among the ‘prudential means of grace’ (Nairobi §13; Brighton §§59-60).

113. Methodists have a long history of the careful and communal examination of conscience: in early Methodism, small groups such as the weekly class meeting provided a forum for such examination. The same desire to engage with the question ‘How is it with your soul?’ and to speak freely about obstacles to holy living can also be recognised in the Catholic instinct towards the confessional and the tradition of a nightly examination of conscience. For Catholics and Methodists, rites of self-examination, repentance, and reconciliation are intended to be core practices of a pilgrim people.

114. In continuation of Jesus’ healing ministry, Christians from earliest times prayed with, laid hands upon, and anointed those amongst them who were ill (Jas 5.14-15). Catholics and Methodists alike have seen caring for the sick as an intrinsic part of holy living, which has included the establishment of health facilities and places for tending to the infirm. In these and other ways, both our traditions find a place for physical frailty within the life of those called to holiness. Indeed, sickness itself can be transformed by grace into a particular form of holy living and service.

115. Whilst participation in these sacraments and rites does not, of itself, necessarily constitute holy living, nevertheless such events are particular and effective moments in the reception of grace strengthening a pilgrim people traversing a difficult terrain. For Methodists and Catholics, the graces conferred in the household of the Church are always oriented to the living of holiness in and for the world, which compels disciples out on to the road to recognise the Lord’s presence there in new and sometimes surprising ways.

Shared Practices of Holy Living

116. The importance of the sacraments and other liturgical celebrations in the life of the Church should not be allowed to eclipse the many other practices of holiness in the world, which also are constituent of holy living. Central to these is the reading and study of the scriptures, in personal as well as communal settings. Sacred scripture is ‘the highest authority in matters of faith’ (Ut unum sint §79) and thus a privileged means of encountering the life of God. As we journey in holiness, ‘it is Christ, through the Holy Spirit, who opens our minds to understand the Scriptures’ (Seoul §55), firing our hearts anew. For both Catholics and Methodists, public worship necessarily includes the faithful reading of the scriptures, which is itself a means of grace for nurturing growth in holiness (Rio §107).

117. Both Catholic and Methodist traditions encourage Bible reading and study in small groups as well as regular personal reading of the scriptures. This aspect of holy living has undergone significant renewal among Catholics in the last two generations. At the Second Vatican Council, St Jerome’s saying that ‘ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ’ was invoked in order to encourage ‘all the Christian faithful […] to learn by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures the “excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ” (Phil 3.8)’ (Dei Verbum §25). This renewal of scriptural devotion draws us two communions into a deepening relationship, as increasingly Christians are able to read and study the scriptures together.

118. In different ways both Catholics and Methodists have sought to describe the characteristics of personal holiness from a particular reading of the scriptures, notably the Beatitudes and the New Testament Epistles. Thus John Wesley referred to a ‘holy disposition’ or ‘holy tempers’ as a way of giving a more detailed and practical account of what holiness looks like in the Christian. A holy ‘disposition’ or ‘temper’ is an orientation of the human heart (i.e., the will) towards God, resulting in particular behaviours. Holy tempers are ‘stable, orienting dispositions’ that stem from the love of God, arising out of grace and human responsibility. Hence, Wesley could speak of ‘working out’ one’s own salvation. Such holy tempers include humility, meekness, and simplicity. In comparison, ‘affections’ are more ‘transient’ (Wesley’s word), less enduring and habituated, and include the temporary experience of joy, hope, gratitude, fear, holy mourning, and peace. Tempers are foundational and even inform the affections.

119. This Wesleyan language of holy tempers, with its strong emphasis on basic dispositions and habits that shape the affections, has a good deal in common with the Catholic language of virtues. St Gregory of Nyssa makes clear the role of the virtues in the Christian call to holiness: ‘The goal of a virtuous life is to become like God’. As with Wesley’s ‘tempers’, the virtues are not themselves acts, but rather orient the whole person to what is good and so shape a person’s actions and decisions (cf. CCC §1803). For the Catholic tradition, growth in virtue requires human effort, especially in relation to the moral virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. At the same time, it is the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, which originate in God and the gift of the Holy Spirit, that are the foundation of all Christian moral life: ‘they are the pledge of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in the faculties of the human being’ (CCC §1813).

120. The Christian life of holiness is characterised by the joyful proclamation of the risen Christ as he is encountered on the road: ‘Woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel!’ (L Cor 9.16; cf. Rom 10.14-15). This witness requires a profound engagement with the complexity of the world and the diversity of human cultures. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, giving an account of Christian hope requires all the intelligence and skill that disciples can bring to the task.

Methodists and Catholics agree together that Christians witness to the Gospel and evangelise not only, or even primarily, through their words, but above all by holy living as characterised by personal faithfulness and Gospel-based action in the world.

121. Both Catholics and Methodists have long traditions of witness to the Gospel through active engagement with the world in service to God’s reign, and can together speak with a common voice into the places of power and decision-making. Thus, holiness is practical as well as spiritual. Holy living is expressed socially in the pursuit of justice and in acts of mercy. It is, for example: to speak into political debates concerning the environment and how human beings are called to inhabit God’s creation; to welcome the stranger, offer sanctuary to the foreigner, protect the vulnerable, and confront human enslavement and trafficking; to challenge unjust social structures and promote the development of the poor by working for improved access to education, healthcare and employment with a just wage; and to eradicate the structural causes of poverty.20 Such holy living will require personal and corporate divestment of status and privilege in solidarity with those being served, so as to be a ‘church that is poor and for the poor’, thereby embodying God’s compassion and love for the world.

122. Works of holiness in and for the world are deeply rooted in the practice of prayer in all its corporate and personal forms. Many of these are common to the Catholic and Methodist traditions: private and family prayers; the singing of Christian songs and hymns; pilgrimages to holy sites and shrines; quiet days and spiritual retreats. Similarly, both Catholics and Methodists encourage fasting and almsgiving as foundations both for growth in personal holiness and as acts of charity and solidarity with others. In many parts of the world, such holy practices are lived out ecumenically with fellow Christians.

Areas for Continuing Dialogue

123. Whilst there is much that Methodists and Catholics hold in common in terms of holy living in the world, there are also areas of unease and difference. In particular, there are a number of devotional practices traditional in Catholic life that raise questions, and even some alarm, for Methodists. Particular areas of Methodist discomfort relate to the Catholic emphasis on certain bodily gestures, the use and veneration of images, the blessing of inanimate objects, and specific devotions regarding Mary, the saints, the veneration of relics, and adoration of the Eucharist. The particular concern is whether the centrality of the person and work of Jesus Christ is in danger of being obscured and whether the Gospel is in danger of being compromised by superstition. Whilst some Methodists appreciate the use of Christian images in worship, devotions and education, they also share John Wesley’s concern that ‘what were at first designed as monuments of edification, became the instruments of superstition’.21

124. Nevertheless, in many parts of the world, Methodists are beginning to rediscover a more sensual or embodied spirituality as a way towards holiness, through the use of candles and religious artefacts in worship, anointing with oil, and devotional practices related to the liturgical year. Such developments not only reflect something of the holistic spiritual sensibilities of contemporary Western culture, but also revive the strong sacramentality of the Wesleyan tradition, and so open ways into a deeper understanding of more especially Catholic devotions.

125. Devotional practices spring from the hearts and life of faithful people in particular places and times, and so necessarily reflect cultural and contextual features. This means that certain devotional practices in one part of the world may seem strange or even alien elsewhere, even to those of the same ecclesial tradition. The ecclesial discernment of what constitutes appropriate devotional practice is a delicate task for both Methodists and Catholics.

126. Characteristic of many traditional Catholic devotions is an instinct for the embodied nature of holiness. ‘Genuine forms of popular religiosity are incarnate, since they are born of the incarnation of Christian faith in popular culture. For this reason they entail a personal relationship, not with vague spiritual energies or powers, but with God, with Christ, with Mary, with the saints. These devotions are fleshy, they have a face. They are capable of fostering relationships and not just enabling escapism’ (Evangelii Gaudium §90). Yet the Roman Catholic Church also expresses caution in regard to some devotional practices that have taken exaggerated forms and may be considered false expressions of piety (cf. LG §67).22 In this task, Catholics can be aided by the observations of their Methodist brothers and sisters.

127. Methodists and Catholics together recognise on the basis of scripture the unique role of Mary as Jesus’ Mother and God-bearer (Theotokos) (Matt 1.18-25; Lk 1.26-29), holy exemplar (Lk 2.19, 51), advocate for the poor and lowly (Lk 1.46-55), and disciple (Acts 1.12-14). Catholics also name Mary as intercessor (Jn 2.5) and Mother of all Christians (Jn 19.26-27). Whereas Methodists have no tradition of Marian devotion, Catholics have a significant tradition of devotions relating to the Mother of Our Lord: Marian prayers and anthems, praying the rosary, feast days, processions, and pilgrimages to sites of Marian

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real communion that the saints on earth have with the saints in heaven.

131. These devotional practices spring from the natural human desire to visit the graves of those we love, and to remember them by retaining certain of their possessions. Methodists similarly reverence special objects and places including the sites associated with significant figures in the Methodist tradition. Catholics would ask Methodists if they might be more accepting of the practice of venerating relics if understood in humanly affective ways. At the same time, Catholics might appropriately be challenged by the Methodist concerns about the attendant risk of idolatry; for even a very holy thing can become a focus for sinful idolatry. For both Catholics and Methodists, popular devotion to holy relics must always be properly discerned so that it does not detract from the worship of God alone.

**Holy Dying**

132. Holy living comes to its natural conclusion in death as the end of the pilgrim journey on earth. Catholics and Methodists believe that holy dying is part of holy living, and that the people of God witness to the Gospel in the manner of their dying. Edifying accounts of holy dying have inspired and encouraged the faithful in every generation as they contemplated the prospect of their own death. The possibility of seeking a ‘good death’ in the hope of the resurrection to eternal life is a powerful witness to the Gospel in the face of contemporary social trends where the end of life is regarded as a negative experience to be hastened. Holy dying comes to its natural conclusion in death as the end of t

133. In the Catholic tradition, a ‘good death’ has been a consistent theme for corporate and private prayer. At the end of life, the prayers and rites of the Church support holy living in the particular form of holy dying. Through repentance and the confession of sins in the sacrament of reconciliation, and in the anointing of the sick, the dying person is strengthened to undertake his or her final journey. In these special circumstances, the dying person receives the Eucharist as ‘food for the journey’ (viaticum). The passing from this life through death is thus a profound moment of grace. Such a reverence for the end of life and the desire to enable holy dying continues to find expression today in the hospice movement advocated by Catholics and other Christians.

134. In a similar way, early Methodists believed that holy living prepared a person for the experience of holy dying, with a ‘good death’ regarded as a powerful and exemplary witness to Christ. Thus inspirational accounts of holy dying were often published in Methodist literature. Dying was viewed as an opportunity for further growth in grace, and so was often accompanied at the bedside by prayer, the singing of hymns, the reading of scripture, and sharing in the Lord’s Supper. Today, Methodists continue to follow these and similar rites and practices with the dying and at the time of death. Some liturgical resources draw upon prayers from the Catholic tradition, such as ‘Go

apparitions. Many of these Marian devotions raise concerns for Methodists.

128. For Catholics, authentic Marian devotion draws the Christian into a closer relationship with God’s incarnation and humanity in Jesus through the mystery of Mary’s motherhood by the power of the Spirit. Although Marian devotion as such is not obligatory, whenever Catholics address Mary as ‘Mother’ or pray to and with her, they are expressing a natural, loving response to the mystery of this faithful woman in whose flesh God becomes incarnate, and in whose maternal love and care all people can trust. Catholics look to Mary as one who knows Jesus in a privileged and unique way; Marian devotions are simply expression of love for her.

129. A staple of Catholic devotional life is the ‘Hail Mary’ and particularly the rosary. While the origins of the rosary remain obscure, it is clear that, through the middle ages, the development of the 150 Hail Marys arranged in fifteen meditations or mysteries became established as a lay alternative to the monastic recitation of the 150 Psalms of the Divine Office: a means to holiness for the vast majority of the faithful who at that time would have been illiterate. These meditations reflect on the incarnation (joyful mysteries), the passion (sorrowful mysteries), and the resurrection (glorious mysteries). In 2002, Pope St John Paul II added five new mysteries (luminous mysteries), focusing on the life and ministry of Jesus. Catholics understand the rosary as ‘a Gospel prayer’ (Marialis, §§44), and its repeated prayers may be seen as means of entering into contemplation of the incarnation, ministry, suffering, and resurrection of Christ. Through its recitation, the Christian draws closer to Jesus in loving companionship with his Mother, the Mother of all Christians and the exemplary disciple: pondering, as she did, these things in her heart. ‘In the spiritual journey of the Rosary, based on the constant contemplation – in Mary’s company – of the face of Christ, this demanding ideal of being conformed to him is pursued through an association which could be described in terms of friendship’ (RVM, §15). Catholics invite other Christians to recognise the spiritual benefit of praying the rosary to deepen their relationship with Jesus.

130. The Catholic practice of the veneration of relics causes concern for many Methodists. Though less common than it once was, the veneration of relics – often taken from the bodies or personal possessions of saints – is a long-established tradition within Catholicism. Permanent altars in Catholic churches typically include in their structure small relics of a saint related in some way to the community. This custom dates back to the ancient practice of celebrating the Eucharist in the catacombs or in cemeteries, where the tombs of the martyrs and other faithful departed were used as altars, thereby emphasising Christian belief in the resurrection of the body. Praying at the tombs of the saints, and venerating their relics, extends this practice. These affective actions give tangible expression to the
forth, Christian soul’ (Proficiscere) (e.g., UMBW, p. 167; MWB, p. 431).

135. Methodists and Catholics share an understanding of dying as a graced experience, even in the face of suffering and loss. Therefore, holy dying is not simply a private affair or something exclusively for a spiritual elite. On the contrary, belief in holy dying informs Catholics and Methodists in their contribution to the spheres of public policy making and social and medical care, where the call to holiness finds expression in respecting the dignity of the dying and those close to them, and in presenting a vision of the end of life as a place of love, patience, care, and hope. At a time when, increasingly, dying is seen as ‘a waste of time’, and moves are being made towards the legalization of euthanasia and assisted suicide, Methodists and Catholics can speak together to political authorities to challenge some secular approaches to the end of life which demean the dying.

**On the Road to Jerusalem — and Beyond**

136. This chapter has investigated the ways in which Catholic and Methodist churches enable and accompany God’s pilgrim people in their growth in holiness. Implicit in the living of holiness – through the encounter with the risen Christ in scripture and sacraments, in prayer and action – is a call to life with God in beatitude. The journey of the Christian is a journey into the heart of the Trinity, into the perfect love which is the beginning and end of holiness. These reflections on holy living by pilgrims on ‘the way’ lead to a consideration of the ‘saints above’ and the final goal of holy living.

**Saint Josephine Bakhita**

Josephine Bakhita (a name which means ‘fortunate’) was canonised in 2000 and is recognised as a saint because of her holiness and the way in which she overcame unspeakable sufferings, discovered human freedom, and came to trust and profess faith in her Saviour, Jesus Christ. Born in the region of Darfur in southern Sudan in 1869, Bakhita was kidnapped as a young girl and sold into slavery in the markets of El Obeid and Khartoum. Her owners treated her cruelly and she bore the physical scars of this suffering for the remainder of her life. Eventually she was bought by the Italian consul Callisto Legnani, who treated her well and showed her respect through small gestures of kindness. When Legnani had to return to Italy for political reasons, Bakhita obtained permission to travel with his family and so began the passage towards freedom. After spending some time with another family, she was entrusted to the Canossian Sisters in Venice. There she came to know about the God she had acknowledged since childhood: ‘I remembered how, as a child, when I contemplated the sun, the moon, the stars, and all the beautiful things of nature, I was wondering, “who is the master of it all?” And I felt a keen desire to see Him, know Him, and pay Him homage.’

In 1890, she received baptism and was given the name Josephine. Six years later she entered the convent and spent the rest of her life in prayer, simple work, and welcoming people with kindness and warm hospitality. In spite of sickness and pain, she trusted and prayed ‘as the Master desires’. She died in 1947. Catholics recognise her as a Patron for those who are the victims of human trafficking and ask her intercession for freedom and dignity for those who are abused in this way.

**The Reverend Dr Donald Oliver Soper**

**Baron Soper of Kingsway**

Donald Soper made his mark in the world as a prophet of the soapbox. He preached in the open air weekly, on Wednesdays and Sundays, at ‘Tower Hill and Speakers’ Corner in London – a ministry that he continued from 1926 until three weeks before his death in 1998 at the age of 95. He always managed to link profound Christian piety, holiness, and evangelical witness with concern for social justice and service to the poor. He led the West London Mission and its social work ministry for forty-two years.

Donald took the Sermon on the Mount not as a beautiful but impossible piece of idealism, but as a practical programme for living. His faith led him to a ministry which was always spiritually rooted, but to which social and political action was integral. He coined the phrase ‘fellowship of controversy’, which well describes the way he lived his Christian faith. Donald defended pacifism in an age of war and conflict. Though an outstanding broadcaster, he was banned from the BBC during the Second World War because he refused to soften his pacifist convictions. He was regularly knocked off the wall at Tower Hill because of his views.

As well as being President of the Methodist Conference of Great Britain in 1953, the highest office of that denomination, Soper founded or was active within organisations that reflected the convictions that sprang from his faith. He co-founded the Christian Socialist Movement in 1960, was for a time Chairman of the homelessness charity Shelter, President of the League against Cruel Sports, President of the Methodist Sacramental Fellowship, and President of the Methodist Peace Fellowship. In 1981, the World Methodist Council presented him with the World Methodist Peace Award. Despite all this, Donald Soper was content to be known as ‘one of Mr Wesley’s travelling preachers’.

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CHAPTER FOUR
God’s Holy People: The Saints Above

137. This chapter explores the transition of the Christian from death to eternal life, and to the final consummation of all things in Christ at the end of time. It focuses on the saints in heaven — the ‘saints above’. The culture of contemporary scientific thought makes it difficult for many people to understand the Christian mysteries concerning what follows death. The subject matter of this chapter, therefore, must be approached with humble Christian faith and due reticence, recognising that words, concepts, and images are inadequate to express the mystery of God’s love and life beyond the grave. In the presence of mystery, it is better to say less rather than to attempt to speculate.

138. The richness of God’s revelation in the scriptures provides the foundation for Christian teaching about the resurrection and eternal life. This truth is known both from Jesus’ teaching — ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live’ (Jn 11.25) — and the witnesses to the resurrection. St Paul teaches that if Christ has not been raised from the dead, then faith is futile (1 Cor 15.20-21). Christians trust that what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is’ (1 Jn 3.2). The Christian hope is that ‘we will be with the Lord for ever’ (1 Thess 4.17).

139. As friends and followers of Christ, Christians journey together as pilgrims towards the promise of eternal life and fellowship with the saints ‘standing before the throne’ (Rev 7.9). Jesus commands his disciples to love God and one another in relationships that begin in this life, but extend beyond death when knowledge and love will be perfected. ‘For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known’ (1 Cor 13.12).

140. There are many questions relating to ‘the last things’ which Christians explore because ‘faith seeks understanding’. The Gospels contain many references to the final judgement (cf. Matt 25.31-46) and speak of Christ’s return in glory (cf. Mk 13.26). In Luke’s Gospel (23.43), Jesus says to the penitent thief on the cross, ‘Today you will be with me in paradise’. This promise raises the question about what happens between a person’s death, and the final judgement and general resurrection. Is there an intermediate state? What does it mean to speak of ‘a new heaven and a new earth’ (Rev 21.1) when ‘Christ is all and in all’ (Col 3.11)?

141. Catholics and Methodists profess together the ecumenical creeds that affirm the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. This common profession expresses a shared Christian hope, and yet there are differences in theological understanding between our communions, some of which stem from Reformation controversies. Moreover, what a Christian community believes is articulated in the context of particular local cultures, so that a common belief in the resurrection and life after death may yet be expressed in a diversity of liturgical and cultural forms.

Communion with the Saints Above

142. All the baptized, living and dead, make up the communion of saints. However, Methodists and Catholics recognize within this communion the exemplary presence of divine grace in specific persons whose words and holy living — even to the shedding of their blood for Jesus — testify to the transforming action of the Spirit. This ‘cloud of witnesses’ transcends ecclesiastical divisions (Singapore §66). The saints above, who have passed into the fullness of the mystery of God’s grace, are forever part of the community. Their witness and example from the past continue to be cherished; the saints above are held as instances of Christ’s closest love and as signs of the eventual fulfilment of all God’s promises (Singapore §75). Holy living among the saints below can be inspired by contemplating and meditating upon the witness of these exemplary figures.

143. The communion between the saints below and the saints above is like that of a family, where bonds of love continue to exist between the living and the departed. The dead are still remembered as family members in prayer and on special days as well as at particular places. There is a sense of solidarity with the saints above as faithful Christians who have lived the Gospel and become holy during their lives.

Come let us join our friends above
that have obtained the prize,
and on the eagle wings of love
to joy celestial rise;
Let all the saints terrestrial sing
with those to glory gone,
for all the servants of our King
in earth and heaven are one.

Death and the Hope of Resurrection

144. Death brings people to the uttermost limits of human experience, imposing a finality immersed in mystery. Human life is a life unto death. It is precisely in the face of death that the proclamation of the Gospel bursts forth: Jesus Christ has conquered sin and death and offers the promise of salvation, resurrection, and eternal life to all who believe in him (Jn 3.16-17). Through Baptism, the faithful share in the death and resurrection of Christ and become his adopted children to ‘walk in newness of life’ (Rom 6.3-8) as members of his body, God’s holy people. The assurance of Christ’s triumph over evil and sin inspires the

pilgrimage of the Christian who desires to see God face to face and whose life anticipates the final resurrection. Physical death completes the dying with Christ that begins at Baptism and anticipates the fulfilment of the promise of resurrection. Whilst grief and loss naturally surround the end of life, Christians attribute a positive meaning to death: ‘For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain’ (Phil 1.21).

143. The rituals of dying are followed by rituals of death. Methodists and Catholics hold in common: prayer with the bereaved, often in the presence of the deceased; a wake or vigil; a funeral, memorial service or Mass; and burial or else cremation followed by the reverent disposal of the ashes. In these rites, the Christian community offers consolation to those who mourn and proclaims its hope of resurrection by reading the scriptures and singing Christian hymns, and by entrusting the deceased to the mercy of God.

146. Christian teaching holds in tension the continuity of personal identity from this world to the next, and the discontinuity between life on earth and in heaven. St Paul expresses the conviction that not even death can separate a person from the love of Jesus Christ (Rom 8.38-39). This hope holds for all people. Christian belief affirms that God’s creative power will reunite body and soul at the general resurrection after the pattern of Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Cor 15.49-53).

147. Catholics and Methodists together believe that God wills the salvation of all people, whilst also believing that salvation is attained exclusively through Jesus Christ (Acts 4.12). Hope for those who do not come to an explicit saving faith in Jesus Christ rests in a just and merciful God. Catholic teaching affirms that ‘[t]hose also can attain to salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience’ (LG §16). Methodists have not found it necessary to articulate authoritative teaching concerning the possible salvation of those who do not come to an explicit saving faith in Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, the Wesleyan theological tradition maintains that there is a basic knowledge of God available to those who have not heard the Gospel of Christ. Such knowledge is itself the result of universal prevenient grace, which is grounded in the atoning work of Christ. When humans respond to God’s call to holiness, according to the enlightening knowledge that they have received by grace and through the power of the Holy Spirit, then there are grounds for hoping that this will lead to a saving relationship with God, which is always and necessarily through Jesus Christ.

148. Both Methodists and Catholics affirm their trust in the mercy of God regarding infants and others who die without receiving the sacrament of Baptism, believing that they, too, share in the promise of eternal life. Nevertheless, Catholics and Methodists are encouraged to baptize premature babies and others in danger of death. In cases of emergency, any person may baptize another using water in conjunction with the trinitarian formula. In response to pastoral need, Catholics and Methodists provide funeral rites for stillborn babies, who are commended to God’s mercy (cf. UMBW, p. 171; MWB, p. 492). Pastorally, it is often important to offer parents a liturgical rite that enables them to voice their grief for the loss of their stillborn child and to show respect for the child’s human dignity. More recently, liturgical rites have also been developed for women and parents who have suffered miscarriages. In tragic circumstances such as these, liturgical rites and pastoral care for the bereaved help acknowledge the reality of death and loss whilst assisting the process of grieving.

God’s Judgement

149. The Apostles’ Creed affirms that Christ ‘will come again to judge the living and the dead’. Though some Christians find this idea of divine judgement unpalatable and prefer to focus exclusively on God’s mercy, the fullness of the Gospel challenges believers to hold mercy and justice together. On the Day of Judgement, a person will stand before the holiness of God and the full story of his or her life will be laid bare (Matt 12.35-37). The consequences of holy living and the failures of sin will be revealed before the Lord, who commanded his followers to love God and neighbour (Mk 12.30-31), to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, and to visit the sick and those in prison (Matt 25.31-46). At the same time, God bestows upon each person the gift of freedom so that there is always the possibility of accepting or rejecting God’s gracious gift of salvation and the call to holiness.

150. Methodists and Catholics believe that God’s particular judgement at the point of death determines a person’s final destiny. Although some Methodist Holiness traditions teach and expect perfection in this life, both our traditions accept that many will fail to attain the unqualified holiness required before a person can see God face to face (Heb 12.14). When a person dies not having attained such perfection, Methodists and Catholics agree that this will be conferred in the transition to eternal life (JCS, p. 90). The nature of this transition is debated.

151. God’s mercy is limitless, but neither Catholics nor Methodists believe in universalism (that all will be saved irrespective of their free will), accepting that a person may choose to sever his or her relationship with God. Catholics and Methodist traditions allow for a range of interpretations concerning what happens at the judgement, and both acknowledge the possibility of everlasting damnation. Likewise, both traditions have described hell in terms of the vivid scriptural image of everlasting fire. However, contemporary accounts of heaven and hell focus on the relationship with God. Like any relationship, a person’s relationship with God after Baptism may mature and deepen or else diminish and wither. Hell can then be understood as the death of a relationship with God and thus total
alienation from God. Both Catholics and Methodists consider it appropriate to hope that no one will be eternally damned.

152. A significant difference between Methodists and Catholics relates to the question of how unqualified holiness is conferred upon those who have died without having attained it. The Catholic doctrine of purgatory envisages a process of purification following death, in which the deceased person is purged of sins and made perfect in holiness through the cleansing effect of God's grace. However, the Reformers rejected this teaching as merely speculative and liable to misuse. Following the lead of John Wesley, who similarly rejected the doctrine of purgatory as interpreted by the Reformers, Methodists have been circumspect in their teaching about this transition. Some Methodists understand perfection to be a gift from God bestowed instantaneously at death whilst others consider growth in holiness to continue in an intermediate state beyond death. Interestingly, Wesley appears to have held this latter view and writes of souls held in Abraham’s bosom ‘continually ripening for heaven’ and states further: ‘it is certain, human spirits swiftly increase in knowledge, in holiness, and in happiness, conversing with all the wise and holy souls that lived in all ages and nations from the beginning of the world.’

153. In recent times, Catholic teaching has further refined the doctrine of purgatory. Pope Benedict XVI’s 2007 encyclical *The Hope that Saves* (*Spe salvi*) offers possibilities for developing an ecumenical understanding of purification after death. The encyclical describes the purification of the soul in terms of the dramatic encounter with Christ, before whom all falsehood melts away. There is pain in this encounter, as the sickness of our lives becomes evident to us, but ‘it is a blessed pain, in which the holy power of his love sears through us like a flame, enabling us to become totally ourselves and thus totally of God’ (*Spe salvi* §47). Seeking to overcome the theological controversy that arose when purgatory was conceived in terms of space and time, the encyclical states that ‘we cannot calculate the “duration” of this transforming burning in terms of the chronological measurements of this world. [...] it is heart’s time, it is the time of “passage” to communion with God in the Body of Christ’ (*Spe salvi* §47). Catholics offer this encyclical to Methodists as a possible way of describing a process of purification and perfection following death. The shared understanding of Catholics and Methodists that the transition from earthly to heavenly life depends on the gracious action of God provides a christological foundation for further dialogue concerning purification after death and the doctrine of purgatory.

Prayer for the Departed

154. Just as Christians pray for one another here on earth, Catholics continue to pray for those still being purified, and particularly their loved ones. That ‘all the ties of affection which knit us as one throughout our lives do not unravel with death’ encourages Catholics to believe that a spiritual exchange of prayer and its effects is possible between all members of the body of Christ. Furthermore, a precedent for this practice can be found in a prayer in the deuto-canonical scriptures for those who have died (*2 Maccabees* 12.44-45; cf. 1 Cor 3.15). Intercessory prayers are an act of trust in God’s merciful power to save through the redeeming work of Christ. Similarly, acts of charity, prayer, the celebration of the Mass for the intention of a loved one, or good works such as almsgiving through God’s grace can assist those who have died. Catholics pray for the faithful departed that their sins may be forgiven and that they may be welcomed into heaven: ‘Eternal rest grant unto them O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May they rest in peace.’

155. In rejecting the doctrine of purgatory, the sixteenth–century Reformers similarly rejected the practice of prayer for the departed. The twentieth century, however, witnessed a growing interest in prayer for the departed in response to pastoral needs created by a huge number of distant deaths caused by warfare. As a result, there are indications that Methodists may increasingly be open to the practice of prayer for the departed. Some Methodist liturgical rites acknowledge the place of the faithful departed within the communion of saints. In Eucharistic liturgies, the Sanctus in the prayer of thanksgiving refers to the saints above joining with the saints below in the worship of God. Methodist funeral liturgies sometimes refer to the communion of saints, especially at the commendation of the dead (*Into the glorious company of the saints in light*; *UMBW*, p. 150). Specific prayers for the departed are often inspired by texts in the Catholic Requiem Mass; for example, ‘we pray for those who we love but see no longer’ (*MWB* p. 458) and ‘we praise you for the great company of all those who have finished their course in faith and now rest from their labor [...]’. Let perpetual light shine upon them’ (*UMBW*, p. 143).

The Saints joined in Love and Praise

156. Methodists and Catholics honour the saints above as witnesses to holiness and exemplars of holy living. Some, such as the apostles and martyrs of the early Church, are publicly named and honoured as saints by all Christians. The saints in heaven praise God, while the saints on earth join in their praise through prayer, song and worship, especially in the Eucharist. The saints above encourage the saints below as they continue on their earthly pilgrimage: ‘The saints


on earth remain on pilgrimage, journeying towards and praying for an ever fuller expression of unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity. The saints in heaven are their unseen friends, divided temporarily by death, but united in faith, love, thanksgiving and praise’ (CLP §2.4.13).

157. For Catholics, the saints in heaven are also intercessors because of the bonds of love that exist between all the members of the Church and Christ. The intercession of the saints is a daily occurrence as the saints are mentioned in liturgical prayers. In the words of the Preface of the Mass for the Saints, ‘By their way of life you offer us an example, by communion with them you give us companionship, by their intercession, sure support, so that, encouraged by so great a cloud of witnesses, we may run as victors in the race before us and win with them the imperishable crown of glory’ (RM). As well as soliciting the prayers of those around them, earthly pilgrims can ask their friends in heaven to intercede for them. This strong sense of mutual friendship and support builds up the communion of the Church through reciprocal prayer. All such prayer relies upon the merits gained by the death and resurrection of Christ, the one mediator, which are applied for the benefit of individuals and the community. In Catholic imagination, the earthly and heavenly choirs worship God in unison and pray for one another as friends in Christ.

158. Methodists acknowledge the mysterious solidarity of the saints above and the saints below, which stems from the indissoluble bonds of love and communion that unite them in the body of Christ. At the same time, Methodists have been reluctant to explore in detail the possible implications of that solidarity and mutual encouragement between the saints below and the saints above. They have generally been resistant to the invocation of saints lest the absolute uniqueness of Christ as sole mediator be compromised. Article 14 in John Wesley’s abridgement of the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England denounces the invocation of saints (among other Catholic practices) as ‘a fond thing, vainly invented, and grounded upon no warrant of scripture, but repugnant to the Word of God’. On the other hand, Wesley suggests elsewhere that the spirits of the faithful departed may minister alongside the angels to the living: ‘may we not probably suppose that the spirits of the just, though generally lodged in paradise, yet may sometimes, in conjunction with the holy angels, minister to the heirs of salvation?’ He then adds, ‘how much will that add to the happiness of those spirits which are already discharged from the body, that they are permitted to minister to those whom they have left behind!’


This suggests that God may commission the departed saints to minister to the living, though the living may not petition the saints for their specific intervention. Further convergence will depend on whether and how Methodists develop the liturgical and practical implications of the solidarity between the saints above and the saints below.

159. In this regard, the naming of saints’ days demonstrates the importance of the saints in Catholic and in certain Methodist liturgical calendars. Some Methodists have found the observance of saints’ days and prayerful reflection on the lives of the saints to be helpful as signs of the love of God and the fruits of the Spirit, which inspire growth in holiness.

Mary: Life and Sign of Grace and Holiness

160. Chapter Three considered Mary, the Mother of the Lord, as a woman of prayer (Acts 1.14) who finds favour with God (Lk 1.30), is the servant of the Lord (Lk 1.38), and whose holiness always points towards Christ. Here the dogma of the Assumption of Mary is briefly examined in relation to grace and holiness, recognising that Methodists, in company with others, have reservations about its scriptural foundations.

161. Catholics believe that Mary, at the end of her bodily life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory. The feast of the ‘falling asleep’ of Mary dates from the end of the sixth century. In the East, the feast was known as the ‘dormition’, which implied her death but did not exclude her being taken into heaven. In the West, the term used was ‘assumption’, which emphasized her being taken into heaven, but did not exclude the possibility of her dying. This belief is reflected in the theology of the early Church, though the dogma of the Assumption was not formally defined until 1950.

162. It is important to recognise that the ‘dogma does not adopt a particular position about how Mary’s life ended, nor does it use the language of death or resurrection, but rather focuses on the action of God in her’.28 At the heart of the dogma is the conviction that at the end of her life Mary would be embraced and brought into the immediate presence of the God who took flesh in her womb. Prepared by grace for her unique role in salvation history, her path to holiness was lived in the intimacy of being Mother to the incarnate Word. Mary already shares fully in the hope of the resurrection, which is the hope of all. Her assumption into heaven is the completion of her redemption, being raised up by Christ and totally dependent on him. Catholics understand Mary to be all holy, panagia, thoroughly sanctified and perfected by the gift of the Holy Spirit who overshadows her and fills her life. In this, Mary is an anticipatory sign of what Christians are to become as individuals, but above all as the Holy Church of God. She is a sign and icon of the universal call to holiness (cf. MML §26).

163. Methodists similarly affirm the unique role of Mary in salvation history, as recorded in the scriptures – notably her grace-filled response to God’s invitation to carry the incarnate Word in her womb, and her exemplary discipleship in which she urges others also

28. ARICIC, Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ, §58.
to heed the call to holiness (Jn 2.5). Although they find no scriptural foundation for the Catholic dogma of the Assumption, Methodists can affirm its core intention to bear witness to God’s saving work in Christ and the final consummation of holy living. By grace, Mary was made perfect in love and holiness through her close relationship with her son. From a Methodist perspective, Mary’s life is readily seen to manifest Christian perfection or entire sanctification. Thus, her ‘falling asleep’ anticipates and testifies to the glorious future of all God’s children made possible through the paschal mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

165. Christian hope in the resurrection looks to the time when ‘death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away’ and all things will be made new (Rev 21.4-5). The scriptures speak of the end of salvation history in vivid imagery, prominent among which is the idea of ‘a new heaven and a new earth’ (Rev 21.1). In this heavenly state, all the saints will finally come to experience eternal life in the fullest and most immediate communion of love with God, joyfully participating in the ‘messianic banquet’ (Is 25.6; Matt 22; Lk 14.15; Rev 7.16). Whereas ‘now we see in a mirror, dimly, then we will see God face to face’ (1 Cor 13.12), Catholics and Methodists believe heaven to be the ultimate end and fulfilment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme happiness and bliss.

166. The article of the Apostles’ Creed ‘I believe in the resurrection of the body’ – literally, the resurrection of the flesh – means not only will our immortal soul live on after death, but the ‘mortal body’ will also experience resurrection. Scriptural images speak of a transformation in which Christ will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body (Phil 3.21) and of a ‘spiritual body’ in which perishable bodies put on imperishability (1 Cor 15.44, 49-55). Since Christ assumed all that is human, all that is human will be redeemed. Catholics and Methodists share this common hope and a responsibility to keep the promise of eternal life alive in the hearts of believers and to evangelise the world.

167. United in worship and prayer with the saints above, the saints below await the return of the Lord, as dramatically portrayed in the scriptures (1 Thess 4.16-17; Rev 21.2), which will bring salvation history to its close. The mission and ministry of the Church will finally be fulfilled when all things are restored in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit (Eph 1.10). Surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses among the saints above, the saints below run with perseverance the race that is set before them, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of their faith (Heb 12.1-2). ‘Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!’ (Rev 22.20).

Heleny Guariba

Heleny Guariba is one of the ‘disappeared’ from the time of the military dictatorship and the so-called anos de ferro (‘iron years’) in Brazil (1964–1985). She was persecuted, imprisoned, tortured, and, it seems, executed by the National Intelligence Service. Despite all the suffering she underwent, Heleny remained faithful to her Lord and Saviour and to her understanding of God’s kingdom of justice and peace.

A Methodist, Heleny was a leader of her church youth movement and was dedicated to religious education particularly through her contributions to the magazine Cruz de Malta. These pedagogical writings always emphasised ecumenism, social issues, and the courage Christians required to witness in contemporary Brazil. On the strength of these articles, Heleny was dismissed from her job with the church as the regime’s grip tightened.

However, Heleny’s resistance continued. She was part of an underground network that provided safe passage for those under suspicion and in danger of arrest. One person she helped was Frei Beto, a Dominican friar and theologian. A year after his escape, the pair met again, this time in prison. Frei Beto wrote of her, ‘Even in prison your joy was contagious. I recall the scene of the last time we met: it was your birthday, and your children brought a cake with candles and a small present. When you untied the pink silk ribbon and unwrapped the paper, you saw the present and started to find it hilarious: how paradoxical after all the
torture you had undergone. You started showing everybody and kissed your children who laughed with you [...] soon after, you were released from prison. Even under torture nothing was proven against you! In July 1971, the news circulated about your disappearance. The only thing that is known is that you were taken by the national security service and died under torture. I heard that your body was thrown into the sea. I don’t know, I can’t accept it. The only thing that I know is that now Iemanjá (Queen of the seas) has for me a joyful face'.

Christian de Chergé

Christian de Chergé (1937–1996) was born in France, but spent part of his childhood in Algeria. He returned there for a time as a seminarian, and during that time, a Muslim friend saved his life during a military skirmish; the next day the friend was murdered for protecting Christian. Years later, Christian wrote, ‘in the blood of this friend, I came to know that my call to follow Christ would have to be lived out, sooner or later, in the very country in which I received the token of the greatest love of all.’

Eventually, Christian became a Trappist monk and, in time, prior of Notre Dame de l’Atlas Monastery, located in Tibhirine, Algeria. He and his community lived their monastic observance with dedication and in peace, having built strong relations with their Muslim neighbours. Christian occasionally gathered to pray with one of those neighbours, Mohammed, without losing sight of the significant differences between Muslims and Christians. They referred to their prayer as ‘digging a well together’. One day Christian asked Mohammed: ‘at the bottom of our well, what will we find? Muslim water or Christian water?’ Mohammed replied: ‘You know very well that at the bottom of that well, what we’ll find is God’s water.’

In 1993, unrest broke out between rebel forces and the Algerian government. All foreigners were warned to leave the country. The small community of monks decided to stay, eschewing government protection, in solidarity with their Muslim neighbours.

On 27 March 1996, seven of the monks were kidnapped by rebels belonging to the Armed Islamic Group (GIA). Weeks later, they were found dead, and Christian was among them.

Two years before the kidnapping, and aware of the danger his community was in, Christian sent a letter to his family in France to be opened in the event of his death. The letter concludes with this prayer for his would-be executioner:

And also you, my last-minute friend, who will not have known what you were doing: Yes, I want this thank you and this goodbye to be an ‘A-Dieu’ for you, too, because in God’s face I see yours. May we meet again as happy thieves in Paradise, if it please God, the Father of us both. Amen! Inch’Allah!’

CHAPTER FIVE
Growing in Holiness Together: Openings for Common Witness, Devotion and Service

How Far have Catholics and Methodists travelled on their Shared Pilgrim Journey?

168. In the introduction to this report (§5), it was noted that ‘the call to holiness is a call to unity in the Church’, and that ‘holiness and Christian unity belong together as twin aspects of the same relationship with the Trinity such that the pursuit of either involves pursuit of the other’. The relationship between holiness and unity speaks directly to why our two world communions have entered into dialogue in the first place, and why the present topic has been addressed. Like Cleopas and his companion on the road to Emmaus and then back to Jerusalem, Catholics and Methodists are communities of disciples who have encountered the risen Lord and been transformed by the encounter. We are travelling on the same road, seeking faithfully to follow the same Lord, desiring to be led by the same Spirit, and yearning to find our identity as children of the same Father. The triune God who calls us to holiness also calls us to unity.

169. It is now fifty years since the World Methodist Council and the Roman Catholic Church entered into dialogue, and that dialogue has been tremendously fruitful. In the ten rounds of this dialogue, commission members have repeatedly reached more convergences than were anticipated. The consensus between Catholics and Methodists concerning the trinitarian and christological foundations of faith, and convergence on many other aspects, is a tangible sign that the Holy Spirit has been fruitfully at work in our churches, and in our dialogue and efforts at reconciliation. When we consider all that the Spirit of God has achieved through fifty years of dialogue and growing relations, there is much cause for rejoicing.

170. The Commission’s experience in the current round of dialogue has been deeply encouraging. Mindful that the call to holiness is a universal and corporate summons, we have set out to address the ways our communities understand and seek holiness, naming common ground and addressing differences. We have found common ground in our understanding of the human person, created by and for God; in our

31. Ibid., pp. 49-50.
32. Ibid., p. 199.
understanding of divine grace at work, enabling, justifying, and sanctifying stumbling human beings, and creating sons and daughters of God capable of witnessing to and sharing in God’s saving work for the world; in the ways in which human beings are called to live holy lives in the Church and in the world; and in a shared hope for life with God after death. We have reflected upon continuing differences, and that conversation has led us to a deeper understanding of each other. When we have encountered differences which keep us from being in full communion, we have not experienced them as dead ends, but as areas where further work is necessary, and where the Spirit of God will need to show us a way forward in God’s time.

171. In the work of dialogue, the identification of common ground and exploration of divergences bring different tasks to our respective communions as dialogue partners on the road to the full visible unity of the Church. What are our next steps? Where is the Holy Spirit leading us next? At the end of the very first round of Catholic–Methodist dialogue, the Denver report (1971) spoke of its goal in terms of the ‘education of our Churches at lay, ministerial and local levels, for the overcoming of prejudices and misunderstandings’ (§121); closer communication and ‘the stimulating of good relations, of dialogue and cooperation at national and local level’ (§122); and of spiritual renewal, spiritual sharing (§129) and joint witness to Christian values (§131). In 1986, the Nairobi report identified a more comprehensive goal: ‘full communion in faith, mission and sacramental life’ (§20). That goal has been reiterated in subsequent reports and remains the objective of Catholic–Methodist dialogue.

172. Methodists and Catholics have come to see each other as brothers and sisters in Christ, and our churches as being in a relationship of real but incomplete or imperfect communion. For those engaged in dialogue over these past fifty years, that sense of a real communion, which binds us in God’s love, has become increasingly strong and tangible.

173. The Commission is mindful that our dialogue reports are not well known among Catholics and Methodists, and that the consensus and convergences these texts have registered have not had the transformative effect on our relations for which we had hoped. Convergence statements such as these hold rich potential but, in the end, they are only documents until hoped. Convergence statements such as these hold rich potential but, in the end, they are only documents until the insights and understandings they carry are received. This leaves us with both a sense of urgency and an abiding hope that our and other efforts at reconciliation between divided Christians will contribute to fruitful engagement in our churches.

174. The members of the Commission come from eleven different countries, and we have also met on four different continents in the current round of dialogue. This has provided frequent reminders that relations between Methodists and Catholics differ greatly in different parts of the world. In some regions, relations are cordial; in others, they are marked by suspicion. In some places, it is commonplace for Catholics and Methodists, often joined by Christians of other communities, to work together for justice or in charitable outreach; in other areas, the prospect of cooperation seems difficult and problematic. In some countries, gathering together for prayer and giving common witness to Christian faith happens frequently and with ease, whereas in other countries, such gatherings are rare. There are historical, social, and ecclesiastical reasons that help to explain the state of Catholic–Methodist relations in different parts of the world. But it is also the Commission’s conviction, out of the experience of dialogue and encounter with each other, that those relations could be strengthened in every part of the world; that none embodies a full realization of what is possible; and that God wills that Catholics and Methodists learn to walk more closely together.

175. In 1952, shortly after the World Council of Churches was formed, the Lund Principle was formulated, inviting churches to ask themselves ‘whether they should not act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately’. Methodists have turned to the Lund Principle in numerous ecumenical engagements over the past decades. A Catholic version of the Lund Principle is articulated in the 1993 Ecumenical Directory, which notes that the contribution that Christians can make in responding to the world’s needs ‘will be more effective when they make it together, and when they are seen to be united in making it. Hence they will want to do everything together that is allowed by their faith’ (§162).

Unfortunately, the history of ecumenism suggests that it is not easy to change the way churches do things, and that there is a resistance to engage deeply in shared witness and mission; churches tend to choose to do things separately except where extraordinary circumstances move them to act together.

176. In approaching this final chapter, readers are invited to ponder the relationship between holiness and unity, and to make a connection between the pursuit of holiness and the taking of steps towards reconciliation between our two communions based on our shared understanding of what binds us together. Each area where there is consensus in our understanding of the faith can translate into aspects of common witness, joint prayer, and a deeper sharing in the mission entrusted by Christ to his Church. Each convergence can be a stimulus for common study and ongoing dialogue. Each step towards a greater communion in faith, mission, and sacramental life is a valuable step.

177. At the opening of the Methodist Ecumenical Office in Rome on 6 April 2016, Cardinal Kurt Koch, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, commented on the relationship between various steps moving Catholics and Methodists towards reconciliation: ‘We say that a principal duty of ecumenism is to join together in common witness and mission. But how can we engage in common witness unless we know we are inspired by
a common love, flowing from the Trinity? And how can we locate that common love unless we pray together and speak with each other? Finally, as two worldwide communions, how can we hope to find one another in common prayer before the Lord and in holy conversation unless we create places to encounter each other and draw our structures, our mission, indeed our ecclesial lives into a closer relationship with each other? Ecumenical relations are not moved forward by compromise or negotiation. Rather, they are moved forward when encounter with the other leads to a recognition that our brothers and sisters in Christ of another Christian community hold much in common with us; that each of our communities is enriched when open to receiving gifts from the other; and when that which we hold in common is given lived expression in our churches through common prayer, ecumenical friendship, joint mission, and common witness. To engage in this work of reconciliation is an intrinsic part of the path to holiness willed by the all-holy God. Indeed, it is the Holy Spirit who is leading us on this journey, it is the Risen Lord who is accompanying us as we walk together.

In this final chapter, the Commission offers a summary, in the form of creedal statements based on previous chapters, of what Catholics and Methodists are able to say together. Where divergences have been registered, these will also be noted. Then we will raise a series of questions in terms of what might be able to flow from both common statements and divergences, mindful that these questions need to be answered not principally on the level of the universal Church, but in each country, region and congregation or parish where Methodists and Catholics live side by side. It is our hope that these creedal summaries and questions might be studied in congregations and schools, in families and among groups of clergy, in areas where Methodist–Catholic relations are strong, and in areas where they are minimal. It is our hope that these resources are approached with an eye to the profound relationship between the search for unity and the pursuit of holiness. All references in the section below are to paragraphs in this document, except where otherwise noted.

Revisiting Chapter One: The Human Person

Methodists and Catholics have come to recognize that in very significant ways they hold a common understanding of the human person. Together, we believe that:

- human beings are a mystery to themselves, a mystery that is to be lived in relationship with God, with others, and with creation (14, cf. 17–22);
- humans are created by and for God (16), in the image of God (15), to be addressed by God and to hear and receive God's word (17);
- the origin and destiny of the human person are connected to the identity of God (16); we are created with a desire that can only be fulfilled by communion with God (14);
- our relationship with God is the one absolute dimension from which every other dimension takes its point of reference (20);
- in our social nature we reflect the triune God in whose image we are created (19); as social beings, we are created for relationship with family, community, and society; life in community, which calls forth interpersonal self-giving, is integral to holy living (18–19);
- in the encounter with the other as person, humans find themselves before an image that has not been fashioned by human hands (19); we thus have an obligation to respect and care for the other, and our identity and fulfilment is intrinsically linked to others;
- human beings are created by God in such a way that they need the world that surrounds them for their own subsistence; furthermore, the world is filled with God's grace, and it is part of the human vocation to care for and nurture creation (20–22);
- human beings were made to live in harmony with God, creation, and neighbour (20), and doing so carries both gifts and responsibilities which are an essential part of holy living;
- human beings are a mysterious unity, constituted of body and soul (23–24); being embodied, humans are finite and mortal; being ensouled, we transcend the world and are called to immortality (23–24);
- the human body was created good, is essential to personal identity, and is called to final transformation in the resurrection, but is currently weak, fallen, and in need of transformation (24–25);
- human beings have been created with freedom, making us capable of love, communion, and the shaping of our identity by the choices we make; like all aspects of human existence, our freedom is finite and limited (26);
- holiness requires human beings to recognize and respect the limits of our creaturely existence, and in our failure to do so, we have fallen; in our sin, we have become estranged from God, from others, and from the created world (27–29); all of history is shaped both by sin and by God's grace;
- while sin can disfigure or deform God's image in the human being, it cannot destroy that image (30);
- God does not want anyone to be lost; in God's great mercy, God does not abandon his fallen creatures but continues to overcome human estrangement by acting in our history and calling us into relationship (31–33).

Catholics and Methodists agree that the full mystery of the human person is revealed in Jesus Christ:
– just as the human being bears the image of the first Adam, so too are we made to bear the image of Jesus Christ, in the sharing of his risen body; the created image (imago Dei) marred by sin is made a new creation in the image of Christ (imago Christi) by the power of the Holy Spirit (34);
– the Christian vocation to holiness is to be conformed to Christ and clothed with his image (34);
– all has been created through Christ, and all is directed towards him; Christ is the one who gives the image of God in the human its true and definitive form; he is the full measure of human being, and the final goal of human existence (8, 36, 39);
– the plan of God, revealed initially in the gift of creation, is confirmed and re-created in the mysteries of the incarnation and redemption (15);
– salvation is above all liberation from sin and reconciliation to God in Christ (36);
– holy living begins with the recognition of many gifts received; it consists in living into one’s baptismal identity in the ordinary tasks of daily affairs; in so doing, Christians contribute to the transformation of the world, the re-creation of the universe (37, 41);
– in Christ, human freedom attains its goal, receptivity to the Father and openness towards all people in an attitude of service, mercy and love (40);
– the glory of God is the human person fully alive, and the life of the human person is the vision of God; being conformed to Christ in holiness does not diminish the human, but humanizes us (42).

182. Questions for local or regional discussion:

How might Catholics and Methodists support each other in living the Christian vocation to holiness by being more deeply conformed to Christ? How might we learn from each other as we strive to live into our baptismal identity?

Mindful of our common understanding that human beings are created by and for God, to be addressed by God and to hear and receive God’s word, what are some ways that we could creatively gather in prayer or come together to study the word of God?

What are some ways in your region where human dignity is challenged or threatened? What are some of the key ethical questions being grappled with in your society? Given that in significant ways Methodists and Catholics hold a common understanding of the human person, what can you do together in defence of the dignity and integrity of the human person?

In light of our shared recognition that it is part of the human vocation to care for and nurture creation, and that we are called to live in harmony with the natural world, how might we pool our energies at the service of the environment and the safeguarding of the earth and its creatures?

We proclaim together that God does not want anyone to be lost and does not abandon us. How might we work together to overcome human estrangement by serving the marginalised and those in greatest need in our midst?

How might you structure a local or regional dialogue between Methodists and Catholics? Would a sharing of ways in which our respective communities understand and seek holiness be a good first topic for that discussion?

Revisiting Chapter Two: The Grace of God

183. Catholics and Methodists share a common understanding of God’s grace. Together, we believe:
– grace is God’s work of re-creating humankind, overcoming humankind’s estrangement from God as a result of sin and leading us to salvation (45);
– grace is the saving love revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ, in his incarnation, and in the paschal mystery of his death and resurrection; in the mystery of salvation, the grace of Jesus Christ transforms human nature and its condition, giving us a new way of living in the world, reconciled to God and to one another, patterned after his way of holy living (43, 46-47);
– the gift of the Holy Spirit, who is ‘the Spirit of grace’ (Heb 10.29), was bestowed upon the early Church at Pentecost, and continues to be present and active in the Church throughout the ages; the Spirit seeks us out in our sinfulness, and makes the grace of Christ present in our lives; the gifts of the Holy Spirit are always a gift of grace in our lives (49-52, cf. 14);
– the grace that enables, the grace that justifies, and the grace that sanctifies are intertwined aspects of God’s saving love and call to holiness (68);
– enabling or ‘prevenient’ grace, universally offered to human beings, is at work even before individuals come to faith, preparing people to receive and respond to salvation offered us through Jesus Christ. It is through God’s initiative that we are saved, and we are saved solely as a result of God’s mercy. Since human beings are never without enabling grace, there can be no radical separation of ‘nature’ and ‘grace’ (53-54);
– enabling grace, which precedes and facilitates the human response to God’s initiative in salvation, does not remove the need for a free human response, but we are not saved by our response. Catholics and Methodists refer to this first work of the grace of the Holy Spirit in terms of repentance or conversion (53, 55-56);
– ‘by grace alone, in faith in Christ’s saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit’; the grace of faith which justifies is never merited, but ‘renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works’ (59, citing JDDJ §15);
while not contributing to justification, good works of mercy and piety in the Christian life are its inevitable consequence and an obligation of holy living (61, 79);

- ‘justification is not an isolated event in the Christian life but one aspect of a process of sanctification or being made holy through a deepening relationship with Christ in his body, the Church’ (64, citing Honolulu §13). Sanctifying grace is an habitual gift or disposition such that the Christian grows in the image of Christ and is drawn more deeply into life with the triune God (64-65);

- by God’s grace, all in the Church are called to holiness, and that holiness is both personal and communal (68-70; cf. 94);

- sanctifying grace leads to perfect love, as Christians grow in grace and devote themselves to the love of God and neighbour; because there is no limit to the power of God’s grace, Catholics and Methodists affirm that perfection in love is possible before death (73-77);

- the experience of grace and holiness is always oriented towards the strengthening of the Church and bringing all things into the new creation in Christ; as God’s chosen agent and instrument of the call to holiness, the Church on earth is essentially missionary, oriented towards the transformation of the world; elements of grace and holiness exist beyond the visible Church, but are always directed towards incorporation into Christ (71-72, cf. 10);

- being sure of God’s grace – what Hebrews 11.1 calls ‘the assurance of things hoped for’ – stems from the trustworthiness of God’s promises and is confirmed by the interior work of the Holy Spirit (89; cf. Honolulu §24). Catholics and Methodists confess together that the faithful can rely on the mercy and promises of God, and on the work of God’s enabling, justifying, and sanctifying grace in our lives. Mindful of Jesus’ desire that his disciples be one, how might our shared understanding of God’s grace and faithfulness translate into common worship?

The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ), signed by the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation (1999) and affirmed by the World Methodist Council (2006), brought reconciliation on a major controversy of the Reformation. What are appropriate contexts in your region for studying the [JDD] and the pastoral implications of this agreement?

Methodists and Catholics agree that the Church on earth is essentially missionary, oriented towards the transformation of the world. What are major areas of injustice in your region, and where is reconciliation needed in your society? How can we act together as artisans of reconciliation and agents of justice?

Acknowledging that elements of grace and holiness exist beyond the visible Church as a result of the work of the Holy Spirit, are there ways in which Catholics and Methodists, working with other Christian communities, can strengthen relations and enter into dialogue with adherents of other religious traditions?

Revisiting Chapter Three: The Saints Below

Methodists and Catholics agree that the Christian life of holiness involves walking with the risen Christ. Faith, conversion of life, and membership in the Church are essential (93-94). Together, we believe that:

- ‘individual believers are joined in a family of disciples, so that belonging to Christ means also belonging to the Church which is his body’; we
are called to be holy together, as the Church (94, citing Nairobi §11);

– ‘the Church’s structures must effectively serve both the holiness of its members and the mission of the Church’ (95, citing Seoul §101);

– the risen Christ summons his disciples from fear and doubt to faith and joy, so as to send them out as witnesses to the world; the Church is holy in that it communicates assuredly the blessings and graces of Christ’s paschal mystery (100-101);

– the Church equips the people of God for God’s mission in and for the world; mission and service are characteristic of the call to holiness (100);

– the holiness of the Church is that of a people on the pilgrim way; it is marked by the sins of its members and is a place of human brokenness; it is a forgiven people called to forgive and embody God’s loving plan for a broken world; holiness is not primarily about success in being good, but rather about being open in all the brokenness and giftedness of our lives to God’s transforming grace (96, 101, 111);

– Christian communities are called to be ‘households’ of grace and holiness; the Church is sacramental in character; as sign, instrument and foretaste of the kingdom of God, it is grace-filled and instrumental in conferring grace (100, 102-103);

– the economy of salvation is sacramental in nature; liturgies and worship practices, and especially the sacraments and preaching, are public ecclesial ways of nurturing holy living in the world (105);

– baptism is a lifelong sacramental gracing of the Christian’s journey, immersing us in the paschal mystery and consecrating us for the holy work of God’s mission (106);

– ongoing participation at the Eucharist renews the faithful for mission and holy living, transforming disciples more and more into the likeness Christ; in the breaking of the bread, Christ is truly present, and those who receive him are sent out into the world to bear new witness to him (107);

– the two principal rites of vocation for adults – marriage and orders – give grace to the individual or couple, so that the wider community might grow in grace; there is no hierarchy to the various states of Christian life, and all can be avenues to, and expressions of, holiness; community life and emerging forms of consecrated life continue to be discovered and lived with integrity as Christians prayerfully discern how God is calling them to respond to the Gospel and the needs of the world (109-110);

– the Church is called to be a community close to those in need, and close particularly to those whose sin, weakness, and marginalisation leaves them in need of deep compassion, accompaniment, and the binding of wounds (111);

– rituals of self-examination, repentance, and reconciliation are intended to be staple practices of a pilgrim people (113);

– caring for the sick is an intrinsic part of holy living; and sickness itself can be transformed by grace into a particular form of holy living and service (114);

– the reading and study of the scriptures, in personal as well as communal settings, is a privileged means of grace for nurturing growth in holiness; reading and studying the scriptures together (ecumenically) is a source of grace (116-117);

– the pursuit of holiness is enhanced by basic dispositions and habits which shape the affections; these virtues or ‘holy temper’s orient the whole person to what is good and so shape one’s actions and decisions (118-119);

– the Christian life of holiness is characterised by the joyful proclamation of the risen Christ, and by giving an account of the hope that is within us; witness to the Gospel requires a profound engagement with the complexity of the world and the cultures in which we live (120);

– we witness not only through our words, but above all by holy living, characterised by both personal faithfulness and active engagement with the world in service to God’s reign; holy living is expressed socially in the pursuit of justice and in acts of mercy, embodying the compassion and love of God for the world (120-121);

– holiness is fostered through private and family prayers; the singing of Christian songs and hymns; pilgrimages to holy sites and shrines; quiet days and spiritual retreats; fasting and almsgiving (122);

– holy dying is part of holy living; the saints below witness to the Gospel in the manner of their dying; the passing from this life through death is a profoundly human place of grace even in suffering and loss; by aiding and honouring the dying and those close to them, and in presenting a vision of the end of life as a place of love, patience, care, and hope, Catholics and Methodists can challenge some secular approaches to the end of life and to death itself (132-135).

187. There are also differences in holy living that reflect underlying theological disagreements between Methodists and Catholics that often have their origin in Reformation disputes. In particular, there are differences regarding the number of sacraments, though Methodists do see a sacramental character in what Catholics identify as the seven sacraments (107-114). Here are other areas of divergence regarding holy living:

– Catholics emphasise that the Church, as an eschatologically present reality in the world, is without sin, even though its individual members
may be sinful. Methodists speak of the holiness of the Church, but see the correlation between the visible and the invisible Church in less theologically precise terms than Catholics, and are uncomfortable with language that suggests the Church is without sin (97-99);

– While Methodists and Catholics jointly recognise Mary’s unique role as Jesus’ Mother and God-bearer, and see her as a holy exemplar, disciple, and advocate for the poor, Methodists have significant questions about Marian devotions in the Roman Catholic Church, including praying the rosary and pilgrimages to sites of Marian apparitions, and would ask whether the centrality of the person and work of Jesus Christ is in danger of being obscured (127);

– The Catholic practice of the veneration of relics causes concern for Methodists about the attendant risk of idolatry. Catholics and Methodists agree that popular devotion to holy relics must always be properly discerned so that it does not detract from the worship of God alone (130-131);

– Other Catholic devotional practices involving the saints, adoration of the Eucharist, the use and veneration of images, and the blessing of inanimate objects, evoke Methodist discomfort and concern that the Gospel may be in danger of being obscured by superstition (123).

188. Questions for local or regional discussion:

Methodists and Catholics agree that belonging to Christ means belonging to the Church, and that we are called to be holy together. Through recent rounds of dialogue, we have made great strides towards a common understanding of the Church. Yet our dialogue texts have hardly begun to fulfil their potential for transforming our relations; nor can documents alone build and strengthen our relations. Identify some contexts in your region where Catholics and Methodists can encounter each other, forging ecumenical friendships, and discerning ways to grow together in communion and mission.

How can we more visibly acknowledge our recognition of each other’s baptisms and our common understanding that Baptism is a lifelong sacramental gracing of the Christian’s journey, immersing us in the paschal mystery and summoning us to a share in Christ’s mission? Given that further dialogue is needed before Methodists and Catholics can share fully in each other’s Eucharistic celebrations despite much common ground regarding the Lord’s Supper, what are ways in which we can pray and give thanks to God together?

What might Methodists and Catholics learn from each other about fostering and encouraging all forms of Christian vocation, including married and single life, ministry and consecrated life? Are there new forms of community life, including those with an ecumenical character, forming among Christian communities in your region?

Where Catholics and Methodists live side by side, they face the common challenge of witnessing to the Gospel by engaging with the complexity of the world and the cultures in which they live. In what ways might we work together in giving an account of the hope that is within us (1 Pet 3:15)?

In many parts of the world, euthanasia and assisted suicide are allowed or their legality is being publicly debated. Catholics and Methodists jointly witness to holy dying as a constitutive part of holy living, and see the end of life as a time of grace even in the midst of suffering and loss. Are there ways in which you can work together in your region to uphold the dignity of human life, protect the freedom of conscience of healthcare workers, and build up our social structures to care well and compassionately for the dying?

As this chapter details, we hold some devotional practices in common, and differ on others. Encourage conversations between neighbouring Methodist and Catholic congregations about devotional practices, making sure to share about both common and different ways of seeking holiness. Encourage participants to listen respectfully to each other with the possibility of gaining new insights, but also being able to ask each other difficult questions from which we might learn.

Revisiting Chapter Four: The Saints Above

189. Methodists and Catholics alike acknowledge that words, concepts, and images are inadequate to express the mystery of God’s love and life beyond the grave (137), but the richness of God’s revelation in the scriptures allows us to profess together:

– Jesus Christ’s conquering of sin and death and his promise of eternal life provide a wellspring of hope for human beings, who encounter death as the uttermost limit of human experience (144);

– resurrection hope leads us to look to the time when ‘death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more,’ and all things will be made new; heaven is the ultimate end and fulfillment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme happiness and bliss (165, citing Rev 21.4-5); our Christian hope is that ‘we will be with the Lord for ever’ (138, citing 1 Thess 4.17). Catholics and Methodists share this common hope and a responsibility to keep the promise of eternal life alive in the hearts of believers and to evangelise the world (166);

– the ecumenical creeds that affirm the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting (141);

– we are called to love God and one another in relationships that begin in this life but extend beyond death when knowledge and love will be perfected (139). The communion between the saints below and the saints above is like that of a
family, where bonds of love continue to exist between the living and the departed (143);
– within the communion of saints, we recognize the exemplary presence of divine grace in specific persons whose words and holy living – even to the shedding of their blood for Jesus – testify to the transforming action of the Spirit; their witness can inspire the saints below (142); some, such as the apostles and martyrs of the early Church, are publically named and honoured as saints; the saints above are unseen friends to the saints below, encouraging them as they continue on their earthly pilgrimage (156);
– God wills the salvation of all people; we also believe that salvation is attained exclusively through Jesus Christ. Hope for those who do not come to an explicit saving faith in Jesus Christ rests in a just and merciful God (147). We can entrust to the mercy of God infants and others who die without receiving the sacrament of Baptism, believing that they, too, share in the promise of eternal life (148);
– God’s creative power will re-unite body and soul at the general resurrection after the pattern of Jesus Christ (146); since Christ assumed all that is human, all that is human will be redeemed (166);
– Christ ‘will come again to judge the living and the dead’; on the Day of Judgement, each person will stand before the holiness of God and the full story of his or her life will be laid bare (149). God’s mercy is limitless; a part of the mercy is the gift of human freedom, including the freedom to accept or reject God’s gracious gift of salvation and the call to holiness (149, 151); while human beings can choose to sever their relationship with God, Catholics and Methodists consider it appropriate to hope that no one will be eternally damned (151);
– we await the return of the Lord; his coming will bring salvation history to its close; the mission and ministry of the Church will finally be fulfilled when all things are restored in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit (167).

190. Flowing from this common profession, Catholics and Methodists also hold certain practices in common:
– rituals for the dying and the deceased which offer consolation to those who mourn and proclaim our resurrection hope, including prayer with the bereaved, often in the presence of the deceased; reading the scriptures, singing Christian hymns, and entrusting the deceased to the mercy of God; a wake or vigil; a funeral, memorial service or Mass; and burial or else cremation followed by the reverent disposal of the ashes (145).

191. Methodists and Catholics have not yet reached full agreement on the transition of the Christian from death to eternal life, nor on the relationship between

the saints below and the saints above. Principal divergences include:
– the doctrine of purgatory. When a person dies still unprepared to see the face of God, the Catholic doctrine of purgatory envisages a process of purification following death, in which intermediate state the deceased person is purified of sins and made perfect in holiness through the cleansing effect of God’s grace. Reformers rejected the doctrine of purgatory, and Methodists have been circumspect in their teaching about this transition. Methodists and Catholics are in agreement that God’s particular judgement at the point of death determines a person’s final destiny, and that the transition from earthly to heavenly life depends on the gracious action of God; this provides a foundation for further dialogue (150-153);
– prayer for the departed. Catholics, believing that a spiritual exchange of prayer and its effects is possible between all members of the body of Christ, continue to pray for those still being purified after death and in so doing ask for the intercession of the saints in heaven. While there are indications that Methodists may increasingly be open to the practice of prayer for the departed, it remains a subject for further conversation (154-155);
– intercession of the saints. Closely related to the previous point, Catholics also view the saints above as intercessors for themselves and those still living, ever mindful that Jesus is the one mediator between God and humanity. Methodists acknowledge the mysterious solidarity of the saints above and the saints below, but have generally been resistant to the invocation of saints lest the absolute uniqueness of Christ as sole mediator be compromised (157-158);
– the Catholic dogma of the Assumption of Mary and the intercession of Mary. Catholics believe that Mary, at the end of her bodily life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory. Methodists can affirm the dogma’s core intention to bear witness to God’s saving work in Christ and the final consummation of holy living, but find no scriptural foundation for the dogma (160-163). Catholics and Methodists continue to differ concerning the way in which they respectively understand the spiritual and pastoral implications that Mary’s unique place within the communion of saints holds for the saints below. It would be fruitful for Methodists and Catholics to continue to ask each other questions with regard to Mary as a sign of grace and holiness (164-165).

192. Questions for local or regional discussion: Christian hope is ultimately grounded in the death and resurrection of Jesus; his conquering of sin and rising from the bonds of death is the good news at the heart of our witness. How can Methodists and Catholics join
with other Christians in proclaiming the new life – and promise of eternal life – given us in Christ?

Catholics and Methodists agree that bonds of love exist between the living and the departed, and that there is a real communion between the saints below and the saints above, as the latter inspire and encourage us on our earthly pilgrimage. We are not in full agreement about prayer for the departed, intercession of the saints, and the role of Mary in the lives of believers. Consider ways in which Catholics and Methodists can share stories and reflections on the relationship between the saints above and the saints below. Also consider ways in which we might gather together to pray for those who have gone before us.

Methodists and Catholics both hold that God wills the salvation of all people, and that all salvation is in Christ, leaving Christians with a summons to spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth. Likewise, we both believe and hope that God, ever rich in mercy, can offer salvation to the unbaptized and to non-believers. Do Catholics and Methodists engage together in interreligious dialogue in your region, and if not, what might enable them to do so?

Methodists and Catholics readily acknowledge that words, concepts, and images cannot adequately grasp or communicate the mystery of God’s love and life beyond the grave. Whatever our way of picturing this, we both believe that we will stand before the judgement seat of God, and rely utterly on God’s great mercy. Invite pastors to share how they hold together God’s mercy and God’s justice in their teaching and preaching.

The doctrine of purgatory has been a point of strong disagreement between Catholics and Protestants since the time of the Reformation, but there are signs that our differences are not as great as they once were in this regard. When you enter into dialogue about purgatory and the transition from death to eternal life, try not to allow differences to lead the conversation into a dead end, but rather see them as the subject of further dialogue and be ready carry forth the conversation.

In all of these questions and reflections, return often to the relationship between holiness and unity, and encourage the people of our two communions to make connections between the pursuit of holiness and the taking of practical steps towards reconciliation between us.

**EPHESIANS 1.1-10 (NRSV)**

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us ‘in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

In this opening section of the Epistle to the Ephesians, St Paul reflects on the themes of grace and holiness in relation to the broad sweep of salvation history. By grace, God has made it possible for humankind to attain salvation. From the foundation of the world, God elected a people, in Christ, to be ‘holy and blameless before him in love’, a state only made possible by redemption through the atoning death of Christ for the forgiveness of sins.

The redemption achieved by Christ is the source of abundant blessings. In response, God deserves to be blessed because he has so richly blessed us ‘in the heavenly places’. The blessing of the age to come has been bestowed on Christ, who reigns at God’s right hand. United with Christ, his elect people already participate in this hoped for blessing.

To say that election in Christ took place before the foundation of the world is to emphasise that it was not on account of historical contingency or human merit but solely by God’s sovereign grace. The reference here is to collective rather than individual election: God eternally chose a people in Christ (that is, the Church), to be holy and blameless before him at the final judgment and so enter into the full blessings of the age to come.

Election is described in familial terms as God’s adoption of sons and daughters, through Jesus Christ. Borrowing from Graeco-Roman law, where adoption conferred the status of heir upon those who were not so by birth, St Paul employs this same idea to describe the privileged new relationship that those in Christ now enjoy with God. Under God’s free elective will, those in Christ are adopted into God’s family to enjoy intimate fellowship as children and heirs.

Redemption in Christ is made possible through God’s grace, which is ‘glorious’ and ‘freely bestowed’. These terms suggest both abundance and extravagance, though words are inadequate to describe the inexhaustible riches of God’s grace, which not only makes redemption possible, but also supplies the spiritual insight and wisdom necessary to sustain and deepen holy living.

The ‘mystery’ of God’s elective and salvific will was revealed in the life and ministry, death, and resurrection-glorification of Jesus Christ. St Paul affirms that God’s election is not limited in scope. For it is God’s intention in the fullness of time ‘to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth’.
APPENDIX

Resources for Prayer and Meditation

Prayers of Self-Offering

Prayer of St Anselm

Lord Jesus Christ; Let me seek you by desiring you, and let me desire you by seeking you; let me find you by loving you, and love you in finding you. I confess, Lord, with thanksgiving, that you have made me in your image, so that I can remember you, think of you, and love you. But that image is so worn and blotted out by faults, and darkened by the smoke of sin, that it cannot do that for which it was made, unless you renew and refashion it. Lord, I am not trying to make my way to your height, for my understanding is in no way equal to that, but I do desire to understand a little of your truth which my heart already believes and loves. I do not seek to understand so that I can believe, but I believe so that I may understand; and what is more, I believe that unless I do believe, I shall not understand.

Wesleyan Covenant Prayer

I am no longer my own but yours. Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will; put me to doing, put me to suffering; let me be employed for you or laid aside for you, exalted for you or brought low for you; let me be full, let me be empty, let me have all things, let me have nothing; I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things to your pleasure and disposal. And now, glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you are mine and I am yours. So be it. And the covenant now made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven. Amen. 33

Suscie of St Ignatius Loyola

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, all I have and call my own. You have given all to me. To you, Lord, I return it. Everything is yours; do with it what you will. Give me only your love and your grace; that is enough for me.

A Hymn of Charles Wesley

Thou to whom all hearts are known, Attend the cry of mine, Hear in me thy Spirit’s groan For purity divine:

Languishing for my remove, I wait thine image to retrieve; Fill me, Jesus, with thy love, And to Thyself receive. Destitute of holiness, I am not like my Lord, Am not ready to possess The saints’ immense reward; No; my God I cannot see, Unless, before I hence depart, Though implant thyself in me And make me pure in heart. Partner of thy nature then, And in thine image found, Saviour, call me up to reign With life immortal crown’d; With thy glorious presence blest In speechless ecastacies to gaze, Folded in thy arms to rest, And breathe eternal praise. 34

Prayers of Gratitude that we have been

Saved and Prayers of Desire to Imitate Christ

A Prayer of Susannah Wesley

I thank Thee, O God, for the abundant reason that I have to adore, to praise, to magnify Thy goodness and love in sending Thy Son into the world to die for sinners. What reason have I to praise and adore and love that Saviour who suffered so much to redeem me! What sentiments of gratitude should I conceive for such boundless charity to souls! Help me gladly and cheerfully to take up my cross for Him who suffered death upon the Cross for me. Enable me to praise and adore the blessed Spirit, who sanctifies and illumines the mind; who cooperates with the means of grace; who condescends to visit and assist and refresh my soul by His power influences. Glory be to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, joint Authors of my salvation! Amen. 35

A Prayer of Carlo Maria Martini, SJ

We praise and thank you glorious Lord Jesus Christ, for being present among us and in us. In us you praise the Father with the voice of the Spirit, whom you have given us. Lord may this voice of the spirit be roused in us as we listen to the words of Scripture in a manner that is worthy and fitting, appropriate to the meaning of the text and in harmony with what is revealed to us. Make us ready to recognise how we can correspond to the teaching and example proposed to us, for you are God, living and reigning for ever and ever. Amen.


33. MWB, p. 290.
A Prayer of Mary Ward

O Parent of parents, and Friend of all friends, without entreaty you took me into your care and by degrees led me from all else that at length I might see and settle my love in You.

What had I ever done to please You? Or what was there in me wherewith to serve You? Much less could I ever deserve to be chosen by You. O happy begun freedom, the beginning of all my good, and more worth to me than the whole world besides.

Had I never hindered Your will and working in me, what degrees of grace should I now have. Yet where as yet am I?

My Jesus, forgive me, remembering what You have done for me and whither You have brought me, and for this excess of goodness and love let me no more hinder Your will in me.

A Hymn of Charles Wesley

How happy every child of grace
Who knows his sins forgiven!
This earth, he cries, is not my place,
I seek my place in heaven:
A country far from mortal sight;
Yet, O! By faith I see
The land of rest, the saints' delight,
The heaven prepar'd for me.

A stranger in the world below,
I calmly sojourn here,
Nor can its happiness or woe
Provoke my hope or fear:
Its evils in a moment end,
Its joys as soon are past;
But, O! The bliss to which I tend
Eternally shall last.

To that Jerusalem above
With singing I repair,
While in the flesh, my hope and love,
My heart and soul are there:
There my exalted Saviour stands,
My merciful high-priest,
And still extends his wounded hands
To take me to his breast.

Prayers for the Saints Below

Traditional Prayer to the Holy Spirit

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And You shall renew the face of the earth. O God, who taught the hearts of the faithful by the light of the Holy Spirit, grant that by the same Spirit we may be truly always truly wise and ever enjoy His consolation; through Christ Our Lord, Amen.

John Henry Newman’s Prayer - Our place in the Household of God

God has created me to do Him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission. I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons.

He has not created me for naught. I shall do good; I shall do His work.
I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place, while not intending it if I do but keep His commandments.

Therefore, I will trust Him, whatever I am, I can never be thrown away. If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him, in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him.
If I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him. He may take away my friends. He may throw me among strangers. He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide my future from me. Still, He knows what He is about.

A Prayer from the Didache for Christian Unity

We give you thanks, our Father, For the life and knowledge you have made known through your son and servant Jesus Glory to you world without end. As this broken bread, once scattered over the mountains was gathered together and made one, So may your church be built up from the ends of the earth, And gathered into your kingdom, To you be glory and power through Jesus Christ for ever and ever.

A Hymn of Charles Wesley

Christ, from whom all blessings flow,
Perfecting the saints below,
Hear us, who thy nature share,
Who thy mystic body are:
Join us, in one spirit join,
Let us still receive of thine,
Still for more on thee we call,
Thee, who fillest all in all.

Closer knit to thee our head,
Nourish us, O Christ, and feed,
Let us daily growth receive,
More and more in Jesus live:
Jesu! We thy members are,
Cherish us with kindest care,
Of thy flesh, and of thy bone:
Love, forever love thine own.

Move, and actuate, and guide,
Diverse gifts to each divide;
Plac’d according to thy will,
Let us all our work fulfil,
Never from our office move,
Needful to the others prove,
Use the grace on each bestow’d,
Temper’d by the art of God.

Sweetly now we all agree,
Touch’d with softest sympathy,
Kindly for each other care:
Every member feels its share:
Wounded by the grief of one,
All the suffering members groan;
 Honour’d if one member is
All partake the common bliss.

Many are we now, and one,
We who Jesus have put on:
There is neither bond nor free,
Male nor female, Lord, in thee.
Love, like death, hath all destroy’d,
Render’d all distinctions void:
Names, and sects, and parties fall;
Thou, O Christ, art ALL in ALL.

Prayers concerning the Saints Above

Prayer of St Ambrose in the face of death
Carry me, Christ, on your Cross, which is salvation for
the wanderer, rest for the wearied, and in which alone
is life for those who die.

Prayer for the Dying (Proficiscere)
Go forth upon your journey, Christian soul,
in the name of God the Father who created you;
in the name of Jesus Christ who suffered for you;
in the name of the Holy Spirit who strengthens you;
in communion with the blessed saints,
with angels and archangels and with all the heavenly
host.
May you rest in peace
and may the City of God be your eternal dwelling. Amen.

Prayers of Thanksgiving for the Faithful Departed
Eternal Father, God of the living and not of the dead:
we thank and praise you for the faithful of all
generations who served you in godliness and love and
are now with you in glory. We thank you for those who
have enriched the world with truth and beauty, for
the wise and good of every land and age. Teach us to
follow them as they followed Christ; that at the last we
may receive with them the prize of eternal life; through
Jesus the Christ, our Lord.

A Hymn of Charles Wesley
Happy the souls to Jesus join’d,
And sav’d by grace alone,
Walking in all thy ways we find
Our heaven on earth begun.

The church triumphant in thy love
Their mighty joys we know,
They sing the Lamb in hymns above,
And we in hymns below.

Thee in thy glorious realm they praise,
And bow before thy throne,
We in the kingdom of thy grace,
The kingdoms are but one.

The holy to the holiest leads,
From hence our spirits rise,
And he that in thy statutes treads
Shall meet thee in the skies.

Prayers for Mission

A Prayer for the Earth from Pope Francis’s
Laudate Si’
All-powerful God, you are present in the whole
universe
and in the smallest of your creatures.
You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.
Pour out upon us the power of your love,
that we may protect life and beauty.
Fill us with peace, that we may live
as brothers and sisters, harming no one.
O God of the poor,
help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this
earth,
so precious in your eyes.
Bring healing to our lives,
that we may protect
the world and not prey on it,
that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.
Touch the hearts
of those who look only for gain
at the expense of the poor and the earth.
Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,
to be filled with awe and contemplation,
to recognize that we are profoundly united
with every creature
as we journey towards your infinite light.
We thank you for being with us each day.
Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle
for justice, love and peace.

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37. ‘The Communion of Saints, Part IV’, John Wesley and Charles
Wesley, Hymns and Sacred Poems (London: Strahan, 1740).
38. MWB, p. 431.
39. Uniting in Worship 2 (Sydney: Assembly of the Uniting Church
40. John Wesley and Charles Wesley, Hymns on the Lord’s Supper
(Bristol: Farley, 1745), no. 96.
# ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BDUMC/ART</td>
<td>Articles of Religion of the Methodist Church (1808), §104, pp. 63-70.</td>
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<td>BDUMC/CON</td>
<td>Confession of Faith of the Evangelical United Brethren Church (1963), §104, pp. 70-75.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPM</td>
<td>The Methodist Church in Britain. A Catechism for the Use of the People called Methodists, Rev. ed. 2000.</td>
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<tr>
<td>LG</td>
<td>Lumen Gentium (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), 1964.</td>
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<td>PL</td>
<td>Migne, Patrologia Latina</td>
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<tr>
<td>RM</td>
<td>Roman Missal (3rd edition, 2002).</td>
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<tr>
<td>RVM</td>
<td>Rerarum Virgilii Manae (2002).</td>
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<tr>
<td>SC</td>
<td>Sacrosanctum Concilium (Constitution on the Liturgy, 1963).</td>
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<tr>
<td>UR</td>
<td>Unitatis Redintegratio (Decree on Ecumenism), 1964.</td>
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English translations of Roman Catholic documents may be found at www.vatican.va.

Note on Scripture Quotations

All scriptural quotations are from the New Revised Standard (Anglicised) Version.
This report of the tenth phase of international Methodist–Roman Catholic dialogue is beautifully and logically arranged. It begins with a passage from Scripture and ends with another, the two of which, taken together, help show the broad perspective of the theme, namely, that God calls both individuals and the community to holiness. At the beginning, before the Introduction Luke 19: 1-10, the story of Jesus and Zacchaeus is presented as “a story of divine grace and the call to holiness” for an individual. Zacchaeus “has been drawn into a saving relationship with Jesus” (first para). The story shows “the drama of divine grace at work and its powerful salvific effect” on an individual (second para). At the end of the report, Ephesians 1:1-10 is cited. Here St Paul “reflects on the themes of grace and holiness in relation to the broad sweep of salvation history. By grace, God has made it possible for humankind to attain salvation. From the foundation of the world, God elected a people, in Christ, to be ‘holy and blameless before him in love’ “(first para). Election in Christ here is collective rather than individual: “God eternally chose a people in Christ (that is, the Church), to be holy and blameless before him at the final judgment and so enter into the full blessings of the age to come” (third para).

THEME AND FOCUS

The theme of holiness has, of course, deep roots in the life of both communities. For Catholics this idea echoes the teaching of Vatican II concerning “The Universal Call to holiness in the Church” (LG, Chpt.5). For Methodists, it is consistent with the historical mission of Methodism “to spread scriptural holiness over the land” (n.2). In treating holiness, this dialogue comes back to an issue which has long been one of its key concerns. The report of the second phase of this dialogue could already say in 1976 that “It has been recognized from the beginning of our dialogue that among the ‘more solid grounds for affinity’ between our two traditions the first was ‘the central place held in most traditions by the ideal of personal sanctification, growth in holiness through daily life in Christ’.”

As to focus, The Call to Holiness, considers how Catholics and Methodists understand the nature and effect of divine grace upon the human person and the implications for the Christian life. In so doing, “it investigates grace and holiness not simply as theological concepts, but in relation to their central place in the Christian life. For the God of grace calls people to holy living in a relationship of communion or fellowship (koinonia) with the Holy Trinity and with one another” (n.4).

An engaging characteristic of this presentation, and found throughout, is that of the Church on pilgrimage. “The life of holiness for the Christian is fundamentally a walking with the risen Christ” (n.93). “The holiness of the Church is that of a people on the road, on pilgrimage, and so has the quality of both a present reality through the presence of the risen Jesus, who walks with us, and of a promise of holiness towards which disciples travel, step by step” (n.96). “The idea of the pilgrim journey lies at the heart of all aspects of the Church and Christian life” (n.100). In discussing Holy Dying in Chapter Three, the text says: “Holy living comes to its natural conclusion in death as the end of the pilgrim journey on earth” (n.132). Discussion of “The Saints Above” in Chapter Four, begins with “As friends and followers of Christ, Christians journey together as pilgrims towards the promise of eternal life and fellowship with the saints ‘standing before the throne’ (Rev. 7.9)” (n.139).

STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

Among the theological foundations of this report, three are “particularly noteworthy.” First is the trinitarian mission in salvation history as recorded in scripture and tradition. Second is the Methodist Statement of Association (2006) with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation (MAJDDJ[2006/1999]). Third, the common participation of Christians in the paschal mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The first and third build on previous work of this dialogue (n.6), and are areas in which there is much fundamental agreement among Christians. The second, MAJDDJ, involves the Methodist reception of a major ecumenical achievement of the Lutheran-Catholic dialogue.

1. The paragraphs of the brief commentaries on both scripture passages are not numbered.
2. Dublin Report, 1976, n. 26. Also, “Methodists and Catholics repeatedly discover a notable rapport when they speak of spirituality, the life of the Spirit” (Honolulu Report, 1981, n. 7. “A key point of agreement between Methodists and Roman Catholics is the need for graced, free and active participation in God’s saving work” (Brighton Report, 2001, n.53.)
illustrating that this Methodist-Catholic bilateral dialogue has been positively influenced by another bilateral, the Lutheran-Catholic bilateral, and supports the latter’s achievement, making it its own.

The report is divided into three sections, comprising five chapters. The first section, including Chapters One and Two, “outlines a shared Christian anthropology and understanding of the nature and effect of divine grace and holiness in relation to the human person” (n.7). Chapter One, “The Mystery of being Human,” articulates a Christian anthropology as the theological basis for the chapters that follow. It considers the creation of the human being in the image and likeness of God, the effects of the fall on humankind and creation, the longing for reconciliation, and the person of Jesus Christ as the full measure of human being (n.8). Chapter Two, “God’s Work of Re-creating Humankind,” describes the saving work of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit in mediating divine grace, presented in three aspects: the “grace that enables,” the “grace that justifies,” and the “grace that sanctifies.” (n.9).

The second section, comprising chapters three and four, draws upon the shared understanding of grace and holiness to investigate particular elements of holy living in the communion of saints (n.7). It explains that “just as Christian anthropology leads to soteriology, consideration of the saving work of Christ is inseparable from ecclesiology, since the experience of grace and holiness is always oriented towards the formation of relationships in the church and the transformation of the world.” The communion of saints includes those below, and those above. Chapter Three, “God’s Holy People: the Saints Below,” considers the personal and ecclesial effect of grace and what it means to be called by God to holy living in the church and in the world. “The chapter describes the pilgrim Church itself as a household of grace. Holy living is described in relation to the sacraments, witnessing to the Gospel, devotional practices, and service in the world” (n.10). Since the living and the departed “are joined together in love and praise within the household of grace,” Chapter Four, “God’s Holy People: The Saints Above,” considers the eschatological effect of grace, and what this means for a communion among the saints which transcends death. This chapter explores related topics such as death and the hope of resurrection, judgement, purification and growth in grace beyond death, prayer for departed saints, the intercession of departed saints and Mary, the Lord’s return, images of final salvation, and the fulfillment of God’s design and purpose for humankind in a new heaven and a new earth (n.11).

The third section includes chapter five, which offers a summary of the report’s convergences and divergences, and asks how the fruits of dialogue might have a transformative effect in Methodist and Catholic communities (n.7). Chapter Five, “Growing in Holiness Together: Openings for common Witness, Devotion and Service,” reflects upon the close relationship between holiness and unity. “The work of reconciliation between our world communions is itself a Spirit-led response to the summons of holiness” (n.12).

THE CALL TO HOLINESS AND THE QUEST FOR UNITY

An important characteristic of this text is that it clearly relates holiness to Christian unity. At the start it affirms that “The call to holiness is also a call to unity in the church, the body of Christ. Jesus prayed for his disciples to be sanctified in the truth that they might all be one (Jn 17.17, 21). Holiness and Christian unity belong together as twin aspects of the same relationship with the Trinity such that the pursuit of either involves the pursuit of the other” (n.5).

Chapter Five continues the reflection on holiness and unity, saying that “the relationship between holiness and unity speaks directly to why our two world communions have entered into dialogue in the first place, and why the present topic has been addressed.” Like Cleopas and his companion on the road to Emmaus encountering Christ, Methodists and Catholics together “are traveling on the same road, seeking faithfully to follow the same Lord, desiring to be led by the same Spirit, and yearning to find our identity as children of the same father. The triune God who calls us to holiness also calls us to unity” (n.168).

Reflection on this theme gives the opportunity to indicate some of the successful results of the dialogue in seeking unity. In ten rounds of dialogue we “have repeatedly reached more convergences than were anticipated. The consensus between Catholics and Methodists concerning the Trinitarian and Christological foundations of faith, and convergence on many other aspects...” is a cause for rejoicing (n.169). In the current round we “have found common ground in our understanding of the human person, created by and for God; in our understanding of divine grace at work, enabling, justifying, and sanctifying stumbling human beings, and creating sons and daughters of God capable of witnessing to and sharing in God’s saving work for the world; in the ways in which human beings are called to live holy lives in the Church and in the world, and in a shared hope for life with God after death” (n.170).

But they admit, as well, that there are also continuing differences which keep them from being in full communion, and where further work is necessary (n.170). While the goal of this dialogue remains full communion in faith, mission and sacramental life (n.171), the dialogue has brought Methodists and Catholics to a stage of seeing their churches “in a relationship of real but incomplete or imperfect communion” (n.172). But, besides the continuing differences which need to be resolved, there are obstacles which this dialogue, like other dialogues, has towards moving towards full communion, such as the following. The reports are not well known among Methodists and Catholics, and therefore consensus and
convergence registered by these dialogue texts have not had the transformative effect on our relations for which they had hoped. The insights achieved by dialogue need to be received in order to foster that effect (n.173). Furthermore, the relations between Methodists and Catholics differ greatly in different parts of the world. In some places they are cordial, in others, marked by suspicion. The Commission, however, out of the experience of dialogue and encounter with one another, is convinced that those relations could be strengthened in every part of the world (n.174). Also, when churches have acted separately for so long, there is resistance to getting them to act together in shared witness and mission (n.175). Despite these obstacles, “readers are invited to ponder the relationship between holiness and unity, and to make a connection between the pursuit of holiness and the taking of steps toward reconciliation between our two communions based on our shared understanding of what binds us together” (n.176). “To engage in this work of reconciliation is an intrinsic part of the path to holiness willed by the all holy God. Indeed it is the holy Spirit who is leading us on this journey, it is the Risen Lord who is accompanying us as we walk together” (n.178).

OVERVIEW OF THE REPORT

While this report presents many agreements and convergences, the report shows also divergences, differences and open questions.

Chapter One, “The Mystery of Being Human: Created by God and Re-created in Christ for being in communion with God”, articulates an agreed Christian Anthropology. Humanity is created in the image of God and for relationship with God, with others, and with creation. Human beings, constituted with body and soul, were also constituted with the freedom to accept communion with God or not. The failure of freedom resulted in the “original fault freely committed by the first parents of the human species” (n.27). “As a result of that first sin, the world is marred by sin” (n.28). There is estrangement from God, and the reality of sin which divine revelation discloses, resonates with human experience.

Nonetheless, God did not abandon human beings after the fall, and God’s love for fallen creatures is made concrete in salvation history. The incarnation of the eternal Word and the sending of the Holy Spirit overcome the human estrangement from God, creation, and self, suffered in the fall. Christ, the New Adam, fully reveals the mystery of the human being. “Together, the mystery of creation and the mystery of redemption are the proper foundation for a true understanding of humanity” (n.35).

Being re-created in the image of Christ has an eschatological orientation. The drama of human existence unfolds in history between the creation and its final consummation. “The full meaning of humanity’s present existential situation can be found only in Christ who gives the image of God in the human its true and definitive form” (39). “In Christ, human existence receives a new and deeper meaning: the whole creation is restored” (41).

This chapter is presented as a shared account of humankind created in the image of God. At no point does it signal significant differences between Methodists and Catholics.

Chapter Two, “God’s Work of Re-creating Humankind,” is considered in light of the paschal mystery of the death and resurrection of Christ. A brief summary is first given of the grace of God in the person and work of Christ and the Holy Spirit, followed by an exploration of the nature and effect of divine grace in its personal and corporate aspects. It concludes by investigating two issues which have been contentious between Catholics and Protestants: the merit accruing from good works of mercy and piety, and whether it is appropriate to speak of an ‘assurance of salvation.’

Commenting first on “the Grace of God in Jesus Christ” the report states that Catholics and Methodists describe grace in similar terms, as a favour, a free gift of God’s help so that we can respond to his call to become children of God. “God’s grace is not an abstract idea but is saving love revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ…” (n.46). The work of Christ “leads to the fulfilment of God's purpose for the whole created order and not just for humankind” (n.48).

Scripture shows, too, how the Holy Spirit is constantly present and active in the person and work of Jesus Christ (n.49) and is present and active in the Church throughout the ages (n.51). “The Holy Spirit is the spirit of grace’ (Heb 10:29), who makes the grace of Christ present and active, drawing people into a deepening relationship or fellowship with God and with one another” (n.51). The diverse gifts of the Holy Spirit are always a gift of grace in one form or another, meant for the common good of the Church. While it is not the purpose of this report to develop a common ecclesiology, given what is said about the Holy Spirit in ns.49-51, the report could have easily added a sentence at the end of those numbers saying that the Church is indeed the Body of Christ (n.64) and the Temple of the Holy Spirit.

Grace is described according to three characteristics: grace which enables, grace which justifies, and grace which sanctifies. As to grace that enables, Catholics and Methodists ‘Confess together that all persons depend completely on the saving grace of God for their salvation’ (JDDJ, 19). Enabling grace means that it is only by God’s grace that human beings have the capacity to respond to salvation offered us through Jesus Christ (n.54). At the same time, it does not remove the need for a free human response to God’s initiative in salvation. “Catholics and Methodists reject the idea of universal salvation where this is interpreted as meaning that all will be saved whether or not they freely consent” (n.55).

Discussion of the grace that justifies helps recall that one of the major controversies of the Reformation
concerned the doctrine of justification. The Lutheran-Catholic (1999) Methodist (2006) Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification which resolved this conflict is the basis for this treatment, and is cited several times. It cites the heart of the JDDJ (15): “By grace alone, in faith in Christ’s saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works” (n.59). The grace of justification re-creates the human person, though not necessarily in a permanent state of being. While it always remains possible for the justified to depart from grace, even then, the grace of God makes it possible to repent afresh and receive the grace that justifies (n.63).

The grace that sanctifies involves a process of sanctification, or being made holy through a deepening relationship with Christ in his body, the Church (n.64). Sanctifying grace is not only interior to the human soul, but also involves a commitment to holy living in every sphere of human life. Citing JDDJ 37, Catholics and Methodists confess together that good works of mercy and piety are the fruit of justification and an obligation of Holy living. As such they belong to God’s victory over sin and death. Holy living itself leads to growth in sanctifying grace (n.65).

These three features of grace are aspects of God’s saving love and call to holiness (n.68). As God’s chosen agent and instrument of the call to holiness, the Church on earth is essentially missionary, oriented towards the transformation of all things into the new creation in Christ (n.72). Christians are called to perfection in love and holiness. While absolute perfection belongs to God alone, Catholics and Methodists agree together that ‘sanctification is a process that leads to perfect love’ (Honolulu 18) as Christians grow in grace and devote themselves to the love of God and neighbor. They have different approaches in speaking about Christian perfection, but basic agreement. In light of what is said in ns.73-77, the first phrase in n.75 (“although Catholic theology generally does not refer to Christian perfection or entire sanctification as such”) could have been left out to avoid misunderstanding.

A point of difference is introduced here. While both can say that being brought into a final state of perfection in love and holiness is the work of grace, they have traditionally differed on the way this final state of perfection has been attained. For Catholics it is by a post-death experience of purification traditionally called purgatory. While Methodists take seriously those passages in scripture that suggest a process of purification from the effects of sin, they do not accept the Catholic doctrine of purgatory as it was understood and rejected by the Reformers (n.77). This difference will be taken up further in Chapter Four.

This leads to another area which has been controversial between Catholics and Protestants since the Reformation, namely, the question of good works and merit. But JDDJ (15) has brought reconciliation on this point. Good works of mercy and piety in the Christian life do not contribute to justification but are its fruit. But a continuing difference between Catholics and Methodists “concerns the possibility that the merit arising from the good works of Christians might aid the sanctification of others.” Both explain their positions on this. The Catholic explanation includes a discussion of indulgences (n.83). Some convergence is registered since, in a certain sense, “Methodists accept that good works of piety may benefit particular individuals” (n.85), and also since “some Methodists would further accept that the prayers of departed saints and the prayers of the saints on earth may also be mutually beneficial, albeit in ways that cannot be identified precisely in terms of their salvific effect” (n.86).

Moreover, further theological reflection on the implications of the bonds of love within the communion of saints “may lead to greater convergence between Catholics and Methodists concerning the possibility of an ‘exchange’ whereby the holiness of one benefits others” (n.86).

Chapter Two ends by discussing the “Assurance of Faith and Salvation.” Again referring to the JDDJ (34), the report finds that the different ways that they have of speaking about an “assurance of salvation” are differences of emphasis “and does not constitute a substantial disagreement between Catholics and Methodists in understanding the nature of Christian assurance” (n.90). In order to avoid misunderstanding, the first sentence in n.91 “For Catholics, to have faith is to trust in God,” might be expanded slightly to say, “For Catholics, one very significant aspect of having faith in God, is trusting in him.”

Having dealt, first, with creation, and then with redemption, the report turns then to holiness and the Church, with Chapter Three, “God’s Holy People: The Saints Below.” Exploring first, the Church as “a Holy People,” it describes the church on pilgrimage. “The holiness of the Church is that of a people on the road, on pilgrimage, and so has the quality of both a present reality through the presence of the risen Christ, who walks with us, and of a promise of holiness towards which disciples travel, step by step” (n.96). Immediately, the question of sin is raised. “The Church on its pilgrim way is still possessed of the sins and failings of its members, yet unmistakably oriented towards its future fulfilment in God” (n.96). The idea of the pilgrim journey lies at the heart of all aspects of the Church and Christian life (n.100)

This eschatological orientation of ecclesial life is the context in which some historically divisive issues are taken up, such as whether the church itself is sinful. Catholics emphasize “that the Church as an eschatologically present reality in the world is without sin, even though its individual members may be sinful” (n.97). Methodists affirm the holiness of the church, but “emphasize that ecclesial structures can themselves be affected by sin. The Methodist reluctance to claim that the Church is sinless reflects a sensitivity to the risks in such a proposition, which can lead to a failure to repent and reform when sin occurs in the church.
Holiness can never simply be reduced to a possession or an unquestioned characteristic of the Church, but must always be understood as God’s action and free gift” (n.98). While these contrasting emphases are not mutually exclusive, they have implications for the way Methodists and Catholics respectively speak of the Church, its institutional forms and limitations of authoritative discernment. The implications are significant and underline many persisting differences and divisions among Christians, especially the relationship between the Church ‘visible’ (its historical, institutional reality) and ‘invisible’ (its spiritual reality in Christ) (n.99).

It is important that Methodists and Catholics can say together that the Church is a means of grace, “a sacramental and missionary means of grace for the world” (n.104). This statement is followed by sections which explore the ecclesial practices of the church which nurture the holy living and mission of God’s pilgrim people. These include celebration of sacraments, shared thinking around practices of social justice, ethics, personal and public devotions, approaches to dying and death as the end of the Christian’s pilgrimage on earth (n.104).

The Church is described as the household of grace (n.101, 105-115). “In the Church, Christians meet Christ in ways consistent with our human existence as embodied and social beings.” In this light the report discusses “The Household of Grace: Holy Living and the Sacraments” (n.105-115). The economy of salvation is sacramental in nature; God uses particular sensory experiences (sight, sound, touch, smell, taste) in order to mediate grace assuredly... Liturgies and worship practices, and especially the sacraments and preaching, are public ecclesial ways of nurturing holy living in the world. The discussion of sacraments that follows shows the importance of sacraments for holiness. There are many agreements, e.g. regarding baptism, many convergences but also differences of belief, between Methodists and Catholics especially regarding the Lord’s supper/Eucharist, how we understand the sacraments of initiation, the number of sacraments. One difference which should be mentioned here concerns the relationship of the Eucharist to sacramental ordination, especially in light of the fact that Catholics and Methodists differ in their understanding of the number of sacraments.

Besides sacraments there are many other practices of holiness in the world which are constituent of holy living including the reading and study of scripture (ns.116-118), traditions of witness to the Gospel through active engagement with the world in service with God’s reign (n.121), which are deeply rooted in the practice of prayer (122).

Here again, between Methodists and Catholics there are areas of unease and difference, areas for continuing dialogue (n.123). Methodists are concerned with a number of devotional practices in Catholic life because of which, in their view, the centrality of the person and work of Jesus Christ is in danger of being obscured, or the gospel is in danger of being compromised by superstition (n.123). One should say that when strong words such as superstition are used, it would be helpful if specific examples were given to clarify Methodist concerns. As serious as these concerns are, and as strong as the language is, as the report shows, new insights in both communities can foster convergences (ns.127-129). This is true also when concerns about Marian devotions, and about purgatory are expressed. Regarding Mary, both Catholics and Methodists together recognize, on the basis of Scripture, the unique role of Mary as Jesus’ Mother and God-bearer (Theotokos). Catholics, different from Methodists, have a significant tradition of devotions relating to the Mother of our Lord. “For Catholics, authentic Mary devotion draws the Christian into a closer relationship with God’s incarnation and humanity in Jesus through the mystery of Mary’s motherhood by the power of the Spirit” (n.128). The Catholic practice of the veneration of relics is based on a long and meaningful tradition, but it causes concern for many Methodists (ns.130-131).

In n.130, while Catholic practice of the veneration of relics “causes concern for many Methodists”, what follows in 130-131 is an adequate Catholic explanation of this practice, and a mutual challenge of each to the other on this matter. Later, In ns.152-153, regarding Purgatory, while it is noted that the reformers rejected this teaching as merely speculative, as did John Wesley, Methodists “have been circumspect in their teaching” about the transition that takes place, and have differences regarding it. However, in 153, Catholics suggest that Pope Benedict XVI’s encyclical The Hope That Saves offers possibilities for developing an ecumenical understanding of purification after death.

Chapter Three ends with a brief consideration of “Holy Dying”, the end of the pilgrim journey on earth. “Catholics and Methodists believe that holy dying is part of holy living, and that the people of God witness to the Gospel in the manner of their dying.” (n.132)

Chapter Four, “God’s Holy People: the Saints Above”, focusing on the saints in heaven, explores the transition of the Christian from death to eternal life, and to the final consummation of all things in Christ at the end of time (n.138). This discussion, too, is offered as another component of the pilgrimage, the walking with Christ, in which Christians participate (n.139). Since the Gospels contain references to the final judgement, one question which is raised concerns what happens between a person’s death, and the final judgement and general resurrection. “Is there an intermediate state?” Catholics and Methodists profess together the ecumenical creeds which affirm the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting. “And yet there are differences in theological understanding between our communions, some of which stem from Reformation controversies.” (n.141).
In this chapter Methodists and Catholics affirm much together. They start by affirming that all the baptized, living and dead, make up the communion of saints (n.142). An important ecumenical observation is made, that among those who have died are some, both Methodists and Catholics, who gave their lives for Christ, showing that ‘This cloud of witnesses’ transcends ecclesiastical divisions (n.142). Both traditions attribute a positive meaning to death, since physical death completes the dying with Christ that begins at baptism and anticipates the fulfillment of the promise of resurrection (n.144). Methodists and Catholics believe that God’s particular judgment at the point of death determines a person’s final destiny. (n.150).

A significant difference between Methodists and Catholics relates to the question of “an intermediate state.” How is unqualified holiness conferred upon those who have died without having attained it. The difference focuses on the Catholic doctrine of purgatory, an intermediate state in which the deceased person is purged of sin and made perfect in holiness through the cleansing effect of God’s grace. Like the Reformers, Wesley rejected the doctrine as merely speculative and liable to misuse (n.152). As already mentioned, Pope Benedict XVI’s encyclical, The Hope that Saves, refined Catholic teaching on the doctrine of Purgatory, and provides a basis for further discussion on this matter (n.153).

Another difference, related to this, concerns “Prayer for the Departed.” Catholics continue to pray for those still being purified (n.154), but in rejecting purgatory, the Reformers also rejected this practice, as have Methodists. But today a number of liturgical developments among Methodists, indicate that they may increasingly be open to the practice of prayer for the departed (n.155). Still another difference concerns the intercession of saints. For Catholics, the saints are intercessors because of the bonds of love that exist between all the members of the church and Christ (n.157). Methodists have been generally resistant to the invocation of saints lest the absolute uniqueness of Christ as sole mediator be compromised (n.158).

In regard to reflection on Mary, there are convergences in that Methodists and Catholics affirm the unique role of Mary in salvation history as recorded in scripture, notably her grace-filled response to God’s invitation to carry the incarnate Word in her womb, and her exemplary discipleship, urging others also to heed the call to holiness (Jn 2.5) (n.163). However Methodists and other Protestants have reservations about the scriptural foundations of the dogma of the Assumption (n.160). On the other hand, Methodists can affirm the core intention of that dogma “to bear witness to God’s saving work in Christ and the final consummation of holy living. By grace, Mary was made perfect in love and holiness through her close relationship with her son. From a Methodist perspective, Mary’s life is readily seen to manifest Christian perfection or entire sanctification. Thus her ‘falling asleep’ anticipates and testifies to the glorious future of all God’s children made possible through the paschal mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ” (n.163). Catholics and Methodists differ, however, “regarding what the spiritual and pastoral implications of Mary’s unique place within the communion of saints holds for the saints below.” Catholics regard the intercession of Mary as particularly effective because she is ‘Mother of God.’ Methodists find no reason to seek the intercession of Mary (or any other departed saint), for all are equally dependent upon Christ for their redemption. Further discussion may lead to greater convergence on these matters (n.164).

Finally, united with the saints above, the saints below await the return of the Lord as dramatically portrayed in the scriptures, which will bring salvation history to its close. The mission and the ministry of the Church will finally be fulfilled when all things are restored in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit (n.167). Catholics and Methodists “believe heaven to be the ultimate end and fulfillment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme happiness and bliss” (n.165). Both believe that the immortal soul will live on after death and the ‘mortal body’ will also experience resurrection.” Since Christ assumed all that is human, all that is human will be redeemed” (n.166).

Chapter Five summarizes Catholic and Methodist agreements found in previous chapters, in the form of “creedal statements,” noting also divergences which have been registered. It is hoped that this will assist discussion of these results in parishes and congregations.

Important is the affirmation, which is correct, made in n.186, summarizing especially ns. 109-110, that “the two principle rites of vocation for adults – marriage and orders – give grace to the individual or couple, so that the wider community might grow in grace”. This is followed by the statement “that there is no hierarchy to the various states of Christian life, and all can be avenues to, and expressions of holiness.” But from a Catholic perspective, more must be said on this matter to prevent misunderstanding. Thus, as reflected in n.110, Catholic teaching shows that “from the very beginning of the church there have been men and women who have renounced the great good of marriage to follow the Lamb wherever he goes... Christ himself has invited certain persons to follow him in this way of life, of which he remains the model...” (Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC] (1618). “Virginity for the sake of the kingdom of heaven is an unfolding of baptismal grace, a powerful sign of the supremacy of the bond with Christ and of the ardent expectation of his return, a sign which also recalls that marriage is a reality of this present age which is passing away” (CCC 1619). “Esteem of virginity for the sake of the kingdom and the Christian understanding of marriage are inseparable, and they reinforce each other.” (CCC 1620). According to Lumen gentium 42, the holiness of the Church is also “ fostered in a special way” by the
observance of the “manifold counsels proposed in the gospel by our Lord to his disciples. Outstanding among them is that precious gift of divine grace which the Father gives to some men… so that by virginity, or celibacy, they can more easily devote their entire lives to God alone with undivided heart. This total continence embraced on behalf of the kingdom of heaven has always been held in particular honor by the church…”

Finally, it can be noted here, as well, that the goal of this dialogue is stated as full communion in faith, mission and sacramental life. (ns.171, 176, 185). This is a good formulation, perhaps the best formulation of the goal of this dialogue that these two communions can express together at this time. At the same time, in an earlier statement of this international dialogue, the 1986 report Towards a Statement on the Church, the Roman Catholics clearly expressed their Church’s teaching that the Bishops, as successors of the Apostles, foster the unity of the People of God. “In collegial communion with fellow bishops and with the Bishop of Rome, they cement and express the bond of the universal fellowship” (n.32). Since this is a position with which Methodists apparently do not agree, one might ask in which way this Catholic teaching is accounted for in the formulation of the goal of this dialogue.

ECUMENICAL RECEIPTION

As mentioned above, the lack of reception of insights of dialogue reports into the life of the churches is one obstacle preventing the churches in dialogue from moving closer to unity. The Call to Holiness contributes to ecumenical reception in two ways. First, by various means, the report itself provides assistance to the reception of its findings into the local churches. Second, in making its theological arguments for its subject matter, it receives again, and utilizes, one of the milestones of the ecumenical movement, the official Lutheran and Catholic (1999) and Methodist (2006) Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, which resolved one of the major theological problems of the Reformation.

First, local reception and the pastoral aspect of this report. This report provides in a number of ways pastoral aids to reception of its major concerns. First, after theological elaboration on the subject matter, four of the five chapters conclude by giving a brief account of the life of two persons, one Catholic and one Methodist, who have been recognized by the respective communion as living an extraordinary life of holiness. This remarkable feature of the report helps the reader to see holiness in very tangible terms, encouraging the reader to explore his or her capabilities of deepening the quest for holiness. Second, Chapter Five in its second part, does two things which foster discussion of the theological content of the report. One is that it offers a summary, in the form of “creedal statements”, based on each of the previous chapters, of what Methodists and Catholics can say together, also noting divergences or differences when these have been registered. The other is that these “creedal statements” are followed by a series of questions for discussion on each chapter in regional or local settings where Methodists and Catholics live side by side. Third, the report provides a very helpful Appendix: “Resources for Prayer and Meditation.” These could be used for common ecumenical prayer between Methodists and Catholics during their discussions, or at other times. It provides prayers from both Methodist and Catholic sources, under categories also relating to the themes found in the report. These categories include: (1) Prayers of Self-Offering; (2) Prayers of Gratitude that we have been Saved and Prayers of Desire to Imitate Christ; (3) Prayers for the Saints Below; (4) Prayers concerning the Saints Above; (5) Prayers for Mission. The Appendix reminds us that while ecumenical dialogue is important for discovering agreements on the dimensions of holiness and all that it involves as Christians move on pilgrimage toward unity, prayer which promotes holiness, and prayer for unity, is even more fundamental. If made use of, these resources would be helpful for the reception of the report.

Second, this text receives and utilizes the historic Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. The JDDJ stated that “a consensus on basic truths of the doctrine of justification exists between Lutherans and Catholics (n.40), thus helping resolve the clashes over this doctrine of justification which were at the heart of Luther’s protest against the Church in the sixteenth century. In 2006, the World Methodist Council officially associated with the JDDJ, joining Lutherans and Catholics in accepting this ecumenical achievement. While The Call to Holiness builds on and receives previous Methodist-Catholic international reports, it also builds on and continues to receive the JDDJ. It does this in several ways.

In its introduction, The Call to Holiness mentions three theological foundations for this report which are particularly noteworthy, one of them being the Methodist Statement of Association with the Joint Declaration (MAJDDJ) (n.6). In addressing the subject of grace in Chapter Two, the MAJDDJ “is an important source of basic agreement between Catholics and Methodists (and Lutherans) concerning theological questions which have divided Catholics and Protestants since the Reformation” (n.44).

As Chapter Two continues, its treatment of “The Grace that Enables”, starts by citing JDDJ 19: “Catholics and Methodists ‘confess together that all persons depend completely on the saving grace of God for their salvation.’” But it is especially under the second heading (the grace that justifies) and third heading (the grace that sanctifies) that specific JDDJ wording is used a number of times to articulate aspects of Methodist and Catholic theological agreement.

4. It is used in three different numbers under “The Grace that Justifies” (in n.59 (twice), n.60 and n.61), and in two numbers under
CONCLUSION

The Call to Holiness makes an important ecumenical contribution in several ways. First by showing the many agreements/convergences Catholics and Methodists share on the matters discussed, it underlines again, and deepens, the real though imperfect communion which they share. The clear explanations of differences help the reader to see where dialogue is still necessary, and the differences are often accompanied with suggestions illustrating the direction which dialogue can take in order to deepen that communion.

Second, the report shows clearly the two areas which every dialogue now should take into account, namely, the continuation of dialogue itself to clarify and resolve issues over which Christians are divided, and second, the various possibilities of reception of dialogue results. Third, it illustrates that among issues over which Christians divided, common views on issues related to holiness and the spiritual life are also important. Fourth, this dialogue’s way of linking holiness to unity is a significant contribution to the ecumenical movement.

On various occasions, Pope John Paul II spoke of ecumenism as a pastoral priority of his ministry, and of the Church. Ecumenical achievements such as reconciliation of Christians on important matters such as justification (the JDDJ), or the milestone Faith and Order text Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM), are, of course, vital for ecumenical progress. What they have achieved is also pastoral because they enable divided Christians to recognize one another more easily as brothers and sisters in Christ. Exploring the topic of holiness enabled Methodists and Catholics to explore, together, life in Christ. In a sense this dialogue itself plunged them into the pastoral life itself. It enabled them to explore that at which Christians always aim when preaching the gospel, administering sacraments, doing catechetical work. That is, to promote and deepen holiness among Christians and others who will hear. It is to promote the holiness, the closeness to God which we gain because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This indeed is a pastoral priority.

With this report the international Methodist-Catholic dialogue has taken another step towards healing the division between their communions. One must congratulate that dialogue for this important contribution, and pray that its consistent work of healing the divisions between us will continue and be successful as well.

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Under “The Grace that Justifies,” in n.59 the heart of the JDDJ is cited to remind the reader that, while historically there was conflict between Catholics and Protestants concerning justification, today Methodists and Catholics can together confess 'By grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works’ (JDDJ, 15). They also cite the Joint Declaration in saying together that “even faith is not a human achievement since ‘faith is itself God’s gift through the Holy Spirit who works through word and sacrament in the community of believers’ (JDDJ, 16).” In n.60, the JDDJ is cited to show the biblical basis for saying that justification means “liberation from the dominating power of sin and death,” that it “unites a sinner with Christ and with his death and resurrection,” and that it means “being accepted into a relationship of communion (koinonia) with God already now, but then fully in God’s coming Kingdom” (JDDJ, n.11). In n.61, JDDJ 25 is cited in speaking of the relation between faith and good works, namely that good works do not contribute to justification, but they are its inevitable consequence. Faith in the saving action of God in Christ is always and necessarily active in love and thus results in good works of mercy and piety. The point is then made by citing JDDJ 25 that ‘whatever in the justified precedes or follows the free gift of faith is neither the basis of justification or merits it.’

Still in Chapter Two, in two numbers under “The Grace that Sanctifies” the JDDJ is cited twice as support. First to support the important point in n.65, that “Sanctifying grace is not only interior to the human soul, but also involves a commitment to holy living in every sphere of human life (cf. Rom 12.1)”, it cites JDDJ 37 after saying that “Catholics and Methodists confess together that good works of mercy and piety are the fruit of justification and an obligation of holy living.” Then, their assertion, in n. 66, that “Holy living itself leads to growth in sanctifying grace” is supported by JDDJ 38. In discussion on “The Grace that Sanctifies” references are made to MAJDDJ, once in n.66, once in n.67. The JDDJ is cited to support themes also in other sections of the report.

Thus, in this report, the achievements of this dialogue on holiness are well presented, and the important contributions to reception of dialogue results are well illustrated.

“‘The Grace that Sanctifies’” (n.65 and n.66), MAJDDJ is referred to twice under “The Grace that Sanctifies” (n.66 and n.67).

5. In Chapter two, under “Good Works and merit,” para 79 cites JDDJ 15, and para 80 cites JDDJ 38, and under “The Assurance of Faith and Salvation,” para 88 refers to JDDJ 34, para 91 refers to JDDJ 36, and para 92 refers to MAJDDJ n. 4.6.
JUSTIFICATION AND SACRAMENTALITY: 
THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY AS AN AGENT FOR JUSTICE

REPORT OF THE FOURTH PHASE OF CATHOLIC-REFORMED 
INTERNATIONAL DIALOGUE*

INTRODUCTION

1. “Justification and Sacramentality: The Christian Community as an Agent for Justice” constituted the theme of the fourth phase of the international Catholic-Reformed dialogue, which was held under the auspices of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU) and the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) between 2011 and 2015. In these meetings, representatives of the Catholic Church and the Reformed churches came to explore various dimensions of this theme. At Rome, Italy, in 2011, “Justification: Reformed and Catholic (Historically and Currently)” introduced the discussions. “Justification and Sacramentality” with emphasis on the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist or Lord’s Supper provided the agenda for the meeting at Decatur, Georgia (USA), in 2012. In 2013 at South Bend, Indiana (USA), the topic “Justification and Sanctification” in the context of the teaching authority of the church continued the conversations. At the fourth meeting at Coatbridge, Scotland, in 2014, the dialogue team explored the relationship between justification and justice, discussed preliminary drafts of the first chapter, and proposed the outline for the entire text. At Ghent, Belgium, in 2015, after several short papers on particular points that had been identified as needing further consideration, the initial drafts for the entire report were carefully revised, tasks were assigned and a plan was agreed for the final revision and completion of the report.

2. This most recent phase resumes a dialogue that originated in informal discussions between members of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and the Catholic Church during the Fourth General Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) held in Uppsala, Sweden in 1968. Both communions were convinced that in the context of the new situation created by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) the time was auspicious to move forward with official conversations at the international level. The theme chosen for their first meeting was “The Presence of Christ in Church and World” (1970-1977), which addressed the topics of Christology, ecclesiology, the Eucharist, and ministry. The second phase of the dialogue, “Towards a Common Understanding of the Church,” (1984-1990), sought to extend the conversation on ecclesiology, focusing especially on the relation between the gospel and church in its ministerial and instrumental roles. These roles were seen to consist in the proclamation of the gospel and the celebration of the sacraments. The former has assumed central importance for the Reformed churches and determined their understanding of the church as “creature of the Word” (creatura verbi). The category of sacrament has been decisive for the Catholic understanding of the church, defined here as “sacrament of grace” (sacramentum gratiae). The signal achievement of this phase was the mutual recognition that these two conceptions of the church are complementary: Word and sacrament are necessary for any adequate conception of the church. In the third phase, “The Church as Community of Common Witness to the Kingdom of God” (1998-2005), the two communions sought to shed further light on ecclesiology and Christian witness through an extended biblical investigation into the kingdom of God. At least two reasons—methodological and thematic—lay behind this choice. First, the ecumenical movement had already by this time begun to ask about the aims of dialogue: how does the struggle to overcome Christian divisions in faith and order relate to the struggle to overcome what divides societies, nations, cultures and religions in today’s world? Since the kingdom of God, the universal reign of peace which is the destiny of the whole creation, embraces in a mysterious way all cultures, societies, nations, and religions, the theme was considered responsive to this concern. Second, the theme proved appealing in light of its biblical and patristic roots, its relative neglect by both sides of the Reformation divide, and its helpfulness in addressing the hopes of contemporary Christians for a greater measure of peace, justice and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17) in a turbulent world.

3. How then does the theme “Justification and Sacramentality: The Christian Community as Agent for Justice” continue and build on what has preceded? To

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* Following the request of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, in this report the title “Catholic Church” refers to that community that is also known as the Roman Catholic Church.

2. Ibid., 17.
answer this question, it is necessary to note developments in the first decade of this century, especially since the end of the third phase of our dialogue in 2005. These developments in large part influenced the choice of this theme.

4. On 31 October, 1999 the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ) was signed by the Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity in Augsburg, Germany. As the outcome of thirty years of bilateral dialogue on a doctrine regarded as one of the most important disputes of the Reformation era, the consensus statement was then and is still regarded now as a significant milestone on the ecumenical journey which Catholics and Lutherans have traveled together. But this historic event has had ecumenical repercussions for other churches that did not participate in the process culminating in JDDJ. For this reason, its signatories invited the World Methodist Council (WMC) and WARC, together with observers from the Commission on Faith and Order of the WCC, to a theological consultation in Columbus, Ohio (USA), in 2001. The purpose of the invitation was twofold: (1) to submit JDDJ to these churches for theological evaluation; and (2) to determine ways to involve them in ongoing discussion with the ultimate aim of inviting them to associate with JDDJ. For their part, the delegates of the WMC received the content of JDDJ; the WMC associated itself with JDDJ at its world conference in July 2006 at Seoul, Republic of Korea.

5. The WARC took a somewhat different approach in responding to JDDJ. Because of their historical commitment to the doctrine of justification and to its implications for individual and social life, the Reformed were invited to participate in a quadrilateral study commission, in which their perspective was expected to contribute to a wider ecumenical understanding of justification. This commission was not constituted at the time. Non-official responses to JDDJ, however, include three Reformed presentations given at Columbus. In addition, the European Area Committee of WARC appointed a Theological Subcommittee following the Columbus consultation to address the doctrine of justification from the Reformed perspective, with particular attention to the relation between justification and justice. These reports were later compiled in a volume published in 2009. No official action on JDDJ, however, was taken by WARC.

6. The following year witnessed a significant event in the history of the worldwide Reformed family of churches: in 2010 WARC and the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC) organized a Unity General Council (UGC) in Grand Rapids, Michigan (USA), to merge the two bodies into the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). This new fellowship of Reformed, Presbyterian, Congregational, Waldensian, United and Uniting churches was the outcome of a process that began for WARC in Accra, Ghana in 2004 and for REC in Utrecht, the Netherlands in 2005.

7. This event provided an opportunity to the new WCRC to learn the mind of its member churches about a number of issues affecting them. To give concrete responses to these issues each of the delegates was appointed to a thematic section, including one on “Christian unity and ecumenical engagement.” Here the delegates urged that future ecumenical encounters should emphasize the implications of theological positions for action on behalf of justice in the world. Having the proposed theme of the upcoming phase of the Catholic-Reformed dialogue on justification before them, the delegates observed that there is a necessary relationship between justice and justification. In Jesus Christ the “setting right” which is accomplished in God’s work of justification calls and commits the justified to the work of justice in the wider world. For the Reformed churches today, “justification” and “justice” are integral to each other. Therefore, the latter cannot fall outside a doctrinal consensus on justification in any agreed statement. Even JDDJ itself speaks of the need to clarify further issues of doctrine, not least the relation between justification and social ethics. In this spirit there was some willingness on the part of the delegates to investigate what it may mean for the Reformed to associate with JDDJ. A new statement on justification could serve as a theological foundation of the Reformed churches’ commitment to justice. In addition, attaching such a statement to JDDJ in the act of associating with it would be symbolically significant in view of the 500th anniversary in 2017 of the beginning of the Reformation.

8. Since the signing of the JDDJ in 1999, several significant events have occurred also in the Catholic Church related to the theme of this phase of the dialogue. First of all, the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 gave special attention to ecumenical relations and, in his post-Jubilee apostolic exhortation Novo millennio inunte (2001), Pope John Paul II expressed hope for a renewed ecumenical commitment in the post-Jubilee pilgrimage. Second, the first decade of the new millennium provided many occasions for further reflection on the JDDJ both within the Catholic Church and with various other Christian communities, as mentioned above. Third, that decade was also marked by synods of Catholic bishops devoted to the

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5. JDDJ, 43. For the complete text, see http://www.prounione.urbe.it/dia-int/l-rc/doc/i_l-rc_just.html (accessed 20 February 2016).
Eucharist (2005) and to the Word of God (2008), both of which resulted in important theological literature and official teaching on Word and sacrament. Fourth, the pontificate of Pope Benedict XVI (2005-2013), included not only many ecumenical meetings and initiatives but also three encyclical letters (Deus caritatis est (2005), Spe salvi (2007), and Caritas in veritate (2009), which provided substantial biblical and theological material relevant to the themes chosen for the present phase of our dialogue. For example, the attention given by the last of these to Catholic social teaching and to the theological foundation of a just society paralleled the concerns of the third phase of the dialogue and one of the more important emphases of Reformed churches in recent years. Moreover, the special Pauline Year (June 2008-June 2009) provided numerous opportunities for reflection on the writings of Saint Paul, particularly Pope Benedict’s cycle of catecheses on Paul’s doctrine of justification.6 Subsequently, the interventions of Pope Francis confirmed some of the themes mentioned here.

9. Thus, various developments in both communions opened the way for beginning a new, fourth phase of bilateral dialogue between us. The theme of justification by faith naturally presented itself as an obvious and preferred topic in light of the various unfinished conversations between us in relation to the JDDJ during the first decade of the new century, as reported above. Furthermore, the convergence claimed and deepened by our two preceding phases of dialogue concerning the complementarity of Word and sacrament offered the intriguing prospect of exploring how these two essential dimensions of ecclesial life might relate to justification by faith and sanctification. The fact that both Reformed and Catholic believers see an indissoluble link between justification and sanctification, both of which are intimately related to Word and sacrament, promised to open new levels of convergence between us. Finally, the keen interest by both of our communions in the role of the church as an agent for justice led to the tantalizing intuition that justification and Christian action on behalf of justice in the world must be intimately connected to each other. These considerations prompted the choice to explore the connections between justification and sanctification and the ministry of Word and sacrament with a view to clarifying the role of Christians and the church as a whole as agents for justice in the world.

10. The foregoing reflections on these developments explain the decision to dedicate this fourth phase of dialogue to an exploration of the theme: “Justification and Sacramentality: The Christian Community as an Agent for Justice.” Accordingly, the structure of the following report consists of the following chapters: I. “Justification and Sanctification”; II. “Justification and Sanctification through the Church’s Ministry of Word and Sacrament”; and III. “Justification, Sanctification and Christian Action on Behalf of Justice in the World.”

CHAPTER ONE
JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION

11. Central to the disputes at the time of the Reformation was the understanding of the doctrine of justification by faith. The centrality of this doctrine was reaffirmed in the JDDJ, signed by the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church on 31 October 1999. Several member churches of WARC offered varying and even critical reviews of the document. The newly formed WRCR later concurred with its insistence on the importance of the doctrine of justification by faith. An earlier phase of the Catholic-Reformed dialogue registered agreement between us about the Trinitarian and Christological foundations of justification and sanctification, which we determined to be a helpful starting point for our own reflections:

6. During the “Year of Faith” called by Pope Benedict to mark the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, Francis’ first encyclical, Lumen fidei (2013), not only supplemented Pope Benedict’s letters on charity and hope but also resonated well with the theme of justification by faith. In his apostolic exhortation Evangelii gaudium (2013), Francis called for a renewed proclamation of the gospel in the context of the many social challenges facing today’s world, devoting the entire fourth chapter of this document to “The Social Dimension of Evangelisation” (176-258). He writes that “All Christians, their pastors included, are called to show concern for the building of a better world,” a task in which the Catholic Church unites “its own commitment to that made in the social field by other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, whether at the level of doctrinal reflection or at the practical level” (183).

Before all humankind, sisters and brothers, we announce the death of the Lord (cf. 1 Cor. 11:26) and proclaim his resurrection from the dead (cf. Rom. 10:9; Acts 2:32; 3:15). In the mystery of his death and resurrection we confess the event which saves humanity, that is, it liberates it from the distress in which it is imprisoned by sin and establishes it in communion with God. . . . In his life and in his death Jesus is revealed as the Son par excellence of God, the one alone who knows the Father and whom the Father alone knows (cf. Matt. 11:27), who can address himself to God saying “Abba, Father” (Mark 14:36). . . . Finally, the work of Jesus, the Son, reveals to us the role of the Spirit who is common to him and to the Father: it reveals to us that God is triune. By the life, death and
resurrection, the Holy Spirit becomes the common gift of the Father and the Son to humanity.7

12. Subsequent paragraphs of the same report8 present material pertinent to justification and sanctification. From Jesus Christ, the one Mediator between God and humankind, comes the grace by which we are justified through faith and thereby brought into communion with God in the one Holy Spirit. That dialogue team further confessed that the acceptance in faith of justification is itself a gift of grace. “To rely for this salvation on anything other than faith would be to [detract] from the fullness of salvation accomplished and offered in Jesus Christ.”9

13. This faith through which we receive our justification, our “pardon, our liberation, our life with God,”10 is a “living and life-giving faith,”11 that is, it is a faith that “receives grace freely” and “bears testimony actively” as it works itself out in love (cf. Gal. 5:6). Justification can thus be seen to issue in good works. “Justified by the free gift of faith, [we] can henceforth live according to righteousness”12 and “committed to gratitude and service, we bear fruits worthy of the grace”13 we have received. In this connection, this previous phase of the dialogue stated that “justification by faith brings with it the gift of sanctification, which can grow continually as it creates life, justice and liberty.”14 Thus, Jesus Christ is not only the one Mediator but also the “unique way” by which we may lead lives pleasing to God.

A. Justification and Sanctification: Reformed Perspective

14. The Reformed tradition developed its understanding of justification initially in the 16th century, in agreement with Martin Luther’s emphasis that Christ alone is our righteousness, which we receive by faith alone and not through any works of our own. John Calvin even called justification “the main hinge on which religion turns.”15 In addition, in the work of Calvin and such confessional documents as the Belgic Confession (1561), the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), the Second Helvetic Confession (1566), and the Westminster Confession (1647) there is evident a deep concern for sanctification, that process of growth in holiness which Reformed see as a vital, but distinct aspect of Christian life. From the 16th century to the present, this “double grace” of justification and sanctification has characterized the Reformed understanding of salvation, and the two should be considered as distinct but never as separate from one another. Recent confessional documents have continued this dual emphasis, but have tended not to use those specific terms, preferring instead language such as “deliverance” and “service.”16

15. Jesus Christ is the basis and content of our justification. The starting point for the Reformed understanding of justification is that Christ himself is our righteousness (cf. 1 Cor 1:30). For the Reformed tradition, the righteousness of Christ that we receive is grounded in his perfect obedience, which is defined as both active and passive. By his active obedience he perfectly fulfilled the law through his life of love toward God and human beings, especially those in dire need. This is precisely the life for which God created us, yet because we fail to live it in greater or lesser degrees we stand condemned as sinners before God’s just judgment. But for this very reason, Christ’s obedience is also passive. By his passive obedience Christ consented to bear, in his passion and death on the cross, the just penalty of the law against sin in order that we might be pardoned.

16. Christ was delivered over to death for our sins, but raised to life for our justification (Rom 4:25). In the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are at once judged and condemned for our sins and accepted in grace, placed in a new life before God and with God. On the basis of what Christ has done and undergone for us and in our place, God is merciful with respect to our sins and does not impute them to us, but rather imputes to us the righteousness of Christ (cf. 2 Cor 5:19).17 In this event consists the mystery of the “wonderful exchange” (commercium admirabile). On the cross Christ has taken our sin and death to himself (cf. Rom 8:3, 4), and in rising again from the dead he gives us his righteousness and life.

17. Christ’s righteousness and life are given to us whole and entire by faith, which unites us with Christ and makes us members of his body the church. They are given to the believer once and for all, in and with baptism, and then ever anew day by day. To believe in Jesus Christ is to receive him as he has given himself to us. According to John Calvin, Christ has given himself not only to deliver us from sin and death and restore us to favor with God, but also to regenerate us by his Spirit, so that we may live a new life of love and righteousness.18 In virtue of our union with Christ through faith we therefore have received a twofold

8. Ibid., 77-79.
9. Ibid., 77.
10. Ibid., 78.
11. Ibid., 77.
12. Ibid., 79.
13. Ibid., 79.
17. Institutes of the Christian Religion, 3.3.1., 592-93.
benefit (*duplex gratia*), namely, justification and sanctification.

18. Like justification, sanctification is entirely a gift of grace received by faith. The sanctifying action of the Holy Spirit is reflected in a faith that is living, because it “ apprehends Christ who is alive and makes alive and shows that it is alive by living works.”

19. It is impossible for true faith to be unfruitful, because it is a faith that works itself out in love (cf. *Gal* 5:6) and engenders a desire to do those works that God has commanded in his word. Thus the new life of faith is characterized by a “complete joy in God through Christ and a strong desire to live according to the will of God in all good works.”

19. This is not to suggest that our walk in obedience is anything more than a small beginning in this new life of faith. Though sanctification is given to us whole and entire, we never succeed completely in overcoming all sin here and now. There remains a continual struggle between the flesh, which desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit, which desires what is contrary to the flesh (cf. *Gal* 5:17). Therefore, the new life of faith consists not only in works of love and justice, but also in lifelong repentance. Though the power of sin is broken, we have still to pray for forgiveness for the sins that we daily commit as those who are both righteous and sinful (*simul iustus et peccator*). We have constantly to die (*mortificatio*) to sin in order that we may live (*vivificatio*) to God in the power of the risen Christ (cf. *Rom* 6:11). “For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them” (2 *Cor* 5:14-15).

20. God continues to forgive the sins of those who are justified, and they can never fall ultimately from the state of justification. Since the gifts and call of God are irrevocable (cf. *Rom* 11:29), the gift of faith includes the assurance of salvation; faith without assurance is deficient. Nevertheless, our assurance does not come from anything in ourselves, much less from our good works; rather, it is based on Christ and the promises of God. Our perseverance is based on the promise of God to be faithful to us in Christ to the end. “I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6). For this reason we are confident as we work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in us according to his good pleasure (cf. Phil 2:12-13).

21. A presentation of the Catholic doctrine of justification and sanctification requires a consideration of the teachings of the Council of Trent (1547), the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and the *JDDJ* (1999). Catholics believe that doctrine undergoes development and deepening in the course of history in a way that is both faithful to Scripture and tradition, on the one hand, and responsive to the needs of new contexts and questions, on the other. While the teaching of the Council of Trent is the first official, normative Catholic presentation of the doctrine of justification, Vatican II provided a solid Christological, anthropological and ecclesiological basis for this teaching and the *JDDJ*, as its official explanation within the context of the ecumenical dialogue, is an authoritative interpretation of it.

22. Critically responding to the Reformers, the Council of Trent assumed the Pauline category of “justification,” but previously that same salvific event was also described in terms of new life, re-creation in Christ, sanctification. The essential content of the decree affirms that justification depends entirely on the grace of God that we receive through Jesus Christ, in continuity with the teaching of the first millennium against the errors of Pelagius. Self-justification is excluded from the outset, and salvation is said to be offered to the whole world through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ: “But even though ‘Christ died for all’ (cf. 2 *Cor* 5:15), still not all receive the benefit of his death, but only those to whom the merit of his Passion is imparted.” The merit of Christ effects “the transition from the state in which one is born a child of the first Adam, to the state of grace and adoption as [children] of God (cf. *Rom* 8:15) through the second Adam Jesus Christ our Saviour.” In adults, the beginning of justification is attributed to God’s prevenient grace through Jesus Christ. By turning away from sins, adults assent to and cooperate with God’s grace and so prepare for the sacrament of baptism, which bestows the gift of justification.


25. *Ibid*, chapters 5 and 6. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* interprets the meaning of this “cooperation” in the following way: “Justification establishes cooperation between God’s grace and man’s freedom. On man’s part it is expressed by the assent of faith to the Word of God, which invites him to conversion, and in the cooperation of charity with the prompting of the Holy Spirit who precedes and preserves his assent.” Liguori, MO, Liguori Publications, 1994, 1993.
23. Trent uses the language of causality to describe justification in a way that gives emphasis to the priority of the divine action.26 The aim of justification (its “final cause”) is the “glory of God and of Christ, and life everlasting.” The agent (“efficient cause”) “is the merciful God who gratuitously washes and sanctifies (cf. 1 Cor 6:11), sealing and anointing with the promised Holy Spirit. . . .” The meritorious cause “is the most beloved only begotten Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ who, ‘while we were enemies’ (Rom 5:10), ‘out of great love with which he loved us’ (Eph 4:4) merited for us justification by his most holy Passion on the wood of the Cross and made satisfaction for us to God the Father.” Baptism plays an instrumental role; for this reason it is considered the “sacrament of faith,” since without faith “no one has ever been justified.” Finally, the formal cause of justification is “the justice of God, not that by which He Himself is just, but that by which he makes us just.”

24. Justification remains a free gift of grace, since “nothing that precedes justification, neither faith nor works, merits the grace of justification.”27 During the course of life, one can “increase in the very justice . . . received through the grace of Christ,”28 seeking to live a godly life (cf. Tit 2:12), obeying the commandments (cf. 1 Jn 5:3) and performing good works (2 Pet 1:10). Nevertheless, one must not be presumptuous about salvation but rather ask for the grace of perseverance.29 Finally, God rewards those who “abound in good works” (cf. 1 Cor 15:58; Heb 6:10; 10:22; 2 Tim 4:7), which are never independent of Christ. As the life of the vine flows into the branches (cf. Jn 15:5), so the power of Christ “always precedes, accompanies, and follows [our] good works, which, without it, could in no way be pleasing to God and meritorious.”30 Sanctifying grace is lost by mortal sin, even though faith might not be lost. This grace can be restored to the repentant sinner through the sacrament of penance instituted by Christ for this very purpose.

25. The affirmations of the Second Vatican Council that Christ is the “focal point and goal” of human life and that in him alone is revealed the mystery of human dignity, community, and action address to some extent the Christological concerns expressed in the Reformation slogan solus Christus. The Church likewise believes that the key, the center and the purpose of the whole of human history is to be found in its Lord and Master. The Lord is the goal of human history, the aim of justification (its “final cause”), and that in him alone is revealed the mystery of human dignity, community, and action. The church is the people of God, the community of believers who have responded to God’s self-revelation in faith under the influence of the grace of the Holy Spirit.33 These teachings of Vatican II represent a deepening of Trent’s vision of faith, relating it to the Christological, anthropological, and ecclesiological doctrines of the Catholic Church. Faith is no longer considered merely as the first step in the process of justification that leads to the reception of baptism.

26. The principal elements of an authentic interpretation of justification, as officially embraced by the Catholic Church in the JDDJ, include the following affirmations: “sinners are justified by faith in the saving action of God in Christ” and “whatever in the justified precedes or follows the free gift of faith is neither the basis of justification nor merits it.”36 Renewal of life “necessarily follows from justification”; without such renewal “faith does not exist.”37 Therefore, when

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26. All quotations in this paragraph are taken from Decree on Justification, 7 (1528-31).
27. Ibid, 8 (1532).
28. Ibid, 10 (1533).
29. Ibid, 12-13 (1540-41).
30. Ibid, 16 (1545).
31. Cf. Vatican Council II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World Gaudium et spes, 10 and 45 (4310, 4345); see also 22, 32 and 38 (4322, 4332, and 4338).
32. Vatican Council I, Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith Dei Filius, 3 (3008).
33. Synod of Orange II, can. 7 (377); Vatican Council I, Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith Dei Filius, 3 (3010).
34. Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on Revelation Dei verbum, 5 (4205). See also the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation On the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church Verbum dominii (September 30, 2010) of Pope Benedict XVI, especially on the God who speaks (6-16), our response in faith to the God who speaks (22-25) and all of Part Two on the Word of God in the church, Verbum in ecclesia (50-89).
36. JDDJ, 25.
claiming that the renewal of the person takes place through the reception of grace, Catholics do not thereby deny that God’s gift of grace in justification remains independent of human cooperation.”

Human participation in preparing for the reception of justification is itself “an effect of grace” and “not an action arising from innate human abilities.” While not using the language of “assurance of salvation” (perhaps because of Trent’s caution against rash presumption), still Catholics affirm that, in spite of human weakness, a believer cannot “at the same time consider the divine promise untrustworthy.”

C. Consensus and Convergence

27. Regardless of the differences which appear in the previous two sections, our exploration of this theme, together with the common confession from the second phase of our dialogue, allows us to claim full agreement with the consensus formulated in JDDJ:

In faith we together hold the conviction that justification is the work of the triune God. The Father sent his Son into the world to save sinners. The foundation and presupposition of justification is the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ. Justification thus means that Christ himself is our righteousness, in which we share through the Holy Spirit in accord with the will of the Father. Together we confess: By grace alone, in Christ’s saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to do good works.

28. We also affirm together that the doctrines of justification and sanctification must be seen within the whole scope of Christian revelation. Scripture and its faithful interpretation in the course of the life of the church confess the saving activity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in bringing about the redemption of human beings from sin and death and their sanctification by means of this same divine economy. We firmly agree that there are a plurality of images and metaphors used both in Scripture and our respective traditions to describe this saving activity and that justification cannot be separated from many other ways of speaking about salvation, including redemption, reconciliation, regeneration, forgiveness, new creation, and kingdom of God, among others. Nevertheless, we agree that the doctrine of justification is of particular significance in expressing the very heart of the gospel.

29. We also affirm together that justification and sanctification are free gifts received by faith, not earned by us.

30. We also affirm together that justification is inseparable from sanctification, which involves the transformation of the sinner and the commitment to live a life of righteousness and love, a life characterized by obedience to the commandments and to the teachings of Jesus. The council fathers at Trent taught that Christians must strive to live in charity. They emphasized this calling to counter what they perceived to be a teaching that rendered unnecessary the pursuit of a life of holiness because of the assurance that salvation is based on faith alone. Calvin’s teaching of the double grace of justification and sanctification that we receive in virtue of our union with Christ shows that the position rejected by Trent is not applicable to him. Since justification and sanctification are so intimately united for the Reformed, they cannot be said to have denied the need for the pursuit of holiness that Trent was so concerned to defend.

D. Points Needing Further Clarification

31. Our dialogue has acknowledged that there are different conceptions at work in our thinking about justification which, however, appear to be compatible with our agreement with the fundamental statement of the JDDJ. We are agreed that we are justified only in virtue of the passion and resurrection of Christ for the glory of God, the honor of Christ, and eternal life. The major remaining divergence seems to be that for the Catholic justification refers to a process while for the Reformed it indicates a status. Trent and classical Catholic teaching speak of an “increase” or “growth” in justification. For the Reformed, justification refers to the new standing we have before and with God, in union with Christ by grace through faith, as pardoned and reconciled sinners. This standing is whole and complete and so cannot admit of a “more” or a “less.” Reformed, however, do speak of increase and growth in sanctification.

32. Trent maintains that one can lose the grace of justification after serious sin. Nevertheless, Catholics affirm that one cannot believe in God and at the same time consider the divine promise untrustworthy. No one may doubt God’s mercy and Christ’s merit. The Reformed insist that one cannot lose the gift of justification. The assurance of salvation is rooted in the calling and gifts of God, which are irrevocable. The Reformed affirm that assurance of salvation rests not in themselves but in the promises of God who is

38. Ibid., 24.
39. Ibid., 20.
40. Ibid., 36.
41. Ibid., 15.
42. Decree on the Sacraments, Foreword (1600). While Trent speaks of an “increase” in justification, the more common Catholic way of expressing progress in discipleship is in terms of growth in grace. All followers of Christ “must steadily advance along the way of a living faith, which arouses hope and works through love…” But if charity is to grow and fructify in the soul like a good seed, each of the faithful must willingly hear the word of God and carry out his will with deeds, with the help of his grace.” Lumen gentium, 41, 42 (4166).
43. JDDJ 36.
faithful. Still, in the Reformed tradition there have been some who have raised the question of this absolute assurance of salvation over against serious sin committed by the justified believer.\textsuperscript{44} 33. Trent finds the concept of “merit” helpful for understanding what the New Testament affirms about God’s promise to reward good works, even using the concept with respect to eternal life. The Reformed tradition, concerned to safeguard a proper understanding of salvation by grace alone, has preferred to apply the concept to Jesus Christ. Thus, we are justified not on the basis of our works and merits (propter opera et merita nostra) but on the basis of Christ’s merit (propter merita Christi). The Reformed do not deny that God rewards good works (cf. Matt 5:12; 10:42 et passim), but they do not ascribe the reward to the person who receives it; it is ascribed rather to the “goodness, generosity and truthfulness of God who promises and gives it.”\textsuperscript{45} As St. Augustine wrote: “God crowns in us the gifts of His own mercy.”\textsuperscript{46} Above all, for the Reformed eternal life is not seen as a reward dependent on good works, but as a free gift given in justification by grace through faith alone.

CHAPTER TWO
JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION THROUGH THE CHURCH’S MINISTRY OF WORD AND SACRAMENT
34. The previous chapter pointed out agreement between the Reformed and Catholics that justification and sanctification cannot be separated. The present chapter seeks to integrate that agreement with an important achievement claimed by two earlier phases of dialogue between our communities. They had stated that a typical way of contrasting our respective visions of the Church as “creation of the Word” (creatura verbi) for the Reformed and as “sacrament of grace” (sacramentum gratiae) for Catholics was insufficient, because this does justice neither to the Christian understanding of the Word of God nor to that of sacrament, which always comprises both performative gesture and accompanying word. In 1990, the final report of our second phase of dialogue noted:

The two conceptions, “the creation of the Word” and “sacrament of grace,” can in fact be seen as expressing the same instrumental reality under different aspects, as complementary to each other or as two sides of the same coin. They can also become the poles of a creative tension between our churches.\textsuperscript{47}

Subsequently, the final report of the third phase, issued in 2007, stated:

We can now affirm, in light of our investigation both of the kingdom and of the patristic literature, not only that these visions are mutually informative and complementary but also that neither is fully adequate without the other. A “sacramental” church that does not give proper place to the Word of God would be essentially incomplete; a church that is truly a creation of the Word will celebrate that Word liturgically and sacramentally. If our churches differ according to these two visions, perhaps it is less because either church is convinced that the church is only creatura verbi or only sacramentum gratiae and more because each tradition has emphasized one aspect to the point of de-emphasizing or neglecting the other. In such a case, arriving at full communion will amount to a process in which each community recovers the full scope of God’s provision for the life of the church.\textsuperscript{48}

How do justification and sanctification relate to the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the sacraments within the ongoing life of the Christian community? Because the specific theme of this fourth phase of dialogue between our communities concerns the relation of justification to the “sacramentality” of the church and to the church’s action on behalf of justice, the present chapter will concentrate on the relation of justification and sanctification to Word and sacrament, while the final chapter will consider the relation of justification and sanctification to action on behalf of justice.

35. Our experience has confirmed what a recent ecumenical report pointed out about one result of the long division of Christian communities from one another:

Dialogue demonstrates that the partners speak different languages and understand the meanings of words differently; they make different distinctions and think in different thought forms. However, what appears to be an opposition in expression is not always an opposition in substance. In order to determine the exact relationship between respective articles of doctrine, texts must be interpreted in the light of the historical context in which they arose. That allows one to see where a difference or opposition truly exists and where it does not.\textsuperscript{49}

Perhaps this is especially important to remember when discussing the relation of justification to Word

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45. Second Helvetic Confession, 16.
47. Towards a Common Understanding of the Church, 113.
48. The Church as Community of Common Witness to the Kingdom of God, 193.
and sacrament or when asking whether the church as a whole may be considered in some sense to be “sacramental.” John Calvin and many other leaders of the 16th century Reformation had no hesitation in speaking about the necessity of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper within the life of the church. Yet they placed more emphasis upon Christ as the ground and content of justification and sanctification and upon the Holy Spirit’s use of the proclamation of the Word to impart saving faith than upon the role of the sacraments or that of the church as a whole. For the Reformed, however, the church is the ordinary setting where the proclamation of Christ’s gospel of salvation takes place. For their part, Catholics have tended to emphasize the close union between Christ and the church in such a way as to see Christ’s saving activity through the Church’s proclamation of the Word and celebration of the sacraments; nevertheless, for them Christ remains the unique foundation and author of justification and sanctification. Both views can call upon Scripture for support — that there is salvation in no one else but Christ (cf. Acts 4:12 and 1 Cor 3:11) and that Christ is intimately united through the Spirit with his body, the Church (cf. Eph 1:22-23; 4:15-16). But the customary language, thought and exegetical patterns of both churches emphasize these truths in different ways. As a result, the language of “sacraments” and of “sacramentality” sounds different to Reformed believers than it does to Catholic believers.

36. Can one delve underneath such language to ask whether there is a real difference in substance between our communities? Both profess that the actions of the church in proclaiming the Word and in celebrating the sacraments are not on the same level as the saving activity of Christ but are dependent on his gift of grace and the power of the Holy Spirit. The heart of the question seems to concern whether — and, if so, how — one may speak of a certain “instrumentality” or “cooperation” on the part of the church. An important consensus on this point has already been reached in Catholic-Protestant dialogue in France: “The divergence . . . does not pertain to the fact of the instrumentality of the Church in the transmission of salvation, but to the nature of this instrumentality: is the Church sanctified in such a manner so that she can herself become a sanctifying subject?”

A further question is whether priority in such a role should be given to the proclamation of the Word, to the celebration of sacraments, or to neither, both being equally necessary. The Appendix to the JDDJ, a document which has served as one of our sources in the present dialogue, includes the words: “The working of God’s grace does not exclude human action: God effects everything, the willing and the achievement, therefore, we are called to strive (cf. Phil 2:12 ff.). As soon as the Holy Spirit has initiated his work of regeneration and renewal in us through the Word and the holy sacraments, it is certain that we can and must cooperate by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

As long as the recognition of the Holy Spirit’s agency is assured, many Reformed Christians are able to agree with Lutherans and Catholics in that statement.

A. Justification and Sanctification in the Church of Word and Sacrament

37. We note that the second phase of the Catholic-Reformed dialogue registered agreement about how justification — and, in light of our first chapter, we would add sanctification — relates to Word and sacrament.

Justification by grace through faith is given to us in the Church. This is not to say that the Church exercises a mediation complementary to that of Christ, or that it is clothed with a power independent of the gift of grace. The Church is at once the place, the instrument, and the minister chosen by God to make heard Christ’s word and to celebrate the sacraments in God’s name throughout the centuries. When the Church faithfully preaches the word of salvation and celebrates the sacraments, obeying the command of the Lord and invoking the power of the Spirit, it is sure of being heard, for it carries out in its ministry the action of Christ himself.

38. The New Testament suggests that justification and sanctification, on the one hand, and the proclamation and celebration of Word and sacrament, on the other, are intimately related within that profound mystery of salvation in Christ. Some passages highlight the importance of the Word as a means by which Christ bestows the gift of saving faith. Such faith, according to Paul, comes from hearing the Word: “But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?” (Rom 10:14).

This leads Paul to conclude: “So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ” (Rom 10:17). This faith is the means of our justification: “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1). Other passages speak of rites such as baptism and the


52. Towards a Common Understanding of the Church, 86.
Eucharist as means of the saving action of Christ in the Spirit. “But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Tit 3:4-7). John’s Gospel includes passages which seem to point to the saving effect both of baptism – “Jesus answered, ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit’” (Jn 3:5) – and of the Eucharist – ‘Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day’ (Jn 6:53-54). In the account of the day of Pentecost and in the summary of ecclesial life which immediately follows, we read: “Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?” Peter said to them, “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. .. . So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:37-38, 41-42). The importance of the audible word and the visible rite for the life of the church reflects the essentially incarnational nature of the mystery of salvation in Christ.

39. A contemporary ecumenical presentation of salvation history, which seeks to clarify the notion of sacrament, can at the same time illustrate the importance of the Word. One such attempt was offered in a summary of the responses to the convergence text Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry of the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC.

In the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God has communicated effectively the mystery of his saving love to the world. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the risen Christ continues his saving action of God by being present and active in our midst. For this purpose God continues to act through human persons, through their words, signs and actions, together with elements of creation. Thus God communicates to the faithful, and through their witness to the world, his saving promise and grace. Those who hear and receive in faith and trust this gracious action of God are thereby liberated from their captivity to sin and transformed in their lives. Those who receive this gift, respond to it in thanksgiving and praise, and are brought into a koinonia with the Holy Trinity and with each other and are sent to proclaim the gospel to the whole world. Through this sacramental action, communicated through words, signs and actions, this community, the church, is called, equipped and sent, empowered and guided by the Holy Spirit to witness to God’s reconciling and recreating love in a sinful and broken world. And so all who in faith long for fullness of life in Christ may experience the first-fruits of God’s kingdom – present and yet to be fully accomplished in new-heaven and earth.53

This description expresses how God makes use of words, signs and actions in the economy of salvation. Since our current phase of dialogue focused in a special way upon sacramentality, the following section will consider one of the sacraments that we both celebrate: Baptism. The subsequent section will address sacraments in general. Because the dialogue considered Eucharist mainly in connection with justice, this report will treat it in chapter three. Nevertheless, there are some general aspects that pertain to both sacraments.

a) Justification, Baptism and Incorporation into the Church

40. Both Catholics and Reformed acknowledge “one baptism for the forgiveness of sins” and so recognize the importance of the celebration of baptism.54 Indeed, on the acknowledgment that the appropriate formula and practice are being used, there is now a long established practice of mutual recognition of baptism between the Catholic and Reformed churches.55 This expression of the faith of the ancient church is in harmony with Paul’s interpretation of baptism as a “participation in the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ”.56 Even though they explain differently


55. Recent Catholic-Reformed national dialogues in the United States and Scotland have brought to light similar concerns for both traditions in terms of the pastoral demands for those requesting baptism for their children, while not even in the widest sense being active members of the church, as well as the urgent need for contextually appropriate baptismal education. For the United States dialogue report, entitled These Living Waters, see http://www.uscch.org/beliefs-and-teachings/ecumenical-and-interreligious/ecumenical/reformed/upload/These-Living-Waters.pdf [accessed September 11, 2015]. The Scottish text is entitled Baptism: Catholic and Reformed, which can be obtained at http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/3115/Baptism_document.pdf [accessed September 11, 2015].

56. Cf. Rom 6: 3-11; Col. 2:12; BEM 2. BEM also recalls other biblical expressions for baptism: a washing away of sin (1 Cor 6: 11);
the relation between the unique justifying act of Christ and the ecclesial sacramental action by which this new life is signified, Catholics and Reformed alike can confess together, with the words of the JDDJ, “that sinners are justified by faith in the saving action of God in Christ. By the action of the Holy Spirit in baptism, they are granted the gift of salvation, which lays the basis for the whole Christian life”57; and that “in baptism the Holy Spirit unites one with Christ, justifies, and truly renews the person.”58 This is the reason why it is so important to explore the relations between justification, sanctification, the celebration of baptism and its significance for the justified person. It is worthy of note that the baptismal liturgies as practiced both in the Catholic Church and the Reformed churches do not reflect the language of justification. Here it might be of interest to pursue further some of the theological reflection expressed in the national Catholic-Reformed dialogue that took place in the United States, which focused its attention on the relationship between baptism and grace rather than that of baptism and justification.59

41. Given the emphasis in the Reformed tradition not only upon sola scriptura but also tota scriptura,60 it is not surprising that its theology of baptism has sought to interpret the meaning of this sacrament in the context of the covenant witnessed to in the Old and New Testaments. Baptism is the sign of the covenant (signum foederis Dei), grounded in God’s promise to Abraham, which is confirmed to him and his descendants in the rite of circumcision. Baptism stands in analogy to circumcision, signifying inclusion in this one covenant and a share in its blessings.61 Baptism is the sacrament that makes salvation personal: “holy baptism reminds and assures us that Christ’s one

a new birth (Jn 3: 5); an enlightenment by Christ (Eph 5: 14); a re-clothing in Christ (Gal 3: 27); a renewal by the Spirit (Tit 3: 5); the experience of salvation from the flood (1 Pet 3:20–21); an exodus from bondage (1 Cor 10: 1–2) and a liberation into a new humanity in which barriers of division whether of sex, race or social status are transcended (Gal 3: 27–28; 1 Cor 12: 13).

57. JDDJ, 25.
58. JDDJ, 28. Here it is important to note that the Reformed would not say that it is in the strict sense the Holy Spirit who justifies. For the Reformed God the Father justifies the sinner in virtue of the redemption accomplished by the Son (see, e.g., Rom 8:31–32), a redemption that includes justification and sanctification. But since these gifts do not benefit us unless the Spirit unites us with Christ so that he and these gifts become ours, it is not inaccurate to say that the Holy Spirit plays a role in our justification.
59. See Section 5, 70–73 of These Living Waters, available at the website indicated in note 48 above.
60. Paragraphs 24–25 of the report of the first phase of the Catholic–Reformed international dialogue The Presence of Christ in Church and World registers some important convergences between us on the relation between Scripture and Tradition. Such a convergence is one of the fruits of many bilateral dialogues; see W. Kasper, Harvesting the Fruits, London/New York, Continuum, 2009, 102, 197-198.
61. Heidelberg Catechism, 74.

sacrifice on the cross benefits us personally.”62 The administration of baptism symbolizes that our sins are washed away. But it is not the water of baptism that effects this reality: “Only Jesus Christ’s blood and the Holy Spirit cleanse us from all sins.”63 Baptism means not only the washing away of sins but also a rebirth: “God saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit” (Tit 3:5). On the relation between sign and the reality signified in the administration of baptism, there is a difference of opinion within the Reformed tradition; generally, however, it is held that grace is given by the Holy Spirit who acts in the Spirit’s own time. Only those who believe in Christ will benefit from baptism. That is why children are baptized after the parents have professed their faith and adults are baptized only after a similar personal profession. Nevertheless, baptism is not reducible to the personal, but includes also a strong communal dimension, since those who are baptized are incorporated into the body of Christ, made visible through their assembling together as his church.64 “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body” (1 Cor 12:13). Finally, baptism has moral consequences: “To be washed with Christ’s Spirit means that the Holy Spirit has renewed and sanctified us to be members of Christ so that more and more we become dead to sin and live holy and blameless lives.”65

42. According to the teaching of the Catholic Church, baptism is the sacrament of faith that plunges us into the paschal mystery;66 without faith no one is ever justified. The celebration of baptism, as a profession of faith, is not only a personal confession of the faith of the believer but also a confession of the faith of the church as the community of believers.67 This is especially evident in the baptism of an infant, which also expresses the Catholic understanding that the celebration itself of the sacrament, and not the subjective state of the recipient or the celebrant, is determinative of validity. The Catechism of the Catholic Church affirms that “our Lord tied the forgiveness of sins to faith and Baptism” (citing Mk 16: 15-16), adding that “Baptism is the first and chief sacrament of forgiveness of sins because it unites us with Christ, who died for our sins and rose for our justification.”68 Catholics believe that baptism is “necessary for salvation for those to whom the Gospel has been proclaimed and who have had the possibility of asking for this sacrament” and “the means that assures entry

62. Ibid., 69
63. Ibid., 72.
64. Ibid., 74.
65. Ibid., 70.
67. Lumen gentium 7 (4112).
68. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 977.
into eternal beatitude”. The effects of baptism are signified by the perceptible elements of the sacramental rite. Immersion in water symbolizes not only death and purification, but also regeneration and renewal. In baptism one becomes a new creature, an adopted child of God, a “participant of the divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4), a member of Christ, co-heir with him and temple of the Holy Spirit.

43. Thus, the whole of Christian life has its roots in baptism. Finally, baptism makes one a member of the body of Christ, incorporating one into the church. From the baptismal font is born the one people of God of the new covenant, which transcends all natural or human limits of nations, cultures, races, and sexes. By means of baptism, Christians become living stones to be “built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood” (1 Pet 2:5), participating in the priesthood of Christ and in his prophetic and royal mission. Baptism precedes the apostolic and missionary activity of the people of God. “Incorporated in the Church through Baptism, the faithful are destined by the baptismal character for the worship of the Christian religion; reborn as children of God they must confess before men and women the faith which they have received from God through the Church.” As Vatican II’s Decree on Ecumenism states, baptism “establishe[s] a sacramental bond of unity which links all who have been reborn by it.”

b) The Relation between Justification and Sanctification and the Understanding of Sacraments in General

44. There has been considerable agreement among Christian churches about baptism, even though practices such as re-baptism are evidence that some communities have not recognized this rite of initiation as practiced in other communities. The specific sacrament of baptism was chosen for consideration in the foregoing section because it most clearly offers an opportunity for exploring the particular relation between justification and sacraments, which is the central theme of the present chapter. In the following paragraphs, the Reformed and Catholic reflections concerning the relation between justification, sanctification and baptism will now be considered in relation to sacraments in general. A first section will present material suggestive of possible convergences between us regarding the relation of justification and sanctification to the sacraments. A second section will identify several differences, which call for further exploration and dialogue.

c) Areas of Converging Understanding Concerning the Sacraments

45. The Reformed tradition, insisting on God’s sovereign grace and the freedom of the Spirit, is careful about language or thought patterns that would deny or compromise them. God is not bound by the sacraments. Nevertheless, God instituted the sacraments to seal and confirm the promise of the gospel proclaimed in the Word, “making it more evident to us and in a sense ratifying it.” The Geneva Catechism affirms that the sacrament is the “outward attestation of the grace of God, which, by a visible sign, represents spiritual things to imprint the promises of God more firmly in our hearts, to make us surer of them.” By giving us signs tangible to the senses God condescends to us in order to accommodate our human weakness, that is, our corporeality. Sacraments, just as the proclamation of the Word, are indeed means of grace, but the Reformed reject the view that grace is somehow “contained” in the elements used in their celebration. The Westminster Confession insists that “the grace which is exhibited in or by the sacraments, rightly used, is not conferred by any power in them.” On the other hand, the connection between the sacramental sign and the thing signified is so close that the Reformed do not hesitate to refer to a “sacramental union” (unio sacramentalis). According to the Westminster Confession, “there is in every sacrament a spiritual relation or sacramental union between the sign and the thing signified; whence it comes to pass that the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other.” In this perspective, it is not inappropriate to say that the waters of baptism wash away sins and grant a participation in Christ; or that the bread and the wine of the Lord’s Supper nourishes Christians with the body and blood of Christ, uniting them more and more with his glorified body as well as with members of his body the church. It has always to be borne in mind, however, that it is the Holy Spirit that communicates Christ and his benefits to those who receive them by faith. The Holy Spirit is the sole cause of the efficacy of the sacraments. This is not to deny the fact that they remain sacraments even if they are received by the unbelieving. Together with the Word, the sacraments are objective means of grace appointed by God and used by the Holy Spirit to grant us a participation in Christ and to confirm our faith in his promises. Because these are the principal activities of the worship of God’s people, the Reformed emphasize the indispensability of the church. Following the famous

69. Ibid., 1257. The catechism goes on to speak of “baptism of blood” regarding those who are martyred for the faith (1258) and “baptism of desire” regarding catechumens who die before having the opportunity to receive the sacrament (1259). The sacrament of baptism is treated in paragraphs 1213-1284 of the catechism. Much of what is written here about baptism is taken, often quite literally, from paragraphs 1265-1271.

70. Lumen gentium 11 (4127).

71. Unitatis redintegratio 22; cf. also 3 (4188).


73. Calvin, Geneva Catechism, 310.

74. Westminster Confession of Faith, 27.3.

75. Ibid., 27.2.
phrase of St. Cyprian that one cannot have God as one’s father if one does not have the church as one’s mother, Calvin prized the image of the church as a mother, who conceives and nourishes each of her children.76

46. Catholics would concur in substance with many of these Reformed perspectives on Word and sacrament. They too affirm the uniqueness of the salvific activity of Christ and the Holy Spirit, the sovereignty of God, the centrality of union with Christ and the importance of the proclamation of the Word. However, their emphasis upon the close unity between Christ and the church leads them naturally to stress the notion of efficacy in their sacramental language and practice in a way that is quite different from that of the Reformed. After offering its teaching on justification and prior to treating each sacrament individually, the Council of Trent promulgated a decree on the sacraments in general (sacramenta in generali), explaining how they relate to justification: “For all true justification either begins through the sacraments, or, once begun, increases through them, or when lost is regained through them.”77 The teaching that justification begins, increases, and can be regained reflects the Catholic understanding of the close relation between justification and sanctifying grace, which connotes as well the inseparability, in Catholic thinking, of justification and sanctification.

47. The sacraments are prepared for by the Word of God and by the faith which assents to this Word. Therefore, they are called sacraments of faith. According to Vatican II, “Sacraments not only presuppose faith, but by words and objects they also nourish, strengthen, and express it; that is why they are called ‘sacraments of faith’.”78 This presupposes a close relatedness of Word and sacrament: “The people of God is formed into one in the first place by the Word of the living God. . . . The preaching of the Word is required for the sacramental ministry itself, since the sacraments are sacraments of faith, drawing their origin and nourishment from the Word.”79

48. In addition, the Catechism of the Catholic Church has outlined the Christological foundation of the sacraments.80 They are founded in the mysteries of Christ’s life, and are effective, not on the basis of their own “power” but thanks to that power that comes forth from the body of Christ, through the action of the Holy Spirit at work in the church. The Spirit manifests and communicates to human beings, especially in the Eucharist, the mystery of communion with the God who is love. Their purpose is to sanctify human beings, to build up the body of Christ, and to glorify God. In this context the language of sacramental efficacy needs to be carefully understood; in fact, the sacraments “are efficacious because in them Christ himself is at work. It is he who baptizes, he who acts in his sacraments in order to communicate the grace that each sacrament signifies. The Father always hears the prayer of his Son’s Church which, in the epiclesis of each sacrament, expresses her faith in the power of the Spirit.”81 Sacramental grace is that grace of the Holy Spirit, given by Christ and proper to each sacrament, by which the Spirit heals and transforms the recipients, making them “become participants of the divine nature” (cf. 2 Pet. 1:4). Clearly the celebration of the sacraments entails the reception of the Word in faith and of that sanctifying grace which is the very heart of justification and sanctification.

d) Areas Calling for Further Dialogue

49. Many Reformed believers concur with much of the above. What differences then remain between our churches regarding the individual rites known as sacraments? One area concerns the question of the efficacy of the sacraments. The fact that it is Christ himself who baptizes and celebrates the Lord’s Supper/Eucharist (and Catholics would add – who presides at the other sacraments as well) has led Catholics to emphasize forcefully the efficacy of the sacraments, as suggested by the expression that they are effective ex opere operato, that is, “by the very fact of the action’s being performed,” not depending upon the subjective state of those conferring or receiving them.82 While Catholics would also affirm that a sacrament does not bear fruit in the life of a person who does not receive it in faith, nevertheless, the meaning of the expression ex opere operato has been misinterpreted as suggesting an efficacy that is mechanical or automatic and insufficiently respectful of the agency of the Holy Spirit through the celebraion of the sacraments. Calvin noted that “We must not suppose that there is some latent virtue inherent in the sacraments by which they, in themselves, confer the gifts of the Holy Spirit upon us . . . since the only office divinely assigned to them is to attest and ratify the benevolence of the Lord towards us; and they avail no farther than accompanied

81. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1127.
82. Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1128: “This is the meaning of the Church’s affirmation that the sacraments act ex opere operato (literally: ‘by the very fact of the action’s being performed’), i.e., by virtue of the saving work of Christ, accomplished once for all. It follows that ‘the sacrament is not wrought by the righteousness of either the celebrant or the recipient, but by the power of God’ (Thomas Aquinas, Summa theologiae III, 68, 8). From the moment that a sacrament is celebrated in accordance with the intention of the Church, the power of Christ and his Spirit acts in and through it, independently of the personal holiness of the minister. Nevertheless, the fruits of the sacraments also depend on the disposition of the one who receives them.”
by the Holy Spirit to open our minds and hearts, and make us capable of receiving this testimony in which various distinguished graces are clearly manifested. ... God, therefore, truly performs whatever he promises by figures and by signs; nor are the signs without effect, for they prove that he is their true and faithful author.” From what has been said above, what is being criticized here is not the view that the Catholic Church actually holds. It would seem that both positions seek to affirm both the primacy of divine agency in the sacraments and that they are effective signs. Still they seem to differ in nuance, emphasis and the language used to express these convictions.

50. Another area of disagreement concerns the identification of those rites which are properly designated as “sacraments.” Our differences here depend in part on different notions of what a sacrament is and upon different understandings of their “institution.” Calvin identifies baptism and the Lord’s Supper as the two sacraments instituted by Christ, adding that he would have no objection to calling the laying on of hands a sacrament but for the fact that it is not meant for the use of the whole church. Later, however, he devotes an entire chapter to argue against the “five sacraments falsely so called.” While the Council of Trent, for its part, teaches that Christ instituted seven sacraments, it immediately rejects the notion that they are all of equal importance. Such qualitative differentiation makes it possible for Catholics to maintain the traditional view which has always recognized the prominent significance of baptism and Eucharist as sacra menta maior a or principalia, in contrast to the other five sacraments. At the same time, it is true that the Reformed celebrate a number of those rites which Catholics call “sacraments,” such as confirmation, reconciliation, marriage and ordination, without designating them with that term. In some contexts, these rites are known as “ordinances of God.” In some ecumenical dialogues, criteria have been proposed in order to overcome the historical divergences.

83. Institutes IV, 14, 17.
84. Cf. The Presence of Christ in the Church and in the World (1977), 98; Towards a Common Understanding of the Church (1990), 140.
85. Institutes IV, 14, 20, see also IV, 14, 22, 18, 20.
86. Institute IV, 19.
87. Council of Trent, Decree on Sacraments, (1601 and 1603).
88. Cf. Related with this idea is Thomas Aquinas’ expression “potissima sacramentum” (Summa theologiae III, q. 62, a. 5; cf. also Summa contra gentiles, IV, 72). See also Y. Congar, “The idea of ‘major’ or ‘principal sacraments,” Concilium 4 (1968), no. 1, 12-17.
89. The Second Helvetic Confession for instance reads under chapter 19 entitled ‘Of the Sacraments of the Church of Christ: ‘There are some who count seven Sacraments of the new people. Of these we acknowledge that repentance, the ordination of ministers (not indeed the papal but the apostolic ordination), and matrimony are profitable ordinances of God, but not Sacraments.”
90. Some ecumenical dialogues involving the Reformed and Catholics have suggested that a promising approach to addressing disagreement about the number of sacraments may be found in

B. The “Sacramentality” of the Church in Relation to Christ’s Salvific Activity in Justification and Sanctification

51. The following section will explore the possibility of applying what has been said so far concerning the sacraments to the wider topic of the nature and mission of the church as a whole. This will build upon the agreements of our earlier phases of dialogue concerning the church as a community of Word and sacrament and will hopefully serve as a good transition to our third and final chapter on the church as an agent for justice in the world.

52. During the twentieth century, some Catholic theologians began to develop the theological notion of “sacrament” as a way of interpreting the salvific activity of Christ and the Spirit in and through the Church as sign and instrument. The divine economy of salvation takes place within the conditions in which human beings live, through audible words and visible signs. Already creation reflects and speaks of its divine author. With the incarnation and paschal mystery of the Son of God, redemption brings to fulfillment God’s saving design for creation. This echoes a principle dear to medieval scholastic theologians, that is, that grace perfects nature, now reinterpreted more broadly. If a sacrament may be considered to be a visible encounter with grace in history, then, always depending upon Christ and recognizing that he continues to work in history through the Holy Spirit, it becomes possible to speak analogously of the sacramentality of the church as a whole, not only in celebrating particular sacramental rites, but also in proclaiming the Word of God and in the witness of Christian life. This is what was meant when Vatican II opened its Constitution on the Church by claiming that the church “is in Christ like (soluta) a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race.”

Our dialogue has seen such a designation of the church as a welcome change from the largely institutional self-understanding which dominated Catholic ecclesiology in the centuries following the Reformation. The conviction that the church, by the power of the Holy Spirit, is called to bring healing to a world wounded by sin resonates to some degree with a Reformed distinguishing between a broader and a narrower usage of the term “sacrament” (cf. Lehmann, K. and Pannenberg, W., Hrsg., Lehrverortenungen – kirkentreuend, Band I: Rechtfertigung, Sakramente und Amt in Zeitalter der Reformation und heute, Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder/Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 1985, 77-88, I. 1.2) or between two “sacraments” and five “sacramental (ecclesial) acts” (cf. Groupe des Dombes, The Holy Spirit, the Church and the Sacraments (1979), 32).

91. This development was anticipated in the 19th century by Johann Adam Möhler (1796-1838) and Matthias Joseph Scheeben (1835-1888). Yves Congar and Karl Rahner, both of whom played influential roles at the proceedings of the Second Vatican Council, acknowledged an intellectual debt especially to the former.

92. Lumen gentium 1 (4101).
emphasis on the witness which the Christian community, as the prophetic people of God, is called to give in history. 93

53. Through justification and through the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit, the church, as the body of Christ, is emboldened to continue Christ’s offices of prophet, priest, and king in keeping with its unique calling to be a sign and sacrament of the kingdom of God. According to the Heidelberg Catechism, Jesus is called the Christ because he was ordained by the Father and anointed by the Holy Spirit to be our chief prophet and teacher, our only high priest and our eternal king. 94 Moreover, every Christian by faith shares in this anointing and in this threefold office. 95 The value of this triple office was acknowledged by Vatican II when it described not only individual members of the ordained clergy and the laity, 96 but the entire people of God as a prophetic, priestly and kingly people. 98 This suggests the possibility of an important convergence between us regarding the nature of the church. Those who are justified by grace through faith and sanctified by the Holy Spirit through Word and sacrament are invested with the prophetic office of proclaiming the gospel message of Jesus concerning the kingdom of God in speech and action. They offer their lives as a living sacrifice of praise (cf. Rom 12:1) and dedicate themselves to action for justice and peace in accordance with the demands of the kingdom. Justification grounds the lifelong process of sanctification in which the prophetic, priestly and kingly people of God commit themselves to share in the offices of Christ by acting as he did. During our dialogue, we on occasion referred to sanctification as the “middle term” between justification and justice, which finds expression in social action and the promotion of human dignity. This was a brief, useful way for the dialogue to express the interconnectedness of justification, sanctification and social action.

54. Seeing the Church as a prophetic, priestly, and kingly people on the basis of Word and sacrament also provides a framework for understanding the relation between prophetic voices and authority within the life of the community. It is the Holy Spirit who inspires believers to deepen their understanding of the good news of Jesus Christ and to discern ways of applying the gospel to the needs of time and place according to the signs of the times. 99 It is the same Holy Spirit who is invoked to assist those charged with roles of authority and leadership within the community. Our dialogue did not touch on the significantly different ecclesial structures and understandings of authority, accountability, and discernment in our two traditions. It would be mutually enriching to take up such themes in future phases. Only some very general comments can be offered here. In the Catholic Church there has been a tendency to locate the role of authority, leadership, and discernment within individual offices, although since Vatican II conciliar structures have been fostered at various levels of the life of the Church inviting the participation of all according to their specific vocation within the people of God. 100 The Reformed tradition invests authority in conciliar processes, which are found at local, regional, and national levels and which interact with each other. Within these conciliar processes the decision making authority on all matters of the church is vested not only in ordained members of the clergy but, on a level of parity, also in elders, deacons, and their equivalents. In particular situations such decision-making authority can be vested in all members of a congregation.

CHAPTER THREE

JUSTIFICATION AND CHRISTIAN ACTION ON BEHALF OF JUSTICE IN THE WORLD

55. Our first chapter explored our agreement that justification and sanctification are indissolubly linked in Reformed and Catholic thought. The second chapter related justification and sanctification to the ministry of Word and sacrament, giving an opportunity, first, to explore points of convergence and difference between

93. See e.g. K. Barth, The Humanity of God, Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, 1996: “The Church is the special race of men, the congregation, or to use Calvin’s expression, the compagnie, which has been constituted, appointed and called to be His witness in the world by a knowledge of the gracious God manifest in Jesus Christ, as knowledge which is rather miserable, but which is invincible because the Holy Spirit has the making of it.”


95. Ibid., 32.


97. Ibid., 34-36 (4160-62).

98. Ibid., 10-13 (4125-32).

99. Lumen gentium teaches that “discernment in matters of faith is aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth. It is exercised under the guidance of the sacred teaching authority, in faithful and respectful obedience to which the people of God accepts that which is not just the word of men but truly the word of God. Through it, the people of God adheres unwaveringly to the faith given once and for all to the saints, penetrates it more deeply with right thinking, and applies it more fully in its life” 12 (4125).

100. Such participation includes all of all of the baptized, including those who, in Catholic parlance, are called the laity. As Lumen gentium states: “But by reason of their special vocation it belongs to the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God’s will. They live in the world, that is, they are engaged in each and every work and business of the earth and in the ordinary circumstances of social and family life which, as it were, constitute their very existence. There they are called by God that, being led by the spirit to the Gospel, they may contribute to the sanctification of the world, as from within like leaven, by fulfilling their own particular duties. Thus, especially by the witness of their life, resplendent in faith, hope and charity they must manifest Christ to others. It pertains to them in a special way so to illuminate and order all temporal things with which they are so closely associated that these may be effected and grow according to Christ and may be to the glory of the Creator and Redeemer.” 31 (4157).
us regarding these essential dimensions of the life of the Christian community and, second, to consider the service of the church as a whole in God’s saving action in history. This final chapter will explore how the acceptance of God’s pardon in justification and the ongoing sanctification of believers by the Holy Spirit through the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, impel Christians to commit themselves to participate in the kingdom of God already inaugurated by Christ Jesus.

56. The very similarity between the words “justification” and “justice” in almost all languages invites Christians to reflect upon whether and how the realities they express are related. The New Testament makes use of the very same word – δικαιοσύνη – to express both the quality of upright behavior and the state of being freed from sin through the mercy of God. That both of these meanings are conveyed with the same word reflects the fact that they are profoundly related. The one who is justified by faith is called to act in a righteous way. As a consequence, the doctrine of justification cannot be seen in the abstract, divorced from the reality of injustice, oppression, and violence in today’s world. The report of phase three of the dialogue between WARC and the Catholic Church noted that “Jesus, the Word made flesh, proclaimed that the kingdom is at hand and the community of disciples is that group of human beings which, under the influence of grace, has responded in faith. . . . This response of saving faith impels them, for their part, to proclaim the Word of salvation and commissions them to witness to the kingdom values that Jesus taught.”

The tragic abundance of economic injustice, oppression, racism, sexism and abuse of the environment is all too evident in our world today; these evils are present even within the Christian community. In the face of this, there have been repeated calls in both of our communities for commitment to work for change. The church is nourished to work on behalf of justice, peace and the protection of creation through the ongoing encounter with Christ in the Spirit through Word and sacrament. As the previous phase of our bilateral conversations noted:

The transformation of the world occurs in part through efforts to create a more just and peaceful society. But Christians also believe that this transformation is realized now, in an anticipatory way, in that communion between God and human beings which takes place in the church, especially through the proclamation of the Word, the celebration of the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist and other sacraments or rites. As sacrament of the kingdom, the church is and must be both creation of the Word and sacrament of grace.

Justice is a complex reality, having various meanings depending upon the perspective from which it is viewed. But we found the greatest convergence about it by starting with the revelation of the loving and graceful God, who expresses justice-seeking action in all facets of the lives of human beings and of creation.

57. God makes and declares human beings just not only to be saved individually within the community of the church, but also so that they can participate in God’s work of healing and transforming their unjust world. In this sense, one can talk of the ethics of justification. This is beautifully expressed in the parable of the separation of the sheep and the goats, where Jesus states that at the last judgment he will say “Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.” (cf. Matt 25:31-46). The God of the Bible is a God of righteous mercy who takes human misery to heart, entering into it and overcoming it from within. God establishes justice for the innocent who are threatened, the poor, the alienated and the oppressed. God stands unconditionally and passionately on their side: “he has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly” (Lk 1:52). God’s concern for us in our distress cannot be taken seriously without assuming responsibility for all those who are poor and wretched. The believer is summoned to accompany and defend those who suffer wrong. Conformity to Christ means attending to the needs of those excluded by society. The poor, the marginalized and the victimized, together with the whole groaning creation, require the special attention of the Christian.

101. The noun δικαιοσύνη can be translated either as “justice” or as “righteousness.” In the New Testament it can express simply the quality of upright behavior, as in the verse “unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:20). A central theme of Pauline theology, however, is to employ this word in his reflection about the relation between faith and the works of the law: “But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.” (Rom 3:21-22). For its part, the noun justification, in today’s vernacular languages, refers either to God’s activity of reconciling sinners to himself or to the experience of being reconciled to God. Paul uses this verb (δικαιοῦμαι) to express God’s gracious saving action in Christ: “Therefore since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1).

102. The Church as a Community of Common Witness to the Kingdom of God, 190.

103. Cf. Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, II/1, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 386-387.

104. See Pope Francis, Evangelii gaudium, 197-201; Laudato si’, 17-19.
A. Justification, Sanctification and Action on behalf of Justice

58. For the Reformed, justification is always accompanied by sanctification; they are two inseparable aspects of the saving activity of Christ granted to believers in virtue of their union with Christ that as a result they may live in holiness. The Second Vatican Council entitled an entire chapter of its Constitution on the Church the “universal call to holiness,” proposing that the church is holy ‘because Christ, the Son of God, who with the Father and the Spirit is hailed as ‘alone holy,’ loved the Church as his Bride, giving himself up for her so as to sanctify her (cf. Eph 5:25-26); he joined her to himself as his body and endowed her with the gift of the Holy Spirit for the glory of God. Therefore all in the Church . . . are called to holiness, according to the apostle’s saying: ‘For this is the will of God, your sanctification’ (1 Th 4:3; cf. Eph 1:4).”

59. The Word of God – incarnate, written, and proclaimed – founds the Christian pursuit of justice. The incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, embodies God’s justice most fully, as we see in his proclamation in the synagogue at Nazareth: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” (Lk 4:18-21, quoting Is 61:1-2).

60. The righteousness proclaimed and embodied by Jesus presupposes the Old Testament tradition that testifies to God’s justice. God is the just judge (Ps 7:10; 11:7; Jer 11:20) who rules and orders all things with righteousness (Dt 32:4; Ps 119:137; Is 5:16). God’s righteousness lasts forever (Ps 119:142) and brings about the deliverance of the people Israel, in fulfillment of the promise (Ps 103:6; Is 42:6-7; 45:13,24-25 and, in general, Is 40-66). Justice is also a human moral virtue which designates the observance of God’s commandments so that one does justice or acts with righteousness (Gen 18:19; Ps 106:3; 119:40,106; Prov 21:3; Is 56:1; 58:2). In the Old Testament, God’s good gifts of heaven and earth, seas and dry land, vegetation and animals, and God’s promise of land to Israel, beckon us to seek not only just human relations, but also the care and protection of God’s whole creation.

61. While one dimension of biblical justice is captured in the “golden rule” (“Do to others as you would have them do to you,” (Lk 6:31), the New Testament encourages an even more radical form of righteousness, following the very example of Jesus: “Live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us” (Eph 5:2). In this way, scripture asks not simply that people act fairly and consistently, treating others as they hope that they might themselves be treated, but to treat others as they themselves have already been treated. Christ delivered us at great cost from the peril of eternal death. We have been spared from a condemnation that would otherwise have been ours. From now on there is nothing for us but to live a life of gratitude. The standard of behavior is set not by our every human heart, a claim that accords with the Catholic understanding of natural law. Though the Reformed have varying perspectives on the concept of natural law, they do affirm that God’s law given at creation is consistent with God’s law revealed to Moses and embodied in Jesus Christ. As those renewed by the Holy Spirit and thereby empowered to obey this law more completely, Christians have a special interest in pursuing justice.
wishes to be treated fairly but by Jesus’ saving act of radical, self-sacrificing love.

62. We hear and respond to God’s Word most frequently in and through the church’s proclamation of the good news of God’s righteous action in Christ, which is: “since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed” (Rom 3:23-25). Christ’s death for us on the cross is for the sake of our salvation as well as an indication of the depth of his suffering love on behalf of the oppressed and marginalized.

63. Proclamation of this gospel has obvious implications for the social commitment of Jesus’ followers. Faith engendered by hearing the Word heals the person wounded by sin and moves him or her toward justice both within and beyond the bounds of the church. As Pope Francis noted in his exhortation on the joy of the gospel:

Reading the Scriptures also makes it clear that the Gospel is not merely about our personal relationship with God. Nor should our loving response to God be seen simply as an accumulation of small personal gestures to individuals in need, a kind of “charity à la carte” or a series of acts aimed solely at easing our conscience. The Gospel is about the kingdom of God (cf. Lk 4:43); it is about loving God who reigns in our world.\(^{110}\)

And as the Belhar Confession, of the Uniting Reformed Church in South Africa, states:

We believe that God has entrusted the church with the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ; that the church is called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, that the church is called blessed because it is a peacemaker, that the church is witness both by word and by deed to the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness dwells.\(^{111}\)

Both these statements underline our shared conviction that the church is directed beyond itself toward the world, to which it is called to bear witness about the good news of God’s reign of love and justice.

C. Sacraments and Commitment to Justice

64. Sacraments, as expressions of faith, both clarify the meaning of justice and call believers to commit themselves to pursuing its realization in the world. An essential aspect of the believer’s response of gratitude for what God has done in his or her life is to live a life worthy of the call to sanctification and holiness. The sanctification of believers by the Holy Spirit impels them to promote that justice which scripture relates with the kingdom of God. “For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom 14:17). Baptismal liturgies in our churches tend to emphasize biblical themes related to salvation in Christ, especially those of participation in the paschal mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection and birth in Christ to become a new creation. Dying and rising with Christ, sharing his life through life-giving grace, becoming an adopted child of God – these fundamental dimensions of baptism impel Christians to be conformed to Christ, whose mission and identity are so devoted to the relief of human misery. An essential characteristic of baptismal life in the pattern of the Trinity is that it is oriented to mission. The Father sent the Son to give the Spirit. Jesus’ baptism inaugurated his mission. Anointed with the Spirit at his baptism, Jesus was tempted in the wilderness and then returned to Galilee proclaiming the advent of the kingdom of God (cf. Mk 1:9-15; Lk 3:21-4:14). Similarly, the Christian, conformed to Christ in baptism and anointed by the Spirit, is sent to serve the coming of the kingdom of God, to participate in Christ’s mission while manifesting the love of the Father, Son, and Spirit and thus to transform the world. In the end, the establishment of the kingdom is the work of God:

Certainly we cannot “build” the Kingdom of God by our own efforts—what we build will always be the kingdom of man [sic] with all the limitations proper to our human nature. The Kingdom of God is a gift, and precisely because of this, it is great and beautiful, and constitutes the response to our hope. And we cannot – to use the classical expression – “merit” Heaven through our works. Heaven is always more than we could merit, just as being loved is never something “merited,” but always a gift.\(^{112}\)

D. The Eucharist and Justice in the World

65. It is with regret that we must acknowledge that, even though we agree on the implications of the Eucharist for justice, our two communions still cannot celebrate the Eucharist together. The reasons for this situation have not yet been addressed by dialogue between our churches at the international level, though

\(^{110}\) Evangelii gaudium, 180.

\(^{111}\) The Confession of Belhar (September 1986), 3. The confession was adopted by the synod of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in South Africa in 1986. In 1994 the Dutch Reformed Mission Church and the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa united to form the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA). This inclusive language text was prepared by the Office of Theology and Worship, Presbyterian Church (USA). For full text see http://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/theologyandworship/pdfs/belhar.pdf

\(^{112}\) Sper sabi, 35.
we hope that this will be taken up in the future. With this in mind we are nevertheless able to say together the following.

66. The Eucharist by its very nature leads to sharing and caring for the poor and disadvantaged. One of the earliest accounts of the Eucharist – 1 Cor 11:17-34 – is a good point of departure for considering its social significance. Paul writes to admonish the Corinthians to correct certain abuses, such as disparities in food and drink, with some persons having more than enough while others had very little. The community was torn apart by conspicuous consumption at the expense of the poor and needy. Its celebration of the Lord’s Supper stood in contradistinction to that communion which is the very meaning of the Eucharist. In John’s Gospel, Jesus’ miracle of multiplying the loaves and his discourse on the bread of life make explicit reference to the feeding of the Israelites with manna – bread from heaven – during their journey through the desert to the promised land (cf. Jn 6, 31-33 and Ex 16). This feeding of the people during their exodus from Egypt was a miraculous experience of solidarity and sharing, in which those who gathered much had nothing left over and those who gathered little had no shortage (Ex 16, 18). The Eucharist, like the manna in the desert, is food for people on the march toward the true promised land, revealed by Jesus to be the kingdom of God. The Eucharist is essentially a shared meal which scholarship has shown to be deeply associated with the paschal celebration; it is one of the culminating moments of the ministry of Jesus, who often shared meals with his followers and with publicans and sinners and who encouraged his disciples to invite the poor, crippled, lame, and blind who were unable to repay one’s generosity (Lk 14:13-14). Furthermore, the Eucharist is the expression of the self-giving, sacrificial love of Christ, who says “this is my body given for you” (Lk 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24), “this is my blood poured out for you” (Mt 26:28; Mk 14:24; Lk 22:19), verses which reflect the suffering servant hymn of Is 53:4-6. The celebration of the self-sacrificing love of Christ in the Eucharist invites those who participate to do as he has done, offering their own action on behalf of those in need. In this way, one can see that a deep meaning of the Eucharist is charity. Charity is at the very heart of the social commitment of the Church:

Charity is love received and given. It is “grace” (δόγκας). Its source is the wellspring of the Father’s love for the Son, in the Holy Spirit. Love comes down to us from the Son. It is creative love, through which we have our being; it is redemptive love, through which we are recreated. Love is revealed and made present by Christ (cf. Jn 13:1) and “poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit” (Rom 5:5). As the objects of God’s love, men and women become subjects of charity, they are called to make themselves instruments of grace, so as to pour forth God’s charity and to weave networks of charity. This dynamic of charity received and given is what gives rise to the Church’s social teaching, which is caritas in veritate in re sociali: the proclamation of the truth of Christ’s love in society.

67. The connection between the Eucharist and love was also nicely underlined by some of the earliest Christian writers. According to the Didache, the Eucharist was expected to express the overcoming of every cultural division, especially those rooted in enmity, while at the same time committing all who partook of it to sharing with the poor. Concerning Christian worship in the second century, Justin Martyr wrote:

And on the day named after the sun, all, whether they live in the city or countryside, are gathered together in unity.... Those who are prosperous and who desire to do so, give what they wish, according to each one’s own choice, and the collection is deposited with the presider. He aids orphans and widows, those who are in want through disease or through another cause, those who are in prison, and foreigners who are sojourning here. In short, the presider is a guardian to all who are in need.

Several decades later, Tertullian speaks of the Eucharist in contexts where it appears associated with the practice of the works of love that the Christian community practiced, especially for the weak and persecuted. Perhaps even more important is the actual practice of some of the various churches about which we have some information.

68. From this one can see that the church, in various contexts, drawing much good from cultures as well as challenging what is contrary to the gospel, is called to be a transforming community that cares for the poor, the needy, and the humiliated. It needs to reflect Jesus’ words at the last supper: “By this everyone will know

113. The 7th round of Reformed-Catholic dialogue in the United States (2003-2010) did spend significant time exploring convergences and divergences in Eucharistic theology and practice. This work helps to illuminate the continuing limits of our Eucharistic sharing, as well as suggesting areas for future dialogue. See the dialogue’s final report This Bread of Life, esp. section 3c “Presence of Christ” and section 3d “Offering and Sacrifice”, as well as section 4 “Pastoral Implications”. http://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/worship/pdfs/this-bread-of-life.pdf

114. Benedict XVI, Caritas in veritate, 5.


that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn 13:35). The Eucharist points to and embodies real reconciliation. The third phase of dialogue between our communities pondered the role of the Church during the situation of apartheid in South Africa, where a provoking stimulus to reflection on the system of separation of the races began precisely because of the refusal on the part of some to celebrate the Lord’s Supper in a way that included all believers.118 The Eucharist impels the Christian community to overcome such division. The Eucharist points out, in a most eminent way, what it means to be a Christian. Its celebration necessarily implies a certain way of life. Regarding justice, the Eucharist recalls and manifests that, in Christ, the righteousness of God has been revealed, as a gift and human response. In the offering of his body and the shedding of his blood, a new order has been definitively established. Each celebration of the Eucharist introduces us into the dynamic of justification, reconciliation and re-creation of humankind. But the witness character of the sacramental symbols does not end with human re-creation. Immersed in the waters of baptism and transformed by sharing the manna of Christ, fruit of the earth, and work of human hands, we are also thereby called to be responsible stewards of the environment. Our sharing of a meal must also be extended to the responsibility to safeguard that the earth be habitable for all. In the face of so many structures and mechanisms of injustice and exclusion, the Eucharist should be a true sign of the coming kingdom of God.

E. Authority and Action on Behalf of Justice

69. It is the church as the whole people of God that is called to advance and promote those things that lead towards the establishing of a more just world. In order to avoid that such advancement and promotion be conditioned by any cultural, social or political context alone, this requires continuous processes of discernment under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. At the same time it involves the openness to be challenged to live the Christian witness as appropriate to different contexts.

70. In the church there are different ministries and areas of service, both those that hold formal authority and those that manifest themselves prophetically/charismatically from time to time. Care must be taken not to create any false dichotomies between institutional and prophetic/charismatic authority nor between clerical and non-clerical voices. The collaboration between prophetic voices within the Church and the voices of those in roles of formal institutional authority needs to find expression within the formal structures of the church as well as beyond those structures.

71. Experience shows that such collaboration produced by the Spirit can be preceded by tension and conflict. Dialogue and discernment through humble, prayerful listening to one another under the guidance of the Holy Spirit provides the church with good cause for hope that the level of agreement needed for carrying out its mission as the prophetic, priestly and kingly people, can be reached, without prejudice to the legitimate variety of insights and proposals that emerge within the community.

72. Formal authority and leadership within the church are ordered very differently in our respective traditions. The dialogue team did reflect on some matters relating to this difference but not sufficiently so to report on it. It would therefore be useful to take up an exploration of the structures and ordering of our churches together with their respective decision-making processes at a future point. In particular, the better understanding of the location of formal authority and leadership within the respective ecclesial structures might prove itself to be ecumenically fruitful.119

F. Building on our Previous Phase: Church as “Sacrament” of the Kingdom

73. The kingdom of God was at the heart of the ministry and activity of Jesus. In The Lord’s Prayer, Reformed and Catholic Christians pray together, “Thy kingdom come.” We acknowledge that Jesus and the kingdom are one. There is no kingdom without Jesus, and no Jesus without the kingdom. When we pray for God’s kingdom to come, we are praying for the coming of Jesus at the same time. As this divine kingdom comes to us in the person and work of Jesus, we would note that it has three tenses. In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God’s kingdom has come once and for all. In the proclamation of the Word of God and the celebration of the sacraments, this kingdom enters into our midst here and now. At the end of history, when Jesus will be revealed in glory, this kingdom will reach its fulfillment in universal thanks and praise for the mercy and justice of God.

74. Phase three of our dialogue explored in depth the meaning of this kingdom as revealed both in scripture and in subsequent tradition. Here we affirm together that reception of the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist calls Christians to a firm commitment to serve the cause of the justice of the kingdom of God in

118. See The Church as a Community of Common Witness to the Kingdom of God (2007), 82-101.

119. See paragraphs 142-144 of the report of the second phase of our dialogue Towards a Common Understanding of the Church and especially chapters 2 and 3 of the report of the third phase of our dialogue, The Church as a Community of Common Witness to the Kingdom of God on case studies of common action on behalf of justice and on structures and processes of discernment.
today’s world. Baptism anoints the Christian community to become the priestly, prophetic and kingly people of God. The Lord’s Supper forms us into a just, reconciled, and loving communion and strengthens the bonds of communion between and among the members of the body of Christ, thereby impelling them to become agents of justice, reconciliation, and love within the church and the world. Our earlier phase has spoken of the church as a kind of sacrament of the kingdom of God. In its focus on the implications of the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist for the justice of this kingdom, our current phase has sought to deepen and extend reflection on this image of the church. Together we affirm the hope, expressed in our earlier dialogue, that our articulation of the church’s ministerial and instrumental role, in total dependence on the Spirit of Christ and directed toward God’s kingdom, can make a contribution to Christian unity that reaches beyond our own communities. The ecumenical movement as a whole may be understood as participation in the movement of the Holy Spirit, who calls and inspires us to seek the kingdom of God together, and to commit ourselves to one another. If churches find new ways to give shape to this mutual support and accountability, then we pray that the result will be greater visibility for the church as sign and instrument of God’s kingdom.

In this light, we recognize that the relation of eschatology and justice could serve as an important topic for the future of ecumenical exploration.

G. Inseparability of Doctrinal and Practical Ecumenism

75. There has been a classic conflict among ecumenically minded Christians between those who insist that the path toward unity requires a focus upon doctrinal questions which have been at the root of historic divisions, such as justification by faith, sanctification, and sacraments, and those who insist that such issues are less important today and that the focus of work for unity should be directed toward collaboration between the churches for the betterment of society. This is the tension, which can be expressed as that between doctrinal ecumenism and social ecumenism and was represented by the distinct efforts of the ecumenical movements of “Faith and Order” and “Life and Work.” Our work in this dialogue has hopefully shown that theological agreement about the Holy Spirit’s saving activity of justification and sanctification by grace through faith. Sanctification by the Holy Spirit through Word and sacrament is precisely what impels believers and the Christian community as a whole to action on behalf of justice in the world. These classic doctrinal themes provide a broad theological basis for the action of the Christian community on behalf of justice, peace, and the protection of creation. The specific issues addressed in the Church’s social action also need to be grounded in a solid theological reflection. Commitment to and work for social justice in our world finds an important and irreplaceable foundation in agreement about the theological doctrines of justification and sanctification, which are generated in believers by the Holy Spirit through the Church’s ministry of Word and sacrament.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

76. Approaching the Reformation anniversary year of 2017, we have taken up the theme of justification by faith, which was so important in the debates and eventual divisions between Christians five hundred years ago. Our aim was to consider this topic within several fresh perspectives that have perhaps not been sufficiently explored by us or by other ecumenical participants up until now. The three chapters of our report consider the relation of justification, respectively, to sanctification, to Word and sacrament and to action on behalf of justice in the world.

77. We discovered a very substantial agreement that justification and sanctification cannot be separated. This means that justification will make possible and lead to the fruits of virtuous action. The justified believer enters into a journey toward that holiness to which he or she is called by the Lord and enabled by the grace of the Holy Spirit. As a result, the teaching that human beings are saved by grace through faith and not through works, which St. Paul proposed within the precise conditions he faced when gentiles entered into the Christian community, does not serve as a reason for division between us regarding the meaning of salvation by faith and the importance of good works. There seem to remain some differences between us in that the Reformed, for their part, see justification as complete and irrevocable, based on their confidence of the faithfulness of God to his covenant, while Catholics, for their part, closely associate justification with sanctifying grace, which they understand as lost when a believer falls into grave sin. Future dialogue toward greater doctrinal agreement and full communion between us should take up the themes of divine election and the possibility of falling into and of overcoming serious sin.

78. We discovered a very substantial agreement that justification and sanctification are brought about by the Holy Spirit by means of Word and sacrament. This allowed us to bring our theme of justification and sanctification into contact with an important advance registered by two earlier phases of dialogue, that is, our agreement that the Church is constituted by both the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the sacraments. Through Word and sacrament the Holy

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120. Cf. The Church as a Community of Common Witness to the Kingdom of God, 190-193.
121. Ibid., 197.
Spirit confers the grace of faith, which is at the heart of both justification and sanctification. A contribution that our convergence here can make to the overall ecumenical movement is to nuance the conviction that human beings are saved “by faith alone.” This expression should not obscure the fact that the Spirit makes use of means, such as audible spoken words and visible enacted rites, to impart the righteousness that comes by grace through faith. Significant differences remain between us regarding how we understand the salvific efficacy of Word and sacrament and regarding the number of the sacraments. Furthermore, the charismatic interplay between the prophetic voice of the whole community of the Church and the formally located voice of authority within the Church needs to reflect the nature of the community as a prophetic, priestly and kingly people, anointed as such by the Spirit received in baptism and nourished in the Eucharist. We have not taken up the question of what precise ministerial offices and structures are called for by Word and sacrament. These could serve as themes for future dialogue.

79. Finally, we discovered full agreement that the theological doctrine and reality of justification by faith and sanctification impels the Christian community to act on behalf of justice. The imperative for justice flows necessarily from justification and from the call of the whole Church to holiness. We especially considered how the celebration of the Eucharist or the Lord’s Supper points to the need for the community to reach out to those in need. Here we noted that justice is closely allied to charity and mercy, both in the Scriptures and in the voices of the tradition. Differences remain on where each community locates formal authority. The process and structures of decision-making remain to be more fully explored, though this theme has already received some important initial treatment in the report of phase three of dialogue between our communities, The Church as Community of Common Witness to the Kingdom. Fortunately our present report has shown that there need be no tension between dialogue about traditionally divisive theological issues, such as the nature of justification, and collaboration in the work of justice. To our delight, we discovered that it is precisely theological agreement that can provide a basis for collaboration in promoting justice, peace and the protection of creation.

80. As we conclude this fourth phase of dialogue between the World Communion of Reformed Churches and the Catholic Church, we members of the bilateral international commission unanimously encourage our two communities to continue on the path of dialogue. Each of the three previous paragraphs spotlights some issues which this phase of dialogue has shown to be in need of further discussion. Other issues to which this report invites us to give greater attention are the Eucharist, ordained ministry, and the exercise of authority. We believe that a most promising theme for dialogue which could lead to the uncovering of greater ecclesiological convergence between us could be a focus upon the nature of the Church as a prophetic, priestly and royal/shepherd people of God, a theme which is explicitly proposed both by Calvin and by the Reformed tradition as well as by the Second Vatican Council. Should a new bilateral commission be nominated, perhaps its first consideration might be to discern, in light of the foregoing paragraphs, what particular concern seems to call most urgently for discussion within our respective churches.

81. We also would suggest several concrete steps that can enhance the reception of the present report.

- The report ought to be made available to the various ecumenical offices throughout our communities at regional, national, and local levels; the internet could be used for inexpensive and expedited communication to promote growth toward greater unity between our churches.

- Some collaboration in preparing catechesis on justification and sanctification, about which we share a significant consensus, could be developed.

- Efforts can be made at regional and local levels to agree to develop and make use of common certificates of baptism, noting that our churches fully recognize baptism when administered according to the mandate of Jesus in Matthew 28:19.

- Discussions about Reformed association with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification can be continued and, if possible, lead to such an association, which would be important not only for our two churches but for the wider ecumenical community as a whole.

- Especially in light of Chapter Three of the present report, new initiatives for promoting justice, peace, and the protection of the environment can be fostered between our communities at various geographic levels.

122. It would seem that the words “faith alone” appear in the New Testament only in James 2:4, which claims that one is not saved by faith alone, without works. The emphasis on saving faith by the Pauline tradition finds a good expression in Ephesians 2:8 (“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God”).

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NOVEMBER 2017

1. The purpose of this commentary is threefold: (1) to highlight the ecumenical value of the agreement reached in Justification and Sacramentality: The Christian Community as an Agent for Justice (hereafter, JS); (2) to indicate areas that need further study; and (3) to note particular or potential difficulties for a Catholic understanding, and reception, of the document.

2. The first area requires some initial general observations about the genesis of JS, the type of document it is intended to be, and the achievement it represents.

3. The second and third areas overlap, since some difficulties for a Catholic understanding of salient points in the document may require further study, which could help clarify or even solve them, whereas some other topics might be judged as obstacles to reception because they appear to be incompatible with already received Catholic doctrine.

4. Inevitably, the second and third purposes of this commentary require more description and explanation than does the area of the ecumenical value of the agreement as such. Therefore, this commentary will necessarily devote more space to these areas than to the first area. But it should be clear from the beginning that the relatively greater length of this commentary devoted to the second and third purposes is not an indication of an overall negative judgment concerning the worth of the document. It bears noting that the positive stress that comes with listing areas of agreement and the value of such agreements is, in fact, a foundation for assessing how what is held in common can, in the future, lead to even greater agreement. From the Catholic perspective, many—though not all—criticisms regard matters of omission, not of positive error. It is perhaps easier to imagine what more should be said rather than correcting what has been said. Like many agreed or convergence statements, all parties give thanks for what is held in common, and from that point, work to give a full presentation of areas of divergence and areas for future exploration.

5. Another preliminary remark concerns hermeneutics. Care must be taken to understand sympathetically what is said in the document. From time to time it may be useful to suggest expressions that, it is hoped, convey the meaning intended by the authors, or by particular traditions, in a way that can be grasped by all without ambiguity. When using terms hallowed by particular use in different traditions, e.g., simul iustus et peccator or instrumental causality, it will be necessary to explain how the traditions that use such expressions want them to be understood. This is important in order to avoid having different traditions use the same expressions in different, conflicting ways, leading to the paradox of the common use of an expression fostering confusion rather than clarity. The reverse is also true. Not every apparent opposition is an opposition in reality. This is recalled in §35 which cites the Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue, From Conflict to Communion:

[What appears to be an opposition in expression is not always an opposition in substance. In order to determine the exact relationship between respective articles of doctrine, texts must be interpreted in the light of the historical context in which they arose. That allows one to see where a difference or opposition truly exists and where it does not.

Since the 1990s, solid ecumenical practice has made explicit the fact that sometimes, terminology that was once polemical can now be seen instead to communicate the same truth, albeit with distinct nuances.]

6. With regard to the two expressions cited above—simul iustus et peccator and instrumental causality—it behooves the partners in dialogue to consider carefully, with regard to the first, how to understand simul: if it means “at one and the same time,” it is necessary to

1. For an example of this method of treating expressions that once were taken as dividing, but now assist reciprocal appreciation of a commonly held truth, see the Common Christological Declaration between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East signed by Pope John Paul II and Mar Dinkha IV on 11 November 1994, which reads in part: “Christ therefore is not an ‘ordinary man’ whom God adopted in order to reside in him and inspire him, as in the righteous ones and the prophets. But the same God the Word, begotten of his Father before all worlds without beginning according to his divinity, was born of a mother without a father in the last times according to his humanity. The humanity to which the Blessed Virgin Mary gave birth always was that of the Son of God himself. That is the reason why the Assyrian Church of the East is praying the Virgin Mary as ‘the Mother of Christ our God and Saviour’. In the light of this same faith the Catholic tradition addresses the Virgin Mary as ‘the Mother of God’ and also as ‘the Mother of Christ’. We both recognize the legitimacy and rightness of these expressions of the same faith and we both respect the preference of each Church in her liturgical life and piety.”
understand well how grace works in a person, and how sin affects a baptized person. Likewise, it would be imprudent to presume that it means “over time,” rather than “at any time.” JDDJ paragraph 29 points out this difficulty.

7. Paragraph 19 of JS presents the notion of simul iustus et peccator in such a way that the notion of “lifelong repentance” might fruitfully be placed “in dialogue” with the Catholic notion of ongoing conversion (the mortification described as a constant dying to sin) mindful, however of a key difference: Catholics hold that it is at least possible that some—while always struggling against sin—can overcome sin here and now with the help of God’s grace.

8. Paragraph 20 states that “God continues to forgive the sins of those who are justified, and they can never fall ultimately from the state of justification.” It is desirable that this notion be explicitly linked to—or divorced from—the praying for forgiveness mentioned in paragraph 19. This would make it clear whether praying for forgiveness is “merely” an effect of justification or is in some way instrumental in maintaining one’s justification. The tenor of the paragraph (“they can never fall ultimately from the state of justification”) suggests that praying for forgiveness is something the baptized Christian ought to want to do, but need not. Given the Catholic teaching that those cannot be saved who, “if they are not only will they not be saved, they will be judged

9. Instrumental causality is treated below in paragraphs 33 to 35.

10. This commentary will be divided into two main sections. The first describes the ecumenical value of the agreement reached in JS. The second treats of difficulties that require further study in common or which pose a challenge to Catholic reception of the document.

I The ecumenical value of the agreement reached in JS

Method

11. The ecumenical value of JS lies in its demonstration that a dialogue can be fruitful and worthwhile even while some important matters remain to be resolved. It is not the case that dialogue comes to a halt when issues that continue to divide communities remain unsolved. Rather, acknowledgement is made of the problematic issues that have not yet been successfully tackled, and the dialogue continues.

12. This is evident right from the beginning. The title, Justification and Sacramentality: The Christian Community as an Agent for Justice, is not to be understood as promising that all the issues connected with justification and sacramentality are mutually agreed on, and that therefore, the dialogue can talk from a basis of commonly acknowledged unity in those matters about the Christian community as an agent for justice. Rather, the report indicates that there is sufficient agreement about justification and sacramentality to move the dialogue away from what might be termed further systematic considerations towards consequences deriving from what is already commonly held in the area of social morality or ethics. The last part of the JS explicitly links the notion of the Church as agent for justice to the notions of justification, sanctification, and sacramentality, while yet acknowledging that work remains in those fields.

13. At a time in the history of the ecumenical movement when some disagreements seem to present insuperable barriers to the achievement of full, visible unity, it is important to see, as JS shows its readership, that progress towards unity can still be made even when obstacles remain. Such progress is a sign that the unity for which Jesus prayed (John 17:21) and for which our churches and communities labor may be achieved not merely by approaches that represent logic corollaries deriving from some agreed positions, but also by other means known to the Spirit.

Widespread consideration of neuralgic issues

14. During the three phases of Catholic-Reformed dialogue which preceded the phase represented by the current Report, some major ecumenical achievements occurred, one of which features prominently in JS, namely, the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ) signed by the Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity on 31 October 1999. The JDDJ, while not bringing about a perfect union between Catholic and Lutheran perspectives in the area of justification, did nevertheless demonstrate an attractive theological agility according to which both Catholics and Lutherans could assert the priority of grace and the importance—as a consequence of grace (although the issue of the relation of grace to one’s will was not completely elucidated)—of a life of
good works. The JDDJ succeeded in attracting the attention of other communities. In 2006 the World Methodist Council associated itself with the JDDJ. The World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), while not studying the JDDJ officially, did receive reports from some members and from its European Area Committee. Presciently for this fourth phase, these reports devoted special attention to the relationship between justification and justice.

15. In 2010, the WARC itself was merged, as the result of a Uniting General Council, with the Reformed Ecumenical Council. The resulting fellowship, the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), comprises Reformed, Presbyterian, Congregational, Waldensian, United and Uniting churches. Inevitably, the fact of being together entailed studying together what they are and how they intend to live. With regard to what they are, a common understanding of baptism is crucial, and with regard to how the baptized live, it was logical to study how the planting of the Kingdom of heaven implies fostering justice in this world (see JS §7). As the Report says, “For the Reformed churches today, ‘justification’ and ‘justice’ are integral to each other” (§7).

16. Finally, the impetus deriving from a common understanding of the Church as creatura Verbi and sacramentum gratia—terms that do not stand in opposition to each other, but are like two sides of the same coin—led to a sympathetic appreciation of the magisterium of the last three Bishops of Rome with regard to this report’s focus on the Church as an agent of justice.

17. How each of these neuralgic issues has been treated demonstrates the importance of trust and of a receptive, open consideration of the steps that follow from what many are saying together. If the theological virtue of hope can be described as the virtue by which the goal we know through faith (unity in Christ) is worked toward through choices that bring us closer to that goal, then the communities in dialogue about justification, the Christian’s identity (in particular, the Christian’s share in the tria munera Christi thanks to baptism), the sacramentality of the Christian community, and the transformation of the world into a more just place modeled on the Kingdom, are evidence of hope. In these regards the JS makes a significant contribution to today’s ecumenical climate.

Other important areas of agreement

18. JS notes that “God is not bound by the sacraments” (§45). As shall be mentioned below, this statement should be understood as denoting that God does, in a real way, bind himself to the sacraments even while not being limited to producing the effects of sacraments also outside of sacramental celebrations. Properly understood, this statement usefully diminishes any temptation to consider a sacramental rite a sort of deus ex machina.

19. Regarding baptism, JS notes “that the baptismal liturgies as practiced both in the Catholic Church and in the Reformed churches do not reflect the language of justification” (§40), and it suggests that it might be fruitful in the future to focus instead on the relationship between baptism and grace. This is an important statement on at least two counts. First, it implies that for those involved in the dialogue, liturgy is a locus theologicus, and liturgies with common elements in both traditions are seen as witnessing to truth. Secondly, it builds on the relationship of justification to grace as found in JDDJ, and this witnesses to the effect of a careful consideration of a significant document in the ecumenical area.

20. A further area of agreement concerns the share of the baptized in the munera of Christ (§53). Paragraph 80, in fact, speaks of this as “a most promising theme for dialogue which could lead to the uncovering of greater ecclesiological convergence between us [namely] a focus upon the nature of the Church as a prophetic, priestly, and royal/shepherd people of God, a theme which is explicitly proposed both by Calvin and by the Reformed tradition as well as by the Second Vatican Council.” Presumably, future dialogue would need to deal with the question of whether sharing in the tria munera Christi is ontological (§43, for example, is not clear on this point).

II Difficulties requiring further study or which could impede Catholic reception of JS

The theological virtues

21. Although JS, in paragraph 19, quotes Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians (“[Christ] died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them”) which describes hope as a theological virtue, the lack of any explicit reference to hope in this section and elsewhere suggests that an investigation into the relationship among the three theological virtues, and an explanation of their relationship to baptism, which would necessarily differ somewhat depending on whether the subject of Baptism is an infant or an older person able to choose the sacrament for himself.
Such an investigation could shed light on how JS intends one to understand the statement that according to the Reformed tradition, “Christ’s righteousness and life are given to us whole and entire by faith, which unites us with Christ and makes us members of his body the church. They are given to the believer once and for all, in and with baptism, and then ever anew day by day” (§17).

In Catholic thought, baptism confers a disposition to the theological virtues when it is conferred on infants, and it strengthens those virtues, which may already be present in the subject of baptism, in the case of older candidates. This disposition is not lost, since, Catholics hold, the sacrament imparts a character which is indelible on the soul of the baptized. Should the Christian turn away from virtue, he or she will lose grace (see §23), but the receptivity to a life of faith, an orientation to eschatological happiness (hope), and charity, remains as Christ’s pledge of fidelity to those who are his own. Thus, for the Catholic, one is either “iustus” or “peccator”, but even as sinner, one has a relationship with the Lord who is ever faithful to his promises.

The debate over the relation of works to faith, as indeed, the consideration in JS of the relationship between justification and works of justice, would be enriched by an investigation into the nature of the theological virtues as gifts of God, the relationship between those gifts and the sacrament of baptism, and a clearer description of the eschatological orientation of each of the virtues which, in turn, sheds light on the purpose of each virtue in this life. This is especially germane given the link JS makes between charity and agency for justice.

**Justification and sanctification**

JS affirms full agreement with JDDJ’s statements that “Justification [...] means that Christ himself is our righteousness in which we share through the Holy Spirit in accord with the will of the Father” (§27), and that “justification is inseparable from sanctification, which involves the transformation of the sinner and the commitment to live a life of righteousness and love, a life characterized by obedience to the commandments and to the teachings of Jesus” (§30).

JS notes that the foundation of this statement is the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ (§27), but the link between the Son’s assumption of human nature as the instrument of the redemption of human beings, and the instrumentality of the Church (and her sacraments) today needs to be expressed in greater depth. *Lumen gentium* 8 speaks of the analogy according to which “just as the assumed nature serves the divine Word as a living instrument of salvation inseparably joined with him, in a similar way the social structure of the Church serves the Spirit of Christ who vivifies the Church towards the growth of the body.” An explicit reference to this text would be welcome, because this makes it clear why and how justification is a gift, and it indicates that the modality of receiving that gift is, at least ordinarily, through the visible instrumentality of the People of God. Paragraph 36 presents the problematic clearly. It asks if the Church can be a sanctifying subject, and if so, whether that is because of the proclamation of the Word, the celebration of sacraments, or to both.

Likewise, the notion of instrumentality makes it easier to describe not only one’s own sanctification, but also how one who is a part of the “agency” of justice in the Church is a vital part of the instrumentality that the Church enjoys, or, to put it differently, how one participates in the *tria munera Christi* by sharing in the priesthood of Christ.

Paragraph 31 states that “for the Catholic justification refers to a process while for the Reformed it indicates a status.” If justification is inseparable from sanctification, then there is still indeed a significant division between Catholics and Reformed communities on this point. Both communities believe in the fidelity of God to his promises. Their divergences lie in the area of sin and grace. Furthermore, one could mention that an area of future exploration should be that of the divine will, or Providence. To say that God wants all to be saved, but that not all will be saved, is to introduce the difficult area of the antecedent and consequent will of the Triune God. While this is not an easy topic, it is a useful one so that the notion of God’s promises not be taken too mechanically, and the notion of human free choice not be reduced—in effect—to a single act of the will. Paragraph 36 speaks of God’s willing the sanctification of humans and of the cooperation of human beings with God’s will, but much could be gained by explaining God’s will and the sometimes episodic cooperation of human beings more thoroughly.

Finally, an investigation of this theme would require a sensitive explanation of the assertion, “without faith no one is ever justified.” There are many theories about the salvation of unbelievers, but from the Catholic perspective, the dictum *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* can have two basic meanings. First, those who *culpably* do not join or stay in the Church (that is, those who know that Christ founded the Church as the needed sacrament of salvation) cannot be saved. Second, the Church as the needed sacrament of salvation is in some way instrumentally used by Christ for the salvation of all who are saved (see *Lumen gentium* 14 and *Dominus Iesus* 16).

Paragraph 32 mentions that “in the Reformed tradition there have been some who have raised the question about this absolute assurance of salvation over against serious sin committed by the justified believer.” However, JS does not attempt to evaluate the authority of such statements. In the future, it will be imperative to compare and contrast the notions of magisterial authority with the voices of diverse
theologians. Like the Reformed acceptance of liturgical tradition as a useful theological source, it is to be hoped that an evaluation of the nature and authority of theological tradition could lead to future breakthroughs.

**Grace and the sacraments**

31. The sacrament most thoroughly treated in JS is baptism, and one problem that is not satisfactorily presented concerns the notion that sacraments “contain” grace, or that the sacraments, as instruments of Christ, confer grace. The Catholic Church prefers to speak of sacraments containing grace in order to avoid saying that sacraments are merely occasions of grace—rites that dispose the recipient to be open to the workings of the Spirit “who acts in the Spirit’s own time” (§41). The notion that sacraments contain or confer grace denotes a certainty: when the sacrament is properly celebrated by the correct minister in the correct way, for properly disposed recipients, the effect that Christ wills to be communicated by the sacrament is actually communicated. The sacraments are thus certain, or definite, encounters with the Savior whose saving graces flow from his Passion.

32. Since saving effects are, logically, effects willed by the Savior, and since the Savior redeemed the human race through his death on the Cross, the only way to hold that sacraments contain grace is to explain that they contain grace in a “transitive” way: they are like instruments which are inert unless wielded by someone with a vision of how to use them and a skill in actually using them. When so wielded, they render effective the will of the one using them. Thus understood, sacraments only confer grace when they are used by Christ’s body, the Church, for the purpose of conferring grace. That is why the Catechism of the Catholic Church affirms both that the sacraments confer grace, and that when a sacrament is celebrated, it is Christ who is celebrating it.3

33. Paragraph 45 states that sacraments “are indeed means of grace, but the Reformed reject the view that grace is somehow “contained” in the elements used in their celebration.” Further exploration of the notion of transitory or transitional containing (which is always to be distinguished from the theology of an ongoing, Real Presence, in the Eucharistic species) might make it possible to advance beyond these words, also found in paragraph 45: “[It is not inappropriate to say that the waters of baptism wash away sins […] or that the bread and the wine of the Lord’s Supper nourishes Christians with the body and blood of Christ […]].” This is premised on the notion of “a spiritual relation or sacramental union between the sign and the thing signified.” If an exploration of the question of grace in the sacraments focused on how to understand the sacraments as instituted by Christ to give supernatural effects that exceed the natural effects of which the signs and gestures are capable, it might be possible to reconcile these views which are already close.

34. The Catholic notion that the sacraments are objective means of grace is important when considering how those who fall into serious sin can “regain” justification (see §46). The existence, in Catholic sacramental theory, of the “medicinal” sacraments of Reconciliation and the Anointing of the Sick, which can be repeated, and of the desirability of receiving the Eucharist frequently, underlines the importance of linking the notion of grace being contained in sacraments with (a) God’s ongoing invitation to sinners to convert and to grow in holiness, and (b) the desire humans have for certitude that a sacrament actually does what it signifies.

35. The conclusion of paragraph 49, devoted to the question of the ex opere operato efficacy of the sacraments, shows that the participants who composed JS are sensitive and hopeful about future developments in this area: “[W]hat is being criticized here is not the view that the Catholic Church actually holds. It would seem that both positions seek to affirm the primacy of divine agency in the sacraments and that they are effective signs. Still they seem to differ in nuance, emphasis and the language used to express these convictions.”

**The number of the sacraments**

36. While it is true that the Council of Trent did not explain how to understand what institution by Christ looked like for each of the seven sacraments, it did teach in a binding fashion that Christ instituted seven and only seven sacraments., no more and no fewer. Trent’s teaching refuted the positions that Christ gave the Church the authority to institute sacraments or that the Church discerned the connection between the will of Christ and certain sacraments, and many theories distinguish between the relative importance of, say, the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist on the one hand, and the medicinal sacraments on the other which restore impaired communion. Nevertheless, no sacrament can be called, in Catholic thinking, an “ordinance” of God in the sense of being simply a wholesome thing to do.

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3. See, for example, CCC 1127: “Celebrated worthily in faith, the sacraments confer the grace that they signify. They are efficacious because in them Christ himself is at work: it is he who baptizes, he who acts in his sacraments in order to communicate the grace that each sacrament signifies.”
37. Division on this issue is difficult to overcome, because there are different theological methods employed by Catholics and by the Reformed. Thus, in the future, a common investigation, with reference to the Second Vatican Council’s Constitution Dei Verbum, of the relationship between Scripture and Tradition, would be a useful starting point.

38. Already, as noted above in paragraph 19, the Reformed use of liturgy as a theological source gives evidence of an openness to a more developed notion of Tradition that might help overcome the methodological differences undergirding our opposing positions in this regard.

39. In turn, such a development could lead to a deeper appreciation of the Church as a sacrament (§52).

The sacrament of the Eucharist

40. JS acknowledges that it is not in a position to speak at length about the Eucharist because the issues that divide Catholics from the Reformed concerning common celebration of the Eucharist have yet to be taken up by the dialogue. As a result, there is some imprecision in paragraphs 66 and following. However, this is not due to any misplaced irenicism, and the statement that “a deep meaning of the Eucharist is charity” is one that is certainly central not only to the concern of JS that the Church be an agent of justice, but also to the notion of communion with God Who is Love which is strengthened by holy communion. It is to be hoped that in the future, the notion of the Eucharist as the sacrament of Christ’s sacrifice can be fully explored.

III Conclusion

41. JS is a document that merits careful attention because it is the fruit of dialogue participants who have seriously considered the fruits of other dialogues (most notably the JDDJ), the scope and limitations of their theological methodologies, and the attempts made by voices in one another’s traditions to move towards agreement on issues that undergird a consideration of the Church as an agent for justice.

42. JS shows that in neuralgic areas of investigation, it is possible to lay aside some issues that cannot yet be resolved and still make progress. In leaving certain issues to the future, JS notes what the issues are from the Catholic and the Reformed perspectives, and it often offers an opinion as to whether a particular topic is a matter of serious theological dispute or, instead, a matter of expression that could, with sufficient clarification, lead to agreement.

43. Given that JS acknowledges areas of continued disagreement, and given that it acknowledges a significant discrepancy between Catholic and Reformed understandings of the sacramental economy, the fact that JS is able to describe sufficient unity to be able to speak of the Christian community as an agent for justice is remarkable. This is due above all to hopeful signs of a convergence in theological methodology. The Report can be accepted as a significant milestone along the journey toward full, visible communion.

The following note below constitutes part of the official Catholic Response to the text of the Justification and Sacramentality: The Christian Community as an Agent for Justice, and has been prepared by common agreement between the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. With regard to the section entitled “Areas of Converging Understanding” (in particular, paragraph 48) of Chapter Two, the following Catholic teaching should also be considered: “God has bound salvation to the sacrament of Baptism, but he himself is not bound by his sacraments” (n. 1257 Catechism of the Catholic Church).
INTRODUCTION
On 11 November, 1994, His Holiness Pope John Paul II and His Holiness Mar Dinkha IV, Catholico–Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East signed a Common Christological Declaration. This historic document was the result and the conclusion of a first phase of unofficial dialogues (1984–1994) between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East.

Whatever our Christological divergences have been, we experience ourselves united today in the confession of the same faith in the Son of God who became man so that we might become children of God by his grace*: with these words, an age-old doctrinal controversy concerning the Christological implications and consequences of the Council of Ephesus was concluded and new horizons of theological dialogue and pastoral collaboration were opened up.

The Christological Declaration continues: “Living by this faith and these sacraments, it follows as a consequence that the particular Catholic churches and the particular Assyrian churches can recognize each other as sister Churches. To be full and entire, communion presupposes the unanimity concerning the content of the faith, the sacraments and the constitution of the Church. Since this unanimity for which we aim has not yet been attained, we cannot unfortunately celebrate together the Eucharist which is the sign of the ecclesial communion already fully restored.” The Joint Committee for theological dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East consequently programmed two further phases in its activity: one on sacramental theology and a following one on the constitution of the Church. The phase on sacramental theology was carried on between 1994 and 2004 and concluded with the document at hand. Our third stage of dialogue, carried on between 1994 and 2004 and concluded with the document at hand. Our third stage of dialogue, carried on between 1994 and 2004 and concluded with the document at hand.

The present statement, elaborated by the Joint Committee for theological dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East, deals with sacramental life. As the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East have different ways of distinguishing and listing the sacraments, this document is structured according to a classification that applies to both of their traditions. All liturgical rites considered as sacramental celebrations in either both traditions or in only one of them, are treated in five following subdivisions: 1. Holy Orders and the Sign of the Cross; 2. Holy Baptism and Chrismation; 3. Holy Qurbana or Holy Eucharist, Holy Leaven and the Consecration of the Altar; 4. Christian Life (Christian Marriage, Religious Life); 5. Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick and Funeral. The main purpose of this classification is to clarify how both sacramental traditions are one in their diversity; in different forms and rites, indeed, they both intend to celebrate the one and same mystery of salvation.

I. SACRAMENTAL THEOLOGY
Sacramental life is a life of participation in the mystery of God’s salvific work through Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. This mystery is made present in the liturgy of the Church, which is called a celebration of ‘Razeh’ in the Syriac tradition, or ‘Mysteries’ in the Greek tradition or ‘Sacraments’ in the Latin tradition. Through the celebration of these mysteries, in grateful response to God’s initiative, the Church enables the faithful to share in God’s life and to concretely reflect that gift in their daily lives, through their communion with God and with one another.

As effective signs, sacraments convey the divine reality that they represent. Through their celebration, the Church in reality participates in the fruits of Christ’s Paschal Mystery and in the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Sacramental celebrations are thus more than a mere remembrance or an image of that divine reality; they make present efficaciously the grace that they signify. They actually introduce the faithful into God’s work of salvation, through and in the Church. For believers, consequently, sacraments are ordinary means of salvation.

The Holy Spirit is the principal cause of this real effectiveness. He is at work through all the words and deeds of the assembled community. He associates to his transforming power the ordained ministers, for the accomplishment of their mission. He sanctifies the material element in every sacrament (such as bread, wine, water, oil, the imposition of hands, etc.) and operates through them. He unites the entire community to the life and mission of Christ. The
Epistle therefore pertains to the very heart of every sacramental celebration.

All sacraments are celebrated in joyful hope of the coming of God’s Kingdom; they are celebrated “until He comes” and “that God may be all in all” (cf. 1 Cor 11:26; 15:28).1 Sacramental celebrations therefore stand in the eschatological tension between the ‘already given’ and the ‘not yet fulfilled’ dimension of God’s Kingdom. They confer here and now an actual participation in the final reality of God's Kingdom, a Kingdom, which still awaits fulfillment. They introduce the Church into a life, which still tends towards its achievement: their full participation into the mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (cf. Jn 3:3–5; Rom 6:3–4).

The sacramental celebrations of the Church are not arbitrarily established. They spring from the life of Jesus Christ and the foundational activity of the apostles, through the working of the Holy Spirit. They also decisively touch the crucial stages or moments of human and Christian life. This origin and purpose makes sacramental celebrations among the most sacred and essential actions of the Church. As regards their origin, status and necessity, however, some historical and theological distinctions can be made among sacramental celebrations. This internal difference among the sacraments can be expressed in different ways.2

Though essentially one and the same, sacramental life has distinguishing characteristics and features in the liturgical traditions of East and West. These different traditions are the result and the expression of different missionary movements, ecclesial developments and cultural backgrounds. As one and the same mystery is celebrated in these respective traditions, their different characteristics and features can be considered as a remarkable element of complementarity within the Church of Christ. “You have been trusted to look after something precious; guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us” (2 Tim 1:14), writes St. Paul to Timothy. The following chapters present and explain that ‘unity in diversity’, which characterises the sacramental traditions of both the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, the Church has gradually recognised the treasure received from Christ and, as a faithful steward of God’s mysteries, determined its ‘dispensation’. In the Catholic Church, this gradual recognition led to the magisterial discernment that among liturgical celebrations there are seven that, in the strict sense of the term, are sacraments instituted by the Lord.3 In the Assyrian Church of the East, no similar magisterial discernment was established. During the centuries, however, some authoritative authors employed distinct approaches dealing with the ‘Razeh’ or ‘Sacred Mysteries’, as celebrated in the Assyrian Church of the East. These approaches are slightly different from one another. Two of the most notable treatises, including a list of seven ‘Razeh’ or ‘Sacred Mysteries’, were composed by Metropolitan Mar Abdisho of Nisibis (+ 1318) and Patriarch Mar Timothy II (from 1318 till 1332).4 Respecting the sacramental traditions of both the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East, the succeeding chapters deal with all liturgical celebrations considered as ‘Sacraments’ or ‘Razeh’, in at least one or both traditions and with them only.

The liturgical traditions of the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East also practice a number of liturgical signs or rites which bear a resemblance to the sacraments, although they are not considered by both as ‘Sacraments’ or ‘Razeh’ in the strict sense of the term. In the Catholic tradition, these signs are generally called ‘sacramentals’. They signify effects, particularly of a spiritual nature, which are obtained through the intercession of the Church. They always include a prayer, often accompanied by a specific sign, such as the laying on of hands, the sign of the cross, or the sprinkling with holy water. Some of these rites are occasional blessings of persons, meals, objects or places. Other blessings have a lasting importance because they consecrate persons to God, or reserve objects and places for liturgical use. By this variety of ritual or liturgical signs, Christians are disposed to receive the chief effect of the sacraments and various occasions in their lives are rendered holy. The following chapters do not deal with ‘sacramentals’ as such. All liturgical celebrations, mentioned herein

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1. Quotations of Holy Scripture in this document are taken from “The Jerusalem Bible” version.

2. During the centuries, several distinctions were made in the Catholic tradition between sacraments necessary for ‘the salvation’, ‘the perfection’ or ‘the preparation’ of the faithful, between ‘major’ and ‘minor’ sacraments. In a comparable way, different Church of the East authors composed distinct sacramental lists, reflecting analogous theological considerations.

3. This discernment was formally decreed for the first time at the Council of Lyons II (1274); this determination was subsequently confirmed at the Council of Florence (1439) and the Council of Trent (1547).

4. Patriarch Mar Timothy II, in his treatise eBook of the Seven Causes of the Mysteries (Razeh) of the Churches presented the following list: (1) Priesthood; (2) Baptism; (3) Consecration of Altars; (4) Eucharist; (5) Consecration of Monastic Life; (6) Funerals; (7) Marriage. Metropolitan Mar Abdisho, moreover, in the introduction of his treatise, presents the following list of the ‘Razeh’: (1) Priesthood; (2) Baptism; (3) Oil of Unction; (4) Holy Qurbana; (5) Absolution; (6) Holy Leaven; (7) Sign of the Cross. However, in terms of historic patrimony, it should be noted that in the same treatise on the ‘Razeh’, Mar Abdisho substitutes the chapter on the “Sign of the Cross” with a chapter on “Marriage and Virginity”; he deals with the subject of the “Sign of the Cross” in the following section dedicated to the acts of worship. For circumstantial reasons, Mar Abdisho’s list became more available and consequently recognized and adopted in the Assyrian Church of the East. In fact, during the Patriarchate of Mar Dinkha IV, the Holy Synod of the Assyrian Church of the East affirmed in 2001 Abdisho’s list of ‘Razeh’ as the official list for the Assyrian Church of the East.
II. HOLY ORDERS

Jesus Christ personally called, formed and empowered the twelve apostles; from the very beginning they were his companions, called to assist him in the proclamation of the Good News, by their words and by their deeds (cf. Mk 3:13–19). After the Resurrection, the Lord commissioned his disciples to continue his work until the end of the world (cf. Mk 16:15–16; Mt 28:18–20; Lk 24:47; Jn 20:21–23; Acts 1:8). In turn, the twelve apostles transmitted their apostolic ministry to their successors, by the working of the Holy Spirit. They “prayed and laid their hands on them” (Acts 6:6; 13:3; cf. 2 Tim 1:6). The Church continued this apostolic tradition. By a specific consecratory prayer and the imposition of hands, she qualifies her sacred ministers for the fulfillment of their apostolic mission. Both the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East believe that ordination is a spiritual charism given to men elected by the Church to celebrate the ‘Mysteries of the Church’ (Razeh d–Edita) for the edification of the faithful and the building up of the Body of Christ, but never apart from the Church. Holy orders may not be repeated.

The requirement that all ordained ministers of the Church should stand in the apostolic succession, in virtue of their sacramental ordination, is an expression and a guarantee of continuity between the apostolic origin of the Church and the present qualification of her ministers. Being ordained in the apostolic succession, all ministers of the Church participate in the Pentecost of the Church: the Holy Spirit descending upon the apostles and their successors, after Christ’s Resurrection, for the accomplishment of their world-wide mission, till the end of time.

The sacrament of Holy Orders is exercised in three different degrees, episcopacy, presbyterate and diaconate. As expressed in the liturgical rites, theological teachings and uninterrupted praxis of both the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East, these three degrees pertain to the one sacrament of Holy Orders. Although each of the three degrees is related in a specific way to the one ministry of Christ, all three are conferred by a particular sacramental rite of ‘ordination’. As the bishop has the fullness of priesthood, he also can confer the presbyterate and the diaconate to others. 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.

All sacraments normally have to be administered by an ordained minister, according to his degree of participation in the ministry of Christ. Although reflecting a basic similarity, a few different practices exist between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East concerning the minister of some sacraments, at least in certain occasions. These differences will be indicated below, each of them in their respective context.

Sacramental ministry has to be situated within the context of the Christian community, as a service to the common priesthood of the baptised. The whole community of believers, indeed, is in a special way priestly. Christ, high priest and unique mediator, has made of the Church “a kingdom, priests for his God and Father” (cf. Rev 1:6; 5:9–10; 1 Pet 2:5,9). Lay Christians exercise a baptismal priesthood through their participation, each according to his own charism or calling, in Christ’s mission as priest, prophet and king. Through their baptism and union, they fully participate in the mission of the Church, especially in its mission towards the world. Christian parents, as heads of their families, educate their children in the faith, giving them the example of Christian virtues and “offering their lives as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God” (Rom 12:1); this is their spiritual worship. Lay Christians also have the right and the duty, individually or grouped in associations, to work so that the divine message of salvation may be known and received by all throughout the world. Some lay Christians can also be admitted temporarily or permanently to different forms of non-ordained ministry.

THE SIGN OF THE CROSS

The Trinitarian formula, as expressed in the ‘Sign of the Cross’, is a basic element of all sacramental celebrations. Because all sacraments are conferred in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the ordained minister repeatedly makes the ‘Sign of the Cross’ during all sacred mysteries or sacramental celebrations. By doing so, he expresses that these celebrations are performed in the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. At the same time he efficaciously administers to the assembled community and the faithful all divine gifts, which take their origin and come upon them from the Holy Cross (cf. Col 1:20). From one sacramental celebration to another,
Christians are increasingly endowed with the gifts of salvation, brought about by the life-giving sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The fundamental conviction that every sacramental celebration depends on the salific death and resurrection of Jesus Christ explains why some authors of the Assyrian Church of the East ranked the ‘Sign of the Cross’ among the ‘Razeh’ or ‘Sacred Mysteries.’

The ‘Sign of the Cross’ functions as an explicit symbol of unity among all the sacramental celebrations. For the Assyrian Church of the East, when used in a sacramental manner by the priest in all of the sacred mysteries (Razeh), it is part of the consecratory process of each of the sacraments, by which they are ‘sealed.’ All of them are means by which the Church further associates her members into the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ (cf. Rom 6:6–11) and into the eternal communion of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

III. HOLY BAPTISM AND CHRISMATION

Faithfully following the commandment of the Lord before his Ascension into heaven (Mt 28:16–20), Saint Peter said on the day of Pentecost: “You must repent . . . and every one of you must be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). From the very beginning of her existence, the Church has thus celebrated and administered the sacrament of Holy Baptism.

By their baptism, Christians are brought from the darkness of ignorance and sin into the light of knowledge and holiness (cf. 1 Thes 5:5; Eph 5:8). Baptism is their second birth; if by their first birth they receive the gift of human life, by their second birth from water and the Holy Spirit they receive the gift of divine life and salvation. Baptism is among the ordinary means for salvation, as already affirmed by the Lord himself (cf. Jn 3:5).

According to the Scriptures and to the doctrine of the Church, the effect of baptism is manifold. It purifies the neophytes from sin (cf. Acts 2:38). It makes them ‘adopted sons of God’ (Gal 4:5–7). It incorporates them into the Body of Christ, which is the Church (cf. Rom 8:17; 1 Cor 6:15; 12:27). It transforms them into temples of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 6:19). It makes them in a special way participants in the priesthood of Christ and in his prophetic and royal mission (cf. 1 Pet 2:9). It qualifies and leads them into a life of sacrifice, holiness and happiness (cf. 1 Cor 16:13–16; 2 Cor 5:15). It makes them participants in the death and Resurrection of Christ (cf. Rom 6:3–11) and the divine nature of God (cf. 2 Pet 1:4).

In accordance with the early Church, when whole ‘households’ received Baptism,” both the Catholic and the Assyrian tradition practice the baptism of adults and the baptism of infants. Children are baptised to bring them into the realm of freedom of the children of God, being freed from the servitude of sin. Every human being is in fact conditioned or affected by sin (cf. Jn 1:29; Rom 5:12–13), as Mar Timothy II says, “a person, who is born from a slave, is a slave himself, till he receives liberation from his servitude”.

Infant baptism manifests moreover, in a very emphatic way, that all faithful receive their new creation in Christ as a sheer gratuitous gift of salvation.

Since Christian initiation is incorporation into Jesus Christ and reception of the Holy Spirit, baptism with water is completed by the acts of imposition of hands and unction with Holy Oil. The Latin liturgy administers a first post-baptismal unction, which announces a second and usually later postponed anointing with Sacred Chrism, called Confirmation. The Assyrian Church of the East liturgy, in accordance with the Oriental practice, administers a “final signing” with Holy Oil, immediately after the baptismal rite. This “final signing” is considered as a distinct completion of the baptismal rite for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the perfection of Christian life. It covers what the Latin liturgy means by her separate and usually postponed sacrament of Confirmation.

The rite of initiation into Christian life is a journey with several distinct steps or stages, including the catechumenate, profession of faith, baptism with water, anointing with sacred oil and admission to Eucharistic Communion. Although these essential elements are the same in both the sacramental traditions of Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East, different liturgical practices and sequences have developed. For adult baptism, both traditions normally administer baptism, chrismation and Holy Communion during one single celebration. For infant baptism, however, liturgical practices differ. In the rite of the Assyrian Church of the East, consistent with the Oriental practice, the initiation of infants begins with baptism, immediately followed during one and the same liturgical celebration by the signing (shumlaya) with holy oil and completed by the reception of the Eucharist. In the Latin rite, infant baptism is normally

9. In the Latin tradition, the consecration of “Sacred Chrism” is reserved to the bishop. In some Oriental traditions this consecration is even reserved to the Patriarch. In the Assyrian Church of the East it is the celebrant who consecrates fresh oil of baptismal anointing during the baptismal liturgy, signing it with the old Holy Oil (also called the ‘Oil of the Horn’), and praying for the coming of the Holy Spirit.
10. Traditions differ with regard to the ordinary minister of this ‘final anointing’ or ‘confirmation,’ in the Latin rite the original minister of Confirmation is the bishop, in the rite of the Assyrian Church of the East, consistent with the Oriental practice, the priest who baptizes confers himself the “final anointing” during one and the same liturgical celebration.
11. In most Oriental traditions, infants immediately receive Holy Communion with their baptism and unction, during one and the same ceremony. In the Assyrian Church of the East children.
followed by years of catechesis, before being completed later on by confirmation and Eucharist. Infant baptism as practised in both traditions requires parents, godparents and the Christian community to make sure that children are reared in Christian faith and Christian life.

A Christian person can only be configured to Christ and signed with the seal of the Holy Spirit once and forever. Both baptism and anointing therefore confer an indelible spiritual character on the faithful.

**IV. HOLY QURBANA OR HOLY EUCHARIST**

From the beginning the Church has been faithful to the Lord’s command “*Do this in remembrance of me*” (1 Cor 11:23–25). With respect to the very first Christian communities it is written “*they remained faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers*” (Acts 2:42). More precisely on Sunday, the Day of the Lord, Christians met to celebrate the memorial of His passion and resurrection, to share in His Body and Blood and to grow as living members of His Body, which is the Church. That celebration thus became the centre of the Church’s life.

In the Assyrian Church of the East sacramental and Eucharistic theology, the concept of ‘*Mdabrannuta*’ is of particular importance. According to the Syriac vocabulary, ‘*Mdabrannuta*’ covers the whole salvific mystery, God’s divine economy for the creation and the salvation of humankind. Originating in the eternal plan of God, ‘*Mdabrannuta*’ finds its ‘former dispensation’ in the Old Testament, culminating in the Advent of Christ in humanity. Its ‘present dispensation’ is the New Testament economy, beginning with the Incarnation, culminating in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and being completed by the descent of the Holy Spirit. Its ‘future dispensation’, which began at Pentecost, still awaits the Second Coming of the Lord, the glorification of the Church and the renewal of creation. The entire ‘*Mdabrannuta*’ or salvific mystery is commemorated and celebrated throughout the Liturgical Year, in the Liturgy of the Hours and in the Sacraments. Its most clear and comprehensive celebration, however, is effected during Holy Qurbana or the Eucharistic celebration. During the Eucharist, the human condition before the Incarnation is evoked, humanity’s need to God’s salvific economy is confessed, and forgiveness is prayed for. Gratitude is expressed for the abundance of grace, given through the Old Covenant, through the Incarnation, through the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. An enumeration is made of the many blessings and benefits obtained through the provision of God’s salvific economy. The whole mystery of salvation or ‘*Mdabrannuta*’ is thus summarised, celebrated and gratefully received in every Eucharistic celebration. Although this comprehensiveness is more evident or extensive in the Syriac Eucharistic tradition, it also is a characteristic feature of all Catholic Eucharistic traditions. In both traditions, the whole mystery of salvation is gratefully commemorated and celebrated in every Eucharistic celebration.

Reflecting their common Eucharistic faith, the same fundamental structure characterises Eucharistic celebrations in the tradition of both the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East: the gathering of the local community presided by the bishop or the priest, the Liturgy of the Word including readings from both the Old and the New Testament, the intercessions of the faithful, the presentation of the offerings, the anaphora or Eucharistic prayer, the fraction and the communion in the Body and Blood of Christ, followed by prayers of thanksgiving.

The anaphora or Eucharistic prayer leads to the heart and summit of the Eucharistic celebration, which is the receiving of ‘the bread of heaven’ and ‘the cup of salvation’. By the invocation of the Holy Spirit and by the representation of what our Saviour has done and said at the Last Supper, the elements of bread and wine sacramentally become the Body and Blood of our Lord. Both the Epiclesis and the Words of our Saviour are thus necessary elements of the anaphora or Eucharistic Prayer. The real and true presence of Christ under the species of bread and wine, moreover, is part of our common faith and devotion.

While sharing the same Eucharistic faith, different liturgical traditions have developed in both the Catholic Church and in the Assyrian Church of the East for the celebration of Qurbana or Holy Eucharist. These different liturgical backgrounds and traditions are a constitutive element of our respective ecclesial identities, which leads to mutual enrichment. Each of these traditions should therefore be faithfully preserved and organically developed. In this context, a highly respectful consideration is due to the anaphoras.

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14. Among the Anaphoras of the Church of the East, the Anaphora of Addai and Mari occupies a special and venerable position, being recognized as its most ancient Anaphora. The validity of the Eucharist when celebrated with the Anaphora of Addai and Mari was recognised by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith on January 17th 2001; Pope John Paul II subsequently approved this decision (cf. Guidelines for Admission to the Eucharist between the Chaldean Church and the Assyrian Church of the East, and Ammissione all’Eucaristia in situazioni di necessità pastorale, in: L’Osservatore Romano, Friday 26 October 2001, p. 7–8.
traditionally used in our liturgical heritages, especially when they date back to venerable antiquity.

HOLY LEAVEN

In different ways the early Church practised a partition of Eucharistic bread, combined with a distribution of these particles among the churches or the celebrants of a specific area. Such liturgical practice existed both in the Christian East and in the Christian West. One of these practices, called the ‘fermentum’, consisted in a distribution of small Eucharistic particles by the bishop to the priests of the surrounding area; each priest had to dip this particle into the cup of his eucharistic celebration, hence the name ‘fermentum’ or ‘leaven’. Similar practices gradually disappeared in the Western Church and in most of the Oriental Churches.

The Assyrian Church of the East, however, faithfully conserved such a liturgical practice, called ‘Holy Leaven’ or ‘Malka’. Every year on Holy Thursday, the local parish priest renews the Holy Leaven by mixing the old Leaven with the new one. This Leaven is subsequently to be used during the year in all the Eucharistic loaves prepared by the priest before the Eucharistic celebration. In the sacramental tradition of the Assyrian Church of the East, this Holy Leaven has an integral and necessary part in the overall process of consecration. Further, the Holy Leaven functions as a visible sign of historical continuity between every Qurbana or Eucharistic celebration and the Last Supper (cf. Mt 26:26).

CONSECRATION OF THE ALTAR

Both the tradition of the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East reverently respects the altar around which the community is gathered, on which the Eucharistic gifts are offered and from which the Body and Blood of the Lord are received. A solemn liturgy for the consecration of an altar is provided in both their liturgical rites. This consecration is reserved for the bishop; it is carried out by an invocation of the Holy Spirit and an unction with sacred oil. However, in the Catholic and Assyrian traditions, the consecration of the altar is not considered one of the sacraments.

15. In virtue of its venerable origin, theological meaning and liturgical stature, the Holy Leaven was ranked by Mar Abdisho of Nisibis among the ‘Razez’ or ‘Sacred Mysteries’. The rite of Holy Leaven is still practiced by the Assyrian Church, not by the Chaldean or the Syro–Malabar Church.

16. Due to its ecclesial and liturgical importance, the consecration of the altar was ranked by Patriarch Mar Timothy II among the ‘Razez’ or ‘Sacred Mysteries’; according to his liturgical order, the consecration of the altar functions at the same time as a consecration of the whole church and the sanctuary where the altar stands. In the actual liturgical practice of the Assyrian Church, following the sacramental list of Mar Abdisho, the consecration of an altar is a liturgical rite, that is not considered as a sacrament. In a similar way, in the Catholic tradition, the consecration of an altar is ranked among the sacraments.

V. CHRISTIAN LIFE

CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

Marriage is vested with special importance and meaning, expressing both the order of creation and the order of salvation, that is God’s eternal plan for the creation (cf. Gen 2) and the salvation of humankind, culminating in Jesus Christ (cf. Eph 5:32). It is a covenant by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a lifelong and complete partnership, which of its own nature is ordered to the well-being of the spouses and to the procreation and upbringing of children. This intimate communion of life and love has been established by the Creator and endowed by Him with its own proper laws. The model of Christian marriage is the covenant between Christ and his Church, as made clear by the Apostle Paul:

“Husbands should love their wives just as Christ loved the Church and sacrificed himself for her to make her holy” (cf. Eph 5:25–26). Through the celebration of the Church, the spouses receive the grace that enables them to represent in their conjugal love the fidelity of God to the people of His covenant and of Christ to his Church, and to bear witness to that divine fidelity. Christian marriage thus receives its sacramental character.

The parties to a Christian marriage are a baptised man and woman, not impeded from contracting marriage and who freely express their consent. The Church’s minister receives and blesses their consent in the name of the Church. He especially prays the Holy Spirit, the ever–available source of their love and fidelity, to bless and to seal their covenant. The presence of the Church’s minister and also of the witnesses visibly expresses the fact that Christian marriage is an ecclesial reality.

The unity of marriage, distinctly recognised by our Lord, is made clear in the equal personal dignity

17. Marriage does not appear on the list of the ‘Raze’ composed by Mar Abdisho. His list reflects indeed an earlier stage in the development of the actual list of seven sacraments, preceding some later developments, common to the Greek and Latin tradition. In the tradition of the Assyrian Church of the East, however, the liturgical texts used for the celebration of marriage, as well as the teaching documents explaining its meaning, display the same elements which are considered as constitutive for its sacramental character in the Catholic tradition.

18. Regarding marriages between Christians belonging to different Christian communities or marriages between Christians and non–Christians, we have to refer to the appropriate canonical regulations of both the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East. In the Catholic Church, permission for a marriage between a catholic and a non–Christian can be given by the bishop; in the Assyrian Church of the East, however, no such permission can be given.

19. In the Latin Church, it is ordinarily understood that the spouses, as ministers of Christ’s grace, mutually confer upon each other the sacrament of Matrimony by expressing their consent before the Church. In the Assyrian Church of the East, in accordance with the Oriental tradition, the liturgical rite of marriage must have the presence of the priest, the cup of blessing, and the Cross as ‘intermediaries’ required for the validity of the rite.
that must be accorded to husband and wife in mutual and total affection. The indissolubility of marriage is clear in the Lord’s saying: “They are no longer two, therefore, but one body. So then, what God has united, man must not divide” (Mt 19:6).

As a participation in God’s creative love, marriage is ordered to the procreation and upbringing of offspring (cf. Gen 1:27–28). In our time and world, often alien and even hostile to faith, believing families are of primary importance as centres of living and radiant faith. It is in the bosom of the family that parents are by word and example the first heralds of faith for their children. They should encourage their children in the vocation proper to each one of them, fostering with special care any religious vocation. Spouses unable to receive children can likewise have a conjugal life full of meaning, in both human and Christian terms. Their marriage can radiate fruitfulness of charity and of sacrifice, both between themselves and towards others.

RELIGIOUS LIFE

Religious life has developed in the tradition of both the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East, since the first centuries, as a special charism and way of Christian witness. Vocation to religious life was considered as a special gift of the Holy Spirit, for the sanctification and enrichment of the Church.20 Several spiritual or ecclesial themes were related in a specific way to religious life, such as desert life (cf. Mk 1:12–13), the radical imitation of Jesus Christ (cf. Mk 10:17–31) and the following in example of the first Christian communities (cf. Acts 2:42–47).

Different forms of religious life developed in both traditions. In the Catholic Church successive periods of foundation and reform repeatedly contributed to the internal renewal and diversification of religious life. In the Assyrian Church of the East religious life spread at the end of the third or the beginning of the 4th century and prospered for many centuries.21 At the end of the 14th century, nevertheless, it came to a rapid decline and almost completely disappeared, mainly due to drastic social and political circumstances.22

VI. RECONCILIATION, ANOINTING OF THE SICK AND FUNERAL

RECONCILIATION

According to Holy Scripture, God’s heart is not like the heart of men and He does not like to destroy (cf. Hos 11:8–11). He does not want the death of the wicked, but that he may turn from his evil way and may live (cf. Ezek 18:23). Jesus is the full representation of God’s mercy, as he affirmed himself: “It is not those who are well who need the doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Lk 5:32). He finally gave his life and poured out his blood for the forgiveness of sins (cf. Mt 26:28). In communion with his own mission, Christ gave the apostles and their successors power to forgive sins (cf. Mt 16:19; Mt 18:18; Jn 20:22s.). By virtue of this mandate and authorisation sins can be forgiven by the ministry of the Church, even after baptism. This ministry of reconciliation has been entrusted to bishops and priests. They received the authority to absolve by a sacramental act of absolution and reconciliation.

The sacramental administration of reconciliation exists in the liturgical tradition of both the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East. Constitutive elements of this reconciliation are repentance, confession, penance, absolution and conversion (cf. Mt 3:8). Different practices developed within both liturgical traditions for the administration of reconciliation, giving priority either to the private or to the communal character of reconciliation. The communal confession of sins and the ministerial proclamation of forgiveness during the celebration of Holy Qurbana or Holy Eucharist retains a particular penitential importance in both liturgical traditions; Christian conversion and reconciliation find in fact their source and nourishment in the Eucharist. The practice of personal confession and absolution exists in both the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East, at least for grave sins. In the Catholic Church, the ‘private’ practice of penance favoured a regular frequenting of the sacrament of personal confession. Although less customarily or frequently, the Assyrian Church of the East also practices personal confession and sinners at any time can ask for it.23

ANOINTING OF THE SICK

Illness and suffering have always been part of human reality. In the Holy Scriptures illness is associated with

20. The liturgical admission into monastic life was ranked by Patriarch Mar Timothy II among the ‘Razeh’ or ‘Sacred Mysteries’. In the actual liturgical practice of the Assyrian Church of the East, following the list of ‘Razeh’ or ‘Sacred Mysteries’ of Mar Abdisho, admission into monastic life is a liturgical rite, that is not considered as a sacrament. In a similar way, in the Catholic tradition, the consecration of virgins and the rite of religious profession are ranked among the sacramentals.

21. In ancient times, the Assyrian Church of the East observed a unique type of ‘Proto-monasticism’ known as the Baya/Baath Quma, or the ‘Sons/ Daughters of the Covenant.’ This ancient form of religious life consisted of men or women living a consecrated life in their homes and among the community of faithful. It pre-dated the formal monasticism instituted by St. Anthony of Egypt, and it is the type observed by St. Ephrem and Aphrahat the Persian Sage.

22. In recent years attempts in the Assyrian Church of the East at revival of monastic life have begun in Iraq and in India and the United States.

23. Private confession was increasingly more practised by the Chaldean Church and the Syro-Malabar Church, bringing their liturgies into line with the Latin tradition.
human sin and with confidence in God. On the one hand, all sufferings on earth are associated with Adam’s sin (cf. Gen 3:16–19; Rom 5). On the other, it is before God that the faithful lament in their illnesses, and it is from God, the Master of life and death, that they implore healing. Prayer of healing in time of sickness is recommended together with repentance for sin (cf. Sir 38:9–11). Jesus Christ gave surprising priority to bringing healing to the sinners and the sick. His compassion and healing of every kind of infirmity became a resplendent sign that the Kingdom of God was at hand (cf. Mt 11:1–5). Already during his public ministry, He sent his disciples with a mission to heal the sick (cf. Lk 10:9). And after his glorification, He mandated the apostles to continue such a healing ministry: “Go out to the whole world; proclaim the Good News to all creation. He who believes and is baptised will be saved... In my name . . . they will lay their hands on the sick, who will recover” (Mk 16:15–18; cf. Jn 5:14–15).

The liturgical traditions of both the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East tradition make provision for the anointing of the sick. This anointing has to be administered by an ordained minister, namely a bishop or a priest. The efficacy of this anointing is attributed to the healing power of Jesus Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit. This is not only indicated by the corresponding prayers, but also by the fact that the oil has to be blessed by an ordained minister and that the anointing is accompanied by the Sign of the Cross. Those elements are an expression of the sacramental character of this anointing rite.25

As the liturgical prayers of both the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East indicate, the effect of this anointing is manifold: healing of the body and the soul, sanctification of the Church and fortification of the person. The manifold effects of this healing anointing are noted by the apostle St. James: “And if he is sick, let him call the presbyters of the Church and let them pray over him, and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith shall heal the one who is sick, and our Lord will raise him up...” (Jn 5:14–15).

VII. CONCLUSIONS
Sacramental life and theology is multiform in its nature, because it is the quest for understanding the mystery of faith in human categories and celebrating this faith in forms that are characteristic of each culture and nation. In general, the sacramental life and theology of the Catholic Church developed in a Greco–Roman context. As to the Assyrian Church of the East, its sacramental life developed in lands, which never were ruled by the Roman Empire, either by the Western or by the Eastern Empire. It developed in a predominantly Semitic and Syriac theological context, very close to the background of the primitive apostolic communities.

During many centuries, due to massive and sometimes very painful historic situations, the Church of the East could not communicate in a normal way with the rest of Christianity, situated within the Greco–Roman area. Some later developments in sacramental theology and practice, which gradually were adopted in the Greco–Roman area, did not affect the Assyrian Church of the East. Remaining extremely faithful to its proper apostolic origins, however, the Assyrian Church of the East conserved and developed its sacramental patrimony, stemming from the apostolic age. This patrimony represents a unique source and testimony for the whole Church.

A comprehensive approach to sacramental life confirms, indeed, that Christian life in both the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East is structured by one sacramental reality. While celebrating sacramental rites according to different liturgical and cultural traditions, in essence, they both share the same sacramental faith and the same sacramental life. Their sacramental rites can therefore be considered as complementary expressions of a unique divine reality, unfolding its wonderful richness in a diversity of ecclesial traditions. The principle of unity in diversity can thus be applied, not only regarding the formulation of doctrine, but also

24. God’s healing presence is not partial but complete; it tends to restore human life in all dimensions of its being weak and wounded. According to the Holy Scriptures, healing of evil and sin is considered as the most fundamental healing a human person can receive from God (cf. Mt 9:1–8; Mk 2:1–12; Lk 5:17–26).

25. The anointing of the sick does not appear on the list of ‘Razeh’ composed by Mar Abdisho (cf. note 5). In the Assyrian tradition, however, the liturgical texts used for the celebration of the anointing of the sick, as well as the teaching documents explaining its meaning, display the same elements which are considered as constitutive for its sacramental character in the Catholic tradition.

26. Cf. this prayer of the Church of the East for the oil of the sick: “O true Healer whose word is full of all well–being, aid, care and healing. O Lord let your grace dwell on this oil and make it to be a helper and healer of all our illnesses, a reliever of our pain, tensions and hardship, a cure for our wounds, a cleanser of our infliction, may we find in it the cure for our illnesses, now and forever. Amen”.

27. In virtue of its liturgical, spiritual and pastoral meaning, the liturgy of funeral was ranked by Patriarch Mar Timothy II among the ‘Razeh’ or ‘Sacred Mysteries’. Nevertheless, in the actual liturgical practice of the Assyrian Church of the East, following the sacramental list of Mar Abdisho, funeral is a liturgical rite, that is not considered as a sacrament.
regarding the celebration of sacramental life in both the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East.

In their Common Christological Declaration of 1994, the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East declared themselves united “in the confession of the same faith in the Son of God who became man so that we might become children of God by his grace”. That common heritage of faith was received, maintained, taught, confirmed and clarified by the Holy Spirit in both traditions, especially through their respective sacramental and liturgical heritages. Sacraments being sacraments of faith, the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East are now able to declare themselves also united in celebrating the same faith “in the Son of God who became man so that we might become children of God by his grace”, and in dispensing the same salvific mystery, through their respective sacramental and liturgical traditions.

To be full and entire, communion between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East not only presupposes unanimity concerning the content of faith and the celebration of sacraments, but also concerning the constitution of the Church, as written in the Common Christological Declaration of 1994. Accordingly, both the Common Christological Declaration of 1994 and the present Common Declaration on Sacramental Life lay the foundation for the third phase in our theological dialogue, namely, on the constitution of the Church. When brought to a good end, the third phase will have completed the agreement on faith, sacramental life and the constitution of the Church, and the way will be open for the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East “to celebrate together the Eucharist, which is the sign of the ecclesial communion already fully restored.”

24 November, 2017

His Eminence Cardinal Kurt Koch
President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity
CO–CHAIR

His Beatitude Mar Meelis
Metropolitan of Australia, New Zealand and Lebanon
CO–CHAIR

28. This present ‘Common Statement on Sacramental Life’ and the common sacramental understanding of our two Churches does not allow for the con–celebration of the sacraments and rites of the Church by their respective clergy.