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A Center conducted by the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement

Director's Desk

In this issue of the bulletin we have the pleasure of presenting four of the conferences that were held at the **Centro** during this past year. You will note that these texts are quite different in nature showing the diversity of themes that we try to treat through our activities. Prof. David Carter who is a member of the British Catholic-Methodist dialogue takes a look at the rich diversity in ecclesiologies between the Methodist and Catholic churches and tries to illustrate that the diversity that exists is not an obstacle to the possible reconciliation of the two churches. While David was here he also held a seminar at the Angelicum for the students of the ecumenical section.

Sarah Coakley, Professor of Divinity at Harvard University, presented the second annual Fr. Paul Wattson and Mother Lurana White lecture. She presents us with a fresh reading of classical Trinitarian theology to show the link that the Fathers make between Trinity, prayer and sexuality. A lively discussion followed her presentation by some of the participants. We would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Sarah on her ordination for the Anglican diocese of Oxford. This year's Wattson/White lecture will be given by Prof. Bruno Forte. His lecture entitled "Beauty as a Way to Unity" will take place on December 14th at the **Centro**. A concert will be held on the next day to mark the anniversary of the foundation of the Society of the Atonement. We hope that many of our Italian readers will be able to join us.

The director of the Anglican Centre in Rome, Bishop John Baycroft offered this year's Week of Prayer for Christian Unity conference held in January. In his lecture he illustrated the challenges that the recent ARCIC text on authority offers to the churches. Following his lecture we had an ecumenical celebration of the Word presided by Pastor David Huie of the Scots Presbyterian Church in Rome with the homily given by Rev. Tom Best of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches. Later in the year the Anglican Centre had the distinguished honor of welcoming Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip. We were most honored that we were invited as supporters of the Anglican Communion and Centre to meet the Queen and talk about the collaboration that goes on between our Center and the Anglican Centre.

The final text in this issue is the lecture given by the President of the Sorbonne, Michel Meslin. This lecture rounds out the series that the **Centro** has sponsored dealing with the question that Pope John Paul II raises in *Ut unum sint* on the role of the petrine ministry and the unity of the Church. Prof. Meslin is an anthropologist and historian of religion and hence his talk approached the understanding of primacy from this perspective. In the context of the recent document from the Congregation on the Doctrine of the Faith *Dominus Iesus*, this lecture helped clarify some issues confronting the churches today on the interreligious and ecumenical fronts.

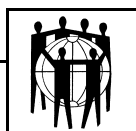
Two successful Summer sessions were sponsored this year. One held in Jerusalem co-sponsored by the SIDIC Center and the Sisters of Our Lady of Sion in Ein Kerem. The other was our annual Summer course. Once again for both programs we had participants from over 20 different countries. You will find a flyer for this year's Summer course to be held from June 25 to July 13, 2001. Reserve your place early!

Several groups visited the **Centro** this year including a German study group led by Dr. Martin Wallraff from the University of Bonn and a group of French couples from the movement Foyer Notre Dame. In addition we had the pleasure of presenting the study of Giovanni Turbanti *Un concilio per il mondo moderno* which is a study on the evolution of the Second Vatican Council's pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes*. We are also grateful for the research that has been done on behalf of defenseless children by Vincenzo Ancona. His volume *Bambini indifesi* (Scheda Editore) is a welcomed addition to the library.

We would like to remind our readers that this periodical is indexed in the *ATLA Religion Database*, published by the American Theological Library Association, 250 S. Wacker Dr., 16th Floor., Chicago, IL 60606 (<http://www.atla.com>).

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James F. Puglisi, sa
Director





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Centro Conferences

Can the Roman Catholic and Methodist Churches be Reconciled?

by

David Carter

Member of the British Catholic-Methodist Dialogue

(Conference given at the **Centro Pro Unione**, Thursday, 25 November 1999)

In 1992, Rev. David Butler, Secretary of the British Roman Catholic-Methodist Committee for dialogue, wrote a paper entitled, 'Can the Methodist and Roman Catholic Churches be Reconciled?'¹ It was subsequently received by the Commission, and sent by the Methodist members for consideration by the Methodist Conference. In 1992, it was sent down by the Conference for discussion and comment by the Methodist districts, thus initiating a process of reception and reflection from the Methodist side, a process which was, however, not as thorough and complete as the Committee would have wished.

That such a paper could be written, let alone almost immediately commended for study by the highest organ of the British Methodist Church, is a sign of the rapid progress made in recent years in Catholic-Methodist relations, especially in England. This process has not, of course, occurred spontaneously in a vacuum. It had its origin in the great movement of ecumenical and spiritual renewal which culminated, on the Roman Catholic side in Vatican II, and on the Methodist side, in 1967, in the enthusiastic acceptance of the Vatican's offer of a bilateral dialogue. Right from the beginning, Methodist members of the dialogue commission asked that the ultimate goal of visible unity should be kept constantly in mind, however long and arduous the journey towards it might be.

Even before the 1960's there were signs of mutual interest and recognition between Catholics and Methodists. John Wesley had a great devotion to many Catholic saints². Cardinal Manning is said to have loved the local preachers of North country Methodism because they pleaded the one sacrifice as effectively from their pulpits as he did from his altar. In the early twentieth century, many Methodists and Catholics recognised that their common concern for holiness represented an important bridge across the many differences. Nevertheless,

as late as the 1950's, few could have envisaged the rapid progress that was to occur over the next 40 years.

It is, of course, important not to exaggerate this. It is true that, where they exist, relationships between Methodists and Catholics, in England, are usually warm, and based on mutual respect. However, it is also true that enormous numbers of Catholics and Methodists, in England and elsewhere, still live in deep ignorance not only of the spiritual riches of each others' traditions, but even of aspects of the others' most basic convictions. The Methodist people do not generally lack goodwill towards other Christians. Nevertheless, they are often puzzled by differences that they do not understand. In particular, they often misunderstand Catholic teaching about the 'real presence' in the Eucharist. They are often unable, to relate unfamiliar types of Christian life and devotion to their own experience of the faith. A vast work of reception lies ahead of us, a point stressed by Cardinal Cassidy when he visited the British Methodist Conference in 1998³. Even if the theologians were able tomorrow to resolve all the remaining differences, to the mutual satisfaction of both the Vatican and the World Methodist Council, a prolonged period of preparation would be necessary in both churches to ensure that all our people appreciated the fuller heritage into which they were being asked to enter. I am sad to record that little, as yet, is being done about this in Britain. Many Methodist districts made no response to the paper referred to above. Occasional study days are being held in a few districts and dioceses, but that is as far as it goes⁴.

Despite these caveats, it is undeniable that great progress has been made on many fronts. The early stages of the dialogue were carried out in a respectful but cautious mood. Great honesty was displayed in recording areas of continuing dis-

¹D. BUTLER, 'Can the Roman Catholic and Methodist Churches be Reconciled?' (Methodist Publishing House, 1992).

² The standard work on this is D. BUTLER, *Methodists and Papists. John Wesley and the Catholic Church in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1995).

³For the text of Cardinal Cassidy's address, see the British Methodist theological journal, *Epworth Review* 25, 4 (1998) 13-22.

⁴ A local dialogue group meets regularly in Liverpool Archdiocese/District. Southwark and Arundel and Brighton diocesan ecumenical commissions have sponsored several study days in conjunction with the Methodist London SW. District. Otherwise, there is little local dialogue and reception.

agreement as well as those of agreement or convergence⁵. Some of the former, however, are now ripe for reconsideration in the light of developments in ecumenical thought since BEM, and, also, in the light of some of the work done in the fourth and fifth quinquennia of the dialogue. These two quinquennia issued reports on the Church and the Apostolic Tradition which showed clear signs of convergence on key aspects of fundamental ecclesiology, doctrine of the ministry and Tradition and traditions⁶. In 1996, the dialogue published its latest complete report, on revelation and faith, 'The Word of Life'.

Let us look at some of these issues, beginning with ecclesiology. Roman Catholic ecclesiology since Vatican II has balanced acceptance of the ecclesial reality of other churches and Christian communities with a continuing emphasis on the primacy of the see of Rome as the cornerstone of universal *koinônia*. Unity 'subsists' in communion with the See of Rome, with its uniquely authoritative double apostolic foundation by Peter and Paul. This means that full *koinônia* is only possible with a reception of the Petrine ministry, though it is clearly accepted that this reception will probably be of a style different from that practised since the time of Paul V or even Gregory VII. John Paul II has hinted at this possibility in his preparedness to discuss the future style of his ministry with the theologians and leaders of the other churches⁷.

British Methodist ecclesiology takes as axiomatic the claim of the Deed of Union, which constituted the present British Methodist Church in 1932, that 'Methodism claims and cherishes its place within the one Holy Catholic Church'⁸. Methodism has never, of course, claimed to be the whole of the Catholic Church. Methodists accept that there was a time when

the Universal Church existed without a separate Methodist body. Many of them look forward to a time again when Methodism no longer needs to exist as a separate body. Methodists believe, however, that within the providence of God, they have certain insights into the nature of the Church and the practice of the Christian life that should become part of the permanent heritage of the Universal Church⁹. This claim is consistent with the ecclesiology of Vatican II and of the recent encyclical 'Ut Unum Sint' with their talk of the gifts and endowments of many Christian communities.

We can reasonably hope, ultimately, for a union of the two churches, within which they will both work and pray for such further and completer union of the whole of Christendom as might still then be necessary. Such a union would transcend but not eclipse the claims and ecclesiologies of the two churches. Following the ecclesiology of Cardinal Willebrands, it should be possible for Roman Catholics to recognise within Methodism an authentic 'typos' of ecclesial life and spirituality which embodies within a particular manner the essentials of the Apostolic Tradition¹⁰. Methodists have shown their willingness to restore the sign of the episcopal succession, and to receive the Petrine ministry, if and when they can be convinced of its indispensability for the unity of Christ's Church¹¹. Methodists believe that the Petrine ministry needs to be exercised in a 'connexional' and collegial context, but, in the light of Vatican and post-Vatican II thinking about collegiality this should not

⁵ For the first three reports of the dialogue, see H. MEYER & L. VISCHER (eds.), *Growth in Agreement: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level*, (NY/Geneva: Paulist/WCC, 1984) 307-388.

⁶ 'Towards a Statement on the Church', 1984, published by World Methodist Council, Lake Junaluska and 'The Apostolic Tradition', 1991, published by Methodist Publishing House, Peterborough, 'The Word of Life', published by the World Methodist Council at Lake Junaluska, 1996. Currently, the dialogue is studying teaching authority.

⁷ See 'Ut Unum Sint', paras 98-107. For a range of both catholic and other views on the possibilities, see J.F. PUGLISI (ed.), *Petrine Ministry and the Unity of the Church* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1999), being the papers of the symposium held at this Centro in December 1998. For the Methodist contribution, by Geoffrey WAINWRIGHT, see ch 4, pp. 59-82.

⁸ The Deed of Union of 1932 sets out the basis on which the three previously existing main British Methodist churches viz: the Wesleyan, Primitive and United Methodist Churches came together in that year as one, the 'Methodist Church'. For a full text of the doctrinal clauses of the Deed of Union of the Methodist Church of 1932 see, G.T. BRAKE, *Policy and Politics in British Methodism 1932-1982* (London: Edsall, 1984) 829-830.

⁹ For statements on this, see, for example, G. WAINWRIGHT, *The Ecumenical Moment: Crisis and Opportunity for the Church* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1983) 196-199.

¹⁰ For Cardinal Willebrands' famous sermon on this, "Diversity without Separation," *The Tablet* 224 (1970) 92-93. The question of the extent of legitimate diversity within the Great Tradition remains a matter for theological exploration between our communities. See e.g. my article in *One in Christ* 29, 3 (1993) 226-234: "Legitimacy of Diversity in the Apostolic Tradition", which was a paper given to the British Roman Catholic-Methodist Committee in 1992.

¹¹ For British Methodism's attitude to the recovery of the historic episcopate, see M. THURIAN (ed.), *Churches respond to Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper, 132 (Geneva: WCC, 1986) vol 2, 215 where it is stated "we await the occasion when it would be appropriate to 'recover the sign of the episcopal succession'". For the statement on Petrine ministry, see "Towards a Statement on the Church", *op. cit.*, 17. See also the response of the British Methodist Faith and Order Committee to 'Ut Unum Sint', Conference Agenda, 1997, pp 256-57.

be impossible to achieve¹². We can derive particular hope from the flexible approach taken by Pope John-Paul II in 'Ut Unum Sint', as already noted.

The rapprochement of the two churches will be facilitated by their common emphasis on the Church as the 'Pilgrim People of God'. It is a welcome feature of the Report on 'The Apostolic Tradition', issued after the fifth quinquennium of the dialogue, that it presents a very carefully nuanced ecclesiology, juxtaposing and acknowledging the reality both of the divine element, and of the human element, with all its frailty, in the Church, and thus avoiding some of the pitfalls of both pre-Vatican II Catholic and traditional Protestant ecclesiology with their respective tendencies to veer towards the monophysite and the nestorian in ecclesiology. Both churches understand themselves to be 'in via' towards their promised eschatological perfection (Ephesians 5:27). Both would, I think, accept George Tavard's dictum that the Church 'progressively images the kingdom of God' and that it continues to meditate upon the word of God until all the promises of God are fulfilled in its life¹³. Within their histories, they recognise that there have been times of great renewal and spiritual progress and also times of weakness when the Church has stood in dire need of reform. They accept the principle 'ecclesia semper reformanda'. Within this framework, it is possible for both churches to recognise and affirm each others' periods of renewal, such as the monastic revivals of the Middle Ages or the Wesleyan revival of the eighteenth century, and to acknowledge their joint need of

constant renewal¹⁴.

Another great fillip has been given to Catholic-Methodist convergence by the common developing understanding of the Church as *koinônia*¹⁵. This emphasis was fundamental to early Methodism, 'as much a revival of primitive church life as of primitive doctrine', to quote James Rigg, a great nineteenth century Methodist ecclesiologist¹⁶. It is instructive to note the parallel phenomenon in the renewal of Catholicism from the work of Möhler and Newman through to its coming to fruition in developments after Vatican II. This involved a return to the patristic sources, and with it a renewed appreciation of the Church as *koinônia*¹⁷. The link between doctrinal and ecclesiological renewal is very strict. A renewed understanding of the dynamics of trinitarian theology led to a renewed understanding of the Trinitarian mission to all creation, and thence to the understanding of the *koinônia* effected by the Word and the Spirit as they graciously involve the elect in the life and mission of the Triune God. These links can be exemplified both in much Catholic teaching at and after Vatican II and in the recent Ecclesiology Report of the British Methodist Faith and Order Committee¹⁸.

The understanding of the Church as communion helps us to transcend the dichotomy between those ecclesiologies that start from the necessity of an authoritative hierarchy and those which start from the presupposition that authority emanates upward from the gathered congregation. Rather, ordained ministry and laity are in a symbiotic relationship with each other within which they listen to each other, the ministry transmitting the apostolic gospel and the people of God speaking back to the

¹² The term 'connexional' (spelt 'connectional' in US) is used to describe the Methodist system of church organisation and government, the core emphasis of which is on the essential interrelatedness and mutual accountability of all local churches. Arising originally as a pragmatic device for ensuring the maximum coverage in mission, the system became increasingly justified as better expressing the total *koinônia* and interdependency of the Church than other systems of church organisation. See eg. J.H. RIGG, *A Comparative View of Church Organisations* (London, 1887). For a recent, profound justification of connexionalism, see the articles in *Epworth Review*, the British Methodist theological review, of Rev. Brian BECK, the then Secretary of the Conference, "Some Reflections on Connexionalism", (May/Sept 1991) 48-59. For a summary of principles and recent theologising, see B.W. ROBBINS and D. CARTER, "Connexionalism and *Koinônia*: A Wesleyan Contribution to Ecclesiology," *One in Christ* 34, 4 (1998) 320-336. Connexionalism is combined with an episcopal ministry in the main American Methodist traditions, but with a non-episcopal system in Britain. Methodism everywhere emphasises collegial and communal decision making. The relationship between this tradition and the personally focused system of episcopate exercised by bishops is under discussion in contemporary British Methodism. In USA, there has always been a delicate balance between the authority of the General Conference and that of individual bishops and the Council of Bishops.

¹³ G.A. TAVARD, "Tradition as *Koinônia* in Historical Perspective," *One in Christ* 24, 2 (1988) 110. Decree 'Dei Verbum' of Vatican II, para 8.

¹⁴ *Apostolic Tradition*, *op. cit.*, para 32.

¹⁵ The sources on this are almost too many to mention, but see especially, J.M.R. TILLARD, *Church of Churches. The Ecclesiology of Communion* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1992) *passim* and, for a selection of Wesley's hymns that have influenced Methodism's sense of *koinônia* throughout its history, see *Hymns and Psalms: A Methodist Ecumenical Hymn Book* —the present British Methodist Hymn Book, (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1983) Nos 752-763.

¹⁶ J.H. RIGG, *A Comparative...*, *op. cit.*, 239.

¹⁷ See e.g. P. McPARTLAN, *Sacrament of Salvation. An Introduction to Eucharistic Ecclesiology*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995) 30-44, for a brief resume of such influences.

¹⁸ See the Ecclesiology report approved by the Methodist Conference in 1995. *Called To Love and Praise* (London: Methodist Publishing House, 1999), esp paras 1.4.3. and 2.1.1. In joint dialogue, see the approach taken in 'Towards a Statement on the Church', *op. cit.*, paras 1-10 and 'The Apostolic Tradition', *op. cit.*, paras 9-32. Methodists would sympathize with much of the ecclesiology of J.M.R. TILLARD, especially in *Church of Churches*, *op. cit.* and *L'Église locale: ecclésiologie de communion et catholicité*, *Cogitatio fidei*, 191 (Paris: Cerf, 1995), with their frequent and strong emphasis on the 'synergy' of ministers and lay people in *koinônia*.

ministry of communion its prophetic insights in order that through them the life of the whole body may be further enriched. The relationship is one of mutual accountability and has its ultimate paradigm and source in the mutually accountable relationship of Father and Son as described in John's Gospel. The whole concept of *koinônia* is suffused by mutual respect and submission and cannot be authentically lived without such kenotic openness¹⁹.

Our two churches are also at one in their affirmation of the simultaneous importance of the Church Universal and the local church, even if they nuance this understanding somewhat differently. For both Methodists and Roman Catholics the fullness of the Church is present in each local church, and the Universal church is thus, truly, 'Church of churches'. However, both communions also assert the essential interdependence of all churches. For Catholics, this point has been recently reemphasised in the Letter of the Congregation For the Doctrine of the Faith to the Catholic Bishops. For Methodists, it has been reemphasised in the report 'Called To Love and Praise'. Both churches agree that this is on account of the nature of the total worshipping and witnessing life of the Church which reaches its culmination and focus in the Eucharist²⁰. For Roman Catholics, no local church can exist properly in isolation; all need to relate to each other, to be 'porous', to use Jean-Marie Tillard's expression, through the ministry of the college of bishops under its head, the Bishop of Rome. For Methodists, the communion of local churches is maintained through the outworking of the 'connexional principle' with its interlocking levels of *koinônia* from the 'class meeting', the small fellowship group meeting under the leadership of an individual responsible to the pastor of the local 'society', through the 'circuit' and 'district' to the level of the national Conference, which exercises

¹⁹ See for example John 5:19-30 with its alternating assertions of the complete equality of the Father and the Son, the Son's complete voluntary submission to the will of the Father and the Father's placing of all trust and authority in the hands of the Son. John 15:15 is also relevant in this context where Christ talks of the disciples as friends with whom he has shared everything that he has heard from the Father. For a classical Wesleyan reflection on the trinitarian basis of the *koinônia* of the Church, see B. GREGORY, *The Holy Catholic Church, the Communion of Saints* (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1873) 152-53.

²⁰ See the 'Letter' quoted in P. McPARTLAN, *Sacrament...*, *op. cit.*, 69-71; *Called To Love and Praise*, *op. cit.*

collegial supervision of the whole 'Connexion'²¹. Catholics define the 'local church' strictly as the diocese. Methodists have never made such a strict definition. In one sense, where it still exists, the 'class meeting' can still be seen by the faithful Methodist as the most concentrated form of 'local church', but he or she will also view his 'society' (local congregation) as a key element in 'local' ecclesiality, a point that can be sustained from an examination of the 'hymns for the society meeting' of the Wesleys. British Methodists also value the fellowship of the 'circuit'²². In terms of sharing resources, the circuit and district are both important. The distinction is less between 'local' and 'universal' in absolute terms as between interlocking levels. Both Catholics and Methodists, however, acknowledge this interconnectedness. The Catholic Church uses national Bishops' Conferences as key elements of intermediate *koinônia*. The Pope clearly sees the different typoi of life, theological thought and devotion, Eastern and Western, in the Catholic Church, as mutually enriching; he talks of the Church as 'breathing with its two lungs'. *Koinônia* may be described as a circulation of love throughout the whole, with interchange of spiritual and material

²¹ For Tillard's expression 'porous', see *L'Église locale...*, *op. cit.*, 380.

For the benefit of Roman Catholics and others unfamiliar with British Methodism, the following points should be explained. The 'class meeting' is a fellowship group which meets for common prayer and study. Membership of these groups was originally compulsory and they used to meet weekly. Now, they do not exist in all churches, and where they do exist membership is optional and meetings are usually less frequent than hitherto. The 'Society' corresponds to the local parish/congregation in other traditions. The 'Circuit' is a group of churches sharing the ministry of ordained and lay or 'local' preachers. Methodist ministers are traditionally assigned to a circuit rather than an individual congregation. Regular meeting between the members of societies within a circuit gives them a close sense of cohesion. A circuit is in some ways usually comparable in size to a Catholic deanery. The 'District' is comparable to a diocese. Its twice yearly Synods are presided over by a Chairman who is appointed for a period of years, and who exercises general episcopate in much the same way as a Catholic bishop. The final authority in a national Methodist Church is the Annual Conference, consisting of an equal number of ministers and lay persons. It has final authority over the stationing of the ministers and the deployment of the resources of the Church. It also has final authority in terms of interpretation of doctrine within British Methodism. The situation elsewhere is recounted a little later in this text.

²² 'Constitutional Practice and Discipline', the code of canon law of British Methodism and the equivalent of the Book of Discipline in US Methodism talks of the 'local church' as the local congregation but adds that the circuit is 'the primary unit in which local churches experience their interconnexion in the Body of Christ'. Standing Order 500.

resources after the pattern witnessed to by the Apostle Paul²³.

It is for this reason, however, that both Churches, while wishing to safeguard the legitimate rights of 'local churches' repudiate any idea that churches can be totally independent of each other. As far as Methodists are concerned, this is embodied in the very 'connexional' principle, a principle which they see as enshrined in the total divine economy²⁴. As far as Catholics are concerned, the matter was clarified in the Letter to the Bishops of the Congregation For the Doctrine of the Faith. This made it clear that the interdependence of churches related to the very nature of the Eucharist as focus and summit of Christian life and praise²⁵. Methodists would agree. The communion of the whole Church, past and present, in the Eucharist points to the 'connexional principle' so deeply rooted in the 'sensus fidelium'. When Catholics and Methodists can see the Petrine ministry in the context of the fostering and guardianship of this *koinônia*, they may then be able to move towards an integrated ecclesiology of 'primacy within connexionalism'²⁶.

However, within the present practice of connexionalism, one important distinction may be seen within world Methodism at the highest level. The United Methodist Church, originating in the USA, and its associated overseas churches maintain a four yearly General Conference as an instrument of universal *koinônia*²⁷. The British Methodist Conference maintains close relations with those sister churches of British origin, but exercises no ultimate supervision over them through a global Conference; their 'conferences' are fully autocephalous in a manner similar to the Orthodox Churches. There is here a need for inter-Methodist reflection, within which the consideration of the role of a universal primate could come to play a part.

From such a consideration of the mystery of the Church, it is natural to proceed to an analysis of the sources of authority

²³ Cf. 2 Corinthians 8-9, Romans 1:12; in the latter Paul speaks of his desire to visit the Church of Rome in order that his faith and theirs may be mutually enriched. Both John Paul II (*Oriente Lumen*, para 45) and the great classical Wesleyan ecclesiologist, James Rigg, quote this in ecclesial contexts.

²⁴ For the link between ecclesiological connexionalism and the 'connectedness' of all creation in recent United Methodist thinking, see Robbins and Carter, "Connexionalism...", *op. cit.*, 328.

²⁵ McPartlan, *Sacrament...*, *op. cit.*, 69-70 quotes relevant sections of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith's document.

²⁶ For two accounts of possibilities, see Wainwright chapter in J. PUGLISI (ed.), *Petrine...*, *op. cit.* and D. CARTER, "A Methodist Reaction to *Ut Unum Sint*," *One in Christ*, 33, 2 (1997) 125-137; also D. CARTER, "Papacy and Connexionalism," *Methodist Sacramental Fellowship Bulletin*, 126 (1997) 33-40.

²⁷ For an account of the working of the 'United Methodist Church' and its global connexional system, see T.E. FRANKS, *Policy, Practice and Mission of the United Methodist Church*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997).

under which it lives, and, in particular, to look at the nature of the ministry through which the People of God are enabled to live their apostolic witness.

Both churches are agreed on the supremacy of Scripture, which as the British Methodist Deed of Union puts it, 'contains the divine revelation'²⁸, which was given by God, through the Word and the Spirit, to the first apostles, whose primary function was to act as 'servants of the Word' (Acts 6:4). Both churches now repudiate any simplistically fundamentalistic understanding of Scripture, but nevertheless regard the divine revelation contained in it as normative for their life and teaching, and as a source to which they must constantly return in order to see that they are in true continuity with the Apostolic Tradition. Roman Catholics emphasise that the magisterium is always subject to the word of God and serves its interpretation. Both churches believe that the revelation contained in Scripture needs constant rereading and re-reception by the people of God in ways that enable them to fulfil their mission in changing circumstances. The Methodist-Catholic statement on 'The Apostolic Tradition' states,

'Christians do not order the life of the Church by fixed repetition of rigid routine laid down in the past. Rather, by recalling and holding fast to the treasured memory of the events of our salvation, we receive light and strength for our present faith as, under God, we seek to meet the needs of our own time. It is Christian hope that makes possible our wholehearted and active contribution to the continued handing on of the transforming power contained in the Gospel'²⁹. Para 6 goes on to state that the developing tradition of the Church helps us in this process; However, at the same time, the Church always has to be careful to check development against the original witness of Scripture. Scripture and Tradition cannot exist without each other. 'Scripture was written within Tradition, yet Scripture is normative for Tradition'³⁰. Tradition is essential to the life of the Church, but it is always subject to checking against the authority of Scripture.

Both churches have a high regard for genuine Tradition as an activity of the Holy Spirit within the Church. British Methodism introduced its 'Statement on the Nature of the Christian Church' of 1937 thus.

'The Church of Christ is the home of the Holy Spirit, and is therefore a family with a unique and developing life. It is a life of distinctive quality, a life which under the guidance of the Spirit should be richer as time goes on, with fresh manifestations as new nations and races are added to the Church, and as new apprehension of divine truth is given'³¹.

²⁸ G. Thompson BRAKE, *Policy...*, *op. cit.*, 829-830.

²⁹ Apostolic Tradition, *op. cit.*, para 5.

³⁰ *Ibid.* para 21.

³¹ *Statements of the Methodist Church on Faith and Order 1933-83*, (London: Methodist Publishing House, 1984) 7.

To a degree, both churches make a distinction between the 'Great Tradition' of the Early Church, and the separate traditions of later churches. The distinction is clearer in Catholic thought than Methodist, though it is clearly implicit in the way in which Methodism has claimed legitimacy for many of its practices as good and edifying without ever suggesting that they are indispensable for the rest of the Church³². Within the dialogue, it is reflected in two ways in the Report on the 'Apostolic Tradition'. Firstly, the fundamental importance of the Nicene Creed is stressed as explicating the apostolic faith witnessed to in Scripture. Secondly, the centrality of the Eucharist is emphasised as 'the focus where the pattern of Christian life is set forth'³³. Some aspects of Eucharistic theology, definition and devotion may, in due course, come to be held by the two churches as 'secondary' in the sense that they are legitimate, but not universally binding. One can perhaps distinguish between the way in which the two types of tradition are to be received as follows. The first, where it clearly explicates the logic of Scripture, and is an established part of the heritage of the Universal Church, is to be received universally, whereas the second is merely to be acknowledged with respect as carrying the local authority of a particular church or churches, but as not necessarily binding on all the other churches. Both churches accept that there is a legitimate variety in the way in which the Apostolic Tradition has been explored and articulated within different churches³⁴. Provided that the essentials of the Tradition are maintained, there may be variety of devotional expression, styles of Christian life and forms of theological expression. As John XXIII said, the Apostolic Tradition is unalterable, but its mode of expression may be variable. We shall touch later on one or two areas where there is continuing disagreement between our churches as to whether certain later developments are to be regarded as universally binding or as

possibly permissible theologoumena.

The concept of the 'sensus fidelium' is important to both communions. This has its biblical root in the Johannine teaching concerning the 'anointing' which the faithful have from the Holy Spirit, by which they have a sure instinct for the things of God. This instinct inheres in the Body as a whole. Methodists would say that it is verified in the obedient practice and the living experience of the people of God³⁵. In both churches, it is the practice of those who have the duty of articulating the faith of the people, to consult them before issuing any key doctrinal statement. Thus, before the definition of the Marian dogmas of 1854 and 1950, the popes concerned asked the bishops to verify that what they proposed to define was, indeed, the faith of the people. In British Methodism, it is the custom of the Conference, before officially approving any doctrinal statement, to commend a draft form of it for discussion at the local level. Only after an interval, during which it ponders the weight of the responses, does the Conference decide whether to adopt the statement as an official one.

There is some difference in the authority ascribed to the magisterium, or teaching office, in the two churches. These differences reflect their respective different forms of ecclesiological self-understanding. Methodism does not purport to be able, of itself, to issue dogmatic statements which are binding on all Christians. It does accept the teaching of the first four councils of the undivided church as continuing to have universal authority, both because of their clear grounding in Scripture and their universal acceptance among the orthodox Trinitarian churches³⁶. The Catholic Church contends that its magisterium, whether acting through all the bishops or, extraordinarily, through the Pope alone, can, in principle, make statements binding universally on all the faithful. The Methodist people ascribe a high degree of authority to their local doctrinal statements as reflecting the mind of a particular church, and worthy, as such, of serious exploration by sister churches, even if they are not 'received' by them as binding. The Wesleyans of the last century distinguished usefully between our 'doctrines', and their binding formulation for Methodists, and the fact that these emphases need not be received in exactly the same form by other Christians. The present seventh quinquennium of the international Catholic-Methodist commission is studying the

³² For a good example of this, see B. GREGORY, *Holy Catholic...*, *op. cit.*, 239ff in which he traces the history of the Methodist class meeting and argues for it as fulfilling an essential function in *koinônia*, without ever suggesting that churches that lack such or similar meetings are not true churches. This summary betrays an ambivalence in the Methodist tradition, especially in the writings of the British Wesleyan ecclesialogists of the 19th century who claimed many Methodist innovations helped the Church more fully to live out its nature and calling. Perhaps there is an analogy with the thought of those Anglicans who claim that episcopacy is of the 'esse' but not the 'bene esse' of the Church.

³³ Apostolic Tradition, *op. cit.*, para 44.

³⁴ See e.g. Y. CONGAR, *Diversity and Communion*, (London: SCM, 1984), *passim*; also the recent Papal encyclical 'Orientale Lumen'. For Methodism, see the famous resolution of the Liverpool Conference of 1820. 'Let us therefore maintain towards all denominations of Christians, who 'hold the Head', the kind and catholic spirit of primitive Methodism; and, according to the noble maxim of our fathers in the Gospel, 'be the friends of all and the enemies of none', quoted in J.S. SIMON, *A Summary of Methodist Law and Discipline*, (1923).

³⁵ For Catholic teaching, see J.H. NEWMAN, "On Consulting the Faithful in matters of doctrine", 1859. For Methodism, see especially some of the hymns on fellowship, especially *Hymns and Psalms*, *op. cit.*, 753. T. RUNYON in his recent *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998) emphasises 'orthopathy' alongside 'orthodoxy' and 'orthopraxy' in the Christian tradition. see esp. 146-167. The implications of these Wesleyan insights for a common convergent doctrine of the 'sensus fidelium' have yet to be teased out in dialogue.

³⁶ The Deed of Union talks of the authority of the historic Creeds, see G. Thompson BRAKE, *Policy...*, *op. cit.*, 829-830.

whole question of the exercise of teaching authority.

In conclusion to this section, a word should be said about the degree of authority that Methodists ascribe to experience, a matter that has frequently been misunderstood in other churches and sometimes even by individual Methodists. Methodists have always believed that it is the privilege of Christian people to prove existentially in their lives the truth of the great doctrines of the faith, and that the witness of the Spirit in the lives of Christians is a powerful confirmatory source of authority in verifying the truth of what is already believed through Scripture and/or Tradition. Experience has confirmatory force; it is never an independent source of authority, and any experience that is contradicted by basic Scriptural authority can thereby be shown to be unsound. The word 'prove' is used constantly in Wesley's hymns³⁷. It has its analogy, in the Great Tradition, in Irenaeus' appeal to the practice and experience of worship in 'proving' the doctrine of the Incarnation. 'Our faith is in accordance with the Eucharist and the Eucharist is in accordance with our faith'. It has Pauline roots in the call to 'prove and approve' the acceptable will of God (Phil 1:9-10)³⁸. It is in a sense consistent with this that Wesley talked of Christianity as 'the true, the experimental religion'.

In this context, it is worth raising the question of the necessity of dogmatic definition to which there have been contrasting, but not necessarily finally incompatible, approaches in our two communions. For Methodists, the ultimate purpose of dogmatic definition has been to safeguard those truths that are experimentally important in the pursuit of sanctification and perfect love. Methodists have sometimes found it difficult to understand how some of the dogmatic definitions of Rome, such as the Marian dogmas of 1854, are thus necessitated. They are able to affirm some of the truths which the dogmas are intended to uphold such as the eschatological destiny of all Christians in the case of the dogma of the assumption³⁹. We ask, as did the American Catholic-Lutheran dialogue, whether these matters need to be church dividing⁴⁰. Many Catholics, however, see the dogmas as doxologically required. There is need for further study here.

Our last main sphere of theological consideration is that of the doctrine of the ministry. Both churches recognise the

fundamentally pastoral nature of the ordained ministry⁴¹. Such ministers are 'stewards in the household of faith'⁴², with a special responsibility for the faithful transmission of the Gospel and for supervision/oversight of the life of the Church. Ministers also maintain the bonds of *koinônia*, relating local churches to each other and ensuring their continued communion. To use the rather quaint phrase of Gregory, they are 'impersonations of order and harmony, keystones in the arch of unity'⁴³.

The ordained ministries of the two churches are differently, but not incompatibly structured. The Roman Catholic Church has, since at least the second century, maintained the historic threefold order of ministry, within which the norm of episcopal ordination has prevailed almost without exception⁴⁴. Methodism has, on account of missionary imperative rather than any deliberate rejection of the model per se, departed from it in certain ways⁴⁵. Neither Wesley nor his successors in Methodism ever repudiated episcopacy as a legitimate system of church government, though they could and did claim that genuine churches existed without it. Wesley himself despaired of ever persuading Anglican bishops to ordain ministers for the Church that was rapidly emerging in America. Accordingly, in 1784, after long hesitation, and believing himself as a presbyter to have such powers 'in extremis', he set aside, by the laying on of hands with prayer, Thomas Coke as 'superintendent' of the work in America. Wesley believed that he was providing for the necessary foundation of a new church where none previously existed⁴⁶. Coke and Asbury used the title of 'bishop', and proceeded to establish the threefold ministry which has prevailed since in the United Methodist Church of USA and its daughter churches.

In Britain, Methodism established only one order of ministry, the presbyteral, which saw itself as exercising a

³⁷ See e.g. *Hymns and Psalms*, *op. cit.*, 753.

³⁸ 'The Word of Life', para 63.

³⁹ For the work of the British Roman Catholic-Methodist dialogue committee on this, see M. EVANS (ed.), *Mary, Sign of Grace, Faith and Holiness* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1995).

⁴⁰ For this dialogue see J.A. BURGESS and J. GROS (eds.), *Growing Consensus: Church Dialogues in the United States 1962-1991* (New York: Paulist, 1995) 374-484 and especially 456-457 for the suggestion that some interim communion might be possible between churches not agreeing on these dogmas provided there is continued joint exploration of the matter.

⁴¹ 'Apostolic Tradition', *op. cit.*, para 86.

⁴² This expression is used in the Deed of Union.

⁴³ B. GREGORY, *Holy Catholic...*, *op. cit.*, 103.

⁴⁴ For some interesting exceptions, see a paper presented to the US Catholic-Lutheran dialogue in P. EMPIE and T. MURPHY (eds.), *Eucharist and Ministry, Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue IV* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1979) 189-208.

⁴⁵ It is interesting to note that the great Wesleyan theologians always allowed episcopacy as a legitimate form of church government when it was assailed by other evangelical Protestants.

⁴⁶ Not surprisingly, there is a very considerable literature relating to Wesley's theology of the ministry and, in particular, the understanding of the ordinations he carried out, both in 1784 and subsequently. A key work still is A.B. LAWSON, *John Wesley and the Christian Ministry. The Sources and Development of His Opinions and Practice* (London: SPCK, 1963).

corporate, collegial episcopē over the Connexion as a whole⁴⁷. The corporate ministerial body was seen as the watchdog of orthodoxy for all individual presbyters as well as for the discipline of the laity. Emphasis was placed on the importance of orderly transmission of ministerial authority through this body. Recently, the diaconate has been restored in British Methodism, which also stated, in 1982, that ‘it awaits the moment when it would be appropriate ‘to recover the sign of the episcopal succession’, a moment which it is usually assumed will come when Methodism is ready to unite with a church that treasures the historic episcopal succession⁴⁸.

Methodism thus has no objection to the historic threefold ministry as practised in the Roman Catholic and other churches. A greater difficulty arises when we consider the relationship of the ordained ministry to that of the whole people of God. In reaction against a pre-Vatican II tendency in Roman and Anglo-Catholic thought, British Methodism emphasised the solidarity of the ordained ministry with the whole people of God, claiming that the former exercised ‘no priesthood differing in kind’ from that common to the whole of the faithful, and that ordained ministers had ‘no exclusive cure of souls’ (the latter point emphasising a pastoral role that had always been performed by Class Leaders and some Local Preachers within Methodism as a whole)⁴⁹. Roman Catholic theology has, on the other hand, talked of the priesthood of the ministry as ‘differing in kind and not just in degree from that of the laity’. It has, however, emphasised that the two forms of priesthood are intrinsically related⁵⁰. Some see the emphasis on a ‘separate’ form of priesthood as witnessing to the life long commitment involved in ordination. Methodism also accepts that ordination implies such a commitment and a person ordained in British Methodism who subsequently relinquishes the exercise of his

or her ministry for whatever reason, is not re-ordained if later readmitted to the full discharge of ministerial functions.

It is in the correct evaluation of this relationship that hope lies for reconciling the different emphases of the two churches. The only priesthood in the Christian religion is Christ himself. All Christians, in virtue of their baptismal union with Him, share in his priesthood, **as a corporate body**. The New Testament never speaks of an individual priesthood other than that of Christ. It only speaks of the corporate royal priesthood of all the faithful⁵¹. The ordained ministry exists to serve the needs of the corporate royal priesthood which encompasses laity and clergy alike. It is ‘for the equipping of the saints’⁵². Ordained presbyters are priests with a special pastoral function. According to Fr Michael Richards, this is the essence of the ‘priesthood differing in kind’ referred to by Vatican II⁵³. If Fr. Richards’ point be accepted, there is no need for any disagreement between Roman Catholics and Methodists on this issue. In sum, we could say that the priesthood of Christ is primary, that of His Body the Church is secondary and dependent, and that of his ministers holding the pastoral office is tertiary.

The teaching of British Methodism is that presbyters are ‘representative persons’, focusing the ministry of the whole Church. From amongst those who, believing they have a genuine vocation to that ministry, offer themselves for it, they are chosen, trained and ordained. Chosen to represent the Church to the world, to represent the local churches, over which they are given charge, to the wider church. They exercise collegially, but also in association with lay leaders, episcopē over the people of God. Their ministry is, as it were, a sign of commitment within the general sign of the Church. In this way we may understand their ministry as iconic as well as being doubly representative, of Christ to the Church, and of the people of the Church⁵⁴.

In the past, Methodists have felt great difficulty with the

⁴⁷ J.C. BOWMER, *Pastor and People: A Study of the Church and Ministry in Wesleyan Methodism from the Death of John Wesley (1791) to the Death of Jabez Bunting (1858)* (London: Epworth Press, 1975), is the key work on the Wesleyan understanding of the ministry. For the sense of ‘collegiality’ see 64-70. It is interesting to note that Bowmer considers the traditional Wesleyan doctrine to have considerable potential in resolving ecumenical dilemmas in the understanding of ministry. See his conclusion, 247ff.

⁴⁸ “British Methodist response to BEM”, *op. cit.*

⁴⁹ *Deed of Union...*, *op. cit.*, The real aim of late nineteenth century and early twentieth century Methodists was deny any doctrine of grace as **exclusively** sacramental, and, therefore ‘controlled’ by the ministry that seemed thereby to make ordained ministers exclusive intermediaries between the soul of the Christian believer and Christ. Methodism emphasised the free access of the believer through Christ to the Father. This, rather than the denial of the essential nature and function of presbyteral ministry lay behind the statement in the Deed of Union. The statement over ‘cure of souls’ was designed to lay to rest controversies that had split British Methodism in the previous century.

⁵⁰ Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, 2.10.

⁵¹ 1 Peter 2:9. On the whole question of the use of priestly language, in a strictly derivative way, to refer to either the laity or to ordained presbyters and bishops, the approach of the recent Anglican-Methodist dialogue report, *Sharing in the Apostolic Communion* (Lake Junaluska: World Methodist Council, 1994) may be found useful. See para 54, ‘Anglicans continue to speak of presbyters as priests. As they use the language of ministerial priesthood, they recognize that they must distinguish the secondary and derivative language of priesthood both from the high priesthood of Christ and the royal priesthood of the people of God’ (there follows a citation from the draft Anglican-Methodist ordinal of 1968).

⁵² Ephesians 4:11.

⁵³ M. RICHARDS, *A People of Priests. The Ministry of the Catholic Church* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1993) 11ff.

⁵⁴ Ecclesiology Report, *op. cit.*, para 4.5.10. ‘Statements on Faith and Order’, *op. cit.*, 27.

Roman Catholic concept that presbyters are 'sacrificing priests'. However, in the light of the above exposition, the term may be interpreted in a manner consistent with Methodist theology. Wesleyan theology traditionally used the term 'Pastoral Office' as a synonym for the presbyterate⁵⁵. Ultimately, both terms, 'sacrificing priesthood' and 'pastoral office' have their biblical roots in the same image of the presbyteral minister as under-shepherd of the Great Shepherd who 'laid down his life for the sheep'⁵⁶. The essence of sacrificing priesthood lies in the lifelong commitment to unstinting service that is recognised and ratified by the Church in the sign of ordination. The dichotomy between 'functional' and 'ontological' views of the presbyterate which has bedeviled some Catholic-Protestant debate is a matter of semantic dispute⁵⁷. Presbyteral ministry must be both functional and ontological. Every 'action' performed is witness to an abiding 'sign'.

The doctrine of the ministry need no longer be a point of division for us. I realise that this leaves the question of the 'validity' of existing orders on one side, but I also believe that when the time comes we will be able to see clearly whether the reconciliation of our ministries can be effected by a simple act of recognition, or whether some act of the laying on of hands will be necessary as expressing the inauguration of a new stage of our relationship. It is worth remembering that new ventures in mission in New Testament times were sometimes so signed, as in the separation of Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13. Bernard Sesboué picks up this point in his proposals for a reconciliation of Catholic and Protestant ministries in France⁵⁸.

So far, I have said little about other important aspects of Catholic-Methodist rapprochement in such matters as sacramental theology or mariology. The question of the sacramental/sign nature of the Church is being increasingly raised in our British Roman Catholic-Methodist dialogue. In the past Methodist theology emphasised the functional missionary nature of the Church, though there always coexisted with this a real sense of the divinely infused life of the mystical body, particularly exemplified in some of Wesley's perennially popular hymns⁵⁹. Today, greater appreciation of the sign nature of the Church is shown, as is exemplified in this quotation from 'Called To Love and Praise'.

'The outgoing, all-embracing love of God for his creation

⁵⁵ J. BOWMER, *Pastor...*, *op. cit.*, esp 207-219.

⁵⁶ 1 Pet 5:1-4.

⁵⁷ See D. CHAPMAN, "Koinônia and Ordination", *Epworth Review* 23, 2 (1996) 76-83.

⁵⁸ B. SESBOÛÉ, *Pour une théologie œcuménique: église et sacrements, eucharistie et ministères, la Vierge Marie*, Cogitatio fidei, 160 (Paris: Cerf, 1990) 287-311.

⁵⁹ As already cited, especially nos 752-763 in *Hymns and Psalms*, *op. cit.*

flows through the Son and the Spirit. Such an understanding of the Trinity is authenticated when the Church shares in God's mission to the world. In whatever way we think of the Trinity, we cannot have an adequate ecclesiology without a proper Trinitarian doctrine, since the Church is called to mirror, at a finite level, the reality which God is in eternity⁶⁰.

A related question is that of the connection between the sign nature of the whole body and the authentic sign nature of the ordained ministry. The Roman Catholic Church still denies the full title of 'church' to those communities whose ministry it cannot yet recognise as fully apostolic. A great ecumenical challenge to all churches, not just Catholics and Methodists, is how we reconcile emphasis on the value and significance of the sign of ministerial succession, however defined, and the need to recognise truly ecclesial apostolic faith and life in churches lacking the sign in its fullness. This challenge was recognised at the time of the 'Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry' process of Faith and Order⁶¹. In Scripture, the great Wesleyan theologian, Benjamin Gregory identified a doctrine of 'apostolic recognition' which might now be received as a complement to the enlarged modern concept of apostolic succession as a bundle of characteristics of life, ministry and teaching that has emerged since 'Lima'⁶².

The present international commission is studying the whole ticklish problem of authority, especially teaching authority. From what I hear there are grounds for further convergence, though not full agreement. However, I think we are increasingly holding two points in tension. Firstly, the need for clear teaching authority, something which was once stressed as strongly by Methodists as by Roman Catholics, and which perhaps, we Methodists need to 're-receive' rather more strongly. Secondly, there is the balancing need to stress, as does the recent ARCIC statement, the 'Gift of Authority' that authority is also about listening and receiving. The bishop has a duty to listen to the prophetic witness of the faithful in his local church as they, struggling to live the Christian life, come to new insights and perceptions. Authority, as Paul said long ago, is about 'equipping the saints', not just instructing them! The Church is circle and communion of love, not pyramid of hierarchy.

In the realm of mariology, the British Catholic-Methodist

⁶⁰ 'Called To Love and Praise', *op. cit.*, para. 2.1.9.

⁶¹ Baptism, Eucharist Ministry, para M34 for the enlarged concept of continuity in apostolic characteristics. para M53 for challenges to episcopal churches about the recognition of churches with apostolic faith and life but lacking a ministry with the episcopal succession.

⁶² Gregory commented on the situation described in Acts 8 where churches were founded by refugees from the first persecution in Jerusalem without apostolic authority or participation, but were subsequently 'recognised and brought into connection' by the apostles. Gregory saw such recognition as a key apostolic duty. See B. GREGORY, *Holy Catholic...*, *op. cit.*, pp 38-39, 49-50.

Committee has made striking progress with its paper, 'Mary, mother of the Lord, sign of faith, grace and holiness, and has hopefully, thereby, begun to regain for Methodism the basis of an authentic Methodist marian devotion which will stress her as model disciple and believer. It is interesting to note that whereas many British Catholics feel that strict acceptance of the marian dogmas is essential for unity, some continental Catholics would appear to think that reception of the approach stated in the document by both sides should suffice for unity, notwithstanding different evaluations of the status of the dogmas of 1854 and 1950⁶³.

Recent parallel emphasis on the recovery of a dynamic Trinitarian theology has played an important part in our work as has a renewed understanding of the totality of the paschal mystery⁶⁴. I have already registered my conviction that a further consideration of the ecclesiological consequences of the relationship between the Father and the Son as presented in Johannine theology will enable us to transcend ecumenically the differing perspectives of those churches which view ministry at the moment from a primarily 'hierarchical' or more 'congregational' standpoint. If we see the Trinitarian life as the source and the model for ecclesial life, we will come to see the Church as a circulation of love, within which the ministry and laity are in essential partnership, each fulfilling an essential role. Different emphases remain within our theologies and spiritualities. They are not incompatible with ultimate reconciliation.

I have tried to speak as positively as I can without being irresponsibly or naively optimistic. I believe that there are times when ecumenists have to speak prophetically, and, ahead of where their churches are, though they must never forget the latter. I end though, with two key caveats.

The first relates to the ordination of women to the presbyterate and episcopate. This is now almost universal in Methodism. We believe it to be a legitimate development of the Tradition, enhancing the catholicity of the Church⁶⁵. Some of us sympathise with Roman Catholic and Orthodox difficulties, but believe, on the basis of fundamental insight into the nature of the new creation inaugurated by the paschal event, and not on the basis of modern feminism, that this is a development to which we must hold.

The second point relates to the great global diversity of Methodism. While Methodists are held together by their 'connexional principle', their doctrine of sanctification, and the theological and hymnodical tradition of the Wesleys, there is also very considerable diversity, to a degree which Roman Catholics might challenge as unacceptable. Some trends within contemporary Methodism certainly make Roman Catholic-Methodist rapprochement easier. The liturgical renewal and greater emphasis upon sacramental worship on both sides of the Atlantic is one such key factor. On the other hand, much of Methodism remains marked by pietistic stands and by forms of more liberal Protestantism that still tend to be dismissive of the 'catholic' tradition in its broadest sense (here I am thinking of Orthodoxy and Anglicanism as well as the Roman Catholic tradition per se). The World Methodist Council, under whose aegis the dialogues take place from the Methodist side, is primarily a consultative body, with no real power to move Methodism forward in such matters.

I end then on a note of theological optimism, combined with caution about reception. But if this work is, as I trust, the work of the Spirit of God, He will show us the way forward.

⁶³ M. EVANS, (ed.), *Mary...*, *op. cit.*

⁶⁴ These influences are specially evident in the 'Apostolic Tradition', paras 7ff, with their careful consideration of the role of the Word and the Spirit.

⁶⁵ 'Called To Love and Praise' *op. cit.*, para 4.5.14. Note especially 'Methodism, therefore, fully endorses the equality of men and women in ministry, whilst recognising that the distinctive contribution of women's ministry to the wholeness of the Church has yet to be fully explored and realised'.



CC

Centro Conferences

The Trinity, Prayer and Sexuality: A Neglected Nexus in the Fathers and Beyond

The Wattson/White Lecture, Rome, December 16, 1999

by

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(The Second Paul Wattson / Lurana White Lecture given at the **Centro Pro Unione**, Thursday, 16 December 1999)

In this presentation, offered in honour of the founders of the Friars of the Atonement, and especially in honour of Mother Lurana White, I want to lay before you three theses about the Trinity which have been much exercising me in my recent theological research¹, and which are, I believe, intertwined in a complex and fascinating way. They relate to what I see as the interlocked themes of the Trinity, prayer, and sexuality. Let me start with a succinct enunciation of my three theses, and then proceed to a slightly more ramified explication of each in the time available.

I. The **first thesis** is this: *that the revival of a vibrant trinitarian conceptuality, an 'earthed' sense of the meaningfulness and truth of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, most naturally arises out of a simultaneous renewal of commitment to prayer, and especially prayer of a relatively wordless kind.* I shall try to explain why I think this is so with special reference to Paul's discussion of the nature of Christian prayer in Romans 8 as 'sighs too deep for words' (Romans 8:26), instituted by the Holy Spirit; and how I think this Spirit-leading approach to the Trinity through prayer is the only experientially-rooted one likely to provide some answer to the sceptical charge: why three 'persons' at all? Why believe in a trinitarian God in the first place?

¹ See S. COAKLEY, "Can God be Experienced as Trinity?" *The Modern Churchman* 28 (1986) 11-23; *idem*, "Why Three? Some Further Reflections on the Doctrine of the Trinity," in S. COAKLEY and D.A. PAILIN (eds.), *The Making and Remaking of Christian Doctrine: Essays in Honour of Maurice Wiles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); and *idem*, *God, Sexuality and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming). An earlier version of this Wattson/White memorial lecture was published in *The Anglican Theological Review* 80, 2 (1998) 223-232, and is reproduced here with kind permission of the editor.

So that will be my first thesis: the inextricability of renewed trinitarian conceptuality and the renewal of prayer-practice, and I shall be arguing that Christian prayer practice is inherently trinitarian. In a way this is a belated riposte to the charge of the great German 'liberal' theologian, Friedrich Schleiermacher, that the Trinity can never be experienced, can never be, as he put it, 'direct to consciousness'. This I want to challenge.

II. The **second thesis** goes on from this, and is perhaps a little more surprising; it is that *the close analysis of such prayer, and its implicitly trinitarian structure, makes the confrontation of a particular range of fundamental issues about sexuality unavoidable.* (Note that I use 'sexuality' in a wider sense than is often employed in North America – not restricting it to actual genital sexual activity.) The unavoidability of this confrontation seems to me to arise from the profound, but messy, entanglement of our human sexual desires and our desire for God; and in any prayer of the sort in which we radically cede control to the Spirit there is an instant reminder of the close analogue between this ceding (to the trinitarian God), and the *ekstasis* of human sexual passion. Thus it is not a coincidence that intimate relationship is at the heart of both these matters. That the early Fathers were aware of this nexus of associations (between trinitarian conceptuality, prayer of a deep sort, and the - to them - dangerous connections with issues of sex and gender), I shall illustrate with a particular example from the third century Alexandrian theologian, Origen. He was someone crucial in the early development of patristic trinitarianism, but whose doctrine of the Trinity is rarely discussed in relation to what he also writes about *eros*. What will emerge from this second thesis, I hope, is that no renewed trinitarian spirituality can *sidestep* these profound issues of the nature of sexual desire, issues which

now so divisively exercise us in the Church's life, and are, in turn, of course, fundamentally connected with gender themes about women's roles, women's capacity for empowerment, and for professional equality.

In short, if I am right, then renewed prayer practice, enlivened trinitarian doctrine, and an honest confrontation of tough questions in the contemporary Church about issues of sexuality and gender constitute a thematic nexus. These three issues belong together, and can be shown with a bit of delicate archaeological digging beneath the polite edifice constructed by the standard history-of-doctrine textbooks, to have accompanied one another all along. Or do I shall argue.

III. My **third thesis**, then finally, is not so much a finished proposition, but a task in progress for us all. It is the task of *rethreading the strands of inherited tradition on these three matters in such a way that enacted sexual desire and desire for God are no longer seen in mutual enmity, as disjunctive alternatives, with the non-celibate woman or homosexual cast as the distractor from the divine goal*. Rather, I am seeking a renewed vision of divine desire (a trinitarian vision, I suggest) which may provide the guiding framework for a renewed theology of human sexuality — of godly sexual relations—rooted in, and analogously related to, trinitarian divine relations. In terms of the unfortunate polarities we face in contemporary Western culture between hedonism on the one hand and supposed 'repression' on the other, this very quest may appear 'subversive' of established ways of thinking. But again, I want to suggest, there are resources in the tradition for this task, even if one has to dig a bit.

Let me now say at least a bit more about these three theses in turn, and where my thinking has led me.

I. *The Trinity in prayer-practice.*

When we move to face the puzzling question of why perfect relationship in God was understood as triadic in the first place, I want to argue that an analysis of Christian prayer (especially relatively-wordless contemplative or charismatic prayer) provides an acutely-revealing matrix for explaining the origins of trinitarian reflection. Vital here is Paul's analysis of prayer in Romans 8, where he describes how, strictly speaking, we do not autonomously do the praying, for we do not even really know what to ask for; rather it is the 'Spirit' who prays in us

to the ultimate source in God ('the Father'², or 'Abba') and does so with 'sighs too deep for words' transcending normal human rationality. Into that ceaseless divine dialogue between Spirit and 'Father' the Christian pray-er is thus caught up, and so transformed, becoming a co-heir with Christ and being fashioned into an extension of redeemed, incarnate life. Recall how Paul puts it:

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, 'Abba, Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ (Romans 8:14-17a). ... Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God (Romans 8:26-27).

Now it is important to underscore that what is going on here is not three distinguishable types of 'experience' (in the sense of emotional tonality), each experience relating to a different point of identity — 'Father', 'Son' and 'Holy Spirit'. This in any case would prove to be a 'hunting of the snark' from the perspective of later developed orthodox trinitarianism, since the *homoousion* principle disallows that the different 'persons' should be experientially separate, or do different things. Rather, what is being described in Paul is *one* experience of an activity of prayer that is nonetheless ineluctably, though obscurely, triadic. It is *one* experience of God, but God as simultaneously (i) doing the praying in me, (ii) receiving that prayer, and (iii) in that exchange, consented to in me, inviting me into the Christic life of redeemed sonship. Or to put it another way: the 'Father' (so-called here) is both source and ultimate object of divine longing in us; the

² I do not here address the vexed issue of whether a feminist theologian should, under any circumstances, call God 'Father'. In *God, Sexuality and the Self* (see n. 1) I argue that in *inner-trinitarian* contexts there are theological reasons why it is difficult to insist on consistent substitutions for 'Father' language; 'creator', 'redeemer', and 'sanctifier', for instance, does not do the same theological *work* as 'Father', 'Son', and 'Holy Spirit'. In addition, the attempt to repress *all* 'Father' language out of liturgical usage may merely force paternal imagery underground, leaving it to continue its (often baleful) effects out of conscious sight. My solution is a multi-pronged one, including the use of deliberate illogical conjunction (maternal and paternal imagery combined) as a means of avoiding crass literalism in the attribution of parental characteristics; but I do not advocate the complete obliteration of 'Father' language, especially in the trinitarian context.

‘Spirit’ is that irreducibly- though obscurely- distinct enabler and incorporator of that longing in creation — that which *makes* the creation divine; and the ‘Son’ is that divine and perfected creation, into whose life I, as prayer, am caught up. In this sense, despite all the unclarity and doctrinal fuzziness of Romans 8, the prayer described here seems to be at least proto-trinitarian in its implications.

Now no-one would suggest that most of our prayer, sweated out as it so often is in states of dryness and distraction, may clearly feel like this. But just occasionally, I submit (at least if we allow enough space in which we are not insistently setting the agenda - if we allow, that is, this precious *hiatus* for the Spirit), then we breathe the Spirit’s breath in this way; we see briefly that this is, theologically speaking, the triadic structure of God’s graced ways with us — what is always going on though we mostly cannot see it. As John of the Cross puts it in a lovely passage in *The Spiritual Canticle* (39.3.4), not coincidentally quoting Romans 8: ‘the Holy Spirit raises the soul most sublimely with that His divine breath ... that she may breathe in God the same breath of love that the Father breathes in the Son and the Son in the Father ...’

The Spirit, on this view, note, is no redundant third, no hypostatized afterthought, no cooing ‘feminine’ adjunct to an established male household. Rather, experientially speaking, the Spirit is *primary*, just as Pentecost is primary for the church; and leaving noncluttered space for the Spirit is the absolute precondition for the unimpeded flowing of this divine exchange in us, the ‘breathing of the divine breath’, as John of the Cross puts it.

Now what we want to know next is this (and it brings us to our second thesis): What happened to exegesis of Romans 8 in the critical early-patristic period? Why was it not the well-spring of the turbulent conciliar discussion of the Trinity? And why, as it seems from the standard textbooks, did the Spirit get properly attended to only third and last (in the later fourth century) in the development of trinitarian doctrine in the crucial early-patristic period, when the equality of the rational Logos with the ‘Father’ was discussed and established so much earlier? Or was this really so? Was there perhaps a ‘soft underbelly’ history of the development of the doctrine of the Trinity which the textbooks have obscured, and in which the Spirit played a much more significant role from the outset?

II. *The Trinity and sexuality*

My answer to this last question, although it is a speculative answer, is ‘Yes’. There is a ‘soft underbelly’ history of the early development of the doctrine of the Trinity which many of the Fathers themselves had reason to push to one side. What I suggest is that there is an alternative account of the genealogy of the doctrine which only becomes clear once we see the covert entanglement of this genealogy with questions

of sex and gender.

What is striking, first, is how little Romans 8 gets used as a basis for trinitarian argument and reflection in the early period (with some important exceptions in Irenaeus, Origen, and then the later Athanasius³). My hypothesis is that this is because this Romans 8 approach, fertile as it was theologically, proved a little too hot to handle. Why?

What I suggest here is that, from the second century on, there were both politico-ecclesiastical *and* gender reasons for keeping this approach to the Trinity away from the centre stage in the public conciliar discussions of the matter. For Paul’s analysis of prayer in Romans 8 notably involves: (i) a certain loss of noetic control to the leading experiential force of the Spirit in the face of our weakness (8:26); (ii) an entry into a realm beyond words, beyond normal rationality or *logos* (*ibid.*); and (iii) the striking use of a (female) ‘birth pangs’ metaphor to describe the yearning of creation for its ‘glorious liberty’ (8:22). After Montanism (the prophetic and rigorist sectarian movement of the second century, ultimately condemned by Rome), it is not hard to see why any or all of these features could look less that attractive to developing mainstream ‘orthodoxy’, at least as a first basis for trinitarian reflection. The danger of ecstatic prophecy, when loosed from the primary control of an extrinsic Logos, was one matter. This had all the drawbacks of an essentially sectarian manifestation of the faith. The releasing of ‘wretched women’, as Hippolytus reports of early Montanism⁴, into positions of authority and prominence, was a second one. But there was a third danger, with which I think the third-century theologian Origen is primarily concerned (much more than he is with Montanism); and that is the danger, in any form of prayer that deliberately gives away rational mastery to the Spirit, of possible confusion between loss of control to that Spirit and loss of *sexual* control.

Let me just describe to you briefly what Origen says about prayer, trinitarianism and sexuality — all together in one nexus of association— in his fascinating treatise on prayer, the *De Oratione*⁵.

I shall just draw attention to the following four features of this work, especially of its open sections, from which you will see how closely related they are to the themes I have just

³ See, e.g. Irenaeus, *Ad haer.*, 5.20.2; Origen, *De oratione*, I.3-6 (see discussion below); Athanasius, *Ad Ser.* 1.6, 1.7, 1.19, 1.24, 1.25, 4.4. These passages are set in context in my article ‘Why Three?’ (see n. 1, above).

⁴ See Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haer.* 8.19; also discussed in ‘Why Three?’ (see n. 1, above).

⁵ I use here the English translation of the *De Oratione* (and the section divisions) in R.A. GREER (ed.), *Origen* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979) 81-170.

outlined:

(i) The work starts (I) with an insistence on the priority and primacy of the Holy Spirit in understanding the nature and purpose of prayer; and it stresses the capacity of the grace of God to take us beyond the ‘worthless reasoning of mortals’ to a sphere of unutterable mysteries (see 2 Cor 12), where ‘spiritual prayer’ occurs in the ‘heart’. Already, then, there is the explicit willingness to allow that the Spirit – although from the start a ‘fellow worker’ with the Father and Son – escorts us to a realm beyond the normal constraints of human rationality, even though in Origen’s case there is no suggestion that the Spirit finally undermines the significance of the rational sphere. (ii) Exegesis of Romans 8 is central to the argument from the start, and citations are reiterated more than once; it is through prayer, and being ‘mingled with the Spirit’, that we become ‘partakers of the Word of God’ (X.2). (iii) This form of prayer is repeatedly, and strikingly, compared to sexual intercourse and procreation. Thus, for instance, Origen writes: ‘Just as it is not possible to beget children without a woman and without receiving the power that serves to beget children, so no one may obtain ... requests ... unless he/she has prayed with such and such a disposition’ (VIII.1). The Old Testament figure of Hannah, on this view, becomes the supreme type of the pray-er who overcomes sterility through the Spirit (II.5, etc.). But finally (iv) (and this is where we see Origen putting the brakes on), an *absolute disjunction*, according to Origen, must be made between the sexual and procreative theme in its metaphorical force (as we would now call it), and in its normal human functioning. Thus Tatiana, the woman to whom (along with a man, Ambrose) this work is addressed, can be trusted with this approach only because she is ‘most manly,’ and has gone beyond ‘womanish things’ – in the ‘manner of Sarah’ (Genesis 18:11). And knowing how ‘to pray as we ought’ (Romans 8:26, see II.2) is paralleled with an appropriately ‘passionless’, ‘deliberate,’ and ‘holy’ performance of the ‘mysteries of marriage,’ lest ‘Satan rejoice over you through lack of self control’. Unsurprisingly too, then, Origen’s daring treatment of Romans 8 also occasions an immediate reminder (with reference to 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Corinthians 11), that women should always wear modest apparel and cover their heads at prayer, lest their distracting presence lead to the same sort of same loss of (male) sexual control. Later in the text, too, Origen advises against praying at all in a room in which sexual intercourse has taken place (XXXI.4). The intrinsic connections between (deep) trinitarian prayer and sex, it seems, are too close, but also too dangerous.

For Origen, the answer to this closeness between trinitarianism, contemplative ascent and sexuality, and the concomitant danger of a sinful confusion of the areas, must lie in allowing only advanced contemplatives (‘enoptics’) —those who have also shed actual physical sexual relations— into the

circle of those who may safely use the erotic language of the *Song of Songs* to describe Christ’s intimate mystical embrace of us⁶. Hence erotic language becomes the (finally) indispensable mode of speaking of our intimacy with God, but only at the cost of renouncing the physical or fleshly expressions of sexuality. In other words, Origen, having charted the entanglement of deep trinitarian prayer and erotic thematization steps back and wrenches them apart again. To pray in this deep trinitarian way can only be the preserve of the celibate or a ‘manly’ woman who is beyond the menopause.

But it is precisely here, with this dilemma exposed, that our third question presses, one to which I have no complete answer, but only some speculative suggestions in closing.

III. *Divine and human desires*

My third thesis, you remember, is the call to rethread the strands of tradition on divine and human desires such that they are no longer set in fundamental enmity with one another, no longer failing in their alignment. For the fatal accompaniment of such a failure of alignment, as is all too clear in Origen (amongst others), is the implicit denigration of nonvirginal woman, or indeed any humanly desirable person, as a distractor for the contemplative from the divine goal.

What has the Trinity got to do with *this*? Let me just suggest two programmatic points in closing:

(i) The first is the hypothesis that unless we have some sense of the implications of the trinitarian God’s proto-erotic desire for us, then we can hardly begin to get rightly-ordered our own erotic desires at the human level. Put another way, *we need to turn Freud on his head*. Instead of thinking of ‘God’ language as really being about sex (Freud’s reductive ploy), we need to understand sex as really about God, and about the deep desire that we feel for God - the clue that is woven into our existence about the final and ultimate union that we seek. And it matters in this regard —or so I submit— that the God we desire is, in Godself, a desiring trinitarian God: the Spirit who longs for our response, who searches the hearts, and takes us to the divine source (the ‘Father’), transforming us Christically as we are so taken.

In this connection there is a wonderfully suggestive passage in the fifth-century pseudo-Dionysius (*Divine Names*, IV) where Dionysius speaks of this divine *ekstasis* and yearning of God for creation catching up our human yearning into itself: ‘This divine yearning’, he writes, ‘brings ecstasy so that the lover belongs not to self but to the beloved ... This is why the great Paul, swept along by his yearning for God and seized of its ecstatic power, has these inspired words to say: “It is no

⁶ Origen makes this point emphatically at the opening of his *Commentary on the Song of Songs* (Prologue, I); see tr. R.P. LAWSON, *Origen: The Song of Songs Commentary and Homilies* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1957) 22-23.

longer I who live but Christ who lives in me". Paul was clearly a lover, and, as he says, he was beside himself for God⁷.

Now it needs to be admitted that this passage of Dionysius's is not worked out explicitly in trinitarian terms, indeed it is open to the charge of being more influenced by neo-Platonic notions of emanation and effusion than by a strictly Christian conceptuality. But I want to suggest here that it is at least capable of trinitarian glossing, according to the model provided in undeveloped form in Romans 8, and discussed above. And on this basis I suggest that we need to have a vision of trinitarian divine *ekstasis* if we are even to begin to construct a decent theology of human sexual desire that is in analogous relationship to divine desire.

(ii) Thus secondly, and lastly: if human loves are indeed made with the imprint of the divine upon them – *vestigia* of God's ways – then they too, at their best, will bear the trinitarian mark. Here we have to take off where Augustine left us, at that crucial moment in the *De Trinitate*, at the end of book VIII, when he rejects finally the analogy of 'the lover, the loved one, and the love that binds', as inadequate to the Trinity because it is bound to bodies. 'Let us tread the flesh underfoot and mount up to the soul,' as he puts it (*De Trinitate* VIII 14). But sexual loves *are* bodily, and if they are also to be godly, then they too should mirror forth the trinitarian image. And what would that involve? Surely, at the very least, a fundamental respect each for the other, an equality of exchange, and the mutual *ekstasis* of attending on the other's desire as distinct, *as other*. This is the opposite of abuse, the opposite of distanced sexual control; it is, as the French feminist Luce Irigaray has written, with uncanny insight, itself intrinsically trinitarian; sexual love at its best is not 'egological', not even a 'duality in closeness', but a shared transcendence of two selves toward the other, within a 'shared

space, a shared breath.' 'In this relation,' she writes, 'we are at least three ... you, me, and our creation of that ecstasy of ourself in us (*de nous en nous*) prior to any child'⁸. As each goes out to the other in mutual abandonment and attentiveness, so it becomes clear that a third is at play – the irreducibility of a 'shared transcendence'.

To speak thus of the trinitarian nature of sexual love at its best is a far remove from the grimy world of pornography and abuse from which Christian feminism has emerged to make its rightful protest. Unfortunately, no language of *eros* is safe from possible nefarious application; and hence the feminist hermeneutic of suspicion can never come to an end. Even these reflections on divine trinitarian *eros* could, I am well aware, be put to potentially dangerous and distorted applications⁹. In this regard, Origen's caution about putting the *Song of Songs* into the wrong hands looks less completely wrong-headed than we might have suggested earlier. We do indeed play with fire when we acknowledge the deep entanglement of sexual desire and desire for God.

But what, finally, I have been trying to lay before you tonight, in these reflections on the Trinity, prayer, and sexuality, is that this potent nexus of themes is one that no serious renewed and ecumenical 'Catholicism' can afford to ignore or repress; and that only the faithfulness of prayer that reveals the nexus in the first place can hope to deliver the insights we need in developing an adequately-rich trinitarian theology of sexuality to confront the ecclesiastical ructions on matters of sex and gender that now so profoundly exercise us.

⁷ Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, 4.13; see tr. C. LUIBHEID, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works* (London: S.P.C.K., 1987) 82.

⁸ L. IRIGARAY, "Questions to Emmanuel Lévinas", in M. WHITFORD (ed.), *The Irigaray Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991) 180.

⁹ The point about the *dangers* of some feminists' use of the 'erotic' as a positive and transformative category is well made in K.M. SANDS, "Uses of the Thea(o)logian: Sex and Theodicy in Religious Feminism," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 8 (1992) 7-33.



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Centro Conferences

Challenges of *The Gift of Authority* for the Churches

by

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I believe that *The Gift of Authority* (=GA) is a very challenging document. This afternoon I can only touch on a few of the challenges for churches that I see in it. I am aware that many of you have already read the document carefully, and some of you were here some weeks ago when I spoke in a more general and introductory way about understanding GA. I think that most of us would agree that we are faced with a serious piece of work that deserves careful study. One of the biggest challenges GA offers is how to help people to reflect carefully on the understanding of authority as gift, and to ponder the first three quarters of the document, before reacting to the final sections. Today, however, I have decided to risk giving an unbalanced impression to those who have not studied the document, because I thought that a cavalier approach might provoke some dialogue amongst those who are already familiar with it.

First let us acknowledge the context and purpose of the document. *The Gift of Authority: Authority in the Church III*, published in 1999, is an Agreed Statement by the Anglican – Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC). It is the most recent fruit of the seeds planted in this city thirty-three years ago when Pope Paul VI and the Archbishop of Canterbury (Michael Ramsey) declared their intention, “to inaugurate between the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion a serious dialogue which founded on the Gospels and on the ancient common traditions, may lead to that unity in truth for which Christ prayed.” (Common Declaration, Rome, Saint Paul Without-the-Walls, 24 March, 1966). Although there have been serious obstacles standing in the way, the unswerving aim since then has been, and continues to be, “a restoration of complete communion of faith and sacramental life”. (*ib.*) This will be impossible to achieve without substantial agreement about the exercise of authority in the Church. ARCIC is the servant of the Anglican Communion and the Roman Catholic Church. Its mandate is to work for their reconciliation and full visible unity. Nevertheless, the Commission also keeps in mind the wider ecumenical movement. We should ask whether its Agreed Statements, particularly *The Gift of Author-*

ity, have anything to say to other Churches as well as to Anglicans and Roman Catholics.

The gift of authority itself, that is to say not merely a document about the gift, but the gift itself, must be a gift that God intends for all Christian Churches. The ARCIC document challenges the Churches to see authority in the Church as a gift from God. The gift of authority from the author of life is gracious, life-giving and liberating. Yet Anglicans, Roman Catholics, and members of other Churches today seem to find it difficult to welcome and accept the gift. Ecclesial authority particularly, is often regarded with fear and suspicion, even at times by those called to exercise it. Thinking of authority as a gift from God makes it more difficult to justify rejecting the gift, but not necessarily any easier for contemporary Christians to receive it. Since *The Gift of Authority* is officially part of the life of Anglican and Catholic Churches, I believe that those Churches must take its challenges seriously. However, I think that it would be unfortunate if the other Churches paid no attention to the issues raised by the agreement that was discovered in dialogue in the Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission.

This afternoon I want draw to your attention a small selection from the many challenges to be discovered in study and reflection on the document. I shall focus particularly on primacy and the mission and ministry of the Bishop of Rome. However, I must remind you that the gift of authority is not given only to the Bishop of Rome and there are many challenges to the Churches about the exercise of authority that have very little to do with how the Bishop of Rome serves the Church and communion.

Synodality is a key concept in GA.

“In each local church all the faithful are called to walk together in Christ. The term *synodality* (derived from *synodos* meaning “common way”) indicates the manner in which believers and churches are held together in communion as they do this. It expresses their vocation as

people of the Way (cf. Acts 9:2) to live, work and journey together in Christ who is the Way (cf. Jn 14:6).

They like their predecessors, follow Jesus on the way (cf. Mk 10:52) until he comes again". (*Gift of Authority*, 34)

While the Eucharist is the fundamental expression of *synodality* that is constitutive of every local church, the concept of *synodality* (always understood in the light of its eucharistic expression) is particularly useful because it can be concretely expressed in many forms in different circumstances and cultures. For example, in meetings for consultation and decision-making there are many very different expressions of *synodality*. Both Anglicans and Roman Catholics have within their churches a wide variety of "synodal institutions" with a common purpose: "to help all the faithful to walk together in Christ". We need to ask of ourselves and of each other whether these institutions are sufficient. Do we each need to learn from each other about effective *synodality*? Do we both need to be open to fresh expressions of *synodality* that will allow Anglicans, Roman Catholics, and other Churches, to walk more closely together in Christ?

For example, Anglicans put a strong emphasis on regional and sometimes national configurations of local churches. We usually speak of these configurations as Provinces. As Anglicans and Roman Catholics move towards full and visible ecclesial communion, Anglicans would not be willing to lose the authority exercised by the Primate of the Province, the Provincial House of Bishops, and the Provincial Synod. Anglicans will expect any universal instruments at the service of synodality and communion, to strengthen the regional, as they are intended to strengthen the local. Many Anglican fears of centralized authority may be the result of misunderstanding. But here I am speaking of what Anglicans believe has been a gracious gift from God – the freedom and authority of a region, wider than the local church but not as huge as the universal church, to actualize the Gospel in the historical and cultural context in which the local churches of that region must live and witness. We speak not from fear but from gratitude. In their experience of Provincial Church life, Anglicans see life gifts that perhaps could be embraced by Roman Catholics in their Church life and structures.

Catholic Conferences of Bishops are good examples of regional expressions of synodality. Yet I suspect that none of them, as structured at present, would satisfy Anglicans that the place of the laity is sufficiently respected. I am not speaking of introducing copies of western "democratic" institutions into ecclesial structures. But we do need to ask whether we can recognize God speaking to his people through the insights and experience of the whole people of God. If so, how does that get heard and incorporated into authoritative teaching and decisions? Canon Law seems to make some provision for this within a diocese. Where do we see robust examples of it regionally and nationally? With reference to the collegiality of Bishops as an expression of synodality, the experience of

Anglicans and Roman Catholics regionally is much more similar than would be case for a comparison of the ministry of Primates of Provinces or any regional synodal institution that included presbyters and lay people as well as bishops. Yet we still wonder whether Catholic Conferences of Bishops have taken all the authority they need in order to exercise the ministry and fulfill the mission to which they are called. All of these questions can only be answered satisfactorily when we discern what is truly gift from God.

Anglicans may be getting themselves into a position that is unfamiliar for them. Are we claiming that God graciously gives the Church greater authority and freedom than the Catholic Church is ready to acknowledge. I think the shoe used to be on the other foot! If this claim comes from human arrogance then we must pray for repentance and humility. But if we are genuinely recognizing God's grace abounding, then we must try to encourage others to see and receive the gift also. I do not want to frighten you off *GA*, but I cannot resist testing out implications that were not explored by ARCIC and which the Commission would probably wish to exclude. For example, if God does give the Church the kind of authority described in *GA*, can the Catholic Church refuse to ordain women solely on the ground that it lacks the authority to do such a thing. The Church has perhaps more authority than it dares acknowledge.

At the same time, Anglicans must be very challenged by this line of thought. If universal communion requires universal authority, how will Anglicans cope with this authority. For example, will an Anglican Province exercise restraint, and refrain from doing what it believes is right, because the Church as a whole has decided that what is proposed is wrong? If Roman Catholics are challenged to see that the Church is given authority to say Yes, Anglicans are challenged to accept that the Church has also the authority to say No!

I expect that *the Gift of Authority* will present different challenges to different cultures. I belong to a European and North American urban culture that is extremely individualistic. It is very hard for us to accept that we might have to do something we do not want to do simply because it would contribute to the common good, especially if it requires a significant sacrifice. When this entails submitting to an authority outside of ourselves we tend to resist. Individuals, special interest groups, and congregations are all uncomfortable if they feel that their freedom to do as they please is limited. While those of us who are believers know that we need help in order to follow Jesus together, our culture makes it difficult for us to accept that help. Receiving authority in the Church as a gracious gift is very challenging for us. Anglicans, formed in the culture I know best, will find it difficult to accept any "interference" from "outside". This applies to all levels, from the individual believer to the regional and Provincial expressions of church life. Even with all the thought that has been given to strengthening bonds of communion within Anglicanism our international organs remain consultative and their decisions and advice have moral

influence but are not binding on Provinces.

GA emphasizes the importance of reception and re-reception. “This reception is at one and the same time an act of faithfulness and of freedom. The Church must continue faithful so that the Christ who comes in glory will recognize in the Church the community he founded; it must continue to be free to receive the apostolic tradition in new ways according to the situations by which it is confronted.” (GA, 24) This re-reception requires the exercise of ecclesial authority. How can we be confident that what we intend to be a re-reception of the Apostolic Tradition is an authentic actualization of the Gospel in a new culture and not simply a surrender to culture, bringing with it the possibility of the loss of some essential element of the Tradition? Authority is essential for mission since the Gospel must be proclaimed with authority. Mission requires the re-reception of the Gospel in every age and culture. Re-reception also requires authority. The Church is challenged to proclaim the Gospel with boldness, including the bold risk of faith that the Church is able to propose fresh expressions of the Gospel in the confidence that they are faithful. This may sound awfully convoluted. Yet it is very important to see how God gives authority, through Scripture, through Apostolic Tradition, through the experience and insights of the People of God, and through the ministry of memory, and how bishops, clergy and lay people cooperate in the re-reception of the living Tradition. If we ignore the gift of authority we shall be either too timid, or too careless, in our witness to the truth. In either case our mission will suffer.

I cannot explore these questions here. I simply want to acknowledge their importance before turning to universal primacy — an area that appears to be very challenging for Anglicans. To be honest I believe that the notion of a renewal of the mission and ministry of the Bishop of Rome is at least as challenging for Catholics as for Anglicans.

We ought not to be surprised that some kind of an agreement on authority has been reached by ARCIC. After all, first Statement on Authority in the Church was published by ARCIC as long ago as 1976, followed by an Elucidation of the first Statement together with a second Statement in 1981. These documents demonstrated substantial agreement about most aspects of Authority but also identified areas for continuing study. In 1981 ARCIC suggested “that some difficulties will not be wholly resolved until a practical initiative has been taken and our two Churches have lived together more visibly in the one *koinonia*.” (*Authority in the Church II*, 33) However, instead of “a practical initiative”, more study and dialogue were called for by our authorities and no clear message indicated what kind of a “new relationship” might be established “as a next stage in the journey towards Christian unity.” (*ib.* Conclusion) Now that we have had several more years of study and dialogue I pray that the Churches will take up this ARCIC challenge to live together more visibly in the one *koinonia*. GA certainly challenges us to do this in Section IV when it suggests,

“ways in which our existing communion, albeit imperfect, may be made more visible through the exercise of a renewed collegiality among bishops and a renewed exercise and reception of universal primacy.” (GA, 51)

ARCIC’s early work on authority in the Church was part of an emerging ecumenical consensus on a universal primacy¹. Prior to ARCIC’s first Authority statement (1976), the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue of the USA published a document entitled *Papal Primacy and the Universal Church*, that pointed to “a growing awareness among Lutherans of the necessity of a specific ministry to serve the church’s unity and universal mission”². It continues:

“Catholics increasingly see the need for a more nuanced understanding of the role of the papacy within the universal church. Lutherans and Catholics can now begin to envision possibilities of concord, and to hope for solutions to problems that have previously seemed insoluble. We believe that God is calling our churches to grow closer together, and it is our prayer that this joint statement on papal primacy may make some contribution to that end”³.

In this statement an openness is declared, but it is a two way, not a one sided openness. It is clear that both Churches are being called forward and challenged. It is not only Lutherans who see a need to change in order to accept this specific ministry. Members of both churches are saying together as an agreed statement that they both need to grow and change.

ARCIC was discussing the same kinds of things at this time. In 1976, ARCIC could agree:

“If God’s will for the unity in love and truth of the whole Christian community is to be fulfilled, this general pattern of the complementary primatial and conciliar aspects of *episcopate* serving the *koinonia* of the churches needs to be realized at the universal level”⁴.

Primacy and conciliarity do not float free and independently of each other. They are complementary and inseparable aspects of *episcopate* serving the communion of the churches. We continue to seek ways to grow in understanding of conciliarity and the discussion of synodality helps our understanding. Once it is accepted that the primatial aspect of *episcopate* “needs to be expressed at the universal level,” the observation that “[t]he

¹ Cf. J. BAYCROFT, “An Emerging Ecumenical Consensus on Papal Primacy?” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 35, 3-4 (1998) 365-369.

² P.C. EMPIE and T.A. MURPHY (eds.), *Papal Primacy and the Universal Church*, Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue 5 (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1974) 10.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Authority in the Church I*, Venice, 1976, para 23 in ARCIC, *The Final Report: Windsor, September 1981* (London: Catholic Truth Society and SPCK, 1982) 64.

only see which makes any claim to universal primacy and which has exercised and still exercises such *episcopate* is the see of Rome, the city where Peter and Paul died” is obvious and incontestable. The Commission concluded, “It seems appropriate that in any future union a universal primacy such as has been described should be held by that see”⁵.

Addressing the Lambeth Conference in 1988, the Orthodox Bishop and Theologian John Zizioulas said, “The theology that justifies, or even (as an Orthodox, and perhaps an Anglican, too, would add) *necessitates* the ministry of episcopacy, on the level of the local church, the same theology underlies also the need for a primacy on the regional or even the universal level”. So even amongst the Orthodox it is possible to hear a kind word about primacy at the universal level.

After the Lambeth Conference of 1988 the Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission reflected on the nature of communion within the Anglican Communion and on how Anglicans belong together and hold together. This Commission published a report in 1997 which is known as *The Virginia Report*. This Report asks Anglicans whether their bonds of interdependence are strong enough to hold them together, embracing tension and conflict over the answers to what seem to be intractable problems. *The Virginia Report* also raises questions of concern for the wider ecumenical community. It asks whether there is a need for a universal primacy, exercised collegially and respecting the role of laity in decision-making within the Church. It also asks, “Is not universal authority a necessary corollary of universal communion?”

In *The Gift of Authority* ARCIC tries to deepen and extend the consensus which appears to be emerging amongst at least some Christians. *GA* speaks very strongly about universal primacy as a “gift to be shared” and a ministry that should be offered to the whole Church of God. This is a huge challenge to the Churches.

Anglicans have managed without a universal primate for over four centuries. Now we are challenged to re-receive this ministry, a ministry which has changed immensely since we last experienced full communion with the Bishop of Rome. If as an interim step in our growth towards full visible ecclesial communion the ministry was possible, would we be ready to take it? I have mentioned Anglican determination to protect the freedom of local churches and regional groupings to actualise the Gospel in their particular circumstances. There is also amongst us a serious concern to protect the freedom of faithful scholars in the pursuit of truth. Of course, we know that there is a danger that some people will abuse their freedom, and the present Archbishop of Canterbury has had to work hard to get rid of the notion that in Anglicanism “anything goes”. But many Anglicans are very fearful of what they would see as a discouragement of legitimate theological exploration. Clearly the kind of ministry of a universal primate envisaged in *GA*

would make Anglican theology more liable to be challenged by ecclesial authority, and this could turn out to be a good thing. However, press reports of alleged Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith behaviour in recent years, and indeed recent weeks, make this a very sensitive area.

Catholics are very positively challenged by *GA*. I want to ask a question as a simple Anglican, not as a member of ARCIC. Will Catholics allow the exercise of the ministry of the Bishop of Rome to grow into a truly universal primacy that could embrace and be embraced by Anglicans and other Christians? It seems to me that the problem here is not with the Pope. Both Paul VI and John Paul II seem to have been aware that something about the ministry of the Bishop of Rome needed to change and be renewed. But so far the ministry remains trapped in what is certainly a wonderful, huge, diverse and immensely attractive Church, which nevertheless appears to be too small and too narrow in its culture to contain the universal aspects of the Petrine ministry entrusted to the Bishop of Rome. I do not believe that the Roman Catholics have the right to keep the Pope to themselves. Thank God that many Catholics in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council are reaching out and offering both to share their gifts and also to receive from other Christians. But there is still a dangerous mind set amongst others that appears to believe that if they just are firm enough, and patient enough, the rest of us will eventually give in, not because we really want to but because that is the only way we can see to reach the goal of the unity God wills. To be honest I have been tempted to do this. I could live very happily as a Roman Catholic. But, and I know I am talking nonsense, just suppose all the other Christians in the world “converted” (as we used to say) to the Catholic Church that exists today. Surely there would then be an immense loss of rich traditions that have been the fruits of the Spirit’s work during centuries in Churches and ecclesial communities living apart from Roman Catholics! Since I believe that God wills our reconciliation I believe also that God will provide the grace and strength for the Roman Catholic Church to fling wide its doors. But it will have to overcome a lot of its present fears and defensiveness.

I have not been careful this afternoon. Please remember that *GA* is the fruit of careful and prayerful dialogue. The Commission believes that it expresses an authentic agreement. It is remarkable therefore that both Churches are presented with challenges that seem balanced. Catholics are challenged to be more catholic. Anglicans are challenged to overcome their fear of the Roman. Both are challenged to grow in understanding of authority as a gracious gift from God and to recognize its importance in the service of mission and unity. It would be difficult to decide whether more is asked of one than of the other Church. I have risked giving you an unbalanced impression because I believe that is a matter of urgency to promote a discussion of fresh ways to welcome a wholesome exercise of authority in the Church.

⁵ *Ibid.*



CC

Centro Conferenze

Quelques réflexions sur primauté et pouvoir

par

Michel Meslin

Président Honoraire de l'Université de Paris - Sorbonne

(Conférence donnée au **Centro Pro Unione**, jeudi, le 26 novembre 2000)

Historien des religions, spécialiste d'anthropologie religieuse mais néanmoins frotté aux controverses théologiques, je n'aurai pas ce soir la prétention de retracer les étapes du lent développement doctrinal du concept de primauté dans l'Église catholique. La bibliographie est immense et ce serait une tâche impossible dans le temps qui nous est imparti. Je suppose donc cette histoire connue, au moins dans ses grandes lignes. Je me contenterai de rappeler que ce concept de primauté résulte à la fois d'une théologie positive qui a scruté les textes de l'antiquité chrétienne, des Pères de l'Église, des conciles, en même temps que d'une théologie spéculative et d'un droit canon qui entend réguler les rapports d'autorité. Mon propos sera plus simple sinon plus facile. Je voudrais tenter de rechercher si le concept de primauté pourrait avoir d'autres fondements en plus de ceux habituellement invoqués. Je voudrais tenter de savoir si ce concept répond aussi à des comportements propres à certaines sociétés humaines et s'il serait, dans ce cas, conforme à un ordre naturel. Je voudrais ensuite analyser quels peuvent être les rapports entre primauté et pouvoir. Est-ce que le champ sémantique de primauté recouvre, déborde ou diffère de l'usage spécifique que l'on en fait à Rome depuis des siècles? Si l'on voulait poser cette question de manière un peu provocante on pourrait la formuler ainsi: la primauté est-elle humaine ou romaine?

Pour réaliser une telle analyse je pense qu'il faut apporter la plus grande attention au vocabulaire utilisé selon divers moments de l'histoire. Car nous savons combien le même mot peut prendre une acception différente selon les époques. Pour cette raison je mènerai l'analyse en deux temps, en référence à deux contextes culturels différents: celui du Nouveau Testament puis celui de la fracture de l'unité chrétienne occidentale au XVI^e siècle. Ce qui nous amènera à préciser les liens entre primauté et pouvoir. L'analyse des textes scripturaires doit nous permettre de savoir si la notion de primauté convient déjà pour définir la mission dévolue à Pierre. Dans les textes néotestamentaires relatifs aux Douze Pierre est toujours nommé en tête (Mt 10,2; Mc 3,11; Lc 6,13; Jn 21,1; Ac 1,13). Il est qualifié de *prôtos*, *primus*, non comme le premier d'une série

numérique en opposition à un éventuel second, troisième, etc... ni même explicitement selon un rang hiérarchique. En effet, ce sont les termes *prôtotokos* en grec et *primatus* en latin qui expriment une dignité prééminente, qu'il s'agisse d'un notable dans la cité ou d'un état de supériorité dans l'ordre de la nature et dans les choses, par exemple chez Pline (*H. N.* 24,165). Or Pierre reçoit du Christ la charge d'affermir ses frères et de confirmer leur mission (Lc 22,32). Ainsi, dès les premiers temps, on ne peut dissocier Pierre du collège apostolique conçu comme une fraternité dont il serait, en quelque sorte, le frère aîné. "Nous sommes tous frères selon la loi de l'humilité" rappellera Grégoire le Grand, phrase que ne manquera pas de reprendre Bossuet¹. On peut donc se demander, à titre d'hypothèse, si la fonction dévolue à Pierre ne recouvrirait pas analogiquement et dans le contexte culturel de l'époque ce qu'une hiérarchie coutumière désigne par le droit d'aînesse. Il est important, en effet, de noter que le champ sémantique de *prôtos* et de ses dérivés, comme celui de *primus* suggère l'existence d'un droit particulier de primogéniture. Ainsi lorsque les LXX et les Pères parleront d'Esau ils utiliseront le terme de *prôtotokia*, ou de *primas* pour désigner le droit d'aînesse en usage dans le monde juif, *mispat habbekorah* et celui qui en jouit. Ce droit apparaît clairement dans l'ancien testament et définit le statut privilégié du premier fils, *bekôr*; il fut largement répandu dans les sociétés sémitiques pratiquant une économie pastorale. Ce droit ressortit à un ordre précis: l'aîné comme prémices de la vigueur paternelle fonde une hiérarchie naturelle qui repose sur une notion de continuité de la vie. Du vivant du père il a une préséance sur ses frères et exerce sur eux une autorité quasi paternelle. Dans la famille de Jacob Ruben dirige ses frères, les conseille, les réprimande (Gn 37,21-30; 42,22.37). Avant que le père ne meure l'aîné reçoit une bénédiction particulière le confirmant ainsi dans son privilège: "Sois un maître pour tes frères" dit Isaac en bénissant Jacob (Gn 27,29). Cette fonction d'aînesse est tenue pour sacrée: Esau est qualifié de profanateur pour avoir vendu son

¹ Lettre 65, in *Histoire des variations des Églises protestantes* (Paris: G. Garnier Frères, 1917) VII, 73.

droit d'aînesse (He 12,16). Néanmoins la possibilité d'un transfert de la qualité de *bekôr* à un autre frère existe en cas de raison grave. Isaac ratifie ainsi ce transfert d'Esau à Jacob malgré la ruse de celui-ci, et Jacob de Ruben, coupable d'inceste, à Joseph (Gn 27 et 49,4) consacré d'entre ses frères. Il est intéressant de noter ici que les LXX remplacent la mention "droit d'aînesse" par le terme de "bénédition" pour mieux marquer le renversement d'un ordre purement culturel. De fait ce droit d'aînesse, qui se retrouve dans beaucoup de sociétés au Moyen Orient, ne peut plus jouer dans l'ordre spirituel et religieux. Lorsqu'Elisée demande à Elie "une double part de son esprit", se référant ainsi au droit habituel (Dt 21,15-17), celui-ci lui dit "Tu demandes une chose difficile" (1 R 19—21), car l'esprit prophétique ne peut se transmettre d'homme à homme, seul Dieu peut le donner. C'est pourquoi les textes dits "yahvistes" contestent radicalement ce vieux droit coutumier. L'élus dépositaire des promesses divines est un cadet. Ainsi Abraham donne tous ses biens à Isaac preuve vivante de l'alliance divine et non à Ismaël son fils aîné (Gn 25,5). C'est aussi par le choix de Dieu que l'héritier davidique devient le *bekôr* "l'aîné, le Très Haut sur les rois de la terre" (Ps 89,28). Le renversement ainsi opéré est de l'ordre de la grâce et non de la nature. Désormais Israël, le peuple choisi par Dieu est qualifié de *prôtotos* (Ex 4,22; Je 31,9). On relèvera cependant comme indice de l'importance du privilège de la double part accordée à l'aîné ce conseil de Paul concernant "les presbytres qui exercent bien la présidence: ils méritent la double part" (1 Tm 1,17) se référant sans doute au statut réservé aux Lévitites choisis parmi les fils premiers nés.

L'examen de ces textes vétéro-testamentaires montre que le privilège dévolu au "premier" s'inscrit dans une pratique coutumière qui, en un sens, peut-être tenue pour naturelle dans la mesure où cette prééminence est inséparable de la notion de premier-né. Mais, à maintes reprises, cette coutume est contredite par une volonté supérieure, un choix divin qui, en renversant l'ordre des hiérarchies et des valeurs sociales, instaure un nouvel ordre spirituel. Mais revenons à Pierre. S'il est *prôtos*, premier, il n'est cependant jamais désigné comme étant *prôtotos* terme, par lequel les LXX ont traduit l'hébreu *bekôr*, le premier-né. Ce terme de *prôtotos* est strictement réservé dans le Nouveau Testament au Christ, "l'aîné d'une multitude de frères" (Rm 8,21), frères qui vont constituer cette Église des premiers nés qui sont inscrits dans les cieux " *ekklèsia prôtotokôn* (He 12,23). Il est évident que cette primauté du Christ que Paul définit dans Col 1,15 est une primauté d'excellence, de plénitude, à laquelle Pierre ne peut prétendre, ni même à cette "primauté que les anges ont perdue se laissant séduire par les filles des hommes" (Jude, 6 rappelant Gn 6,1-2). Car cette primauté définit précisément le statut des "justes pour qui brillera la lumière" (I Hénoc, 1,8).

Il faut constater que dans tous les récits concernant la mission reçue par Pierre aucun mot ne renvoie à un quelconque privilège ni à un pouvoir tel que l'impliquera, bien plus tard, le

concept de primauté. Le surnom que Jésus lui donne, *Kepha(s)*, qui justifiera le jeu de mot en grec *Petra-Petros*, — quel que soit le moment exact où se situe cette scène —, est tissé de résonances bibliques. Dans l'ancien testament Yahvé est le Rocher, le refuge d'Israël (Dt 32,4; Ps 18,3; Es 17,50, etc...). On se souvient que la bénédiction de Jacob sur Joseph, devenu l'aîné après la faute de Ruben, associe le Pasteur et la Pierre d'Israël (Gn 49,24), de même que Jésus donnera à Pierre la mission d'être à la fois l'abri sous roche, le refuge et le pasteur de ses brebis (Jn 21,13-16). Lui qui est le seul Bon Pasteur choisit Pierre comme berger parmi les hommes. La péripécie, si discutée, de Mt 16,17-19 utilise le terme technique d'*oikodomê*, construire une maison, pour marquer l'édification de la communauté, *qehal-ekklèsia* dont Pierre est le fondement. Or cette notion de fondement est un véritable archétype, celui de la pierre d'angle et du roc indestructible. De nombreux mythes insistent sur le caractère sacré de toute fondation associée à la notion de stabilité. Une fois l'édifice ou l'institution fondés, les générations à venir ont l'obligation de la maintenir et de la conserver. Plus précisément on rapprochera le texte de Mt de celui d'Esau, 28,16 où Yahvé annonce qu'il "pose en Sion la pierre de granit, la pierre angulaire de fondation bien assise, et qui s'y fie ne sera pas ébranlée". Jésus, qui s'applique à lui-même le verset 22 du psaume 118 sur la pierre d'angle, associe donc Pierre dans cet acte fondateur. Nous percevons ainsi la double marque d'une élection particulière, dans la mission pastorale et fondatrice donnée à Pierre, mais non d'un privilège quelconque ni d'un pouvoir spécifique. De même que, dans l'ancien testament, Dieu inverse l'ordre naturel en choisissant le cadet; de même le Christ choisit Pierre, malgré son triple reniement, et non pas "le disciple que Jésus aimait", ce qui eût été conforme à un ordre humain. La mission de Pierre ne repose pas sur une préférence affective mais sur un choix supérieur.

J'aimerais envisager un autre aspect de la figure de Pierre celui des relations entre lui, le premier au sein du collège apostolique et Paul qui revendique toujours le titre d'apôtre choisi lui aussi directement par le Christ (1 Co 9,1; Col 1,1) tout en se considérant comme le moindre d'entre eux (1 Co 15,9; Ep 3,8). Comme Pierre il a reçu directement sa mission d'évangélisation. L'examen de leurs rapports peut-elle nous aider à entrevoir une quelconque prééminence de Pierre? C'est là une vieille question, très souvent controversée, de la paulinité ou de la pétrinité de l'Église de Rome où précisément s'achève la vie des deux apôtres. Sans entrer dans le détail d'une chronologie souvent floue on peut remarquer que ce n'est que trois ans après sa conversion que Paul monte à Jérusalem pour y rencontrer "Céphas et Jacques le frère du seigneur" (Ga 1,18). À Corinthe sa prédication se heurte à l'hostilité de judéo-chrétiens intégristes qui se réclament de Céphas et de Jacques (1 Co 1—12) À Antioche il "résiste en face à Céphas" trop influencé par les circoncis partisans de Jacques (Ga 2,11-12). Ce n'est qu'en 49 au concile de Jérusalem que Pierre et Paul se mettront d'accord sur la conduite à tenir vis à vis des Gentils

“Jacques, Céphas et Jean, ces notables, ces colonnes nous tendirent la main en signe de communion” (Ga 2,9). Ces événements ne donnent pas l'impression d'une prééminence de l'autorité de Pierre. Dès 54, Paul salue la première communauté chrétienne qui existe déjà à Rome, composée de Juifs convertis à la nouvelle foi. C'est encore Paul qui, au printemps 58, arrive à Rome, déféré comme citoyen romain au tribunal impérial. Bénéficiant d'un non-lieu après deux ans d'attente, il vit en résidence surveillée “enseignant le Seigneur Jésus Christ avec une entière assurance et sans entraves” dit Luc (Ac 28,31). Ce n'est qu'ensuite, à une date que nous ignorons, venu d'Antioche, Pierre parvient à Rome. L'un et l'autre seront martyrisés sans doute en 67/68. Si l'on comprend fort bien la cause juridique de la venue de Paul à Rome, même s'il en avait marqué le désir dès 54 (Rm 1,11), celle de Pierre demeure plus énigmatique sauf à admettre qu'il ait eu une intuition providentielle de la future romanité de l'Église. Il faut constater un hiatus entre le peu que nous connaissons de l'activité de Pierre à Rome et l'affirmation postérieure de l'importance de son ministère romain. L'association des deux apôtres comme co-fondateurs de l'Église de Rome n'est qu'une interprétation datant de la fin du Ier siècle lorsque Clément les réunit dans la même gloire du martyr. C'est cette égalité dans le témoignage rendu qui va constituer la source de l'autorité de l'évêque de Rome, avant même que la notion de primauté n'apparaisse clairement. On comprend ainsi l'opinion émise par un théologien protestant, J.J. von Allmen: “Il ne suffit pas que Pierre soit à Rome, il faut que Paul y soit aussi pour que l'Église y soit en plénitude”². Le pape Jean-Paul II lui-même déclarait le 27 janvier 1993 que “l'évêque de Rome est le successeur de Pierre et, on peut le dire, l'héritier de Paul”³. Les termes, très certainement pesés, de successeur et d'héritier marquent la vigueur d'une tradition officielle tout en reconnaissant l'égalité de la mission reçue directement du Seigneur par Pierre et Paul.

Examinons maintenant les liens entre primauté et pouvoir. L'histoire atteste clairement qu'à partir du Moyen Âge le fondement scripturaire du pouvoir pontifical des successeurs de Pierre, agissant comme vicaires du Christ sur terre, a édifié la première forme d'une monarchie absolue, d'autant plus que ce pouvoir s'exerce à la fois sur l'Église et sur des états territoriaux, même si ce dernier pouvoir n'a aucun fondement évangélique. Or il n'est pas sans intérêt de noter que le mot “primauté” apparaît en français au XVI^e siècle, au moment où s'effectue la cassure de l'unité chrétienne en Occident et où commencent à s'ériger des monarchies nationales qui se veulent de plus en plus autonomes vis à vis du pouvoir pontifical. Or l'unité était non seulement partie intégrante de la mission

confiée par Jésus à ses apôtres (Jn 17,21-23; Ep 4,3-6), mais, à l'image de l'unité culturelle et politique de l'empire romain cette unité de l'Occident n'avait pas cessé, pour l'Église, d'être un objectif majeur de lutte contre toutes les formes de chaos. Tout au long d'un millénaire, de Chalcédoine au XVI^e siècle, la primauté romaine, en poursuivant ce but, fut à la fois facteur d'unité et de divisions. Mais revenons au vocabulaire. Si primauté apparaît au XVI^e siècle, dès le Moyen Âge apparaissent déjà, calqués sur le latin ecclésiastique, les termes de *primacie* (lat. *primacia*) au XIII^e siècle et de *primat* (lat. *primas*) qui indiquent une supériorité hiérarchique. La primatie est la dignité du primat qui a une prééminence sur d'autres dignitaires sans posséder pour autant une autorité suprême. Déjà le 6^e canon de Nicée avait défini la nature du pouvoir, *exousia*, du patriarche d'Alexandrie dans la faculté de convoquer un concile. De même Calvin parlera “des patriarches qui assemblaient le concile de tous les évêques répondants à leur primauté”⁴. Nous sommes bien là dans l'espace institutionnel de l'Église. Mais le désir des États modernes devait se heurter à cette conception du pouvoir: la primauté devient le lieu de revendications d'un pouvoir souverain, Le fondement d'un État ne peut désormais résider que dans une certaine autonomie vis à vis de l'évêque de Rome. A la primauté pontificale s'oppose donc une autre monarchie qui va tenter de se réclamer, elle aussi, d'un droit divin.

Je ne développerai qu'un seul exemple qui, bien que paradoxal est très significatif: il s'agit de l'Angleterre. Salué comme *Defensor fidei* par le Pape auquel il a dédié son *Assertio septem sacramentum*, Henri VIII, alors fidèle catholique va néanmoins poser les fondements d'une religion d'État détachée de l'obéissance à Rome. Après avoir été déclaré “l'unique protecteur de l'Église, son maître suprême et unique autant que la loi du Christ le permet”⁵ le roi est, après son excommunication, et par décrets du Parlement, reconnu en 1534 comme “roi, tête sur terre de l'Église d'Angleterre, avec pleins pouvoirs, ceux de l'évêque de Rome lui étant remis ainsi que les revenus pontificaux”. Ainsi s'opère un transfert de l'autorité temporelle et spirituelle du Pape à un monarque de qui dépend désormais le salut des sujets qui obéissent à sa volonté. Quelques années plus tard le synode de Londres de 1562, reprenant une loi de 1559, confirme “la souveraine puissance de la reine (Elisabeth) sur tous ses sujets soit ecclésiastiques soit laïcs sans qu'ils puissent être assujettis à aucune puissance étrangère”. Cette révolution où le souverain prend la place de l'évêque de Rome et porte le titre de Chef de l'Église est naturellement ressentie comme une usurpation de la primauté ecclésiastique romaine, Or c'est précisément dans ce contexte de rivalité qu'apparaît en 1651 le terme de “suprématie”, déjà utilisé en Angleterre pour contrer la primauté pontificale. Restait

² *La primauté de l'Église de Pierre et de Paul: remarques d'un protestant*, Ökumenische Beihefte / Cahiers œcuméniques, 10 (Paris/Fribourg: Cerf/Éditions Universitaires, 1977) 90-91.

³ *Osservatore Romano*, 28.1.1993

⁴ *Institution chrétienne*, 859.

⁵ *Concession facta*, in *Concilia Magna Britannica et Hibernia*, III, 1737.

à justifier un tel renversement.

Ce fut, au début du XVII^e siècle, l'oeuvre de Jacques Ier d'Angleterre. Il entend fonder l'unité de son Etat sur le droit divin seul capable à ses yeux d'en assurer la permanence. Mais il se heurte ainsi à la conception du pouvoir indirect du Pape que défend alors le cardinal Bellarmin. "Lieutenant de Dieu sur la terre" le roi s'oppose ainsi au Vicaire du Christ, dans une confrontation directe de deux conceptions du pouvoir absolu, dans le heurt de deux espaces institutionnels où se déploie la notion d'autorité. La vieille querelle médiévale entre pouvoir spirituel et pouvoir temporel est, en un sens, alors dépassée. Car cette rivalité se situe au sein même du christianisme où l'Église romaine entend bien se réserver le pouvoir de définir l'orthodoxie doctrinale et l'orthopraxie afin de réaliser un certain ordre sur terre. Or si l'Église de chaque Etat fait un corps entier autour de son souverain et peut donc, sous l'autorité unique de son roi examiner, réformer les moeurs ecclésiastiques il y a rupture de l'unité. L'Église est réduite à un corps politique. Bossuet ne se fera pas faute d'affirmer: "Il y a dans l'Église catholique un principe d'unité indépendant des rois de la terre"⁶. La question du fondement même de l'autorité, celle de la puissance séculière et celle de l'Église se trouve ainsi posée dans cette tension entre obéissance civile et liberté religieuse, entre pouvoir et témoignage d'unité. La notion de primauté se situe désormais dans un contexte d'absolu et de sacralité.

Après avoir relevé l'apparition des termes de primauté et de suprématie dans le contexte du XVI^e siècle, j'aimerais faire trois remarques

—Dans la sphère de la primauté de quel pouvoir s'agit-il exactement? La typologie bien connue de Max Weber parle d'un pouvoir traditionnel justifié par la volonté de se conformer aux coutumes dont l'ancienneté fonde l'autorité. Il est évident que la théorie de la succession apostolique comme fondement du pouvoir épiscopal ressortit à ce type. Dans le cas précis qui nous intéresse le fondement du pouvoir de la primauté romaine est conçu comme découlant d'une loi divine dont le représentant sur terre est détenteur de l'autorité; il en tire sa suprématie.

On peut dire que le pouvoir est dévolu à celui qui représente une puissance qui se situe au-dessus des hommes et que ceux-ci reconnaissent comme telle. Ainsi la notion même de primauté implique la croyance qu'elle est d'institution divine, même si nous ne la percevons qu'à travers la contingence des événements historiques. Car l'exercice de ce pouvoir qui lui est attaché révèle une interpénétration constante d'éléments divins et humains, "le divin étant constamment immuable et l'humain constamment changeant" remarquait déjà en 1829 J.A. Möhler⁷.

—D'autre part la notion de primauté s'oppose à toute idée

d'un pluralisme de l'autorité. Le monothéisme monarchique a suscité nécessairement une fonction unificatrice de l'autorité. Toute la vie politique, ecclésiastique, sacrale se trouve placée sous la détermination de l'Un. Longtemps la conception monarchique de la primauté s'est développée autour d'une symbolique paternelle, au service d'un rapport de supériorité: "rejeter la primauté... c'est être ennemi de l'ordre et de la paix" dira encore Bossuet⁸. Tel est le modèle de l'autorité dans l'Église qui est à la fois exigence d'unité et refus de tout fractionnement plus ou moins schismatique, Un seul exemple: l'encyclique *Ad Episcopos Angliae*, du 16 septembre 1864, reprenant des termes employés par Cyprien, définit l'évêque de Rome comme *principum, radix et origo Ecclesiae* et de son unité, identifiant ainsi la primauté à un pouvoir suprême. Or cette primauté implique précisément l'exercice d'un pouvoir mais qui n'est jamais que délégué par Dieu à son Vicaire et qui n'est pas au dessus du pouvoir de l'évêque en son Église. On comprend mieux la réflexion critique de l'Église orthodoxe constatant que l'ecclésiologie romaine la primauté se confond avec le pouvoir. Ce pouvoir cesse alors d'être une fonction dans l'Église et devient un pouvoir sur l'Église⁹. Or si la l'onction de la primauté est de maintenir et de sauvegarder l'unité de l'Église et de veiller au dépôt de la foi, cela veut dire que cette unité lui est antérieure et que ce n'est pas la primauté qui la crée. Le pouvoir découlant de la primauté est donc d'ordre exécutif et non constitutif; son pouvoir de juridiction est de l'ordre de la gestion et de la discipline interne, et sa norme est avant tout juridique. Disons que la *potestas* de la primauté est une *potestas executiva*. Car si la primauté est la continuation dans l'histoire de Pierre, *primus* parmi les apôtres, l'épiscopat est bien la continuation de la mission apostolique, l'une et l'autre étant *jure divino*. D'où l'inéluctable rivalité avec quelque autre institution se réclamant aussi d'un droit divin ou, au contraire, désirant s'en détacher dans une volonté de sécularisation.

Il semble néanmoins difficile de restreindre le pouvoir imparti à la primauté à un simple pouvoir juridictionnel chargé de faire recevoir par les Églises locales, observer et exécuter les règles de l'Église. Car dès les premiers temps du christianisme c'est l'*agapè* qui cimenterait l'unité des chrétiens. L'amour de Dieu et des frères s'incarne dans la communauté, *ekklèsia* que dirige le corps épiscopal. La fonction essentielle de la primauté va peu à peu consister à être un centre d'unité. Or cette unité ne peut se réaliser que dans une collégialité épiscopale issue directement de l'héritage indivis des apôtres, en liens constants avec leur frère de Rome. En d'autres termes le pouvoir de juridiction renvoie à une Église comme société canoniquement hiérarchisée, et la charité, l'*agapè* à l'Église comme mystère et réalité spirituelle. Dès lors la primauté ne peut se concevoir

⁸ *Histoire des variations*, XV, 165.

⁹ A. SCHMEMANN, in N. AFANASSIEFF, *et al.*, *La primauté de Pierre dans l'Église orthodoxe*, Bibliothèque orthodoxe (Neuchâtel: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1960) 131.

⁶ *Histoire des variations...*, VII, 70.

⁷ Dans son cours sur l'Histoire de l'Église.

qu'en exerçant son pouvoir au seul service de la charité ecclésiale. Telle est, du moins la perspective idéale. Mais une autre question surgit alors: est-ce que le pouvoir propre à la primauté peut se partager? Promulguant la constitution apostolique *Lumen Gentium*, dont le chapitre III complète Vatican I en précisant les rapports entre le Pape "chef du collège épiscopal" et les évêques, Paul VI déclarait "seul le Pape possède cette prérogative de représenter le Seigneur au sein de l'histoire et à la face du monde; personne d'autre que lui n'a une telle plénitude d'autorité".

Le décret *Christus Dominus* sur la charge des évêques, voté en 1965, affirme que "la primauté du Pape est au-dessus de la collégialité" §2. Plus récemment, dans des "Réflexions sur la Primauté du successeur de Pierre" le cardinal Ratzinger, reprenant tous les textes de la Tradition, rappelait que "l'évêque de Rome est successeur de Pierre dans son service primatial de l'Église universelle; cette succession explique la prééminence de l'Église de Rome"¹⁰. Il insiste sur le fait que l'épiscopat et la primauté, liés réciproquement et inséparables, sont d'origine divine.

Que conclure?

Au terme d'une analyse que j'ai voulue la plus objective possible il apparaît que le concept de primauté structure un

système clos. Il ne prend de sens que dans un usage interne propre à l'Église catholique. En effet la primauté ne ressortit à aucune autre pratique, coutume ou institution humaine. Ce concept instrumentalise, en fait, l'exercice d'un pouvoir de type particulier en vue de remplir la mission d'abord confiée à Pierre en tant que prôtos, premier des apôtres. Au long des siècles la notion de primauté s'est développée jusqu'à nos jours, à travers des situations contingentes que l'on a toujours justifiées par des arguments scripturaires et théologiques qui l'ont en fait sacralisée. Dans la mesure où la primauté ne peut se penser que *jure divino* elle concentre toutes ses activités et ses symboles dans une sphère institutionnelle qui lui est propre. Une telle conception définit l'Église romaine. Elle ne peut que susciter des réactions variées, voire critiques, des autres Églises chrétiennes. Or il est évident que nous assistons à l'heure actuelle à une réaffirmation de cette primauté en même temps qu'à une recrudescence d'un pouvoir centralisateur. Certains peuvent penser qu'il s'agit là d'une vigoureuse réaction inspirée par un certain passé. D'autres peuvent estimer que cette affirmation du roc romain sur lequel l'Église s'est constituée témoigne d'une volonté sécurisante face à un contexte de crise et d'incertitudes provoqué par le choc entre une tradition ecclésiale lentement élaborée depuis deux mille ans et une modernité de plus en plus sécularisée et sans cesse changeante.

¹⁰ *Osservatore Romano*, 31.X.1998; *Documentation catholique* 95, 2193 (1998) 1016s.