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A Center conducted by the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement

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Director's Desk

We are pleased to present the twenty-second up-date of the Bibliography of the International Interchurch Theological Dialogues compiled by Dr. Loredana Nepi, our librarian. You may also find the up-to-date bibliography (in real time) on our web site at all times (<http://www.prounione.urbe.it> click on library and then go to the bibliography of interconfessional dialogues called "dia").

In this issue of the *Bulletin*, we are publishing the corrected version of the lecture given by Dr. Michel Perrin at the symposium sponsored by the Ecumenical Institute "St. Bernardino"-Venice, the Institute catholique de Paris, the Angelicum and the **Centro Pro Unione** held in December 2005. Unfortunately the corrected version arrived too late to be included in the first issue of *The Jurist* 2006 with the other lectures. We apologize and hope that you will find his research enlightening especially as it deals with the issues of the structures and procedures of the early church in the Roman empire of the fourth century.

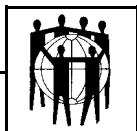
The ninth annual Wattson/White lecture was given by Mrs. Gillian Kingston, president of the Irish Council of Churches and co-chair of the Irish Inter-Church meeting. She was also a member of the International Catholic-Methodist dialogue and one of the principal organizers of the World Methodist Council's General Assembly held in Seoul in 2006. Her lecture entitled: "Methodist/Roman Catholic Relations. Strengthening Each Other's Hand in God" offers a wealth of insights and experience from her many years of service within her own Methodist church as well as to the ecumenical community. The tenth annual lecture will be given by Dr. Timothy Radcliff, OP, former Master General of the Dominicans and will deal with the issues of believing in the world today.

This year's programs at the **Centro Pro Unione** are planned to "Celebrate Lima and the BEM Document's Twenty-fifth Anniversary (1982-2007)". Four lectures are planned to look at the influence of BEM document on the churches, what has been achieved and what needs to be on the future ecumenical agenda of the churches. In addition to this program and given the situation in the world today, we agreed to co-sponsor some discussions between Catholics and Mennonites, two traditional "peace churches" on issues of peace and progress in the world today.

We have hosted various groups during the second half of last year including the annual visit of students of the Bossey Ecumenical Institute, the staff of the Johann-Adam-Möhler-Institut für Ökumenik who celebrated their 50th anniversary of foundation (1957-2007), a group of Lutheran pastors from Finland, the Committee for English in the liturgy which deals with common liturgical texts and student groups from diverse educational institutes.

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James F. Puglisi, sa
Director





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Centro Conferences

The Relationship between Bishops, the Church and Christian Communities in the Roman Empire of the IV Century

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(Conference given at the Symposium “The Relation between Bishop and the Local Church
Old and New Questions in Ecumenical Perspective”, Friday, 2 December 2005)

¹On 19 May 303 the *curator* of the city of Cirta, the future Constantine, today in Algeria, went escorted by three court clerks and a municipal slave to “the house where the Christians met”, that is, the cathedral church. In his capacity as the chief of police and public order in the Numidian city, he had to oversee the application of the imperial edict of the previous February that laid down the order to confiscate the Scriptures of the Christians and to burn them, and to destroy their places of worship. At the time of this house search, the story of which is known because of the rare conservation of its account found in the minutes of the city council, the bishop Paul received the *curator*. He was presiding, probably sitting on his cathedra, surrounded by a number of his clergy and was assisted by two priests also seated; standing there were two deacons, four subdeacons, and at least six gravediggers. The six readers who kept holy books in their homes were absent, but the *curator* went immediately to their homes to confiscate them.²

¹ I wish to thank the Reverend Father Hervé Legrand, op for inviting me to this conference. I wish to extend my thanks to Reverend Father James Puglisi, sa, Victoria Bridges Moussaron and Béatrice Caseau for their help in translating this text. I wished to preserve the particular flavor of the oral presentation and I have kept the annotations to a minimum. [EDITOR’S NOTE: This text is the corrected text which arrived too late for publication if the first issue of *The Jurist* (2006)].

² *Gesta apud Zenophilum*, in OPTATUS OF MILEVIS, *Opera. Appendix* (CSEL 26) 185-197. See the translation and commentary by J.-L. MAIER, *Le dossier du donatisme*, t. I, *Des origines à la mort de Constance II* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1987) 211-239, and S. LANCEL, P. MATTEI, *Pax et Concordia. Chrétiens des premiers siècles en Algérie (III^e-VII^e siècles)* (Alger: Marsa, 2003) 29-32. Cf. Y. DUVAL, *Chrétiens d’Afrique à l’aube de la paix constantinienne. Les premiers échos de la grande persécution* (Paris: Institut d’études augustiniennes, 2000) with reviews by S. LANCEL, *Revue d’histoire ecclésiastique* 97 (2002) 180-188, Id., *Revue des études latines* 80 (2002) 398-401, M. SIMONETTI, *Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa* 38 (2002) 367-371, Cl. LEPELLEY, *Latomus* 62 (2003) 712-715.

This first hand testimony shows us the Christian clergy of an important city in Roman Africa and the material resources, real estate and furnishings, of a particular church. It testifies to what extent the bishop at the start of the 4th century was considered as a representative and natural head of the *corpus christianorum*, to apply a juridical expression used at that time.³ This means the president of the college or association formed by each of the Christian communities of the Great Church according to Roman law. It was not at all unusual at that time to see this kind of visibility given to the hierarchical organization of the immense majority of Christian groups, and more generally to the Christian phenomenon in its diverse manifestations. If during the first half of the 3rd century it were possible for the Roman authorities in different places to continue to know little or even be unaware of the modalities of internal structuring of the communities of the Great Church, the edict of the emperor Decius at the end of 249 or beginning of 250 that ordered all his subjects to sacrifice to the guardian gods of the Empire revealed, if there were any need, the full extent of the Christian problem throughout the Roman world. The refusal to sacrifice had revealed the diffuse presence of Christians, although varying widely according to regions and localities, and this undoubtedly called attention to their organization. This is evidenced by the edicts of persecution, in the most technical sense of the term, taken against the Christians by the emperors Valerian and Gallienus in 257-258. First to be targeted were the bishops, priests and deacons called before the provincial governors to either sacrifice to the gods or be sent into exile. Meanwhile gathering for worship was forbidden

³ Constantine and Licinius, “So-called edict of Milan” (in fact a letter to the governor of Bithynia), in LACTANTIUS, *De mortibus persecutorum* 48. 9 (SC 39). See S. CORCORAN, *The Empire of the Tetrarchs. Imperial Pronouncements and Government AD 284-324. Revised Edition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000) 158-160 and 189.

as was access to 'what are called cemeteries.' The first step was to remove the heads of the Christian communities and to deprive them of their leadership. In 260 the edict of Gallienus put an end to the persecutions and *de facto* granted minimum official recognition to these communities. This was the start of the period of the 'Minor Peace of the Church', as it is referred to by modern historians, which it undoubtedly saw its development and consolidation, however the scarce the available documentation. The established churches and bishops were more, who had to face the persecution of Diocletian. The testimony of Eusebius of Caesarea recalling the situation of the churches just before this event, however exaggerated it may be, cannot be without grounds: 'one saw how favored, indeed how honored the heads of each church were by those who held procuratorial posts and governorships.'⁴

The privileges, in the technical sense of the term, that is, the special arrangements that the emperors Constantine and Licinius (particularly the former) made in favor of the Christians from 312 onward, however revolutionary they may have been, did not signify for the churches what certain romantic literature liked to imagine (and occasionally still imagines) the transition from the 'shadow of the catacombs' to the 'light of the Christian empire,' these privileges are more in the context of a 'return to normal.' The anti-Christian measures were revoked - which was already the case in the West from 306 - and in particular, confiscated goods were returned. What was new was that the emperor Constantine, who acted as patron and protector of the Christians, displayed evergetism with regard to the *corpus christianorum* very soon after the battle of Pons Milvius on 28 October 312. He provided the churches with financial gifts and granted clerics a dispensation from municipal responsibilities. This put them on equal footing with the heads of Jewish communities and certain pagan priesthoods.⁵ The

⁴ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, *Ecclesiastical History*, VIII, 1, 4 (SC 55) [translation taken from Early Church Fathers www.ccel.org]. For the historical context, see L. PIETRI, "Les résistances: de la polémique païenne à la persécution de Dioclétien", in J.-M. MAYEUR, Ch. & L. PIETRI, *et al.*, *Histoire du christianisme des origines à nos jours* Vol. 2, *Naissance d'une chrétienté (250-430)* (Paris: Desclée, 1995) 155-172, and T. BARNES, "Constantine and Christianity: Ancient Evidence and Modern Interpretations," *Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum* 2 (1998) 274-294.

⁵ See Ch. PIETRI, "La conversion: propagande et réalités de la loi et de l'évergétisme," in J.-M. MAYEUR, Ch. & L. PIETRI, *et al.*, *Histoire du christianisme...*, *op. cit.*, 189-227; T. BARNES, "From Toleration to Repression: The Evolution of Constantine's Religious Policies," *Scripta Classica Israelica* 21 (2002) 189-207; R. DELMAIRE, *Les lois religieuses des empereurs romains de Constantin à Théodose II*, I, *Code théodosien XVI* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2005) 56-69.

application of these measures, well known as concerns Africa, turned bishops into agents of imperial generosity. The bishop of Cordoba, Ossius, makes his first appearance at this moment in the sources available today. He seems, for reasons as yet unknown, to have played the role of ecclesiastical adviser to Constantine, for whom he drew up a memorandum listing the beneficiaries of the emperor's largesse. It is the bishop of Carthage, whom Ossius very probably recommended, Caecilian, who was given charge of allotting the imperial manna among the African bishops and of correcting any oversight.⁶ It is clearly here that the emperor's gifts binds him, and in consequence he was immediately faced with the divisions in the Great Church in the conflicts among bishops and among communities. Caecilian, after his consecration probably in 308, was contested as bishop of Carthage and had to face the competition of Majorinus and later that of Donatus. Deprived of imperial subsidies, Majorinus also claimed his share part, while the imperial chancery, in an act that was to have such an impact on the future, accepted as its own the heresiological categories of the Great Church and designated as sole beneficiary of the gifts of the emperor 'the Catholic Church of the Christians.' But where is the *Catholica* when two sides dispute the title? Here the emperor and the imperial administration were called to take sides as to the unity of the Great Church, and the binomial 'orthodoxy' / 'heresy' entered surreptitiously into the field of State law.⁷

⁶ See CONSTANTINE, *Letter to Caecilianus of Carthage*, in EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, *Ecclesiastical History* X, 6, 1-5 (SC 55), and the commentary of S. CORCORAN, *op. cit.*, 153. J. VILELLA (Barcelona) is currently preparing the notice 'Osio de Cordoba' for the *Prosopographie chrétienne du Bas-Empire*, III, *Espagne*. I am indebted to him for some precisions on Ossius.

⁷ For the *primordia* of the donatist crisis see Ch. PIETRI, "L'échec de l'unité 'impériale' en Afrique. La résistance donatiste (jusqu'en 361)," in J.-M. MAYEUR, Ch. & L. PIETRI, *et al.*, *Histoire du christianisme...*, *op. cit.*, 229-248; M. LABROUSSE, "Aspects historiques," in *Optat de Milève. Traité contre les donatistes*, I, *Livres I et II* (SC, 412) 57-81. For the legal notion of heresy, see K.-L. NOETHLICH, *Die gesetzgeberischen Massnahmen der christlichen Kaiser des vierten Jahrhunderts gegen Häretiker, Heiden und Juden* (Cologne: Wasmund-Bothmann, 1971) with the reviews of T. PEKÁRY, *Gymnasium* 80 (1973) 561-563, and Z. VÉGH, *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte. Romanistische Abteilung* 89 (1972) 457-464; J. BEAUCAMP, "Législation et refus de(s) dieu(x) dans l'Antiquité tardive," in G. DORIVAL, D. PRALON (eds.), *Nier les dieux, nier Dieu* (Aix-en-Provence: Publications de l'Université de Provence, 2002) 345-359; R. DELMAIRE, *op. cit.*, 69-79. On the notion of *Catholica* in the first Constantinian legislation, see S. CALDERONE, *Costantino e il cattolicesimo* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1962; reed., Turin: Il Mulino, 2001) 136-150, S. MAZZARINO, *L'Impero romano* (Rome: Laterza, 1962) II, 654-656; P. LEMERLE, *Philippe et la Macédoine orientale à*

From then on, at the very outset of a period extremely rich in conflicts breaking the Great Church apart – one need only mention the Donatist and the Arian crises – the bishop, teacher of the faith *par excellence*, became, more than ever, a public figure, which even so does not mean an agent of the State. The recognition, in 318 perhaps, of the *episcopalis audientia*, that granted to bishops the right to judge civil cases without appeal just like the Jewish religious authorities, and gave them the right to free slaves in the churches with the same consequences and classical modalities (manumission by will, *vindicta* or *censu*), secured the public role of the bishop.⁸ As president of the association that constituted each church in the eyes of the law, he was the natural interlocutor contacted by functionaries and administrators for any question concerning the Christians in his jurisdiction. To repeat the words of Charles Pietri, “[Constantine] established a system of laws that gave the church a new juridical status, economic, social and judicial privileges granted in exchange for insuring functions for the benefit of the *res publica*”.⁹ As a consequence, we can easily understand that it is hardly possible, and even less so in prior centuries, to discuss the ties between bishops and the Church in the Roman Empire from the 4th century onward, setting aside what each of these two entities represented beyond the Christian sphere, or in other words, the society they lived in. We cannot recount the history here, but as the decades following Pons Milvius went by, with regard to relations between Church and State – to use the accepted expression which needs much nuancing –, it is enough to emphasize that with the reigns of Gratian and Theodosius I, from the end of the 370s, there was actually a ‘State Catholicism.’¹⁰ Symbolic of this is an occasional text, the edict *Cunctos populos* of 28 February 380 addressed to the people of Constantinople, whose terms are worth quoting:

It is our desire that all the nations subject to our clemency of government should continue in the profession of that religion which was delivered to the Romans by the divine Apostle Peter as it has been preserved by faithful tradition. It is clearly this that is followed by the pontiffs Damasus and Peter, bishop of Alexandria, a man of apostolic holiness, namely, that we must believe according

l'époque chrétienne et byzantine. Recherches d'histoire et d'archéologie (Paris: De Boccard, 1945) 97-98.

⁸ R. DELMAIRE, *op. cit.*, 61-62.

⁹ Ch. PIETRI, “La conversion...,” *op. cit.*, 219.

¹⁰ Ch. PIETRI, “Les succès: la liquidation du paganisme et le triomphe du catholicisme d’État” in J.-M. MAYEUR, Ch. & L. PIETRI, *et al.*, *Naissance d’une chrétienté...*, *op. cit.*, 399-434.

to the teaching of the apostles and the doctrine of the Gospel, in one divinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in one equal Majesty and one holy Trinity. We authorize the followers of this law to assume the title of Catholic Christians. But as for the others, since in our judgement they are foolish and irrational, we decree that they shall be branded with the ignominious name of heretics, and shall not presume to give to their gatherings the name of churches. They will suffer first the chastisement of divine condemnation, and then the punishment which our authority, in accordance with the will of heaven, shall decide to inflict.

It would greatly restrict the position of this historical study if the research were limited to a purely ecclesiological analysis, all the more so because it is a period of growing adherence to Christianity. *Crevit hypocrisis, id est simulatio*, exclaimed Augustine in unison with contemporary preachers, but Origen had already said the same thing¹¹ – even a non-baptized person could be considered Christian. So, it is in a unified history of Christianity attentive to the inseparable interaction of ecclesial discourses and practices that the historian can try to produce a draft of a synthesis, but without even attempting an exhaustive study. This is where my preliminaries have been leading, and I ask you to excuse their length. This is also the purpose behind the chronology used here that runs from the start of the 4th century – we have just talked about the significance of that date – to the 430s. The choice of the date for the other end of the period under consideration is more arbitrary. The death of Augustine and the prodromes of the Nestorian crisis do not mark, strictly speaking, a new stage in the history of the links between *Episkopos* and *Ekklesia* in the Roman Empire, but those years saw a demultiplication in the documentation available, and consequently there is greater difficulty in availing of this kind of data. However, I shall not refrain from stepping over the limit at times according to the needs of the analysis.

Two last clarifications are needed before entering *in medias res*. On the one hand, for information concerning bishops in late antiquity, even for the limited period we are dealing with, the sources are countless and the literature secondary, and after the 17th century at least, plethoric. The last few years have been no different, and in fact have been particularly rich in publications of all kinds. There can be no question then of citing them all and discussing them all in this study. It is a sign of the

¹¹ In Ps. VII, 7; XXX. II, 2, 2, etc. (HDR, p. 284). Cf. A. von HARNACK, *Der Kirchengeschichtliche Ertrag des exegetischen Arbeiten des Origenes* (Leipzig: Hinrich, 1918-1919) 76: “Hundert Jahre vor Constantin sind wir hier schon mitten in der ‘Weltkirche’.

times that recent specialized dictionaries and encyclopedias have decided against giving an entry 'bishop / episcopate' and instead include it in explanatory notes. That means I was obliged to favor certain themes in keeping with the general orientations of this symposium, their historiographic topicality and my own interests, and to offer a very limited range of examples.

On the other hand, before it came to belong to the historian's territory, the episcopate was first of all, throughout the centuries, a major stake in the doctrinal controversies among Christians, particularly after the Reformation. In those debates, each party often found recourse in argumentation of a historical nature, and called on the presumed observances and beliefs of the early church in order to establish the legitimacy of their own practices and teachings, and they put the seal of prevarication on that of the adversary. This intense polemic and apologetic activity benefitted today's historian further because it greatly contributed to the collection and indeed the elucidation of dispersed testimonies from the Fathers concerning the episcopate. The admirable article 'Bishop' in the *Dictionary of Christian antiquities* by Smith and Cheetham published in 1893 and indebted to the writing of former Fellow of Trinity College Oxford, Arthur West Haddan, is the best proof of this. To cite just one example, the best known of all, *The Antiquities of the Christian Church* (1710-1722) by the Anglican canonist Joseph Bingham (1668-1723) remains a first class work, today largely unknown after having been plagiarized shamelessly. However, the building up of collections of the patristics destined to serve as an armory to feed the jousts of positive theology has also carried with it a procession of hermeneutic distortions that are best avoided. In other words, it is absolutely necessary to keep the sources in mind and to take care not to apply to them labyrinths of anachronistic readings or to search there for categories or theological problems that were mostly produced later. The analysis being drafted here is not meant to provide any norm in any subject whatever. It does not proceed from any primitivism nor is it conceived in principle to serve any restoration or reform in the churches. It is not gauged according to any theological yardstick. This is in my opinion a condition *sine qua non* for a healthy and profitable articulation of the work of the historian and that of the theologian. Michel de Certeau who was both - which is not my case - , said this in fiery terms in an article that appeared in 1969-1970 in successive issues of *Esprit* entitled 'Christian authorities and social structures' and later published under the title *La faiblesse de croire* [The frailty to believe]. Under the title 'L'insolence des faits', de Certeau wrote:

To listen to the lesson of facts is not to submit unconditionally to a new power. Historical relativity does not imply relativism. History is not historicism that substitutes for all others the authority of a conception (moreover outdated) of science. When it replaces a fixed sky of truth with a retinue of religious and social constellations, it does not state what one **must** think, but that which it is henceforth **impossible to deny** if one wants to think or act. (...) It is not possible to stop time and to locate the true here or there, nor to refer to an unhistoric synthesis that would erase these differences in the name of a lowest common denominator (in fact understood differently by each one and decided only by some). (...) The historian therefore does not enrol easily in the service of a dogmatic position. He emerges from the vaults and distances of Christian experience to contrast a present time with something **else** that happened back there. He says, 'Do not touch! Do not put your hand on man, nor yet on God!' (...) He unearths the insolent existence of institutions and conceptions different from ours. What he defends is history. It escapes those who try to catch it in the net of a 'meaning'. It attracts otherness, that slashes assurances that are closed too well. It no longer allows itself to circumvent, like a theater where it would be possible to seize the truth behind the scenery. It is history precisely because it does not concede.¹²

When speaking out against a Luciferian deacon called Hilarion in the period 376-388, Jerome wrote:

Given that he was a deacon when he left the church, and that he believed that the crowds of the world were for him alone, Hilarion could not administer the Eucharist as he was neither bishop nor priest nor, without the Eucharist, could he dispense Baptism. As the man is already dead, the sect has also disappeared with the man; because, being a deacon, he could not ordain any clerics after him. There is no church without *priests*.¹³

[On this topic, see Ambrosiaster, *Comm. in Epist. I ad Timoth. 3, 7: episcopi et presbyteri una ordinatio est; uterque enim sacerdos est, sed episcopus primus est*]. What Jerome is referring to here - and many other parallels could be mentioned - , is primarily the diffusion

¹² M. de CERTEAU, *La faiblesse de croire* (Paris: Éditions du Deuil, 1987).

¹³ JEROME, *Altercatio Luciferiani et Orthodoxi*, 21, (SC 273) (Paris: Cerf, 2003).

of the episcopal organisational model at the end of the 4th century in the ancient *orbis christianus*. He is echoed by Ephraim the Syrian in the *madrâshê* known under the title *Hymns against heresies*: he distinguishes the groups separated from the Greater Church, in general before his time, like the Manicheans, the Marcionites, the Bardaisanites or the obscure Gnostics, who may have acquired their own features in liturgy and discipline, etc., and who were thus easily identifiable - these are the ones he calls 'those who are outside' (*barrâyê*) -, and the adversaries that he calls 'those who are within' (*gaw-wayê*), for example the Arians, Sabellians, Photinians, Messalians, Paulicians, etc. whom he described thus:

There were 'bishops' in their churches,
and some were priests and deacons,
others scribes or readers;
Some belonged to the alliance (ascetical
movement).
From the church they had stolen the order
of the different types of ministry:
ordaining priests, baptising,
celebrating the Eucharist, and teaching
that the Lord has come and will return.
Blessed are those who hold all in Truth.¹⁴

In the Greater Church, there were divisions. From at least the middle of the 3rd century, the episcopal structure was part of the common heritage. The accounts delivered by Rufinus of Aquila in his *Ecclesiastical History* telling of the introduction of Christianity to Aksum on the Abyssinian plateau, or to the Saracens, the nomadic Arabs at the south-eastern extreme of the Empire, in the middle of the 4th century, show that one of the first predictable requests made by the earliest converts was for a bishop to be sent in order to plant the church. This is because only a bishop could initiate a clergy, particularly priests. These, whether in virtue of ancient traditions or because of new needs resulting from the growth in the number of Christians and places of worship, could baptise and celebrate the Eucharist, give catechesis and preach. This was all under the supervision of the bishop who is the liturgist *par excellence*. Among the sources testifying to this is a canonical-liturgical compilation produced in Eunomian circles as *Apostolic constitutions* at the end of the 4th century. The bishop controlled the register of clerics and personnel attached to the church he administered. The immunities and subventions granted by the State to clerics obliged him, more than in the past, to keep this list up to date, even if the definition of lower frontiers of clergy was a process not yet concluded at that time. Concerning the link that could exist between the cleric

¹⁴ EPHRAIM, *Hymns against heresies* XXII, 21.

and his bishop we have testimony from an exceptional document, a papyrus from Vienna slightly damaged, from the beginning of the 4th century, and of which the provenance is unknown:

To Ammontheon bishop of ?, Aurelios Basis, son of Akoris of ?, greetings. As I was ordained deacon today at your service and I have made a declaration by which I commit myself to join your diocese (episkopê) without treachery, I therefore commit myself through this document not to abandon and not to transfer (to the service of another?) bishop or priest [--- ?], unless you agree, because it is with those conditions (that I have made this contract). If I should wish to distance myself without your accord or without a letter, (I would not be able) naturally to be a member of your clergy any longer as a deacon at your service, but only to participate in lay communion, etc.¹⁵

If the links between deacons and their bishop are particularly strong, priests are equally subject to a similar obligation. One of the best proofs of this is the control of spatial mobility of the clerics confirmed by the *epistolai sustatikai*: clerics could not by right - and the papyri document the practice - leave their diocese except with the consent of their bishop.¹⁶ This increasingly responds to the need to identify as such travelling clerics in order to prevent the usurping of functions and to confirm the 'orthodoxy' and membership of a given communion of faith. It is also and principally because the clergy were ordained for a precise community incardinated by the bishop - human mediation was essential in antiquity -, just as the bishop was the bishop of a given people, whatever name that had: *plebs, populus, parochia, plethos, demos*, etc. This explains the numerous conciliar canons from the start of the 4th century that prohibit the transfer from one see to another, even if - in the East at least it seemed so -, examples to the contrary were not unusual. The transfer of Eusebius from the see of Nicomedia to Constantinople at the end of 338 and the beginning of 339, after the bishop Paul was deposed - Eusebius had already passed from Berytus to Nicomedia - gave rise to a series of stands taken against transfers by the prelates favourable to Athanasius of Alexandria, of whom Eusebius was a sworn enemy. Emblematic in this regard are the canons resulting from the interventions of Ossius

¹⁵ CPR, V, 11. Cf. E. WIPSYZCKA, "Il vescovo e il suo clero," in *Storia della Chiesa nella tarda antichità* ([Milan:] Bruno Mondadori, 2000).

¹⁶ T. TEETER, "Letters of recommendation or letters of peace?" in *Akten des 21. Internationalen papyrologenkongresses*, (Stuttgart, 1997) 954-960, and *Shifting Frontiers*.

of Cordoba to the western council of Sardica, today Sofia, in 343:

A prevalent evil, or rather most mischievous corruption must be done away with from its very foundations. Let no bishop be allowed to remove from a small city to a different one: as there is an obvious reason for this fault, accounting for such attempts; since no bishop could ever yet be found who endeavoured to be translated from a larger city to a smaller one.¹⁷

Athanasius compared such an act to adultery because the bishop, he said, is attached to his church like 'a wife to her husband'.¹⁸ We should not conclude that the transferring of sees was a speciality of the anti-Nicenes, but simply that the growing hierarchisation of the episcopal sees, that we shall deal with later, and the certain advantages to be enjoyed by imperial proximity, caused certain bishops to feel the urge to migrate. Gregory of Nazianzus, who continuously had to defend himself from being transferred from the see of Nazianzus where he had succeeded his father, to that of Constantinople, during those bitter days that followed his eviction from that city, did not refrain from denouncing in his *Carmina* 'the cathedra bazaar'¹⁹ and the *phthonos*, the *philoneikia* and the *philarchia* of his Nicene confreres. Again it was generally necessary in order to pass from one see to another, for part of the electoral body qualified to decide on the choice of the new bishop to deign to call a bishop as a candidate. Ossius of Cordoba at Sardica also brought up this situation: "But if any such person should be found so mad or audacious as to think to advance by way of excuse an affirmation that he had brought letters from the people [laity], it is plain that some few persons, corrupted by bribes and rewards, could have got up an uproar in the church, demanding, forsooth, the said man for bishop".²⁰

In fact, the general customs and laws - we shall have to give further nuances and particulars to this affirmation very soon - require that a bishop be elected. The electoral body is primarily in principle the people and clergy who are to be entrusted to him. This arrangement, confirmed in the 3rd century several times in the correspondence of Cyprian of Carthage and occasionally in other sources that came from the Greek

part of the Empire, remained widely in force during the period we are considering here.²¹ At the turn of the 4th to the 5th century, the pagan aristocratic author of *Histoire Auguste*, a series of imperial biographies where fantasy carries him quickly to the accuracy of the information, alludes to this when he imagines that the emperor Alexander Severus, at the start of the 3rd century, modelled himself on the Jews and Christians by deciding to submit to popular approval the choice of provincial governors just as they did for their priests.²²

As for the exact procedure of this election, the sources are very allusive, if we exclude a series of testimonies kept in the official report of the appearance of the clerics of Cirta before the governor of Numidia, Zenophilus, in 320. In order to determine if the bishop Silvanus of Cirta was a *traditor* or not, the high functionary called these witnesses of the episcopal election that probably took place in 307, because on that occasion the past morality and behaviour of the bishop had been questioned. One of them, Nundinarius, who was also Silvanus' accuser, declared: 'When it seemed that he was going to be made bishop, the people replied: Let it be another; God, forgive us!'. And he continued: 'You elders (*seniores* = notable people in the community) you cried out: 'God, forgive us; we want our fellow citizen (in other words, not Silvanus); that one is a traitor'. And later he added: "When he became bishop we had no dealings with him (*non illi communicavimus*), because they said he was a traitor. (...) I saw the arena attendant (of the amphitheatre) Mutus take him on his shoulders. (...) He had prostitutes there". Another witness was more specific: "The arena attendants brought him, as well as the people (*populus*), because the citizens (*cives*) were enclosed in the *area martyrum*". If this last part is far from being clear, because its exact meaning does not take in the *consensus omnium doctorum*,²³ if that election is out of the ordinary because it turned into a disturbance - not an unusual occurrence (it is an excellent indication of Christianisation): it suffices to recall the events that led to a bloodbath in Rome at the time of the episcopal election of September-October 366, when the supporters of Damasus, arena attendants, augurs and grave-diggers attacked the *basilica Liberii*, close by here in the vicinity of Saint Mary Major's, and they massacred about a

²¹ R. GRYSON, "Les élections ecclésiastiques au IIIe s.," *RHE* 68 (1973) 353-404.

²² SHA, *Vita Alexandri Severi* 45, 6-7.

²³ Y. DUVAL, *Chrétiens d'Afrique à l'aube de la paix constantinienne: les premiers échos de la grande persécution* (Paris, Institut d'études augustiniennes, 2000) with reviews by S. LANCEL, *RHE* 97 (2002) 180-188, M. SIMONETTI, *Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa* 38 (2002) 367-371, Cl. LEPELLEY, *Latomus* 62 (2003) 712-715.

¹⁷ Sardica can. 1 [Trans. *The Canons of the Council of Sardica*, <http://www.ccel.org/fathers2>]

¹⁸ ATHANASIUS, *Apologia contra Arianos* 6, 7.

¹⁹ *Carm.* II, 1, 13, v. 98 [our translation].

²⁰ Sardica can. 2 [Trans. *The Canons of the Council of Sardica*, <http://www.ccel.org/fathers2>].

hundred supporters of his rival Ursinus.²⁴ So if episcopal elections are often moments of crisis for a Christian community - the ideal sought being unanimity that is interpreted to be the result of the action of the Holy Spirit -, recalling the election at Cirta allows us to estimate how much this ritual borrows from contemporary civic rituals.

In fact the acclamations of the people are one of the most documented elements of late antiquity concerning their participation - to use a vague word - in the decision making of the various instituted powers, in particular in the cities. The writings of Tertullian and Cyprian, as shown by François Jacques and Claude Lepelley, already show 'a deep-seated impregnation of mentalities by the municipal system.'²⁵ François Jacques wrote that (without considering) the Christian community to be a simple replication of the municipal *res publica* and denying its originality, we consider (however) that "its *plebs* would probably not have maintained a compulsory institutional role if, in the world where it was inserted, the people had been excluded from local political life. The cultural ambiance was held in common. The two worlds came together in events and happenings, and interpenetrated at the level of daily life".²⁶ This civic ethos is a fortiori at work in the Christian communities of the 4th century and beginning of the 5th where, on the one hand, the cities were far from decline, and on the other hand, incidences of osmosis between civic behaviour and ecclesial behaviour had been widely demonstrated. We could add that there seemed to be an increasing emphasis on the preferentially urban character of an episcopal see, that is on the need to establish it in places where civic traditions are alive.²⁷ Africa's numerous rural bishoprics in large country properties or in small villages seem to be special cases. Moreover, Christianity at this time spread more in urban areas except for exceptional cases. The bishop

²⁴ R. L. TESTA, *Senatori, popolo, papi. Il governo di Roma al tempo dei Valentiniani* (Bari: Edipuglia, 2004) chap. 2.

²⁵ Cl. LEPELLEY, "Ubique *res publica*. TERTULLIEN témoin méconnu de l'essor des cités africaines à l'époque sévérienne" reproduced in *Aspects de l'Afrique romaine: les cités, la vie rurale, le christianisme* (Bari: Edipuglia, 2001).

²⁶ F. JACQUES, "Le rôle du peuple dans l'Église chrétienne d'après la correspondance de S. Cyprien", in *Le privilège de liberté: politique impériale et autonomie municipale dans les cités de l'Occident romain 161-244* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1984) 426 ff. Cf. A. LEWIN, *Assemblée popolari, e lotta politica nella città dell'impero romano* (Florence: La giuntina, [1995]).

²⁷ Sardica 6. It was not permitted to establish a bishopric in a village or small town (against the Donatists?); LEO THE GREAT, *Epistle to the bishops of Mauritania Caesarea* (PL 24, 653): *non in quibuslibet locis neque in quibuscumque castellis episcopi consecrentur*.

increasingly became a central personality in his town, as Sergio Mochi Onory well demonstrated almost three-quarters of a century ago, and as so many contemporary historical works rediscover and develop:²⁸ the bishop could be his city's ambassador to the emperor, and exercise real patronage in cases of conflict over taxes, intercede for the wrongly accused and try to protect him by providing refuge in a church, etc. "When there is affirmation and consolidation of the bishop's authority in ecclesial organisation, his functions begin to go beyond the religious and into the social sphere thus entering resolutely into the system of the civil constitution". From that time on, it is not surprising that episcopal elections became a civic event. This is the general sense of the outline proposed by Louis Duchesne in a letter recently published that was written on 29 December 1889 to the Bollandist Albert Poncelet.²⁹ "Certainly there, as elsewhere, there is a preponderance of lay aristocrats and of clergy, yet no one is excluded. Everyone can shout out. It is as it used to happen at one time in the English elections. The presidents agree with the bigwigs to choose the one who seems to have the most qualities and connections, then they show the candidate. *Vultis hunc?* So we vote at full voice".

The plasticity of the electoral ritual - acclamation and not the vote - opened the way for games of using influence. Just as prominent people had far greater weight in the management of a city, even though they had to take the reactions of the *popolo minuto* into account and the fact that acclamations were often organised under the form of clapping, in the same way the prominent Christians - known in Africa by the term *seniores* - had a central place in the episcopal elections, and this probably started long before sources identified their role in these events. In a letter written in 370 in the name of his father, the bishop of Nazianzus, and addressed to the church of Caesarea to favour the election of Basil as bishop, Gregory distinguished four categories of recipients: the *hieratikoi*, the *monastikoi*, the magistrates and the members of the boule (curiales), and finally all the people (*pas ho demos*).³⁰ Unless there are errors due to the complexity in the case of African *seniores*, this is the first mention of senators as distinct participants in an episcopal election. A significant work by Yvette Duval, Luce and Charles Pietri, has shown that in the West the phenomenon is recorded much later

²⁸ S. M. ONORY, *Vescovi e città sec. 4.-6.* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1933).

²⁹ L. DUCHESNE, *Monseigneur Duchesne et les Bollandistes: Correspondance*, ed. Bernard Joassart (Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 2002) *Tabularium hagiographicum*, 1, 81-83.

³⁰ GREGORY, *Ep.* 41, 9.

in the sources, not before the end of the first third of the 5th century.³¹ In any case, a movement was taking shape that would swell in subsequent centuries.

Besides the prominent citizens, the local clergy played an important role. Contemporary prosopographical studies carried out on African, Italian, Asiatic or Cappadocian episcopates lacked significant statistical facts - Rome, Alexandria and Constantinople are special cases -, so they did not generally allow for exact identification of the geographical origin of the elected bishops, and the part played by the local clergy. The only thing that it is possible to say without great risk of error is that the curiales or men who came from curiale families were a significant pool for the episcopate, and more generally the clergy. From the year 320, imperial legislation was frequently passed that aimed to prevent curiales from joining the clergy in order to benefit from fiscal immunity and escape municipal duties.³² The few conciliar canons of the period related to the choice of bishops, - just like certain decrees of the Roman bishops, to take terminology established through usage even if it is mediaeval -, constituted norms according to age, matrimonial status, profession, ecclesial situation, even the sequence of clerical offices held, etc. We shall just call them the statute of indicators of the dream bishop, although we cannot measure exactly the distance between dream and reality. From the historical point of view, it is good to refrain from any legalism. The place the decisions of this or that synod acquired in canon law throughout the centuries often long after the meeting of such assemblies, says nothing of their impact at the time they were taken. Besides, it would need thorough study of the name and geographical origin of the participants of each council. We should not forget that, as far as we know, except for the single case of the conference of Carthage in 411 that brought together almost six hundred Donatist and anti-Donatist bishops, the largest conciliar assembly known in antiquity is the synod of Rimini in 359 with more than 400 bishops, and we cannot say that it has left a permanent mark on jurisprudence.

Therefore, to take just one example, episcopal dynasties are reprobate, but many cases have been identified, beginning with that of the two Gregory of Nazianzus, father and son, the father moreover most probably having sired his three children during his episcopate. Another perhaps was Lucius Petronius Dexter, the first documented bishop of Chiusi, whose

five children engraved his epitaph in the catacombs of Mustiola in December 322.³³ More generally there is emphasis, although there should not be, on the absence in antiquity and well beyond of all specific clerical formation, with the exception of some episcopal monasteries like that of Augustine of Hippo. Moreover, the possibility remained open to clerics of all ranks, bishops included, to practise a trade, and the papyrological documentation in particular shows that some did not deprive themselves.³⁴ Clerical ethos, specifically the episcopal, is present only briefly in antiquity, and from what we can see it displays traits that are very far from those that can be identified, for example, with the Catholic post-Tridentine clergy. Moreover, when we speak about the participation of the local clergy in the episcopal election, it is good to remember this 'inventory of differences'. From the sociological point of view, and more precisely in terms of *habitus* to borrow from the 'bourdieusien' framework, the distance between clerics and laity in the period under discussion is, in many respects, probably not large.

The activity of the prominent citizens together with the intervention of the clerics probably allowed the selection of candidates and the orientation of the acclamations be directed towards certain individuals. It involved, among other things, trying to limit anything that could be eruptive or uncontrollable with the crowds of the faithful - at least that was the idea of the clerical and social elite. Clerics and dignitary played the role of mediators. This is certainly not a reliable gauge of unanimity and serenity. Rivalries and conflicts of interest could give rise to much ill-feeling and schisms, and these take over and destroy the links of clientele and friendship. On 26 September 426, Augustine declared to his faithful and clergy "I know that churches are wont to be disturbed after the decease of their bishops by ambitious or contentious parties."³⁵ That is why he organised his succession during his lifetime as his confrere Severus of Milevi had done. The difference is that he not only informed the clerics but also the people, because in Milevi this lack of communication had disastrous effects and Augustine had been called to help solve the problem. Speaking to the people of Hippo he declared: 'I wish to have for my successor the presbyter Eraclius.' The people ratified the choice by acclamation: 'Deo gratias, Christo laudes' 23 times, the notaries of the church record, 'Exaudi Christe, Augustino viva' 16

³¹ *Peuple chrétien ou plebs: le rôle des laïcs dans les élections ecclésiastiques en Occident*, reproduced in Ch. PIETRI, *Christiana Respublica: éléments d'une enquête sur le christianisme antique*, t. II (Rome: École française de Rome, 1997) 1059 ff.

³² CTh XVI, 2, 3.

³³ *Inscriptiones christianae italiae* (Bari: Edipuglia, 2003) XI, 2.

³⁴ G. SCHMELZ, *Kirchliche Amtsträger im spätantiken Ägypten: nach den Aussagen der griechischen und koptischen Papyri und Ostraka* (München; Leipzig: K.G. Saur, 2002).

³⁵ *Ep.* 213, 1 [trans. from <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1102213.htm>].

times, 'Te patrem, te episcopum' 8 times. The acclamations recommenced after Augustine had said a prayer for the future bishop. The extraordinary document that includes the report of that appointment is preserved in the *Acta ecclesiastica* of Hippo and is known under the name of Augustine's letter 213, and it could in itself constitute the object of this talk it is so rich in teachings. Augustine is well aware that on designating his successor he runs the risk of being accused of violating the conciliar decisions. "When my father and bishop, the aged Valerius, of blessed memory, was still living, I was ordained bishop and occupied the episcopal see along with him which I did not know to have been forbidden by the Council of Nicaea; and he was equally ignorant of the prohibition" - he was actually referring to canon 23 of the Council of Antioch in 341. This is why Eraclius would remain a priest and would have to await Augustine's death to be ordained bishop, even though two otherwise unknown bishops, Religianus and Martinianus, were present at the designation. Perhaps they had been mandated by the councils of Numidia and Carthage where Augustine had asked to devote 5 days per week to the *cura scripturarum*, which the designation of Eraclius would allow him to do, as the future bishop would assume *onera occupationum mearum*.

The presence of bishops at an episcopal election was essential because an election was not enough to make a bishop. Ordination was required and it could only be conferred by other bishops - three was generally considered the minimum number - normally through the imposition of hands. We can easily observe an informal role taken on by these consecrating bishops: they could serve as mediators or orient the choice of candidate. Moreover, the gradual hierarchisation of episcopal sees that was already clearly perceptible in the 3rd century and formalised at Nicaea for the East, associated with the irresistible increase in the number of synodal meetings, meant that the bishop was rarely in his diocese if he ever was there at all: cf. the ancient practice of letters of communion or the announcement of an election. The Council of Nicaea instituted the system of metropolitans - a principal see in each ecclesiastical province itself copied from civil geography -, and a consequence of this was that no bishop's ordination could take place unknown to the others in their province (canon 6) nor without the agreement of the bishops of the same province (canon 4). Jurisprudence is constant in the East. This meant there was a strong presence of provincial bishops during episcopal elections and negotiations with the traditional players in elections: the people and the clergy. On reading the correspondence of a Basil of Caesarea, one gets the impression of constant vigilance on the part of the metropolitan of Great Cappadocia over the episcopal elections in his province

that he covered in all senses of the word - it was his duty -, but also over the neighbouring territories, although with a lot more reserve because he could not encroach on them. However, suggestions of candidates, strategic advice and study of maps of bishoprics are not infrequent under his pen. Among other things, the concern was for doctrinal balance in these jurisdictions at a time of serious dogmatic divisions. The provincial synods, generally held twice a year by invitation of the metropolitan, had the power to depose bishops, as did the supraprovincial councils that met on the initiative of the emperor. It was a case then of seeing to the grain and counting his troops. There is a close parallel with Ambrose of Milan in Italy when it was under rations who did not adopt the provincial structure. In fact, the metropolitan system would take time to be adopted in the West. It appeared first in Gaul at the end of the 4th century. In Africa it was the primate of Carthage or the primates of the various ecclesiastical provinces to whom appeals were made. Rome and Alexandria were cases apart as recognised in canon 6 of Nicaea. The methods of control over the episcopal elections used by the bishop of Rome in suburbicane Italy and in the islands are little known about before the 5th century when there is the first mention of visiting bishops in charge of overseeing the elections,³⁶ even at a time when the apostolic See did not cease to use every opportunity to spread its discipline. The activities of the bishop of Alexandria are much better documented. From the 3rd century, it seems, no episcopal ordination could take place without his agreement, and by the start of the 4th century it is clear that he himself ordained all the Egyptian bishops, either during his visits around the country or in Alexandria itself. The Meletian schism, if we follow the disputed hypothesis of Annick Martin, is perhaps primarily a reaction of the bishops of Upper Egypt against this general control. The sending of a festal letter each year before the pre-paschal fast, from the middle of the 3rd century at the latest, to all the Egyptian churches to announce the date of Easter, was the opportunity not only for the doctrinal, spiritual and moral teachings that Athanasius and his successors knew how to use with such mastery, but it was also the means of making known the names of new bishops enthroned over the course of the preceding year.

This development of supra-diocesan control over episcopal elections was more marked in the East it seems than in the West, according to the analyses of Roger Gryson.³⁷ To this we must add the increasingly

³⁶ C. MAGNI, *Ricerche sopra le elezioni episcopali in Italia durante l'Alto Medio Evo* (Rome: A. Sanpaolesi, 1928).

³⁷ "Les élections épiscopales en Orient au IV^e s.," *RHE* 74 (1979) 301-345; "Les élections épiscopales en Occident au IV^e s.," *RHE* 75 (1980) 257-283.

frequent interventions of the emperor and his representatives in some of these appointments, at least for the large cities in the East, beginning with Constantinople. All of this had the potential to lead to conflict between local choices and the metropolitan, conciliar or imperial will. To impose a bishop, often after the deposition and sending into exile *mani militari* of his predecessor which was the usual procedure in the Christian Empire, was not easy. At the Council of Antioch in 268 the 70 or 80 bishops gathered to pass judgement on Paul of Samosat decided to have recourse to the emperor Aurelian, a pagan, to enforce him to leave 'the house of the church'. An anecdote told by Theodoret of Cyrus in his *Ecclesiastical History* gives a picturesque illustration. In Samosat, after the exile of the Nicene bishop Eusebius under the emperor Valens, the faithful refused by all possible means to enter into communion with the new bishop, one called Eunomius, a good man, but hostile to the Nicene Creed.

On one occasion he had expressed a wish to bathe, so his servants shut the doors of the bath, and kept out all who wished to come in. When he saw the crowd before the doors he ordered them to be thrown open, and directed that every one should freely use the bath. He exhibited the same conduct in the halls within; for on observing certain men standing by him while he bathed he begged them to share the hot water with him. They stood silent. Thinking their hesitation was due to respect for him, he quickly arose and made his way out, but these persons had really been of opinion that even the water was affected with the pollution of his heresy, and so sent it all down the sinks, while they ordered a fresh supply to be provided for themselves. On being informed of this the intruder departed from the city, for he judged that it was insensate and absurd on his part to continue to reside in a city which detested him, and treated him as a common foe.³⁸

The opposite could happen and a bishop could attract the affection of the people and so decisively direct their choice when there were controversies that were tearing apart the *orbis christianus*. Examples abound. The historian Socrates mentions the case of Eleusius of Cyzicus, who was forced to abandon the faith of Nicaea. He confessed to his people that his choice had not been free and he urged them to find another bishop. The faithful refused to let him go. Sozomen mentions that at Tomi Pontus the bishop Vetrano defended the Nicene faith before the emperor Valens and that he was followed by his people.³⁹ Gregory of Nazianzus wrote in the name of his father to the church in Caesarea that 'the church suffers fully with its leader or is saved with him,

³⁸ THEODORET OF CYRUS, *EH* IV, 15, 2-3. [trans. <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/27024.htm>].

³⁹ SOZOMEN, *EH* VI, 21.

following whatever he does.'⁴⁰ Recalling his farewell discourse to Anastasius in Constantinople in 381, he quotes from memory the cry of one of the faithful at the moment of his departure: 'You will take away with you the Trinity.'⁴¹ The examples of Athanasius, Ambrose and John Chrysostom are too well known to be discussed here. On the other hand, if a bishop was hated, this entailed the rejection of his confession of faith. Sometimes it was the reverse that happened. Athanasius always pointed out that the faithful refused the bishops imposed by the 'Arians' and preferred exile or prison.⁴² The *Libellus precum* of the Luciferian priests Faustinus and Marcellinus enumerate the cases of Florentius of Merida and Theodor of Oxyrhynchus as examples of pastors rejected by their people.⁴³ Eunomius, who succeeded Eleusius in Cyzicus, was driven away by the people.⁴⁴ The value of these testimonies might be suspect at first glance as they almost all come from clerical sources - or were influenced by clerical models -, and one of their aims was to illustrate the function of teaching the faith that is attached to the episcopal office. Some sources however testify directly to the attachment of the faithful to their bishop when there was need. Augustine in a sermon reported a response made by the Donatists: 'we do not worry because we follow our Bishop.'⁴⁵ Just before the conference of Carthage in 411, he urged the faithful to be calm encouraging them to withstand even the abuse against their own bishops.⁴⁶ The price attached to the return of a Donatist pastor, as he brought his *plebs* with him, corroborates these instructions.⁴⁷ We know of Augustine's efforts, in his *Alphabetical Psalm* for example, to address the Donatist faithful over the heads of their bishops, and the

⁴⁰ GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS, *Ep.* 41,5.

⁴¹ GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS, *Carm.* II, 1, 11, v. 1100.

⁴² ATHANASIUS, *Hist. Ar.* 73, 2; 74, 5; 75, 3.

⁴³ FAUSTINUS and MARCELLINUS, *Libellus precum* 43-44 and 93-100.

⁴⁴ SOCRATES, *HE* IV, 7, 10; SOZOMEN, *HE* VI, 26,4; THEODORET, *HE* II, 29, 2.

⁴⁵ AUGUSTINE, *Hom.* 46, 21.

⁴⁶ AUGUSTINE, *Hom.* 357, 4.

⁴⁷ See, for example, AUGUSTINE, *Serm. Dolbeau* 27, 2; *Ep.* 20*, 3; etc. Cf. CYPRIAN, *Ep.* 51, 11, 1 (the return to unity of Trophimus and his *plebs*). See S. LANCEL, "Le sort des évêques et des communautés donatistes après la Conférence de Carthage en 411," in *Internationales Symposium über den Stand der Augustinus-Forschung vom 12. bis 16. April 1987 in Schloss Rauischholzhausen der Justus-Liebig-Universität Giessen*, eds. C. MAYER, K. H. CHELIUS (Würzburg: Augustinus-Verlag, 1989) 149-167.

canonical resourcefulness put into practice to insure a *modus vivendi* and a *modus administrandi*, to use the words of the late Serge Lancel, between the Donatist bishop who returned and his old adversary and colleague (for example the founding of a consortium with a system of alternating preeminence that would finish on the death of one of the two).

The strength of the links that could be tied between the faithful and a bishop were always special. Was it his power of oratory, a quality increasingly required of bishops, that had magnetised his audience? Was it his qualities of *pater pauperum* that gave him the recognition of a numerous clientele enrolled on the church register? Was it his ascetical way of life that aroused ardent fascination? Or was it the fruits patiently cultivated through a unanimous election? The sources only let us know in rare cases. And this is where the historian's territory comes to an end.



CC

Centro Conferences

Methodist/Roman Catholic Relations Strengthening Each Other's Hand in God

Gillian Kingston

President of the Irish Council of Churches and Co-Chair of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting

Ninth Annual Conference in Honor of Father Paul Wattson and Mother Lurana White

(Conference given at the **Centro Pro Unione**, Thursday, 14 December 2006)

PREAMBLE

Writing in Dublin in 1749, John Wesley, in his *Letter to a Roman Catholic*, comments,

You have heard ten thousand stories of us, who are commonly called Protestants, of which, if you believe only one in a thousand, you must think very hardly of us. But this is quite contrary to our Lord's rule, 'Judge not that ye be not judged'; and has many ill consequences, particularly this – it inclines us to think as hardly of you. Hence we are on both sides less willing to help each other, and more ready to hurt each other. Hence brotherly love is utterly destroyed; and each side looking on the other as monsters, gives way to anger, hatred, malice, to every unkind affection, which have frequently broke out in such inhuman barbarities as are scarce named among the heathens¹.

Perceptions did not improve at any great speed, and in 1765 he was writing, somewhat wryly,

It is not easy to reckon up the various accounts which have been given of the People called Methodists. Very many of them as far remote from truth as that given by the good gentleman in Ireland: 'Methodists! Ay, they are the people who place all religion in wearing long beards'².

¹ J. WESLEY, "A Letter to a Roman Catholic" (July 18th 1749), par. 1, in T. JACKSON (ed.), *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M. Sometime Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford*, 3rd rev. ed. Reprint [1st ed. 1829-1831] (London: John Mason, 1856) Vol. 10.

² J. WESLEY, "A Short History of Methodism" (ca. 1765) in R.E. DAVIES (ed.), *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 9: *The Methodist Societies. History, Nature, and Design* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989) 367.

These comments of the founding father of 'the people called Methodist' indicate something of the distorted views Catholics and Methodists have held of each other. And, in spite of some forty years of theological dialogue between the World Methodist Council and the Roman Catholic Church, these views may well, indeed do, remain in some places.

What, then, has this dialogue achieved? Has it made any difference at all to how we, as Methodists and Roman Catholics, view each other and to how we interact? Are the cordial relationships enjoyed within theological commissions replicated at the proverbial grassroots?

Those from a farming background may be familiar with that important piece of cowshed furniture, the milking stool. It is small and squat and has only three legs. Each is essential if the stool is to function as intended. This may not be an entirely inappropriate image: the ecumenical enterprise needs three 'legs' too - theological exploration, structural flexibility and local engagement in order to be fruitful.

Theological progress remains in the 'ivory tower' if it is not implemented in the structures of the Churches and among the faithful; structural change is cosmetic if nothing is happening among the people in our Churches and if there is no theological foundation; ecumenical relationships at local level are stifled unless there is movement structurally and in theological thinking;

This, however, is much more easily said than achieved. Geoffrey Wainwright speaks of the tension which is perceived to exist between what the theologians are doing in their 'ivory towers' and what is happening at the 'grass-roots' level³

...the ecumenical 'movement' has moved – or needed

³ Though he makes ironic use of these terms, with reference to one as an old cliché and the other as jargon designated, that does not strip them of *all* truth!

to move – in two directions, sometimes characterized as ‘from the top down’ and ‘from the bottom up’. Theoretical insights and practical initiatives have sometimes come from church leaders; and doctrinal dialogues have been conducted by ecclesiastical hierarchs and professional theologians. The question then becomes one of ‘reception’ among what the jargon designates as ‘the grass roots’⁴.

But, he goes on to point out, this can be perceived as ‘condescending’, and, conversely, lay and local initiatives can be interpreted as “a practical and sacramental ‘impatience’ (which) appear to override concerns of faith and order that are legitimate over a wider topographical range and in the longer historical term”⁵.

This evening, I would like to reflect on the considerable achievement of the long-standing theological dialogue between the two World Communions and then on something of the lived experience of the relationship between Catholics and Methodists in a variety of places.

The nature of dialogue and Methodist practice in dialogue

Concerning the nature and function of theological dialogues, Harding Meyer makes two points so obvious that they are easily overlooked:

*First, they are official church dialogues in that they are authorised by the respective church authorities who appoint the delegates and to whom the results must be directly submitted. Second, they are mainly concerned with doctrinal matters (esp. authority in the church, eucharist, ministry, ecclesiology), the aim being to overcome the church-divisive divergences inherited from the past and reach agreements on these issues sufficient for the establishment of closer fellowship*⁶.

And certain features are pre-requisite:⁷

Firstly, dialogue partners need to have a common starting point, a meeting place, in terms of faith and practice; otherwise, where to start?

Secondly and equally clearly, there must be significant differences between them in at least some critical matters;

⁴ A paper delivered to the Societas Oecumenica, August 2006: “The Exchange of Ideas and the Exchange of Gifts: Some Thoughts on Ecumenical Relations in the Light of *Ut Unum Sint*(2) and the International Methodist-Catholic Dialogue”.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ H. MEYER, “Dialogue, Bilateral” in N. LOSSKY *et al.*, *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, 2nd ed. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2002) 310f.

⁷ Outlined by G. WAINWRIGHT, *Methodists in Dialogue* (Nashville: Abingdon/Kingswood Books, 1995) 31-32.

otherwise, why bother?

Thirdly, partners must have a goal, a point to which they wish to move; otherwise, the process becomes, literally, pointless.

Fourthly, partners need to concentrate on issues which have divided them; otherwise dialogue runs the risk of becoming too diffuse.

The World Methodist Council has entered dialogue with a number of partners – the Roman Catholic Church, the Lutheran World Federation, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, the Anglican Communion, the Salvation Army and, in an exploratory manner, with the Ecumenical Patriarchate⁸.

There is a certain family likeness among these resulting documents. Dr Wainwright summarizes these⁹ and I paraphrase:

- There is doctrinal responsibility: though John Wesley differentiated between essential beliefs and nonessential beliefs (‘opinions’), he was firm about what he believed to be those essentials of the faith.
- There is spiritual engagement: an acknowledgement of the Reality beyond the realities;
- There is a missionary thrust: ‘the people called Methodist’ owe their beginnings to the impulse ‘to spread Scriptural holiness throughout the land’ and they continue that thrust;
- And there is explicit glorification of the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in the texts of all the dialogues.

The Methodist/Roman Catholic International Commission

The Methodist / Roman Catholic dialogue was among the first to be established in the wake of the Second Vatican Council. The World Methodist Council, meeting in London in 1966, accepted the invitation to embark on dialogue and the first meeting took place in 1967. It has continued without break.

The Commission works in five-year series of meetings, in step with the meetings of the World Methodist Council. There have been eight agreed statements and these have been presented simultaneously to the Council and to the Vatican. The Council habitually receives each ‘with gratitude’ and the Vatican acknowledges each by appointing a scholar to comment on the text. Conscious that a continuity

⁸ The conversations with the Lutherans and World Alliance of Reformed Churches arrived a satisfactory conclusions; that with the Anglican Consultative Council was theologically satisfactory, but the resolution to forward the relationship stalled at the Lambeth Conference of 1998; the conversation with the Ecumenical Patriarchate is on hold until other issues are resolved; the dialogues with the Salvation Army and the Roman Catholic Church are ongoing.

⁹ G. WAINWRIGHT, *Methodists..., op. cit.*, 33-34.

of thought and work builds a certain momentum, the Commission has often indicated themes for the next phase.

With the tacit assent of the Roman Catholic side, the documents have assumed popularly the name of the location in which the relevant World Methodist Council has met and its date¹⁰. Hence the latest document will be known as Seoul 2006, despite its proper title, *The Grace Given You in Christ*. We have been known to remonstrate with ourselves about this every now and again, but to little avail!

Cardinal Cassidy, speaking to the Conference of the Methodist Church in Great Britain in June 1998, commented on the nature of this particular dialogue, observing that

It has been working away quietly (perhaps too quietly!), but steadily. It has been ...like a deepening conversation, in which we have attempted to listen to each other; to find common ground and recognize that there are areas that are not contentious, in order then to look at similarities and differences¹¹.

This dialogue has indeed received very little public attention in spite of its long standing. At a colloquium in honour of Cardinal Kasper in Durham, England, earlier this year (2006), a member of the most recent Roman Catholic team commented that this is the Cinderella of the dialogues. Grace restrained him from indicating who might be the Ugly Sisters, but the question is: when do we get to the Ball?

The Reports of the Methodist/Roman Catholic International Commission

The first report of the Commission was presented to the Vatican and to the World Methodist Council in Denver in 1971.

This was an introductory and tentative document. The respective teams were, understandably, in exploratory mode, feeling their way in a new situation and with a new relationship. There was an effort to establish common ground on non-contentious issues such as spirituality and Christianity in the contemporary world, and then to move on more sensitive issues such as some associated with Christian home and family life. The latter part of the document raised some of the issues which have subsequently emerged as most significant in the Commission's

work: eucharist, ministry and authority¹².

While acknowledging the significance of these issues, and, in particular, that of authority, the Commission

... agreed to postpone these important questions because it seemed to us fundamentally important to begin, not with our differences and disagreements, but with our agreements and with that fundamental unity without which all our conversations would cease to be conversations between Christians¹³.

The next report, Dublin 1976, also considered a range of issues. It noted that

more than once... we have been called to recognize our common heritage; not just to put an ecumenical veneer on the otherwise unalterable furniture of our separation, but to discover the underlying realities on which our churches are founded and to which the common feature of our heritage point. Now we must go further ...¹⁴

The third report was the first to have a thematic focus. *Towards a Statement on the Holy Spirit* (Honolulu 1981) notes that 'Methodists and Catholics repeatedly discover a notable rapport when they speak of spirituality, the life of the Spirit.' The second section of this report rejoices in the delicately balanced title, "The Holy Spirit, Christian Experience and Authority", picking up on what may be neuralgic issues for Methodists and Catholics respectively. It highlights the tension between the outcome of the Holy Spirit's role in drawing believers into faith communities and the role of the Spirit in the teaching and disciplining task of the Church. Among 'problems or differences which have recurred and seemed most obstinate'¹⁵, it identifies 'The Nature of the Church' as the theme for the next phase of the dialogue.

The fourth report in this dialogue was called *Towards a Statement on the Church* (Nairobi 1986). The document seeks to project a model of church for a time of unity: "As we reflect on a reunited Church, we cannot expect to find an ecclesiology shaped in a time of division to be entirely satisfactory"¹⁶. The text begins with a broad view of the nature of the Church and gradually narrows the focus to a concentration on the area of Petrine ministry, thus moving from the more generally agreed to the more generally

¹⁰ The Denver (1971) and Dublin (1976) reports had no formal title, but subsequent reports are as follows: Honolulu (1981) *Towards a Statement on the Holy Spirit*; Nairobi (1986) *Towards a Statement on the Church*; Singapore (1991) *The Apostolic Tradition*; Rio (1996) *The Word of Life*; Brighton (2001) *Speaking the Truth in Love*; and Seoul (2006) *The Grace Given You in Christ*. All documents will be cited by the city followed by the paragraph number.

¹¹ As recorded in *Epworth Review* 25, 4 (1998) 13-22.

¹² These issues have emerged as priorities in almost every dialogue, eg ARCIC.

¹³ Denver 100.

¹⁴ Dublin 17.

¹⁵ Honolulu 57.

¹⁶ Nairobi 22.

contentious. It is here that we find stated for the first time the goal of this dialogue: *full communion in faith, mission and sacramental life*¹⁷.

Moving to a more detailed examination of structures of ministry¹⁸, and, in particular, of the Petrine Office¹⁹, this report seeks, through Scripture and history, to discern a more universal pattern for ministry. The Church has always needed a God-given ministry, but

*...we are not agreed on how far this development of ministry is now unchangeable and how far loyalty to the Holy Spirit requires us to recognize other forms of oversight and leadership that have developed, often at times of crisis or new opportunity in Christian history*²⁰.

Prophetically, provocatively or prematurely, but, in any case, tentatively, it suggests that

*It would not be inconceivable that at some future date in a restored unity, Roman Catholic and Methodist bishops might be linked in one episcopal college and that the whole body would recognize some kind of effective leadership and primacy in the Bishop of Rome*²¹.

And now, or so it seems to me, that the commission moves, consciously or otherwise, into a more focussed mode.

The fifth report, *The Apostolic Tradition* (Singapore 1991) attempts to set out the theological perspectives in which more specific questions may be viewed. With the motif of *koinonia* very much in the ecumenical mind at the time, the working definition of tradition became 'koinonia in time'. Set in an understanding of 'The Apostolic Faith: its Teaching, Transmission and Reception', it was hoped that ministry might be viewed from a new perspective, that of 'Serving within the Apostolic Tradition' – to use the two main headings in the report.

It is precisely here that the major issues lie: apostolic succession and the role of bishops in the church, the nature of ordination and the location of authority in the Church. These are issues which continue to exercise this – and other – dialogues.

In the sixth report, *The Word of Life: a Statement on Revelation and Faith* (Rio de Janeiro 1996), the Commission was "looking for commonly acceptable ways of

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 29-38.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 39-75.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 62.

expounding the historical self-disclosure and indeed self-gift of the triune God, focussed in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, and brought home to successive generations of believers by the Holy Spirit, released in power at Pentecost²². It sought also to consolidate agreement reached thus far and to provide a basis for movement to more contentious issues.

The report observes that

*...Roman Catholics and Methodists share a common concern regarding the Church universal as an expression of communion in Christ. But they differ widely in their beliefs about the means which God has given to attain or preserve this goal. These differences may be the greatest hindrances on the way to full communion*²³.

However, the publication in 1995 of the Papal encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*²⁴, with its oft-quoted paragraph 96, encouraged the dialogue to suggest that

*Future study could address the related topics of pastoral and doctrinal authority, the offices of oversight in the church and succession in them, and the offer made by Rome of a Petrine ministry in the service of unity and communion*²⁵.

Thus the seventh report, *Speaking the Truth in Love* (Brighton, England, 2001), turned its attention to the issues surrounding teaching authority among Catholics and Methodists. This report deviates from the usual pattern, in that the first section states in systematic form what the commission believes it possible to agree on concerning authoritative teaching, noting the divergences that remain and the questions one side would like to put to the other, while the second describes the practices and understanding of each party in a way readily accessible to the other. It is suggested that those unfamiliar with either or both partners should read this first!

The report indicates considerable agreement in many

²² Rio 1.

²³ *Ibid.*, 130.

²⁴ *Ut Unum Sint: Encyclical Letter of the Holy Father John Paul II on Commitment to Ecumenism* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995):

Paragraph 96: *...Could not the real but imperfect communion existing between us persuade Church leaders and their theologians to engage with me in a patient and fraternal dialogue on this subject, a dialogue in which, leaving useless controversies behind, we could listen to each other, keeping before us only the will of Christ for his Church and allowing ourselves to be deeply moved by his plea 'that they may all be one...so that the world may believe that you have sent me' (Jn 17:21)?*

²⁵ Rio 132.

areas, but differences remain over teaching authority. Acknowledging that “Christ’s Church is totally dependent on the free gift of God’s grace for every aspect of its life and work”²⁶, the report reflects on how this grace may be channelled and through whom. Paragraph 61 crystallised this –

Methodists and Catholics affirm that baptism, confirmation and ordination are unrepeatable acts whereby God’s grace is conveyed to the recipient in special ways. However, some of our remaining differences centre on whether and how a means of grace may be ‘guaranteed’ or ‘trustworthy’. Catholics ask Methodists how and by what criteria they verify that a particular means is a trustworthy channel of God’s grace. Methodists ask Catholics whether the idea of the guaranteed quality of a sacrament takes full account of the weakness, limitations and sinfulness of the human beings called to be agents of God’s grace....

The eighth and most recent report, *The Grace Given You in Christ* (Seoul 2006), indicates in its subtitle something of the ‘cumulative’ methodology of this dialogue – ‘Catholics and Methodists further reflect on the Church.’ (my italics).

The opening chapter is historical in nature and reflects on the perceptions each partner has had of the other over the years. Though there was sometimes genuine understanding, the report observes that mutual evaluations were more often

*... coloured by the religious, social and political conflicts which have generally characterised relationships between Protestants and Catholics, and they were fed by mutual ignorance, defective understandings or partial views of each other*²⁷.

Both communions “acknowledge the changes that came with the Second Vatican Council...as a result (of which) there has been a shift from polemics to dialogue, from accusation to respect and from ignorance to trust”²⁸.

Posing the question ‘What is the Church?’ the second chapter builds on and reaffirms many of the findings which emerged in previous reports²⁹. It concludes that Methodists and Catholics are agreed on much that constitutes Church – the role of the Holy Spirit in calling together the community of God’s people; the trinitarian ‘shape’ of the church as ‘People and Family of God the Father’, ‘Body and Bride

of Jesus Christ, God the Son Incarnate’, ‘Living Temple of the Holy Spirit’;’ on ministry as “a gift from God to the Church, a graced service of the Church’s living communion with Christ throughout the world and through the ages”³⁰.

The serious divergences are clearly in the consideration of ministry and these include “a precise understanding of the sacramental nature of ordination, the magisterial role of the episcopate in apostolic succession, the assurance asserted of certain authoritative acts of teaching, and the place and role of the Petrine ministry”³¹.

Picking up on the language of ‘gift’ used in *Ut Unum Sint*³², and acknowledging that “the Holy Spirit is the true giver of the gifts we are seeking to exchange”³³, the third chapter seeks to identify the principle ways in which Methodists and Roman Catholics are able to recognize each other’s ecclesial character; and then highlights “the gifts we truly have to offer each other in the service of Christ in the world”³⁴.

Acknowledging that there is a difference of starting place: “Catholics have an instinct for the whole and an emphasis upon the confident actions of the Church as Church, while Methodists have an instinct for the individual and an emphasis upon the assurance that each individual has”³⁵, and, further, that “Catholics tend to think first of *apostolic succession* and Methodists of *mission*”³⁶, the report proceeds to consider what we might each offer the other.

Time does not permit a full enumeration, but among those which Methodists might offer Roman Catholics are³⁷

- the role of lay people in both preaching and the decision-making process of the church;
- a concept of ministry which includes lay people and which includes women among the ordained;
- a characteristic ethos in worship and spirituality, expressed often, though not exclusively, through the hymns of Charles Wesley.

²⁶ Brighton 49.

²⁷ Seoul 11.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

²⁹ In particular the Nairobi, Singapore, Rio and Brighton reports.

³⁰ Seoul 89.

³¹ Seoul 92.

³² *Ut Unum Sint* 28: “Dialogue is not simply an exchange of ideas. In some way it is always an ‘exchange of gifts’. (cf. *Lumen Gentium* 13)”.

³³ Seoul 97.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 97.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 99.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 101.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 114-120.

The gifts Roman Catholics, in their turn, might offer Methodists include³⁸

- an articulated ecclesiology, with a sense of continuity both in space and in time;
- the Petrine ministry, offered as a service of love and unity;
- those doctrines, which at the Reformation, became obscured rather than reformed of excess and which, at the Second Vatican Council, were re-articulated; among these understandings of the Eucharist and of the priesthood;

We are taught that it is more blessed to give than to receive, but we need to be sensitive to the possibility of a 'dead mouse' gift³⁹. What we treasure, and even feel we may sacrifice in the giving, may be distasteful and unacceptable to the intended recipient! Methodists and Roman Catholics need at all times to be sensitive to each other!

Noting Pope Benedict's words that "Concrete gestures that enter hearts and stir consciences are essential, inspiring in everyone that inner conversion that is the prerequisite for all ecumenical progress"⁴⁰, the final chapter of the report seeks to ground the agreement reached throughout the forty years of this dialogue.

This section is carefully structured in terms of the declared goal of the dialogue – full communion in faith, mission and sacramental life. It notes a number of national Methodist/Roman Catholic dialogues – in Great Britain, New Zealand and the United States –

Outlining a number of principles and proposals for closer working together, the Report allows that

The practical proposals outlined in this chapter do not exhaust the possibilities for closer collaborationnor are they equally relevant to the groups specifically addressed in this report. Nevertheless, these proposals constitute a comprehensive set of concrete gestures that will assist our two communions as we journey towards the next stage on the way to our full visible unity⁴¹.

This report was presented to the World Methodist Council meeting in Seoul, South Korea, in July 2006. It was received with enthusiasm. It has also been presented to the Vatican, who will commission a response. We wait

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 128-135.

³⁹ An image which surfaced at the 2005 conference on Methodist/Catholic dialogue in Dallas, Texas.

⁴⁰ BENEDICT XVI, "Striving to be the 'Servus servorum Dei'," Initial Message of Pope Benedict XVI, Wednesday, 20 April [2005], §5, *L'Osservatore Romano*, English ed., 17, 1871 (27 April 2005) 4.

⁴¹ Seoul 163.

to see the direction the next phase will take...!

David Chapman, in a paper presented during the last session of the dialogue, suggests that

Perhaps the most basic question for the Joint Commission to address is how Methodists and Catholics can together revisit the undivided history of the Church to find sources, methods and norms for an ecclesiology that will enable subsequent differences to be overcome⁴².

Audience with His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI

The work of the Commission was marked in a significant way last December (2005) when a delegation from the World Methodist Council was received in private audience with Pope Benedict XVI. Commenting on the 'patient and persevering dialogue in which we have engaged,' His Holiness observed that

These efforts have been candid in addressing areas of difference. They have also demonstrated a considerable degree of convergence and are worthy of reflection and study. Our dialogue and the many ways in which Catholics and Methodists have become better acquainted have allowed us to recognize together some of those "Christian treasures of great value".... let us seek to foster a mutual commitment to the Word of God, to witness and to joint prayer⁴³.

Formal Association with 'Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification'

There has been an interesting development involving a mutual partner, the Lutheran World Federation.

At the meeting of the World Methodist Council Executive in Oslo, Norway (September 2002), congratulations were sent to the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation on the signing of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. Discussion began as to the possibility of the World Methodist Council 'signing up' to an historic and significant agreement reached between two of its own dialogue partners on an issue of fundamental theological importance. After discussion with representatives of the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation, a draft text associating the Council with the Declaration was sent to all the member churches of the

⁴² D. CHAPMAN, "The Nature and Identity of the Church in Methodist-Catholic Dialogue", 2003. For a much fuller treatment of this dialogue see D. CHAPMAN, *In Search of the Catholic Spirit: Methodists and Roman Catholics in Dialogue* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2004).

⁴³ BENEDICT XVI, Address to members of the World Methodist Council, Friday, December 9th, 2005, *L'Osservatore Romano*, English ed., 51/52, 1924 (21/28 December 2005) 5.

World Methodist Council for response and comment. The responses received were unanimous in their support. On Sunday, July 23rd, 2006, in the presence of the World Methodist Conference in Seoul, representatives of the three World Communions signed an Official Common Declaration⁴⁴.

The methodology here may hold promise for other dialogues and agreements. Being more than a dialogue, yet not quite multilateral, it allows for associations of the like-minded, so to speak, on specific theological issues.

Mind the Gap!

Those who have travelled on the London Underground system will be familiar with the intoned warning, 'Mind the gap!'⁴⁵ Those undertaking the ecumenical journey need also to mind the gap, the gap between the theological discourse and the lived experience of the faithful. As with the London Underground, the gap varies: sometimes it is hardly noticeable, other times it is considerable.

The commission acknowledges that "an international report cannot take proper account of the immense variety of local circumstances that affect relations between Catholics and Methodists in different parts of the world."⁴⁶ Nevertheless, when considering Methodist/ Roman Catholic relations as a whole, honesty compels us to acknowledge and to deal with the gap⁴⁷. There are many factors – we can only consider a few.

Firstly, in most situations, the Methodist Church is in a minority situation in relation to the Roman Catholic Church. There are, after all, some one and a half billion

Roman Catholics and just seventy four million Methodists. This clearly affects the relationship between the two communions at local level.

Colin Ride, Europe Secretary of the Methodist Church in Great Britain, has observed

It's a bit like the elephant and the mouse. The elephant doesn't always see the mouse, so the mouse gets trampled; even if it does see the mouse, it gets ignored because it's so small. On the other hand a few elephants notice the mouse and try not to tread on it as they realise it has a life of its own but because the elephant is so big it's hard for it to do things differently.

Less colourfully perhaps, the Seoul document notes that

While doctrine and theology are of major importance in the life of the churches, the religious experience of the faithful cannot be separated from their social setting. Majorities tend to restrict the freedom of minorities. When, in the past, Methodism was part of a Protestant majority or ascendancy, it tended to contribute to the marginalisation of Roman Catholics in society and to the imposition of measures against the free exercise of their faith. Likewise, where Roman Catholicism dominated, it tended to marginalise Protestants, including Methodists, to prevent them from full participation in society, and to limit the free practice of their faith and exercise of conscience⁴⁸.

There can be no question about this. To illustrate from Ireland, it was clearly the case that the majority influence on the legislative body has served in times past to block access for non-Catholics (ie. members of other Christian traditions and those of other faiths and none) to services such as contraception and divorce. Catholic ethos and practice in hospitals in the field of obstetrics left non-Catholic mothers feeling insecure about their treatment. And this perception – or reality – lingers in rumbling arguments about the ethos of the large teaching hospitals particularly in Dublin.

In Ireland, Methodists are a minority within a minority. All-too-often, ecumenical relations are perceived, at least by the media, as relations between Anglicans and Roman Catholics. The growing number of Orthodox Christians, members of 'new churches' and of African and other indigenous churches may serve as a corrective to this!

It is the case that majorities tend to know little about the minorities among them. A minister who formerly served in this city comments that

⁴⁴ OFFICIAL COMMON AFFIRMATION

In this Statement the World Methodist Council and its member churches affirm their fundamental doctrinal agreement with the teaching expressed in the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* signed at Augsburg on 31 October 1999 on behalf of the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church.

The signing partners of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* join together in welcoming the above Statement of the World Methodist Council and its member churches, which declares and demonstrates Methodist agreement with the consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification as expressed in the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*.

Building on their shared affirmation of basic truths of the doctrine of justification, the three parties commit themselves to strive together for the deepening of their common understanding of justification in theological study, teaching and preaching. The present achievement and commitment are viewed by Catholics, Lutherans and Methodists as part of their pursuit of the full communion and common witness to the world which is the will of Christ for all Christians.

⁴⁵ ..between the train and the platform, quite wide at some stations and on curved platforms!

⁴⁶ Seoul 142.

⁴⁷ I am grateful to contacts, mainly Methodist, from a number of countries who have taken time to share their experiences with me.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

Italian Catholicism is something of an enigma! The vicinity of the Vatican at the centre of the nation's capital means that, despite the effects of secularism, Catholicism continues to have a profound influence on the national conscience, political and social life. One would therefore expect recent developments within Catholicism to be felt in Italy before anywhere else.

He continues...

At a certain superficial level this can be seen in ecumenical relations. Shortly after the second Vatican Council, each Diocese nominated an Ecumenical Officer whose task was, and continues to be today to encourage contact between the Roman Catholic Diocese and other Churches, particularly Protestants and Orthodox....

And he comments that...

On the other hand, the understanding of Protestantism in general and of Methodism in particular in even the most ecumenically active Parishes is very limited and quite shallow. When asked to speak about Protestantism at Catholic Parishes I never ceased to be amazed by the ignorance I encountered, both from laity and clergy. We are frequently confused with Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses; many asked me whether we believed in Jesus, the Holy Spirit and whether we celebrated Christmas and Easter!

I can echo that from personal experience in Ireland.

Secondly, it should be recognized that the picture varies enormously, with all that that means of the need for stories to be shared and lessons to be learned.

An Austrian minister reports that

In many parishes ecumenical groups exist; pulpit exchange, ecumenical worship services are being held. So-called ecumenical marriages are not a problem any more. There are clear regulations and agreements. All this has become ecumenical normality. In Vienna and Graz days or weekends of theological studies are organised regularly once or twice a year. These events have helped people to understand the different theological and spiritual traditions of the different churches. They helped to establish an atmosphere of mutual respect and interest.

Speaking of co-operation in religious broadcasting, he observes that

This form of ecumenical cooperation has helped to

establish a kind of ecumenical fellowship and friendship across all confessional lines that still nourish all other ecumenical forms of living and working together.

But, in other places, there remains 'theological name-calling' of a nasty kind.

In parts of Latin America, where the Roman Catholic Church is in majority of about 85%, situations arise where "there is very little working together... with RC's labeling evangelicals as 'sects' and evangelicals calling the RC's 'papist' or 'heretics'".

Sadly, in spite a history of working together on social concerns in Brazil, internal dissension between 'liberals' and 'conservatives' in the Methodist Church has led to a call for the Methodist Church to withdraw from any body which includes the Roman Catholic Church. This, in turn, has been welcomed by an element within the Roman Catholic Church opposed to ecumenical dialogue.

A comment from Pakistan indicates that

there remains a very real antipathy between Protestants and Catholics with a lot of Protestants thinking that they are the true bible-believers and the Catholics thinking that Protestants are outside the kingdom.

But Methodists and Catholics are at one when there are social issues of one kind or another with which they need to engage together.

A theologian from Brazil comments that

After the 1960s, the Methodist Church championed ecumenism in Brazil and worked very closely with the Catholic Church. This was important after 1964 and during the 1970s, when both churches worked together in social projects and opposed the military dictatorship in Brazil by supporting liberation theology.

Similarly from Sri Lanka

What brings us together is social conditions and not any Biblical or Theological foundations. For example, there is regular contact and mutual consultation on issues related to the nation. This is very specifically manifest in the Northern and Eastern provinces where the impact of the ethnic conflict is acute.

from Pakistan

The United Church of Pakistan (of which the Methodists are a part), has a relationship of support and cooperation with the Roman Catholic Church in areas of advocacy, human rights and education....as

a minority church within an Islamic context much of relationship and work is harmonious for purposes of witness and identity.

However, a South African minister observes

My personal sense is that since 1994 ...relations have got weaker. Prior to 1994 there was a solidarity in the struggle against apartheid which went deep and found expression in resistance and protest. It is missing now.

Thirdly, this dialogue, in common with other dialogues, has a major problem with reception. Most Methodists and Catholics are quite simply not aware that it exists and therefore it has not informed their relationship in any way.

It would undoubtedly be helpful if there were more local/regional dialogues. There are very few. This can be attributed at least in part to disparity in numbers. “*We are too small to be considered as a reliable ecumenical partner for any dialogue in depth,*” says a Methodist bishop from Portugal.

Notable, however, are the dialogue committees in Great Britain, New Zealand and the United States. The dialogues in Great Britain and in the United States have reflected on the documents of the International Commission and have produced agreed statements of their own. In particular, the British Methodist/Roman Catholic Committee has produced a document on *Mary, Mother of the Lord – towards a shared understanding* – a theme with which the International Commission has not yet engaged⁴⁹. Of the dialogue in New Zealand, one member comments that

It has not been our inclination here to produce ‘agreed statements’. Rather we have examined major areas of difference, such as priesthood and ministry, eucharist and baptism. In the third phase ...there have been discussions on end-of-life issues and euthanasia, on the churches’ social witness and music in worship.

The President of the Methodist Church in Sri Lanka, Ebezener Joseph, makes the pertinent comment that

What is needed is for an official proclamation by Vatican and the World Methodist Council to make it mandatory for localised discussions on areas of agreements reached and for them to formulate the practical implications at the local level, if it is to further strengthen relationships and see practical, action-oriented consequences.

⁴⁹ M. EVANS, *Mary, Mother of the Lord, Sign of Grace, Faith and Holiness: Towards a Shared Understanding* (London: Methodist Publishing House/CTS Publications, 1995).

Following the signing of the document of association with the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, a Korean theologian emailed me observing that

... most of Korean Methodist bishops are apprehensive about the July ‘theological shock’ at the World Methodist Conference..... The anxiety of Korean bishops is mainly caused by their lack of understanding in the matter of the ecumenical dialogue.

The Korean Methodist bishops are not alone in this matter, I suspect!

Conclusion

In welcoming his Excellency Philip McDonagh, to the Holy See, Pope John Paul drew attention to the significance of the ecumenical task

The message of the Gospel cannot be separated from the call to a change of heart; neither can evangelization be isolated from ecumenism and the promotion of fellowship, reconciliation and openness to others, especially to other Christians. May the initiatives of all those who seek peace and reconciliation be blessed by God’s grace and bear fruit for the children of tomorrow⁵⁰.

The task is far from completed, even after forty years. The theological dialogue has come a long and encouraging way; Methodists and Roman Catholics are working, praying, witnessing together in a way that would not have seemed possible even fifty years ago. To return to the image of the milking stool, it isn’t as steady as it might be, but it is a good deal less wobbly than it was! We should not be discouraged, we are in a very different place to where we were before we started – and it is a better place. It is a matter of keeping on keeping on, as my mother would say. Welcoming his Excellency, Francis Campbell, to the Holy See, Pope Benedict made precisely this point

I encourage all those involved in this work never to rest content with partial solutions but to keep firmly in view the goal of full visible unity among Christians which accords with the Lord’s will for his Church⁵¹.

John Wesley concluded his *Letter to a Roman Catholic* with words which have something for every stage of relationship between the two communions...

In the name, then, and in the strength of God, let us

⁵⁰ September 5th, 2004, *L’Osservatore Romano*, English ed., 37, 1860 (15 September 2001) 8.

⁵¹ December 23rd, 2005, *L’Osservatore Romano*, English ed., 2, 1926 (11 January 2006) 8.

resolve, first, not to hurt one another; to do nothing unkind or unfriendly to each other; nothing which we would not have done to ourselves. Rather let us endeavor after every instance of a kind, friendly, and Christian behavior towards each other.

Let us resolve, secondly, God being our helper, to speak nothing harsh or unkind of each other. The sure way to avoid this is to say all the good we can both of and to one another; in all our conversation, either with or concerning each other, to use only the language of love, to speak with all softness and tenderness, with the most endearing expression which is consistent with truth and sincerity.

Let us, thirdly, resolve to harbor no unkind thought, no unfriendly temper towards each other. Let us lay the axe to the root of the tree; let us examine all that rises in our heart, and suffer no disposition there which is contrary to tender affection. Then shall we easily refrain from unkind actions and word, when the very root of bitterness is cut up.

*Let us, fourthly, endeavor to help each other on in whatever we are agreed leads to the Kingdom. So far as we can, **let us always rejoice to strengthen each other's hands in God***⁵².

Charles Wesley, younger brother of John, catches the sentiment perhaps more poetically

*Christ, from whom all blessings flow,
Perfecting the saints below,
Hear us, who Thy nature share,
Who thy mystic body are.
Never from Thy service move,
Needful to each other prove;
Use the grace on each bestowed,
Tempered by the art of God.
Love, like death, has all destroyed,
Rendered all distinctions void;
Names and sects and parties fall;
Thou, O Christ, art all in all!*⁵³

⁵² J. WESLEY, "Letter to a Roman Catholic..." *op. cit.*, §17

⁵³ BRITISH METHODIST CONFERENCE, BAPTIST UNION, CHURCHES OF CHRIST, CHURCH OF ENGLAND, CONGREGATIONAL FEDERATION, METHODIST CHURCH IN IRELAND, UNITED REFORMED CHURCH, and WESLEYAN REFORM UNION, (eds.), *Hymns and Psalms: A Methodist and Ecumenical Hymn Book* (London: Methodist Publishing House, 1983) 764.

A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF INTERCHURCH AND INTERCONFESSIONAL THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUES

Twenty-second Supplement - 2007

ABBREVIATIONS FOR CONFESSIONAL FAMILIES CHURCHES AND COUNCILS

A Anglican	M Methodist
AC Assyrian Church of the East	MECC Middle East Council of Churches
AIC African Instituted Churches	Mn Mennonite
B Baptist	Mo Moravian
CC Chaldean Catholic Church	O Eastern Orthodox (<i>Byzantine</i>)
CEC Conference of European Churches	OC Old Catholic (<i>includes Polish National</i>)
CCEE . Council of European Episcopal Conferences	OO Oriental Orthodox (<i>Non-Chalcedonian</i>)
CP Constantinople Patriarchate	Pe Pentecostal
CPCE Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (formerly <i>Leuenberg Church Fellowship</i>)	R Reformed
D Disciples of Christ	RC Roman Catholic
DOMBES Groupe des Dombes	SA Salvation Army
E Evangelicals	SDA Seventh-Day Adventist
FC Free Churches	U United Churches
FO Faith and Order	W Waldensian
L Lutheran (<i>includes German 'Evangelische'</i>)	WCC World Council of Churches

LIST OF DIALOGUES

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|---|--|
| <p>A-B: Anglican-Baptist International Forum</p> <p>A-D / aus: Anglican Church of Australia-Churches of Christ Conversations</p> <p>A-L: Anglican-Lutheran International Commission</p> <p>A-L / africa: All Africa Anglican-Lutheran Commission</p> <p>A-L / aus: Anglican-Lutheran Conversations in Australia</p> <p>A-L / can: Canadian Lutheran Anglican Dialogue</p> <p>A-L / eng-g: Representatives of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) and of the Church of England</p> <p>A-L / eng-nordic regions: Representatives of the Nordic countries and of the Church of England</p> <p>A-L / eur: Anglican-Lutheran European Regional Commission</p> <p>A-L / usa: Episcopal-Lutheran Dialogue in the USA</p> <p>A-L-R / eng-f: Official Dialogue between the Church of England and the Lutheran-Reformed Permanent Council in France</p> <p>A-M: Anglican-Methodist International Commission</p> <p>A-M / eng: Anglican-Methodist Conversation in Great Britain</p> <p>A-Mo: Anglican-Moravian Conversations</p> <p>A-Mo / usa: Moravian-Episcopal Dialogue in the USA</p> <p>A-O: Anglican-Orthodox Joint Doctrinal Commission</p> <p>A-O / usa: Anglican-Orthodox Theological Consultation in the USA</p> <p>A-OC: Anglican-Old Catholic Theological Conversations</p> <p>A-OC / na: Anglican-Old Catholic North American Working Group</p> | <p>A-OO: Anglican-Oriental Orthodox Dialogue</p> <p>A-OO / copt: Anglican-Coptic Relations</p> <p>A-R: Anglican-Reformed International Commission</p> <p>A-RC: Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC)</p> <p>A-RC: International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission (IARCCUM)</p> <p>A-RC / aus: Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission of Australia</p> <p>A-RC / b: Belgian Anglican-Roman Catholic Committee</p> <p>A-RC / br: Brazilian Anglican-Roman Catholic National Commission</p> <p>A-RC / can: Canadian Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue Commission</p> <p>A-RC / eng: English Anglican-Roman Catholic Committee</p> <p>A-RC / eur: Anglican-Roman Catholic Working Group in Western Europe</p> <p>A-RC / f: Anglican-Catholic Joint Working Group in France</p> <p>A-RC / usa: Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue in the USA</p> <p>A-U / aus: Conversations between the Anglican Church of Australia and the Uniting Church in Australia</p> <p>AC-CC: Joint Commission for Unity between the Assyrian Church of the East and the Chaldean Catholic Church</p> <p>AC-OO / copt: Theological Dialogue between the Assyrian Church of the East and the Coptic Orthodox Church</p> <p>AC-OO / syr: Bilateral Commission between the Assyrian Church of the East and the Syrian Orthodox Church</p> |
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AC-RC: Mixed Committee for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East

AIC-R: Dialogue between the African Instituted Churches and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches

B-CPCE / eur: Dialogue between the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe and the European Baptist Federation

B-L: Baptist-Lutheran Dialogue

B-L / g: Baptist-Lutheran Dialogue in Germany

B-L / n: Baptist-Lutheran Dialogue in Norway

B-L / sf: Baptist-Lutheran Conversation in Finland

B-L / usa: Baptist-Lutheran Dialogue in the USA

B-M-W / italy: Baptist-Methodist-Waldensian Relations in Italy

B-Mn: Baptist-Mennonite Theological Conversations

B-O: Baptist-Orthodox Preparatory Dialogue

B-R: Baptist-Reformed Dialogue

B-RC: Baptist-Roman Catholic International Conversations

B-RC / f: Baptist-Catholic Joint Committee in France

B-RC / usa (ab): American Baptist-Roman Catholic Dialogue

B-RC / usa (sb): Southern Baptist-Roman Catholic Dialogue

CEC-CCEE: Joint Committee of Conference of European Churches and Council of European Episcopal Conferences

D-L / usa: Disciples of Christ-Lutheran Dialogue in the USA

D-O / rus: Disciples of Christ-Russian Orthodox Dialogue

D-R: Disciples of Christ-Reformed Dialogue

D-RC: Disciples of Christ-Roman Catholic International Commission for Dialogue

D-U / aus: Conversations between the Churches of Christ in Australia and the Uniting Church in Australia

D-U / usa: Disciples of Christ-United Church of Christ Dialogue in the USA

DOMBES: Dialogues des Dombes

E-RC: Evangelical-Roman Catholic Dialogue on Mission

E-SDA: Theological Dialogue between the World Evangelical Alliance and the Seventh-Day Adventist Church

FC-O / g: Free Churches-Orthodox Dialogue in Germany

FO: Faith and Order conferences, consultations, studies

L-M: International Lutheran-Methodist Joint Commission

L-M / n: Conversation between the Church of Norway and the United Methodist Church in Norway

L-M / s: Dialogue between the United Methodist Church in Sweden and Church of Sweden

L-M / sf: Lutheran-Methodist Dialogue in Finland

L-M / usa: US Lutheran-United Methodist Dialogue

L-Mn / f: Lutheran-Mennonite Dialogue in France

L-Mn / g: Theological Dialogue between the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany (VELKD) and the Association of Mennonite Assemblies in Germany (AMG)

L-Mn / usa: Lutheran-Mennonite Dialogue in the USA

L-Mo / usa: Lutheran-Moravian Dialogue in the USA

L-O: Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission

L-O / g-cp: Theological Dialogue between the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) and the Ecumenical Patriarchate

L-O / g-rom: Theological Dialogue between the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) and the Romanian Orthodox Church

L-O / g-rus: Theological Dialogue between the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) and the Russian Orthodox Church

L-O / sf: Theological Discussions between the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the Finnish Orthodox Church

L-O / sf-rus: Theological Discussions between the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the Russian Orthodox Church

L-O / usa: Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue in the USA

L-O-R / f: Dialogue between Representatives of the Inter-Orthodox Bishops' Committee in France and the Protestant Federation of France

L-O-R / na: Lutheran-Orthodox-Reformed Theological Conversations in North America

L-OC / g: Dialogue between the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany (VELKD) and the Old Catholic Church in Germany

L-OO / copt: Theological Dialogue between the Coptic Evangelical Church and the Coptic Orthodox Church

L-OO / copt-s: Coptic Orthodox-Lutheran Dialogue in Sweden

L-OO / india: Dialogue between the Orthodox Syrian Church of the East and the Lutheran Churches in India

L-Pe / sf: Lutheran-Pentecostal Dialogue in Finland

L-Pe-R / f: Pentecostal-Protestant Dialogue in France

L-R: Lutheran-Reformed Joint Commission

L-R / arg: Dialogue between the Evangelical Church of the Rio de la Plata and the Evangelical Congregational Church of Argentina

L-R / aus: Dialogue between the Lutheran Church of Australia and the Reformed Churches of Australia

L-R / can: Canadian Lutheran-Reformed Conversations

L-R / f: Fédération Protestante de France

L-R / usa: Lutheran-Reformed Committee for Theological Conversations in the USA

L-R-RC: Lutheran-Reformed-Roman Catholic Dialogue

L-R-RC / f: Catholic-Protestant Joint Working Group in France

L-R-SDA / f: Protestant-Seventh-day Adventist Dialogue in France

L-R-U / eur: Leuenberg Church Fellowship

L-RC: Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity

L-RC / arg: Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue Commission in Argentina

L-RC / aus: Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue in Australia

L-RC / br: National Roman Catholic-Lutheran Commission in Brazil

L-RC / can: Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue in Canada

L-RC / g: Joint Commission of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) and the German Episcopal Conference (DB)

L-RC / india: Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue in India

L-RC / jap: Lutheran-Roman Catholic Joint Commission in Japan

L-RC / n: Lutheran-Roman Catholic Discussion Group in Norway

L-RC / s: Official Working Group of Dialogue between the Church of Sweden and the Catholic Diocese of Stockholm

L-RC / sf: Lutheran-Roman Catholic Relations in Finland

L-RC / usa: Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue in the USA

L-SDA: Lutheran-Seventh-Day Adventist Consultations

L-U / aus: Theological Dialogue between the Lutheran Church of Australia and the Uniting Church in Australia

M-O: Methodist-Orthodox Commission

M-R: Methodist-Reformed Dialogue

M-RC: Joint Commission between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council

M-RC / eng: English Roman Catholic-Methodist Committee

M-RC / usa: Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the United Methodist Church in the USA

M-SA: Methodists and Salvation Army in Dialogue

Mn-R: Mennonite World Conference and World Alliance of Reformed Churches

Mn-RC: Mennonite-Catholic International Dialogue

O-OC: Joint (Mixed) Orthodox-Old Catholic Theological Commission

O-OO: Joint Commission of the Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches

O-OO / rus: Theological Dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches

O-R: Orthodox-Reformed International Dialogue

O-R / ch: Protestant-Orthodox Dialogue Commission in Switzerland

O-R / na: Orthodox-Reformed Conversations in North America

O-R / rus: Dialogue between the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Russian Orthodox Church

O-RC: Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church

O-RC / ch: Orthodox-Roman Catholic Dialogue in Switzerland

O-RC / f: Joint Catholic-Orthodox Committee in France
O-RC / g: Greek Orthodox-Roman Catholic Joint Commission in Germany
O-RC / rom: Joint Commission for Dialogue between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Romanian Church United with Rome (Greek-Catholic)
O-RC / rus: Theological Conversations between Representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church
O-RC/rus-g: Theological Dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and the German Episcopal Conference
O-RC / usa: North American Catholic-Orthodox Theological Consultation
O-U / aus: Theological Dialogue between the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia and the Uniting Church in Australia
OC-R-RC / ch: Old Catholic-Reformed-Roman Catholic Dialogue in Switzerland
OC-RC: Old Catholic-Roman Catholic Conversations
OC-RC / ch: Dialogue Commission of the Old Catholic and the Roman Catholic Churches in Switzerland
OC-RC / g: Dialogue between the Old Catholic Church and the Roman Catholic Church in Germany
OC-RC / na: Joint Commission of the Polish National Catholic Church and the National Conference of Catholic Bishops
OC-RC / nl: Old Catholic-Roman Catholic Study Commission in the Netherlands
OC-RC / pol: Joint Commission of the Polish Catholic Church and the Roman Catholic Church in Poland
OO-R: Oriental Orthodox-Reformed Theological Dialogue
OO-RC: International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches.
OO-RC / armenia: Armenian Apostolic Church-Catholic Church Joint Commission
OO-RC / copt: International Joint Commission between the Catholic Church and the Coptic Orthodox Church
OO-RC / eritrea: Eritrean Orthodox Church and Catholic Church Relations
OO-RC / ethiop: Ethiopian Orthodox Church and Catholic Church Relations

OO-RC / india: Joint International Commission for Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church
OO-RC / syr-india: Joint International Commission for Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church
OO-RC / usa: Official Oriental Orthodox-Roman Catholic Consultation
Pe-R: Pentecostal-Reformed Dialogue
Pe-RC: Pentecostal-Roman Catholic International Dialogue
R-RC: Reformed-Roman Catholic Joint Study Commission
R-RC / a: Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Presbyterian Reformed Church in Austria
R-RC / b: Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Presbyterian Reformed Church in Belgium
R-RC / ch: Protestant/Roman Catholic Dialogue Commission in Switzerland
R-RC / nl: Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Reformed Church in the Netherlands
R-RC / scot: Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Scotland
R-RC / usa: Roman Catholic-Presbyterian Reformed Consultation in the USA
R-SDA: International Theological Dialogue between the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches
RC-SDA: Conversations between the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the Roman Catholic Church
RC-U / aus: Working Group of the Roman Catholic Church and the Uniting Church in Australia
RC-U / can: Roman Catholic-United Church Dialogue Group in Canada
RC-W / italy: Roman Catholic-Waldensian Relations in Italy
RC-WCC: Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches
SA-SDA: Theological Dialogue between the Salvation Army and the Seventh-day Adventist Church
WCC: World Council of Churches - assemblies, convocations, relations

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