



# Holiness and unity: praise, meekness and love in ecumenical dialogue

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*The report of the tenth session of the Methodist–Roman Catholic International Commission makes the point that there is an inextricable link between the holiness of God, the holiness that God demands of his people and the call of Christians to unity. While this thesis could be defended and explored using the theological riches of other major Christian traditions, in this article it will be unpacked and developed using primarily Roman Catholic and Wesleyan/Methodist theological sources. Christian unity is located both in the holiness of God, as triune, and in the universal hope of God's purposes. Past schisms are being addressed by the ecumenical movement today, with the most important concern being that of reception in a spirit of generosity and humility.*

ECUMENICAL RECEPTIVITY • UNITY • HOLINESS • METHODIST–ROMAN CATHOLIC DIALOGUE

## The call to holiness

The call to holiness is also a call to unity in the Church ... Holiness and Christian unity belong together as twin aspects of the same relationship with the Trinity such that the pursuit of either involves the pursuit of the other.<sup>1</sup>

It is the conviction of the Judaeo-Christian tradition as a whole that the holy God, whose mercy is over all his works and who is eternally faithful to his covenant promises, calls human beings into a relationship with himself in and through which they work with him as stewards of his creation and towards the fulfilment of his redemptive purposes.<sup>2</sup> Human beings are created in the image of God, that is, with the capacity to relate to him. They are called to reflect his nature in all their doings with him, with each other and with the rest of the created order. Christ, the eternal Son of God, perfect alike in both divinity and in the human nature that he takes on in his incarnation, teaches this: 'You shall be all goodness as your heavenly Father is all goodness.'<sup>3</sup> By God's grace – creative, redeeming and sanctifying – they are to be holy, with a holiness deriving from and dependent upon his eternally faithful holiness.

The Eastern Christian tradition interprets the two metaphors in Genesis 1:26, 'image and likeness', by associating 'image' with the potential for holy love with which human beings are created and 'likeness' with the goal of that potential, reached in the saints, which is described as a sharing in the mind of Christ. Within the Wesleyan tradition this goal is the 'spirit of finished holiness' in which life is to be, as Charles Wesley sings, 'all praise, all meekness and all love' – the praise being praise of God in his holiness, displayed also in all his saints, the meekness being humility before God and others, and the love being the catholic spirit, doing good to all people, but especially to those that are of the household of faith (as commended by St Paul).<sup>4</sup>

Governing and controlling everything is the knowledge and worship of the one true God, involving hearty assent and diligent devotion to his holy will, which is for the beneficent development of all that he has made in preparation for its consummation in the glory of the new creation as described in the last two chapters of the book of Revelation.

I propose now to look at the link between holiness and Christian unity from three angles, that of the holiness of God, that of the holiness of his plan for human salvation and that of the implications of both for Christian discipleship, corporate and personal.

## The holiness of God and Christian unity

From the earliest of times, primitive human beings seem to have had some awareness of the numinous and of a transcendent dimension to their experience of the world as something which they could not define, but before which they were in awe and sometimes even terror. There was a sense that this numinous other was qualitatively different from anything else in their experience, that it had to be acknowledged and in some sense placated. Human beings began early to bury their dead, and cave paintings show signs that seem to point to primitive forms of worship. Every human tribe, even those few still at a Stone Age level of culture, appears to have had some form of religious belief and worship, however much it may be mixed up with what would now be regarded as superstition and error.

How we account for and explain this development remains a moot question. Perhaps, the emphasis within both the Catholic and Wesleyan traditions on prevenient grace, of the grace of God acting upon us from before we can become aware of it, let alone of its precise significance and implications, is here relevant since, if we accept that we developed as a species particularly made in the image of God, then some divine preparation for development must have been involved even though its exact nature and progress cannot be precisely established. It seems to have been the view of several of the early fathers of the Church that the primitive religions of their time contained seeds of the truth later fully revealed in Christ, however imperfectly they were apprehended.

Certainly, the sense of awe which characterises much early religion remains important within the later development of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. People became aware of a transcendent and eternal Other that they could not fully understand, yet that demanded homage, worship and obedience. A sense of awe in the presence of One who can never be fully encompassed by human understanding remains part of the later Judaeo-Christian tradition. It is witnessed to by the prophets, such as Isaiah and Hosea, and is implicit in the Mosaic prohibition on graven images (the Other can never be adequately represented by such). It is continued particularly in the Eastern Christian tradition with its stress upon apophatic theology and the un-knowability of God outside of those aspects of his nature that he has seen fit to reveal to us.

As far as the full implications of the revelation of the holy will of God and of his nature as holy love are concerned, these begin, in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, with the call of Abraham and, for Christians, reach their consummation in

the paschal events and the subsequent coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, completing the process of the revelation of the triune God in all his self-giving glory.

In the call of Abraham, God confronts an individual with his universally salvific will and calls for a specific response, integral to his plan for his creation. He calls on Abraham to migrate to a new land where he will become the father of a race that will play a particular role in the salvation of the world, 'in you will all the nations of the world be blessed'.<sup>5</sup>

Abraham is called to holiness: 'Walk before me and be blameless'.<sup>6</sup> It is from this point that the ethical consequences of holiness for human behaviour begin to be revealed to Abraham and his descendants. Israel is to be a holy nation, set aside for and devoted to God's purposes. The understanding of this is deepened through the subsequent experience of its liberation from slavery in Egypt. It is there that the link between holiness and justice begins to be appreciated. God is experienced as a liberating and merciful God. He hears the cry of his specially adopted nation in their woes and exerts his power on their behalf. However, this is complemented by the giving of a law that affects the relationship of the chosen people with outsiders and indeed the rest of creation. Thus, they are told that the holy day of rest is sacred not only to them, but to others. The stranger within the gate, the slave, even the farm animals must share in the Sabbath rest. The God who has given Israel liberating justice wills that justice be shown to others. The God who lays down for their benefit a system of sacrificial worship by which his people may honour him, wills also that they worship and honour him through the pursuit of justice in all their relationships. It is also increasingly indicated that true spiritual worship involves more than the repetition of cultic acts. It involves the giving of thanks and the expression of reliance, in every need, upon God. As the author of Psalm 50 presents God as saying: 'Do you think that I eat the flesh of bulls and drink their blood? Offer unto God thanksgiving and call upon me in the time of trouble.'

The holiness of their liberating God reflects the even greater truth that 'his mercy is over all his works'.<sup>7</sup>

The ethical demands of holiness reach their highest level of development before Christ in the teaching of the prophets. They recognise not just the demands of the holy God upon his people, but also the incredible depth of his merciful commitment to his people. They speak of the disasters that were to overcome their people with the Assyrian and Babylonian conquests as just punishment for Israel's disobedience to the divine covenant and call to

corporate holiness of life, but they also speak of God's forgiving and restoring love, a love that is even more awesome than the demonstrations of divine wrath. Hosea, in particular, develops the theme of the divine love that will not be faithless to the covenant, even despite its constant breaches by a faithless people.<sup>8</sup> God teaches Hosea that he is God and not human, that his punishment of his people is not to be confused with human revenge and that it is precisely because he is God and not man that his heart recoils within him and he repents of his fierce anger. The extraordinary generosity of God is revealed also by Jeremiah and by Joel. Both look forward to the Pentecostal gift, Jeremiah in terms of the new covenant which will be written on the hearts of the people and Joel specifically in the pouring out of the Spirit on all flesh.<sup>9</sup>

Though God remains unknowable, he nevertheless expresses sentiments analogous to those of human pity for others. His heart recoils within him at the thought of cutting off his disobedient but chosen people. Hosea relates God's comparison of his compassion with that of a father for his toddler son and Isaiah speaks of the walls of Jerusalem as engraved on God's hands, for Christians a striking anticipation of the cross, as expressed in Charles Wesley's line, 'Jehovah crucified'.

Several of the prophets, and Isaiah in particular, present visions of the final coming of God's kingdom, of the enormous feast that will take place at the end of time as the nations of the world gather together at Mount Zion and receive the law of God, the law of harmony and peace by which all nature will live.<sup>10</sup> To them is granted the knowledge of God's redemptive purposes, which will be achieved across the whole of creation to the very point where the lion and the lamb lie down together. The holiness of God is no longer perceived simply in the awesomeness of creation or even in terms of his salvific work among his specially chosen people, but in terms of a holistic plan for the whole created order. What is not vouchsafed to the prophets is the way in which these promises are to be fulfilled; there is left in them that spirit of longing summed up in Isaiah's plea, 'O that you would rend the heavens and come down,'<sup>11</sup> a prayer that, for Christians, is answered in the Incarnation.

It is important to note the spirit within which this developing revelation is received by the prophets and the other true Israelites who loyally act according to the requirements of God's covenant with them. It is a spirit in which both the deepest humility and the most trusting love are united and balanced. They are amazed at God's regard and love for them. The Psalmist sings in wonder at the human vocation: 'What are human beings that you are mindful of them,

mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honour.<sup>12</sup> They recognise that it is their duty to 'walk humbly with their God', being guided in everything by him. It is their duty to follow God in loving mercy and acting justly. Elsewhere, the Psalmists celebrate the comprehensive benevolence of God in providing for all the physical and spiritual needs of human beings and in asserting his universal benevolence.

It is, however, only in Christ that the full extent of the self-giving love of the triune God is revealed alongside the revelation of his eternal nature as triune communion, utterly sufficient within that communion, yet also reaching out in compassionate love to his creation and most fully to sinful and wayward human creatures, made in his own image. God remains awesomely transcendent, yet reveals a human face in the incarnate Christ, who responds to the prayer of Isaiah in revealing himself as the one who is both the Father's pleasure and is also well pleased to meet human beings where they are in the midst of their distortion, both personal and corporate, as a result of sin.<sup>13</sup> The Father reveals through his beloved eternal Son his holy will to be eternally reconciled with all human beings to the full extent of adopting them into a relationship of grace that corresponds with the relationship that the Son has by nature with him from all eternity.<sup>14</sup> He does not hold back from 'sparing his only Son', but rather truly participates in human nature and exposes himself to all the frailties of human flesh, precisely as a sign that he will also 'give us all things with him.'<sup>15</sup>

It is in the paschal events that both the awesome grandeur of God's holy love and his utter loving patience with human beings are revealed. His holy love and its power are revealed in both cross and resurrection, with full power to redeem and to sanctify. Charles Wesley sums up the full effect of the paschal mystery on sinners in these lines:

Vouchsafe us eyes of faith to see  
The man transfixed on Calvary,  
To know thee, who thou art,  
The one eternal God and true:  
And let the sight affect, subdue,  
And break my stubborn heart.<sup>16</sup>

The nature of the triune God is revealed in these events: the Son responding to the Father's will, the Spirit enabling Christ's offering on the cross, the Father raising the Son to glory in the power of the Spirit.<sup>17</sup> A new dimension is added

to the previous understanding of the holy God, now seen as the God whose own internal communion reveals the nature of the communion that he both demands and makes possible for all humankind, in which its myriad of hypostases are called, in virtue of their nature as created in his image, to become one communion with each other in him. The pattern for this is revealed at Easter, when the Father raises the Son in the power of the Spirit; the power to enable its realisation is given at Pentecost.

## God's redemptive plan and the unity of the Church

God's plan for universal redemption and new creation is foreshadowed in the Hebrew Scriptures, particularly in the promise of universal blessing made to Abraham and in the prophetic visions of the gathering of the nations referred to above. However, at the beginning of his epistle to the Ephesians, Paul states that the fullness of God's plan was revealed only in Christ – a plan to unite all things in him, which can be seen both as a restoration of all things to the unity originally intended by God, which had been sundered by human sin, and, also, as a new and glorious transformation, transcending even the glory of the first creation.<sup>18</sup>

According to the gospel that Paul proclaimed, Christ, through his victory on the cross, has transcended the age-old division between the chosen Jewish people and the Gentiles. God now calls both to unity in the one undivided Christ, a unity that it is the duty of the Church to proclaim and to embody in its fellowship of mutual love and service.

The Church continues the work of Christ in all aspects save only that of offering his perfect and all-atoning sacrifice, a sacrifice that only he, in his sinless nature, human and divine, could offer.<sup>19</sup> In the New Testament, the Church is called both the Body of Christ – the agent of the continued action of the risen and ascended Lord among those whom he has gathered to himself – and the Bride of Christ, the latter title indicating particularly the close relationship in holiness to which the followers of Christ are called corporately and in which they are promised the ultimate gift of corporate holiness without spot or wrinkle. The members of the apostolic churches are addressed by Paul as saints, the word carrying not the later canonical implications but the original understanding of the term as those who are called and set aside for the specific service of the holy God, equipped with all the means of grace commended to the Church and all the special charisms given to particular individuals for the building up of the whole Body.

The Church is called to be holy, that holiness being not just that of its individual members but of the entire body in all its interrelationships. God's saving intention is not limited to the salvation of particular individuals out of the world but encompasses the vision of the whole of humanity, in all its relationships, being brought into the realm of the new creation. That is why, as George Tavad puts it, the Church is called progressively to image the kingdom even though, of course, it is only God who can bring it in, in its final fullness.<sup>20</sup>

Human beings are inescapably social beings, thus all have been affected in varying ways by the sinful nature of the world into which they have entered, but all are also called to be saved from within that weakened human nature into a nature that will ultimately reflect the glory of God in Christ, as promised in 1 John 3:2. Just as all are affected by the solidarity of the human race in sin, so all in Christ are called to co-operate in the growth in holiness of life of others within the Christian community. They are called to 'together travel on' and 'kindly help each other on'.<sup>21</sup> The holiness of the Church must involve not simply the sanctification of its members as individuals, but the sanctification of all their relationships, whether they be those at the most local level of small fellowship group or congregation, those between ordained and lay members, those between churches living according to different styles of church life that are nevertheless consonant with the one apostolic tradition.

The processes of sanctification, individual and corporate, can be slow, but they are guided by the presence of the Holy Spirit at every level, from that of the individual disciple, living out his or her vocation in the situation in which they find themselves, through to the life of the gathered congregation and local church, through to that of the universal Church. The Church is holy Church and without its holiness it cannot be catholic and apostolic and certainly not one (a point to be developed in the next section).

Entry into the Church involves entry through baptism into the paschal mystery of dying to self, rising to Christ and receiving the Holy Spirit.<sup>22</sup> All such are the adopted children of God, sharing with Christ in his worship of the Father, alike in prayer, in sacramental celebration and in the sacrificial offering of all that they have and are to him. Within this process, it is necessary to grow. In Romans 8, Paul paradoxically refers to Christians both as already adopted and yet not fully of their final stature and glory as God's children. He talks of the way in which the whole creation groans as it awaits the revelation of the sons of God, a time that will come when the whole Body, as a result of its incessant meditation upon all the words of God and its faithful use of all



the means of grace, finally discovers that all the promises of God have been fulfilled in it.<sup>23</sup>

The Church is called to grow in that communion and unity that is God's will for it, in fulfilment of Christ's prayer that they may all be one, as the Father and the Son are one. The Church is called to reflect the life-in-communion of the Trinity, a life of faithful trust and confidence between all its members and all its ministers in which each affirms and upholds the particular gifts and calling of the others. It is called to enable the light of Christ to shine through each and every member and local congregation, so that the promise contained in Psalm 34, that the members of the people of God shall 'look to him and be radiant', can be fulfilled. It is called to affirm and respect all differences that contribute to the rich diversity-in-communion of the whole. The unity to which the Church is called is a unity in legitimate and enriching diversity in which, as Adam Mohler teaches, true individuality is not suppressed but makes its disciplined contribution to the whole.<sup>24</sup>

In the search for this, each and every Christian is aided by the indwelling Spirit of God. The Spirit enables alike the discernment of God's will and gifts in fulfilling that will that he bestows. Each congregation is enabled corporately to make that discernment according to the edification it needs for the work of mutual edification, and outward mission and service.

For most Christians, the unity of the Church is lived primarily within the local congregation. It is, as Charles Wesley sings in his celebration of the unity of the early Methodist societies, the unity of those who, being 'touched by the lodestone of thy love', 'ever towards each other move (in love), and ever move towards thee'.<sup>25</sup> It is the unity of those who, having the blessed end of perfect love in view, 'join with mutual care' and 'kindly help each other on, till all receive the starry crown'. It is the unity that results from the patiently loyal exercise of all those virtues towards which Christians are called as a result of their being raised with Christ. As Paul puts it in Colossians, they are called to 'seek the things that are above', thereby practising, 'as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness and patience, forbearing one another, and ... forgiving one another'.<sup>26</sup>

The responsibility for living in that way extends also beyond the local church or congregation. It lies behind Paul's famous injunction, 'Do good to all people, but especially towards those that are of the household of faith'.<sup>27</sup> Christians must pay attention to the *sensus fidelium*, that sense of what is Christianly appropriate in their relationships with others both within the church

community and beyond it. They must remember that they are called to live a life of fellowship with each other that points towards God's kingdom and helps people outside to see the Church as the God-given beacon of hope and true community living in a world in need of such a model. They must also, of course, seek to recognise the signs of kingdom values and living in others who do not profess Christ, but nevertheless profess and live by values that are consonant with those of the Christian faith and to which those of other faiths, indeed even some of no faith in a religious sense, may be moved by the prevenient grace of the Holy Spirit operative in their ideals and their practical expression of them.

Such grace, the Methodist–Roman Catholic International Commission stresses, is always related to fulfilment within the Church.<sup>28</sup> As 'sign, instrument and first fruits of the Kingdom', the life of the Church is meant to point towards that life of true community and communion that God wills for all people. Its unity is demanded by God's gracious saving plan for his creation and particularly for his human creation as called to be a kingdom of priests for all creation.

The unity of the Church is thus an integral part of the holy and eternal will of God. It is at the heart of the eternally unalterable counsel of God.<sup>29</sup> Through the Son and the Spirit, all the necessary means of grace have been given to the Church and all the charisms continue to be bestowed upon particular persons, specially called communities and local churches as deemed necessary in God's wisdom. To this unfailing generosity of God, the Church, in and through all its members and ministers, must offer a united response since the grace given is always responsible grace, the grace of a faithful God who empowers us to give and requires of us a faithful response.

The unity of the Church is thus focused in Christ, who is not to be divided but to be the source of human unity, a unity expressed in 'his last and kindest word', establishing the Eucharist as the proclamation and celebration of the saving events, celebrated within each local church but always in communion with each other local church and with the Church above. To fail to maintain unity in the one mutually recognisable Eucharist is to contradict the prayer of Christ and the holy will of God.

## Implications for the life of the churches today

The search for unity is, sometimes, sadly seen as a sort of add-on for a few enthusiasts who place special emphasis upon it. However, it is an integral part of Christian daily discipleship, a duty incumbent on all Christians and all churches. This is the clear teaching of both Roman Catholics and Methodists. The Decree on Ecumenism of the Second Vatican Council states it clearly: 'Concern for unity pertains to the whole Church, faithful and clergy alike! It stresses the importance of the basic Christian virtues of common life: 'We should therefore pray to the divine Spirit for the grace to be genuinely self-denying, humble, gentle in the service of others and to have an attitude of generosity towards them.' The Methodist Conference of 1820 called on the Methodist people to 'ever maintain the kind and catholic spirit of primitive Methodism towards all denominations of Christians holding the Head'.

A key rediscovery in both communions has been the understanding that the assertion of their own catholicity does not thereby deny that of others and that it is the duty of all churches to recognise wherein their catholicity may be wounded by separation from others, a point clearly made in the Decree on Ecumenism, and wherein it is their duty to learn from them as a result of that embellishment of the *koinonia* that has occurred across the ages through God's ever generous inspiration. To generously and graciously affirm these points in no way means disloyalty to the claim of the Methodist people to have been raised up by God to spread scriptural holiness throughout the land, nor to the Roman Catholic claim to have preserved the petrine ministry as vital to the communion and well-being of the universal Church.

Humility, generosity of spirit and praise of the work of God among other churches are at the root of Catholic and Methodist approaches to ecumenism, rightly understood. They depend on a spirituality that stresses that relationships are based on 'all meekness, love and praise'. Fr Hocken, in his book *The Glory and the Shame: Reflections on the Twentieth-Century Outpouring of the Holy Spirit*,<sup>30</sup> stresses the importance of recognising the work of God across the spectrum of the denominations and movements. The contribution of each to the whole must be discerned and received. This was the teaching alike of the Wesleyan ecumenical pioneer William Shrewsbury and the Roman Catholic pioneer Abbé Paul Couturier.<sup>31</sup> Shrewsbury remarked that the Wesleyans of his day were the 'debtors to all the churches' – to the Puritans, to the Anglican fathers, to the Pietists of the Continent. Couturier never ceased to insist that in certain respects other Christians had developed parts of the tradition more

thoroughly than had the Roman Catholics of his time. Thus, he extolled the sense of the cosmic dimension of salvation so strong among the Orthodox and the Protestant devotion to the detailed study of and reflection on Scripture.

*Reception*, by the entire people of God, is essential to any lasting ecumenical progress. It is never enough for theologians alone to reach accords, a point which was sadly shown in the failure of the reunion accords of 1273 and 1438–39, when the people, particularly in the East, failed to accept them. In modern times, important accords on justification and on Christology have been reached, the first involving Catholics, Lutherans and, latterly, Methodists, the latter involving Catholics and Oriental Orthodox, but they still need to be more firmly received by the entire communities involved.

For the people of God to be able to receive such agreements they must attentively and lovingly receive the teaching and vision of Paul as he contemplates the wonder of God's uniting work across barriers in his time. They must hear him saying to the people of Rome, both Jews and Gentiles, that they must not quarrel over things that are trivia or simply matters where opinion can legitimately vary.<sup>32</sup> They must hear him announce his own great desire to be with the Church of Rome in order that both he and they may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.<sup>33</sup> They must hear again his prayer for the Ephesians that, through the indwelling Christ and their own resultant grounding in love, they might 'have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the height and depth, breadth and length' of that love.

In particular, churches must be penitent for their past sins and offences against believers of other traditions. This was a key stress of the fathers of the Second Vatican Council, who accepted that, in the schisms of the sixteenth century, there had been faults on both sides. The late Pope John Paul II reinforced this by visits to countries like the Czech Republic where he showed repentance for the persecution there by Catholics of Protestants in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Christians must never forget how far it is possible to fall from grace in the process of showing zeal. *Petit Histoire des Camisards*<sup>34</sup> recounts the history of the Protestant guerrillas who in the early eighteenth century tied down a high proportion of Louis XIV's forces sent to repress them. In the context of this conflict, atrocities were committed on both sides as vicious as those currently being committed by Isis and other Muslim jihadist groups, a standing reproach to those who remember Christ's unstinting refusal of force. Faced with Peter's determination to defend him, he said, 'Do you not know that I could appeal to my father and he would send me at least twelve

legions of angels? But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled?<sup>35</sup> God's Church must work by God's methods, those appropriate to their nature as created and recreated in his image.

What is needed above all as the divided churches seek to respond to the Lord's prayer for unity is that they act in a humble spirit, seeking always to discern what they should be receiving from the other. The ambient atmosphere must be one in which all is meekness, praise and love: the meekness that prefers the other in honour and seeks to work with the other in deepening a common understanding of the riches of Christ; the praise that rejoices in the gifts given to the partner; and above all the love that seeks to understand, to enter sweetly and more fully into God's design and into the common doing of his will.

Major schisms of church history which are the focus for today's ecumenical work can be seen as examples of what results when the Church fails to recognise and receive legitimate differences or the complex factors that led to each side hardening its position.

The first period of lasting schism was in the fifth century over the nature of the unity of divinity and humanity in our Lord. It resulted in the separation of the Oriental Orthodox churches from those churches in the Latin and Byzantine Greek traditions, or, as the Orientals would understandably put it, the separation of the Latin and Greek churches from their communion. Many factors were involved in the schism, including especially the interference of emperors in church life and their determination (so often later imitated by Henry VIII, Louis XIV and others) to have uniformity of religion within their realms. While conflict at the time became inevitable, later sensitivity to nuances enabled a recognition that the rival formulae of Ephesus and Chalcedon were not incompatible and thus need not have been Church-dividing.

The second schism was the eleventh-century separation of East and West, occasioned partly by disputes over the procession of the Holy Spirit, but, above all (as is now more clearly recognised from the fruits of modern scholarship), over the nature of the primacy that can be attributed to the see and Bishop of Rome, a matter on which East and West had begun to divide seven centuries earlier. The most recent report of the Roman Catholic–Orthodox dialogue accepts that the two traditions began independently to drift apart in their ways of understanding the primacy, a fact that makes the question of the rightness of either development a matter for prayerful and measured reflection rather than assertion of the exclusive rightness of either development. In addition, the need of the Western papacy to defend the Church against the secular arm

inevitably encouraged bishops of Rome from Gregory VII to take a tough line with anything that they saw as threatening their unity, which was confused at times in their minds with uniformity.

The third period of historic schism is, of course, that of the Reformation, where the waters were even more muddied than in the earlier periods by secular influences, political ambitions and resentments of forms of corruption, rife in some ecclesiastical circles. The Reformation was really more a series of reformations, of which there were two main types: the magisterial variety, involving state control or sustenance in its three main varieties, Anglican, Lutheran and Reformed, and the radical Reformation with its stress on congregational independency of both state and higher-level ecclesiastical jurisdiction. The radical reformers experienced persecution alike from Catholics and state Protestantism. That the key theological issue of justification might have been capable of solution is shown by the famous Colloquy of Regensburg in 1541 where Melancthon and Cardinal Contarini proposed a reconciling formula, which in some respects foreshadowed the later Catholic–Lutheran Joint Statement of Justification of 1541. Other issues, particularly those of authority, were more difficult.

It has been the habit of some to decry the effectiveness of the ecumenical movement, particularly over the last generation. However, when we contrast the foregoing historic schisms with the ecumenical movement's achievements, particularly through patient theological dialogue, we realise how far the Christian world has travelled, if not to full unity certainly to a far more positive evaluation by communions of each other. We have learnt the lesson of Colossians 2:2, that the desired order is not understanding the other that we might love, but rather loving so that we might come more fully to understand. We have learnt to seek out what it is that we can affirm in each other as truly of the gospel and thus of the Church. We are increasingly learning the importance of looking for those qualities and ways of Christian service and devotion that we ought to receive from others. Such learning will be integral to the continued development of the Anglican–Methodist Covenant and other similar ventures towards greater unity.

## Notes

1. *The Call to Holiness*, para 5, <http://worldmethodistconference.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/The-Call-to-Holiness-Final-copy-28062016.pdf>.
2. Psalm 145:9.
3. Matthew 5:48. I prefer 'all goodness' to the traditional translation of perfect. Human beings can be all goodness in intention and action but cannot, as finite and fallible human beings, be guaranteed against ever making honest mistakes.

4. *The Wesleyan Methodist Hymn Book* (1877 edn), no. 341, verse 4. Galatians 6:10. The term 'the catholic spirit' was the title of one of Wesley's sermons, in which he called on all Christians to 'love alike': 'If we cannot all think alike, let us at least love alike.'
5. Genesis 12:3.
6. Genesis 17:1.
7. Psalm 145:9.
8. Hosea 11:8–9.
9. Jeremiah 31:31–34; Joel 2:28.
10. Isaiah 25:6–9.
11. Isaiah 64:1.
12. Psalm 8:4–5.
13. See, for example, William Cowper's lines, 'Myself the Father's pleasure, /And mine, the sons of men'. Cf also in the hymn traditionally used at the Methodist Covenant service, 'And if thou art well pleased to hear, / Come down and meet us now'.
14. W. B. Pope, *A Compendium of Christian Theology* (1880), vol. 3, p. 4.
15. Romans 8:30.
16. *The Wesleyan Methodist Hymn Book*, no. 122.
17. Mark; Romans 1:4; Hebrews 9:14.
18. Cf *The Call to Holiness*.
19. See Benjamin Gregory, *The Holy Catholic Church, the Communion of Saints*, London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1873, p. 15.
20. George H. Tavard, *The Church, Community of Salvation*, Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992, pp. 49–50, 92.
21. From 'Thou God of truth and love' by Charles Wesley.
22. *Encountering Christ the Saviour: Church and Sacraments*, Ninth Report of the International Catholic–Methodist Commission (Durham, 2011), pp. 9–14.
23. *Dei Verbum*, para 9.
24. J. A. Möhler, *Unity in the Church or the Principle of Catholicism* (1825).
25. From 'Jesu, united by thy grace' by Charles Wesley.
26. Colossians 3:12–13.
27. Galatians 6:10.
28. *The Call to Holiness*, para 71.
29. Psalm 33:11: 'The counsel of the Lord shall endure for ever: and the thoughts of his heart from generation to generation.'
30. Peter Hocken, *The Glory and the Shame: Reflections on the Twentieth-Century Outpouring of the Holy Spirit*, Guildford: Eagle, 1994.
31. See David Carter, 'Two Ecumenical Pioneers', in M. Woodruff (ed), *The Unity of Christians: The Vision of Paul Couturier*, London: Catholic League, 2003, pp. 64–75.
32. Romans 14.
33. Romans 1:12.
34. Eugène Bonnemère, *Petit Histoire des Camisards*, Paris: E. Dentu, 1877.
35. Matthew 26:53.

