

Excerpt from Report of Joint Commission between the World Methodist Council and the Roman Catholic Church (second series, 1972-75) (known as the "Dublin Report" 1976).

II

Common Witness And Salvation Today

6. One of the common concerns of Roman Catholics and Methodists, which emerged in our first series of conversations and was registered in the Denver Report, was for a just analysis of the contemporary situation from the point of view of those who wish to live the gospel of Jesus Christ and announce it to others. What obstacles and what opportunities are offered them in today's world?
7. The second part of section II of the Report was able to set out eight "Areas of Agreement Which May Serve as Aids to Joint Efforts to Encounter the Contemporary World." These are well worth considering again.² The emphasis here, it will be noted, was on agreement not for its own sake but looking toward joint action, and the second series of talks was launched with a "Call to Joint Action" addressed to our respective churches.
8. Since the Denver Report was written, parallel concern has been manifested widely over the religious field and several other important discussions of it helped to induce us to give it the central place in our second series of conversations. The Denver Conference itself, at which our report was received, issued a call to Methodist churches to join in intensified mission to the world, and passed appropriate concrete resolutions, one of which was that "every effort shall be made to work in concert and in co-operation with other communions and churches."¹
9. The renewed Roman Catholic/World Methodist Commission first met (December 1972) a few weeks before the World Council of Churches' Bangkok Conference on Salvation Today, and since some of its members

¹Lee F. Tuttle, ed.: *Proceedings of the Twelfth World Methodist Conference*, Denver, Colorado, August 18-26, 1971 (Nashville & New York: Abingdon), pp. 46-49 (Paras. 34-50). Hereafter cited as *Proceedings*.

²*Proceedings*, pp. 35-7.

could look forward to being in Bangkok, the Commission decided to appropriate to its own direct study the theme "Common Witness and Salvation Today". Hence papers and reports were prepared for our second meeting which were largely developed out of reflections on Bangkok, and discussion of them represented the first stage of our work on the theme.⁴

10. At this same time it was known that the Synod of Bishops of the Catholic Church, meeting in Rome in October 1974, would be choosing the theme of Evangelisation. In fact, our Commission met for the third time in Venice just after the Synod had begun its sessions. Hence the position papers for the meeting, which had been commissioned at Reuti,⁵ were supplemented by a critique of the Synod's programme as set out in its preliminary document. Therefore, in drawing up the present joint statement we have been able to reflect not only on our own papers and discussions but also on the proceedings of the Synod as so far known, and on the work of the World Methodist Council at its Mexico and Jerusalem consultations. These have been referred to directly where it seemed appropriate.
11. We begin by stating briefly five general themes which appear to run through the documents and reports we have examined and which command our joint acceptance:
 - (a) The church's calling to witness in word and life to God's saving work in Christ is fundamental to her being;
 - (b) This witness can be fully effective only when the churches witness together, not out of expediency or for practical convenience but for the sake of the truth being proclaimed and lived;
 - (c) Salvation has individual and social dimensions that must not be separated, involving as it does relationship to God and to fellow-man, and transformation in Christ of both the person and the society which he helps to make up and which shapes him in turn;
 - (d) God's saving work in Christ is not restricted to Christians but extends also to non-Christian communities and the whole created order;
 - (e) Witness today calls for a re-interpretation of salvation that goes beyond translation into contemporary language and takes account of the many ways in which people now hope and seek for salvation.
 - (f) The church is still commissioned to preach the gospel to all men, in the hope that all may come to know God revealed in Christ.
12. Common usage of the word "salvation" implies that the existence of somebody or something is threatened, that there is a menace or danger from which somebody or something is being saved. In theological terms this

⁴Dr. Robert Nelson, "Salvation: Illusion, Puzzle or Joy?"; Fr. T. Stransky, "A Report on the Bangkok Conference"; Mons. Charles Moeller, "Reflections on Bangkok"; Bishop F. W. Schäfer, "Possible Themes for Dialogue Emerging from Bangkok and Mexico City".

⁵Mons. C. Moeller, "Jesus Christ Frees and Unites"; Fr. Michael Hurley, S.J., "Prevenient Grace and Salvation Today: A Note on John Wesley"; Dr. J. Miguez Bonino, "The Wesleyan Tradition of Conversion in Relation to Salvation Today".

men¹ as long summed up in the phrase "the wrath is come," but in mature Christian thought this "negative" was inseparable from a positive vision of what God's salvific will, manifest in the reality of Christ's saving work, meant for man, namely a transformation in the living Christ, begun already in baptism and kindling a hope² of eternal transformation for those who held to Christ.

13. If "salvation from" in its more starkly eschatological form has faded in contemporary consciousness, the conditions of contemporary life in which every sort of insecurity looms have thrust it forward again in other forms, just as acutely felt. Today we can distinguish concern for salvation:
- (a) On the elemental level, where fully one-third of human beings live, salvation means deliverance from the day-to-day threat of failure of the means of survival;
- (b) On a higher level, salvation means deliverance from the wretchedness of mere subsistence and entry into a fuller human life—work for the unemployed, learning for the illiterate, dignity and power for the despised and downtrodden.
- (c) On the highest level, salvation means deliverance from those anxieties, that discontent and even despair to which material comfort offers no answer. Indeed we should have to go further and say that man seems so made that obsession with or complacency about the "primary" forms of salvation is self-defeating and likely to threaten that very social and political order in which primary needs are met. Man's glory is a "divine discontent" which distances these needs by a sense of the transcendent. The point was superbly expressed by the Anglican poet George Herbert:

Yet let him keep the rest
But keep them with repining restlessness
Let him be rich and wearie, that at least
If goodness lead him not, yet weariness
May toss him to My breast.

14. The Judeo-Christian message of salvation has never artificially separated these three levels, although its ultimate concern is with the last. The Old Testament shows God's salvation as concerned, whether for the individual or the nation, with concrete experiences, dangers, afflictions, deprivations, injustices, but culminating with the prophetic emphasis on "salvation for" the kingdom, the peace of God.
15. The Christian message of salvation has always been vulnerable to an interpretation involving rejection of matter, escape from "the world"; but in fact it embraces every human need while transcending it. It affirms eternal life which encompasses yet goes beyond our mortal condition. It

¹Methodists have characteristically spoken of assurance in this connection, but this should not be seen as a form of certainty which removes the need for hope. Assurance, itself a gift of the Holy Spirit, was no guarantee of perseverance, nor even a necessary accompaniment of saving faith.

finds its ground and hope in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

16. Given a longing for salvation which is as wide as humanity, and the concern of all churches to witness to its true meaning, what in particular can Roman Catholics and Methodists say and do?
17. More than once since 1966, when these conversations began, we have been called to recognise our shared heritage; not just to put an ecumenical veneer on the otherwise unaltered furniture of our separation but to discover the underlying realities on which our churches are founded and to which the common features of our heritage point. Now we must go further and see that, arising out of that shared heritage, there are things that we are impelled to insist on and to do that will contribute to the current debate on Common Witness and Salvation, but more, that will involve us together in the common witness itself:
18. (i) The affirmation of the *reality of sin* which Roman Catholics and Methodists have traditionally made has never seemed more relevant than today. The weight of sin needs to be seen in all its gravity, against either naive Pelagianism or Promethean humanism, but also without overstressing the trivial. The total picture of human injustice, venality, selfishness, not least where the churches have seemed to condone it, needs to be seen and denounced in the prophetic spirit of the great preachers of history.
19. (ii) But in the same spirit of sober realism the reality and glory of the *grace of God*, equally central in our traditions, needs to be proclaimed, as answering in truth to all needs of man. There will be liberation only as God's grace transforms the will of those who exercise power. There will be love only as God's grace evokes in us response to his initiative of love in Christ. With all our technical resources there will be food enough for all only as God's grace leads us to responsible parenthood and finally changes our wills so that we are more ready to produce and to share. In the words of the 1974 Synod of Catholic Bishops, union with Christ is the only thing which raises the individual "lost in the ocean of history and the incalculable multitude of humanity" to the challenge of today.
20. (iii) *Social concern* has been characteristic of the Roman Catholic and Methodist traditions. Today, when care for salvation often manifests itself on only one of the levels mentioned earlier, we need to witness that our social concern is a fruit of faith, and that we test whether salvation at any level is the work of the Holy Spirit by relating it to the teaching of Jesus Christ, God's saving work made manifest. Such a test must be a moral test of the means employed to achieve the desired end, e.g. in the search for liberation. When unjust power is overwhelming and deaf to persuasion, force may not simply be ruled out, but the *spirit of faction and violence* remains alien to the Christian's concern for the poor and oppressed.

21. (iv) A strong missionary impulse is common to us, and recently our churches have publicly recognised both that it must continue and that it must develop new forms of expression. The gospel may well by now have been preached to every corner of the earth, but there have never been so many people living who have never heard of the saving grace of God in Christ. All over the world people are growing up in communities that have not heard, or who have heard and no longer listen, or who follow other voices that speak of salvation.
22. (v) Our traditional shared concern for sanctification has been a source of strength, but we have sometimes (especially where we have been an extra-establishment minority) shared also a tendency, contrary to our true traditions, to understand regeneration largely as the new birth of the individual.⁷ Thus sanctification has been thought of as limited to the work of the Holy Spirit in the individual life. While maintaining the fundamental importance of personal spirituality, we need to explore the fullest implications of the biblical view of salvation as new creation, so that sanctification will be seen to include the fulfilment of God's purpose for the whole created order and we shall hear the call to witness together to the responsibility of mankind for the earth which is God's good creation.
23. Looking outward in this way we must be sensitive to the riches in other living faiths. Even unbelief challenges us to purify our faith. Especially we must be sensitive to the possibilities of *preparatio evangelica* in the searchings and aspirations of our contemporaries, while recognising the essential ambiguity of many social, cultural and ideological movements. A real sensitivity to the gospel and to the world will enable us to be true to our aim as Christians: to help people towards a living faith in Christ *within* their own society and culture, and not to offer a way of thinking and living as Christians belonging only to our own society. *It is essential that above all, our own way of life must reflect faithfully the gospel which we preach. Where it does not, our credibility as Christians is seriously challenged.*
24. (vi) If we are to be taken seriously, we must ourselves take seriously the call to unity. Our present series of conversations began with a Call to Joint Action — "What can Roman Catholics and Methodists do together?" The discernment of common traditions and concerns by a few does not of itself produce joint action on any significant scale. Our people must share the discernment as part of their own Christian commitment which they must see as pointing to unity not division. Catholics might well reflect that Methodism has had from the beginning structural possibilities for healthy and expanding lay participation in evangelism, and be prepared to learn much from this tradition. Methodists, on the other hand, might well feel that concern for lay involvement has most recently been more manifest

among Catholics, and this could well be a matter for consultation and further cooperation between us.

25. The tests of the seriousness of our joint concern about salvation and evangelisation must be of the practical order pointed to in section VIII of the Denver Report⁸ and in the Call to Action of December 1972. These pointed to the need for "serious planning of the education of our churches" and the connected "vital question of communication". Since the Denver assembly we can point gratefully to growth in collaboration at national, regional and local levels, some of which has produced valuable contributions to the present report: there is room for wider and more generous response. We cannot repeat too often the last words of the "Call to Action" we made at our meeting in 1972: "We do not want merely to accumulate paper for our files, but we want to stimulate one another to common action, so that the world which is starving for lack of good news may not through our unnecessary divisions be prevented from receiving the food of the Gospel".

⁷Proceedings, p. 49 (Para. 47).