

Minutes

Winnipeg Mennonite-Catholic Dialogue, Meeting No. 4

Held on 13 June 2001, 4 to 9 pm
at the Catholic Centre, Archdiocese of St. Boniface

Luis Melo welcomed participants to the meeting. **Michele Sala Pastora** welcomed everyone to the premises, pointed out the historical significance of the buildings, and described the work that goes on there today.

Personal Updates:

Elaine Baete reported attending a Jewish Seder at the Asper Centre.

Harold Jantz is still finding enormous satisfaction working in New Directions in Life Ministries at the House of Hesed (a shelter for men suffering from AIDS). He described how volunteers exercise a very practical ministry by coming to provide meals for men at the facility. Harold also mentioned his work with Mission Fest, an ecumenical mission conference currently in the planning stage.

Richard Lebrun had no new ecumenical experiences to report.

Michele Sala Pastora said that she is still involved in monthly meetings with representatives from various churches on refugee sponsorship at the International Centre.

Ardith Frey reported that in her work with North End neighbours she meets all kinds of people from different religious backgrounds. Most recently she has worked with an outreach ministry of the local Presbyterian church.

Elaine Pinto indicated she was still involved in training at St. Benedict's monastery.

Luis Melo noted a recent press story reporting that Elaine had completed a Master of Sacred Theology degree at the University of Winnipeg.

John Long spoke about a recent CBC television program that he had seen that described a Mennonite-sponsored program that tries to assist sex-offenders to re-integrate into the community. He intends to find out more about the program. John also reported on student feedback from a university course that he offered this past semester on moral and religious education. It appears that many students associate religion with rivalry and competition.

Michael Radcliffe is still working with the Hutterite Brethern on legal issues. He reported as well on Easter baptisms at St. Ignatius church, where this year those being baptized knelt in the water and then had water poured over them.

Helmut Harder noted the following activities: 1) Reading Julian Green's *God's Fool: The Life and Times of St. Francis of Assisi* (in preparation for the meeting of the international Catholic-Mennonite dialogue group in Assisi in November). 2) Preparation of a paper on Violence and Non-Violence in Anabaptist professions of faith for an upcoming meeting of Quakers, Mennonites, and Church of the Brethren. This will be a four-day meeting in Switzerland at the invitation of the World Council of Churches. More information on these issues may be found at the following website: www.peacetheology.org 3) An initiative taken by Mennonite and Catholic congregations in Pennsylvania that has evolved into a consultation group called Bridging. Recently a core group from this initiative met at Collegeville, MN, where

they were addressed by Abbot John Klassen, OSB, and Fr. Killian McDonald, OSB. 4) Preparation of a paper on sacraments for the upcoming C-M dialogue in Assisi. Helmut reported finding this a real challenge because “sacrament” is a term that is scarcely used in Mennonite theological writings. Helmut also reported apologies from **Adolph Ens** for missing this meeting (with an opportunity for bird-watching in Churchill, MB, taking priority). (Helmut also noted **Henry Loewen’s** absence at the beginning of the meeting, despite a reminder phone call. [**Henry** arrived at 7 pm, having confused the hour of our meeting.]

Luis Melo reported that in addition to a lot of travelling recently he had been involved in the following activities: 1) A recent meeting in Montreal of the national Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue, discussing in particular an updating of pastoral guidelines for dealing with marriages between Anglicans and Catholics, which led to deeper theological discussions, including consideration of the papal document, *Dominus Iesus*. 2) Continuing involvement with the Association of Christian Churches in Manitoba, which most recently has included interaction with evangelical churches that had been invited to participate in celebration of the Jubilee Year. These churches have displayed both interest and reluctance to get involved. **Luis** reported an interesting question from one evangelical who wondered what Catholics thought of their “rinky-dinky” style of worship. **Luis** responded that Catholics also use an “informal” style of prayer in the family and small group meetings, as well as a more formal style for Sunday worship/Eucharist.

Michael Radcliffe offered an opening prayer for the well-being and success of our dialogue group and all its members.

Baptism

Luis Melo prefaced participants’ 5-minute responses to the WCC BEM document with a presentation that placed the document in context by providing a very brief history of the World Council of Churches. He noted the WCC’s origins in the 1910 World Missionary Conference (mostly a gathering of Protestants). This initiative continued in 1921 with the International Missionary Council. Meanwhile, there were two parallel developments with the founding in 1925 of a Life and Works Commission (concerned with practical ecumenism) and in 1927 with a Faith and Order Commission (to deal with issues of doctrine). These three initiatives came together in 1948 with the founding of the World Council of Churches. The Roman Catholic Church has not become a formal member of the WCC (mainly because of organizational problems), but has been involved in the Faith and Order commission since 1968 as observers. Most Mennonite churches are not members of WCC (only a couple of North German and Dutch Mennonite groups are involved). The Orthodox got involved from the 1960s.

The BEM document, which pulls together earlier separate consultations on issues relating to Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry, is the work of the Faith and Order commission. There was an official response from the Roman Catholic Church in 1985 (the work of the Vatican group concerned with unity of the Christian Churches and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith after consultation with individual bishops and various episcopal conferences), which was the first ever official Roman Catholic response to an ecumenical document.

Luis noted BEM’s approach of going to the “sources” in both Scripture and Tradition, its

character as a compromise document that stresses convergences rather than one attempting consensus, and its recognition of the need for stages in ecumenical relations.

Elaine Beate found BEM's treatment of Baptism generally very agreeable, but found as well that it was difficult to keep her attention focussed on Baptism since for her everything else (Eucharist, Ministry, etc.) seems to stem from Baptism. She also found that the theological knowledge required for an understanding of the BEM document was quite demanding, that the document makes a good departure point, while only scratching the surface on such matters as the relation of Baptism to Ministry, and that the BEM statement seemed to place more reliance on Scripture than Tradition.

John Long reported discovering that the BEM text had many affinities in style and content with the documents of Vatican II, that its statements were grounded in the faith of apostolic times and the early church, and that its theology was coherent (although incomplete from a Roman Catholic perspective). In particular, he noted that the official Catholic response to the BEM document's statements on Baptism points out that on the relationship between Baptism and the salvation of all humankind the statement does not deal with the question of the salvation of those who are not baptised, that it says little about the relationship of Baptism and original sin, that there seems to be relatively little said about the "context" (the role of the church) in Baptism, that its distinction between "believers and infants" can be misleading (with the suggestion that it would be more accurate to speak of adults and infants), and that in Catholic understanding "chrismation" or confirmation constitutes a separate sacrament. The Catholic response also notes that in contrast to a statement in the BEM document about certain African churches, the Roman Catholic Church considers water essential for Baptism. It also wonders what kind of evidence supports the judgment made in the commentary that 'in many large European and American majority churches infant baptism is often practised in an apparently indiscriminate way.'

Ardith Frey found that BEM's depiction of the meaning of Baptism resonated deeply for her. She particularly liked the emphases on the need for on-going conversion, on the role of the church as communal assembly, and on the ethical implications of Baptism. She saw four areas where the document needed strengthening: 1) The role of the local body of believers, its role in discipleship, and the importance of incorporation into a particular congregation. 2) The concept of conversion, personal experience of Christ's forgiveness, and commitment to living out what is promised in Baptism. 3) The need to work for common understanding and a middle ground on such issues as believer's Baptism and/or children's Baptism and the role of the Church in nurturing faith in all cases. 4) The life of witness of the baptised in bearing witness together to the Gospel to both the church and to the world, even though we can't transform society and its structures.

Helmut Harder began by saying that in his view most Manitoba Mennonites would agree with most of what the BEM document has to say about Baptism, and especially about what is said about it being rooted in the mystery of Christ and being a sign of a new life in Christ. They would also like its ethical orientation. Questions might arise from the implications of what is said (or seems to be said) on some issues: 1) That the rite of Baptism by itself (the words and the water) accomplishes all that Baptism is supposed to accomplish. Mennonites put emphasis on public testimony of a spiritual experience. 2) Mennonites would highlight Baptism as a sign of public commitment, an act of discipleship in the framework of the mutual counsel of the congregation. 3) Mennonites would put more emphasis on the voluntarism (free will) of the

person being baptised (tending to see infant baptism as a violent act done to an infant). Perhaps the high degree of participation of Mennonites in their church's activities reflects the way they come to Baptism voluntarily. 4) With respect to BEM's statement about the "unrepeatable" nature of the act of Baptism, perhaps it would be well to take account of distinctions between Baptisms of water, spirit, and blood. Of course, Mennonites practice "believer's Baptism." Helmut also noted how the language of faith is often just the tip of the iceberg since it tends to define "who we are."

Harold Jantz was struck by BEM's comment about "indiscriminate baptism," and recounted a recent study that he had read that suggested that only one in ten of those baptized as Lutherans remain active church members.

In the discussion that followed participants made a number of observations. **John Long** noted that with respect to "indiscriminate baptism," Catholic pastors are becoming reluctant to baptise infants unless there is good evidence that parents are taking seriously their responsibility for education in the faith. **Luis Melo** put this change in the context of an evolving understanding of the supposed "necessity" of baptism for salvation. John pointed to statements in the new Catechism (to the effect that unbaptized infants were saved in a manner "known only to God") reflecting this evolution.

Ardith Frey acknowledged that in Manitoba Mennonite congregations that social pressure from peer groups could put the "voluntary" nature of acceptance of baptism in doubt. **Helmut Harder** noted that a different social situation probably played a role in his son's decision not to accept baptism as a teenager. Others pointed to the problematic notion of "baptism in the spirit" of some African churches and to the fact that Quakers and the Salvation Army do not practice baptism by water, partly because of their conviction that all of life must be sacramental.

Supper Break

Eucharist

Elaine Pinto distributed her understanding of a Mennonite Brethren perspective on BEM's statement on the Lord's Supper (so participants will have a copy of her remarks), which noted some significant differences of understanding and practice between what is described in the BEM document and her experience in a Mennonite Brethren congregation. She added that personally she finds herself comfortable with Roman Catholic practice with respect to the Eucharist.

Michele Sala Pastora began by commenting that ordinary people are not often aware of the kind of theological niceties that one finds in the BEM document, and by suggesting that if all really celebrated and lived the Eucharist that ecumenical understanding would be greatly facilitated. She found much that she could affirm in the BEM statement, but she pointed that the official Catholic response had noted a certain number of deficiencies from a Roman Catholic perspective. These include reservations about the way the document speaks about the way the church receives the thanksgiving of Christ in the Eucharist and associates herself with it to express the acceptable thanksgiving of all God's benefits, about the way it fails to do justice to Christ's continuing sacrifice in the Eucharist, about a need for some reference to the self-offering

of the participants of the Eucharist, about the need to say more about the role of Christ as the sanctifier, about the need to associate Eucharist and Church more closely, and about the importance of the one who presides at the Eucharist being a sacramentally ordained priest in apostolic succession. The Catholic Church also puts more emphasis on the duration of the real presence after the celebration. Finally, because of the conviction that real unity in the profession of faith constitutes the core of ecclesial communion, it remains impossible at present for the Catholic Church to engage in general eucharistic sharing.

Michael Radcliffe said that as a layman he much enjoyed reading the document as a very measured and weighed document. He found that he tended to read his own position into the words of the document. He especially liked the document's broad historical approach (putting Christianity in context as a branch of Judaism) by the way it speaks of precursors to the Eucharist in earlier kinds of meals. He also like what it had to say about the Eucharist as *anamnesis* or memorial of Christ (and not mere historical re-enactment), and its stress on the spiritual/mysterious presence of Christ. Where he found some conflict or tension was between what it had to say about the unique nature of Christ's death (and sacrifice) and repeated celebration of that event in the Eucharist. Still, he felt that the document was dead-on in its listing of the elements of the Eucharistic liturgy (again acknowledging that much can be read into its generic language).

In the discussion that followed various questions were explored. **Luis Melo** began by noting that the word *anamnesis* is a Greek word with Hebrew overtones, and that it implies that to remember is to relive and to hope to live forever, and that it implies community between the past, the present, and the future. This implies that every celebration of the Eucharist appropriates Christ's death for the present. **Helmut Harder** noted that Mennonites feel strongly that the Christ's life, death, and resurrection are unrepeatable, that at most they can be repeated in discipleship. For example, in holding to pacificism, one might have to participate in Christ's death. **Elaine Pinto** remembered a course in which she had been told that the Catholic biblical scholar Raymond Brown had insisted that there was only one sacrifice (by Christ), and she noted that many Mennonites feel that Catholics are repeating the sacrifice of Christ in the Mass. **Michael Radcliffe** said that it was his understanding that under the New Covenant (as opposed to the old in which there were many repeated temple sacrifices) we enter into the one New Sacrifice by celebrating the Eucharist.

Harold Jantz expressed some dissatisfaction with the way the Lord's Supper is observed in Manitoba Mennonite churches. He finds too much emphasis is put on making it a celebration of joy as opposed to experiencing it as a solemn occasion; that it is treated too lightly. In this respect he was particularly struck by the statement BEM statement (D. 20) that "The eucharist shows us that our behaviour is inconsistent in face of the reconciling presence of God in human history: we are placed under continual judgment by the persistence of unjust relationships of all kinds in our society, the manifold divisions on account of human pride, material interest and power politics, and, above, all, the obstinacy of unjustifiable confessional oppositions within the body of Christ." **Luis Melo** reflected that the celebration of the risen Christ among us has to speak to our particular cultural context. The persecuted church, for example, would likely emphasize different things. The language of the liturgy is extremely rich, so that many different things can be taken from it.

Henry Loewen, who joined the discussion at this point, was invited to present his

response to the BEM statement on Eucharist. He said he found reading and reflecting on the statement a humbling experience, one that made him reflect on his many experiences of the Lord's Supper in his life, - as a child observing the "Holy Evening Meal" (literal translation of the German phrase that identified the ceremony in his childhood), as a teenager who before baptism didn't have to attend the ceremony, of the transition from the communion being served only by the bishop, through communion being served by leading ministers, to today when different members of the congregation can serve communion, and of taking communion on invitation at a United Church in Newfoundland and at an Episcopal church in California. In the light of the BEM stated goal of visible unity among Christ's followers, he finds nothing so potent and challenging as communion with those of other Christian denominations. If we experience communion together it does make us one in the presence of Christ - a critical direction in witnessing to the world. He suggested we ask ourselves whose meal this is? He said we should see Christ as the host, and recalled how Christ acted as host at the Last Supper and with the disciples at Emmaus. At the Lord's Supper we are Christ's guests. Why do we as followers make so many rules? The question might be how not to limit the invitation.

John Long wondered why Mennonites do not find the BEM statement about frequency of the Eucharist (D. 31) compelling. **Ardith Frey** suggested that part of the answer might be found in the emphasis they put on community and reconciling personal relationships in preparation for celebration of the Lord's Supper. **Elaine Pinto** averted to the emphasis they put on opening up God's Word, and Helmut suggested that for him and many other Mennonites hymn singing is where the mystery of God's presence was more often sensed. **John** in his turn acknowledged that for Catholics there is a danger of trivialization of the Eucharist.

Ministry

Richard Lebrun made a short personal statement that stressed how well the 1982 BEM document seems to have stood the test of time. While he found himself in almost complete agreement with BEM's statements about ministry, he acknowledged a wide divergence with the official Catholic viewpoint on ministry by women. Finally, he referred to a 1981 *Concilium* article by Avery Dulles that offered some important distinctions between three different kinds of "ministry of the word" - apostolic ministry, prophetic ministry, and theological ministry. (Richard's comments are being distributed with these minutes.)

Luis Melo began by commenting on the two convergences with respect to ministry reflected in the BEM document and the official Catholic position: 1) The care taken to situate ordained ministry in the context of the ministry of all believers, which ministries are all rooted in the ministry of Christ. He noted that Vatican II documents portray ministry as a gift of the Holy Spirit bestowed on the whole community. 2) The recognition that while there is no one form of ministry described in the New Testament, that by the second or third centuries there was a common pattern of a threefold ministry of bishops, presbyters, and deacons. **Luis** also noted that since Vatican II care has been taken in the Catholic Church to distinguish between the official and the office, with a recognition that the traditional "oversight" role of bishop has been

exercised in different ways over the years. **Luis** also noted how the Canadian theologian and ecumenist Jean-Marie Teillard distinguished the personal, collegial, and communal dimensions of the role of bishop, and observed that putting more emphasis on the second and third of these dimensions is a current challenge for Catholics. **Luis** also identified some underdeveloped themes in the BEM document: 1) For Catholics the sacramental character is not emphasized enough. 2) That while the document speaks of ministry as a “sign,” the Catholic Church would prefer language that referred to an “effective sign.” 3) That although BEM language is descriptive of what Catholics understand by sacrament, the word is scarcely used. 4) The statement that the ministry of ordained persons ‘is constitutive for the life and witness of the Church’ may be overstated (at least in strictly philosophical terms). If something is “of the essence” it cannot be changed, but if it is only for the “well being” of the church, it can and perhaps should be changed. 5: To state (in A. 14) that Christ’s presidency in the celebration “is signified and represented by an ordained minister” is not sufficient or accurate in the mind of the Catholic Church. “Representation” is a sociological rather than a metaphysical or theological term. For Catholics the role of the ordained minister is not just a function. 6. From a Catholic perspective, the statement about the role of succession of apostolic ministry (B.35) is not clear enough. As well, the description of “when” ordination is done is not clear, and for Catholics this is not something that can be repeated. And 6. The mutual recognition of ordained ministries described in section VI (51-55) is not something that seems possible for the Roman Catholic Church at this time. In short, the Catholic Church sees this statement on ministry as something that is pointed in the right direction, but something that requires more study.

Harold Jantz reported that from a Mennonite perspective he found the BEM statement on ministry rich and good, and that he resonated with it in many ways. He particularly liked the emphasis on ministry as a matter for the whole people of God, though he thought Mennonites would put more emphasis on non-ordained ministry. He noted that in some Mennonite circles the whole question of the necessity of ordination was being questioned, with some “ministers” (even bishops) taking a position opposed. The BEM document led him to reflect on the place of authority in the church, especially for the preservation of truth and direction in the church. He reported that his own branch of the Mennonite community was much influenced by American Evangelic movement, which the historian Mark Nolt has characterized as “culturally adaptive biblical experimentalism.” The problem is that if a group absorbs too much from its cultural milieu, it can no longer be distinguished from the general culture. He contrasted this trend with BEM’s stress on apostolic tradition and succession and mused that many Mennonites might find this stress challenging.

Adolph Ens’s response to BEM’s statement on ministry (in his absence) was both read to the session by **Helmut Harder** and distributed to participants. **Adolph** praised much of the document, but made two trenchant criticisms: 1) He suggested that “the mediation of God’s grace in the Christian community is too important to reserve it to an institutionally controlled, select set of religious specialists.” 2) He wondered too about the statement’s stress on “ordained ministry” in keeping the Church “apostolic.” While the document begins this discussion with the claim that the “Spirit keeps the Church in the apostolic tradition,” he finds that “the subsequent argument that the Spirit does this through the (institutionally) ordained ministries more than through *charisms* bestowed by the Spirit on all members is not intuitively or logically obvious.”

Ardith Frey began the general discussion by wondering to what extent BEM’s notion of

a threefold distinction in ministry between bishops, presbyter, and deacon might promote unity between the churches. **Luis Melo** noted that this was a distinction that was important in the Catholic tradition, but noted that BEM does not really discuss the inner dynamics of this differentiation. He noted how in the Catholic Church since Vatican II there has been a rediscovery of the permanent diaconate from the life of the early Church and a new understanding of the bishop's position as the fullness of the priesthood, and recognition that the priest is a helper for the bishop who serves under his discipline. This is in contrast to the medieval understanding that tended to see the bishop as a mere administrator. **Michele Sala Pastora** suggested that lay ministers as well should understand their role as one of assistance to the bishop, and described how at the Pastoral Centre, in the absence of a bishop at the moment, in developing a mission statement they have come to appreciate their need of a bishop for their work to have unity and to have community in their work. **Luis** noted that the very word "ordination" points to the need to establish "order" in the maintenance of unity and truth, and in the maintenance of continuity with the past and the whole church.

Harold Jantz in turn felt the need to stress the role of the ministry of the people of God and to acknowledge that the gifts of the Spirit are not all encapsulated in the ordained ministry. The gifts of the Spirit are broadly distributed. **Michael Radcliffe** reflected that in popular tradition Catholics put great emphasis on the power of the priest to consecrate the Eucharist and to forgive sin, while in the Mennonite tradition it is the congregation that disciplines (though with defined roles for deacons and pastors). He recalled that early Anabaptism statements about the "ban" as a method of discipline were a way of saying to state churches "let us deal with our dissenters" (in a non-violent way). **Elaine Pinto** observed that in Mennonite Churches there is no formal provision for the role of "confessor" in the Catholic sense, and that in most Mennonite congregations that role is only carried out in an informal way. **Helmut Harder** noted that Matthew 18 provides the basis for the discipline of the "ban," but acknowledged that its implementation is often ad hoc. **Luis Melo** suggested that the Catholic "sacramental system" reflected human needs, with the whole thing structured and ordered so that the individual doesn't have to think about it. He noted, for example, that for a priest the requirement for an "annual retreat" is a given, and doesn't require a decision on his part.

At this point the discussion focussed on the issue of the ordination of women. **Luis Melo** noted that while a recent papal statement seemed to rule out the possibility, a 1976 statement had said nothing about women in the diaconate, and suggested that since there had been female deacons in the early church, this was an approach that might be discussed. Following reflection about Orthodox understandings of "recovery" of the Treasury of the past, and similar approaches reflected in the thinking and documents of Vatican II, **Luis** pointed out that structures in the Catholic Church have changed in the past to meet the needs of time. **Harold Jantz** reported that in his personal experience with female pastors that men and women tend to minister in different ways, and that in a situation with exclusively female ministers men may feel unrepresented (as women have felt in the past under exclusively male ministers). **Elaine Beate** pointed out that women religious have been "ministering" in their own ways for centuries (though without a clear place in the hierarchical structure of the church), and recalled her earlier reaction to BEM and its failure to tie everything to Baptism. For her, ministry meant answering the call from Baptism, which can be seen as the root of everything that we are. **Luis Melo** pointed out that the same holds for brothers (non-ordained male religious). In his own congregation (the Marionists), some

brothers may be called by the community to ordained ministry, but the stress is on the role of brothers as evangelizers of the wider community. **Elaine** then suggested that in terms of the distinction of kinds of ministry offered by Avery Dulles, religious played a “prophetic” role, a role not always perceived as such by the Church (bishops). Since Vatican II, as religious communities have sought to recover the charisms of their founders this has led to some very real tensions. She acknowledged that some women may feel “called” to ordained ministry, but she thought that to make this a matter of “rights” was a harder question. **Luis** concluded the discussion by describing the Church’s official stance on the non-ordination of women, and suggested that the real question is to know if the issue is merely matter of discipline or something “core.” He noted that the Church usually moves very slowly on such issues.

Wrap-up and Future Meetings

Helmut Harder commented on the good free-wheeling discussion that the group had had, and his feeling that we had made real progress in discussing the BEM document. In particular he was interested to observe the distinctions being made between hierarchical and grass-roots understandings and experience of church. Questions arose as to whether the group should continue and, if so, what topics should be taken up next. With general consensus (and enthusiasm) about continuing, there were number of suggestions for future topics, including: 1) The role of Scripture in the Church, especially in the light of the threefold presence of Christ in the Word, in the Eucharist, and in the community. Consideration might be given to interpretation of Scripture and to its use in worship. 2) Outreach. How the Church and Christians should relate to the world. This might include consideration of the possible fruit of our dialogue. Are we prophets as a group, or do we simply act as individuals? 3) How should we think about “church.” This topic might include questions relating to mission and to the issue of salvation outside the church. 4) Our understanding of salvation. It was agreed that **Helmut** and **Luis** should meet and propose an agenda (with appropriate homework) for our next meeting.

Next Meeting

The next meeting was scheduled for Tuesday, 25 September, at Canadian Mennonite University. **Henry Loewen** agreed to take the minutes, **Elaine Pinto** to be responsible for the opening prayer, and **Elaine Beate** to be responsible for the closing prayer. **Ardith Frey** indicated that she would not be attending that particular meeting (because of her sabbatical). It was agreed that it would be appropriate for someone else to be invited in her place.