

Minutes

Winnipeg Mennonite-Catholic Dialogue, Meeting No. 10

Held on 8 October 2003
at Mary Mother of the Church parish hall

Present: Helmut Harder, Luis Melo, Elaine Baete, Michele Sala Pastora, Michael Radcliffe, Adolf Ens, Harold Jantz, John Long, and Richard Lebrun

Luis Melo welcomed the group to Mary Mother of the Church in the name of the pastor. **John Long**, a parishioner, told us the church had been built in 1982 (designed by a Mennonite architect, Harold Funk), and that the parish has some 1,400 families.

Each of the participants spoke briefly about the highlights of their summer, with special reference to **ecumenical experiences**:

Michele Sala Pastora mentioned the inconveniences resulting from her daughter's accident with the family car, but had no specific ecumenical experiences to report.

Mike Radcliffe reported an enjoyable summer, continuing involvement with the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius at his parish, and continuing work as legal counsel for a Hutterite community.

Harold Jantz reported his continuing involvement with the House of Hesse, which has been able to obtain a new house for its work (the "Kelly House" on Edmonton).

Richard Lebrun noted with regret that he had to cancel his participation in the Martyrs Conference and the Bridgefolk dialogue at St. John's Abbey, but that he had enjoyed a great summer, with trips to Alaska, Montana, and Duluth.

Elaine Baete reported a visit to the Mennonite Museum in Steinbach, and travels to Ohio State University (with four students) for a conference on chaplaincy work, a meeting in Chicago of Greg alumni, and visits to Notre Dame University and St. John's University.

John Long reported attendance at lectures at St. Margaret's Anglican Church on Christian political theory, where he had the opportunity to meet CMU English prof Paul Dyck, and difficult discussions with his Faculty of Education colleagues on the issue of the federal government's initiative to change the definition of marriage (to include homosexual unions). He is also entertaining a proposal to write a chapter (for a book) on possible ways of encouraging spirituality in the schools.

Adolf Ens reported working to meet an October 31st publication deadline, and a visit to a facility at Nanette, which has been taken over by a Portage La Prairie Youth for Christ project as a place of retreats for youth and families.

Luis Melo reported that he is teaching a course on the Second Vatican Council at St. Paul's College and that he is in the process of establishing an Ecumenical Office for the Archdiocese of St. Boniface (which will serve all of Winnipeg). He also reported attendance at a congress in Rome on Interfaith Families, a pilgrimage visit to Iona (on an island off the coast of Scotland), a Montreal meeting of North American ecumenists, and a meeting of the Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue. He noted that the Anglican community is in crisis over issues relating to homosexuality and the structure of authority, with an emergency meeting of Anglican primates coming up soon. He reported as well on a meeting with Bill Rush, who is associated with the North American conference on Faith and Order, and a proposal to establish a special study group on Faith and Order in Winnipeg.

Helmut Harder reported a remarkable number of ecumenical activities over the summer of 2003:

1. June. Completion of the Final Draft of the International Catholic-Mennonite Dialogue Report, entitled "Called Together to be Peacemakers," which is now in Rome and Strasbourg for translation into French and Spanish before it will be released to the public.
2. July 15-16. At St. John's Abbey/University in Collegeville, MN, where he participated in a conference on "The Anabaptist Martyrs in an Ecumenical Context," by offering a commentary on Brad Gregory's paper on this topic. Gregory's paper and the various commentaries are being edited for publication by Peter Erb.
3. July 17-20. Participation in the Second Annual Bridgefolk Gathering, at Collegeville, this time on the theme "Spiritual Practices in Violent Times." **Helmut** reported there on his involvement in Mennonite-Catholic dialogue, both at the international level and in Winnipeg. He was particularly impressed by Abbot John Klassen's soul-baring documentation of the crisis faced by his Benedictine Abbey in dealing with a crisis arising from sexual abuse incidents involving monks of the monastery.
4. July 21-31. **Helmut** attended the Lutheran World Federation in Winnipeg as one of two Mennonite World Conference representatives. He found it an important assembly in many ways (despite the non-attendance of 51 persons from Third-World countries who were denied entry visas to Canada). He noted in particular a decision to take a new look at the Augsburg Confession regarding its indictment against Anabaptists, and significant resolutions on the issues of violence, justice, and peace.
5. August 4-18. Participation at the 14th Mennonite World Conference Assembly in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, where he hosted Msgr. John Radano who was there representing the Roman Catholic Church. The local Catholic archbishop addressed the Assembly, bringing greetings and commenting on the local political situation. Of the 6,500 persons in attendance, about 1,000 were of European descent. The theme of the meeting was "Sharing gifts in suffering and in joy," with the various continents being featured on various days: Zimbabwe Day, Asia Day, Europe Day South American Day, North America Day, Africa Day, and World Day. Even feeding more than 6,000 people for 10 days was a wonderful accomplishment for the local organizers. The General Council of

the MWC decided to continue its involvement in the international Mennonite-Catholic Dialogue.

6. September 5-7. Attendance at a Festival of Russian-German immigrants (and their offspring) in Western Canada at Medicine Hat. Some 650 persons (mostly from south-eastern Alberta, and south-western Saskatchewan) were in attendance. There were many Catholic and Lutherans and some Mennonites. Helmut shared the Mennonite story, with special reference to David Toews.

Helmut also reported that he is currently reading a book by a German scholar, Fernando Enns, entitled *Friedenskirche in der Ökumene: Mennonitische Wurzeln einer Ethik der Gewaltfreiheit* (English: *The Peace Church in the Ecumenical Context: Mennonite Roots of an Ethic of Non-Violence*). The author's message is that we all need to take a hard look at our ecclesiology.

Worship (in the Church), prepared by Michele Sala Pastora and Henry Loewen, and led by Michele and Adolf Ens.

Personal Sharing on having felt as an outsider (ridiculed, shamed, challenged, "persecuted") because of one's faith:

John Long began by speaking of his experience in recent workplace discussions on the issue of maintaining or abandoning the traditional definition of marriage and whether or not it is in conflict the Canadian Charter of Rights, as well as of issues like sexual abuse charges against Catholic clergymen and allegations of cultural genocide against those who ran residential schools for aboriginal children.

Harold Jantz said that he has always been conscious of belonging to minority, but that he would not associate moral authority with the majority. He suggested that by definition Christians were a minority and would always be in tension with the broader culture and society.

Mike Radcliffe reported growing up in a part of Winnipeg where the majority was Protestant-Orange, and where as a Catholic he learned early to keep his mouth shut about his religious affiliation, and not to wear his faith on his shirtsleeve. Now, as an adult, however, he is much more willing to challenge people by a public acknowledgement of his Catholic beliefs and practices.

Luis Melo recalls being switched from a Catholic school to a public school (where the culture was largely Anglican and very WASP), and feeling targeted as a "papist" in class, and as someone who did not bring his own Bible to daily Bible reading in the classroom. He also recounted a summer experience in Turkey, where he was present as part of a delegation working with local Armenian and Greek Orthodox clergyman, and having to forego wearing clerical garb outside the compounds where the meetings took place.

Richard Lebrun could recall few instances of overt hostility, except one case where he was laughed at in a workplace committee meeting when he showed up one Ash Wednesday with ashes on his forehead. However, his current reading, the book by Philip Jenkins, *The New Anti-*

Catholicism: The Last Acceptable Prejudice, although it deals mainly with the situation in the United States, is causing him to reassess the situation of Catholics in modern society.

Michele Sala Pastora reflected on feelings common to such situations, recalling in particular a recent challenging phone call. She identified the feelings of being not accepted, not respected, of being unknown and shut out, a door being shut in one's face, of injustice, and of something happening without a reason. She recalled a verse from the Psalm of the Good Shepherd: "You prepare a table before me under the eyes of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil, and my cup runneth over," and told of being taken to dinner by an Ethiopian and his wife as a thank you for assisting with refugees.

Elaine Baete remembered growing up in Holland, Manitoba, and feeling "persecuted" by her parents because of being forbidden enter any of the town's other Christian churches with her friends. She has felt hurt because of attacks on religious orders for their role in running residential schools, but this has never been a personal thing.

Adolf Ens, while too young himself to be called to service during World War II, remembers vividly that his oldest brother as a conscientious objector had to accept "alternate service," that he had been called a "yellow belly," and had had his teacher's certificate cancelled. He also recalled an occasion when, after listening to a radio program by a preacher from southern California, his group had sent in a donation, which was returned because this preacher would not accept money from "yellow bellies."

Helmut Harder recalls growing up with persecution stories, mostly about recent persecution of Mennonites in Russia when his relatives lived there. He also recalled an occasion during WWII, when a local bishop told his story about being imprisoned in St. Catharines, ON, at the time of WWI, because he had been a conscientious objector. He recalled as well, attending a public school (where an "English" mentality prevailed) and being called a "little Hitler" because he was perceived as German.

Table Fellowship. The group enjoyed an evening meal prepared by the Catholic participants of the dialogue.

Discussion of Brad Gregory's paper: "Reformation History and Ecumenism: Problems and Prospects."

Helmut Harder opened this part of the agenda with reflections on the St. John's conference where Gregory's paper had been presented, and the commentary he had made of the Gregory paper at the time. With respect to the apparent disjunction between the first and second parts of Gregory's paper, he thought that perhaps they do come together from one perspective: the churches had come apart in the sixteenth century and now they are trying to get back together again in some way. With respect to Gregory's distinction between "social ecumenism" and 'doctrinal ecumenism," Helmut suggested that since the Mennonite are not a "creedal church," the second issue doesn't seem to matter as much to Mennonites as to Catholics, who are more concerned to seek definitions and closure on doctrinal issues. Mennonites put more emphasis on social ecumenism, hospitality, and friendship. In the 16th century, they were even ready to seek

friendship with the Turks! He thought that Mennonites were more ready to put an emphasis on “ethical ecumenism,” on discipleship, etc., and pointed to the Final Report of the International Mennonite-Catholic Dialogue with its call for all to be peacemakers, and to behave in a Christ-like way to all peoples.

Mike Radcliffe spoke of his own growing intolerance for Catholic hierarchical definitions, and of his frustration with official warnings about interdenominational relationships. He sees the theologians at one level continuing to debate abstract theological issues, while people in the pews are saying Why not? Why the seemingly artificial boundaries?

Adolf Ens found the paper’s discussion of 16th century persecution an interesting starting point for discussion. He wondered if it took more commitment to kill for the faith than to suffer passively. Today, perhaps we’ve gone to the opposite extreme in our willingness to be open to any and all kinds of “spirituality.” He also recounted meeting many people who had suffered persecution in the USSR and Eastern Europe, and being surprised at their lack of bitterness over their experiences.

John Long found himself in disagreement with Gregory’s assertion about taking it “for granted that the historical fact of the Catholic persecution of Anabaptists in the sixteenth century is an enormous obstacle to ecumenical relations and to any potential reconciliation between Catholics and Mennonites in the future.” John felt that this statement ignores the possibilities for repentance and forgiveness.

Richard Lebrun wondered about Gregory’s dichotomy between “social ecumenism” and “doctrinal ecumenism” and its seeming exclusion of other approaches. He shared a recent discussion list contribution pointing to the role of various modes of contemplation, such as “centering prayer” and “meditation”—where Catholics often find themselves mediating with non-Catholics. This contributor also noted the ecumenical Taize services that rely less on words than on silence and meditation. He also pointed to our group, with Elaine Pinto teaching centering prayer at St. Benedict’s and to the experience of some of his friends in meditation groups, and concluded by citing the discussion list contributor who writes about finding “that meditating with people from other traditions tends to breed compassion and tolerance for them on very deep levels and in ways that ecumenical or interfaith discussions or theologizing simply cannot seem to do.”

Luis Melo observed that Gregory’s paper was not written from within an ecumenical framework. Gregory is a good historian, but he uses old categories and focuses on old issues, rather than the core of ecumenism, which is a passionate fire for spiritual communion. Luis suggested that constitutions are not the way to go, that that way is too human-centered.

Harold Jantz pointed out how Gregory’s argument focused on the authority structure of the church, and how he seemed to be wanting to persuade everyone to accept the authority structure of the Roman Catholic Church. Harold feels personally grateful to Pope John Paul II for his courage and his ability to articulate a clear position on issue of contemporary concerns, but said for him Christianity is not a set of propositions, but a relationship with God and Christ. He doesn’t think that any church can understand “truth” fully and absolutely, and thinks that the

various churches in the world can all contribute to our understandings. For him the “church universal” is evidenced by understandings coming from different parts of the church. We are helped by Scripture, but he pointed to the prologue to John’s gospel where the evangelist speaks about the light shining in the darkness and the darkness not grasping it. When Christ came, he left himself open to misunderstanding. In effect, we only understand in part. There is a kind of principle of limitation with respect to our knowledge. In effect, Harold found that Gregory’s principle of non-contradiction doesn’t really work for him in religious matters.

Luis Melo referred to the Lutheran-Catholic work on the issue of justification, where both sides came to accept the existence of differences of emphasis, which did not, however, mean an acceptance of relativity.

John Long wondered if some of these propositions were a little too neat, and suggested that theology doesn’t make us holy, and that actions were more important than doctrinal statements.

Luis Melo referred to the beliefs and practices of the Eastern Catholic Churches, where in contrast to the Western Church with its emphasis on laws, order, and uniformity, there is much more a sense of Christianity as a mystery, and where there is more of an ecclesiology of communion.

Helmut Harder reflected that perhaps our search for an ecumenical way to unity has to be a complex of many of the approaches we are working on. We need to remember that we are in an historical process. There are some fundamentals. Jesus Christ, where we start with the Old and New Testaments: there are a few things about him that are fundamental—his ethical teaching, a life of prayer, certain ethical and spiritual doctrines, etc. Perhaps at some point the goal will be revealed to us.

Mike Radcliffe wondered if perhaps we are mistaken in trying to define the end position in legal terms.

Luis Melo recalled a talk that Cardinal Kasper had given at the Harvard School of Divinity where he used the analogy of the Berlin Wall, which seemed impregnable and everlasting one day, and tumbled down the next. Perhaps unity will come as surprise, like the Incarnation.

Harold Jantz endorsed the idea that we should always be thinking of Jesus Christ. He thought that evangelicals often feel closer to Catholics than to mainstream Protestants because of the clarity of Catholic beliefs on fundamentals about Christ, while the Protestant tradition in favour of the “unadorned truth of scripture” had “failed in such a spectacular and unanticipated fashion.” Harold pointed to the modern charismatic movement, which although confusing and messy, is introducing millions and millions of people around the world to Christ. Some of these people then migrate to more structured churches.

Luis Melo recalled the origins of the modern ecumenical movement in the experience of Protestant missionaries in places like Africa who were finding that denominational differences were proving a great obstacle to the preaching of the gospel. Again, Luis stressed the idea of a theology of communion.

Adolf Ens referred to the experience of Luther, who had begun with an experience of salvation, but whose movement moved back (with the Augsburg Confession) to some pretty rigid doctrinal statements.

Luis Melo thought that his own experience involving ordinary people in Renewal highlights the need for educating ordinary people in the history and doctrines of their faith..

Michele Sala Pastora, reflecting on “ethical ecumenism,” recalled her experience at a health care conference, where she came away convinced that all the decisions cannot be left to the health-care specialists, and that ordinary people have to be a part of the decision making. Ordinary people need to become equipped to take part in discussion of such issues as human cloning; they need to be educated to wrestle with the issues and thus share their insights.

Luis Melo pointed out that this cannot be mandated. He thought that we often assume (with respect to liturgy, for example), that people in the pews have more religious and Biblical knowledge than they have in fact.

Helmut Harder cited John Howard Yoder on the free church (the “believers’ church) idea, which might provide a unique form of ecumenical expression, and his suggestion that perhaps we may all need to back away from existing forms and together work towards a new form, in a kind of ecumenical movement from below. Yoder suggested that church happens when groups meet frequently and regularly and people achieve a measure of openness and kindness with each other. He suggested a grass-roots approach as opposed to an hierarchical approach.

John Long thought that perhaps Catholic (authorities?) go on too much about the dangers of syncretism, that we put too much armor around everything, and are too worried about having to relinquish anything, and that Catholics are not pushing themselves to consider what might be possible.

Luis Melo, while working to prepare a program for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, coming up in January, reports wondering who will come out, and how many? And he wonders about a once a year event as opposed to something more ongoing. If we get so few people to come out, perhaps we are doing something wrong.

Helmut Harder acknowledged that it is difficult to get people together around an idea, to meet “strangers” on that basis.

Richard Lebrun told an anecdote about a Scarborough Missionary priest who visited St. Paul’s College recently, who said he loved to go and worship with believers of all kinds—various Christian denominations, Muslims, Jews, etc., and how this priest seemed blithely happy just ignoring all the rules!

Michele Sala Pastora told how at a recent meeting, in the presence of her archbishop, she had dreamed aloud about getting an ecumenical group to meet regularly to share prayers, etc., and being told by the archbishop, well, why don’t you do it? Perhaps sometimes we are not daring

enough.

Luis Melo insisted he was involved in the ecumenical movement because of his belief that doctrine is important. The Catholic Church is an historical church and has a role to play as such—but perhaps we are out of balance at times, and not as welcoming as we could be.

John Long recalled Henry Loewen’s question to us with respect to participation in the Lord’s Supper—Whose table is it? There followed a round a stories about eucharistic sharing (and not sharing).

Helmut Harder described divisions among Mennonites on rules for sharing in the Lord’s Supper, with some (himself included) holding for more traditional rules (such a being baptized believers, right with the Lord and neighbours, etc.) and some who would see the Lord’s Supper as an opportunity for proclamation (and thus be more open in inviting almost anyone).

Adolf Ens pointed to special occasions when it might be appropriate for rules to be bent, and told of attending a special service in Uganda, a huge celebration in honour of the Ugandan Martyrs, where he felt that non-Catholics were perhaps inappropriately reminded not to take communion.

Planning for the future:

Interchurch Dialogue Series, Christ the King Parish. **Helmut Harder** reported an invitation from Julian Fredette for our group to participate in this series, and in particular to make a presentation on our Catholic-Mennonite Dialogue on Wednesday evening, January 21, 2004. There are number of questions he would like us to address, and Helmut had suggestions about how our group might organize its presentation. After some discussion, it was agreed that we should accept the invitation, and that Helmut and Luis should plan and organize our panel in more detail. In effect, this event will be the next meeting of our dialogue group.

Future of our group. A number of possibilities were mentioned and explored.

Helmut Harder suggested that one possibility might be for the group to undertake an in-depth study and discussion of the Final Report of the International Catholic-Mennonite Dialogue.

Adolf Ens suggested that with our experience we (in units of two or three people) should perhaps undertake to establish similar new groups in Winnipeg. We could assist such new groups until they became self-sustaining.

Luis Melo, wondered if those who thus might go off “two by two” should not return for larger gatherings on a regular basis (perhaps once a year).

John Long thought our experience both with respect to topics and such things as joint worship could serve us well in such an enterprise.

Luis Melo suggested the possibility that our group might produce a “skeleton” (or manual) of

key questions, documents, etc. Perhaps some general directions. Someone else suggested that we might also be in a position to nominate people as participants in new groups.

Michele Sala Pastora suggested the possibility of starting small, with one new group, and also wondered about the possibility of a project during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

Helmut Harder suggested that another project that our group might take on with respect to a Summer Ecumenical Institute being planned for some time next spring or summer in Winnipeg. A planning committee has met, and Ray and Fenella Temmerman have agreed to serve as co-ordinators of this event. Perhaps as a group we could make a presentation on our Catholic-Mennonite Dialogue similar to the one planned for January at Christ the King Parish. There was enthusiastic acceptance of this suggestion.

Luis Melo asked if there might be a Mennonite church in the St. Boniface area that might be willing to host an event in association with the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, and he was offered a couple of possibilities.

Next meeting: Tentative dates of May 12th or May 19th were set for the next regular meeting of our group, to be hosted at a Mennonite Brethren church. The Final Report will be the likely topic.