

Minutes

Winnipeg Mennonite-Catholic Dialogue, Meeting No. 18

Meeting held on 27 June 2006
at the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies

Present: Elaine Baete, Adolf Ens, Irma Fast Dueck, Helmut Harder, Harold Jantz, Richard Lebrun, Henry Loewen, John Long, Luis Melo, Michael Radcliffe, and Lynda Trenholm

1. **Helmut Harder** opened the meeting and asked **Harold Jantz** to welcome the group to the Ministry Centre. Harold in turn introduced **Ken Reddig**, the archivist at the Centre, who provided a more formal welcome, information about the Centre and the work done there, and a guided tour of the facility.
2. **Harold Jantz** led an Opening Prayer, preceded by a commentary on *Deus Caritas Est* from a Mennonite publication.
3. Sharing ecumenical and personal experiences (preceded by personal introduction for the benefit of our guests, **Ken Reddig** and **Donovan Giesbrecht**).
 - a) **John Long** spoke of:
 - 1) Agonizing with Anglican friends over issues dividing the Anglican communion at this time.
 - 2) His experience at a memorial service following the death of his father at age 88, a man who had become a Roman Catholic when he was 79, with his father's many non-Catholic friends, including the Lutheran pastor of his former congregation, in attendance. The service provided an opportunity for ecumenical reflections and dialogue.
 - b) **Mike Radcliffe** spoke of:
 - 1) His continuing activity in the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises program at St. Ignatius parish, where this past year he served as Spiritual Director for a Pentecostal minister.
 - 2) Volunteer activity at a soup kitchen at Immaculate Conception parish. This part of an Ignatian Lay Volunteer program that has grown out of the Spiritual Exercises program.
 - c) **Richard Lebrun** spoke of:
 - 1) Attendance at a Catholic Stewardship conference in early June in Vancouver. While this was primarily a Catholic event, he did meet an Anglican exhibitor.
 - 2) Planned attendance at the Bridgefolk conference at St. John's University, 29 June – 2 July.

- d) **Luis Melo** provided a handout on his many and continuing ecumenical and inter-church activities, and spoke briefly to some of them:
- 1) Los Angeles: participation in the Azusa Street Mission Centennial (Neo-Pentecostal). The Catholic charismatic movement were represented.
 - 2) Rome: April 6 – May 7. Meetings with representatives of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, including Mgr. Radano, Fr. Donald Bolen, and Fr. Juan Ousman. Luis reported on our dialogues here in Winnipeg, and was told that we are now regarded as a “model” and a “pilot.”
 - 3) Switzerland: May 7 – 11. Grandchamp Ecumenical Monastery near Neuchatel, which is involved in spiritual ecumenism and translation of the text “Third Order.” Meetings in Geneva at the World Council of Churches (May 12 –13) where he met a number of people, including the Mennonite, Rev. Hansulrich Berber, who was in charge of planning the WCC’s Decade to Overcome Violence.
 - 4) London, a brief holiday and involvement with inter-faith activities.
 - 5) Locally: monthly meetings with the Winnipeg Jewish-Catholic Dialogue, which he feels is going very well. Interfaith Leaders Meeting with the Manitoba Interfaith Round Table; Ecumenical Bishops of Manitoba; Coptic Oriental Orthodox. He also reported that the new bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada is Rev. Elaine Sauer (a former Catholic). Luis also spoke about the upcoming Taize meeting in Montreal scheduled for April 27–29, 2007. Luis and Fr. Robert Poltz will also be attending the Bridgefolk conference at St. John’s.
- e) **Helmut Harder** spoke of:
- 1) Speaking at Bethel Mennonite Church (River Heights) on three Saturdays, during which he reported on both the International and local Mennonite-Catholic Dialogues.
 - 2) Speaking at the Mennonite church in Altona, where the pastor has a Catholic spouse, and where attempts are being made to open a Mennonite-Catholic dialogue with Catholics in Le Tellier.
 - 3) Hosting (with his wife Irma) a lady deeply involved in the Focolare movement.
 - 4) A planned visit to Germany (with Irma) in July, where he will be going to Innsbruck to meet with Dr. Astrid von Schlachta who, with the Catholic bishops of the Tyrol, is involved in planning a Hutterite-Catholic reconciliation (with the Hutterites setting the agenda).
 - 5) Scheduled lectures to be delivered at Bethel College in Newton, Kansas, where there will also be contact with Focolare folks in that area.
 - 6) Ongoing work on a project entitled Toward a Cloud of Witnesses, a common martyrology, in conjunction with Bose ecumenical monastery in northern Italy.
- f) **Lynda Trenhom** spoke of:
- 1) Working with secular funeral homes, guiding families, helping them to choose healing funeral services.
 - 2) Celebrations associated with the ordination of a priest who grew up in Christ the King parish.
 - 3) Experience at wedding held at Fort Gibraltar, with much use of sign language to meet the needs of hearing impaired people involved.

- g) **Elaine Baete** spoke enthusiastically about her attendance at a large ecumenical conference in California.

National Workshop on Christian Unity May 8–11, 2006 San Jose California

The National Association of Diocesan Ecumenical Officers (NADEO), a voluntary association of Catholic ecumenical officers, had its annual conference, workshops, and meeting May 8–11, 2006 in San Jose in conjunction with other related groups such as ECCO (Ecumenical Colleagues), EDEIO (Episcopal Diocesan Ecumenical and Interreligious Officers), LARC (Lutheran, Anglican, Roman Catholic), LERN (Lutheran Ecumenical Representatives Network), NEOA (National Ecumenical Officers Association), and the WCC (World Council of Churches) amongst others.

When one has been involved in ecumenical dialogue on informal local levels, becoming familiar with the above groups and with their acronyms in ecumenical and interfaith dialogue was a rather overwhelming experience, let alone the large number of people present for this event. While clergy from various denominations and, from various levels of authority within each faith were present, it is remarkable to see how many lay persons have been committed, involved and present from the grassroots level of their parishes. It is truly impressive to see how many persons are working behind the scenes for the cause of Christian unity and interfaith dialogue and mutual understanding.

After a late afternoon orientation for newcomers to the conference, Bishop McCarthy of San Jose welcomed all participants during the opening liturgy hosted where his cathedra resides. This four day gathering was in view of manifesting God's call to grow in unity according to the Scripture verses of Matthew 18: 20 "Where two or three are gathered in my name I am there among them."

Dr. Richard Mouw, President of Fuller Theological Seminary of Pasadena California, Sr. Dr. Diane Bergant CSA, Professor of Biblical Studies at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, and Rev. Dr. Kevin Mannoia, Chaplain of Pacific University's Graduate and Professional programs, were the Plenary Presenters.

Dr. Mouw in his insightful presentation on "Evangelicals and Ecumenism," spoke on who evangelicals are, why they tend to not be involved in ecumenical dialogue and why they should be evangelical at all. Because of the emphasis on personal conversion and relationship with Jesus Christ, with emphasis on the Bible as the supreme authority, there is little or no need to refer to any sense of "church." Given a genuine conversion, the understanding of one's mission to evangelize is as more a personal mission, and less an ecclesial one. Ecclesiology, preoccupations with internal structures, and gathering for breaking bread together are less important than promoting a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. They also prefer to emphasize inclusive external structures, such as Promise Keepers, rather than developing and maintaining internal structures. The sub-culture inherent in evangelical life can fit in well with post-modern culture. While they may have an ecumenical advantage of being able to take a selective approach to converse with others and to lead them in the

way of righteousness, Mouw describes a particular challenge evangelicals have in terms of being deconstructionists and as having ecclesial amnesia, i.e., not having a sense of history as a foundation with which to build relationships and their mission upon, even in terms of creeds or confessions.

For her two plenary sessions Sr. Diane Bergant CSA, used her biblical expertise in reference to Old Testament stories and pericopes to highlight themes of reconciliation and forgiveness that can be applied within and amongst denominations and Churches in the cause of ecumenism and interfaith dialogue. She invited all those present to share with their neighbours at their tables on the sentiments that are necessary for healing and reconciliation to occur. In concluding each of the two sessions she insisted that the initial step towards reconciliation begins with the victim, though the perpetrator might not be open to it. A challenge to our attitudes was launched in that we are called to put the emphasis on being loving rather than on being right.

Retired Cardinal Archbishop John Quinn of San Francisco was the guest speaker during the LARC Luncheon. His topic, “Papal Authority,” was based on his recent book on this topic. He challenged the current structures and operations of the Catholic Church to become similar to the pre-scholastic era, thus making room for ecumenical reconciliation. According to him the Church could be less centralized and the local conferences of Bishops could have more authority.

In the closing plenary, Dr. Kevin Mannoia spoke on ecumenism in reference to the river of God described in the book of the prophet Ezekiel. In the spirit of ecumenical dialogue we were strongly reminded that like this river, working for Christian unity means we must be always willing to change, be willing to move, and be willing to be forgiving and life-giving.

There were a multitude of mini-workshops and panel discussions offered as ways to initiate and model dialogue for Christian unity and interfaith relations from which to choose. These were occasions for listening, questioning, and for personal contact and growing in sensitivity towards others with regards to issues of ecumenism and interfaith concerns.

Attending such a conference is truly a formative experience with a sharp but worthy learning curve. It is amazing how much we all have in common and are searching for living what we hold most in common: Jesus Christ. The process and content of this conference has also been an affirmation of the ecumenical and interfaith efforts, activities, and events held within our campus ministry program. While there is a lot of unknown ahead, this experience has been nourishment to continue building on what has begun in whatever ways possible. Sincere gratitude is extended to those who have made attendance and participation in this conference possible.

- f) **Irma Fast Dueck** spoke of:
- 1) Planning for a conference on “Worship and Reconciliation” to be held 18–20 January 2007 – to more or less coincide with the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

- 2) An Institute on peace building within congregations, a three-hour session in May with 25 church leaders from various denominations – brought together by conflict!
 - 3) Organization of the CMU end of the planned dialogue of faculty from CMU and St. Paul's College, the major problem being one of keeping the number from CMU down to six. It proved impossible to schedule a "get-acquainted" session in June, so it will have to be scheduled in September. Irma wondered about opening the process up to larger numbers of participants, a suggestion that was discussed, and then more or less tabled with the thought that something along these lines might be more appropriate another year.
- g) **Harold Jantz** spoke of:
- 1) Continuing work at the House of Hesus, where a recent "support evening" attracted about 300 people. He reported that New Directions Ministries is trying to organize nationally, with a central office in Toronto.
 - 2) An experience with an older brother who is dying of cancer, and is being visited by a Christian Reform pastor from Brandon, at whose wedding his brother officiated many years ago.
 - 3) Taking a course at CMU on Anabaptists, Pietists, and Evangelicals in which he wrote a paper on Pietist influence on Mennonites in Russia.
- h) **Henry Loewen** spoke of:
- 1) Helping his son-in-law to build a house.
 - 2) Participating with a male choir at worship at Epiphany Church on Epiphany Sunday, and speaking about the Lutheran-Mennonite dialogue in the U.S.
 - 3) Using *Deus Caritas Est* as the basis of a family meditation at the lake.
 - 4) Asking his brother to provide his Catholic golfing partner with a copy of *Deus Caritas Est*,
- i) **Adolf Ens** spoke of a Mennonite, married to a Catholic (Bolivian), who recently returned to Manitoba having spent some time in Bolivia, with a daughter who had been enrolled at a Mennonite boarding school in Gretna, and another child now enrolled in the Catholic Middle School in Fort Garry. The wife also participates in a Bible Study group.

4. Update on new congregational/dialogue groups.

- a) **Richard** and **Helmut** reported on the St. Ignatius/Charleswood Mennonite group, which has been organized with six persons from St. Ignatius/St. John Brebeuf and six from Charleswood Mennonite. A "get-acquainted" meeting was held at St. Ignatius on May 16th. The agenda included personal introductions, experience of the "other," and brief reports from **Helmut** on the International dialogue and **Richard** on our local dialogue. A second meeting is scheduled for September 18th.

- b) **Irma** referred to her earlier comment about the CMU/St. Paul's College group, now trying to schedule a first meeting in September.
- c) **John** and **Adolf** reported on their efforts to organize a group between Mary Mother of the Church and Adolf's Mennonite congregation. John has recruited six parishioners, who had lots of questions about objectives and process, with a clear interest in action (including worship) as well as discussion. At this point, **Helmut** interjected with information about a peace-building initiative proposed at a recent World Mennonite Conference in California – which may lead to action in Bolivia in a couple of years.
- d) **Harold** and **Lynda** reported on their efforts to organize a group in North Kildonan/East Kildonan, which will most likely involve participants from three Catholic parishes (St. Alphonsus, Holy Redeemer, and St. Gerard) and two Mennonite congregations (River East and McIver).
- e) **Helmut** reported interest from folks at First Mennonite (a more or less downtown congregation) and wondered about a possible Catholic parish to link with – and about leadership, from our group. He suggested that other congregations and parishes might be interested as well.
- f) **Luis** reported his efforts to be a clearing house of information for all these groups. In addition to the template that he and **Helmut** developed, he is collecting “letters of invitation,” agendas, lists of participants, etc. He asked all to send such material to him. Lists of participants should include contact information and parish/congregation affiliation.
- g) There was some preliminary discussion of some form of concluding event next spring, which would provide an opportunity to bring together participants from all these groups, probably at CMU, with both some sort of forum (a “vision session”?) and an appropriate worship service.

6. **Summary and reflections based on *Deus Caritas Est*.**

- a) Luis distributed a document entitled “*Deus Caritas Est*: Background notes and Reflections,” covering both background on encyclicals generally and on this particular encyclical, as well some highlights of Paragraphs 1 and 2. To ensure that this document is part of the record, it is reproduced as Appendix to these minutes. There was not time, at this point, for discussion of this material.
- b) **Adolf Ens** summarized Paragraphs 3–8 and offered reflections thereon. Adolf noted the linguistic features of a document written in German, translated into Latin (the official version), with the English translation made from the Latin version.

Overview

Paragraphs 3–8 seek to bring together *eros* (love between man and woman “which is neither planned nor willed”) and *agape* (love grounded in and shaped by faith), in such a way that the human body and soul can both participate in a unified way in loving.

Since the term *eros* is hardly used in the Bible, and Christianity introduced a new understanding of *agape*, the preferred term of the NT, Christianity has been accused of destroying *eros*. (3) This encyclical argues that Judeo-Christian faith opposed not *eros* as such, but rather the “warped and destructive form of it” which considered *eros* principally as a kind of divine intoxication and exploited fellow humans in the quest to achieve such “divine madness.” (4)

Humans possess both body and soul. It is neither the spirit alone nor the body alone that loves but the “unified creature composed” of both. Both body and soul are therefore affirmed by Christianity, because it view a human being as “a unity in duality” in which spirit and matter “compenetrate” in such a way that each is brought to a new nobility. “Body love” (*eros*), in its rise “in ecstasy” toward the divine, leads us beyond ourselves. (5)

This new path of “ascent and purification” (Hebrew *dodim*; Greek approximately *eros*) begins with a love that is searching, somewhat self-seeking, wanting to sink “into the intoxication of happiness.” But along the way it is transformed into *ahaba* (*agape*), seeking instead the good of the beloved. A further growth toward higher levels purifies love to become exclusive (this person alone) and for ever. Love is thus not a moment of intoxication but rather a journey, an on-going movement toward authentic self-discovery and simultaneously the discovery of God. (6)

In theological and philosophical debate distinctions are sometimes made between “descending, oblation love” (*agape*) as Christian, while “ascending, possessive or covetous love” (*eros*) is seen as non-Christian or “wordly.” To take these distinctions to extremes would detach the essence of Christianity from the vital relations fundamental to human existence. Hence Christianity recognizes that the two should not be separated but find their proper unity. *Eros* may be at first mainly covetous and ascending but increasingly is less concerned with self and more with the beloved. If this *agape* did not enter in, *eros* would be impoverished and even lose its own nature. On the other hand, humans cannot live by oblation, descending love alone; they cannot always give, but must also receive. Anyone who wishes to love must also receive love as a gift. (7)

Fundamentally, therefore, “love” is therefore a single reality, but with different dimensions. With this conclusion of the brief philosophical discussion, our document affirms that biblical faith is **not** opposed to the “primordial human phenomenon which is love,” but, accepting the **whole** human being (body and

soul), intervenes in our search for love in order to purify it and reveal new dimensions of it.

Response:

1. This is a heavy introduction to the encyclical, especially for many of the “lay faithful.” Because it is so brief, the arguments seem at time to take shortcuts; “their own inner logic” is not so obvious on first reading.
2. No reference to some of the classic Protestant treatments of this theme such as Anders Nygren’s (Swedish bishop of Lund) two-volume work of the 1930s, which spawned quite a bit of new literature in subsequent decades.

c) **John Long** summarized Paragraphs 9–11, on The Newness of Biblical Faith as follows:

Especially paragraphs 7 and 8 are a necessary preamble, in that the question is asked whether the message of love proclaimed by the Bible and church tradition is in contact with the human experience of love or opposed to it. The answer provided is that they are one reality and that “biblical faith does not set up a parallel universe, or one opposed to that primordial human phenomenon which is love, but rather accepts the whole man.”

What is significance of biblical faith to the experience of love? Benedict claims that it intervenes in man’s search for love so as to purify it and reveal new dimensions of it.

First the Bible provides us with a new image of God: there is only one God, He is creator of heaven and earth and the source of all that exists. Also, we learn that his creation is dear to him, especially man, whom he loves as one who is faithful to one’s spouse. The relationship is one of fidelity and God’s love for man is while passionate, totally *agape*, that is gratuitous, without merit and forgiving. As shown in Hosea 11:8–9 and John 3:16, that which we otherwise deserve (judgement and repudiation) according to justice, is overcome by love, evidenced in the incarnation and the cross.

The Bible also provides a new image of man. Man alone is incomplete; only in communion with the opposite sex does he become complete (Gen 2:24). *Eros* is rooted in man’s nature and eros directs man to a unique and definitive bond, namely, monogamous marriage of man and woman. The exclusive relationship of married love “becomes the icon of the relationship between God and his people and vice versa. God’s way of loving becomes the measure of human love.”

John also offered some general observations and comments as follows:

- I am delighted with its subject matter, its questions and rationale for a renewed personal and ecclesial response to God’s love.
- Questions in the text of the exposition are so penetrating of the issues; in the context of contemporary secular society, the questions might even be considered brave.
- Benedict seems more the logician than JP II. I couldn’t help comparing The Gospel of Life (1995) with this encyclical.
- I appreciate very much Benedict’s distillation of the proper attributes of Christian charity, personal or ecclesial, notably in Paragraph 31, a, b, and c. and the characterization of these as distinct from the obligations of civil society to do justice.
- I detected in Paragraphs 13 and 14 the elements of a theology of the Eucharist that I can begin to understand and accept.

c) **Irma Fast Dueck** offered the following summary and reflections on Paragraphs 12–15:

1. First, I want to say how much I enjoyed reading this letter. A first for me. I taught a course this past year entitled “Marriage and Family in Christian Perspective” and I realized as I was teaching it how critical I was of mainline Protestant and evangelical understandings of love. I appreciated the wholeness of the understanding of love and the spirituality which accompanies it.
2. Paragraphs 12–15 – *Jesus Christ – the incarnate love of God*
 - a. Honestly, the section surprised me! Not so much what was said but how it was said.
 - b. Paragraph 12 – focuses on the incarnation of God in Christ. God is more than idea, or feeling or even experience, God is embodied in “an unprecedented realism.” This surprising and unpredictable and at times elusive God, shows up in Jesus Christ. A marvellous description and conception of the incarnation of God, “love in its most radical form.” The embodiedness of God in Jesus is breathtaking. It almost verges on ludicrous. I recall one of my favourite novels, Graham Greene’s *Power and the Glory* about the whiskey priest. A priest on the run, ends up in a jail cell but no one knows he is a priest and he doesn’t need to tell anyone and decides that there in that dirty jail cell, he will confess that he is priest. Couple going at it in a corner and pious woman horrified and he marvels about their ability to find beauty amidst the ugliness. In fact isn’t that what the saints was their remarkable imagination – they were able to do Francis of Assisi, Mother Theresa, they were able to see past the ugliness to the beauty that was there. “Really hatred is just a lack of imagination.” The paragraph brings to mind the remarkable imagination of the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ.
 - c. Paragraph 13 & 14 were the surprise. I think I expected the section to flow from the incarnation of God in Jesus, and then the stories of Jesus life

(and his teaching about love on the sermon on the amount) and then his death and resurrection. But no, here we move from the incarnation right to the Lord's Supper. How did we get there so fast? I realize that the Lord's Supper is really the centerpiece for thinking about the incarnation (an "aha" moment). Sacrament more than symbol, perhaps root symbol. Eucharist is God's self-giving to us. We are fed on this love, nurtured by it. In the Eucharist we share with each other and with God. Eucharist as "union with God" – "communion." Jesus allows this "communion." Brings me to the next point.

- d. Paragraph 14 – worship & ethics. I'm not sure if it was a coincidence that I was assigned this little paragraph but anyways, here goes. In my work on Mennonite worship and ethics I have always argued that what binds worship and ethics together can be summarized in one word (or two): "Jesus" (Christ)! On one level the response appears facile, yet it speaks to the centrality of Jesus Christ in shaping Mennonite identity and self-understanding (indeed, for Mennonites, "Jesus" may well be the answer to all theological questions!). The tie that binds believers in both worship and ethics is the person of Jesus Christ. [The New Testament clearly attests to the Christ-centered nature of Christian worship: prayers were offered in the name of Jesus (Jn 15:16; Eph 5:20); converts were baptized into his name (Acts 2:38); Jesus' word was declared (Col 3:16), hymns praised the person of Jesus as the God-become-human and the saving work of his death and resurrection (Phil 2:6–11; Col 1:15–20; 1 Tim 3:16)] and the body of Christ was symbolized in the bread and wine, which also symbolized the unity and oneness of Christ's community, the church. And it is the life of Jesus that is to be emulated in the life and actions of believers. Jesus is the root metaphor of what it means to be the church in both its worship and its lived witness. One might say that within the Body of Christ, Jesus is that connective tissue, like a sinew attached to bone and muscle, which binds the community's praise and witness, faith and action, worship and ethics.

I intentionally did not do much work on the Lord's Supper in my dissertation since another Mennonite scholar, John Rempel, had already done significant work on it in his doctoral dissertation and so I sort of scooted around it. And I could do that, because from Anabaptist-Mennonite perspective though we hold the Lord's Supper as central to our life together in community, it is not necessarily central to our Christology (that is, how we understand Christ to be Christ, the incarnated son of God). According to this document (*Deum Caritas Est*), that would not be possible. For the experience of Jesus, as the incarnation of God, the experience of God's love for us (God's *agape*), culminates in this meal. Jesus' teaching on love only makes sense, can only be understood, sacramentally. We can know the love of Christ in the Eucharist. It is the act by which love of God and love of neighbour, is given coherence. Love is not a requirement but a response to love that is given (eros and agape

come together).

- e. Paragraph 15 – and only then does the document return to the story of Jesus and his parables. The Lord's Supper gives coherence to the parables. Then we begin to understand the concept of neighbour.

So I understand this but is it so? How do we understand the Biblical text? Is the Lord's supper given that kind of authority by which to interpret the meaning of Jesus? What is the role of tradition? And of course, what about those excluded from the table? Just a few questions.

- e) **Harold Jantz** offered the following summary and reflections on Paragraphs 16–18, on Love of God and love of neighbour:

These paragraphs are wonderful Christian reading, raising profound questions, providing wonderful insights. They are hopeful, stimulating, energizing, alive to Christ.

Para. 16 begins with two important questions: can we love God without seeing him? Can love of God be commanded? The answer to both these questions at first seems to be no, and in the end turns out to be yes. The nature of our relationship to God, the way he has become visible to us in Christ, and the way he appears to us in the neighbour provide the basis for that answer.

We don't see God yet we are to love him and demonstrate our love. The way the Scriptures approach that is to say that if we claim to love God and yet hate our [brothers] neighbours, we are liars. It's as plain as that. We can't love God and hate others. The encyclical puts it very powerfully: "Saint John's words should be interpreted to mean that love of neighbour is a path that leads to encounter with God, and that closing our eyes to our neighbour also blinds us to God."

In Para. 17, the encyclical moves farther and says that God "may be invisible, but he does not remain completely inaccessible." The wonderful reality is that he has made himself "visible" in Jesus. It calls this the "love story of the Bible" wrapped up in the incarnation of God, his coming to us in Christ Jesus, his life among us, his suffering and death for us on the cross, his resurrection from the dead and his creation of the church. We experience the love of God, he loved us first and he continues to do so. He encounters us "ever anew" in the church, in the "men and women who reflect his presence, in his word, in the sacraments and especially in the Eucharist. In the living community of believers, we experience the love of God." And "since he has 'loved us first,' love can also blossom as a response in us."

This love is not merely sentiment. It is the outcome of a process of "purification and maturation," though it is never "finished" and "complete." "Throughout life it changes and matures." The encyclical has what I think is a wonderful way of

describing what happens in the encounter between God, us, and others. “The love story between God and man consists in the very fact that this communion of will increases in a communion of thought and sentiment, and thus our will and God’s will increasingly coincide: God’s will is no longer for me an alien will, something imposed on me from without by the commandments, but it is now my will.”

Thus, in Para. 18, love of neighbour is shown to be possible. “In God and with God, I love even the person whom I do not like or even know. This can only take place on the basis of an intimate encounter with God.” It is the result of seeing others through the eyes of Jesus—not through an organization, not simply in terms of outward necessities, as the encyclical puts it, “we see them with the look of love they crave.” We see others as made in the image of God. We see others out of our contact with God, out of our encounter with the Eucharistic Lord. “Love of God and love of neighbour are thus inseparable, they form a single commandment. But both live from the love of God who has loved us first.” The section points out a danger, however. We can try to love our neighbour as a “political necessity” or out of a desire to be “devout” or to do my “religious duties.” The consequence will be growing aridity in my relationship with God and lovelessness to the neighbour. This section concludes by stating that what the Scriptures are calling for in 1 John is “no longer a commandment imposed from without and calling for the impossible, but rather a freely bestowed experience of love from within, a love which by its very nature must be shared. Love unites us to God, makes us a ‘we’ which transcends our divisions and makes us one, until in the end God is ‘all in all.’”

The notes that I found most challenging, instructive and genuinely inspiring in this section were these:

- The close connection it made between loving the ‘invisible’ God and loving our ‘visible’ neighbour.
- The affirmation that we can love God too [and this is part of the ‘mystery’ of God] because he has become known to us and made visible in Jesus.
- The assertion that love for God is more than sentiment, that it involves the will and all our potentialities, and that as our wills coincide more and more, as we abandon ourselves to God, we experience joy.
- And the claim that as we see people through the eyes of Jesus and in the image of God, we can give to them what they “really crave” and truly “need.”

- f) **Richard Lebrun** offered the following reflections on Paragraphs 19–25, which deal with “The Church’s charitable activity as a manifestation of Trinitarian Love” and “Charity as a responsibility of the Church”

At the Northwest Regional Catholic Stewardship Conference that I attended recently (8–9 June) in Vancouver, the closing “keynote” address was given by our own Archbishop James Weisgerber. Quite remarkably, he used these precise paragraphs of Pope Benedict’s encyclical as the text for his talk on stewardship.

Picking up on the pope's remarks in paragraph 25 (a) about the Church's deepest nature being expressed in "her three-fold responsibility: of proclaiming the word of God (*kerygma-martyria*), celebrating the sacraments (*leitourgia*) and exercising the ministry of charity (*diakonia*)," Archbishop Weisgerber introduced the analogy of a three-legged stool. In effect, all three legs are important and essential for the well-being of the Church. If one is missing or weak, the stool will not provide effective support and will be in danger of toppling.

In these paragraphs of the encyclical, the pope provides ample evidence that in the first centuries of its existence the "ministry of charity" had been an essential and constitutive part of the Church and its life. But reflecting at the long history of Catholicism, and in particular on trends in recent centuries, our archbishop wondered if we (we being taken to include both the Church as an institution and individual Catholics) have not put too much emphasis on proclamation of the Word and celebration of the sacraments to the neglect of the ministry of charity. We may have been effective in the first two, but less successful in the third. Our stool may have become a bit tippy.

From this perspective, Archbishop Weisgerber spoke eloquently of stewardship as an idea whose time has come for the Catholic Church. He portrayed stewardship as a call and as an essential means for renewal and reform. The whole conference, with inspiring talks by stewardship leaders (mostly lay people) from across the U.S. and Canada, he said, demonstrated the growing importance of the idea and practice stewardship for the Church today. He spoke about how the ministry of charity (more so than the ministries of the Word and the sacraments) was one in which the laity could and were taking primary responsibility.

In the context of our Mennonite-Catholic dialogue, it strikes me that stewardship is another area (in addition to peacemaking), where Catholics can learn from our Mennonite brothers and sisters. As I understand it, from the sixteenth century, the Anabaptist tradition has taken literally Zwingli's admonition that "to be a Christian is not to talk about Christ but to walk as he walked." Benedict, in paragraphs 12 through 18 of this encyclical, on Jesus Christ the incarnate love of God, and on love of God and love of neighbor, sets out the biblical roots of this perspective. And in the paragraphs upon which I am reflecting, he tries to show how "love is the service that the Church carries out in order to attend constantly to man's sufferings and his needs, including material needs." While it is true that Catholicism, in particular through various religious orders and congregations that have made the service of charity their particular charism, has not entirely neglected this dimension of lived Christianity, still for ordinary lay people this dimension of faith has been less salient. It seems to me that Catholic lay people, in taking seriously the call to stewardship, can learn much from the way Mennonites have lived this tradition in such institutions as the Mennonite Central Committee.

Relevant as well to our ecumenical dialogue, are Benedict's comments on the social character of sacramental communion (back in paragraph 14), where he says "Union with Christ is also union with all those to whom he gives himself. ... Communion draws me out of myself towards him, and thus also towards unity with all Christians." We have, of course, explored our different, and in some ways complementary, understandings of Eucharist / Lord's Supper. This weekend I will be attending the 2006 Bridgefolk conference at St. John's University in Collegeville, where the theme will be "Making Peace: At the Table, In the World," a theme that obviously ties together peacemaking and table fellowship. The most recent issue of *The Bridge*, the newsletter of the Bridgefolk movement, has an article by Abbot John Klassen (of St. John's Abbey and the co-chair of the Bridgefolk movement) entitled "Reflections on Open and Closed Communion." In it, Abbot John suggests that "given the Catholic Church's evolving understanding of the conditions for intercommunion, it would be appropriate for Mennonites to participate fully in the sacrament of Eucharist at our future conferences." I very much look forward to what may be said and done at this Bridgefolk conference; I expect it will all be relevant to both stewardship and our local Mennonite / Catholic dialogue.

g) **Michael Radcliffe** offered a summary and reflections on Paragraphs 26–29:

Mike highlighted the pope's critical analysis of various 19th century ideologies, and was particularly taken by the concept of subsidiarity, and its ideal that the aim of a just social order is to guarantee to each person his share of the community's goods. He also liked the way the document spoke of separation between church and state and the interrelationship between the two. He was glad to see the encyclical critical of "the state which would provide everything," "which regulates and controls everything," and which "would ultimately become a mere bureaucracy incapable of providing" what people really need – "loving personal concern." He thought the document very helpful in its careful delineation of the duties and roles of individuals and the Church.

h) **Elaine Baete** offered the following summary and reflections on Paragraph 30:

Brief Overview: This paragraph refers briefly to the situation of the struggle for justice and love in the world of today. There are manifold misunderstandings, tensions, and suffering going on in the world. Despite the fact that the world seems to be smaller than ever because of the mass means of communications and solidarity in the context of globalization, there ought to be a matching means of reaching out and working towards the relief of the misunderstandings, tensions, and suffering, but this is not the case. The many ways that secular organizations are reaching out to aid those who are disadvantaged throughout the world in a voluntary, philanthropic, and humanitarian manner are acknowledged. The collective endeavors towards justice and relief are affirmed as surpassing individual efforts.

I would like to go to the end of the paragraph and highlight what is defined as a **true humanism** which acknowledges that the human person is made in the image of God

and wants that life be lived in consonance with that dignity.

Personal thoughts/reflections:

Overall this document is a simple reading which when looked at more closely or studied can raise many questions. As I reflect on this paragraph, there seems to be a lot to chew on! I always like to keep in mind a *Christian anthropology* or in other terms, a *Christian vision of the human person* when I read and reflect on such material. The human person as a whole, spirit, body, and soul is made in the image of God, but what does that mean? In this document the image is defined very much and necessarily so by love in its various forms eros, philia, and agape. But there are other elements that make up the Christian vision of the human person that maybe have not been so clearly identified: human potential, freedom, the gifts of faith and grace (versus sin) to name a few. Not the least is the fact that the human person, a creature of God, though made in the image of God, is a *limited* being and not God or a god. And given this context, the famous questions about suffering: why is there suffering? How could a loving God permit suffering? Well, I tend to answer the question in this way: the God who gave us freedom, will not interfere on our freedom, and so there is suffering, but also the fact that we bear the limitation of simply being human and this requires something of us in relationship to one another and to God for that matter. Humble, limited, social creatures in that sacred image that we inherently are, we are called to transcend the limits of the self in “theocentric love” and reach out to be our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers. Can we transcend these human limitations, individual and collective? And how? Perhaps we can do that on a philanthropic, human, or humanitarian way, or, if we are mindful of the grace of God who can do more in us than we can imagine we can be truly inspired by the dying on the cross that has gone before us – and transcend our limitations. Again, all the more if we do it collectively than individually. This document and paragraph affirms that eros integrated with agape within the human person raises human dignity to its true reality.

Mention is given to volunteer work as done by individuals and organizations and the humanitarian associations that promote solidarity among peoples. A little further there is reference to the (extra) quality that is demonstrated by Christian efforts that redound to the effectiveness of charitable service. It would be interesting to follow up on a discussion on the differences between volunteer work and charity (if there are any depending on the perspective(s) one takes)... And how they reflect in our own personal and corporate lives. This is often an insightful formative experience when discussions are held with the students about their volunteer or outreach work from within Chaplaincy.

Last words of reflection: Charity is the crowning of eros with agape... so let the left hand not know what the right hand does!

h) **Lynda Trenholm** offered these reflections on Paragraph 31:

It was comforting to read in print that there is “the increase in diversified organizations engaged in meeting various human needs is ultimately due to the fact that the command of love of neighbour is inscribed by the Creator in man’s very nature.” Also that “it is a result of the presence of Christianity in the world.” I could not agree more. “Our lives are but a single breath, we flower and we fade, yet all our days are in the Creator’s hands, thus we return in love what God has made.” One of my favourite lines from Jesus is his command to us to “love one another as I have loved you.” Notice, he does not command us to love just one other person; he commands us “to love one another.” Certainly, this is a broad, all-encompassing command, all-embracing command. To those who see with eyes of faith, we can only see God, reflected in the faces of those around us, but especially in the faces of all the poor and lowly of the world.

It was interesting to reflect on the essential elements of Christian and ecclesial charity. A) “Christian charity is first of all the simple response to immediate needs and specific situations: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, caring for and healing the sick, visiting those in prison, etc.” How true! In recent times, we have witnessed so many disasters that have robbed so many people of the world of their most basic needs. Certainly, “the Church’s charitable organizations... ought to do everything in their power to provide the resources and above all the personnel needed for this work.” The encyclical mentions the work of *Caritas* in this regard, which prompted me to learn more about the activity of this organization. I discovered on the Internet that Caritas International is a confederation of 162 Catholic relief, development and social service organizations working to build a better world, especially for the poor and oppressed, in over 200 countries and territories. I was more than impressed by these numbers and wondered what role Canada plays in this organization. I learned that DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE is the official international organization of the Catholic Church and the Canadian member of *Caritas Internationalis*. In addition, I learned that “last year, DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE, PROVIDED \$18.4 million to support 309 long-term development projects and 72 emergency relief projects in the Global South.” Certainly, I was proud of the fact that our parish of Christ the King had contributed over \$22,000 toward these projects. Upon further investigation, I learned about one of their more recent national efforts. DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE has joined with the Canadian Network on Corporate Accountability (NCA) to urge the federal government to regulate the operating standards of Canadian mining, oil and gas companies overseas. The issue is that “Canadian extractive companies, including mining, oil and gas, have been implicated in well-documented cases of human rights violations and environmental disasters abroad. These violations by Canadian companies include toxic dumping, the destruction of protected areas, forcible displacement of indigenous peoples, and threats and intimidation of local communities.”

I also had to agree with the encyclical as to the criteria needed for charity workers who carry out the mandate of these organizations for they “are dealing with human beings, and human beings always need something more than technically proper care. They

need humanity. They need heartfelt concern.” Thus, these individuals not only need to be professionals; they “need a “formation of the heart”: they need to be led to that encounter with God in Christ which awakens their love and opens their spirits to others.”

B) Christian charitable activity must be independent of parties and ideologies. Certainly, I would have to agree with this statement. The old adage comes to mind; “charity begins at home,” meaning for me, as the programme of the Good Samaritan and Jesus stresses; it is the heart that “sees where love is needed and acts accordingly.”

C) “Charity, furthermore, cannot be used as a means of engaging in what is nowadays considered proselytism. Love is free; it is not practised as a way of achieving other ends.” Certainly, I could not agree more. Indeed, those who practise charity in the Church’s name realize that “a pure and generous love is the best witness to the God in whom we believe and by whom we are driven to love.” I have certainly found this to be true in my ministry and even in dealings with my own children and family. Unconditional love is just that – unconditional. This is how we are Christ to one another. Thus, “it is the responsibility of the Church’s charitable organizations to reinforce this awareness in their members, so that by their activity—as well as their words, their silence, their example—they may be credible witnesses to Christ.”

i) **Henry Loewen** offered reflections on Paragraphs 32–39:

Henry reported that he was so taken by the “letter that he had received from the pope” that read it straight through at one sitting. He found the document’s treatment of those responsible for the Church’s charitable activity an excellent “self-check” on his own twenty years of fund raising. To have had such a document early would have been a great help in discernment, and particularly liked the description of Paul’s hymn to charity (1 Cor 13) as the *Magna Carta* of all ecclesial service, with its stress that we must give not only something of our own, but of our very self. This section of the document helps us not to become discouraged.

Henry also very much liked the statement that “being able to help others is no merit or achievement of our own” and the idea that “this duty is a grace.” He contrasted these reasons for giving to contemporary practice that all too often allows the government to define “charity” by deciding what counts as a “charitable donation.” On the contrary, we must always minister in the name of Christ. For example, when we buy a lottery ticket at a charitable event, do we do it for the BBQ or as a real act of charity?

j) **Helmut Harder** offered reflections on Paragraphs 40–42

Helmut was positively impressed by the encyclical’s treatment of agape relative to eros. He noted that *philia* did not get much attention. He noted several matters in the encyclical that Mennonites would treat differently than Catholics. This is not meant to be judgmental, but to reflect differing church cultures and differing historical and theological emphases: 1) Mennonites do not officially identify saints, nor elevate

saints for special recognition. The tendency is rather to regard all church members as 'saints' in the way the apostle Paul does at times in the opening lines of his letters to the churches. 2) Mennonites try not to segment charity/good works as a special vocation performed by some or as special institutions to which devotees are attracted. Rather, there is a general emphasis on all receiving the call to discipleship. 3) Mennonites blur the distinction between clergy/ministers and laity. 4) Mennonites do not elevate Mary and do not practice special devotion to Mary. These distinctions having been noted, we could benefit from dialogue on the question of what we could learn from each other, given these differing emphases.

6. **Topic for the next meeting.** **Helmut** had suggested various possibilities in the agenda. After some discussion, it was agreed to use the booklet by C.A. Snyder, *From Anabaptist Seed* (1999) as the basis for discussion at our next meeting (which will also consider reports from the congregational groups, which should be underway by that date).
7. **Next meeting.** The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, 17 October, at St. Paul's College, from 4:30 to 9:30 pm. The late starting time is to take advantage of free parking beginning at 4:30. [**Elaine Baete** has confirmed that the Board Room of the Mauro Centre has been reserved for our meeting.]