

## Minutes

### **Winnipeg Regional Mennonite-Catholic Dialogue, Meeting No. 38**

Held on Monday, 21 January 2013,  
at Fort Garry Mennonite Fellowship

Present: Tom Bailey-Robertson, Paul Doerksen, Marco Funk, Helmut Harder, Victor Kliewer, Richard Lebrun, John Long, Donna Peters-Small, and Nancy Wood.

Regrets: Michelle Gallant, Ron Penner, and Lynda Trenholm

#### **1. Introductions**

**Helmut** asked **Marco** to introduce himself. Marco said he is married, with no children, and that he has lived in Gretna for four years. His wife works in Nora's Diner. Marco also named the Mennonite authors he enjoys. He is a CMU graduate; after five years as a pastor, he did a MA in theology in CMU's new Master's program. He is now a pastor in Gretna. One of his friends is a Catholic deacon, and it was a friend at CMU who got him thinking about the Catholicity of the Mennonite faith. The other participants gave brief self-introductions. We were joined for this meeting by **Henry Loewen**, one of the original members of our dialogue group.

#### **2. Opening prayer – Donna Peters-Small.**

**Donna** led us in prayer and song, using a booklet from the Winnipeg Opening of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity held at Bethel Mennonite Church on 20 January. The focus of that event was India's "untouchables." She enjoyed the drumming at the entrance, and the colorful garb of the Orthodox, Anglican, another groups represented, as well as the various races in attendance, with Mennonites as the hosts. It was, for Donna, a very special evening.

#### **3. Sharing of ecumenical experiences**

**Helmut** requested brief remarks, and then began by saying he agreed with **Donna** on the beauty and importance of last night's Festival of Prayer at Bethel Mennonite Church. He was particularly touched by the homily given by Dr Willard Metzger, Executive Director of Mennonite Church Canada, who spoke about three things that we can do in Canada: action on the environment, aboriginal issues, and interfaith dialogue. Helmut also mentioned the significance of the fact that there are now six denominations in Canada that are now members of both the Canadian Council of Churches and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. Helmut noted as well that he had recently written a review of a new book by Jeremy M. Bergen, *Repentance: The Churches Confront their Sinful Past*, and offered copies of his review to those who were interested.

**Helmut** reported that a study group in his congregation had just read Linden MacIntyre's *The Bishop's Man*, which he found a painful read.

**John** reported weekly breakfasts with a friend, discussing aboriginal issues—looking at recent federal court decisions, sharing views on the history of conflicts growing out of colonization, meaning of the treaties, etc., and trying to get a better understanding of the issues involved. It appears to him that current platforms seem to be erroneous.

**Paul** reported attendance at American Academy of Religion meetings in November (in Chicago). In particular, he mentioned a session in which Brad Gregory, author of *Salvation at Stake* spoke. He noted that Gregory has now published a new book on *The Unintended Revolution*, which tries to explain why the western world is as it is—largely the unintended consequences of the Reformation era.

**Nancy** spoke of new programs to be offered at Chemin Neuf, including Spiritual Exercises sessions for married couples in the summer.

**Victor** reported that Catholics have been hard to find in Steinbach, where he pastors a Mennonite congregation, but that there is now a growing number of Filipinos (mostly professionals) who have established a new Catholic parish, which now has a priest. Victor went to visit him, and had an interesting discussion. Victor also reported email exchanges with **Luis Melo**, now in Rome. **Helmut** said he was jealous of Luis's appointment, where he is involved in an on-going Catholic-Lutheran-Mennonite dialogue on baptism, and meeting with many of Helmut's old friends.

**Donna** reported that she and her husband visited a church in the San Francisco area made famous by Anne Lamott, author of *Traveling Mercies; Some Thoughts on Faith* (as well as a number of novels). The church is in a low-rental housing area of city. The congregation is largely black, though the author is white. It holds large AAA meetings every day. Donna found it a place of acceptance, with lots of guests, and a liturgy with comfortable sharing.

**Tom**, who works at St. John Brebeuf, told us about their RCIA program. The parish has a K to 8 school, which gets kids who have been baptized, exposed to liturgy, and then want to become Catholic. The program deals with a lot of mixed-marriage families (parents who are Lutheran, Mennonite, non-practicing Catholics, etc.) who are being introduced or reintroduced to the church through their children. In effect, their RCIA program has become unique in the city, the only one trying to deal with children as well as adults.

#### 4. Discussion the Encyclical, *Pacem in Terris*.

**John** offered background remarks on Pope John XXIII and *Pacem in Terris*:

Born Angelo Guissepe Roncalli, the son of an Italian tenant farmer, John was elected pope in 1958 at the age of 77. In the course of his life (1881–1963), especially after his death from stomach cancer on the eve of the second session of Vatican II, which he initiated in 1962, he became known as *Il Buono Papa*, “the good Pope,” by men and women of every race, class, and nation, Christians and non-believers alike. As one of his biographers has observed: “For those who admired him during his lifetime for his teaching on peace and his commitment to open his ancient church to the modern world—to all air and light in and let the profound message of the gospel shine out—he stood as a unique character radiating an aura of humility, humour, and sanctity.” (Greg Tobin, *The Good Pope*, p. x). This same biographer asks several provocative questions (see pp. xi and xii) and claims that the contents of the biography is his attempt to answer these questions, and he concludes that the Church and the world would have been much different if John XXIII had not been elected.

*Pacem in Terris (Peace on earth)*

- John XXII’s eighth and final encyclical is the most universal (catholic, if you wish) encyclical because it was addressed not only to bishops and the faithful but also to “all men of good will.”
- It is, therefore, the most “secular” and perhaps this accounts for its wide influence, despite the fact that its message “On establishing Peace in Truth, Justice, Charity (Love) and Liberty” derives from the angelic tidings of St. Luke’s Gospel and genuine gospel precepts.
- At the time, it was considered bold, ambitious, and comprehensive by many, including leading politicians and journalists, coming as did during a time of grave world tensions.
- The idea for the encyclical was conceived by John XXIII during the Cuban missile crisis when he, though an intermediary, helped Khrushchev maintain negotiations with Kennedy in the United States; indeed, he later sent as advance copy to the Russian leader.
- The tone and sensitivity of the encyclical to diverse cultures and political currents reflects Roncalli’s unique diplomatic experience (from postings, for example, in Bulgaria, France, Greece, and Turkey).
- It uses the language of human rights, unlike previous popes who steered clear of such language, though its arguments are buttressed by references to Scripture, Catholic scholars, previous pontiffs (echoing, for example, Leo XIII’s *Rerum novarum (Of New things, 1891)*, and John’s earlier writings.
- However, his discussion of rights was carefully balanced by the idea of social obligations focused on the common good, especially the need for more advanced nations to make greater contributions towards developing nations in the interests of justice and peace.
- It speaks prophetically of the emergence of the global economy and its implications.

- The encyclical logically builds a case for world peace, beginning with order in the universe and order within human beings who are created in the image of a loving and peaceful God. The encyclical underscores the point that a spiritual transformation lies at the heart of peace.

Says Greg Tobin of *Pacem in Terris*: “Perhaps the most enduring legacy of the epochal encyclical is that it changed the conversation. It took the pope off his throne—at least for a significant moment in time. He engaged the world in gentle, impassioned, fatherly dialogue, understandable to superpowers and to peasants alike. His cry for true and sustainable peace based on the gospel precepts of charity, justice, and truth, with duties flowing from rights is seen today as a given in most civilized circles” (pp. 217–18).

5. **Shared meal. Henry Loewen** (one of the original members of our dialogue) joined us at this point. (He and his wife provided our excellent meal.) Henry said he misses our dialogues, which were an important part of his life. He offered a blessing for the meal.
6. ***Pacem in Terris*, continuing discussion:**

**Helmut** reminded us of the “ground rules” for our comments, drawing particular attention to the time limit of about seven minutes per person.

In paragraph 7, John XXIII says: “Men’s common interests make it imperative that at long last a world-wide community of nations be established.” Helmut doubts that a world order is possible as a human achievement. Different states claim different laws, e.g. Marxist, democratic, Sharia, Christian, secular, etc.. It would be impossible to establish a worldwide community under one government. Perhaps John XXIII represents the view of the world and of world order in 1963. But Helmut does not see how that view is defensible today, if it ever was. Our environment is in serious trouble. The universe manifests, at best, a mixture of order and disorder, of vice and virtue, of the perfect and the imperfect, of the divine will and of irreparable destructive forces.

**Tom**, in commenting on paragraphs 8 to 25 said that the first thing that jumped out at him in the section dedicated to relationships between individuals was the emphasis on what we call “commutative justice,” which involves precise and accurate rules for rights, obligations, and violations. It is relatively easy to articulate all this and identify the agencies involved. As we move on from relations between individuals to relations with the state, and between states, we become involved with “distributive justice.” Here things are looser, more vague and indeterminate, less reducible to rules, and it is harder to place blame. It is harder to detect crimes (e.g., denial of adequate health care is a complicated matter). For example, in paragraph 13, on the right to receive education, the pope introduces proportionality. Thus here we are in the realm of “distributive justice.”

**Victor**, commenting on paragraphs 26 to 45, noted the very broad sweep of the document, addressing all of human society. From a Mennonite perspective, this is not usual. Mennonites tend to be more concerned about the Mennonite community, about their closed community versus the evil world. He thinks this is still the case with conservative groups. Shifts have occurred since World War II, but the larger perspective is still not a fully carefully received among many Mennonites. Victor cited a recent story about a conservative Mennonite group, influenced by American evangelicals, pulling out of the Mennonite Central Committee because it was too much involved with environment issues, interfaith activities, etc. This represents a different understanding of what is involved in how the church relates to society. Victor suggested that the Mennonites involved in our dialogue are not representative of the larger Mennonite community, which still tends to be closed to world beyond the Mennonite community. **Donna**, referring to the comments made at the Opening of the Week for of Prayer for Christian Unity, suggested that those comments represented a seismic shift in the Mennonite stance.

**Helmut** (in Lynda's absence), commenting on paragraphs 45 to 59, picked up on John XXIII's statement in paragraph 46 where he says that "God has created men social by nature," and that a society cannot "hold together unless someone is in command to give effective direction and unity of purpose. Hence every civilized community must have a ruling authority, and this authority, no less than society itself, has its source in nature, and consequently has God for its author." **Helmet** made the point that John XXIII was living in a much different world than we are today, and suggested that "men" would find such a regime impossible today. And again, in paragraph 47, John XXIII concludes: "Hence it is from Him that State officials derive their dignity, for they share to some extent in the authority of God Himself." Helmut would ask: But what is the meaning of such a claim? And what if authorities do not believe this? Does this view not imply a "Christian" state? It will be impossible in our day to impose a Christian theocracy, certainly not on a universal basis, and hardly within a nation. **Richard** thought that what John was saying here was straight from St. Paul, who spoke of the powers that be (in this case the Roman Empire), as being from God. **Nancy** read the pope as proposing an ideal. **John** also thought that these paragraphs should be read as "ought" statements. **Victor** wondered if these statements would apply in a Muslim state, and wondered how natural law and Sharia could co-inhabit.

**Paul** offered the following comments on paragraphs 60 to 79:

The encyclical is concerned to describe and define the role of civil authorities, which is given shape by the "common good." That slippery concept is in turn given shape by an assertion of personal rights and duties – so in summary form, safeguarding the common good is best done by guaranteeing personal rights and duties (60). What follows then is a discussion of the content of human rights, the delicate balance that must be cultivated between freedom and

protection, the role of law, and the particular form of government that might be able to discharge the duties of public administration understood in the way described here.

I find that I have hesitations about four areas in this section:

The use of the guiding notion of ‘common good’ has always been problematic for me, and especially given the shaping power that this concept has here. It seems to me that there is just not enough recognition of the contestable nature of what the common good might be;

I’m also concerned about the central role given to the language of human rights. Bluntly put, there is far too much optimism about what human rights are, whether it is possible to agree on them, how far and in what directions they should extend, and just how it is that they are to be enforced.

I’m also concerned about the description of citizens’ participation in public life framed primarily as taking an active part in government (73). That is, the notion of government, even if not put forward as being only one thing, seems to be given status that is too strong for my liking. After I published my book about political theology, someone asked me what I would consider one of the most important things that I learned in the process – a good question. My answer was that I learned to think of politics in ways that were not restricted to that which happens in the conventional halls of power, circumscribed largely by electoral politics. Instead, politics can happen in many ways, and it seems to me that the Christian church has lost sight of possibilities of participation in public life that are far-reaching – possibilities that call on us to act as the church, to not be limited to attempts to change public policy, to redefine our understanding of what constitutes ‘public.’ In other words, the church itself, as a body, gets short shrift here, in my view.

Concern about the language of progress and optimism – especially insofar as that is based in any way on government action and involvement.

**John** commented on paragraphs 69 to 79. He expressed his hesitation about the pope’s use of certain terms, such as the “common good,” with no recognition of how contestable such a term can be. John was also concerned about the central role given to notion of human rights. How can agreement be reached on this matter? What it takes to enforce human rights? There is nothing about “state violence.” He also expressed concerned about what was said about citizen participation in political life, and thought that too much was as being given to government. Reading a recent book on political theology, he learnt to think of politics in ways not circumscribed by electoral politics. He thinks churches have lost sight of possibilities of involvement. Church has a body seems to get short shrift in *Pacem in terris*. He thought Pope John was too optimistic about government. In short, John was surprised at the pope’s use of some concepts without elaboration or definition; too much is left unexamined. **Helmut** also thought discussion was needed on the place of the church in the encyclical.

**Marco** offered the following comments on paragraphs 103 to 113:

These paragraphs cover two main issues: the issue of political refugees and the arms race. There are two points that I found especially interesting and also one point – more of an overall general point – that I find burdensome.

The first interesting point, for me, is how the Pope began his discussion on political refugees. He rooted his discussion in the love of God for all mankind, which God has planted in our hearts. I think that he is exactly right in describing the peace that God intends for the world as a peace that begins in the love God has for His Creation. The pope then goes on to describe the refugees who are “created,” in a sense, by the unjust-disordered societies of our world. The refugee’s existence is proof that the rulers of nations have failed at seeking the common good. From my understanding, *Pacem in Terris* was part of a broader movement within Catholicism, also in the work of Pius XII, and theologians like Jacques Maritain, which sought to build bridges in conversation with an increasingly secular political landscape. However, by rooting his view in the love of God, the Pope’s discussion of refugees was able to make clear that what’s at stake in discussions about those “non-persons” tossed away by unjust rulers was, in fact, the judgment of a loving, but also just and wrathful God. In other words, by beginning in this way, the Pope makes it clear that he comes to the moral quandary of the political refugee as one who fears God; and he makes it clear that all his listeners also stand under this same God.

This connects with the second point that I found interesting. In his discussion of the need for disarmament (113), the Pope wrote about the need for a “deeper disarmament” – one that “reaches men’s very souls.” This, of course, makes complete sense given his role as a spiritual Father for the Church; he’s rightly interested in the most basic part of humanity’s problems – the need for healing in our soul through the grace of God freely given in Jesus Christ. He was a Pastor, I can tell. Moreover, the Pope makes the bold claim – and I completely agree with him – that “true and lasting peace among nations cannot consist in the possession of an equal supply of armaments *but only* in mutual trust.” Understandably, since this is a “public” document, written to both Catholics and non-Catholics, the Pope stops just shy of clarifying the spiritual dimension that makes this mutual trust possible – namely, the reconciliation of all people in the body of Jesus Christ. Without showing his hand, and the Christological foundations for his view of the common good, the Pope makes it clear that the secular narrative of ontological violence is a farce. Peace is absolutely not achieved by the stockpiling of weapons and the threat of mutual annihilation; rather peace is achieved through mutual trust. The true story of humanity begins with God’s love, which then has invited the faithful response of human love.

One burden the pope’s writings here leave with me is a question about the suitability of focusing primarily on the language of human rights in discussing these matters. Philosophers and theological ethicists have, for some time, questioned whether the moral language of rights can help the Church in

speaking truthfully about the common good. I'm not convinced that the moral language of rights is entirely unhelpful, but it does feel somewhat odd to use such individualistic language when speaking about the *common* good. In what sense does the language of human rights not exactly play into the secular vision of a state as the primary arbiter between isolated individuals, stripped of all other moral communities? Who, for Pope John XXIII, is the primary body that secures our human rights? Is it the state? Is this what Paul has in mind with Romans 13? Isn't Paul's view of the state much more limited? Is the state the guardian of the common good or is it part of the old world that God patiently permits to bring some relative order amidst the chaos? In my view, Catholic theologian, William Cavanaugh, rightly questions the adequacy of rights language (William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1998), 187–88.), especially when the Church has such rich moral language at its disposal (think Eucharist, etc.)

Nevertheless, the Pope cannot be faulted for wanting to speak to the public, both Catholic and non-Catholic, using the terminology of the day, especially given the urgency of that moment in history. The world was tearing itself to pieces, it seemed, and so he clarified the basics of how we, as humans, ought to care for those political refugees caught in the middle of the chaos. Did the people listen to him? What is the status of the political refugee in our world today?

Historically Mennonites have not been all that keen to offer a “public” document such as *Pacem in Terris*; and if they had, I wonder if they would have attempted to reach for some universal moral language. I'm not exactly sure why. I think we've seen ourselves as outsiders, speaking the strange language of a foreign community. I'm guessing part of it might be the social location of most Mennonites throughout history. We haven't been privy to those kinds of conversations with rulers and politicians; nor have we been asked to give this kind of moral advice to the rulers of nations. Most of what I have read about “peace on earth,” written by Mennonites, has focused on the peace that's possible between people of faith and between faith communities. This involves discussions on how we share table fellowship. What happens when fellowship is broken? How do we remain connected to one another in the congregation and denominationally? Very seldom has there been a serious opportunity for Mennonites to be heard on this kind of platform; and so you end up speaking on the issues you're faced with on a regular basis. Although we may not have published a public document, the Mennonite witness regarding our understanding of the common good has been fairly clear. We have been, and are, a community that seeks to embody the vision of God's love for humanity in how we deal with our neighbours, our enemies, the political outcast, and also those who have forced us into refugee status.

**John's** comments on paragraphs 114 to 129 focused on two points. He sees in the document an articulation of a narrowing of the exceptionality of a just war.



Echoing Pius XII, Pope John stresses negotiation in place of recourse to arms. In his view, it no longer makes sense to think of war as a fit instrument. Love not fear must dominate. John recalled that one of divergences that we discovered in our discussion of *Called Together to be Peacemakers* was retention by Catholics of a just war theory. Increasingly, since Pius XII, Catholics thinking has seen a narrowing of the theory to the point that war is not even considered a last resort.) The second point: in paragraph 120, writing about the “principle of freedom,” the pope speaks about “unwarranted interference” of one country in the internal affairs of another. This statement does not appear to anticipate the possibility of state violence and abuses. However in paragraph 47 of the document, the pope had written that “it must not be imagined that authority knows no bounds,” so he recognized the possibility of abuse.

**Richard** offered the following commentary on paragraphs 130 to 145:

I find these paragraphs amazingly “modern” and far-sighted to have been written by an eighty-two year old pope. These paragraphs reflect clearly Roncalli’s wide experience with the world. One thinks of his studies of history, his service in Bulgaria, Istanbul, and then as the papal nuncio in Paris just after World War II, as well as his time as the Archbishop of Venice. He was not a man who had been closeted in the Vatican bureaucracy all his life.

In the first paragraph in this section, John shows his awareness of the profound changes in life on our planet as result of the progress of science and technology. I couldn’t help but think of Teilhard de Chardin (like Roncalli born in 1881) and his notion of the Noosphere. I find this perspective reflected in my oldest daughter’s work as a sports medicine doctor; she has gotten to know specialists in her field from all over the world when she serves as a team doctor for Canadian teams at Olympic events, when she attends medical conferences all over the world, and when she collaborates with other scholars from Israel, the U K, and other countries in writing articles for specialized British medical journals.

Similarly, Pope John was fully cognizant of the growing economic interdependence between states. He didn’t use the term “globalization,” but he spoke of the “kind of world economy” now characterized by that term.

Lastly, he stresses the inadequacy of modern states to ensure the universal common good. In his judgment the shape and structure of political life in the modern world and the influence exercised by public authority in all the nations of the world are unequal to the task of promoting the common good of all peoples. Right-wing Catholics in the U.S. and elsewhere were scandalized by any hint that a pope would support anything like a “world government.” But clearly, John’s endorsement of the United Nations (whose birth he had observed) showed where he stood on this issue. In paragraph 137 of *Pacem in Terris* he was quite blunt in stating his belief that the “universal common good” presents the world with problems that are world-wide, and “which cannot be solved

except by a public authority with power, organization and means co-extensive with these problems, and with a world-wide sphere of activities.”

To be sure John does not try to prescribe the precise form “some such general form of public authority” might take. And furthermore, there are three very important conditions to his endorsement of some form of world government. In the first place, he is adamant that such a public authority must be instituted by consent and not imposed by force. In other words, NO to any world-wide empire (whether inspired and imposed by either Communism or Capitalism). Secondly, any such public authority of the world community must have as its special aim “the recognition, respect, safeguarding and promotion of the rights of the human person.” And thirdly, such a world authority must respect the principle of subsidiarity; in his words in paragraph 141, “it is no part of the duty of universal authority to limit the sphere of action of the public authority of individual states, or to arrogate any of their functions to itself.”

It seems to me that 50 years publication, these paragraphs of Pope John’s encyclical *Pacem in Terris* remain prophetic.

In her comments on paragraphs 146 to 153, **Nancy** recognized that the pope was speaking to Christians in the public sphere. She saw in this a divergence from the way Mennonites have seen relations to the world. The pope was bringing an idealistic and Catholic view to the issues: we are in the world trying to bring our Christian values to the world (though many do not do so or do not do it very effectively). She also appreciated the pope’s emphasis on Christian education, which she said resonates with faith formation and her profession.

**Donna** said she was happy to affirm most of what the pope had to say in paragraphs 154 to 162. In the age in which we live, as a counselor in this age in which kids are growing up, she is very aware of the tension between principles and the challenges of life. She sees many real life dilemmas. She liked the pastoral stance evident in paragraph 158, with its distinction between error and the errant, but she found she was bothered by the pope’s use of exclusive language. She appreciated the pope’s reference to prudence as the queen of all virtues, and his call for gradualism.

**Helmut** commented on paragraphs 163 to 172.

Referring to paragraph 163, **Helmut** thought that, practically speaking, Mennonites would not start their program in the way John XXIII proposes, within the framework of a universally envisioned order. Rather Mennonites would say that our first priority is to establish *relationships in the church*, with a view to being a peace church, and via that body, to be a light to the nations and to the world. It is doubtful that true peace can be divinely established without the church as the primary body through which to establish the peaceable kingdom. The States of the world are not oriented foundationally to the peace of

God!! Nor is human nature as such. So how can we be dependent on them to achieve it. Nor, with reference to paragraph 164, would Mennonites begin by putting trust and hope in a vision of peace on earth that is dependent on world leaders. Rather, the church takes the lead in forging peace; it does not begin by expecting to join those in secular society, as though the latter has the vision that the body of Christ latches on to.

**Helmut** also observed, in conclusion, that *Pacem in Terris* does not have a strong ecclesiological underpinning.

Commenting on **Helmut's** remarks, **Victor** observed that with respect to starting small, Mennonite theology has been there, but practice has not been so bright. How well do Mennonites get along with each other? **Marco** spoke about spelling out what it means to love his neighbor. Should we talk about *Pacem in ecclesia*? How do we speak to our neighbours? John's encyclical was his way of speaking to his neighbours. **Richard** observed that this encyclical, unlike previous encyclicals we have studied together, does not conclude with paragraphs about Mary. **John** pointed out that in this instance the pope was trying to speak to people of no faith (all men). But he remained puzzled about why he didn't try to define concepts like common good and human rights. Was this on purpose? **Tom** made the point that Catholic social teachings are part of a specific genre, with documents building on each other. For example, "common good" gets defined in Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes*. These documents take the long view, saying neither too much nor too little.

## 7. Future meeting

**Helmut** asked if we wanted to pursue this peace theme, but there seemed to be no enthusiasm for the suggestion. **Nancy** said she found the document boring. Tom indicated liked the meeting's shorter format, a sentiment with which others agreed.

The next meeting was set (tentatively) for Monday, 10 June 10, at a Catholic venue.

Following a number of suggestions for a topic for the next meeting, it was agreed that participants should send suggestions to Helmut and John, who were charged with coming up with an agenda.

**Donna** was thanked for making the arrangements for the evening's meeting.