

## 35. A Response to The Call to Holiness: From Glory to Glory

<b>Contact name and details</b>	The Revd Dr Nicola Price-Tebbutt Secretary of the Faith and Order Committee price-tebbutt@methodistchurch.org.uk
<b>Resolutions</b>	35/1. The Conference adopts the Report as its response to <i>The Call to Holiness: From Glory to Glory</i> .  35/2. The Conference commends <i>The Call to Holiness: From Glory to Glory</i> to the Methodist people for study and discussion.

### Summary of content and impact

<b>Subject and aims</b>	The report comprises a response to <i>The Call to Holiness: From Glory to Glory</i> which is the tenth report of the Joint International Commission for Dialogue between The World Methodist Council and The Roman Catholic Church.
<b>Background context and relevant documents (with function)</b>	A copy of <i>The Call to Holiness: From Glory to Glory</i> is available here: <a href="http://worldmethodistconference.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/The-Call-to-Holiness-Final-copy-28062016.pdf">worldmethodistconference.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/The-Call-to-Holiness-Final-copy-28062016.pdf</a> . It is the substantive report to which this report responds, and is commended to the Methodist people for study and discussion.

### **A response to the report of the Joint International Commission for Dialogue Between The World Methodist Council and the Roman Catholic Church: *The Call to Holiness: From Glory to Glory***

#### **1. Introduction and background**

- 1.1. *The Call to Holiness: From Glory to Glory* (2016) begins and ends with passages of scripture, framing an exploration of God's call to holiness for both individuals and communities. Held between these scriptures, the text of the report starts:

"The story of Zacchaeus in Luke's Gospel illustrates beautifully how a loving God graciously calls all people to respond to an invitation to holy living in a familial relationship with God. From a Christian perspective, such a relationship is made

## 35. A Response to The Call to Holiness: From Glory to Glory

possible by the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ and by the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit. Catholics and Methodists describe the Christian response to this invitation in similar terms of growth in grace and holiness through an ever-deepening relationship with Jesus Christ (Denver, §55)<sup>1</sup>. This agreement concerning the Christian life ... is encapsulated in the evocative idea of ‘the call to holiness’” (Houston, §§1-2).

- 1.2. *The Call to Holiness: From Glory to Glory* (known and referenced as the ‘Houston’ report) investigates, consolidates and develops how Catholics and Methodists understand “the nature and effect of divine grace upon the human person and the implications for the Christian life” (Houston, §4). As grace and holiness are central to Christian life, short biographies of the lives of “exemplary figures” (Houston, Preface) from the Catholic and Methodist traditions are included as they offer practical examples of holy living. *The Call to Holiness* seeks not just to offer theological reflection on a vital topic, but to stimulate and encourage the very growth in holiness of which it speaks. Emphasising the importance of the spiritual dimension of dialogue and reminding us that it “is never solely an intellectual exercise, but always involves personal encounter”, the dialogue took place in the context of shared prayer and “led to a deepening experience of the real, but imperfect, communion that already exists between Methodists and Catholics through our baptism into the body of Christ” (Houston, §9).
- 1.3. *The Call to Holiness: From Glory to Glory* is the tenth report of the Commission, following:
- |           |   |
|-----------|---|
| Durban    | <i>Encountering Christ the Saviour: Church and Sacraments</i> , 2011                                |
| Seoul     | <i>The Grace Given You in Christ: Catholics and Methodists Reflect Further on the Church</i> , 2006 |
| Brighton  | <i>Speaking the Truth in Love: Teaching Authority among Catholics and Methodists</i> , 2001         |
| Rio       | <i>The Word of Life: A Statement on Revelation and Faith</i> , 1996                                 |
| Singapore | <i>The Apostolic Tradition</i> , 1991   |
| Nairobi   | <i>Towards a Statement on the Church</i> , 1986   |
| Honolulu  | <i>Towards an Agreed Statement on the Holy Spirit</i> , 1981  |
| Dublin    | <i>Growth in Understanding</i> , 1976   |
| Denver    | <i>The Denver Report</i> , 1971   |
- 1.4. Each report investigates historically divisive issues in Christian doctrine in order to

---

1 The previous reports of the Commission are known by their place of publication which was the location in which the World Methodist Council was meeting at the time of the report’s approval. *The Call to Holiness: From Glory to Glory* is therefore known as the Houston report.

## 35. A Response to The Call to Holiness: From Glory to Glory

identify the degree of convergence between Catholics and Methodists and identifies areas where further dialogue is necessary. All have been published for study and can be found on the World Methodist Council website here: [worldmethodistcouncil.org/resources/ecumenical-dialogues/](http://worldmethodistcouncil.org/resources/ecumenical-dialogues/). In 2011, the Commission produced a synthesis text, *Together to Holiness: 40 Years of Methodist and Roman Catholic Dialogue*. This provides a helpful overview of the dialogue between 1967 and 2006, but does not replace the original reports. *The Call to Holiness* builds on the theological foundations laid in these previous reports.

### 2. Structure and content

- 2.1. *The Call to Holiness: From Glory to Glory* fulfils the intention set out in the conclusion to the Durban report (2011) and explores the “whole question of the experience of salvation and the response of the believer to the gift of God’s grace. Catholics and Methodists have different emphases in the way they speak about this, which seem to underpin a number of other matters upon which they often diverge” (Durban, §197). The idea of ‘the call to holiness’ is central in the theology and practice of both churches. As the Commission notes:

“For Catholics, this idea echoes the teaching of the Second Vatican Council concerning ‘The Universal Call to Holiness in the Church’ (LG, Chapter 5); for Methodists, it is consistent with the historical mission of Methodism ‘to spread scriptural holiness over the land’<sup>2</sup>” (Houston, §2)<sup>3</sup>.

- 2.2. The Introduction sets out two important concepts underpinning the idea of holiness. Firstly, the call to holiness “is relational, dynamic, and holistic: it relates to the God who calls and the people, individually and corporately, who respond to God’s call in their particular historical and cultural context” (Houston, §3). These are characteristics that have been given particular attention in many contextual theologies, and they resonate with John Wesley’s understanding of social holiness. Secondly, the call to holiness “is also a call to unity in the Church” (Houston, §5). Holiness and unity belong together such that the pursuit of one involves the pursuit of the other. The survey and encouragement of the Dialogue itself, in the final chapter, is therefore relevant, for “the text notes that each step towards greater communion in faith should translate into fruitful engagement in terms of common prayer, joint witness and mission, a renewed commitment to reconciliation, and a deepening of relationship in the Lord” (Houston, §12).

---

2 ‘Large Minutes’ (1763), WJW 10:845

3 The reference LG refers to *Lumen Gentium* which can be accessed here: [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html)

## 35. A Response to The Call to Holiness: From Glory to Glory

- 2.3. These ideas are explored through five chapters, divided into three sections. The first section, comprising Chapters One and Two, “outlines a shared Christian anthropology and understanding of the nature and effect of divine grace and holiness in relation to the human person” (Houston, §7). The second section, comprising Chapters Three and Four, explores particular elements of holy living in the communion of saints. Chapter Three focuses on what it means to be called by God to holy living in the Church and the world: “consideration of the saving work of Christ is inseparable from ecclesiology, since the experience of grace and holiness is always oriented towards the formation of relationships in the Church and the transformation of the world” (Houston, §10). The eschatological effect of grace and “what this means for a communion among saints which transcends death” (Houston, §11) is the subject of Chapter Four. The final section, Chapter Five, returns to the theme of holiness and unity, reflecting on the progress of the Dialogue and offering a summary of the document so as to encourage local churches to reflect together on its contents.

### **3. Chapter One. The Mystery of Being Human: Created by God and Re-created in Christ for being in Communion with God**

- 3.1. The first chapter establishes a base for all that is to follow in its articulation of a shared Christian anthropology. Beginning with the theological understanding that humanity is created by and for God in the image and likeness of God, human beings find their identity in relation to God, one another and the world. It is stressed that, as far as the call to holiness is concerned, human relationality finds expression not just in individual interpersonal relationships but also “in the realms of economics, politics, and culture” (Houston, §18). Human beings occupy a unique position within the created order and thus have a special responsibility to care for creation, but they have to respect their creaturely limitations. This means that “the relationship with God is essential for the human person, as the one absolute dimension from which every other dimension takes its point of reference” (Houston, §20).
- 3.2. Human beings, constituted body and soul, are created with the freedom to accept communion with God or not. As a result of sin, humanity is estranged from God and creation:

“Revelation declares that the whole of this history is marked by the original fault freely committed by the first parents of the human species ... Indeed, this is the world as we encounter it, marked by goodness but also stained by human beings repeatedly turning away from or distorting their relationship with God, others and creation” (Houston, §27).

This reality “resonates with human experience” (Houston, §29).

## 35. A Response to The Call to Holiness: From Glory to Glory

- 3.3. The image of God in human beings is marred but not destroyed. God did not abandon human beings; on the contrary the “incarnation of the eternal Word and the sending of the Spirit overcome the human estrangement from God, creation, and self” (Houston, §33). The distorted image is made a new creation in the image of Christ: it is “affirmed, renewed, and elevated” (§§34-35). In Christ “the true vocation of every human being is revealed” (§38), “the full meaning of humanity’s present existential situation can be found” (§39), and “human freedom attains its goal – freedom in the Spirit” (§40). As a result of this “human existence receives a new and deeper meaning: the whole creation is restored. The human being, as ‘co-creator’, is called to participate in this work of re-creation of the whole universe” (§41).
- 3.4. There is much to be welcomed and affirmed in this chapter which captures the high degree of theological convergence between Methodists and Catholics. Some British Methodists today may use different language when talking about sin, but this may be due more to developments in contemporary theological thinking than a reflection of a particularly Methodist theological approach. Some further attention could usefully be given to the treatment of the image of God in humankind in the hymns of Charles Wesley, where the image is understood as consisting in responsively creative love.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, more generally, the theology of Charles Wesley, and particularly that contained within his hymns, is a resource that is under-used in this report. Further engagement with this may bring additional richness to the reflection on holiness and also draw out some of the differences in the theologies of John and Charles Wesley in relation to the topics considered.

### 4. Chapter 2. God’s Work of Re-creating Humankind

- 4.1. Chapter Two explores the grace of God in the person and work of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit and the nature and effect of divine grace in its personal and corporate aspects, emphasising that God’s grace supplies all that we need from the beginning to the end. Grace is “not an abstract idea but is saving love revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ” (Houston, §46). We are reminded that the work of Christ “leads to the fulfilment of God’s purpose for the whole created order and not just for humankind” (§48), a point that can frequently be overlooked in our daily life and practice. The continuing presence and activity of the Holy Spirit “makes the grace of Christ present and active, drawing people into a deepening relationship of communion or fellowship with God and with one another” (§51). Grace is then described in terms of three aspects of God’s saving love and call to holiness: grace which enables, grace which justifies and grace which sanctifies.

---

4 The prayer for perfect love is often made in terms of a prayer for the retrieval or recreation of the image, as, for example, in “love thine image, love impart, stamp it on our face and heart”, no. 522 in *A Collection of Hymns for the People Called Methodist* (1780) and no. 522 in *Wesleyan Methodist Hymn Book*, (1877)

## 35. A Response to The Call to Holiness: From Glory to Glory

- 4.2. These reflections on grace are helpful and to be welcomed. We note that British Methodist theology continues to place much emphasis upon 'prevenient' grace, God's grace which is extended to us before we can make any response to it. For example, in the service of Baptism, the promises now come after the baptism has taken place. Before the baptism the following prayer is said:

*"N and N,  
for you Jesus Christ came into the world;  
for you he lived and showed God's love;  
for you he suffered death on the Cross;  
for you he triumphed over death,  
rising to newness of life;  
for you he prays at God's right hand:  
all this for you,  
before you could know anything of it.  
In your Baptism,  
the word of Scripture is fulfilled:  
'We love, because God first loved us.'"<sup>5</sup>*

- 4.3. It is important to note some differences in understanding of perfection in love and holiness (Houston, §§73-77), including the Methodist understanding of 'Christian perfection,' and more could have been said here. Not only are there some distinctions to be made between Catholic and Methodist understandings (for example, it is noted that Methodists do not accept the Catholic doctrine of purgatory), but there are differences in the ways in which Methodists themselves understand and experience it. A more complex picture emerges when we consider the continuing areas of debate including the way in which John Wesley's own thinking developed and the disagreement between John and Charles Wesley on aspects of this topic, and the less than wholehearted embracing of John Wesley's teaching on perfect love (not least by some of those given as exemplars of holiness in this text). Nonetheless, neither these differences within Methodist understanding, nor difference of emphasis between Catholics and Methodists, should undermine the "substantial agreement concerning Christian perfection" outlined in the document (Houston, §76).
- 4.4. The final two sections of the chapter investigate issues which have long been contentious between Catholics and Methodists. The first of these relates to the question of the merit accruing from good works of mercy and piety. The language of 'merit' itself is an unfamiliar concept within British Methodist theology and there is

---

5 Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, 1999, *The Methodist Worship Book*, The Baptism of those who are able to answer for themselves, and of Young Children, pp.67-68

## 35. A Response to The Call to Holiness: From Glory to Glory

much assumed in this which British Methodists would not share.

- 4.5. Yet, whilst Methodists continue to rely on the sufficiency of God's saving action in Christ, reflection on the nature and content of prayers offered by Methodists is pertinent. The Commission notes that: "Nevertheless, the bonds of love between Christians lead Methodists to believe that the prayers of the faithful are mutually beneficial... The efficacy of such [intercessory] prayers stems from the belief that God responds graciously and mercifully to interceding by the Church..." (Houston, §85). It continues: "Some Methodists would further accept that prayers of the departed saints and the prayers of the saints on earth may also be mutually beneficial, albeit in ways that cannot be identified precisely in terms of their salvific effect" (§86). The Commission illustrates the latter comment by suggesting that "authorised liturgies in a number of Methodist churches make provision for a general prayer of intercession for the faithful departed" (§86). In the British Methodist Church such prayers speak of remembering them, giving thanks for them, or learning from their example;<sup>6</sup> and the *Methodist Worship Book* includes prayers which specifically intercede for the departed, such as the following prayer from Funeral Service:

"Father of all,  
we pray for those whom we love, but see no longer.  
Grant them your peace;  
let light perpetual shine upon them;  
and in your loving wisdom and almighty power  
work in them the good purpose of your perfect will;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."<sup>7</sup>

- 4.6. The second contentious topic is that of 'assurance of faith and salvation', which has always been a key part of Methodist theology. It is one of the 'four alls' which British Methodism continues to proclaim: all need to be saved, all may be saved, all may know themselves saved (assurance) and all may be saved to the uttermost.<sup>8</sup> Sometimes perceived by Catholics as "a presumptuous assertion based on subjective experience" (Houston, §90), it is recognised that "the difference is one of emphasis" (§90) and such assurance "is not seen as the certainty of possession, but as the reliability of a relationship which is founded in God's love" (§92). It does not guarantee final salvation as it is still possible for a person to fall from grace. The British Methodist Church continues to hold in tension the universality of God's

---

6 Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, 1999, *The Methodist Worship Book*. See, for examples, pages 36, 166, 177, 188-9, and 214

7 Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, 1999, *The Methodist Worship Book*, p.458; and see also p.459 20A.

8 See *A Catechism for the use of the people called Methodists*, §68

## 35. A Response to The Call to Holiness: From Glory to Glory

persistent love and the freedom of human beings to reject that love eternally.”<sup>9</sup> Whilst the “spirit of Christ leads us to long that, in the end, everyone will be saved”, and our experience of God’s grace assures us that God “will use every means” to persuade people to turn to God, we understand that God revealed will not violate human freedom: “Were he to do so, he would not be the God revealed to us on the cross.”<sup>10</sup>

### 5. Chapter 3. God’s Holy People: The Saints Below

- 5.1. The third chapter reflects on the nature of the visible Church on earth as a holy community. Catholics and Methodists affirm the social nature of holy living, leading to the conclusion that “it is this belonging together as Christ’s body that characterises the communal practice of holy living for Methodists and Catholics. We are called to be holy together, as Church” (Houston, §94).
- 5.2. It has already been established that both churches “agree that the Church’s structures must effectively serve both the holiness of its members and the mission of the Church” (Seoul, §101), but the Commission acknowledges in its reflection on the holiness of the Church that there continue to be some important differences in understanding about the nature of the Church, not least the question of whether the church itself is sinful. Catholics “emphasise that the Church as an eschatologically present reality in the world is without sin, even though its individual members may be sinful” (Houston, §97), whereas Methodists are “reluctant to claim that the Church is sinless” and emphasise that the structures can themselves be affected by sin (§98). Although these contrasting emphases are found to not be mutually exclusive, “they have implications for the way that Methodists and Catholics respectively speak of the Church, its institutional forms, and the possibility and limitations of authoritative discernment” (§99).
- 5.3. The theme of pilgrimage running throughout the report comes to the foreground as the Commission explores the Church as “a Holy People”: “The holiness of the Church is that of a people on the road, on pilgrimage, and so has the quality of both a present reality through the presence of the risen Jesus, who walks with us, and of a promise of holiness towards which disciples travel, step by step” (Houston, §96). Catholics and Methodists agree that the Church is “the sacramental and missionary means of grace for the world” (§104) and a substantial part of the chapter is given to exploring the ecclesial practices of the church which nurture the holy living and mission of God’s people (§104). It is established that the “life of holiness for the

---

9 The Methodist Church, 1992, *Methodist Doctrine and the Preaching of Universalism*, Conclusion. (Faith and Order Statements, Volume 2)

10 The Methodist Church, 1992, *Methodist Doctrine and the Preaching of Universalism*, Conclusion. (Faith and Order Statements, Volume 2)

## 35. A Response to The Call to Holiness: From Glory to Glory

Christian is fundamentally a walking with the risen Christ” (Houston, §93), and the chapter has some important insights to offer about how faith is formed, insights which warrant further reflection among Methodists.

- 5.4. In the Church “Christians meet Christ in ways consistent with our human existence as embodied and social beings” (Houston, §105), so grace is mediated through all the senses as God invites people into a deepening relationship with God and one another: “Liturgies and worship practices, and especially the sacraments and preaching, are public ecclesial ways of nurturing holy living in the world” (§106). Discussion of the role of the sacraments in fostering holy living amongst the people of God reveals points of both convergence and divergence between Catholic and Methodist theology.
- 5.5. Most acts of worship in the British Methodist Church would include prayers of confession and general absolution, but the comment that “For Catholics and Methodists, rites of self-examination, repentance, and reconciliation are intended to be core practices of a pilgrim people” (§113) may overstate the experience of many British Methodists who might prefer ‘practices’ over ‘rites.’ There are questions about the extent to which the class meeting can be compared with the confessional. Class meetings were marked by “an emphasis on fellowship, discipline, and a rootedness of Christian living in daily life” and such discipline in this form is understood as distinctive from that practised by most other Christians.<sup>11</sup> Few British Methodists today are faced with the weekly discipline of accountability that characterised the early class meeting, although there is some recognition of the importance of recovering some form of such accountability as part of daily life.
- 5.6. Shared practices in holy living have always been key in Methodism, and there is much interest in contemporary British Methodism in encouraging engagement with these to enable growth in discipleship. The practices considered in this chapter (as well as worship) include the reading and study of scriptures (§§116-118), engaging in issues of social justice (§121), and giving time to prayer (§122). All are vital elements of British Methodist tradition and practice, which would also emphasise the importance of fellowship alongside study in small groups.
- 5.7. The Commission draws attention to a number of devotional practices that “raise questions and even some alarm” (§123) for Methodists. Whilst embodied holiness is a helpful concept some British Methodists continue to have concerns about some of the practices themselves (such as the “emphasis on certain bodily gestures, the use and veneration of images, the blessing of inanimate objects, and specific

---

11 The Methodist Church, 1999, *Called to Love and Praise*, §§4.3.5 and 4.3.6

## 35. A Response to The Call to Holiness: From Glory to Glory

devotions regarding Mary, the saints, the veneration of relics, and adoration of the Eucharist” (§123)). There are significant differences in individual views and practice in relation to these in the British Methodist Church. Whilst some continue to have deep concerns, not all would feel the “discomfort” referred to and indeed find aspects of some of these practices helpful in their own spiritual lives, including the use of candles and religious art (for example items in the Methodist Church Collection of Modern Christian Art, and icons).

- 5.8. Chapter Three ends with a brief consideration of ‘holy dying’ (§§132-135). This is an important short section which merits further consideration, especially given its place within human experience, its importance for pastoral work, and its resonance with contemporary attitudes and discussions in British society. The following affirmation is both welcome and relevant to conversations in wider British society:

“Catholics and Methodists believe that holy dying is part of holy living, and that the people of God witness to the Gospel in the manner of their dying... The possibility of seeking a ‘good death’ in the hope of the resurrection to eternal life is a powerful witness to the Gospel in the face of contemporary social trends where the end of life is regarded as a negative experience to be hastened” (§132).

### 6. Chapter 4. God’s Holy People: The Saints Above

- 6.1. The final core chapter explores “the transition of the Christian from death to eternal life, and to the final consummation of all things in Christ at the end of time” (Houston, §137). Focusing on the ‘saints above’, it is offered as another element of the walk with Christ. Its contribution is valuable, being the first report in international theological dialogue to explore the final destiny of Christians beyond this life and offering reflections on a key part of Christian hope. The Commission recognises that the subject matter:

“must be approached with humble Christian faith and due reticence, recognising that words, concepts, and images are inadequate to express the mystery of God’s love and life beyond the grave. In the presence of mystery, it is better to say less rather than to attempt to speculate” (Houston, §137).

- 6.2. The common profession of the ecumenical creeds that affirm the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting (Houston, §141) expresses a shared Christian hope, but theological differences between Methodists and Catholics remain. All the baptised make up the communion of saints and both Methodists and Catholics recognise in this communion “the exemplary presence of divine grace in specific persons whose words and holy living ... testify to the transforming action of the Spirit” (Houston, §142). “This ‘cloud of

## 35. A Response to The Call to Holiness: From Glory to Glory

witnesses' transcends ecclesiastical divisions" (Singapore, §66). There is agreement that the "bonds of love continue to exist between the living and the departed" (Houston, §143). Physical death is attributed a positive meaning, completing the dying with Christ that began with baptism and anticipating the fulfilment of the promise of resurrection (Houston, §144). There is shared belief that "God's creative power will reunite body and soul at the general resurrection after the pattern of Jesus Christ" (Houston, §146), and that "God's particular judgement at the point of death determines a person's final destiny" (§150).

- 6.3. A significant difference is that of "an intermediate state" (§140) and the destiny of Christians who have not attained perfection in love by the time of death. The Catholic doctrine of purgatory (which envisages a process of purification following death) is one for which Protestants in general have found no biblical basis. Similarly, the practice of praying for those still being purified was rejected by the Reformers, but the Commission notes that the twentieth century has witnessed "a growing interest in prayer for the departed in response to pastoral needs created by a huge number of distant deaths caused by warfare" (Houston, §155). As a result it concludes that there are indications that Methodists may increasingly be open to this practice. This may be the case for some British Methodists, but others continue to have significant concerns about the practice.
- 6.4. Another difference concerns the intercession of saints. Whilst "Methodists and Catholics honour the saints above as witnesses to holiness and exemplars of holy living" (Houston, §156), for Catholics saints are also intercessors "because of the bonds of love that exist between all the members of the Church and Christ" (§157). Methodists have generally been resistant to the idea that the saints above are intercessors "lest the absolute uniqueness of Christ as sole mediator be compromised" (§158). The particular intercessory role attributed to Mary is considered, and the doctrine of the Assumption is examined in relation to grace and holiness. Despite Methodism's concerns about the doctrine of the Assumption itself, there are some points of convergence and there is a renewed devotional interest in Mary amongst some Methodists (although probably not in an intercessory capacity).

### **7. Chapter 5. Growing in Holiness Together: Openings for Common Witness, Devotion and Service**

- 7.1. The final chapter begins with a short reflection on how far Catholics and Methodists have travelled on their shared journey throughout the whole dialogue and looks at the key role of the relationship between holiness and unity in the dialogue:

"readers are invited to ponder the relationship between holiness and unity, and to make a connection between the pursuit of holiness and the taking of steps towards

## 35. A Response to The Call to Holiness: From Glory to Glory

reconciliation between our two communions based on our shared understanding of what binds us together” (Houston, §176).

- 7.2. The goal of the dialogue is stated as “full communion in faith, mission and sacramental life” (Houston, §§171, 176, 185). The Commission recalls how, at each stage of the dialogue more convergence was found than had been expected, and notes that each convergence is a valuable step towards the common goal and a stimulus for further conversation (§176). Differences have led to deeper understanding and rather than being experienced as “dead ends” they reveal “areas where further work is necessary” (§170). These reflections are followed by a summary of the agreements and continuing divergences between Methodists and Catholics as established in the previous chapters.
- 7.3. The report is helpful in recognising that the reception of the Dialogue reports has not been as full as might have been wished. The Commission is aware:

“that our dialogue reports are not well known among Catholics and Methodists, and that the consensus and convergences these texts have registered have not had the transformative effect on our relations for which we had hoped” (§173).

This lack of widespread reception of the thinking and insights in dialogue reports in the life of the churches is identified as one obstacle to preventing a closer move towards unity. The matter is an important one, and it is appreciated that the Commission brings it to our attention. Indeed, the question of reception is relevant not only to reports in ecumenical dialogue, but also to reports received or adopted by the British Methodist Conference. How are church members enabled to engage with the valuable theological thinking that such reports contain? The summary and the questions offered by the Commission in this report are an attempt to begin to address this question, and the resource is welcomed. There are ways in which these materials could be further adapted so as to be appropriately engaging for a wide range of people in local congregations. Members of the British Methodist Church are encouraged, with their Roman Catholic sisters and brothers, to explore such possibilities; for example, by considering the questions in the final chapter of *The Call to Holiness*, by sharing their own faith journeys and experiences of growth in holiness, or by learning more about each other’s devotional practices. Yet the question of reception within our two communities remains as a challenge to be taken up by Catholics and Methodists alike.

### 8. Appendix. Resources for Prayer and Meditation

- 8.1. The Commission is clear from the beginning of the report that the spiritual dimension must not be overlooked, neither in the dialogue itself nor with regards to reflection

## 35. A Response to The Call to Holiness: From Glory to Glory

on the call to holiness. Although it recognises that much time was absorbed in theological conversation, still “dialogue is never solely an intellectual exercise, but always involves personal encounter” (Houston, Preface). Each day of the Commission’s discussions took place in the context of shared prayer.

- 8.2. The importance of the spiritual dimension of both the call to holiness and ecumenical conversation is reinforced at the close of the report. The Commission provides, in the Appendix, a variety of resources from both traditions for personal and joint prayer and reflection. These are a helpful and interesting collection and their inclusion is appreciated, not least for what it signifies about the importance of sharing in prayer on our walk with Christ.

### 9. Practical Examples of Holy Living

- 9.1. An unusual and welcome feature of this report is the inclusion of short biographies which provide practical examples of holy living. Each of the main chapters concludes by giving a brief account of the life of a Methodist and a Catholic who have been recognised as responding to the call to holiness, for example two of the Methodists included are Phoebe Worrall Palmer and Donald Soper. These accounts are intended to be illustrative, to help readers to see and understand holiness in tangible terms. It is a strength of the report, helping it to be more accessible and of interest to a wider readership. It resonates, for British Methodists, particularly with an appreciation of the place of personal testimony in the nurture and witness of faith, and encourages the exploration of deepening the quest for holiness in daily life.

- 9.2. More space and attention could have been given to this aspect of the report. The stories themselves are helpful, but rather short, and the reader is left wondering how these particular people were chosen. The opportunity for engaging in further theological reflection in respect of the stories was not taken in this report, but could be a helpful addition in the future. Read together, there are many similarities in the particular narratives, and some fuller detail about the lives of the individuals included would provide a more rounded, complex, but rich, resource. More detailed biographies may reveal a sometimes less palatable picture of the individual concerned, and yet reveal more of their human frailty and offer further insight into the call to holiness in the mess, chaos, detail and complexity of life.

### 10. Conclusion

The Methodist Church in Britain warmly welcomes this report, which is helpful, insightful, thorough, and full of generosity and imagination. It is a rich resource for promoting reflection on the call to holiness and makes a significant contribution to our shared pilgrimage. It shows the level of convergence between Methodists and Catholics on the matters discussed, and identifies differences in order to

## 35. A Response to The Call to Holiness: From Glory to Glory

indicate where dialogue is still necessary. It is a report of great merit, not least for the continuing journey towards unity, and we are thus challenged to consider the question of how we enable a greater level of engagement with its contents in our local churches. *The Call to Holiness: From Glory to Glory* is a document that both stimulates theological conversation and encourages reflection on our response to the call to holiness in our walk with Christ. The Commission reminds us that “Holiness is not primarily about success in being good, but rather about being open in all the brokenness and giftedness of human life to God’s transforming grace” (Houston, §111).

Finish then thy new creation,  
Pure and sinless let us be;  
Let us see thy great salvation  
Perfectly restored in thee;  
Changed from glory into glory,  
Till in heaven we take our place,  
Till we cast our crowns before thee,  
Lost in wonder, love and praise.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)<sup>12</sup>

### \*\*\*RESOLUTIONS

- 35/1. The Conference adopts the Report as its response to *The Call to Holiness: From Glory to Glory*.**
- 35/2. The Conference commends *The Call to Holiness: From Glory to Glory* to the Methodist people for study and discussion.**

---

<sup>12</sup> First published in Charles Wesley, *Hymns for 'Those that Seek and Those that have Redemption in the Blood of Jesus Christ*, (London: Strahan, 1747), no.9; and quoted by the Commission at the end of the Introduction to this report (Houston, §13)