

# Ecumenical NEWS

## Bi-WEEKLY DIGEST

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### **1. Global Church Groups Urge Reparations To Atone For Slave Trade**

ENI-07-0978 Runaway Bay, Jamaica, 17 December (ENI)--Many churches were actively involved in the transatlantic slave trade and they need to offer reparation to descendants of those enslaved, tortured and murdered by the trade, an international church conference has demanded.

"While there have been some acts of repentance and confessional statements made by some churches, for the most part those statements have not been effective enough in eradicating white supremacy, systemic racism and the ongoing legacy of the transatlantic trade in Africans," participants at the 10-14 December meeting in Runaway Bay, Jamaica, said in a statement issued on 17 December.

The gathering was sponsored by the World Council of Churches, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Council for World Mission. It marked the 200th anniversary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act by the British parliament.

"The statement sends a strong message challenging churches to look at their own past complicity in the evil of slavery and the slave trade and be at the forefront of exposing

modern forms of slavery and oppression of people based on caste, race, gender or economic status," said WARC general secretary the Rev. Setri Nyomi.

Sixty theologians, church leaders and activists from Africa, the Caribbean and the Americas attended the event called "Abolished, but not Destroyed: Remembering the Slave Trade in the 21st Century.

Between the 16th and 19th centuries, an estimated 15 million Africans were forcibly removed from their homes and shipped across the Atlantic Ocean to become slaves in the Caribbean and the Americas.

"Many churches were actively involved in the transatlantic slave trade in Africans and colonialism," the statement asserted. As a result, the church's mission was "seriously compromised and betrayed" it said.

"The process of reparations requires the restoration of relationships that affirm the dignity and humanity of all parties in order to repair what has been broken," the statement noted. "Reparation also challenges the perpetrator to confession and repentance and to minister restoration and healing to those who have been exploited."

## **2. Baptists Poised To Hurdle Divisions With New Covenant**

By Lillian Kwon Christian Post Reporter

For the first time in more than 160 years, Baptists in North America will have a major convocation next month and differences of race, politics, or legalistic interpretations of the Scriptures will not threaten their unity, said former president Jimmy Carter.

Some 20,000 Baptists are expected to join a historic effort, called the New Baptist Covenant, aimed at dispelling an image of division among Baptist groups and in hopes of emerging with a new Baptist voice. The meeting is scheduled for Jan. 30-Feb. 1 in Atlanta.

"One of the basic premises will be that the doors will be open to all Baptists who choose to share this long-awaited experience," said Carter, who spearheaded the initiative, in a statement this week in The Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

Leaders from more than 30 Baptist organizations will be gathering under the theme "Unity in Christ" but notably absent from the convocation will be leaders from the largest Baptist group in America - the Southern Baptist Convention.

Conservative Southern Baptist leaders have been critical of the list of speakers lined up for the New Baptist Covenant celebration. Along with Carter, former president Bill Clinton, Nobel Peace Prize winner and former vice president Al Gore, U.S. Senators Lindsey Graham and Charles Grassley, and Children's Defense Fund founder Marian Wright Edelman are among those scheduled to speak at the meeting.

Southern Baptist Convention president Frank Page said he would not take part in a "smokescreen leftwing liberal agenda" and others have alleged there are political overtones, considering the line-up of speakers and the timing of the event - which takes place during the U.S. presidential election year.

Rising Republican presidential hopeful Mike Huckabee withdrew his participation from the convocation in May and commented last week that being president would be "a

heck of a lot easier job than getting all the Baptists to agree on everything."

At the time of his decision to withdraw from the meeting, he said it would be best for him not to participate and to "not appear to be giving approval to what could be a political, rather than spiritual agenda," he told Florida Baptist Witness.

Organizers of the New Baptist Covenant, including Bill Underwood - president of Mercer University - have denied any political motives and instead emphasized the compassion platform they will be pushing.

One of the major prongs to the New Baptist Covenant is following the compassion mandate through social work in the capacity of poverty, HIV/AIDS and sex trafficking and also addressing religious diversity and evangelism among other issues. Carter has said he wants to bring together as many Baptists as possible on the ground of accomplishing the mission of Jesus.

"Our common ground will be the words of our Savior when he returned to his home town in Nazareth after his miraculous ministry had been demonstrated around the northern shores of the Sea of Galilee: The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord," Carter said in his opinion piece this week.

"These words are both inspirational and a call to action as we strive to emulate, in our own individual ways, the perfect life of Jesus Christ," he added.

The New Baptist Covenant Celebration is being organized under the umbrella of the North American Baptist Fellowship - a division of the Baptist World Alliance - which the Southern Baptist group left following concerns over its "leftward drift."

Meanwhile, Southern Baptist head Page has expressed concerns of divisions within their own 16.3 million-member convention. A negative image of Baptists as "legalistic and mean-spirited" - which the New Baptist Covenant is also trying to counter - has been highlighted by the media. And despite ongoing mission works and the provision of millions of meals to needy communities, Page, like many, says Baptists are more known for what they're against than what they are for.

Baptists need to do a better job of "presenting reality," Page told Southern Baptists at a Tulsa, Okla., church in October. The reality is that Southern Baptists are loving, caring people, said Page.

The Baptist groups supporting the New Baptist Covenant include the American Baptist Churches and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Several historically African-American Baptist denominations, including the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., have also joined the effort.

### **3. Young Europeans To Converge On Geneva For Taizé Prayers**

ENI-07-0986 By Stephen Brown

Geneva, 19 December (ENI)--Tens of thousands of young adults from throughout Europe and beyond are expected in Geneva between Christmas and New Year for five days of prayer and reflection organized by the Taizé community.

The programme includes moments of prayer, silence, song and testimonies from the

ecumenical community of Taizé, founded in 1940 in France by Brother Roger, who remained its leader until his death in August 2005.

Taizé has developed its own style of music for meditation, using simple phrases, usually lines from the Psalms or other pieces of Scripture, repeated and sometimes also sung in canon. The repetition is intended to aid meditation and prayer.

About 40 000 young adults will converge on Geneva on 28 December for the five-day meeting, which lasts until 1 January, and at which Brother Roger's successor, Brother Alois, will offer meditations.

A highpoint will be a televised evening prayer on 30 December at Geneva's Palexpo exhibition centre, but there will also be smaller meetings at churches throughout the city as well as at the headquarters of the World Council of Churches.

It is the 30th such Taizé gathering of young adults from Europe. The first was held in Paris over the 1978-1979 New Year, and the last before Geneva was held in the Croatian capital, Zagreb.

In a 19 December message to participants, Archdeacon Colin Williams, general secretary of the Conference of European Churches, underlined the importance of participation by young people in the ecumenical movement.

"I pay tribute to all that the Taizé Community continues to do to encourage individuals of all ages to deepen their own fellowship with Jesus Christ," said Williams. "Your coming together is a powerful sign of your commitment to the significance of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in our complex world of the 21st century."

Pope Benedict XVI said in a message, "May your trust in God foster hope in you and help you to change the world by rooting you in gospel values."

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon spoke of the need to rebuild bridges and engage in a sustained intercultural dialogue in the face of rising interreligious tensions. "As young people of faith, you are all ideally placed to contribute to this process," he said in his message to participants. "As rising leaders in your communities, you can stress the core beliefs common to all the great faith traditions: compassion, solidarity, respect for life, and kindness towards others."

#### **4. Taizé Urges Young People To Promote Unity Between Churches**

ENI-08-0001 By Stephen Brown Geneva, 2 January (ENI)--The leader of the Taizé community urged tens of thousands of young Christians from Europe who gathered in Geneva at the New Year to organize "vigils of reconciliation" for unity between churches that are divided from each other.

"How can we be credible in speaking of a God of love if we remain separate?" Brother

Alois, prior of the ecumenical Taizé community said in his meditation at a televised prayer service on 30 December at Geneva's Palexpo exhibition centre.

"It is up to you young people to take the initiative," said Brother Alois, who became the community's leader after the death in 2005 of its Swiss-born founder, Brother Roger. "Those who hold positions of responsibility in the churches will support you. It is up to you young people to prepare these 'vigils of reconciliation'."

In launching the community's "call in Geneva for the reconciliation of Christians", Brother Alois said ([www.taize.fr/en\\_article5541.html](http://www.taize.fr/en_article5541.html)), "Coming together in this way in prayer vigils is already a way of anticipating unity; it allows the Holy Spirit to unite us already."

The "European Meeting of Young Adults" from 28 December to 1 January included moments of prayer, silence, song and testimonies. Taizé is a community of brothers that includes Protestants and Roman Catholics. It has developed its own style of music for meditation, using simple phrases, usually lines from the Psalms or other pieces of Scripture.

Brother Alois announced that the next European meeting would take place in Brussels, from 29 December 2008 to 2 January 2009, and that there would be a meeting for young adults from Africa in Nairobi in November 2008.

As well as evening prayer at the Palexpo centre each evening, there were smaller meetings at churches throughout the city as well as at the Geneva headquarters of the World Council of Churches. Many of Geneva's streets thronged with young people during the period.

"It's an encouragement to see young people in Europe getting closer when some people say Europe is going through post-Christianity," WCC general secretary the Rev. Samuel Kobia told Taizé participants meeting at the church grouping's headquarters.

In his 28 December opening meditation, Brother Alois recalled that Brother Roger had left Geneva in 1940 to look for a place in France where he could found a Christian community.

The Geneva gathering was the 30th Taizé meeting of young adults from Europe. The first was held in Paris over the 1978-1979 New Year, and the last before Geneva was held in the Croatian capital, Zagreb. The community said 40 000 people took part in the five-day Geneva gathering, 30 000 coming from outside Switzerland. The biggest national grouping was from Poland, with more than 9000 participants.

Some participants, however, like Isaac and Miho Arai and their two children came from as far as Sendai in Japan. "It looks like a long journey but to us its not a long journey," Isaac Arai told Ecumenical News International, noting that this year is the third time the family has attended such a Taizé meeting in Europe. "We can meet and

talk with so many young people from all over Europe and even from Africa and Asia. We feel so blessed."

## **5. Indians Hail Assurances On Ending Christian Dalits' Discrimination**

ENI-07-0990 By Anto Akkara Bangalore, India, 20 December (ENI)--Church groups and activists have welcomed assurances from the Indian government that discrimination will be ended against Christian Dalits that does not affect their Buddhist, Hindu and Sikh counterparts.

"The entire Christian community will be grateful if the government acts swiftly in the coming months," said the National Coordination Committee for Dalit Christians in a 17 December statement.

India's home affairs minister Shivraj Patil is reported to have told Archbishop Daniel Acharuparambil, president of the Catholic Bishops' Council of Kerala state, that the government was initiating steps to end the discrimination against Christian Dalits and others.

The Dalit Christians' national coordination committee is a forum of the mainly Anglican, Orthodox and Protestant National Council of Churches in India and the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India.

Dalit (meaning "trampled upon" in Sanskrit) refers to low castes treated as untouchables under the caste system in India that enjoins them to carry out degrading and often dehumanising jobs.

Hindu Dalits were made eligible in 1950 for free education and reserved government jobs to improve their social status. Such benefits were extended to Sikh Dalits in 1956 and then to Buddhist Dalits in 1990. However, Christian Dalits who account for two thirds of some 27 million Christians in India, as well as Muslim Dalits, are denied these rights. A decade-old Christian campaign to end what has been labelled an apartheid system has not yet succeeded.

"Caste is the primary identity of all Indians. Caste has affected all peoples and all communities in India. Indian Christianity and Islam have caste discrimination within them," the Dalit Christians' committee pointed out in welcoming the federal minister's assurances.

"We hope the government will fulfil the promise this time," the Rev. Cosmon Arokiaraj, the convenor of the ecumenical group and executive secretary of the Dalit Commission of the Catholic Church, told Ecumenical News International on 19 December.

Successive Indian governments had in the past promised to end this form of discrimination against Christian Dalits, but opposition from Hindu groups was seen as

making the government dither in passing the necessary constitutional amendment. Some Hindu nationalists, led by upper castes, were believed to have feared mass conversion to Christianity if the statutory rights given to Hindu Dalits were extended to Christian Dalits.

Franklin Caesar, a Dalit Christian lawyer, whose petition challenging the "undeclared apartheid" against his group is currently being heard in the federal supreme court, said discrimination against Christian Dalits is "a constitutional fraud". More than 4 million Christian Dalits have reconverted to Hinduism, he said, as a result of Christian Dalits being denied access to free education and reserved government jobs because of their beliefs.

## **6. Jewish, Muslim Groups Launch Dialogue Project In North America**

ENI-07-0994 By Cheryl Heckler Oxford, Ohio, 21 December (ENI)--Two major religious organizations, one Jewish and the other Muslim, have unveiled an interfaith dialogue project intended to reach hundreds of thousands of their members across the United States and Canada.

At its biennial convention in San Diego on 15 December, the Union for Reform Judaism announced it had begun discussions with the Islamic Society of North America.

Rabbi Eric Yoffie, the union's president, told the 5000 people at the convention, "As a once-persecuted minority in countries where anti-Semitism is still a force, we understand the plight of Muslims in North America today." He noted, "We live in a world in which religion is manipulated to justify the most horrific acts, a world in which - make no mistake - Islamic extremists constitute a profound threat. For some, this is a reason to flee from dialogue but in fact the opposite is true."

Yoffie said that when Jews and Muslims kill one another "in the name of God, sensible religious people have an obligation to do something about it".

The president of the Islamic Society of North America, Ingrid Mattson, endorsed the project in an address at the conference. She is the first leader of a major Muslim group to do so and said: "If religion is about anything, it should be about the ability to extend empathy beyond our own family or tribe or religious community to humanity at large."

The Union for Reform Judaism is the largest of the three main branches of Judaism in North America. It has more than 900 congregations.

The Islamic Society covers more than 300 mosques and is the largest Muslim umbrella group in the United States and Canada.

The Jewish-Muslim discussions will be guided by a curriculum developed by the two groups. Manuals and videos will be built around topics that include links between religion and terrorism, and the place of Jerusalem in Jewish and Muslim history, culture and tradition.

Eleven synagogue-mosque pairings have already been set up as pilot programmes throughout North America. Yoffie, however, encouraged those attending the San Diego conference to request materials and begin their own dialogues with mosques in their communities.

"There exists in our community a profound ignorance about Islam, along with a real desire to learn about what moves and motivates Muslims today. We must respond to this desire with serious programmes of education," Yoffie said.

He also told conference participants that the Union for Reform Judaism chose the Islamic Society as its partner because the Muslim group steadfastly condemns terrorism and consistently supports a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

## **7. Malaysian Christian leaders protest against ban on use of 'Allah'**

ENI-08-0015 By Michele Green Singapore, 7 January (ENI)--Malaysian Christians have protested against a government ban on the use of the word "Allah" by non-Muslims in the Islamic Southeast Asian nation.

In a statement issued to the media on 7 January, the Christian Federation of Malaysia expressed "deep disappointment and regret" at the announcement in the first week of January by the minister in charge of Islamic affairs, Abdullah Zin, that only Muslims were allowed to use the word "Allah". Zin said the word "Allah" referred only to the Muslim God and that non-Muslims were banned from using the expression.

Zin's comments followed a long-running government campaign against a Roman Catholic newspaper because its Malaysian-language section referred to "Allah" as a synonym for God.

The latest ban has fuelled concern among Malaysia's non-Muslim population that the government was bolstering the status of Islam at their expense.

"The word 'Allah' is a pre-Islamic word used by Arab Christians before Islam came into being," said Bishop Paul Tan Chee Ing, head of the Malaysian Christian Federation, who is a Jesuit cleric, in a statement.

"We maintain and we have always told the government that we have the right to use the word 'Allah' whether in our Bahasa Malaysia publications or otherwise," the bishop said, adding that the ban violated the right to freedom of religion enshrined in the country's constitution.

About 60 percent of Malaysia's 25 million people are Muslims. Christians and Buddhists, who are mostly from the country's minority Chinese community, make up about 28 percent of the population and Hindus of Indian origin make up about 10 percent.

Non-Muslims have long complained about local government demolition of their places of worship as well as failure to recognise conversions of Muslims to other religions. In some cases, converts have been forced to re-embrace Islam and in other cases deceased converts have been buried as Muslims even if they had been practising Christians, Buddhists or Hindus at the time of their death.

"We have used the word 'Allah' and we will continue to use it because it is our religious right," said the Rev. Hermen Shastri, executive secretary of the Christian Federation of Malaysia.

## **8. Our Fifty Years and Running Oberlin '57, Back and Beyond by Jeffrey Gross, FSC**

*(These notes were prepared for an informal after dinner introduction to the Anniversary Conference of US Faith and Order, July, 19, 2007, Oberlin, Ohio.)*

My assignment for this overview of our history is to be brief and light, what my students call "comic strip" history. The churches can be grateful for your 50 years of service as a Commission to the unity of Christians in the United States, and hopeful for the theological work of a new generation of specialists doing the hard theological work before us with the next 50 years of challenge.

In my view, the primary work of Faith and Order USA is the reception of the wider ecumenical work. We do produce texts. The influence of Oberlin I, its contribution to Montreal '63 and the pioneering work on Scripture and Tradition, the US work on ecclesiology, and the giants present here who influenced three generations of teaching, all are irreversible contributions. As is often noted, the tentative Catholic presence here 50 years ago has begun, gradually, to transform the largest worldwide Christian body, and to destabilize and augment the global ecumenical enterprise.

This Commission is mandated to "Call the churches to full visible unity, in the one Apostolic Faith, in one Eucharistic fellowship, united in worship and witness that the world might believe." This first purpose of the World Council has never been part of the constitution of the US National Council, which was founded as a John D. Rockefeller "cooperative agency." Former General Secretary Arie Brouwer was want to say, this Council is not the bold ecumenical ship leading the churches toward unity, but a flotilla of dingies, seldom sailing in a coordinated direction. In fact, the secular corporate language, "cooperative agency," was only replaced by

theological, "community of communions" language in 1981, a minor step toward the reception of the theological, ecumenical vision of Church unity. This work was largely under the influence of this Commission and its 20 years of ecumenical work with the leadership of Paul Crow, Jeanne Audrey Powers and others. Whether the culture of US conciliar life has yet received the vision of the unity of all Christians as the conciliar goal will have to be evaluated by other voices among us.

On my watch (1981-1991) the churches restructured their Council four times, with no input from the ecumenical partners who had entrusted Faith and Order to them in '57. Three times the Commission was dissolved in the restructure, but it never missed a meeting! During that 10 year period my hope was for a council staff and community of ecumenical officers who would know the theological basis of the ecumenical movement in the 1950 WCC Toronto Statement, but the full reception of these agreements are still before us!

For you younger theologians, there is much work before you. While we leave a rich legacy; as long as the churches are divided there is no dearth of possibilities for service, research and ecumenical reconciliation. Twenty-five years ago, when we celebrated this anniversary, we were guests of the late John Meyendorff at St. Vladimir's Seminary, the late Paul Minear, so active in Oberlin I, spoke; and in the file is a picture of the late Letty Russell and Bill Rusch cutting the anniversary cake at Graymoor.

As early as the 70s Paul Minear noted that the increasing bureaucratization of the churches and the specialization of academic theology made developing ecumenical leadership more challenging. In my experience this observation is verified when I, a Catholic, have to quote Calvin to my Presbyterian colleague; or when it is difficult to find a Catholic biblical scholar who knows Vatican II and Trent as well as the Greek New Testament (or the Weimar *Aufgabe*, like Jesuit ecumenical veteran Joseph Fitzmyer!).

Yes, we have come a long way, but there is a long way to go. When I have a student that says "when the Catholic Church was over" in the 16th century, or when I look for history texts: US, 16th century. Latin American, or general introduction; that are adequate to the 50 years of ecumenical research, I am still at a loss. Yes, there is much work to do.

Of course, not all are called to do this very specific theological research task for the churches. There is one ecumenical movement, and some are called to social advocacy, some to ecumenical education. some to common evangelical witness, and some to common witness in service to the community. Few are called to build the agreements on which the unity of the church can emerge. I have had widely published Protestant theologians drop membership in Faith and Order because mastering Orthodox theology was too much of a stretch. Others would prefer to talk to Buddhist rather than Pentecostal fellow Christians. A call to ecumenism does not necessarily mean a vocation to Faith and Order dialogue and research.

It is a complex, specialized, frustrating and exhilarating task, in service to the

Church and its Lord. As Reinhold Niebuhr has said, no mission is worth giving one's life to if it can be realized in one's own lifetime. Surely I do not expect to see the full, visible unity of Pentecostal, Orthodox, Protestant and Catholic churches in my lifetime; but in reprising the post-Oberlin history, I could not have imagined the changes since my college graduation in 1959, the year of two popes and a Council announcement! I could not have even imagined theological studies, in my Church, being opened to lay persons like myself.

If producing texts of international standing is not the gift or calling of the US Commission, how do we speak of our role in reception? We have noted its role in reception of the theology of the conciliar movement into the US National Council, a process that is early on in its development. There are two other dimensions of ecumenical reception which I see of the calling of the US Commission:

1) The first is the reception of theological work of other dimensions of the one ecumenical movement: church union, bilateral and World Council results, both by evaluating them and communicating them to US Christians, and by providing US voices into these discussions that might be muted otherwise.

2) The second is the reception and outreach to new voices previously absent from the Christian discussions. I see these as a convergence, centripetal dimension of our work, and a centrifugal, outreach dimension. Until all Christians are at the table our work is not complete, and until there is one visibly united Church, Christ's prayer will not reach its full realization.

In this symbolic overview of five decades, I will just note one or another contribution to each of these vocations. A complete retrospective would include more detailed evaluative, historical papers on how the ecumenical movement since Oberlin has transformed each of the US churches, how it has influenced the scholarship on various themes, and how scholars have come to reformulated their research. I try to help especially Methodist, Baptist, Disciples and Catholic students with such an overview; and have written about Anglican, Lutheran, Reformed, Wesleyan and Pentecostal developments. However, we need to hear and celebrate the texture of this rich and relatively recent history in all its post-modern particularity!

One has only to trace how the convergences of Oberlin and Montreal have shaped the influential scholarship of Raymond E. Brown, Albert Outler or Jaroslav Pelikan, for example, to see how the American theological landscape remains in the debt of Faith and Order.

### **The Turbulent Sixties**

Of course, it is the Life and Work heritage of National Council leadership that is most remembered from this period, with the Civil Rights and Vietnam War debates being central to the churches' struggle together in the Council.

In '57, the church unity work was relatively new, and flew under the radar for a decade or two, though the careful work on Scripture and Tradition and the opening of the ecclesiological question for US Protestantism, has had irreversible impact on our churches. In the 1970s I introduced a course on Church &

Sacrament, for example, at Memphis Theological Seminary, and 25 years later, on my return there are full blown electives on both of these themes – and an amazing array of resources unavailable in 1976. The churches represented at Oberlin, symbolized by Holiness church leadership here this week, were a much wider range than the US National Council membership. The churches of the Council have generously stewarded the Faith and Order movement in the US for a much larger Christian constituency than its own members.

While convergences on Scripture and Tradition and on the importance of ecclesiological dialogue were the major centripetal forces to serve the churches, the major outreach, centrifugal force was the engagement of the Catholic Church in the wake of the second Vatican Council. When I arrived in NYC in 1981 the most widely remembered work of Faith and Order was still the *Living Room Dialogues* which brought thousands of Orthodox, Protestants and Catholics together to discussion the issues of faith using resources you produced in this Commission.

### **The Transitional Seventies**

Many of the discussions that went on in the Commissions of World and National Council on Scripture and Tradition in the 50s and 60s, were perused in the Society for Pentecostal Studies and Wesleyan Theological Society from the US evangelical subculture. These ecumenical, internal debates made the 80s participation of representatives of these theological traditions possible. Within the US commission, outreach in fora around the country contributed to the reception of Faith and Order work, and pioneering ethical contributions on Abortion and Homosexuality remain important resources.

The principle outreach was the full incorporation of women into the theological leadership of Faith and Order. This US leadership was a catalysis for international changes in the global movement. as the memorial to Letty Russell during the course of this meeting reminds us. A good paper on both the course of the integration of women's leadership into the work, and the methodological and content changes in Faith and Order style it occasioned, will be an important contribution to this commemoration. This was also a moment for attention to Asian and Latin American/ US Hispanic voices. Papers on these developments and the unique ecumenical resources and challenges they present are also important in this anniversary retrospective.

In the National Council, Faith and Order gave rise first to Christian Jewish work and then to the Task Force on Christian Muslim Relations, both of which matured through the 80s and 90s to become an independent Commission, capable of their own theology and dialogue possibilities. Having been so successful in generating this work in the Council, Faith and Order needs to be cautious not to overlap or do the theological work for which a full Commission now exists in the Council.

The 70s also marks a moment when the most productive Faith and Order work begins to be done in the bilateral dialogues and Consolation on Church Union in the US. This success caused inevitable tensions between churches which preferred the

multilateral venue of Faith and Order and those who were able to resolve historical differences only by the particularity of bilateral research. This tension provided the impetus for important studies in the 80s in the Commission, on reception and the complementarity of multilateral and bilateral methodologies and content.

### **The Productivity and Outreach of the Eighties**

The US Commission was an important servant of the US churches in their contribution to the WCC *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* process and its evaluation and reception in the US community. Study of reception of this text and similar themes in the bilaterals enabled the US churches to see the wholeness of the one ecumenical movement and how convergence in multilateral dialogues served consensus among the churches.

The Apostolic Faith study provided an opportunity for both outreach from consultations with the Peace, African American and Pentecostal churches; to publications on the ancient pneumatological and Christological issues still dividing Christians – but with the newer, diverse voices of the US church situation. The 14 US consultations and 24 WCC consultations on the historic core of the Christian faith give a lie to anti-ecumenical critiques against conciliar ecumenism. The pioneering work on gender and language in the creed was to be a resource for the World Council a decade later when that concern became a pressing issue.

Indeed, I would hold up the volume of work of these two commissions and the bilaterals, documented in the *Growth in Agreement* and, for the US, in the *Building Unity/Growing Consensus* series in a positive comparison to any witness to the faith published by the theological commissions of the National Association of Evangelicals or the World Evangelical Alliance.

As will be discussed by other speakers this week, this is the decade of filling out the Commission to include the Evangelical, Pentecostal and Holiness voices, present but marginal in earlier decades of Faith and Order. The 70s had also been a time of separatism among many African American scholars, with significant ecumenical bridges like Gayraud Wilmore. The 80s enabled several opportunities for staging the African American church voices into World Council discussions.

In brief, I will remind us of the pioneering work on ecclesiology and human sexuality occasioned by the study of the application for membership of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches. It remains a resource as the churches continue to face this issue in their own internal quest for unity. This signals the early stage of the reception of the question of human sexuality into ecumenical dialogue, and demonstrates some principles of civility, dialogue methodology, and ecclesiology which should be continuing resources for the future, a future which is already upon us.

### **The Harvest of the Nineties**

For many, the number of proposals for full communion before the churches for reflection and action during the 80s was a surprise, especially in the US.

Indeed, the fruits of 70 years of bilateral and Faith and Order work were beginning to bear fruit in the lives of the churches themselves. Reformation issues were also beginning to find resolution, not only within Protestantism but with some of the Reformation churches and the Catholic Church. A *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* was signed between Catholics, Lutherans and eventually Methodists. The US Commission has contributed and continues to contribute to widening and deepening this discussion and finding ways of helping its reconciling intent to be integrated into the lives of the US Christian community.

The full communion agreements challenged Faith and Order to both deepen common understanding of these developments and expand its implications by studies on full communion, authority in the Church, and the authority of the Church in the world. As some speakers here will point out, common structures of decision making, in a post-modern world, will be continuing challenges even with churches in full communion. The theology behind these agreements has also contributed to the centrifugal moment of reception by engaging church theologians from traditions who do not have full communion as the goal of their reconciling engagement with other Christians.

During this period and into the new century Faith and Order continues to engage in reaching out to the margins to involve an ever widening circle of Christians in the quest for unity, attending to the contextual theologies emerging in a variety of places within the US and around the world and taking on new issues that threaten to divide the Church.

The willingness of the Commission to respond to the 1995 invitation to a "patient and fraternal dialogue" on the exercise of the papal ministry by the late John Paul II is a historic and ground breaking moment in the reception of a new – and very old – issue, into what was once a Protestant and Orthodox movement toward unity. As the World Council peruses its drafting of the *Nature and Mission of the Church* text, US Faith and Order has a unique opportunity to provide a platform for voices from the margin to participate, and to help the churches at the center of the ecumenical movement begin to reflect on the implications of this text for their life together.

So with this somewhat superficial and breathtaking journey through half a century, it is difficult to tell whether we should be most thankful to God for what has been accomplished in this short window of Church history, or intimidated by the vocation of reconciliation to which God calls us in the decades to come.

### **Conclusion**

Those called to serve the unity of the Church through theological dialogue, research and communication in Faith and Order are a small part of the one ecumenical movement. We are called to collaborate and support the other dimensions and their contributions to the unity of all Christians. However, a caution is in order in this collaboration.

The call for the "blurring of lines" between Faith and Order and Life and Work must be realistic and mutual, as some will note in our evaluation. The best service Faith and Order can provide to the rest of the US National Council is:

- a) to help to advise on building an ecumenical constituency from churches as wide as that in F&O, to supplement NCC member churches in their common witness;
- b) to help identify church dividing issues to which the Life and Work dimensions of the Council need to give their theological and dialogical attention, and
- c) to help Life and Work colleagues design theological consultations that will have the ecumenical breadth and theological depth needed to support the common witness of ecumenical life.

Care must be taken not to become a general think tank for the member churches of the US National Council, or a place where legitimating theology is formulated for public policy decisions already made elsewhere in the Council.

Good papers would be helpful documenting the reception of the ecumenical movement and its Faith and Order method, goal and content, in the Life and Work, educational, and social service dimensions of US church life and the US National Council of Churches of Christ. These should disclose some successes and outline some challenges both for the US churches, and for the collaborative

agencies that serve ecumenical life.

This has been an exhilarating and refreshing first 50 years in the long history of Christianity. We can be grateful to God for generations who pioneered this work, and hopeful for those who will be called to this ministry in the decades to come.

(The fully footnoted text will appear in the proceedings. A more formal history of Faith and Order US is to be published by Rev. Dr. William Norgren by Eerdmans, under the patronage of Dr. William Rusch and the Foundation for a North American Conference on Faith and Order.)

*(Brother Jeffrey Gros, FSC, is Professor of Church History at the Memphis Theological Seminary in Memphis, Tennessee.)*

### **9. Our Common Reconciling Ministry by Bishop Williams Skylstad**

Editor's Note: The following three articles were presented as a panel discussion at the annual meeting of the Catholic Theological Society of America on June 8, 2007, entitled "Bishops as Ecumenical Leaders," organized by Dr. John Borelli of Georgetown University. Dr. Borelli submitted the papers to *Ecumenical Trends*.

It is a distinct honor for me to join you today. I would first like to express the gratitude of the Catholic bishops in the United States for the contribution that members of the Catholic Theological Society of America have long made to the theological enterprise and, in particular, to the ecumenical task so important to the Church's mission. Moreover, I offer you this thanks while recognizing that there is a particular bond that unites us in a common effort. "Both Bishops and theologians," Pope John Paul II remarked during his first Apostolic Visit to the United States in 1983, "are called to live and work and pray for the same great cause: 'That the word of the Lord 'nay speed on and triumph' (2 Thessalonians 3:1)." To be a Catholic theologian, the Holy Father continued, means to be called "to open the treasure of faith ever wider and to inculcate respect for the Magisterium, which in turn guarantees the interpretation of God's word." I offer you my own words, then, in light of this solemn call that we all share, to strengthen and deepen the faith of all Christians and to advance the Church's divine mission to proclaim the Good News to all nations.

I am also here to share with you some of the gifts that I have received as a bishop from the ecumenical responsibilities and opportunities with which the Lord has graced my ministry these past thirty years. Before doing so, though, I wish to acknowledge the presence of Presiding Bishop (retired) H. George Anderson of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, who as a seminary professor and president, and then as presiding bishop of the ELCA, has played a key role in the ecumenical movement. We Catholic bishops owe him a particular debt of gratitude for his leadership of the U.S. Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue. It was altogether fitting that Dr. Anderson was the American Lutheran representative to sign the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* in Augsburg, 1999, following his years of service in our common efforts at doctrinal reconciliation.

Today I come before you as a pastor who has had the privilege of working with church leaders like Bishop Anderson and with members of this distinguished society in laying a foundation for dialogue and the deepening of the bonds of Christian communion. In my short presentation today, I would like to share three experiences that might be of interest to our gathering: first, my personal encounters with fellow Christian leaders in the Diocese of Spokane, the local church to which I am sacramentally wedded; second, my service on the Bishops Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (BCEIA) of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops; third, and as an extension of my service at the conference, my work as co-chair of one of our important national dialogues. There are others here today who could point to the ecumenical service of Catholic bishops who labored in this ecumenical vineyard longer and more prominently than I have. Know that I too am in their debt and count it a special honor to have known many of them.

As dedicated servants of communion, each one of us also brings to the table of ecumenical dialogue a personal journey that includes powerful testimony to the grace that flows when Christian brothers and sisters dwell together in unity (cf. Psalm 133:1-3). While we speak out of the context of the worldwide Catholic Church and its embrace of other Christian believers, we also speak out of the context of our own memories of reconciliation and ecumenical cooperation in works of justice and mercy. For me, the personal journey includes growing up in an inter-church household, and being part of a distinct religious minority in my early schooling. In my earlier years as a bishop while visiting my relatives in Norway, I sometimes was a little apprehensive about how a Catholic bishop might be received by his Lutheran aunts and cousins. Yet I am always delighted to see how glad they are to host me in their homes, take me to visit their churches and introduce me to their friends, not in spite of, but because of my vocation as a believer and bishop of the Catholic Church.

### **The Ecumenical Calling of a Local Bishop**

A major part of our ecumenical work, as many of you realize from working with us, pertains to building relationships. Indeed, our work is relational in any number of directions: each bishop with other members of the College of Bishops, including its Head the Bishop of Rome and Successor of St. Peter; each bishop with his fellow bishops of local churches, typically through the structures of the Episcopal Conference; bishops with theologians of their dioceses and regions; bishops with ecumenical and interreligious partners; bishops with interfaith couples and their families, who often invite special pastoral solicitude.

In addition to forging relationships that enhance theological understanding, attention must concomitantly be given to building the bonds of affection, friendship and trust with all our Christian brothers and sisters of other traditions whom our ministries touch in any way. Only against the backdrop of pastoral charity and solicitude can the dialogues co-led by bishops yield the theological results that serve the reconciliation in faith and worship for which they are intended. Working toward full and complete reconciliation among the members of Christ's ecclesial body

requires an effort to understand the other's spirituality, communal ethos and ecclesial polity. To the extent that we strive for such understanding we will be able to empathize with our partners, and they with us, when times of tension arise, or when our progress toward unity proceeds at a disappointingly slow pace.

In Spokane, for example, relationship-building occurs on a weekly basis as my counterparts and I gather every Wednesday morning for breakfast when we are in town. Twice a year we gather together for a morning of prayer and reflection, once during Advent and once during Holy Week. On two other occasions, they and their spouses and I enjoy summertime barbecue and a festive Christmas dinner. These celebrations naturally engender a spirit of collegiality that enables us to offer common witness on pressing issues in the community, as well as to gain fresh insights into what is happening in the others' churches. The bonds that are forged through years of mutual support and collegial cooperation allow each of us to develop informed views on matters of theological difference, mostly free of the facile stereotypes that impede true listening and empathy. Our network of spiritual support and encouragement deepens our appreciation of the Spirit's freedom in bestowing gifts broadly among the people of Christ and in the field of God's world.

Our local group kids me about the possibility of our taking a trip to Rome, and then using my influence as conference President to get us all into the apostolic palace for a one-on-one with Pope Benedict! Our laughter together enlivens our meetings and helps us to bear the tensions that naturally arise from differing points of view on critical issues, such as those that pertain to God's gift of sexuality and the dignity of nascent human life. Our friendship deepens through honest sharing and entering into the suffering of the other. When the previous Episcopal bishop in Spokane, Bishop Jeff Terry, was seriously ill waiting for a heart transplant, we gathered for our Wednesday morning breakfasts in the Sacred Heart Medical Center cafeteria so that Jeff could be with us. The travails of our Catholic community in Spokane throughout the sexual abuse crisis, including the ordeal of passing through the Chapter 11 process, occasioned various opportunities for my ministerial colleagues to show their solidarity and confidence in my desire to bring healing to a broken community.

As I reflect back on the sexual abuse crisis, and Spokane's participation in what has been one of the greatest crises ever to strike our American Catholic community, I marvel at the ways in which the Lord opened new doors to dialogue and friendship in the midst of so much pain. A year ago I would not have imagined having met five times with the Evangelical leadership in the Spokane area, reflecting and problem-solving over how we, Catholics and Evangelicals in unison, might address the problem of sexual abuse in our churches and in our society at large. Shared vulnerability and spiritual brokenness, when seen in the light of the Cross, can break down the barriers of inter-confessional rivalry and open up channels of communication and effective action.

### **The Ecumenical Leadership of the Bishops' Conference**

Since the close of Vatican II forty-two years ago, most episcopal conferences have established committees or commissions that provide resources and

oversight for the ecumenical and interreligious work of the local church. In the United States our conference is blessed to have teams of theologians who serve on fourteen official dialogues with a variety of churches and religious communities. As part of the presence of the USCCB in these dialogues, and working in collaboration with the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, these scholars excel in representing our Catholic doctrinal traditions, contribute generously in identifying areas of theological consensus with our partners and advise the Catholic bishops of the United States on how to respond to the problems arising in the culture that have an impact on ecumenical, Jewish-Catholic, or interreligious relationships.' It is with the vital collaborative efforts of the sixty or so theologians involved in USCCB dialogues that we bishops are able to sustain an ecumenical program that has yielded so many important fruits for the Catholic community of the United States and for the Catholic Church worldwide.

This committee indeed benefits from several bishop-scholars like Richard J. Sklba, the current chair and auxiliary bishop of Milwaukee, and William Murphy, chair of the sub-committee on Interreligious Dialogue and bishop of Rockville Centre. Before assuming his duties at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in Rome, Cardinal William Levada had been co-chair of the Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue. Eight of the bishops on the BCEIA are each responsible for one of the dialogues with other Christian churches. Other members make an important contribution to the committee's work by offering the perspective of the communities or regions they represent. For example, Bishop Phicido Rodriguez has been on the BCEIA for many years, while also attending the meetings of CELAM. He and I were both part of the USCCB delegation to last month's meeting of CELAM in Brazil, where, for the first time, a U.S. episcopal delegate was a voting member. Our solidarity with the Latin American episcopal conference enhances our efforts as bishops at tending to the pastoral needs of the U.S. Hispanic community, for whom the ecumenical vision stands in tension with anxieties over the departure of many Hispanic Catholics to other Christian communities.

Our task in the BCEIA involves not only giving direction to the eight bilateral dialogues with Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant churches and to overseeing Jewish-Catholic, Muslim-Catholic and other interreligious and ecumenical activity. We are also frequently asked to provide advice on all these relationships to the Holy See as well as help our fellow American bishops regarding ecumenical and interreligious matters on the diocesan, national, and international levels.

In recent years, the committee laid the necessary groundwork for the USCCB to join the new ecumenical entity called Christian Churches Together, whose membership includes thirty-six churches from five confessing families: Roman Catholic, mainline Protestant, historic black and ethnic, Evangelical and Pentecostal, and Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox. When the Holy See published the liturgical document known as *Liturgiam Authenticam* (2001), the BCEIA helped to interpret the initiative in light of its impact on ecumenical translations of scripture and on the broader liturgical movement! When the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith published its important declaration *Dominus Iesus, On the Unicity and SaMlle Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church*, in 2000, it was

crucial to situate the text's doctrinal affirmations about the necessity of Christ and the Church for the salvation of all, and the subsistence of the one Church of Christ in the Catholic Church, within an appropriate interreligious and ecumenical context. The interpretation of such a document, we explained, cannot be isolated from the Catholic Church's irrevocable interreligious commitments, nor from the rich harvest of theological dialogues between the Catholic Church and its ecclesial partners. In that same Jubilee year, the BCEIA invited Cardinal Edward Idris Cassidy of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity to address the November plenary of the USCCB on the Holy See's irreversible dedication to promoting full and visible communion among Christians and mutual understanding between the Church and other religions.' At the same meeting, three bishops were able to share with the body of bishops the blessings of their work as co-chairs of dialogues.

When the Holy See seeks clarification about the status of baptism in other Christian communities, and the pastoral implications of determining its validity or invalidity, it typically falls to the Committee on Doctrine and the BCEIA and its Secretariat to provide background information about the ecclesial community in question, appropriate theological reflection on the formulas and ceremonies employed and analyses of the progress of the Catholic Church's dialogue with this Christian body. Decisions made by other confessing churches also call out for interpretation. When Lutherans moved into "full communion" with several Reformed churches in 1997, and then with the Episcopal Church in 1999, the committee had an opportunity to offer its observations and experiences to other bishops since the very concept of "full communion" in Catholic circles tends to be associated with the RCIA process and with individual Christians joining the Catholic Church. In this case, theologians were drawn upon to advise the committee on how best to assist bishops, and how to provide a sufficiently succinct description of the ecumenical goal of full communion for priests, deacons, and pastoral ministers in the field.

While the theological work of the dialogues may be the most visible area in which we bishops and theologians collaborate in our ecumenical service to the Church, there are a host of other tasks in which theologians provide generous service to their local dioceses, universities and seminaries, and respective fields of scholarly competency. Indeed, as theologians, in your research and publications you are called upon to interpret the ecumenical and interreligious achievements of the past and present, and to apply faithfully the principles of critical investigation to arrive at strategies for realizing what is ultimately God's gift of greater unity and rapprochement in the future. For all these contributions, all Catholic believers should be exceedingly grateful.

### **The Bishop as Dialogue Co-chair**

In the period 1995 to 20021 had the good fortune of co-chairing the United Methodist-Roman Catholic Dialogue here in the United States. Reluctantly, I had to relinquish my duties in Round 7 of this dialogue once I was elected Vice-President and then President of the USCCB. However, my years of work with United Methodist Bishops William Boyd Grove of West Virginia, and Walter Klaiber of Frankfurt, Germany, as well as with the Catholic and Methodist theological teams,

yielded many rewards for me personally. At times the dialogues proved challenging, even exasperating, but always the spirit of mutual respect and commitment to the goals of full communion allowed us to persevere.

During the first round I was chairing, the dialogue produced a popular program called *Yearning to Be One: Spiritual Dialogue between Catholics and United Methodists.*' Development of a parish or congregational instrument like this requires theological expertise, since both sides of the dialogue want the explanations of one another's worship, authority and ministry to be both accurate and positive. In the midst of our development of the instrument, Pope John Paul II's historical encyclical on ecumenism, *Ut Unim Sint* (1995), appeared. In between two of our sessions, over a six-month period, the dialogue members committed themselves to daily devotional reflection on the encyclical. Bishop Grove produced an enlightening Methodist response to the Holy Father's request for a "patient and fraternal dialogue" (UUS, no. 96) on the exercise of his papal ministry in the service of Christian unity. From Bishop Grove's paper and from our efforts to develop the popular educational instrument, we Catholic participants learned a great deal about the catholicity of the Methodist tradition.

I am grateful to the Lord for the privilege of serving on a dialogue with our Methodist sisters and brothers. The publication of *Yearning to Be One* provided a basis for building up an ecumenical spirituality in Methodist and Catholic congregations. Also encouraging for me was to share in the early conversations on the relationship between the local church (diocese or congregation) and the universal or "global" church. The joint statement *Through Divine Love: The Church in Each Place and in All Places* touches on one of the core issues of what it means to belong to the body of Christ.' The most recent dialogue between the Holy See and the World Methodist Council, *The Grace Given You in Christ*, has been able to draw on our dialogue on the one Church and the many churches, demonstrating how important a laboratory is the community of ecumenical theologians in the United States.

The international dialogue has indeed become a rich resource of theological convergence between Methodist and Catholic communities. However, even though the United Methodist Church is the largest ecumenically-oriented church after the Catholic Church in the United States, and has a rich heritage of scholarship embodied in persons like the late Albert Outler (one of the observers at Vatican II), it has been more difficult to engage Methodists theologically than, say, Lutherans and Episcopalians. Yet working together with Bishop Klaiber, one of the most renowned theologians of the Methodist tradition, and with the Catholic theological community, we have been able to produce a text that we hope is among the important building blocks in our journey toward unity in Christ.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate my appreciation for the service that a number of the members of the CTSA provide to our Catholic witness in ecumenical dialogue, and to our ecumenical partners like Dr. Anderson. Indeed, whenever Cardinal Walter Kasper, the President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, refers to the contribution of the U.S. Bishops' Conference, he always makes special

reference to the work done by both our Orthodox and Lutheran national dialogues as a model for other regions of the Church on our common pilgrimage of reconciliation.

As theologians and bishops together, we have a marvelous opportunity to serve the people of Christ by drawing them ever more deeply into the unity for which Christ prayed on the night before his life-giving death. *Ut unum sint*: "May they be one." May we be one, bishops and theologians together in our work of transmitting faithfully the living faith of the apostles. May we be one, Christians, Jews, Muslims, and followers of other spiritual paths in the quest for peace among the religions, the precondition for peace in the world. May we all be one, in our prayer for a just world in which men and women of conscience stand together to defend human dignity in season and out of season. May who is, now and always, our Eucharistic joy and the hope of all ages. Thank you.

( *Most Reverend William S. Skylstad is the Roman Catholic Bishop of Spokane, Washington. He was President of the USCCB at the time of this presentation.*)

**Notes:**

1. <http://www.usceb.org/seia/history.shtml>.
2. <http://cba.cua.edu/brownla.cfm>.
3. Origins, vol. 30, number 28. December 21, 2000, "The Ecumenical Commitment of the Church."
4. [http://www.upperroom.org/bookstore/description.asp?item\\_id=155069](http://www.upperroom.org/bookstore/description.asp?item_id=155069).
5. <http://www.uscch.org/seia/finalUMC-RCS13riiasterintro.pdf>.

## **10. Pope Expresses Hopes for Dialogue With Baptists**

Pope Benedict XVI told Baptist and Catholic representatives he hoped conversations between the two denominations "will bear abundant fruit for the progress of dialogue and the increase of understanding and cooperation." The pope met privately at the Vatican Dec. 6 with more than 20 delegates who were in Rome for a meeting of the joint international commission sponsored by the Baptist World Alliance and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. Pope Benedict said if reconciliation and greater fellowship between Baptism and Catholics is to be realized, certain issues "need to be faced together, in a spirit of openness, mutual respect and fidelity" to the Gospel. He said some of the "historically controverted issues" that needed further discussion are "the relationship between Scripture and tradition, the understanding of baptism and the sacraments, the place of Mary in the communion of the church, and the nature of oversight and primacy in the church's ministerial structure."