

## The Society for Ecumenical Studies

### Speaking the Truth in Love

International Methodist-Roman Catholic Commission Fifth  
Quinquennium

***A review by David Carter, October 2001***

This is the report of the seventh quinquennium of the international Methodist Roman Catholic Commission and it is devoted to the highly topical subject of teaching authority. In common with the recent ARCIC report, *The Gift of Authority*, the Commission agrees that teaching authority is a gift to the Church and necessary in its work of evangelisation and proclamation. It emphasises that this authority is always exercised under the Word of God and that the authority of Scripture remains normative. Teaching authority is exercised within the Church and takes due account of the *sensus fidelium*. Its aim is always the growth in maturity of those for whom and amongst whom it is exercised. Above all it is a gift of the Spirit within 'God's Prophetic Community, anointed with the Spirit of Truth'.

The Catholic-Methodist dialogue has always been a very honest one, anxious to find points of convergence, but equally honest in admitting where differences still exist. This report is no exception. It gives a clear account of the nature of teaching authority within the two communions. Both address questions to each other about the nature of authoritative teaching bodies. Thus, Methodists ask Catholics why layfolk (and, indeed presbyters) are not directly involved in the higher instruments of the magisterium, while Catholics ask why Methodists do not make more of a distinction between ministers and laypeople in teaching terms. Finally, it is agreed that, 'the relationship between ordination, authoritative teaching and the sure guidance of the Holy Spirit remains a topic for further discussion between Methodists and Catholics'.

The Report also contains a very useful section on Methodist and Roman Catholic understanding of the 'means of grace', dealing in particular with the special role of the sacraments *vis à vis* the other means of grace. This opens up a field of great importance, the questions not being those of fine sacramental theology in the traditional sense but rather the role of the sacraments within the totality of worship and spirituality.

There is much here to ponder. It is to be hoped reception in both churches, especially Methodism, will be better than in the past.