

Communiqué

Catholic, Lutheran, Mennonite, Trilateral Dialogue Commission on Baptism

Elspeet, The Netherlands, 9—13 February 2015

Representatives of the Catholic Church (Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity), the Lutheran World Federation, and the Mennonite World Conference met in Elspeet, The Netherlands, 9–13 February, for the third meeting of the Trilateral Dialogue Commission on Baptism. The Commission developed the general topic of the dialogue “Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Church” through papers on “Baptism: Communicating Grace and Faith.” Professors John Rempel and Fernando Enns (Mennonite), Rev Prof. William Henn (Catholic), and Bishop Emeritus Dr Musawenkosi Biyela (Lutheran) made major presentations. The Commission continued also to study baptismal practices of the three Christian traditions, with special attention this year to Mennonites in a paper by Prof. Rempel and Dr Jonathan Seiling. In anticipation of the conclusion of the trilateral dialogue, members reviewed the work of the previous years and agreed on an outline of their final report. Each day began and ended in common prayer; morning prayers included joint reflection on biblical texts relating to baptism.

Hosted by the Mennonite World Conference, the meeting took place at Menno-rode Conference Centre (Elspeet), an important house for Dutch and international Mennonite meetings since the 1920s. One evening commission members met with leaders of the national Mennonite community to learn about the life of the Dutch Mennonite church today, including their practice of Baptism in a highly secularized society. The final day, participants visited historic Mennonite sites in Amsterdam and Friesland, (northern Netherlands), where Menno Simons—from whom Mennonites take their name—was born and first ministered, initially as a Catholic priest, then as an Anabaptist reformer.

Participants in the meeting on behalf of the Catholic Church were Archbishop Luis Augusto Castro Quiroga, IMC (co-chair, Colombia); Rev. Prof. William Henn, OFM Cap (USA/Italy); Rev Prof. Luis Melo, SM (Canada); Sister Prof. Dr Marie-Hélène Robert, NDA (France); and Msgr Dr Gregory Fairbanks (co-secretary, USA/Vatican). Lutheran delegation members were Prof. Dr. Friederike Nüssel (co-chair, Germany); Bishop Emeritus Dr Musawenkosi Biyela (South Africa); Prof. Dr Theodor Dieter (France); Rev Dr KS Peter Li (Hong Kong, China); and Rev Dr Kaisamari Hintikka (co-secretary, Finland/Switzerland). Mennonites were Prof. Dr Alfred Neufeld (co-chair, Paraguay); Prof. Dr Fernando Enns (Germany); Rev Rebecca Adongo Osiro (Kenya); Prof. Dr John Rempel (Canada); Rev Dr Larry Miller (co-secretary, France); and Dr Jonathan Seiling (Canada/Germany) as a guest researcher.

The fourth meeting of the Trilateral Commission is scheduled to take place 28 February—4 March 2016 in Colombia where it will consider the theme “Discipleship: Living Out Baptism.” The Commission intends to conclude its work in 2017 with the submission of a final report to the Lutheran World Federation, the Mennonite World Conference and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.