

10. The Faith and Order Committee

A. GENERAL REPORT

Oversight

The most major component of the committee's work over the past twelve months has been its role in the preparation of the three reports submitted to this present Conference (*The Nature of Oversight, What is a Circuit Superintendent?* and *What Sort of Bishops?*), and the further report still being worked on (*What is a District Chair?*). Aside from the scale and importance of the topics themselves, the significance of the joint submission of a report to the Conference by the Methodist Council and the Faith and Order Committee should not be overlooked.

Use of Methodist Premises

An example of how theological questions arise in the context of knotty legal questions (and of the kind of consultation which the committee becomes involved in) is that of the use of Methodist premises. The question of the use of Methodist premises by groups of other faith traditions appears to be adequately addressed by reports dating from 1972 and 1997 (re. S.O.920). Practice is suggesting that more work may be needed on this matter in the near future, as British society continues to change, and new issues arise. 'Use of premises' questions are, however, also arising with respect to Christian groups, especially with regard to individual, unaffiliated congregations who seek a worshipping home.

The Re-Formation of the Liturgical Sub-Committee as the 'Worship and Liturgy Resources Group'

'Is there life after the Methodist Worship Book?' was a question the Liturgical Sub-Committee had to ask itself. In truth, liturgical questions continue to be asked of the committee through the Secretary. Some are easy to answer, others are not. It also became clear that the committee has available for the Church a body of people able and willing to offer wisdom and guidance on liturgical matters. The Worship and Liturgy Resources Group (convened by The Revd Dr Adrian Burdon, a member of the Faith and Order Committee) is thus a group of nine liturgy and worship enthusiasts who stand ready and equipped to undertake work, and to advise others in their work, in this field. They function as the Faith and Order Committee's standing sub-committee on liturgy and worship matters.

Consultation

In addition to the ways in which the committee is linked in an ongoing way with many other bodies via representation (e.g. Methodist Publishing House, Committee for Local Ecumenical Development, Creative Arts in Methodism, Joint Liturgical Group, Church of England Liturgical Commission, Churches Together in England Theology and Unity Group), the committee has fulfilled its role in scrutinising reports and in acting as a consultative body.

Examples of the committee's interaction with other Churches have been comments made on United Reformed Church documents on the doctrine of the Church, and on patterns of ministry, on the recent Church of England Report, *Women Bishops in the Church of England?*, and on the draft WMC/RC response

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to the RC/Lutheran statement on the doctrine of justification (on which see further section C below).

Later in the year, the committee, its Executive, and individual members working on the committee's behalf, have been considering the papers which came together to form the report of the Joint Implementation Commission (JIC) for *An Anglican-Methodist Covenant*. The committee is delighted to play this important role though, through its Executive, wishes to express a concern that due to constraints of timing the committee has been unable to fulfil its scrutinising role with respect to the current text in the depth that might have been expected. This is something which needs examining as JIC enters the second, longer, phase of its five-year life. The

Internally within the Methodist Church, the committee offered input to the report on discipleship (*Time to Talk of God*, to be found in the current agenda), to the study pack being prepared on marriage and relationships, to the working party on domestic abuse and to the *Time for Action* monitoring group. The committee has also contributed to responses made by the Church to external bodies e.g. on civil marriage practice and on discussions about the introduction of legislation on religious incitement and discrimination.

*****RESOLUTION**

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B. HOLY COMMUNION IN THE METHODIST CHURCH: RESPONSES TO HIS PRESENCE MAKES THE FEAST

Introduction

1. The Conference of 2003 received the Report *His Presence Makes the Feast – Holy Communion in the Methodist Church*, commended it to Districts, Circuits and local churches for study and comment, invited responses to be sent to the Faith and Order Secretary and directed the Faith and Order Committee to report on the responses received to the Conference of 2005.

2. The Report was distributed to every minister in a circuit appointment and a further 2300 copies were sold through the Methodist Publishing House. A total of 41 responses were received by the Faith and Order Secretary: two on behalf of Districts, seven from Circuits, six from local churches, four from other groups and 22 from individuals. The responses ranged in scope from brief emails to a 33-page dissertation, but the majority (about two-thirds) did go into considerable detail. As with responses to other recent consultations on Faith and Order reports, this is a relatively small sample. However, the committee is extremely grateful to all those who have sent responses.

3. With the exception of one totally negative contribution, the responses expressed a sense of gratitude and approval for the Report, commending it as an accessible, interesting and useful resource. A small number raised minor issues of criticism about statements or implied judgements within the Report. A few of the responses expressed dismay at certain aspects of Methodist practice highlighted

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within the Report, but in general reflected many of the differences of viewpoint and practice which the Report itself highlights.

Summary of the responses

4. Many correspondents welcomed the Report's approach of starting with practice, but some expressed reservations ("Reflection on current practice is a good place to *start*, but we should not stop there"; others were concerned that we should start with the Bible or with "what Jesus meant when he instituted it"). One writer found it depressing: "It presents with clarity and accuracy what actually happens, but it also shows as much as anything the incredible muddle that characterises much of Methodist worship".

5. Many particular issues that were highlighted in the Report came in for comment. The 'Open Table' was widely emphasised, sometimes with regret that not all denominations offer the same degree of hospitality as the Methodist Church. Linked to this, some correspondents expressed unease at the Conference's ruling (in the year 2000) that persons receiving communion should normally be baptised. This tension is, of course, referred to in the Report itself.

6. Other correspondents continued to press the case for wider exercise of Lay Presidency – in various ways continuing the debates that have occurred since Methodist Union and, indeed, since the time of the Wesleys.

7. Amongst the other issues that provoked comment by a number of correspondents were:

- general satisfaction with the frequency of celebration except in some smaller churches
- the unease that some people have with sharing the Peace
- the need for careful training for Communion Stewards
- different views about who may assist the minister with the distribution
- a strong antipathy to the use of alcoholic communion wine
- concerns over the hygienic implications of sharing a common cup (though others were in favour on theological grounds)
- a general but not universal preference for distribution 'by tables'
- a variety of views concerning how the surplus elements should be disposed of

8. Issues raised in just one response, but nevertheless noteworthy, were:

- disappointment at the lack of discussion about Love Feasts
- negative comments about the Report's discussion of 'sacrifice'
- dislike or disapproval of language in the Methodist Worship Book (e.g. the epiclesis)
- antipathy to 'Extended Communion'

9. Apart from the cases mentioned above, general appreciation was expressed for the Methodist Worship Book, although some expressed a dislike of any set forms. It does not seem from the responses received that there is much appreciation that service books can be (and are meant to be) used flexibly.

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10. Several responses discussed the question of the admission of children. It is clear that the decision of the Conference in 2000 that the full participation by children in Holy Communion is still in a process of 'reception', and the Church's guidelines on the issue, are not well known.

Conclusions and Recommendations

11. The impression that is gained from the responses is that regular teaching and preaching about the significance of Holy Communion is rare. In the committee's judgement it would be beneficial if ministers and local preachers gave more attention to this topic. The projected illustrated booklet on Holy Communion, in a similar format to '*Called by Name*' (on membership) and '*All this for You*' (on baptism) will be a valuable supplementary resource in this regard, both for local church use and for individual reflection. Opportunities for local preachers to preach at a communion service can also be beneficial. It was clear that in some cases house groups had considered the Report and the committee continues to commend this. '*His Presence Makes the Feast*' will remain a useful resource for some time (but see paragraph 14 below). The depth of engagement with the issues that is evident in the responses received indicates that there is much to be gained from reflection on the Church's beliefs and practices in a variety of contexts.

12. The responses have confirmed the original Report's view that the diversity of customs found in the Methodist Church reflects deeply valued local traditions. Changes, if they are to be introduced, must be made sensitively and with ample opportunity to discuss their advantages and disadvantages.

13. In general, there is no reason, from the responses received, to propose any significant changes in our practices or disciplines, or for further substantial work by the Faith and Order Committee at the present time. However, the Joint Implementation Commission will be taking up some of the 'ecumenically sensitive' issues within its remit to progress the Anglican-Methodist Covenant.

14. One small but significant correction needs to be made to what is printed in '*His Presence Makes the Feast*'. The description of Extended Communion in paragraph 130 is inaccurate, and the third sentence should therefore read: 'Extended Communion is when the bread and wine from a public celebration are taken by the minister or a deacon or layperson authorised by the Church Council and received by a person who is sick or housebound.'

15. It has also come to the committee's notice that there is a discrepancy between Standing Order 609 (Extended Communion) and the text of the Methodist Worship Book. The latter includes presbyters among those who may lead such a service, whereas they are not included in the Standing Order. Whereas in many, perhaps most, situations when a presbyter is available it would be appropriate to conduct a full service of Holy Communion, there is no good reason to exclude presbyters from leading Extended Communion when that would be the appropriate thing to do. The committee therefore brings the proposed amendment to Standing Order 609.

16. Finally, there would be value in the production of an up-to-date successor to the booklet '*It's More Than Washing Glasses*', concerning the role of Communion Stewards, in order to resource this important role within the life of our churches.

***RESOLUTIONS

10/2. The Conference receives the Report.

10/3. The Conference amends Standing Order 609 as follows:

609 Extended Communion. (1) ~~Deacons~~ *Ministers, deacons* stationed in the Circuit and persons authorised to preside at the Lord's Supper under Standing Order 011 may lead acts of worship in homes (including nursing and retirement homes), hospitals and hospices during which elements set aside at a previous celebration of the Lord's Supper are received. In addition a Church Council may annually appoint lay persons to lead such acts of worship.

C. THE WORLD METHODIST COUNCIL AND THE JOINT DECLARATION ON THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION

An agreed statement on the doctrine of justification was signed by the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church in October 1999. Given that this doctrine was at the centre of fierce debate at the time of the Reformation, this was an ecumenical event of great significance. Since then, the document has been discussed by other Churches and declarations of support for and affirmation of the statement are being made.

The World Methodist Council initiated a process by which the member Churches of the WMC could contribute to the agreement of such a statement of affirmation from Methodist Churches worldwide. A draft response to the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* was distributed to all member Churches during 2003. A response to the WMC draft, prepared on behalf of the Methodist Church in Great Britain by the Faith and Order Committee, was considered and its text agreed at the Faith and Order Committee meeting in March 2004. This was then forwarded to the WMC Secretariat as a contribution to the consultative process.

The text which follows is the final version of that response and is now offered to all WMC members for agreement. The Faith and Order Committee received this text at its March 2005 meeting, and recommends to the Conference that, as a member of the World Methodist Council, the Methodist Church in Great Britain supports the signing of the Official Common Affirmation at the World Methodist Conference in Seoul 2006.

***RESOLUTION

10/4. The Conference directs the General Secretary to write to the General Secretary of the World Methodist Council, communicating the Conference's support of the Official Common Affirmation and its delight at the prospect of the tripartite signing of the document.

Note: The full text of the original 1999 statement can be found in book form (*Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* 47pp, Eerdmans 2000) and on both the Lutheran World Federation and Vatican web-sites:
http://www.lutheranworld.org/Special_Events/EN/jd97e.pdf
http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_31101999_cath-luth-joint-declaration_en.html

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Definitive text for transmission to WMC member Churches, December 2004, asking for their official approval of the statement and agreement to a tripartite signing of the Official Common Affirmation to be undertaken in company with the Lutheran and Catholic partners at the meeting of the WMC in Seoul, July 2006

The World Methodist Council and the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification

METHODIST STATEMENT

1. After official approval of the Lutheran World Federation and of the Roman Catholic Church, the “Official Common Statement by the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church” was signed by the two partners on 31 October 1999, thereby confirming the “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification”. Articulating their common understanding of basic truths of the doctrine of justification by God’s grace through faith in Christ, this substantial agreement between Roman Catholics and Lutherans expresses a far reaching consensus in regard to the theological controversy which was a major cause of the split in Western churches in the sixteenth century.
2. We, the Churches joined together in the World Methodist Council, welcome this agreement with great joy. We declare that the common understanding of justification as it is outlined in the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ 15-17) corresponds to Methodist doctrine. We are especially grateful for the trinitarian approach by which God’s work in salvation is explained in these paragraphs:
 15. In faith we together hold the conviction that justification is the work of the triune God. The Father sent his Son into the world to save sinners. The foundation and presupposition of justification is the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ. Justification thus means that Christ himself is our righteousness, in which we share through the Holy Spirit in accord with the will of the Father. Together we confess: By grace alone, in faith in Christ’s saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works.
 16. All people are called by God to salvation in Christ. Through Christ alone are we justified, when we receive this salvation in faith. Faith is itself God’s gift through the Holy Spirit who works through word and sacrament in the community of believers and who, at the same time, leads believers into that renewal of life which God will bring to completion in eternal life.
 17. We also share the conviction that the message of justification directs us in a special way towards the heart of the New Testament witness to God’s saving action in Christ: it tells us that as sinners our new life is solely due to the forgiving and renewing mercy that God imparts as a gift and we receive in faith, and never can merit in any way.
3. We agree also with what Lutherans and Roman Catholics say together about some of the crucial issues in the doctrine of justification which were disputed

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between them since the time of Reformation (cf. JDDJ 19, 22, 25, 28, 31, 34, 37). Moreover, we accept the explanations which Lutherans and Catholics respectively give in paragraphs 20-21, 23-24, 26-27, 29-30, 32-33, 35-36, and 38-39 concerning their respective positions on these issues, and we do not consider these diverse emphases sufficient cause for division between either party and Methodists.

4. The Methodist Movement has always understood itself as deeply indebted to the biblical teaching on justification as it was understood by Luther and the other reformers and then again by the Wesleys. But it has also always embraced elements of the doctrine of justification which belong to the Catholic tradition of the early church both East and West. This gave its own doctrine of justification its distinctive profile. Set in relation to “the remaining differences of language, theological elaboration, and emphasis” which are not reckoned to impair the “consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification” between Lutherans and Catholics (JDDJ 40), the Methodist teaching may be described thus:

- 4.1 According to John Wesley the doctrine of original sin is an essential Christian doctrine. The corruption of human nature cannot be cured by ourselves. The destructive effects of the Fall are countered by the universal availability of prevenient grace (Sermon 85, *On Working Out Our Own Salvation*, III.4). That people are able to respond to God’s call is due only to God’s prior work. According to Wesley, the grace of God “assists” but does not “force” the human response (Sermon 63, *The General Spread of the Gospel*, 11). By God’s grace believers are commissioned and empowered to tell people that God has reconciled the world to himself and to entreat them on behalf of Jesus Christ to be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:20).
- 4.2 The deep connection between forgiveness of sins and making righteous, between justification and sanctification, has always been crucial for the Methodist understanding of the biblical doctrine of justification. John Wesley saw in salvation a twofold action of God’s grace: “By justification we are saved from the guilt of sin and restored to the favor of God; by sanctification we are saved from the power and root of sin, restored to the image of God” (Sermon 85, II.1). The redemptive acceptance into communion with God and the creative renewal of our lives are entirely the work of God’s grace.
- 4.3 Salvation “depends on faith in order that the promise may rest on grace” (Romans 4:16) – this Pauline phrase could well be the motto of the Methodist movement. It started as a missionary movement after the Wesley brothers and their friends experienced the liberating Gospel of salvation by faith alone. It is only through God’s grace that human beings are saved by faith alone. By faith we commit ourselves to the saving, redeeming, healing and renewing work of God’s grace and love in our lives. Therefore genuine Christian faith is always “faith working through love” (Galatians 5:6).
- 4.4 Neither faith nor love are the achievement of human efforts, but by God’s call to faith and by the outpouring of God’s love we as human beings are included in the reality of God’s salvation.

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- 4.5 In Methodist teaching, preaching, liturgy and hymnody, a theology of grace includes not only the assurance of the forgiveness of our sins but also the promise that we are liberated from the power of sin. Methodist theology has tried to take seriously Paul's assertion: "Now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the return you get is sanctification and its end, eternal life" (Romans 6:22). This was the reason why Wesley developed the doctrine of "Christian perfection" or "entire sanctification" (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:23), which he considered to be at the heart of Methodist teaching. This doctrine found different interpretations during the history of the Methodist movement. However, in Methodist teaching five things always remained clear:
- a) "Entire sanctification" or "Christian perfection" is nothing else than "loving God with all your heart and all your soul and with all your mind" and "your neighbour as yourself" (cf. Matthew 22:37-39; 1 John 2:5).
 - b) "Christian perfection" is not the absolute perfection which belongs to God alone; and it "does not imply an exemption either from ignorance, or mistake, or infirmities, or temptations" (Wesley's Sermon 40, Christian Perfection, I.9).
 - c) Even if our whole being is filled with the love of God which has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5), this will always remain God's gift and the work of God's grace and never our human merit or achievement.
 - d) The hope of conquering sin should never lead us to deny or disregard the danger of backsliding and being caught by the power of sin (cf. 1 John 1:5-10).
 - e) Those who are justified and sanctified by God's grace will struggle with temptation and sin during their whole lives. But in this struggle they are strengthened by the promise of the gospel that in Christ God has broken the power of sin. Even if "the contradiction to God within the selfish desires of the old Adam" (JDDJ 28) remains in the lives of the justified, God's grace "reigns through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:25).
- 4.6 For Methodists both the law and the gospel are expressions of God's word and God's will. For guidance in the way of life and good (cf. Deuteronomy 30:15-20), God in his love gave the law, which is summarized in the commandment to love God and our neighbours. As human beings we are not able to follow this way on our own. Because we have all failed to do God's will, the law now serves to accuse and convict us of sin (cf. Romans 3:21). God saves us and gives us life through the love revealed and expressed in the life and the death of Jesus Christ. Although the law no longer has any power to condemn those who believe in Jesus Christ, it remains as summarized in the love commandment an indispensable guide to God's will.
- 4.7 Assurance of faith and assurance of salvation have always belonged to the core of Methodist preaching. Such assurance is not seen as the

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certainty of possession but as the reliability of a relationship which is founded in God's love. This relationship is lived by using the "means of grace", especially searching the Scriptures and receiving the Lord's Supper. These are outward signs, ordained by God, through which he conveys his grace to us. To be assured by the witness of the Holy Spirit that we are children of God (Romans 8:16) is the source of peace and joy in the lives of those who come to believe in Jesus Christ. In Wesleyan terminology, both "holiness" and "happiness" are gifts of God's grace.

- 4.8 "Faith working through love" (Galatians 5:6) is seen as the root of all good which results from the lives of those who believe in Jesus Christ. Works of piety and works of mercy are fruits of the Spirit in the lives of those who follow Jesus. Such works also help the believers to live their lives in communion with God and to be "co-workers with God" (1 Corinthians 3:7) in the field of God's mission and in ministry to the poor and to those who need the love of God most. But all such works are the work of God's grace; or, as John Wesley in his sermon on "Working Out Our Own Salvation" (Philippians 2:12) puts it: "God works, therefore you *can* work. God works, therefore you *must* work" (Sermon 85, III. 2).
5. As Methodists we are grateful that on the basis of such an agreement as this, Lutheran and Methodist Churches in some countries have recognized one another as belonging to the one Church of Jesus Christ and have declared full communion of pulpit and altar. It is our deep hope that in the near future we shall also be able to enter into closer relationship with Lutherans in other places and with the Roman Catholic Church in accordance with this declaration of our common understanding of the doctrine of justification.

OFFICIAL COMMON AFFIRMATION

In this Statement the World Methodist Council and its member churches affirm their fundamental doctrinal agreement with the teaching expressed in the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* signed at Augsburg on 31 October 1999 on behalf of the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church.

The signing partners of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* join together in welcoming the above Statement of the World Methodist Council and its member churches, which declares and demonstrates Methodist agreement with the consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification as expressed in the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*.

Building on their shared affirmation of basic truths of the doctrine of justification, the three parties commit themselves to strive together for the deepening of their common understanding of justification in theological study, teaching and preaching.

The present achievement and commitment are viewed by Catholics, Lutherans and Methodists as part of their pursuit of the full communion and common witness to the world which is the will of Christ for all Christians.