

DUAL ORDINATION (1974)

In the course of its development from a company of travelling preachers in connexion with Mr Wesley, ministering among a number of societies, into a church which 'claims and cherishes its place in the Holy Catholic Church which is the Body of Christ' (Deed of Union, clause 30), the Methodist Church has come to claim for its Ministers that they are ordained, not only within a particular denomination, but 'to fulfil the office of a Minister in the Church of Christ' (Ordination Service), and that this should be universally recognized, even though if a Minister is to act as minister in another denomination, invitation or permission to do so ('jurisdiction' as opposed to 'orders') is necessary. It follows that a Minister who wishes to minister in another denomination should not go through a ceremony which calls in question his ordination as a presbyter.

Thus some churches, freely accepting our claim, will allow a Methodist Minister to minister frequently among them while retaining his status as a Methodist Minister, or to be 'transferred' into their ministry without anything resembling an ordination service. Others feel that they cannot recognize it fully, and have found no way of allowing a Methodist Minister to minister among them, at least if presiding at the Eucharist is involved, except simply to use the service which they normally use for the ordination of a priest. Between these two extremes there are various possibilities: the Service of Reconciliation which was proposed as part of the Anglican-Methodist Unity Scheme was one such proposal; others are conditional ordination, supplemental ordination, the use of the normal ordination service with some statement that it does not imply a denial of a previous ordination, and so on. It would be unwise for Methodism to decide too hastily where among these a line is to be drawn.

Opinion is divided as to the simple use of the ordination service of another church. Some would regard it as theologically permissible, and of these some would wish to allow it in certain cases as contributing to the unity of the church in particular local conditions, while others would regard it as permissible but very inexpedient in present circumstances. Others, however, take the view that, though it may be sincerely intentioned, it must inevitably imply an adverse judgment on the previous ordination. The Conference of 1973 (Ministerial Session) in referring the report to the Faith and Order Committee, also resolved 'In the meantime, the case of any minister who is ordained by the Church of England and does not resign from the Methodist Ministry shall be dealt with under the provisions of S.O. 39.' (i.e. the ordinary procedure for ministerial discipline). The Committee recommends that this arrangement continues.

The Committee is united in its belief that Methodist Ministers are indeed true Ministers. But where our ministry is not universally recognized, it asks whether there are not steps which we could legitimately take to secure the wider recognition of future ordinations. Methodists hold firmly that their Ministers are truly ordained to the ministry of the word and sacraments, and that in principle they ought to be accepted throughout the universal church, but recognize that other churches have reservations on this point. It recommends that the commission likely to be set up as a result of the multilateral conversations be asked to consider whether there are legitimate ways in which these reservations may be removed.

(Agenda 1974, pp. 251f)

The Conference referred this report to 'the Committee likely to be set up as a result of the multilateral conversations'.