

UT UNUM SINT (1997)

Under Standing Order 330(8) the Faith and Order Committee is empowered to deal with any communication touching matters of faith or order which is received during any connexional year. The Committee has responded to the papal encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* in two ways.

First, it has contributed a paper to the British ecumenical discussion of the encyclical under the auspices of the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland. Second, it has sent a response (which covers the same points as the paper submitted to CCBI) to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity in Rome. The response reads as follows:

The Faith and Order Committee of the Methodist Church of Great Britain sends its greetings to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and offers the following response to Pope John Paul's Encyclical Letter, *Ut Unum Sint*.

First, we welcome *Ut Unum Sint* as the first positive encyclical on ecumenism, and in particular we rejoice to read that Pope John Paul sees the Roman Catholic Church as irrevocably committed to ecumenism (3). Moreover, he states (20) that the promotion of Christian Unity is not a sort of appendix to be added to the Church's traditional activity. Ecumenism is 'an organic part of her life and work'.

Second, we share the Pope's awareness of the doctrinal differences which remain to be resolved and of the contribution which bilateral and multilateral dialogues (of which the Roman Catholic/Methodist International dialogue is one) have made to this process (28ff and 49).

Third, we note the Pope's reminder (39) that disagreements should be resolved in the light of Scripture and Tradition. Methodists recognize 'the divine revelation recorded in the Holy Scriptures . . . as the supreme rule of faith and practice', while recognizing not only the Church's tradition but also reason and Christian experience as further sources of authority.

Fourth, we share Pope John Paul's view (66) that the relationship between Scripture and the Church is vitally important, and believe that the Pontifical Biblical Commission's *Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* could serve as an important resource for future ecumenical consensus on biblical interpretation.

Fifth, we wholeheartedly endorse the Pope's advocacy of fellowship in prayer (21-27) and in dialogue (28-39).

Sixth, we note that the Pope writes of the way in which, on various ecumenical visits, he and others 'experienced the Lord's presence' (72). We draw attention to the Roman Catholic/Methodist Dublin Report of 1976 which stated (in connection with the Eucharist and other ways in which Christ's

presence is made known) that ‘wherever Christ is present, he is present in his fullness’. This leads us to suggest that the Eucharist could be a means as well as an end of unity. As the Second Vatican Council’s *Decree on Ecumenism* indicates: ‘(Christ instituted the Eucharist) by which the unity of the Church is both signified and brought about’.

Seventh, we rejoice in the Pope’s desire (96) to have dialogue with other Christians on the nature of the office of the Bishop of Rome. The Roman Catholic/Methodist report (Nairobi, 1986) indicates that, though the primacy of the Bishop of Rome is not established from the Scriptures in isolation from the living tradition, ‘Methodists accept that whatever is properly required for the unity of the whole of Christ’s Church must by that very fact be God’s will for his Church. A universal primacy might well serve as a focus and ministry for the unity of the whole Church’. The report further indicates that Methodists need to be clear as to where the Pope acts as a universal primate and where as a diocesan bishop.

Finally, we look forward to ongoing dialogue on these issues.

RESOLUTION

The Conference adopts the Report.

(Agenda 1997, pp.255-257)

The Conference adopted the above resolution, adding, after ‘Report’, ‘and welcomes the Pope’s encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* and directs the Methodist Council to consider the implications for the Methodist Church and to bring a report to the Conference of 1998’.