

## UT UNUM SINT (1998)

At the 1997 Conference Notice of Motion 45 asked the Methodist Council to consider the implications for the Methodist Church of the encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* and report to the Conference in 1998. The Council referred this work to the Faith and Order Committee and the Committee for Local Ecumenical Development.

The Faith and Order response to *Ut Unum Sint* was delivered and debated at the 1997 Conference. That response was very positive and was warmly welcomed by Cardinal Cassidy, the President of the Council for Promoting Christian Unity at the Vatican. The encyclical marked a step forward in conversations about ecumenism. The previous one on ecumenism from Pope Pius XI, *Mortalium Animos*, had suggested the kind of ecumenism which desired a return of others to the Roman Catholic fold whereas Pope John Paul's encyclical was composed in the light of the documents of the Second Vatican Council, the Decree on Ecumenism and the Constitution on the Church in particular. These documents were clear that other churches had ecclesial character, were not deprived of the means of grace and had many elements of sanctification and truth (eg Decree on Ecumenism 3.1 & 3.2; Constitution on the Church 8.2). The present encyclical goes further than the Vatican II documents and draws on the positive results of the international dialogues which have gone on since the Council. One of those dialogue partners has been the World Methodist Council and reports of those dialogues have been published every five years since 1971.

The response that the Methodist Church in Great Britain has given to *Ut Unum Sint* would seem to have the following implications:

1. Dialogue should continue between the Methodist Church and the Roman Catholic Church in Great Britain, both at the national level (in particular the Roman Catholic/Methodist Committee) and at local level through Churches Together. It is important to develop everywhere an atmosphere of mutual trust which will enable differences between us to be acknowledged and discussed, and the reasons for them better understood. The promotion of local unity through Local Ecumenical Partnerships and the work of the Association of Interchurch Families must be encouraged.
2. Priority should be given to making better known the agreed statements which have been published and the remaining issues between the two churches. The results of the ongoing dialogue should be readily available for Catholics and Methodists (the 1971, 1976, 1981, 1986, 1991 and 1996 reports, and the national ones on Justification, Reconciliation and the Virgin Mary). Many are unaware that conversations have been proceeding for over 25 years. The results of the dialogues require recognition by the Methodist Conference if

they are not to be forgotten. The British Roman Catholic/Methodist Committee is at present summarising these agreements.

3. Since the goal set before us by the Nairobi report of the International Roman Catholic/Methodist commission is 'full communion in faith, mission and sacramental life' (Nairobi 20), we should not allow our sights to be set lower than this, although we recognise that there are many difficulties on the way which have yet to be resolved.
4. *UUS* 21-27 describes the primacy of prayer. The Methodist church welcomes this call to common prayer along the ecumenical path to unity and recognises the need for Christians to 'meet more often and more regularly before Christ in prayer'. Christian unity is a matter not just of organisational adjustments or shared mission but of being of one heart and mind in Christ Jesus.
5. A significant part of *Ut Unum Sint* invited the other churches to a dialogue on the office of the Pope (*UUS* 88ff). This had already begun with the 1986 Nairobi Report and will continue through the national committee which is considering it. A simple pamphlet might be one way to allay Methodist fears at this stage since the Nairobi report is not well known.
6. Eucharistic sharing is still a significant problem between our two churches. We are pleased the Episcopal Conference in England and Wales is at present working on a document on the eucharist which will look at the question of eucharistic hospitality. The importance of eucharistic hospitality for interchurch families must be a part of this thinking.
7. We are divided on some social issues. The social questions could be part of our dialogue, as in the case of *The Common Good* where there was much agreement among us. *UUS* 68 says, 'In this vast area there is much room for dialogue concerning the moral principles of the Gospel and their implications'.
8. The Methodist Church does not stem directly from the Reformation. This means that there is no shared history of confrontation, as is the case with some churches in the Reformed tradition. Nevertheless, the Methodist Church has shared the widespread Protestant view of Roman Catholic doctrine and practice. At the same time we have inherited from John Wesley a recognition of the importance of emphasising the fundamentals of the faith upon which we are not divided, on the basis of which we can join hands with those with whom we may in other things disagree. We recognise that Christians should not 'underestimate the burden of long-standing misgivings inherited from the past, and of mutual misunderstandings and prejudices' (*UUS* 2).

9. Pope John Paul suggests that the destiny of evangelization is bound up with the witness of unity given by the Church (*UUS* 98) and that divisions between Christians impede the very work of Christ in reconciling all things to himself. We share this view of the link between unity and evangelization.

In conclusion the overall implication of *Ut Unum Sint* is that our churches should continue in dialogue and prayer and seek to grow together in faith, mission and sacramental life. This, however, is not a matter for national and international dialogues alone, but for ventures in faith and openness to one another in every circuit and Roman Catholic parish.

## **RESOLUTION**

The Conference adopts the report.