



ADOREMUS 2018

Symposium Presentation

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the eucharist as a sign of the church's unity : "one bread, one body" revisited

His presence makes the feast;
and now our spirits feel
the glory not to be expressed,
the joy unspeakable.

Charles Wesley (1707-88)

Singing the Faith, 590

Hymns on the Lord's Supper, 81

Seven years ago, I was offered and accepted the role of the Methodist Church's Connexional Ecumenical Officer.

Long before that, it had been my privilege to serve for ten years on the British Methodist-Roman Catholic dialogue. Those years included our rejoicing together at how much we have in common and how far we have travelled together since Vatican II. Those years also included the publication of *Ut Unum Sint*¹ and *One Bread, One Body*²; as you can imagine, we discussed both documents at some length.

Re-reading *One Bread, One Body* for this afternoon, I was reminded how we sometimes misunderstand one another. I offer just two examples:

First, I don't think Methodism sees itself as 'rooted in the Reformation'³; the doctrinal standards of the British Methodist Church state that it 'claims and cherishes its place in the Holy Catholic Church which is the Body of Christ. It rejoices in the inheritance of the apostolic faith and loyally accepts the fundamental principles of the historic creeds and of the Protestant Reformation⁴.' That's rather different from being 'rooted in the Reformation'.

Secondly, whilst some Methodists misunderstand what is usually referred to as 'transubstantiation'⁵, I've come across Christians of many traditions who don't appreciate Methodist teaching on the presence of Christ in the Eucharist⁶. I chose the Charles Wesley verse for this very reason: we believe that 'his presence makes the feast'⁷.



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I could have chosen many others, including the last two lines of 'Victim divine, thy grace we claim' in which we pray:

To every faithful soul appear,
And show thy real presence here!⁸

Thankfully as long ago as 1971 and under the heading 'The real presence', the first report of our international dialogue stated:

Both Methodists and Roman Catholics affirm as the primary fact the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the Mass, or the Lord's Supper⁹.

Something else that struck me again as I re-read *One Bread, One Body* was the difference in our understandings of the Eucharist as the sacrament of unity. Although the Decree on Ecumenism says that 'the unity of the Church is both signified and brought about' by the Eucharist¹⁰, I think it's fair to say that Methodists place a stronger emphasis on it being a means of unity among Christians of different churches as well as within each church¹¹.

The implications of that difference are a challenge for many of us. In one of my appointments, however, I had pastoral responsibility for an interchurch family; I am, therefore, acutely aware of the pain as well as the very occasional 'joy'¹² that interchurch families experience at celebrations of the Eucharist¹³. I wait with interest to see what happens to the German Bishops' proposed guidelines on this particular form of eucharistic sharing¹⁴.

Seven days ago, I took up a new appointment so I am no longer the Methodist Church's Connexional Ecumenical Officer. I believe, therefore, that it's appropriate to end this brief response by reaffirming my personal commitment to the goal set before us by our international dialogue in 1986: the goal of 'full communion in faith, mission and sacramental life'¹⁵.

Reverend Neil Stubbens

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and unite us in his love;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Gracious God,
we thank you for the gift of this sacrament
in which we remember Jesus Christ your Son.
May we who revere this sacred mystery
know and reveal in our lives
the fruits of his redemption;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

- 7 Singing the Faith (StF) 590, verse 3 (Hymns on the Lord's Supper (HLS), 81, verse 2, lines 5-8 [StF, 590 is verses 1a, 2, 3a, and 4b of HLS, 81]); see *Encountering Christ the Saviour: Church and Sacraments* (The Durban Report, 2011), §84 which, with reference to HLS, 57 says: 'Methodists seek not to define the mystery of the transformation of the bread and wine, and trust that the presence of Christ and the gift of his grace are "sure and real" while the manner remains unknown.' The House of Bishops of the Church of England make a similar point in §29 (p,14) of the *Eucharist: sacrament of unity*; cf, the hymn, 'Lord enthroned in heavenly splendour' by the Anglican George Hugh Bourne (1840-1925) with its line, 'Thou art here, we ask now how' (verse 2, line 6).
- 8 StF, 600, verse 3 (HLS, 116, verse 5 [StF, 600 is verses 1, 2, and 5 of HLS, 116]); also see the opening verse of StF, 590:

Jesus, we thus obey
your last and kindest word;
here, in your own appointed way,
we come to meet you, Lord.
- 9 The Denver Report (1971), §83.I.1; see also, for example, The Dublin Report (1976), §§54 and 56 ('we both affirm that wherever Christ is present he is present in his fullness') and *Encountering Christ the Saviour*, §88.
- 10 *Unitatis Redintegratio* (Decree on Ecumenism, Second Vatican Council, 1964), §2: 'In His Church He instituted the wonderful sacrament of the Eucharist by which the unity of His Church is both signified and made a reality.'
- 11 See, for example, 'Ut Unum Sint (1997)' in *Statements and Reports of the Methodist Church on Faith and Order: Volume Two: 1984-2000* (Methodist Publishing House, Peterborough, 2000), pp.430-431 (p.431).
- 12 *Ut Unum Sint*, §46.
- 13 'Ut Unum Sint (1998)', p.433, §6 was, presumably, anticipating OBOB when it said: '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 part of this thinking.' Cf, Doral Hayes, 'Interchurch Families: What about the Children?' in *One in Christ* (2018), Vol 52, No 1, pp.158-163.
- 14 See Ruth Reardon 'German Bishops' Proposed Guidelines on Eucharistic Sharing in Interchurch Families' in *One in Christ* (2018), Vol 52, No 1, pp.149-157.
- 15 *Towards a Statement on the Church* (The Nairobi Report, 1986), §20; cf, 'Ut Unum Sint (1998)', p.433, §3: '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.'