

Catholicity and Unity

David Carter*

The concept of the catholicity of the Church received through treatment from Cardinal (then Fr.) Dulles in his Martin C. D'Arcy lectures at Oxford in 1983¹. It is not my intention to tread the same ground. Rather, I wish to examine the concept of catholicity in terms of the expression 'gift and calling', so often used in connection with the unity of the Church. I want to ask what the implications of the claim to catholicity are for the churches that make such a claim in terms of their ecumenical commitment.

All the mainstream trinitarian churches make such a claim. Canon A1 of the Church of England asserts it. The Methodist Deed of Union of 1932 states that Methodism 'claims and cherishes its place within the Holy Catholic Church, which is the Body of Christ'. Some continental reformed churches fight shy of the use of the word, thus effectively ceding its use to the Roman Catholic Church, though they do still confess belief in the Holy, Universal Church. It is a pity that they give up the use of the word since it has an essentially qualitative character which is not captured in the same way by the rather more neutral and geographical term 'universal'.

I begin with some general considerations on the nature of the Church's catholicity before moving on to assess, as part of my investigation of my central theme, the teaching on the nature of catholicity of both the Roman Catholic tradition (primarily at and since Vatican II) and the Methodist tradition (primarily British).

Catholicity, the Church and the Churches

As Yves Congar stated in 1937, the catholicity of the Church has essentially trinitarian and christological roots, because of the presence of Christ within it². I would emphasise also the gift of the Spirit. Interestingly (and I would argue contradictorily) Congar at this stage of his thinking confined the concept of catholicity to his own church. He stated that there could be a non-Catholic ecumenism but not a non-Roman catholicity³. I would argue that this contradicts his basic trinitarian perspective. It is precisely because the Church is enfolded in the love and embrace of the Trinity that it is catholic. If any local church, however ecclesially constituted, confesses the Trinity in unity in its worship and lives out in its life and mission the logic of its trinitarian

* David Carter, a Methodist lay preacher and member of the English-Methodist Roman Catholic Committee, studies, writes and preaches on ecumenical subjects.

faith, that is its essential Amen to the Father's plan 'to reconcile all things in Christ' (Eph 1:10), then it is *catholic*. It has received the all-sufficient catholic gift, the Holy Spirit, since no one can say Jesus is Lord but by the Holy Spirit and certainly no one can live out that lordship in his or her life except the Spirit be in them. Benjamin Gregory argued that no Christian community could deny the catholicity of another trinitarian church without, in fact, impairing its own catholicity by the failure to recognise the same essential faith in a sister church, however much the ecclesial structure of the latter might differ from its own.⁴

Nevertheless, it can be argued that all trinitarian churches in the period between Pentecost and the *apocatastasis* are catholic only *in orientation* and *in part*, not in that final fullness of catholicity with which the Church will be endowed at the end of time when all the faithful, down to the very last of the elect, and from all the local churches across time and space, will be gathered at the marriage feast of the Lamb. The Church is not yet without spot or wrinkle. Christ and the Spirit have not yet finished their work within it and upon it. The Holy Spirit continues to lead us into truth but, as one of the Puritans said, He has yet more light to shine forth from his holy word. The catholicity of the Church has to be understood in terms of an 'already' and a 'not yet'; it is an essentially eschatological concept. The catholic gift of the Spirit is an on-going gift. The Spirit never ceases to impart more and more of the fullness of Christ and the Church never ceases to pray for yet more insight into the divine vision and plan, and more grace to respond to it with fullness of insight and energy. The Church's response to the illimitable grace of the Spirit is, as yet, far from perfect but we have the promise that one day it will indeed be without spot or wrinkle as the bride of Christ⁵.

The paradox is this. The Church was already catholic on the day of Pentecost, when it received the Spirit but was still confined to one assembly in one place. W.B. Pope points to the way in which certain key permanent characteristics of its life appeared on that very day:

Pentecost is the typical day of the future of Christendom; in the morning, the worshipping assembly...in the noon the full evangelical preaching; the rest of the day is given to organisation and fellowship⁶.

The Church is thus, in one sense, catholic before any development within the Tradition, even before the full articulation of its trinitarian faith, implicit from the beginning but not fully proclaimed as such until the fourth century⁷. In another sense, however, it will not be fully catholic till the end of time when the ascended Christ and the Spirit have finished their work upon it and have elicited from all the members that fullness of response in faith and growth in holiness, corporate and individual, that will be the mark of Christians only when they have attained to the mature

personhood in Christ of which the writer of Ephesians speaks⁸. The attainment of such 'mature personhood' does not relate simply and solely to personal holiness. It also relates to the development of a catholic vision, of a passion for the salvation of humanity in all the dimensions of its corporate life⁹. A famous definition of the catholicity of the Church is given by St Cyril of Jerusalem.

It is called catholic because it exists everywhere on the earth from one end to the other, because it teaches infallibly and universally all the truths that men must know, of things seen and unseen, things heavenly as well as earthly; because it brings true worship of every sort to humankind; because, lastly, it cares for and heals every kind of sin, of the body as well as of the soul, possessing every kind of virtue, in word and work and spiritual gifts¹⁰.

In the era between Pentecost and the *Apocatastasis*, Christ and the Spirit remain ceaselessly at work, distributing their gifts of ministry and charisms to the Church. They build up the Church by creating communion within it and the missionary desire to share this gift of communion with all peoples. The catholicity of the Church is enhanced in direct proportion, as it were, to the increasing depth and profundity of its life of communion. As individuals enter the Church and become immersed in its interdependent fellowship, so they become 'attuned', as Rowan Williams puts it, to the wholeness of Christian experience across time and space. Williams argues that the Spirit works upon our individual self-definitions in order to make us genuinely personal. In each, the Spirit realises Christ's image in a uniquely distinct way, whilst linking each to all inextricably in a close web of relationships¹¹. The same sense of transformative fellowship, solidarity and partnership is constantly sung in the hymns of Charles Wesley. We may instance just two examples, the hymns 'All praise to our redeeming Lord' and 'Thou, God of truth and love'. From the first

The gift which he on one bestows,
We all delight to prove:
The grace through every vessel flows,
In purest streams of love¹².

These four lines contain a whole theology of communion. There is a delightful ambiguity within them. Do the first two lines refer to a common gift, first experienced by one person and then by the whole community? Or do they refer to a particular charism given to an individual believer which enriches the entire community and which the community therefore affirms as God's special gift to that one person for the benefit of the whole? Perhaps it does not matter since in either case the whole community is able to praise God for his gift.

From the second we cite these verses which speak so warmly of mutual aid within the fellowship:

Then let us ever bear
The blessed end in view,
And join, with mutual care,
To fight our passage through:
And kindly help each other on,
Till all receive the starry crown¹³.

The catholicity of the Church is thus enhanced in direct proportion to the depth of communion at every level of connectedness. A local church becomes more catholic as it discerns, liberates and benefits ever more fully from the charisms of its individual members whilst simultaneously remaining 'porous' to the concerns of other local churches and open to the receipt of their insights and enrichment¹⁴. The catholicity of the Church is enhanced through the mutual reception by leaders and led of both the apostolic teaching of its ministers of oversight and of the prophetic teaching of persons, both lay and ordained, who are endowed by the Spirit with creative insights into the application of Christian truth. The Church's catholicity is also enhanced by the *sensus fidelium* of all the faithful, jointly discerning what is the appropriately Christian development of the Tradition. The processes of reception, re-reception and an open mindset of receptivity are all involved in these developments¹⁵.

Catholicity and the Holy Spirit

Under-girding the whole process is what one might call the *epicletic* nature of the Church's life and worship. The Church constantly invokes the Spirit in worship. Its whole life is characterised by an ardent longing for the Spirit to fulfil its eschatological destiny¹⁶. Paul talks in Romans of how we 'groan as we await our adoption', a groaning that parallels that of the whole creation as it seeks its final liberation from decay and transience¹⁷. The Church ardently prays for the Spirit to fulfil all God's plan and purposes for us; at the same time, it seeks to co-operate as fully as the Spirit may enable it, in the fulfilment of these plans. This it does as it seeks, in the metaphor of George Tavard, to 'progressively image the Kingdom' in its many forms of life and service¹⁸. The Church longs to see the fullness of God's salvation which will culminate in the new creation and the descent of the new Jerusalem¹⁹. In the meantime, it rejoices in those signs of the coming of the Kingdom that it discerns in its own life and in the world. It is aware of the fact that its extension into new cultures brings new possibilities of enrichment. As the British Methodist ecclesiological statement of 1937 put it:

The Church of Christ is the home of the Holy Spirit, and is therefore a family with a unique and developing life. It is a life of distinctive quality, a life which under the guidance of the Holy Spirit should be richer as time goes on, with fresh manifestations of as new nations and races are added to the Church, and new apprehension of divine truth is given²⁰.

The Church's eschatological longing and its resultant activity in response to the vision of the Kingdom held out before it, is a vital part of the Church's missionary message. We live in a world in which, according to a Japanese historian, history has come to an end as a result of the collapse of the Marxist vision, leaving free market capitalism and its consumerist false utopia as the absolute victor in an otherwise ideological void. Fukiyama is, however, wrong. There is an alternative vision; that of the Christian Church with its catholic vision of unity in human diversity and its proposal of communion as the ultimate goal in life rather than individualistic competitiveness or an imposed totalitarian conformity. The Church's proposal of communion is the only goal answerable to God's loving purposes in creation and especially in the creation of human beings in His image. It is for the *actualisation* of this vision that the whole creation groans²¹.

Increasingly, it is clear to all the trinitarian churches that catholicity is a gift of the Spirit. However, like any gift, it must be received, appropriated and used if it is to attain its purpose. It is a prime characteristic of the humble, kenotic Spirit that He does not force His lavish gifts upon us but rather prompts us gently to receive and use them. Recognition of his activity and response to it are essential. The famous Russian St Tikhon once said that the primary aim of the Christian life was to 'acquire the Holy Spirit'²². Perhaps it might be even better put as recognising the Holy Spirit. The Pope recently put it this way.

Preparing ourselves for the sacrifice of unity means changing our viewpoint, broadening our horizons, knowing how to recognise the action of the Holy Spirit who is at work in our brethren, discovering new dimensions of holiness and opening ourselves to fresh aspects of Christian commitment²³.

At a conference on the Holy Spirit and Ecumenism, held at Bose in October 2002, it was emphasised by a group of ecumenists representing almost all the ecumenically active Christian traditions that 'the Holy Spirit is given generously beyond our desire or imagination'. The group affirmed that the Spirit is not limited to any one category of gifts such as the sacraments or Scripture read, preached and interpreted, but that He is to be found in a whole plethora of means of grace, some directly attested and warranted in Holy Scripture, other arising within the course of the Church's ongoing history²⁴. The Roman Catholic members of the

Conference, whilst not wishing in any way to diminish their traditional emphasis upon the work of the Spirit through the sacraments, testified to their increasing discovery of His activity in the reading and preaching of the word so long valued by Protestants and to His presence in the close fellowship characteristic of the free churches and in the radical discipleship of such communities as the Quakers and the Mennonites²⁵.

From all of this we may conclude that the catholicity of the Church, of any one ecclesial tradition within the Church, consists precisely in its willingness and ability to discern the work of the Spirit both within its own life and in the life of other churches. From the latter flows a receptivity to the rich gifts discerned. It is the ecumenical responsibility of every ecclesial tradition and even of each Christian disciple to seek to become more catholic. The responsibility of the individual Christian to cultivate what John Wesley called the 'catholic spirit' was memorably put by the Wesleyan theologian, Alfred Barrett, when he alleged that many Christians had been soundly converted without going on to let their minds be enlarged. Barrett argued that no single church (it is not entirely clear from the context whether he was talking in terms of 'local' church or 'denomination') was able to grasp the fullness of the Gospel and its implications; they all needed the help of each other for the wider vision²⁶. My claim that all trinitarian churches are catholic in orientation whilst none are yet catholic in the sense of having received that final fullness that is God's promised gift, does not invalidate the legitimate claim of certain churches to have preserved 'in via', in their pilgrim state, elements of catholicity that are lacking elsewhere. It does not invalidate the claims that the Roman Catholic Church makes concerning the Petrine ministry or that Anglicans have traditionally made for the historic episcopate. However, it may be that the way these ministries are exercised is in need of an adjustment, a re-calibrating that can only come from the witness of the ecclesiological insights and practice of other traditions and allows them to be placed more securely within a fully relational context. In this sense, they may need to be re-received in a more fully catholic way²⁷. The fact is that, in isolation from each other, the catholicity of all churches is, to a degree, wounded. I shall argue that this is the implicit teaching both of the Roman Catholic Church since Vatican II and of Methodism. This is quite apart from the fact that, in the mysterious providence of God, the time has not yet come for the Church to receive its final fullness and completion. The understanding of the Church as pilgrim church and of the Church as communion necessarily involves a dynamic understanding of the developing catholicity of the Church Universal.

Churches have to seek catholicity. It is an apostolic and catholic duty not merely to remain loyal to the 'faith once delivered to the saints' but to seek enrichment of the understanding and practice of that faith through

the theological understanding and fruitfulness in spirituality and service of other churches. This is the ecclesiological and ecumenical dimension of the call to holiness, part of the corporate 'pressing on to full salvation' of which Wesley so often spoke; full salvation only being attained at the corporate level with the coming of the new creation and the restoration of all things according to the Father's plan²⁸. It is, as the Wesleyan theological tradition stresses, above all a matter of responsible grace²⁹. The grace of God must elicit from those created in the image of God, and thereby called to a life of active reception of His love, a corporate ecclesial response. The gift, un-received, cannot, out of the divine respect for our freedom, bear fruit; received lovingly it will bear fruit lavish beyond our expectations since God waits to do for us 'abundantly above all that we can conceive'³⁰.

Catholicity in Modern Roman Catholic Thought

I now proceed to illustrate from modern Roman Catholic thinking and from Methodist theology, the extent to which the thesis that I have outlined can be sustained.

In a striking theologoumenon, Congar described the theological loyalty of a Catholic as two fold, to the Tradition as it has been already received within his church, but also to the future development of that Tradition which may well include insights from many sources outside of the Roman Church³¹. I would argue that, if mainly implicitly rather than explicitly, the same understanding applies to Methodism which, since the late nineteenth century, has applied itself to the reception of many insights from other traditions. One might instance in particular, the way in which in the emerging ecumenical ecclesiological consensus in understanding the Church as koinonia, Methodism has recognised an important development as both consistent with its own traditional understanding of Church and yet as also enriching it and calling it to further reception³².

Vatican II marked a very important stage in the development of the Roman Catholic understanding of catholicity, from one that had previously been primarily static and institutionally based to one that was far more nuanced. On the one hand the 'traditional' view of the Catholic Church was reasserted in the statement that 'the Catholic Church has been endowed with all divinely revealed truth and with all means of grace' and the argument that the means of salvation operative in the separated churches derived their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church³³. On the other hand, some striking statements were made. The first was the emphasis upon the Ecumenical Movement as having arisen outside of the Catholic Church, yet needing

to be recognised as a work of the Spirit into which Catholics should now enter. The Catholic faithful were exhorted to 'recognise the signs of the times' and 'to participate skilfully in the work of ecumenism'³⁴.

They were told they 'must joyfully acknowledge and esteem the truly Christian endowments from our common heritage to be found among the separated brethren'³⁵. They should not forget 'that whatever is wrought by the grace of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of our separated brethren can contribute to our own edification' and that 'whatever is truly Christian (in these communities) 'can always result in a more ample realisation of the very mystery of Christ and the Church'. This was immediately followed by the acceptance that division prevented the Church 'from effecting the fullness of catholicity proper to her' and that it was thus 'more difficult to express in actual life her full catholicity in all its aspects'³⁶. Here we find an admission that the very catholicity of the Roman Catholic Church is wounded by her separation from others, a point that had been anticipated in the thinking of the Abbe Paul Couturier when he stated that certain aspects of the Christian mystery had, empirically, been more fully explored and expressed by Orthodox and Protestants³⁷.

The commendation of the dialogue principle is also of key importance here. The very concept of dialogue implies the possibility of mutual reception, the significance of which was reinforced in the insistence that it must be 'on an equal footing' and, even more, in the assumption that catholic theologians would 'search together with the separated brethren into the divine mysteries' and that the way would be opened 'for a kind of fraternal rivalry to incite all to a deeper realisation and clearer expression of the unfathomable riches of Christ'³⁸. In the case of Roman Catholic-Lutheran dialogue, this aspiration seems to have been realised. The Joint Declaration on Justification states that the varying Roman Catholic and Lutheran emphases on the subject need no longer be seen as church dividing. The Pope's subsequent call for the proper reception of the Joint Declaration within the two churches seems to underline the point that the differing insights of the two churches can, indeed, be seen as mutually enriching³⁹.

The treatment of the separated churches and ecclesial communities in chapter III of the Decree pointed in the same direction. This was especially true of the treatment of the Orthodox whose churches were seen as being of genuinely apostolic foundation and whose varying witness in liturgy, theology and spirituality to the same essential revelation was seen as legitimate and enriching, a point further developed in post-conciliar reflection. First, Cardinal Willebrands developed his concept of varying *typoi* of Christian life and faith, each marked by its own internal consistency in terms of discipline, theological and liturgical expression⁴⁰. He saw this variety of *typoi* in the Church as both

legitimate and enriching. Later, Pope John Paul II put forward the view that the Church needed to breathe with both its lungs, eastern and western. In the encyclical *Oriente Lumen* he commended the spiritual riches of the East to the Western Church⁴¹.

The Decree also commended many of the spiritual values of the Protestant churches, though it stopped short of attributing to the Protestant ecclesial communities any recognition of their *typoi* that could be seen as analogous to that extended to the spiritual heritages of the eastern churches⁴². Presumably, this reflected doubts about their full apostolicity based on the *defectus* in their ordinations and, resultantly, in their eucharistic celebrations⁴³. Nevertheless, some moves were made in the direction of a more generous estimation of their life and spiritual strengths. This was especially the case when Paul VI referred to the spiritual patrimony of the Anglican Church and promised that there would be no lessening of that patrimony when the Roman Church was eventually able to embrace her ever beloved sister⁴⁴. A Catholic Benedictine, much impressed by the Benedictine heritage, as he saw it, of Anglicanism wrote a book entitled *Canterbury and Rome sister churches*⁴⁵. Currently, the international Roman Catholic-Methodist Commission is studying the ways in which the two communions can recognise the existence of 'church' in each other and it will be interesting to see whether they can make any positive statement about the legitimate integrity of Methodism as a *typos* of Christian life, fellowship and discipline⁴⁶.

At the Bose Conference referred to above, the question was raised as to whether certain *later* events could be regarded as outpourings of the Spirit and, at least to an extent, regarded as in genuine continuity with Pentecost. Could the beginning of the Methodist Revival in 1738-9 or the Azusa Street Mission of 1906, for example, be regarded in such a light?: if so, could the ecclesial bodies stemming from these events be regarded as 'apostolic' even though lacking the apostolic succession in episcopal ministry as traditionally understood by Roman Catholics, Orthodox and many Anglicans? Recent work on apostolicity in the conversations of the Groupe des Dombes and in the context of the Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry Report of the WCC of 1982 all point in a similar direction⁴⁷.

The encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*, of 1995, is also relevant here. In it, the Pope reiterated his wholehearted commitment to the teaching of Vatican II and to the ecumenical movement⁴⁸. He stressed the importance of dialogue and the exchange of gifts⁴⁹. His invitation to the leaders and theologians of the other churches to engage with him in a 'patient and fraternal dialogue' concerning the exercise of his Petrine ministry contained the clear implication that he needed the complementary insights to be found in the ecclesiological traditions of other churches in order to

find a more finely calibrated way of exercising his ministry as a ministry in the midst of his fellow bishops and, indeed, ultimately, the bishops and leaders of the other churches⁵⁰. Bearing in mind the emerging ecumenical consensus that *episkope* is personal, collegial and communal, we may look forward to a time when the Petrine ministry will be no less personal but will always be exercised in a collegial context together with other church leaders and also in a communal one having respect for and listening to the witness of all the faithful and their *sensus fidelium*⁵¹. How the institutional framework of such a re-reception of the Petrine ministry will develop, we cannot at the moment foresee but we must trust that the Holy Spirit will lead us into such a balanced practice as part of Christ's promise that He will lead us into all truth. The very ecclesiology of communion, so widely received in all the major Christian churches over the last generation implies that all ministries are to be seen and evaluated within a relational context. They are ministries *within* the Church rather than over it, as in some pre-Vatican II Roman Catholic theology, or ministries subordinate to the general body as in some traditional 'independent' practice and ecclesiology⁵².

The Holy Father has continued to develop his own ecumenical thinking, especially in regard to pneumatology. We have already quoted his remarks concerning the recognition of the work of the Spirit in each other. He has also said that the great task of the third millennium is to make the Church 'the home and school of communion'⁵³. Since the Roman Catholic Church now places great emphasis upon the very real, if still imperfect, communion linking it with other Christians (in the case of the Orthodox, this is even stated to be 'almost perfect communion'), one must assume that this implies the ideal of a very real measure of reception between the Roman Catholic Church and the other churches. In this context we might cite a theologoumenon of the late Jean-Marie Tillard to the effect that all the separated churches, including those whose full ecclesial status Rome cannot yet recognise, are potentially sister churches and presumably will be recognised and accepted as such when in their own search for fuller catholicity, communion and unity, they are able to receive the sign of the episcopal succession in a form recognisable by Rome and are able to manifest their *typos* of Christian life as a legitimate variety within the totality of the Apostolic Tradition⁵⁴. In their response to the *Called To be One* process, the Roman Catholic bishops of England and Wales stated that they no longer saw the process of Christian unity as one of simple return to the one true church but as one of convergence in common pilgrimage and mutual reception⁵⁵.

It is thus quite clear that, in the course of considerably less than a century, the Roman Catholic understanding of catholicity changed from a largely static and institutional one, involving submission by those coming

from outside to the over-riding authority of the Roman Pontiff, to one involving a common dynamic search for a fuller form of communion. In this model the positive features of each tradition would be affirmed to an extent whilst at the same time being taken up into a fuller and thus more fully catholic whole, enabling the Universal Church to manifest its unity and catholicity in every part to a greater degree than previously possible. The Holy Spirit and the vision that He gives of the eschatological Kingdom are the gift; in turn, they inspire and call us to work for a Church catholic to the fullest extent that is possible within the providence of the Spirit and the current outworking of the Father's plan.

Catholicity in Modern Methodist Thought

Turning to the Methodist understanding of catholicity, we may begin by citing the definition in the most recent British Methodist ecclesiological statement, that 'the Church is catholic because there is one Universal God who has declared his love for all creation in Jesus Christ'⁵⁶. This reflects an Arminian understanding of God's desire for the salvation of all and for the establishment of a new creation in which, as John Wesley put it, there will be uninterrupted communion with God the three in one. It is worth analysing the patristic definition given by St. Cyril of Jerusalem, and already cited, in terms of the Methodist tradition. Methodists would certainly accept the universal geographical definition and can point to a missionary tradition that reaches back to the time of Wesley himself. They would accept that the Catholic Church teaches and must teach 'all the truths that men must know' and would include in such truths both the basic christology and trinitarian theology of the historic creeds and the truths of the Scripture way of salvation including most particularly justification by grace through faith and the call to entire sanctification.⁵⁷ They would still dispute whether certain secondary truths taught as dogma by the Roman Catholic Church really deserve that status, suggesting that these matters do not relate directly to what the American Church calls the 'marrow of faith'. There would also be some disagreement about how exactly to interpret the term 'infallibly', though it is to be noticed that it is used of the central truths of the Gospel in the hymnody of Charles Wesley:

And publish to the sons of men
The signs infallible.

They would certainly warm to St Cyril's assertion that the power of the Gospel is such as to 'heal every kind of sin', that it brings to humankind true worship i.e. the worship which is offered to the Father in the Son and by the power and inspiration of the Spirit. The holistic emphasis upon

healing of the whole body and personality would also be received as would the emphasis upon every sort of virtue.

It must be stressed of course that Methodism has not necessarily lived its understanding of catholicity better than other churches. John Wesley preached his famous sermon on the 'Catholic Spirit' in which he called for all Christians holding the same essential faith to co-operate with each other in good work despite any disagreements on secondary matters whether of doctrine or style of worship and church government. Wesley's own desire to reach out beyond his own community, indeed to all in need, is shown by two institutions that he encouraged, a regular prayer meeting in which the Methodists were encouraged to pray for the work and mission of other churches and the famous Strangers' Friends Society in Bristol which was specifically to give aid to the non-Methodist poor⁵⁸. That Methodists were no more exempt from the temptation to a sectarian spirit was shown when, in 1820, the Methodist Conference felt it necessary to remind the Methodist people that,

...we do not exist for the sake of party. We, as a body are bound to avoid a narrow bigoted sectarian spirit...to please all men to their edification. Let us therefore maintain towards all denominations of Christians holding the Head, the kind and catholic spirit of primitive Methodism, and, according to the noble maxim of our fathers in the Gospel, 'be the friends of all and the enemies of none'⁵⁹.

Despite this call, there were Methodists who, in the nineteenth century, glorying in their missionary successes and seeing themselves as the most blessed of all churches, displayed a triumphalist attitude which can be compared with that of ultramontane Catholicism in the same period⁶⁰. Such triumphalism was a distortion of the true traditions both of Methodism and of Catholicism. By contrast a truly kenotic spirit of catholicity was shown by William James Shrewsbury. He reminded the Methodist people that, as the most recent of the major Christian traditions they were 'the debtors of all'⁶¹. He pointed to the many influences that had enriched the theological understanding and practical method of the Wesleys, to their debt to classical Anglican and Puritan alike as well as to continental pietists such as the Moravians. He knew that Wesley had been prepared to receive insights from a variety of sources in his search for a true method of spreading experimental religion. He warned the Methodist people against any narrowing of their vision and against any neglect of the many means of grace, prudential as well as covenanted with which they had become acquainted in Wesley's time or subsequently. His attitude can be encapsulated in the fact that he wrote an appendix to his book, at a time when Methodists were increasingly reliant on purely extempore prayer, extolling the virtues of the Prayer book service of Morning Prayer as a distillation of the wisdom both of the early fathers

and of the Reformers⁶². Above all, he commended a genuinely catholic humility in the presence of other Christians.

Wesley himself counselled Christians to use *all* the means of grace constantly. His definition of these was extremely wide and demonstrates his own catholicity. Fundamental, of course, were the *covenanted* means of grace, those which had direct Scriptural warrant. They included the reading of Scripture and the hearing of the preached word, public and private prayer and worship, attendance at and reception of the sacraments. Wesley also included what Catholics once called the corporal works of mercy, claiming that these also had a scriptural blessing attached to them.⁶³ He also commended what he called the prudential means of grace. These were devotional exercises of post-apostolic origin to which no direct scriptural warrant was attached but which had been of proven worth in the development of the spiritual life. These included the special institutions of the Methodist revival such as the class and band meetings, the love feast and the Covenant service. By the same token, he implicitly included any developing means of Christian spirituality, from whatever source, that could be seen to result in an increase in holiness⁶⁴.

The Deed of Union of British Methodism (1932) states that Methodism 'claims and cherishes its place within the Holy Catholic Church which is the Body of Christ'⁶⁵. Methodism does not claim any exclusive catholicity but merely asserts its claim to be considered as a genuine *typos* of Christian ecclesial life, its connexional principle and structures embodying a particular understanding of the koinonia of the Church, its worship, including both liturgical and extempore prayer styles embodying a particular spiritual ethos. The Methodist scholar, H.B. Workman showed the relationship between the piety and practice of the Methodist revival and many precursors including some of the monastic revivals⁶⁶. W.F. Slater also showed the consistency of early Methodist life with that commended in the apostolic age and attested in the New Testament⁶⁷.

Finally, the Methodist understanding of catholicity is holistic. Wesley was fond of saying that the New Testament knew nothing of solitary religion; he was perhaps unduly suspicious of mystical piety. He emphasised the cosmic scope of God's plan⁶⁸. The American Methodist scholar, Ted Runyon has argued that Wesley stood for orthodoxy, orthopraxy and orthopathy. He emphasised that faith without works and practical transforming influence in the world was valueless⁶⁹. Some of his statements, such as that orthodoxy was only a very minor part of religion are, however, misleading if they are taken as in any way devaluing the central trinitarian faith of the Church which under-girded his whole theological vision and was the source of much of the sheer lyricism of his brother's poetry. To the historic emphasis of the Church upon the need for right belief and conduct in the world, Wesley added the experiential

emphasis, believing that the New Testament regarded the conscious experience of salvation and eschatological joy as the privilege of every believer. He was careful, however, to stress that experience must always be judged in the light of the witness of Scripture and Tradition and that its role was confirmatory of the testimony of Scripture and Tradition, not independent of them and certainly in no way over-riding⁷⁰. Wesley stressed the importance of works in a way that sometimes seems redolent of tridentine Catholicism rather than of Protestantism, a point that can be exemplified in his comments on the Johannine injunction to 'work for the food that gives eternal life'⁷¹. Wesley's 'catholic' recognition of the emphases of other traditions can be seen in the way in which he came so close to the tridentine understanding of the relationship between faith and works while denouncing much else in the Tridentine tradition and by the way in which he could come to the very edge of Calvinism in his doctrine of grace whilst fiercely rejecting the understanding of predestination⁷². To Wesley, the essence of the holistic Christian experience was 'righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost' (Rom 14) and one may regard the sense of eschatological joy in the hymnody of Wesley and the worship of early Methodism as one of the key markers of the Methodist *typos* of Christianity⁷³.

The tension between Faith and Order and Life and Work that has haunted the ecumenical movement and especially the World Council of Churches would have been seen as a false one by the Wesleys. They would have stressed that orthodoxy, disciplined church order, necessary to the growth of each member in grace, and orthopraxy belong inextricably together. Individual Methodists have, of course, not always maintained this balance well, but it was magnificently re-asserted by John Scott Lidgett (1854-1953) sometimes described as the greatest Methodist since John Wesley. Lidgett evinced his catholicity in his role of helping late Victorian British Methodism emerge from the relative isolation into which it had cocooned itself. He played a key role in encouraging closer ecumenical co-operation at every level. He was a key figure in the reception of theological insights from other traditions, most especially in his reception of the theology of the Anglican, F. D. Maurice, with its incarnational and societal emphases⁷⁴. Lidgett's theology centred on a strong doctrine of the fatherhood of God and of God's fatherly purpose, implemented through his son 'to bring many sons to glory' and so prepare for the reconciliation of all things in Christ. He explored this theme particularly through two great commentaries, the first being *Sonship and Servanthood* on Hebrews in which he investigated his understanding of the self-offering of the Son in filial obedience to the Father's will and the way in which Christians became incorporated into that paradigmatic pattern of filial service and obedience. In the second, *God in Christ Jesus*,

on Ephesians, he made clear the corporate and ecclesial dimensions of his theology:⁷⁵

The purpose of the Father is to reveal His love in the incarnate life of the Eternal Son and to make possible the sharing of that life in a thoroughly filial relationship with all mankind ... God has planned an infinite receptivity in the heart of man to correspond with his eternal purpose to impart his own infinite perfection as the gift of his holy love⁷⁶.

Lidgett argued that, in the catholicity of God's purpose, human beings are 'differentiated yet bound together'. Since God's plan is 'inescapably social and universal, there is no such thing as purely personal sonship of God, existing apart from the life of human fellowship'⁷⁷. In an interesting re-assertion of a point made by the Victorian Wesleyan, Benjamin Gregory, and in anticipation of the same point re-iterated by the contemporary Orthodox, John Zizioulas, he argued that 'without the Church, Christ is unfulfilled'⁷⁸. In turn of course, the work of the Church is unfulfilled outside the context of the coming of the Kingdom and the realisation of the Father's plan. Lidgett saw an inextricable link between Church, Kingdom and the destiny of humankind⁷⁹.

Lidgett thus presented an integrated vision of the whole counsel of God which is to bring all humanity into communion with Himself, such communion involving both divine initiative and human response. In preparing for the fullness of the human response, the Church plays a key role, its *koinonia* proleptically foreshadowing the fullness of life that will characterise the Kingdom.

Conclusion

We may perhaps conclude this study of catholicity by saying that it is nowhere better summed up than by the author of Ephesians, an epistle central to the holistic vision of Lidgett and, indeed, other ecclesiologists. In seven verses from 3:14 to the end of the chapter, the author reveals the predestined, developing and matured forms of catholicity. It is founded in the Father's acknowledgement and naming of 'every family in heaven and on earth', in that 'mercy that is over all his works' (Ps 145:9, a favourite text of Wesley's). It develops as the saints, being 'rooted and grounded in the love of Christ' come *corporately* to comprehend the length and depth, the height and breadth of divine love, that is to say its cosmic scale and its all-inclusiveness and as they begin and continue to act upon that *sensus fidelium* which gives them insight into the correct way of caring for all God's creation in the furtherance of the Father's plan. It comes to its maturity when they are finally filled with all the fullness of God, when they receive the fullness of divine wisdom and power and appear to all humankind as those sons of God whose adoption

the cosmos eagerly awaits (Rom 8:23). The Church's ongoing worship reflects the doxological anticipation of this promised consummation and the coming of the new creation.

- ¹ Published as *The Catholicity of the Church*, OUP, 1985.
- ² Congar, Y. *Divided Christendom* (ET), London, 1939, p. 95.
- ³ *Ibid*, p. 101.
- ⁴ Gregory, B. *The Holy Catholic Church*, London, 1873, p. 7.
- ⁵ Ephesians, 5:27.
- ⁶ Pope, W.B. *A Compendium of Christian Theology*, London, 1880, vol 3, p. 263.
- ⁷ Jean-Marie Tillard insists, catholic on the very day of Pentecost when the Church was still limited to the one assembly in Jerusalem. Tillard, J-M. *L'Eglise Locale*, Paris, 1995, pp. 32-4.
- ⁸ Ephesians, 4:13.
- ⁹ Rowan Williams in an article on catholicity in *The Oxford Companion to the Christian Church*, (Oxford, 2000), pp. 102-4, points to the treatment of this themes by Vladimir Lossky and Henri de Lubac. De Lubac argues that the Church exists in miniature in each believer. The Wesleyan Methodist Liverpool Minutes (see below, note 60) also point to the essentially 'catholic spirit' of early Methodism
- ¹⁰ Cited in Congar Y. *Divided Christendom* (ET), London, 1939, p. 94.
- ¹¹ Williams, article op cit.
- ¹² *Hymns and Psalms, a Methodist and Ecumenical Hymn Book*, London, 1983, no 753.
- ¹³ *Ibid*, no 374.
- ¹⁴ Tillard, op cit, p. 380.
- ¹⁵ The richness of this process is brought out in the report of the sixth session of the International Roman Catholic-Methodist dialogue, 'The Word of Life', cited in Gros, J. et al. *Growth in Agreement*, vol 2, Geneva/New York, 2000, pp. 618-646, and also in the most recent ARCIC report, *The Gift of Authority*, cited in *One in Christ*, 1999, no 4, paras 25,31.
- ¹⁶ This point was frequently and strongly stressed during our conversations at the Bose Conference, already mentioned.
- ¹⁷ Romans 8:23,19.
- ¹⁸ In his article in *One in Christ*, 1988, no 2, 'Tradition and Koinoinia', p. 110.
- ¹⁹ Revelation 21: 1-8.
- ²⁰ *Statements of the Methodist Church on Faith and Order*, 1933-1983, London, 1984, p.7.
- ²¹ Romans 8:19.
- ²² Cited in Ware, K, *The Orthodox Church*, London, 1963, p. 235.
- ²³ Cited in the symposium *The Wisdom of John Paul II*, London (CTS), 2001, p. 105.
- ²⁴ The papers of this Conference, held under the auspices of the Suenens Foundation, are shortly to be published by Peeters of Leuven, the editors being Professors Doris Donnelly, Adelbert Denaux and Joseph Famerée. The direct quotation is from the communique issued at the end of the Conference.
- ²⁵ This observation is based on the notes that I took as a participant in the Conference.
- ²⁶ Barrett, A. *Pastoral Addresses*, London, 1845, p. 371.
- ²⁷ That this is the case is frequently suggested in the very rich ARCIC text, 'The Gift of Authority' (cited in *One in Christ*, 1999, pp. 241-266). The question of how British Methodism might receive the sign of the episcopal succession and personal episcopacy was frequently discussed from the late 1970's. See especially the criteria

for such reception in a manner consistent with the relational nature of connexionalism in *Statements and Reports of the Methodist Church on Faith and Order*, vol 2 1984-2000, Peterborough, 2000, pp. 407-9.

- ²⁸ See eg. Kissack, R. *Church or No Church*, London, 1964, p. 145 on the ecclesiological consequences of the Wesleyan understanding of the doctrine of Christian perfection.
- ²⁹ As most fully developed in Maddox, R. *Responsible Grace*, Nashville, 1994.
- ³⁰ Quotation for the 1936 Methodist Covenant Service.
- ³¹ Congar, Y. *Christians in Dialogue* (ET), London, 1966, p.349.
- ³² See the most recent British Methodist ecclesiological statement, *Called To Love and Praise*, paras 3.1.6 to 3.1.11, cited in *Statements*, op cit, vol 2, pp. 25-7.
- ³³ Decree on Ecumenism, ch 1, para 2, cited in Abbott, W.M. *Documents of Vatican II*, London, 1966, p 346.
- ³⁴ *Ibid*, para 4 (p.349)
- ³⁵ *Ibid*, para 4 (p. 349)
- ³⁶ *Ibid*, para 4 (p.349)
- ³⁷ See Curtis, G. *Paul Couturier and Unity in Christ*, London, 1964.
- ³⁸ Decree on Ecumenism, paras 9-11 (Abbott, op cit, pp. 353-4)
- ³⁹ cited in *The Wisdom of John Paul II*, op cit, p. 109.
- ⁴⁰ In a sermon given at Cambridge and reprinted in *The Tablet*, 24.1.1970.
- ⁴¹ Rome, 1995.
- ⁴² Decree, paras 21,23 (Abbott, pp. 362-5)
- ⁴³ *Ibid*, para 22 (p.364)
- ⁴⁴ On the occasion of the canonisation of the forty martyrs of England and Wales, 25 October 1970.
- ⁴⁵ Hale, Robert, *Canterbury and Rome: Sister Churches* London, 1982.
- ⁴⁶ It is anticipated this report will be published in 2006.
- ⁴⁷ The Bose observations based on my notes at the Conference. For the work of the Groupe des Dombes, see *Pour la Communion des Eglises, L'apport du groupe des Dombes, 1937-87*, Paris, 1988. The 1976 statement on 'le ministere episcopale' is dealt with on pp. 81-114
- ⁴⁸ paras 3, 8-14
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid*, paras 28-39.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid*, para 96.
- ⁵¹ *Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry*, 1982, para. M 26. Note also *Ut Unum Sint*, para 95 where the Pope refers to his own ministry exercised 'always in communion' with his fellow bishops.
- ⁵² In this context, note especially the Methodist insistence on this in the statement on Episcopate and Episcopacy already noted above (n. 28.)
- ⁵³ Encyclical *Novo Millennio Ineunete*, para 43.
- ⁵⁴ Article in *Osservatore Romano*, 25 October 1995. Fr Tillard memorably emphasises that all Christian communities are called to become sister churches to the church of Rome on a basis of equal dignity.
- ⁵⁵ In the archive of collected responses to the process.
- ⁵⁶ *Called To Love and Praise*, op cit, para 2.4.4. in *Statements*, op cit, vol 2, p.20.
- ⁵⁷ See eg. Geoffrey Wainwright in *Methodists in Dialogue*, Nashville, 1995, pp. 231-236.
- ⁵⁸ See eg the reference to and emphasis upon this by B. Gregory in his *Handbook of Scriptural Church Principles*, London, 1888, vol 2, p. 25.

- ⁵⁹ Cited in Simon, J.S. *A Summary of Methodist Law and Discipline*, London, 1923, p. 269.
- ⁶⁰ The great Wesleyan ecclesiologist, James Rigg, was not above this, asserting, for example that Methodism in its dynamic growth was more likely to absorb Anglicanism than vice versa.
- ⁶¹ Shrewsbury, W.J. *An Essay on the Scriptural Economy of the Wesleyan Methodists*, 1840, pp. 89-90.
- ⁶² *Ibid*, pp. 320-344.
- ⁶³ Cf 'All who read or hear are blessed/if thy plain commands we do'. *Hymns and Psalms, A Methodist and Ecuemnic Hymn Book*, London, 1983, no. 468.
- ⁶⁴ For Wesley on this, see his sermon on 'The Means of Grace' in *Works*, op cit, vol 1, pp. 376-397.
- ⁶⁵ Text cited in Brake, G. T. *Policy and Politics in British Methodism, 1932-82*, London, 1984, p. 829-30.
- ⁶⁶ Workman, H. B. 'The Place of Methodism in the Christian Church' in Townsend W.J, Workman, H.B. and Eayrs, G. (eds), *A New History of Methodism, London, 1909*, vol 1, pp. 1-73.
- ⁶⁷ Slater, W.F. *Methodism in the Light of the Early Church*, London, 1885.
- ⁶⁸ See eg his famous statement on unending communion with the Trinity in the sermon 'The New Creation', *Works*, op cit, vol 2. pp 500-510.
- ⁶⁹ Runyon, T. *The New Creation. John Wesley's Theology for Today*, Nashville, 1997, chapter, pp.
- ⁷⁰ On the question of the so-called Wesleyan Quadrilateral ie. the relationship between Scripture, Tradition, reason and experience as sources of authority, see, Gunter, W, Jones, S., Campbell, T, Miles, R and Maddox R. *Wesley and the Quadrilateral. Renewing the Conversation Today*, Nashville, 1997.
- ⁷¹ In the context of his great dispute with the Calvinists, see Tyerman, L. *Life of Wesley*, London, 1876, vol 3, p.73.
- ⁷² See the excellent chapter in McGonigle, H. *Sufficient Sovereign Saving Grace-John Wesley's Evangelical Arminianism*, Exeter, 2001, pp. 153-77.
- ⁷³ See e.g. my article in Sobornost 18:1 (1996) 'Church and Praise in the hymnody of the Wesleys', pp. 30-47.
- ⁷⁴ For an excellent biography, see Turberfield, A. *John Scott Lidgett, Archbishop of British Methodism?*, London, 2003. Pp. 45-84 give an overview of his theology.
- ⁷⁵ Published respectively in 1918 and 1915 in London. I have explored elements of Lidgett's ecclesiology in my *Love Bade me Welcome, A British Methodist Statement on the Church*, London, 2002, pp. 89-98.
- ⁷⁶ *God in Christ Jesus*, op cit, p. 74.
- ⁷⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 74, 246-7.
- ⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p. 249, Gregory, *Holy Catholic Church*, op cit, p. 18, Zizioulas, J. *Being as Communion*, (ET), London, 1985.
- ⁷⁹ *God in Christ Jesus*, op cit, p. 221.