
Davide Chapman’s book reviews the changing relationships between Methodists and Roman Catholics from the time of John Wesley to the present day. It highlights Wesley’s complex relationship with Roman Catholicism, critical of both Roman Catholic doctrine and public worship and yet accepting that Roman Catholics did belong to the holy, catholic Church. It describes the generally very confrontational relationship of nineteenth-century Methodism to Roman Catholicism. And it tells of the increasingly open, but not uncritical, attitude of twentieth-century Methodism to Roman Catholicism. This last section’s account begins in the 1930s, with Methodists increasingly willing to explore Methodism’s place within the holy, catholic Church in relation to other churches, the Roman Catholic Church included, and Roman Catholic writers beginning to show a greater interest in Methodism as an ecclesial movement. It continues with reviews of the work of both the major Methodist–Roman Catholic international and nation committees, and the Roman Catholic Encyclicals *Ut unum sint* and *Dominus Jesus*, perhaps treating the former maybe a little too flatteringly. And it ends by referring to the importance of liturgical renewal and local ecumenical partnerships for both the deepening of Methodist–Roman Catholic mutual understanding and their growing together.

*In Search of the Catholic Spirit* gives the reader not only a sense of Methodist and Roman Catholic dialogues, but also a fuller understanding of Methodism’s history and developments. It reminds people of the particularity and the variety of Methodism, both in time and in space. It stimulates people of other traditions to reflect upon their own traditions in the light of the issues raised. And it prompts ecumenists to remember that the enterprise in which they are engaged is the ‘long game’. *In Search of the Catholic Spirit* is indeed a useful, and multi-applicable, resource. But, as well as providing useful information, *In Search of the Catholic Spirit* prompts intriguing questions. These especially concern Methodists’ theological stance, their ecumenical process, and their practice of reception.

Clearly there are times when it is manifest where the Methodists stand on various theological issues. Equally clearly there are times when it is not so manifest. When reviewing the Methodist–Roman Catholic international dialogues, Chapman often reports that Methodists do not agree with, or have questions to ask of, this or that Roman Catholic belief or practice. To disagree with, or to have questions of, is, of course, not quite the same as stating what one’s position is. Indeed, such a method leaves one uncertain where Methodists stand on certain issues. Nor is one’s uncertainty lessened when one remembers both the Methodists’ relative disinclination to define doctrine and their acceptance of a wide spectrum
of beliefs on given topics. Witness Chapman's reflection that, while Methodists are far from being indifferent to doctrinal standards, they are less inclined to definitions of doctrine than, for example, Roman Catholics (p. 130); and witness the huge variety of British Methodist beliefs concerning the eucharist, evidenced in the 2003 report to the British Methodist Conference, 'His Presence Makes the Feast: Holy Communion in the Methodist Church'. Such uncertainty, especially when it extends beyond beliefs and practices which are not deemed adiaphora, throws down a significant challenge to how Methodist agreement with, for example, Roman Catholicism may be achieved.

Three aspects of the ecumenical processes adopted in the Methodist–Roman Catholic bilateral talks are particularly interesting. The one relates to the use of questions, the second to applying arguments of propriety and expediency, and the third to the reframing of difficult issues. Firstly, in the more recent bilateral talks Methodist and Roman Catholic members of the international commissions have adopted the practice of posing questions of one another, with the intention of helping clarify key issues of faith and doctrine in a constructive and non-threatening way. Such a method clearly has advantages. It does, however, bring a challenge in its wake. For it opens the door to the possibility of demands for ever more precise clarification. Those who are aware of the Anglican–Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) document *Clarifications on Eucharist and Ministry* (1994) will be minded to ask: When has a key issue been sufficiently clarified? When is an answer a sufficient answer? For different churches, different degrees of detail are often required to permit recognition of a common belief or faith. Secondly, the Nairobi Report (1986), when considering the much debated issue of the ministry of the Bishop of Rome, adopted the precept that 'whatever is properly required for the unity of the whole of Christ's Church must by the very fact be God's will for his Church'. This precept certainly has allowed ecumenical progress, and not simply on pragmatic grounds, even in those areas for which Methodists find no firm evidence in Scripture. Hence, for example, Methodists thereby have found permission to contemplate at some future date, in a restored unity, a universal papal primacy which would serve as a focus of and ministry for the unity of the whole Church. Thirdly, the international bilaterals, and Chapman's commentary on them, often oppose 'Catholics' and 'Protestants', 'Luther' and the 'Council of Trent'. Clearly, at times, such opposing is necessary, if only to set issues in their historical context. Equally clearly, however, it is often necessary to get behind the opposed positions of past polemic, and to reframe the various theological issues in language which is both traditional and expressive of the insights of an age which no longer glories in strife. There is at least one example cited of such reframing. It concerns marriage, a sacrament for Roman Catholics, sacramental for Methodists. In the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference's and the Uniting Church's Assembly's joint report *Interchurch Marriages: Their Ecumenical Challenge and Significance for our Churches*