

Anglican-Methodist Relations :

A QUESTION OF CONSCIENCE

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THE sub-title that has been suggested for this paper* means that I must approach the subject in a personal, though not for that reason in an individualist, or untheological, or unhistorical, way. It means further, if I have rightly understood my assignment, that I must deal with at least some of those fundamental issues which make at least some Methodists conclude that they cannot conscientiously accept the scheme for union as it is now finally laid before us. There is only one consideration that leads me to regret this assignment: it requires me to go over ground that cannot but be familiar, and to repeat at least some of the things I have had occasion to say elsewhere. If this repetition is tedious I must plead that it was asked of me; and indeed I cannot but agree that the present is a time when fundamentals cannot be looked at too often or too hard. At the same time, I shall make it my business not to peer myopically at a very small number of points of detail, however important, but to set the whole issue in as wide a theological and biblical setting as I can. I propose to begin by briefly examining a few unexamined pressuppositions.

When I say that they are unexamined I do not mean that no one has ever examined them; I mean that by now they have been repeated so frequently that the unwary take them for granted, assume their truth, and proceed to build upon them. Yet to say a thing loud and often does not make it true.

I have in mind first the question what we mean, and what we ought to mean, by the unity of the church. Already in 1958 the first group of Anglican-Methodist Conversationalists had turned their backs upon the original suggestion made in his Cambridge sermon of 1946 by Archbishop Fisher (as he then was). Dr. Fisher had suggested as an objective the parallel existence of churches, each maintaining its own identity but each in full communion with the other. They write (*Interim Statement* (1958) p. 42): 'Without surrendering our declared immediate quest of intercommunion associated with a unification of ministries, we have come to see that this objective marks a stage but no more than a stage in the process of growing together towards that fuller unity which we believe to be God's will for his Church.' There was, at least in Methodism, some outcry about this departure from what had been supposed to be the original, and more limited, goal of the Conversations, but the work was continued on the lines thus laid down.

In the 1963 *Report* (pp. 8f.) this conclusion was assumed and no attempt was made to justify it. 'The present report contains outline

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proposals for the coming together of our two Churches in two stages. The second stage is the final goal of union in one Church. For various reasons, administrative, legal and other, we believe that this must be preceded by a stage lasting for some years at which our two Churches enter upon full communion with one another, while retaining their distinct life and identity . . . If . . . our Churches agree to accept stage one of this movement, we believe that it is essential that they should at the same time accept the obligation to achieve, in due course, union with one another in one Church. The existence of two parallel Churches, side by side, in full communion, would be anomalous and unsatisfactory except as a step towards and a means of achieving the ultimate goal of union.' There is a cross reference to pp. 41ff. of the *Interim Statement* where the point is said to be 'fully expounded'. This indeed it is not; but the change in emphasis is clear; it is now (in 1963) the stage of intercommunion that has to be apologised for.

The final report (1968) is fully justified in giving (p. 5) as the first main constituent of the scheme, 'acceptance of organic union as the goal' since this had been accepted by the Convocations and the Conference in 1965.

The question I am raising here is whether the Commission, and others before them, have confused organic union with organised union. Organic union suggests to me the unity of an organism, and a living organism (unless we confine our attention to the most primitive cells) is marked by variety, as Paul long ago remarked in 1 Cor. 12. Paul, it is true, was speaking of individual members of a local church when he wrote of hand and foot, eye and ear; but it seems to me by no means unreasonable to apply his observations to the relations between bodies of Christians, most of which have not only peculiarities but virtues of their own, which can operate in distinctness for the benefit of the whole. It is often said that there were no denominations in the New Testament church, in the sense that there were not within one city or rural area differently organised and distinct groups of Christians. I do not know on the basis of what evidence it can be asserted that the various house groups—ἐκκλησίαι—which existed in such cities as Corinth and Ephesus, or that the various ἐκκλησίαι of the area designated Galatia, had all of them the same organisation. We can, I think, be certain that the churches of different areas differed from one another in organisation and in other respects too, but it is not suggested in the New Testament that their differences were a denial of their unity in the one body. If we turn to John 17. 21f. we read the prayer, 'that they may be one as we are one'. It is safe to say that no words are more often quoted in the interests of Christian unity, and of ecumenical politics, than these. It may be feared that they have been more often quoted than understood. There is not a word in this chapter, or anywhere in the gospel, that expresses the necessity, or even the desirability, that all Christians should belong to one formal organisation. What their unity should mean is made clear in John 13. 34f.: I am giving you a new commandment, that you should love one another, as I have loved you, that you also should love one another. By this shall all men know that you are my disciples,

if you have love for one another (cf. 15. 12). This love could well be expressed within one organisation, but it is not dependent upon that kind of unity, and it is inconsistent with uniformity. For the prayer seeks 'that they may be one *as we are one*', and the unity of the Father and the Son, which is a pattern for the unity of Christians, is certainly not an undifferentiated identity.

Let me make it clear that it is not my intention to oppose the notion of unity within one organisation at all costs and at all times. If we had the opportunity of rewriting Church History from the beginning I have little doubt that we should all agree in composing the story of a single infinitely varied but never fissiparous organism, which could find room for infinite variety within unbroken unity. We are not however called upon to display this kind of imagination but to deal in practical terms with a real situation, and we must be content to take the world—and the church—as we find them. And viewed in this light even a group of federated but autonomous churches, in communion with one another and united in love for the service and evangelisation of the world, seems to me so vastly preferable to both on the one hand a dog-fight of warring sects and on the other a uniform but dead machine, that it scarcely merits the scorn which in these days is conventionally poured upon it.

Arising out of the question what we mean by unity is a second: the question how unity is to be attained. When the presuppositions of our present scheme are examined dispassionately a quite astounding picture appears. Time forbids me to look at more than a few points. Why does not a state of full communion exist at this moment between the Church of England and the Methodist Church? It is a simple fact that, for all their faults, the Methodists would without exception welcome any member of the Church of England at their communion services; equally, they would be willing, if invited, to receive the communion from Church of England ministers. There are some in the Church of England who adopt precisely the same attitude, and would gladly communicate with Methodists. Whether these are a majority or a minority of Anglicans I do not know; what is important is that there are others, who, with equal sincerity and conviction, do not adopt this attitude, and it is again a simple fact that it is their attitude that prevails in the official attitude of the Church of England to Methodist sacraments. Here then are the whole of one church and—let us say—half of a second which are ready to establish immediate relations of intercommunion. One would have supposed that the way to move towards intercommunion was to persuade the recalcitrant quarter to abandon its rigorous separatism. But in fact this course does not seem ever to be contemplated, much less discussed. It is assumed that the way of progress is to induce the Methodist Church to adopt precisely those views—or at least those practices—of church order and ministry which make the separatist element in the Church of England separatist. The absurdity of this is immediately apparent, but it is, so far as I know, very seldom challenged. It is the separatist element in the Church of England that comes out of the situation with the greatest moral credit, for it is standing by its principles, however misguided these principles may be. How, on the other hand, Methodists

can adopt, in the interests of unity, the principles of separatism and sectarianism, is a puzzle too difficult for me; it becomes still more difficult when the Methodists in question declare that they do not accept these principles as principles but merely intend to act as if they did so accept them. The unexamined presupposition that is at work here is the assumption that the only way to unite the church is to accept the practices if not the beliefs of the most exclusive element within it. I do not think that this presupposition will stand up to examination. It may be—we have not yet discussed the matter—that the principles of episcopal exclusiveness are true. If so, they should be accepted and acted upon; but at least they should be studied, and if they do not commend themselves to reason and conscience they should not be followed simply because appeasement and acquiescence are less troublesome—for they are certainly not more Christian—than radical discussion aimed at arriving at the truth.

What I have just said may serve as a particular example of a wider and more far-reaching assumption, namely, that unity is to be achieved by political tinkering with the institutions within which we are at present living. There must be as far as possible (it does not seem in fact to go very far) a balance of give and take. The Methodist Church must accept the historic episcopate; the Church of England must for a limited period tolerate the anomaly of parallel and overlapping episcopates. The Methodist Church must abandon the practice of lay celebration; the Church of England will tolerate it (not in itself but in the parallel church with which it is in full communion) until the present group of lay celebrants has died out. And so on. It is assumed that each church intends to retain as many of its acquired characteristics as are consistent with the unity sought; that (for example) it is unthinkable that the Church of England should abandon the historic episcopate, or that Methodist ministers should accept a rite which is unambiguously described as ordination. It is time to question such assumptions, and the method of seeking unity that goes with them. When, along with other Presbyterian churches, the Reformed Church of Switzerland was invited to comment on the original (and ultimately rejected) plan for intercommunion between the Church of England and the Church of Scotland it expressed polite surprise that two reformed churches should have adopted the methods of ecclesiastical politics. Surely there was only one method open to such churches; surely they should have forgotten (as far as one ever can forget) their traditions and the administrative habits and forms peculiar to each, and together sought in the Scriptures an answer to the question, What does God now wish his church to be? It is a question that could conceivably have proved more disturbing to both parties, but it has yet to be demonstrated that it would not achieve results. The assumption that Christian unity is to be reached by political negotiation between power structures calls for strict investigation.

There is an analogous but negative assumption in regard to the use of Holy Communion itself which I shall only mention here because I have discussed it elsewhere. It is (as far as our Reports and Scheme are concerned) assumed that joint participation in Holy Communion is to be thought of only as a goal, and not as a means that may enable

us to reach the goal. At the most this joint participation may be extended (and the Scheme itself does not go as far as this) to cases where two churches are pledged to achieve and are already on the road toward unity. Ought not this assumption to be loudly and publicly questioned? It is very generally agreed that this sacrament is a gift of God to sinners—to penitent sinners, indeed, but to sinners, not to those who are already perfect. If in regard to our other sins we come to the Lord's Table in penitence with a view to receiving grace in order to amend our lives, why do we make an exception of the sin (if indeed it be a sin) of disunity? Is not this (I speak as a Methodist!) a quite intolerable perfectionism?

Under this first main head I turn finally to another group of unexamined presuppositions, which I may sum up in the form of the question: What is, and how may we recognise, the guidance of the Spirit of God? It has been repeated again and again that the scheme before us is the leading of God's Spirit, and often implied, and sometimes plainly stated, that those who reject it are, if not actually committing the unforgivable sin of blaspheming the Holy Spirit, at least grieving him by their stubborn resistance. I have no intention of affirming that the opposite of this is true; I should prefer to be a little less confident, and simply to raise the question how the mind of the Spirit is known. It cannot be supposed that this is revealed by the simple process of counting heads: majorities have too often been demonstrably wrong, and minorities right, for that. It cannot be because a special gift of infallible leadership resides in the rulers of the church. It can no longer be argued that unity is essential if the mission work of the church is to be effectively done, for it is now recognised that this proposition lacks statistical support. There are means by which the work of the Spirit of God may be discerned and we need not hesitate to see his operation in the growth of love and understanding between the churches, for love is the fulfilment of the command of Christ, whose words it is the Spirit's work to bring to our memory, conscience, and will; but the bland, and very common, identification with the leading of the Spirit of the controversial and questionable details of a plan in the realm of ecclesiastical polity I can only describe as intolerably arrogant and distasteful.

Having now, as we may hope, cleaned the slate by examining some of the presuppositions which our Report chooses to use without establishing, and at least setting the appropriate question mark beside them, we may proceed to look at some of the fundamental issues raised by the *Report*.

FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES

It is here that I am most likely to tread familiar ground. I apologise for doing so; but it is necessary, and I shall move as quickly as I can, and try as far as possible to suggest a few fresh viewpoints.

The scheme provides for the unification in one organisation of the Methodist Church and the Church of England in two stages, the first consisting of full communion between the two churches while they remain distinct. Entry upon the first stage is dependent upon an

undertaking to enter the second in due course. It is further dependent upon the reconstituting of the Methodist Church on the basis of the historic episcopate, with the undertaking that henceforth all Methodist ordinations shall be conducted on the basis of this episcopate in accordance with a new ordinal now proposed for common use in the two churches; and upon the holding of a central Service of Reconciliation, to be followed by similar though not identical services in various localities. I have confined myself to the essential features of the scheme, and I shall confine myself to the essential objections to them.

First, I may take up a point that has perhaps already been sufficiently discussed. By no stretch of the imagination can the proposals be said to be based upon anything but the traditions of the uniting churches; they do not represent an attempt to press behind the traditions to Scripture, and to ask on that basis what God would have his church be and do in the latter part of the twentieth century. They are a skilful weaving together of Anglican and Methodist traditions, with a strong predominance (no one, I think, will dispute this) of the former. The Anglican way of doing things will prevail, with the assimilation into it of as much of Methodism as can reasonably be absorbed. There is no difficulty about the latter proposition, for though Methodists may have laid a special emphasis on, for example, fellowship, evangelism, holiness, and assurance, it would be absurd to claim that these are strange features now about to be introduced for the first time into the Church of England.

The scheme, then, is rooted in tradition. It is often asserted now that this is both inevitable and right. No one, it is said, can approach Scripture direct; he can approach it only within the lines of that tradition in which he himself stands. Up to a point this is true, and a valid proposition; it is not easy to free oneself from presuppositions, either when writing history, or when expounding a text, not least the text of Scripture. For myself, however, I think that the point has been over-pressed; I do not believe that complete objectivity can be obtained, but the position is not so hopeless that the very attempt to obtain it should be abandoned. It is impossible to get rid of one's presuppositions in the interpretation of Scripture, but it is possible to recognise that one has them, and so to allow for them and correct them. Further, if tradition inevitably contributes to the interpretation of Scripture, it is nevertheless possible, and should be considered necessary, to ask, What tradition do we follow? If the old maxim, *Scriptura sui interpres*, is an ideal rather than an achieved goal, and we walk so feebly that we need, as crutches, other interpreters to help us on our way, then we must inquire into the interpreters' credentials, and ask if they succeed in interpreting Scripture as a whole. In other words, traditional interpretations must be steadily interrogated, and it must be made clear that they are servants and not masters. To this principle the Final Report (1968) pays lip service: 'The products of the traditionary process must be tested by the Scriptures to which they claim to be subservient, and wherever they are found deficient they must be reformed' (p. 19). It may however be questioned whether this very proper sentiment has yet been applied to the historic episcopate.

This leads to two further points. I have written and spoken about the historic episcopate so often that I must handle it briefly now. For the interpretation of the historic episcopate the Final Report points back to the Interim Report (pp. 20-27), where a long quotation from the Lambeth Conference of 1930 is given. Let me cite this rather more fully than does the Final Report. After speaking of episcopacy as a fact which was well established at latest by the end of the second century the Lambeth statement continues:

'It is not a mere fact, but an institution fulfilling certain purposes. As an institution it was, and is, characterised by succession in two forms: the succession in office and the succession of consecration. And it had generally recognised functions; the general superintendence of the church and more especially of the clergy; the maintenance of unity in the one eucharist; the ordination of men to the ministry; the safeguarding of the faith; and the administration of the discipline of the church. There have been different interpretations of the relation of these elements in the historic episcopate to one another; but the elements themselves are constant. When, therefore, we say that we must insist on the historic episcopate but not upon any theory or interpretation of it, we are not to be understood as insisting on the office apart from the functions. What we uphold is the episcopate, maintained in successive generations by continuity of succession and consecration, as it has been throughout the history of the Church from the earliest times, and discharging those functions which from the earliest times it has discharged.'

It will be noted that, by the time the end of the quotation is reached, the 'end of the second century' has unobtrusively become 'the earliest times'. This no doubt subconscious *suggestio falsi* should be noted wherever it occurs, and it cannot be said too often that the historic episcopate has no place in the history of the New Testament, nor is the apostolic succession to be encountered in the works of the apostles. No one will dispute that the functions I have just mentioned in the words of the Lambeth Statement represent important services to the church: the maintenance of unity and the preservation of sound doctrine, in a general pastoral oversight and discipline, and ordination. If the episcopate, historic or other, will do these services for the church it has a claim to be considered, along with other forms of church order, in any future Christian body. In point of fact its success in performing these various functions has been very variable, though it may perhaps have been as great as that of any rival; but to assume that a bad and unsuccessful episcopate, just because it is an episcopate, has a superior claim to a well-administered and successful alternative seems to me absurd. Not only is the historic episcopate without support in the New Testament, it involves an inherent danger of autocracy which is avoided in a presbyterian form of church government, and the principle of succession (which, as the Lambeth quotation shows, is doubly involved in the historic episcopate, notwithstanding the common attempts to distinguish it from the 'apostolic succession') is not merely absent from but contrary to the teaching of the New Testament. The New Testament is indeed aware that one person can teach another—Timothy owed much to his mother and his grand-

mother—and the earliest and most innocent form of succession in the second century was that of a succession of sound (i.e., not gnostic) teachers. But the assertion of sufficient doctrinal agreement, made in the final Report, is itself enough to show that the episcopate is not necessary for the transmission of right teaching, and the Lambeth Statement duly emphasises succession of consecration, and evidently finds in this tactual link with the apostles—or the apostolic church—some guarantee of the church's existence as the church. It cannot be too plainly said that the New Testament not only knows no such guarantees; it reprobates the attempt to find them.

The Report goes out of its way to defend, and so do its apologists, the proposition, which is evidently vital to the scheme, that the Methodist Church shall henceforth accept an invariable rule of episcopal ordination. The objection to this has not always been rightly understood. Ordination is a serious business, and no one wishes it to be carried out in a haphazard way. Nor does one wish to see it conferred in different ways, year by year. On the other hand, it would be wrong to freeze the method of conferring it so that no change is ever possible without a major upheaval and division in the church. The fundamental objection to 'strictest invariability'—of anything—is that it rules out in advance the possibility of reformation. I need not remind this company of the fundamental principle familiarly expressed in the saying: *Ecclesia semper reformanda quia reformata*. No church can regard itself as 'reformed' because of an event in its past. It is reformed only if and so long as it is always in process of being reformed by the Word of God. The rule of episcopal ordination, universally applied in the present, comes dangerously near to denying the validity of presbyterian and congregational ordinations, which would be a grave error; to insist on the invariability of this rule for the whole of the foreseeable future is virtually to prevent God from causing more light and truth to break forth from his holy Word. If it is answered that there must be invariable features by which a church may be legally identified I should inquire whether openness and obedience to the Word of God, and readiness in such openness and obedience for change, might not be a very suitable *nota ecclesiae*.

With this I must come to the Service of Reconciliation. This has been modified in several respects since the first proposals of 1963, but I am unable to find any radical change in the latest form. The service arises out of two data: (1) the conviction that the scheme for unification must include at the start the unification of the two ministries; and (2) the belief of some members of the Church of England that a minister who has not been ordained by a bishop within the historic episcopate cannot be in any full and proper sense a minister of the Word, and especially of the sacraments, in the church of God. I know that these two factors were those that operated decisively in the Conversations that produced the Report of 1963; and there is no reason to suspect change. Nor, it should be said, has there been any attempt on the part of the Church of England to hide the facts. The simplest way of dealing with the situation would of course be for all Methodist ministers to accept ordination at the hands of Anglican bishops. This procedure is adopted on occasions when a Methodist minister leaves the Methodist

ministry in order to enter that of the Church of England. This is a perfectly clear procedure; no one is in any doubt about what is required and what is done. What the minister makes of his previous ordination is a matter for his own mind and conscience. Presumably it is in part at least because he has come to question its validity, or adequacy, that he decides to make the change. In the case of the uniting of the two churches this questioning is not to be presumed; indeed it is to some extent excluded by the declaration that ministers will sign before taking part in the service: 'I, A.B., having been ordained to the ministry of the Word and Sacraments in the Church of God according to the rites of the Church of England/Methodist Church. . . . I say 'to some extent' because in this sentence the participle 'having been ordained' receives whatever qualification may be thought to be contained in the phrase 'according to the rites of' so and so. But let us take the sentence at face value. No one questions Anglican ordinations, and no Methodist I know wishes to lay hands on Anglican ministers. The fact remains that some Anglicans believe that Methodist ordination is not true ordination, whereas Methodists believe that it is (though some of them write with greater warmth than clarity about the benefits they hope to receive through being integrated into the historic ministry). How then are the ministries to be integrated? The answer in a nutshell is: By means of a rite which those who so desire can believe to be the ordination of Methodist ministers, but which others can deny to be any such thing. On paper this is a brilliant idea, and worthy of *Alice*: all have won and all shall have prizes. Whether the principle is as satisfactory in real life as it appears to be in Wonderland is another matter. The 1968 Report devotes twelve pages (128-139) to objections, theological and practical, that have been raised against the proposal. I cannot pursue these in detail; each should read the objections, and the answers, for himself. Some at least will find the answers ingenious rather than convincing, and agree with the comment made by Dr. Packer (p. 182). Here, as so often in the past, the historic episcopate and the ministry dependent on it prove to be not the bond of unity but the occasion of disruption. Without it the way to unity would be open; with it, and with insistence upon it as a necessary condition not merely for union but for intercommunion, the separatism and exclusiveness inseparably bound up with legalism in any form immediately appear. If the Church of England does not regard Methodist ministers as real ministers of the Word and Sacraments, then we know where we are, and we must wait for full fellowship until a change of mind occurs, for we cannot deny our own ministry without denying God. If the Church of England does recognise our ministry, nothing prevents advance, and there is no need for episcopal ordination, open or veiled. If the Church of England is divided on so important a question, it would probably be wise to defer further steps towards unity until this internal division is healed. It is not easy to see how a minister can enter into unity with a church a substantial (and indeed determinative) part of which denies that he is truly a minister.

It is this problem that the Service of Reconciliation aims to solve by means of its studied ambiguity. Why should we not think and let think? Why should the Anglo-Catholic not believe that I am being

ordained, while I believe no such thing? There are theological answers to this question. One is that it will be difficult for me to assert that ordination has not taken place when the form and matter of the sacrament of orders are present. A second, balancing the first, is that a Catholic will find it difficult to affirm that catholic orders have been conferred when the supposed recipient declares that he has no intention of receiving them. The rite falls between two stools. But neither of these arguments seems to me so weighty as the moral argument. Reconciliation would hardly be achieved if after the service Anglo-Catholic and Methodist were both to proclaim their contradictory views of what had or had not happened; reconciliation of a sort would be achieved if each remained tactfully silent. But it would be a hollow reconciliation, based on radical disagreement and dishonourable silence. The situation is not saved by the proposition that we should 'leave to God' the question what needs to be done in the service. This might be more credible if the service had not been given the form of ordination; as it is, God (if I may put it so) is given so broad a hint of what is required that we can hardly say that it is 'left to him' to do what seems good in his sight. If 'leaving it to God' were meant seriously we could proceed at once to the joint communion service.

It is at this point that advocates of the Scheme retort: This is all very well, and it is easy to criticize; can you produce an alternative plan?

ALTERNATIVE

Here I must begin by once more taking up Dr. Packer's comment on the Scheme. An alternative plan is written into the Report itself; at least, the possibility of such an alternative is there.

It is well known that one of the problems that have always haunted the discussions has been the future of relations already existing between the two contracting churches and other churches. Thus the Church of England enjoys intercommunion with the Old Catholics, the Methodist Church with the other Free Churches of this country. It would be absurd, not to say unchristian, to initiate new relationships at the expense of the old. The problem was plainly put in the Dissentient Statement in the 1963 *Report*: 'When Stage II is reached, Methodism will exist only as part of a new Church, and, since this new Church can come into being only on the basis of the "strictest invariability" of episcopal ordination, it is very improbable that it will be in communion with non-episcopal Churches (cf. p. 48). Methodists will then no longer be in full communion with their reformed and evangelical brethren in the other Free Churches' (p. 61). These sentences, like the whole of the Dissentient Statement, were read and considered by the whole group, and since no complaint was made that they were an unfair inference from what was then proposed it must be assumed that they were at the time accepted by all, including the eight Methodists who approved the Scheme; the price, no doubt they thought, was one that would have to be paid. The thought, however, of breaking off relations with the other Free Churches raised something of a storm in Methodism, with the result that, at the expense this time of logic, it was officially declared that the Scheme was understood not to

involve such a rupture, and the maimed logic has persisted through the second *Interim Statement* and into the Final Report, which concludes its treatment of the subject with a plain *non possumus*.

'165 We are convinced that as our two Churches move forward into Stage One they should do so with the firm and declared intention that ways shall be found by which at Stage Two no relations at present maintained by either Church will be broken.

'166 As things stand at present the requirement of the strictest invariability of episcopal ordination, with its concomitant that the celebration of the Eucharist is confined to bishops and presbyters so ordained, cannot in a united Church be reconciled with a provision which allows the Holy Communion to be celebrated by visiting ministers who have not been episcopally ordained. This could cause an indefinite postponement of Stage Two. But since we believe it to be God's will that our Churches should unite, we must also believe that he will show us the right way through this difficulty. Progress towards unity among other Churches, and the changes of thought on the subject to which we have referred, justify our Churches in going forward without even a provisional solution to the problem before them. In Stage One they will remain autonomous, able freely to consider both by themselves and together the steps that will be needed in due course. As in mutual trust and common faith they pray and make their plans, we believe that the problem will be resolved' (pp. 53f.).

Once more, the language of piety is invoked to cloak the deficiency of thought; and one may suspect that what is hoped is that by the time Stage Two is reached the other Free Churches will have been induced to follow the Methodist Church in swallowing their scruples and adopting the historic episcopate. This hope, however, is not made explicit, and we must take the Report at its word: a way will be found by which non-episcopal ministers may be accepted in sacramental unity with a church which itself practises the strictest invariability of episcopal ordination. It is therefore unnecessary and unreasonable to require the Methodist Church to accept the historic episcopate as a condition of intercommunion. There is a way forward without it, and the way could be found; the Report itself says that the way could be found—though whether or not the Report is correct in this view is a fair question.

It is right at this point to say something about the South India Scheme, which has been widely canvassed as an alternative possibility, and is certainly a much better plan than that proposed to us, in that it rests upon immediate mutual acceptance of members and ministries without the intervention of any 'Service of Reconciliation'. One of the great stumbling-blocks in the present scheme is thus removed, but only one; for the historic episcopate remains. The significance of this has not always been fully grasped. Shortly after the 1930 Lambeth Conference Bernard Manning wrote:

'By a master stroke of ecclesiastical policy which I can never admire enough the last Lambeth Council turned what looked like a possible weakening of the harsh, legalistic view of episcopacy into the most smashing victory for Judaic legalism that it has won for centuries.

In South India a door so attractive has been opened that in thirty years the descendants of all non-episcopalians may be episcopalian. Yet the Episcopal Church in England has not modified its legalism in the least, for the Anglican Body is not to be in communion with the new Church, but only with such individuals in it as happen to be episcopalian. It is painless extinction for non-episcopalians. No one in fifty years will bother about the specially easy terms on which a few thousand Indian non-episcopalians made their peace with episcopacy. *The disappearance of any churchmanship except episcopalian churchmanship*: that is the fact of historic importance; and non-episcopalian churchmanship will have disappeared without English episcopacy moving one inch from its legalistic position: that is the tragic fact. A settlement in England on South Indian lines would mean that the legalistic and Judaic interpretation of churchmanship would be left without a challenge here' (*Essays in Orthodox Dissent*, pp. 135f.).

That is in these days an unpopular point of view, but it is one that I share. To say that, however, is not to deny that some modification of the South India scheme might be tolerable. The furthest one could go might perhaps be this. In South India the ministries were unified by immediate mutual acceptance; the historic episcopate was at the same time adopted as the framework of the church's life; for a thirty-year period ministers of the contracting churches were to be accepted, whatever form of ordination they had received, but after that episcopal ordination would be required. Suppose that instead of this we began with the integration of ministries by mutual acceptance under cover of a pledge, to enable participation by Anglo-Catholics, that for thirty years the historic episcopate would be maintained as the church's framework and basis, but with the undertaking that at the end of the thirty years this form of church order would lapse, and the church be free to reconstitute itself on whatever basis then seemed good to it, in the light of Scripture and reason. I should embark upon such a scheme with misgiving, because I question whether the present built-in majority in favour of the historic episcopate would die out in thirty years; the bishops would be sitting tenants, and not easy to evict. But it might be workable, and worth trying, if organised unity is as vital as some people think. Certainly one would not be put off by the fact that some Anglicans would discriminate against older Methodists, whose ordination preceded the inauguration of the scheme, in favour of younger men whose ordination had been episcopal. The 1968 Report (p. 142) makes far too much of the bitterness which it is supposed this discrimination would engender. To me it seems no whit more objectionable than the present situation in which the Church of England as a whole, though willing to read my books and even to hear my sermons, firmly dispenses with my presence at Holy Communion.

Those who have opposed the scheme which was set out in 1963 and developed in 1968 have understandably and properly been sensitive to the challenge, what have you to put in its place? And this is not an easy question to answer, especially if one is not satisfied with the South India alternative. As we have seen, the authors of the 1968 Report confess their own inability to see how non-episcopal churches

can be in communion with the united church envisaged in Stage Two. What this suggests—and the conclusion is of fundamental importance—is that the relation between the Catholic and the Protestant understanding of Christianity has not yet been adequately thought through. We have lived through a generation that has sought to demonstrate the Catholicity of Protestantism, and today we witness here and there attempts from within to reform Roman Catholicism. The latter in particular are of first rate importance, and should be viewed with intelligent sympathy. But though in many ways individuals have approached one another, learnt to understand one another, and sometimes changed their views, this has not meant that Catholic and Protestant have ceased to stand for two diverse ways of conceiving the Christian religion. Is it possible to comprehend them within one church? It is answered: Yes; the Church of England is the witness. On this a few (out of many) comments may be made. The first is that a Catholicism which does not include Rome is rather like Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark. The second is that it depends upon the congregationalism of the Church of England. The third is that it depends upon Catholic church order. This point has been made clear in successive Reports. The 1968 Report (p. 28) borrows words from that of 1963 (p. 48): 'The full range of this liberty of interpretation is safeguarded only if the strictest invariability of episcopal ordination is preserved. "For, while it is possible to hold a 'low' view of episcopacy within a strict invariability of practice, it becomes impossible to hold a 'high' view where this invariability is broken." ' This will hardly satisfy those who believe that church order is not, or ought not to be, independent of doctrine, but that it should itself reflect and express the Gospel.

No facile juxtaposition of Catholic and Protestant is likely to effect lasting reconciliation and unity. And, however impatient the ecclesiastical politicians, old and young, may become, the theological conversation between the two will take time. I do not think that this conversation, though it may outlast our generation, is hopeless. It will be hopeful, however, to the extent to which both groups are prepared to get down to the roots; and it is partly, though by no means wholly, with that in mind that I come to the last main division of my paper.

HAVE WE YET BECOME RADICAL ENOUGH?

Theological and ecclesiastical argument has an unfortunate trick of finding what I may call the lowest common level. Of two sets of premises represented by two participants it is as a rule the lower that provides the basis of discussion. The clearest example of what I mean is to be found in the familiar debates that have been conducted over the regularity and validity of orders and sacraments. It is all understandable enough. If one says to me, Your orders and sacraments are irregular and invalid, I find it natural to reply, But indeed they are both valid and regular, and to buttress my assertions with all the arguments I can find, without stopping to ask myself whether regularity and validity (in the sense in which these terms are being used) are

concepts that may with any appropriateness be applied to the ministry and the sacraments. In our generation the classical example of this process is to be found in the booklet called *The Catholicity of Protestantism* (1950), to which I have already alluded. It is perhaps unfair to characterise this work, which contains some excellent things, in a couple of lines; but it is not untrue to say that, in response to the charge made in the parallel Report *Catholicity* (1947) that Protestantism had departed from the wholeness of the Christian faith, the authors set out to show the harmony of classical Protestantism with the ancient and medieval church. They might in the end have done better service had they brought out the protest of Protestantism. My point at the moment however is that most of us are tarred with the same brush. When evangelicalism is impugned from the Catholic side most of us tend to reply in catholic terms and on catholic premises. At least, this is true among Methodists. So far as evangelicals have improved upon this position it has often been in terms of evangelical orthodoxy, with the rediscovery and reiteration of an evangelical tradition which runs back to Luther and Calvin, and has its representatives both in the Church of England and in orthodox dissent. The propositions of evangelical dogmatics are then backed up with scriptural support. This is indeed a great improvement, in so far as evangelical dogmatics are an improvement upon catholic dogmatics, and represent a movement in the direction of scriptural faith and practice.

My question is whether this movement has yet gone far enough, and whether those who profess to ground their faith and teaching upon Scripture have yet begun to listen carefully enough to what Scripture says, and to allow Scripture to speak in its own terms. If both Catholics and Evangelicals can do this, and I am not without hope that they will, though one can hardly hope for so much from the ecclesiastical politicians on either side, or on the cross-benches, then I think the future, though difficult, may prove very interesting and positive.

Consider the church, and what it means to be a member of it. Could Paul, for example, have produced a list of baptised and confirmed communicants in the church of Corinth? He seems to have regarded baptism as a usual and a proper rite, but he certainly could not answer for it that every Christian in Corinth had been baptised; he could not even remember whom he had himself baptised. There is no hint of confirmation, but this is not surprising in view of the fact that, as far as one can tell, only adults were baptised. How did a man know that he was a Christian? The mere fact of his baptism no more assured him of salvation than their baptism had guaranteed the Israelites against sin and damnation in the wilderness. The desire to have an impressive ministry on which to rely soon makes itself known; the idea (canvassed recently) of a 'great ministry for a great church' was well known in Corinth, where it was firmly, if not quite successfully, repressed by Paul; if you want to see the apostolic ministry, he says, look in the gutter.

I have already adumbrated the second and third themes to which I wish briefly to refer: the ministry and the sacraments. Neither the Church of England nor the Methodist Church would, I think, look

favourably upon a minister who earned his living by making tents and was content to preach, and care for his flock, in what spare time he could find. I am not arguing against a regular, full-time ministry; I think that a church that can afford one is in a fortunate position. I am concerned that we should not confound essentials with superfluities; concerned too that passages such as 1 Cor. 12: 7 (To each one is given his own manifestation of the Spirit, with a view to mutual profit) should be taken seriously. To do so is to take a great risk—a far greater risk than that of putting the vernacular Bible in the hands of every church member, but it is one that must be taken.

Paul (I am remaining in the central part of the New Testament) tells us a good deal about the ministry of the word; he tells us nothing about a ministry of the sacraments. 1 Cor. 11 does not suggest the existence of any special person appointed to preside at the Lord's Supper; indeed, it implies the opposite. 1 Cor. 14 depicts a situation in which the interested outsider could make his way into the Christian assembly, listen with amusement and scorn to the noisy phenomenon of speaking with tongues, with growing concern and ultimate conviction to Christian prophecy; and then might stay for supper. Why not? It is true that things were going badly at Corinth, but where they went well the power of Christian fellowship and conviction, and above all the presence of the Lord himself, could be counted upon to convert the inquirer into a believer. To eat and drink together in the bonds of a common loyalty was to enter jointly into the realm of salvation that Christ had won by the offering of his body and the shedding of his blood.

The church walked along a knife-edge; there was no proof that Paul was an apostle; the holy supper had no clear-cut limits, and could turn into a drunken brawl. The Christian Gospel had no external supports, and claimed no external authority. If it was not supported by its own truth, it must fall; if men could not live by faith, they must die without it. They could hope for no greater or more comfortable security than Christ crucified himself. It is this, I believe, that Christians today, concerned as so many of us are to find security not only against unbelief but against our fellow-Christians too, have to relearn.

This is the appropriate point for me to sum up what I have to say in terms of the sub-title that has been given me—a *Question of Conscience*, a question therefore that each individual must answer for himself. I know where I stand, and why. I can bring many criticisms against the latest form of the scheme for union between the Church of England and the Methodist Church. I have mentioned only a few in this paper. Of the rest, some are relatively trivial, but many are profound. Whether I can convince anyone else of their validity I do not know. But for me the decisive consideration is that not so much the details as the presuppositions of the scheme appear to me to contradict what I think I have learned about Christianity from the New Testament. The scheme is concerned about the church as an institution; the New Testament is not. The scheme is concerned about the rights, authority, and authorisation of a separated ministry; the New Testament is not. The scheme is concerned for the security, permanency, and delimitation

of the church; the New Testament is not. The scheme is concerned to protect the means of grace, to exclude the unworthy and to invite the worthy; the New Testament is about a God whose grace and undistinguishing regard lead Him to give Himself away, prodigally, sacrificially, to the unworthiest He can find. The scheme is enclosed within the safe keeping of the bulwarks of dogmatic and ecclesiastical security; the New Testament church lives in the insecurity of faith, under the Cross. Conscience is instructed by reason and the word; and I know where conscience leads me.