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Ecumenism, Models of the Church and Styles of Authority

Robin Nixon.

1. The Doctrinal Basis for Ecumenism.

The basic reasons for the unity of the church seem to be set out clearly in the New Testament. The fact of our history of division over centuries means that we have to think, in ways that the New Testament writers could not, of ecumenism as well as unity.

a. **The Nature of God.** Even if it is often somewhat overworked, John 17:20-23 is still a passage of basic importance. The prayer of our Lord is that his church should be one as he was one with the Father, being in him and loved by him. Likewise we find in Ephesians 4:4-6 that the unity of the church depends upon the oneness of the Spirit, the Lord and the God and Father of us all. In 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 we read of the same Spirit, Lord and God and in vv.11-13 of the same Spirit and the one Spirit and of the one body being Christ.

b. **The Nature of the Gospel.** It would be impossible to conceive the gospel of the grace of God being preached to people and their being told to respond in different ways and to be divided from each other. So in Ephesians 4:4f. we read that there is one hope that belongs to our call and one faith.

c. **The Nature of the Sacraments.** One of the reasons for keeping the unity of the church which is given in both Ephesians 4:5 and 1 Corinthians 12:13 is that there is one baptism and in 1 Corinthians 12:13 that we were all baptized into one body. In an earlier chapter Paul had appealed to the Eucharist as a ground of unity; because there is one bread we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread (1 Cor. 10:17).

d. **The Nature of the Ministry.** In Ephesians 4.11-16 Paul shows that at least the purpose, if not the nature, of the ministry which Christ has given to his church is to build up the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.

e. **The Nature of the Covenant.** This is a point which does not seem to me to have been often made and it is based on the Old Testament. The heart of the covenant is 'I will be your God and you shall be my people'. Jeremiah 31:31-4 is perhaps representative of a number of passages after the disruption which show that Yahweh's covenant is with the house of Israel *and* the house of Judah.

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If one were to ask what sort of unity was in mind in the New Testament there is little doubt that the answer is fully visible unity. That does not mean necessarily the same as uniformity and there was clearly a good deal of divergence of opinion in many of the local churches. But it is inconceivable that the 'Paul', 'Apollos', 'Cephas' groups (1 Cor. 1:12) should have been encouraged to set up their own structures. The amount of space that is taken up in the New Testament in showing how important it was that Jewish and Gentile churches, usually in different areas, should be able to live in unity forbids us to think that local disunity in faith and order could be tolerated.

2. Models of the Church.

It has been recognised for most of the lifetime of the modern ecumenical movement that divisions in the past have often been caused by different conceptions of what the church is or ought to be. In some cases this may have been a rationalisation of situations which occurred for other reasons but over the generations the different churches have grown up with different ecclesiologies which have represented their sense of identity and distinctiveness. It has been one of the gains of recent years that the radical mood, which has in some ways done great damage to the Christian cause, has made us reassess our understanding of the church and helped us to see that the basic 'models' with which the different churches operate need not be exclusive and that the holding of one without the others is likely to lead to an unbalanced and impoverished doctrine of the church.

Church history in the West has made us see the great division as Catholic versus Protestant. The Church of England has been aware of this tension and has tried to hold it within herself with the majority view sometimes veering one way and sometimes the other. Other churches have also been anxious to claim a full catholicity as well as the inheritance of the Reformation, and more recently there have been voices and movements in the Roman Catholic Church which (even in the case of the Pope!) have sometimes been labelled as 'Protestant'. While this word began life as a positive one it has too often acquired a negative sense or one with very little religious content and it would in most cases be better replaced by the word 'Evangelical', if this is given in a sufficiently wide connotation.

A number of important books have appeared on this theme in the post-war period. F.W. Dillistone's *The Structure of the Divine Society* (Lutterworth, 1951) was a recognition that just as in international diplomacy men were talking about organic union between states and others about *federal* union, so these two concepts were to be found in thinking about the

reunion of the church. Some were stressing the one *Body* of Christ and some the one *Covenant* of Christ. Dr Dillistone's own experience was largely of the former within Anglicanism and the latter within Presbyterianism. His book is in three sections. The first deals with organic and covenantal views in the Bible and the second with them in the history of the church. The third section he calls 'Constructive' and in it he first lists six types of community which have emerged in Christian history. (1) The Monastic (2) The Imperial (3) The Organic (4) The Covenantal (5) The Contractual (6) The Sectarian. He finds that '(1) and (6) are fringe-types or tangential-types of Christian community corresponding to the more Catholic or more Protestant emphasis respectively: (2) and (5) are static-types or organizational-types corresponding again to the Catholic and Protestant emphases: while (3) and (4) are dynamic personal types which for our purpose are the most significant . . .' (p.147). He ends by seeking to combine the two concepts under the title 'Heirs of the Covenant in One Body' and reminds us that the church is both the Body of Christ 'one in her derivation from Him and in her dependence upon Him . . .' and 'the People of the Blood-Covenant, the Covenant of His Cross . . .' (p.246).

Two years later this was followed by another book with a similar approach and outlook: *The Household of God* (SCM Press, 1953) by Lesslie Newbigin. The author was a former Presbyterian missionary who was involved in the setting up of the united Church of South India in 1947 and had become Bishop of Madurai. All those involved in that highly significant pioneering reunion scheme were well placed to have thought from the heart as well as the head about the true nature of the church and the different models with which it had been expressed in the different traditions which had come together. What was particularly significant about the book was the wider context in which it set the 'Protestant' and 'Catholic' models. First of all it included Pentecostalism, which was at that time a force largely centred in South America and largely out of contact with the historic Christianity of the West. Little could he have known how this 'third force' would find itself operating within the mainline churches within less than a generation under the rather different guise of 'the charismatic movement'. He confesses a very large omission in that there is no proper treatment of the Orthodox understanding of the church, but significant extra dimensions are given to the book by the last two chapters which 'argue that the Church is only to be understood in a perspective which is at once eschatological and missionary, the perspective of the end of the world and the ends of the earth' (p.9).

Newbigin's introductory chapter accounts for the prominence of the doctrine of the church in recent theological discussion by the interaction of

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several closely related factors, especially the breakdown of Christendom, the missionary experience in lands outside of the old Christendom and the rise of the modern ecumenical movement. Another quarter of a century has intensified all these factors. He starts with the Protestant view of the church which he entitles 'The Congregation of the Faithful'. This stresses the doctrine of justification by faith and the relationship of the believer to God. He views this as a dynamic concept of the church but one in which at times 'the eschatological has completely pushed out the historical' (p.50). Faith can be treated over-intellectually and the concept of the visible unity of the church can easily be lost. The purely spiritual can become the purely private. The Catholic view of the church is summed up under the model of 'The Body of Christ'. He stresses God's saving activity among his people as a whole and the solidarity of the individual in the group and also the importance of the sacraments in the constitution of the church. Continuity in the transmission of authority he finds to be important but sees the danger that the Catholic approach will subordinate eschatology to history and treat the church as 'having, for all practical purposes, the whole plenitude of God's grace in itself now' (p.83). This can easily lead on to the situation in which Catholic definitions of the church may accept a church which has lost all its marks except continuity with the past and reject one which has every other mark of the church but that. The Pentecostal view is entitled 'The Community of the Holy Spirit'. 'If we would answer the question 'Where is the Church?' we must ask 'Where is the Holy Spirit recognisably present with power?'. The definition of this is not to be agreed, as it could be with the other two types, in a court of law. Yet the presence of the Holy Spirit is vital to the existence of the church. Nonetheless there are dangers in the particular approach. There is the danger of a non-historical mysticism if the Spirit is divorced from the word and the sacrament. There is a danger that the extempore and the unprepared will be thought more spiritual than the customary or the planned. There is a danger that the pentecostal congregation may have no idea of the wider unity of the church.

In his penultimate chapter 'Christ in You, the Hope of Glory' Newbigin says 'I hope to have shown that all of these three are rooted in the very nature of the Gospel itself, and that the denial of any of them leads to the disfigurement of the Church and the distortion of its message'. (p.111). Yet it is true that 'each body is compelled to regard what it holds as of the *esse* of the Church. Yet nobody can admit that what others hold apart from it, is of the *esse* of the Church for that would destroy its own claim to be the Church' (*ibid.*). He therefore bids us look at things in the light of eschatology and see that the church 'is what it is not yet, it longs to be what it is'. (p.116). He thinks that we should ask of a church not only 'What is it now?' but also

'What is it becoming?' and that we should accept each other in our common failure to be what the church ought to be and to throw ourselves upon the mercy of God. The final chapter 'Unto All the Nations' is a reminder that between the church militant and the consummation lies the unfinished missionary task. One of the purposes of the unity of the church is so that the world might believe. The task of evangelism should put all our disagreements in perspective.

Another rather shorter but interesting book which has a similar approach is *Two Biblical Faiths: Protestant and Catholic* (ET Lutterworth 1964) by F.J. Leenhardt. He finds the spirituality of Abraham to be a basically 'Protestant' one and that of Moses to be a basically 'Catholic' one and traces them through the Bible.

'The spirituality stemming from Abraham develops its promises if the Mosaic spirituality provides it with a sphere in which to act, a material to animate and quicken. On its side, the spirituality stemming from Moses develops its promises if the Abrahamic spirituality acts upon it as salt and leaven' (p. 113).

There is much of value in this book though I should like to look at it further with the third Newbigin category in mind. A recent Roman Catholic book on the same theme which has recently come to hand is *Models of the Church: A Critical Assessment of the Church in All Its Aspects*, by Avery Dulles, S.J. (Gill and Macmillan, 1976). The author has sifted out five major approaches or models in ecclesiology.

'Each of these models is considered and evaluated in itself, and as a result of this critical assessment I draw the conclusion that a balanced theology of the Church must find a way of incorporating the major affirmations of each basic ecclesiological type. Each of the models calls attention to certain aspects of the Church that are less clearly thought out by the other models' (p. 7).

He is emphatic that we must work simultaneously with different models. But 'although all the models have their merits, they are not of equal worth, and some presentations of some models must positively be rejected' (p. 30). The first model he gives us is the institution. He sees the strength of this approach as being in Catholic tradition, in keeping links between an uncertain present and an esteemed religious past and in giving a strong sense of corporate identity. Against that however lie the facts that it has a comparatively meagre basis in Scripture and early Christian tradition, that it may promote clericalism, juridicism and triumphalism; that it binds theology too exclusively to the defence of currently official positions; that it is ecumenically sterile and that it is out of phase with the demands of the times. A moderate institutionalism can be understood better by seeing the church as mystical communion. This particularly finds expression in the

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images of the body of Christ and of the people of God. Each of these is of value in emphasising the immediate relationship of all believers to the Holy Spirit who directs the whole church. Dulles thinks that it can seem egotistical and monopolistic to talk of the church as the people of God unless it is made clear that this depends on the new covenant. There have been some difficulties of interpretation of the phrase 'the body of Christ' and it can lead to an unhealthy divinisation of the church. The stress on interpersonal relationships in these models is valued though they leave some obscurity regarding the relationships between the spiritual and visible dimensions of the church. The model of the church as a sacrament he sees as especially useful in relating the idea of the church as institution with the idea of the church as a mystical communion of grace. But he acknowledges that as yet the idea has had very little hold in Protestant thought.

Dulles next turns to the model of the church as herald. He follows this through Barth to Bultmann and the post-Bultmannians and to Kung and, in his only direct point of contact with Lesslie Newbigin, quotes his criticisms of the series of disconnected happenings which Barthianism seems to imply. While all the models referred to so far give the church a primary or privileged position, the last model of the church as servant (which has become very popular in the last few years) is very different. But there is a danger if the distinctive mission and identity of the church is obscured and the servant notion of the Kingdom goes astray if it sets itself up in opposition to the kerygmatic.

After discussing these models Dulles then deals with the way in which eschatology affects them all and concludes that the coming of the Kingdom will not be the destruction but the fulfilment of the church. A chapter on the true church deals with the four marks of unity: holiness, catholicity and apostolicity. These marks are differently understood in the different models.

The most fundamental divergence is between the institutional model and the other four. The institutional model identifies the true Church undialectically with a given existing body, which is said to be "substantially" the Church of Jesus Christ. The other four models by their inner logic tend to depict the attributes of the true Church as ideals that are to a certain extent incarnated in history, thanks to the work of Jesus Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit in the communities that accept Jesus as Lord' (p. 129).

'Vatican II favoured a compromise position. In agreement with the institutional view, it held that the one true Church of Christ subsists on earth in the Catholic Church. In agreement with the other models, it admitted that the Catholic Church is itself an imperfect, and in that sense deficient, realization of the Church of Christ' (*ibid.*).

In a chapter entitled 'The Church and the Churches' he shows the way

in which each model can be related to ecumenism. The institutional model is the most difficult but some Roman Catholic thinking has gone along the lines that the church of Christ, while it exists fully in one communion alone, exists in a real but deficient manner in other communions. The concept of the church as being on a pilgrimage between the first and second advents of Christ is helpful in this area.

Dulles next proceeds to relate ecclesiology and ministry, and he reminds us that the church in every age has adjusted its structures and offices so as to operate more effectively in the social environment in which it finds itself. In the institutional model of the church priesthood is viewed primarily in terms of power. With the model of the church as mystical communion the priest is builder and animator of the Christian community. The sacramental model gives the priest a role as sacred mediator, but there is a danger that the priest will be viewed as a substitute for the community and 'in Roman Catholicism today we are witnessing a full-scale revolt against the excesses of the sacral concept of ministry' (p.158). In the kerygmatic model of the church the ordained minister is seen necessarily as primarily a preacher. In relation to the servant model of the church, Dulles does not produce one noun but a certain understanding of the word 'prophet' might meet what he says.

'The fulness of the priestly office, which very few individuals adequately encompass would include the building of Christian community, presiding at worship, the proclamation of the word of God, and activity for the transformation of secular society in the light of the gospel. These functions do not exclude one another, but they stand in some mutual tension, so that a given priest will not be equally involved in all four' (p. 165).

The author's next task is to relate the various models to the concept of divine revelation. The institutional model makes the church the guardian of revelation and an authoritative and infallible teacher. What mattered was to believe things because the church taught them whatever their content happened to be. In the mystical communion model revelation is seen as less propositional and more personal and is practically identified with grace, and faith with the acceptance of grace. The Holy Spirit has a central role. The church is seen less as a mediator or transmitter of revelation than as the gathering of those who have received revelation. This approach however has the danger of fostering little communes for rarified experiences and promoting subjectivism and emotionalism. The sacramental model sees two levels of revelation – the implicit and the explicit, the unthematic and the thematic. The ineffable encounter comes to expression through some kind of visible symbolisation. The perseverance of the church in the truth of the gospel gives it a certain qualified infallibility. The chief weakness of this

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theory is said to be that it may lead itself to a certain aestheticism. Under the next model the revelation is designated as the Word of God. This word is incarnate, written and proclaimed. The church is a herald of revelation but its preaching and tradition must be measured by the norm of scripture and it is continually in need of correction and reform. Dulles affirms that many Catholics find this emphasis helpful but that it needs the theocratic input of the second model and the sacramental emphasis of the third.

'Otherwise there is a risk that the theology of revelation may become too extensive, too word-centred, too authoritarian, too unappreciative of non-Christian religious experience, and too apathetic to the great events of secular history' (p.175).

Corresponding to the servant model of the church there has grown up a more cosmic revelation theory influenced by Teilhard de Chardin.* The church must enter into dialogue with all men of good will to discern what God is doing in the world and to foster in it the values of the Kingdom. The strengths and weaknesses of this approach he believes to be the opposite of those of the former approach. 'Christians who are inclined to this theory have constantly to ask themselves whether they have any clear message, whether they stand for anything definite that they could not stand for without Christ' (p.177).

'The Evaluation of Models' is the title of Dulles' final chapter. The problems of criteria are manifold, so Dulles seeks criteria that are acceptable to adherents of a number of different models though not all equally appealing to all members of all theological schools. He gives the following:

1. Basis in Scripture.
2. Basis in Christian tradition.
3. Capacity to give Church members a sense of their corporate identity and mission.
4. Tendency to foster the virtues and values generally admired by Christians.
5. Correspondence with the religious experience of men today.
6. Theological fruitfulness.
7. Fruitfulness in enabling Church members to relate successfully to those outside their own group.

He suggests that 1. gives good support to the community and kerygmatic models; 2. to the community model; 3. to the institutional and kerygmatic models; 4. to the sacramental and servant models; 5. to the community and servant models; 6. to the sacramental model; 7. to the community and servant models. He reminds us that

'Church officials have a tendency to prefer the institutional model; ecumenists, the community model; speculative theologians, the sacramental

model; preachers and biblical scholars, the kerygmatic model; and secular activists, the servant model' (p.182).

He then suggests two principles to support a reconciling approach:

'The first is that what any large group of Christian believers have confidently held over a considerable period of time should be accepted unless one has serious reasons for questioning it' (*ibid.*).

The second is that men are more apt to be correct in what they affirm than in what they deny. He therefore presumes that the basic assertions implied in each of the models are valid but that they cannot all be accepted without qualification and that they suggest different priorities and even lead to mutually antithetical assertions. He believes that the sacramental model has particular merit for blending the values of the various other models but that the institutional model cannot properly be taken as primary. Changes in secular society suggest that the following trends, already observable in recent church history, will continue:

1. Modernisation of structures.
2. Ecumenical interplay.
3. Internal pluralism.
4. Provisionality.
5. Voluntariness.

But what the church will become in the future is dependent upon the free initiatives of the Holy Spirit. New models will arise but those discussed in this book will not lose their significance.

If the Newbigin and Dulles categories are compared it will be seen that there is a certain amount of common ground between them though they do not agree entirely. Dulles' institution model would clearly fall into Newbigin's Catholic category, as would his sacramental model. His communion model is in some ways closer to Newbigin's Pentecostal category. The kerygmatic model clearly is the same as Newbigin's Protestant category and the servant model probably adds a category absent from Newbigin, the Liberal. The stress on eschatology which is found in both works should enable us to see Dulles' 'People of God' in a more positive light if we think of them as a pilgrim people, as with Kasemann on the Epistle to the Hebrews *Das wandernde Gottesvolk*.

The reasons given in section 1. for unity and ecumenism relate to the various models and categories. The nature of God could be taken as supporting an institutional model but is more properly related to the communion model. The nature of the sacraments and ministry support a sacramental model, which is also related to the nature of the covenant. The nature of the gospel and the covenant undergird the kerygmatic model. And it is possible that, where those who espouse the servant model still believe church unity

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to be relevant at all, they could find a rationale in the idea of the unity of mankind.

3. Styles of Authority.

If we can accept that there are these different models, and perhaps others too, all of which have their part to play, but none of which is absolutely definitive, then the question of the authority for them and the authority residing in them becomes an issue of importance. Dulles has related his models of the church to the idea of revelation and to the ministry, and it is in both these areas that authority is of primary importance. For the ultimate authority of revelation has in practice to be applied to people in their local situation.

a. Authority in Revelation.

The agelong conflict of Bible, Church and reason has taken on new forms recently. As far as biblical authority is concerned the *Ecumenical Review* xxi. 2 (1969) contains a number of important articles and the theme is developed by James Barr in his *The Bible in the Modern World* (SCM Press, 1973). Barr uses the terms 'hard' and 'soft'. He defines 'hard' authority as meaning that the Bible has authority before it is interpreted and that that authority is applicable generally. This type of concept has normally been prevalent in the understanding of biblical authority, particularly in the West. This may be partly connected with the Roman legal tradition which has had such a great influence in many aspects of church affairs. 'Soft' authority on the other hand suggests that authority comes after the interpretation and application and is limited to passages where as authoritative effect has in fact been found. He commends this idea, with its more personal and religious connotation, of a passage that has 'spoken to us with authority', as a correct description of the way in which many people in fact, become convinced of the authority of the Bible. But he goes on to conclude that 'when carried beyond this, however, and given the *logical* status of the *ground* for belief in biblical authority, it is manifestly wrong' (pp.27-9, his italics).

Can we say that basic to the Protestant/Evangelical concept of the has been the idea of the 'hard' authority of the Bible? The authority of the church has then been seen to be 'soft' as has the authority of what is claimed to be 'the Spirit' or 'reason'. (It should I think be noted that in certain limited respects there is a close affinity between Liberal-type and Pentecostal-type views, and indeed in the twenties for example the Spirit seemed to have been almost adopted by the former!).

Can we next assert that traditionally basic to the Catholic concepts

of the church has been the sense that both Bible and church have 'hard' authority? 'Soft' authority has lain with what claims to be 'the Spirit' or 'reason'. The divergence between orthodox Roman Catholics and others who would claim 'Catholic' as a primary label for their position has been over where the 'hard' authority of the church can actually be seen to operate. They have been criticised by the first group for making the authority of the church 'hard' because this has so frequently had the effect of making the professedly 'hard' authority of the Bible in fact 'soft'. But if Dulles' strictures against the institutional model were to be accepted this would have some effect upon the 'hardness' of the authority of the church.

When we look at the third group can we say that, for those with a Pentecostal approach, in most cases the Bible's authority is seen as 'hard', in some cases the church's authority is also seen as 'hard' but that some would wish to make the authority of the contemporary Holy Spirit also 'hard'? If that is in fact the case, the result would be that the authority of Bible and church would be likely to become 'soft'.

Meanwhile in the more radical writings of men like C.F. Evans and D.E. Nineham ('The Use of the Bible in Modern Theology' *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* lii. 1969, pp.178-199) the propriety of having any norms of authority at all is questioned. As Evans puts it:

'If it was the case that religious models, and especially the Old Testament were in the end too much for Christianity, so that a time came when it was no longer possible to say "These are writings which have belonged from the first to our movement, they are the best we have and they have recommended themselves", and one could only say "This is holy scripture", does it, follow from the nature of the case that the church has always to think in this way?'

(Is 'Holy Scripture' *Christian and Other Questions?*, SCM Press 1971).

On this sort of view there is really no 'hard' authority anywhere.

b. Authority in Ministry.

Dulles rightly pointed out the way in which different models of the church appeal to people with different abilities and roles in leadership. We find likewise that the authority of revelation has to be mediated at local level. The Evangelical will see the preacher/Bible teacher with the authority of his calling mediating the authority of the Bible. The Catholic will see the priest with the authority of his office mediating the authority of the church. The Pentecostal will see the prophet with the authority of his gift mediating the authority of the Spirit. There is a danger that the way in which each of these exercises his authority (as also of the scholar with the authority of his learning mediating the authority of reason) may be so much dependent upon

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himself that the people to whom he ministers may in fact be cut of from what he claims to be his primary source of authority. (For a further discussion of problems in this area see also Peter Hinchcliff, 'Authority in the Church' in *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, Sept. 1976, pp. 42-51 and John Goldingay, *Authority and Ministry*, Grove Booklet on Ministry and Worship no. 46, Oct. 1976).

4. The Way Ahead?

The way ahead in ecumenism today is likely to be to a large extent through the acceptance of other positions. When these represent the same thing in a different form, there should be no great difficulty. If we are truly radical, going back to our roots in the Christ event and its interpretation in the New Testament, we can find the way in which our varied approaches have evolved. The church at Corinth for example exhibited characteristics of all Newbigin's main categories. If you had asked a Corinthian how he knew he was a Christian he might have said 'I have believed the gospel', or 'I have been baptised' or 'I have received spiritual gifts'. The three answers refer to the same thing but have sadly been separated in the history of the church. (Incidentally I treasure a cutting from a Roman Catholic newspaper of 25 or so years ago which tells for children the story of the healing of the official's son in John 4. It concludes 'They all became Catholics. That was their way of saying Thank You.' But others may have read it as if they had all become Evangelicals . . . !). It does look now as if we are prepared to see the limitations of our partial approaches. Dulles may be right in believing that the institutional model is going out of favour. If so the prospects of mutual acceptance are much brighter. For the institutional model tends to drive people to the past, to pedigree and credentials, while the other models are more open to each other and to the future. It is the hard legal element in this approach which has made problems of the integration of ministries so difficult.

The Churches' Unity Commission is *Visible Unity: Ten Propositions* seems to take this sort of approach when stating as proposition 6: 'We agree to recognise, as from an accepted date, the ordained ministries of the other covenanting churches, as true ministries of word and sacraments in the Holy Catholic Church . . .'. This should be concerned with the future rather than the past, and being in communion with the bishop is a more positive test than whether hands have been laid on each minister individually. (See e.g. G.W.H. Lampe 'The Limuru Principle and Church Unity', *The Churchman*, 88.1, Jan-Mar 1974).

Yet the approach of mutual acceptance is more difficult when we tackle the problem of authority in revelation. The easiest way would be to

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follow an extreme radical line and let everybody believe just what they wished. But in the end that would destroy the church. There have been approaches recently to restating traditional positions in order to find the common ground which lay behind them. The ARCIC reports are the major examples, but within Anglicanism *Growing into Union* (SPCK, 1970) was a similar attempt. Here two Catholic authors (the Bishop of Willesden [now of Truro] and Eric Mascall) in the thick of the Anglican-Methodist reunion controversy sat down with two Evangelicals (Colin Buchanan and Jim Packer) to try and formulate an agreed approach. In all these and other cases the results have not been above criticism but it remains remarkable how much has been achieved. If revelation is about truth then it cannot be bartered and there must be a wholehearted attempt to get back to the faith of the apostolic New Testament, which enshrines the teaching of the apostolic church inspired by the apostolic Spirit. Where Bible, church and Spirit speak with one voice there is no problem. Where they have diverged, confessions have been necessary to help the church to accept the 'hard' authority of the Bible and a proper modern confession might very well do wonders for the authority of the church. (For an attempt at staking out the ground among non-Roman Catholic churches see J.I. Packer, 'Towards a Confession for Tomorrow's Church', *The Churchman*, 87.4, Winter 1973). It is perhaps at this point that there comes the biggest challenge to the ecumenical movement today.

This exploratory paper was prepared for the meeting of English ARC (Anglican/Roman Catholic) in October 1976 before the ARCIC statement on authority was published.