The Place of Ambiguity in Schemes for Reunion

By Colin Buchanan

THE principle of ambiguity is frequently invoked in current discussion in the Church of England, both in drafting schemes of reunion and in producing new liturgical texts. The principle is one which seems at first sight to have caught evangelicals on the hop—for they tolerate it in eucharistic liturgy whilst sternly opposing it in the Service of Reconciliation. The writer (who has been involved personally in pursuing both these policies simultaneously) believes that the two attitudes are highly compatible. It has become clear however that this compatibility needs demonstrating, and a satisfactory demonstration of it may prove to point to a solution of the reunion problem as forward looking as that recently found to the eucharistic one.

A good place to begin an enquiry into this is the doctrinal statements of *Towards Reconciliation* (the Interim Statement of the Anglican-Methodist Unity Commission). These statements are characterised by a deceptively simple, but very forward-looking, method of procedure. They merely *describe* the situation in the two churches, without *prescribing* anything beyond what is already prescribed in the churches. They proceed by charting common ground first, and declaring that it is sufficient for full communion to be established. They then list different private opinions which are agreed to be allowable but not enforceable in the two churches. This produces *in toto* a framework within which solutions to problems are to be found. A good instance is provided by the Scripture and Tradition statement, which is intended to ensure that 'the ongoing debate about divine revelation' does go on exactly as before. The debate is not to be pre-empted by some statement which would settle it not on the merits of the case, but by some form of quasi-censorship of all positions but one. There lies in this approach a healthy tendency to deliver the churches from a sterile legalism into a situation where a theological position will prevail by its sheer vigour, or collapse through its inward emptiness. If this is different from the more rigorous forms of sixteenth or seventeenth century confessionalism (and it is), yet it is not altogether worse, even from an evangelical standpoint. There are dangers and risks, yes. The nature of revelation is itself the field in which the dangers are greatest. But granted that the churches are going to be broadly committed to the Bible and the God of the Bible, the way is then open for the outworking of the doctrine of semper reformanda. And confessionalism has its dangers too. Evangelicals may need to be prised away from a reliance upon the legal status of documents to a commitment to further searching of the Scriptures and to serving God

with their minds in a changing church. In such a pilgrimage evangelicals should find themselves trusting the Spirit of God to maintain the truth he originally revealed.

Now no-one could exactly describe this openness as ambiguity, but it is clearly designed to secure the same ends that evangelicals have sought in accepting some ambiguity in the prayers about the departed and in the anamnesis in the Second Series eucharistic text. The intention is not to commit the Church of England to a future of sheer theological indifferentism in the eucharistic field. Quite the reverse —the intention is not to delay all change until total agreement can be found, but to postpone decisions on areas of debate in order that that debate may continue. Rightly seen, this amounts to an imperative to enter thoroughgoing dialogue with a view to mutual reform, or at the very least to a narrowing of the area of disagreement. Evangelicals have asked others to accept texts that would say a little less than some would want to say, in the hope that in four years time the process of dialogue will have brought about such new thinking that agreed changes of text will follow naturally. The compromise texts meanwhile enable us to worship in common and together whilst the sorting out goes on. The other course is either alternatives or one exclusive partisan text, and either of these is well calculated to entrench fixed positions, increase antipathy, and promote further mutual misunderstanding.

This means that ambiguity is tolerable, not because it has any innate virtues of its own—for clearly it is merely a tool—but because in certain situations it makes for the peace of the church *without* hallowing a flight from truth. In this the eucharistic text and the new doctrinal statements are identical, for they fulfil exactly parallel functions. In each case an area of disagreement is charted, the 'ambiguity' is confined to that area, and the expression of it is carefully drawn up to meet the actual case and hold the lines within that area.

Why then does the Service of Reconciliation, itself another liturgical text, fall into the category of unacceptable ambiguity? The task of answering this requires first of all an understanding of *where* the Service is ambiguous. It is in fact only ambiguous in one place—the 'reception' of the Methodist ministers by the laying on of the bishop's hands. The 'reception' of the Anglican ministers by the laying on of Methodist hands is unambiguously not an ordination. Thus it is only one half of the ministerial 'reconciliation' which is ambiguous, and it is to this half that we turn attention.

The ambiguity here is unacceptable for three clear reasons:

(i) The ambiguity in the liturgical text is ill-fitted to meet the actual disagreement in the situation. Its proper use would be to give a possible ordination to someone who was indubitably lay (though no doubt few would be seeking such a service). But the actual situation is that some Anglicans are doubtful whether the Methodist candidate for the rite is in fact lay or ordained. The desire is to ensure that he becomes indubitably an ordained man. But the ambiguity required to treat that case is the ambiguity offered in a conditional ordination. The obvious difference in the texts is that the Service of Reconciliation is designed to *create* an ambiguity, whilst the conditional ordination

is designed to *remove* one. If it then be argued that all the 'reconciliands' declare before the Service that they are already ordained, then the only possible reply is that the Service is being applied to the one class of people for whom it is textually completely unsuited, and is thus being put to a purpose which it cannot serve. The case is similar to the presentation of unbaptised persons for confirmation—the complaint then lies not against a text which has a clear meaning, but against the presentation of unsuitable candidates for inexplicable purposes. The question of conditional ordination, which in a way does meet this particular case, is quite different, and there will be reason to revert to it later.

(ii) The ambiguity is unacceptable, because an improper attempt has been made to conceal it in the mutuality of the laying on of hands. Thus the openness of honest ambiguity has become remarkably like a wooden horse of Troy, or a form of subliminal alchemy, and has lost its honesty in the transmutation. Furthermore, the concealing of the ambiguity has demanded an artificial building up of the laying on of Methodist hands on the Anglican ministers, to make this part look the same as the ambiguous part. The result is a pseudo-ambiguity in this second part, and its enforcement upon Anglican ministers creates a totally new rite. This new local English rite in turn threatens to subvert the very concept of catholic ordination, for it will have to replace ordination (even historic episcopal ordination!) as the basic qualification for ministering in the Church of England, or in the united church arising from the union. It will, of course, be true that those ordained after 'Reconciliation' will not need another qualification apart from their ordination by an Anglican or Methodist bishop, but this fact is also subversive of catholic ordination—for episcopal ordination elsewhere (even in the Church of Rome) will not have this 'built-in' 'reconciliation', and will thus become an inferior (and less than catholic) category of episcopal ordination. The writer has expanded on this thought elsewhere (*All in Each Place*, ed. J. I. Packer, Marcham, 1965, pp. 166-181), but meanwhile must content himself with the remark that he is frankly amazed that catholics can feel they either maintain catholic tradition or please the Church of Rome or serve the cause of unity by accepting this misshapen rite.

(iii) The ambiguity in the liturgical text is unacceptable because its context is insufficiently ambiguous. The rite is derivative from the concept of making Methodism episcopal. And there's the rub, particularly on the present two-stage basis. The idea that full communion and even intercommunion should depend upon Methodism taking episcopacy into its system is really a surrender to a distorted catholicism. Its distortion probably arises from Lord Fisher's failure in 1946 to understand the very catholicism he was vainly trying to please. The result is that catholics themselves show some unhappiness at the concept of parallel episcopates in which the bishop loses his relationship to the unity of the church, loses any claim to exclusive territorial jurisdiction, and stands out starkly as the famous 'gimmick for validating orders' which is the one thing everybody is agreed he ought not to be. The situation would be less serious on a one-stage scheme, but even then the treating the bishop as necessary for unity

and communion is in principle a catholicism (though not now distorted). In either case evangelicals should be able to accept the surrender on this point, but only if it is properly held in balance with those principles for which they strive. And here the addition of the Service of Reconciliation is like piling Pelion on Ossa. If true ambiguity is like the toss of a coin, then in these terms, as evangelicals see it, making episcopacy basic to full communion is like extracting money from evangelicals by force, without tossing a coin at all. If then a full recognition of existing Methodist orders were added to the episcopal basis, this would be tantamount to the return of the money and the restoration of the *status quo*. However, the addition of the Service of Reconciliation is more like tossing up whether to extract some more by force or not. Moreover, if the present insistence of the Act of Uniformity were to remain, requiring men to be episcopally ordained before ministering in the Church of England, then the situation would be worse still—rather like tossing a coin, whilst still intending to extract some more whatever the result of the toss. From an evangelical standpoint the ambiguity is so loaded by the context that the Service has to be treated as unambiguously wrong.

When the Service of Reconciliation is now put beside the new eucharistic text or the doctrinal statements in *Towards Reconciliation*, it will be clear why ambiguity is being opposed in the former case, and not in the latter. It is only opposed as misapplied, as wrongly concealed (with serious side-effects), and as fixed into a straightjacket of unacceptable interpretation by its context. It is not opposed *qua* ambiguity, and ambiguity can indeed be carefully employed to secure certain good ends, e.g. that of leaving unfinished debate at least temporarily open. But the Service of Reconciliation would foreclose real debate about the relative standings of episcopal and non-episcopal ministries, and about their relation to the church, its unity, and its sacraments. It represents a clamping of exclusive episcopalianism upon the two churches, and goes far in practice to teach the 'pipeline' theory of grace, which the whole church is said nowadays to reject.

This reason why the Service (even if not very satisfactory to all catholics) is unacceptable to evangelicals may be seen rather more clearly by a 'league table' of ways of uniting episcopal and non-episcopal ministeries. There are five broad categories, as follows:

(i) The episcopal ordination of all non-episcopal ministers, and the bringing of them under the historic episcopate. This is catholicism at its starkest.

(ii) The bringing of non-episcopalians under the historic episcopate, with in addition an ambiguous 'reconciliation' rite on *all* existing ministers, episcopal or non-episcopal. The Anglican-Methodist scheme falls under this heading. It is catholicism with a bare loophole for protestant consciences.

(iii) The bringing of non-episcopalians under the historic episcopate, but with a full recognition and acceptance of all existing ministers. The CSI scheme falls under this heading. It represents the meeting ground of catholicism and protestantism.

(iv) A federal scheme in which different parts of an area have different methods of ordination (episcopal and non-episcopal). This

is roughly what was proposed at Kikuyu in 1913. It is protestantism with a bare loophole for catholic consciences.

(v) The complete extinction of the historic episcopate, and a unified church perhaps of a Presbyterian or Congregationalist type. This is protestantism at its starkest.

There are various details omitted from this list, but they do not affect the overall classification. Thus a conditional ordination of non-episcopalians comes under (i) if mandatory, under (iii) if voluntary. Intercommunion before the imposition of episopacy would be sheer inconsistency under (i), a slight softening of the catholicism of (ii), and a very natural step in the case of (iii). A mutual laying on of hands that was representative, not exhaustive, is to be classified with (iii), whilst a Service of Reconciliation which, as in England now, is not-quite-compulsory, would multiply the odd effects implicit in (ii), without really moving the scheme down into (iii). The list should show why protestants (even high church ones like the writer) feel unhappy with (ii). It *is* a compromise, but as a compromise between (i) and (iii) it veers far too much towards one end of the scale. What should really be sought is a compromise between (i) and (v), or between (ii) and (iv). The answer in either case is scheme (iii), a union uniting ministers in the CSI way.

The question then arises, could evangelicals and catholics agree a CSI scheme? This essay is written in the belief that they could, and equally in the belief that they will never agree any other way. And the key to their acceptance of CSI lies in the concept of anomaly. From either standpoint there will appear at the inauguration of union to be anomalies, and it is of course against such anomalies that the ire of catholics was aroused in the controversies leading up to CSI union in 1947. This in turn gave rise to the Service of Reconciliation, and this in its turn has run into trouble for fairly obvious reasons. The better solution would seem to be the attempt to get catholics to understand and accept the concept of anomaly, which in its turn will be seen to relate closely to the concept of honest ambiguity.

The theory of anomaly is not in itself unchristian or damaging to a firm hold on principles. It can be illustrated historically in several ways, each of them illuminating for the present situation. A biblical instance is found in the argument about idolmeats in 1 Cor. 8 and 10. The major truth of God is that an idol is nothing in the world, and all meats are in principle clean. To refuse to eat idolmeats would appear to testify to some form of dualism, a far cry from Christianity. It would have been appropriate for the apostle to urge all his converts to eat all meats to make it clear that 'the earth is the Lord's'. To refuse to eat is for a Christian anomalous, and even dangerous (as suggesting the real power of the idol). But the apostle prefers to allow such refusal for the sake of 'weak consciences', rather than bring men to a right practice by some form of coercion. A situation arises, and the solution is *not* a logical extension of principle, but a charitable accommodation which is held not to jettison principle. A similar thing is found in the ancient concept of 'baptism by blood' and 'baptism by desire'. Baptism (which by definition included water) was necessary to salvation. A dying catechumen was to be

baptised. The principle was clear. But if men were martyred or accidentally killed without baptism, the church refused, at least for genuine catechumens, to draw the inference that they were not saved. Instead it invented an unbiblical, and indeed at some point of time unprecedented, anomalous concept, that death in such cases was to be reckoned as tantamount to baptism. This did not affect the church's rules, but accommodated them to actual anomalous situations. The Eastern Orthodox principle of 'economy' is similar, and instances could be multiplied.

The present Anglican-Methodist scheme has enough anomaly in it already to turn the anti-anomaly stomach queasy. The whole Stage One of the two-stage scheme is one enormous anomaly—for it allows in local areas communion without union (indeed it enjoins communion, and forbids union), and thus will produce two equal communion-tables either competing for the same congregations or at best consenting to the division of what is properly one eucharistic assembly. Furthermore, the parallel episcopates will, as stated earlier, temporarily strip bishops of any function in relation to the unity of the church, will impair the concept of territorial jurisdiction, and in Methodism may leave the bishop with little else distinctively episcopal to perform except ordinations. The business can be justified on the *reculer pour mieux avancer* basis, but the point for the moment is that all who can accept this whole concept of parallel episcopates and full communion are already committed to the principle of present anomalies for the sake of future gains. These anomalies are endurable on the understanding that organic union will follow in due course, and granted that understanding they are preferable to an ecumenical stalemate.

A CSI type of unity scheme applies this same principle logically to the unification of ministries. In CSI the following features of the unification are worthy of present note:

(i) The whole church became episcopal at union, and all ordinations have been episcopal from then on.

(ii) The existing presbyters of the uniting denominations were all equally accepted as presbyters of CSI without further laying on of hands, and others have been accepted into CSI from episcopal and non-episcopal denominations alike since union.

(iii) Congregations not wanting the ministrations of non-episcopal ministers have been able to invoke the 'Pledge', and thus been spared them.

(iv) The whole ministry position is to be reviewed 30 years from union (i.e., it is bound by constitution to be on the agenda for Synod in 1977).

On any view these features include anomalies. Thus from an evangelical standpoint the keystone principle is the equality of all presbyters within CSI, and the whole church is theoretically in full communion with itself. The question of the historic episcopate is not very significant, for if CSI had to have some one method of government and ordination there was no particular reason why it should not be episcopacy. Indeed evangelicals themselves see good reasons (of the *bene esse* sort) why it should be episcopacy. But the anomaly lies in

the 'Pledge'. This in practice allows some people in CSI to plead 'weak consciences' and treat non-episcopal ministers as inferior to episcopal ones. Thus the whole church is not actually in full communion with itself, but only growing fitfully towards that end. On this view the thirty years are to be used for convincing those who invoke the 'Pledge' that all presbyters *are* equal, so that in 1977 full communion with, say, the Church of Scotland can be maintained, and the 'Pledge' can be discarded as unnecessary.

A catholic can analyse CSI in a different way. He can view the historic episcopate and invariable episcopal ordination as the keystone principles in CSI. The 'Pledge' is then a guarantee that episcopal ordination *is* the norm and the rule, and those who seek episcopally ordained presbyters to minister to them *must* have their wishes met as a fundamental principle. The acceptance of other presbyters into the structure of the church is an anomaly, but one that can be endured as the continual process of ordaining by bishops slowly reduces the anomalous element. By 1977 it might well be possible to reduce or even eliminate the constitutional provision for the anomaly in the church's life. Meanwhile catholics do not have to go into direct sacramental fellowship with such anomalous presbyters, though on the principle of anomaly many are willing to.

The difference between the anomaly of the idolmeats and that of CSI is that there is only one Christian way of looking at idolmeats, whilst there are arguably two of looking at CSI. The anomaly concept is identical however. The church starts with an oddity (though one that in some way testifies to God's grace), but does not then realise its eschatology and coerce the oddity into conformity with the better way, but allows it to continue for a time with a view to bringing its exponents to a better mind as well as a better practice. The anomaly concept is the same—but CSI also incorporates the principle of ambiguity, this time rightly applied. For although each feature of the scheme is quite clear and unambiguous, when all the elements are held in tension together a basic ambiguity emerges. CSI declined at inauguration to define which of the two ways of looking at its ministry was right—and thus allowed evangelicals to treat one feature as fundamental and another anomalous, whilst catholics could take the opposite view. Thus the CSI type of scheme fulfils the same function as the textual ambiguities in the new communion service, or the descriptive elements in the Unity Commission's doctrinal statements. The intention is in every case the same—to make progress in unity whilst still allowing a time for discussion, dialogue and debate. Then, when in the future one theological point of view prevails by its sheer merits, that will become the decisive standpoint of the church. If none does, dialogue must continue. There is (as Lesslie Newbigin has so forcefully put it in his exposition of CSI principles) an 'eschatological dimension' in the church's life. As both holy and sinful the church picks its way, not yet having arrived, but committed to the goal. If its mind is not perfectly one at any particular point of its journey on earth, that exactly corresponds to its failure totally to eliminate sin—but the failure to arrive by some stated point does not invalidate the quest nor abolish the goal. The eschatological dimen-

sion keeps the church's eyes still fixed forward to further reformation, renewal, and growth into unity.

CSI then holds catholicism and protestantism in tension in uniting the ministries. The question remains, would it work in England? Of course, whether the present Convocations could be induced to pass such a scheme is a different question from whether, if passed, such a scheme would work. To the Convocation question the answer is very uncertain. Clearly a large number of catholic proctors would have to be convinced. However, it is worth noting that they already have to accept the principle of temporary anomaly, and they also have to accept that their doctrines of tradition and priesthood are being listed only as variant opinions within the church, and not being made foundation-stones of the future. If to these factors is added the fact that the Unity Commission are going to incorporate the promise of full communion with world Methodism at Stage Two, then it is extremely uncertain whether the present scheme will carry the more obdurate catholic vote anyway. Reasonable catholics in turn may surely have the advantages of CSI urged upon them, and it would be unsafe to say that there are many who would accept the present scheme, but would refuse anything comparable to CSI.

Furthermore, there are many points at which catholic fears about CSI itself can be met in a scheme taking advantage of the lessons learned through CSI. These may be listed as follows:

(i) The new ordinal is available long before Stage One is inaugurated. This, despite the unthinking cries against 'presbyter', is clearly catholic in its character. Yet the writer for one would not resist a move for Anglicans to be ordained 'priests' whilst Methodists were being ordained 'presbyters' during Stage One. This would both declare the two terms to be equal during a period of full communion, and would also follow the principle of deferring decision till a common mind had prevailed. It would even be possible to ask the Methodists to use the new ordinal, whilst the Anglicans kept to 1662. For full communion it is *not* vital that both churches have a common ordinal —only that each recognises the sufficiency of the other's. (The lapse of the Service of Reconciliation would dispel all doubts about the residual use of the word 'priest' in it.)

(ii) The historic episcopate could be given a more theologically and historically informed basis than it had in CSI.

(iii) Non-episcopal ministers would very definitely receive a commission from bishops, even though without the laying on of hands.

(iv) On various other points on which catholic fears have been expressed real concessions could be made. Thus the Anglican method of disposing of the consecrated elements after communion could very properly be urged upon the Methodists.

(v) A provision could be made for the voluntary conditional ordination of Methodist and other non-episcopal ministers, a matter which needs further treatment later in this essay.

In addition to these matters there are other points at which the English scheme could be brought more into line with CSI to its own benefit. In the first place it could in fact be made a one-stage scheme. In the second place the question of full communion with world Metho-

dism at Stage Two (if the scheme remained two-stage) could be deferred, and not built into Stage One as a promise about Stage Two. In either case therefore a time limit would be set to the anomalies. They could be extended after the limit expired, but it would need a conscious decision, not just a failure to act, for that to occur. Evangelicals (including Methodist dissentients) should be content to trade a certainty at Stage One for a promise about Stage Two.

When the CSI type of scheme is then compared with the present one, the gains can be listed at length as follows:

(i) The scheme would be self-consistent, applying the concepts of openness, ambiguity and anomaly in an interlocking way to both faith and order.

(ii) The scheme would encourage the churches to work for a real unity, instead of entrenching opposed positions.

(iii) The scheme would retain the whole principle of catholic ordination once-for-life, and avoid erecting a barrier between the Church of England and the rest of the Anglican Communion.

(iv) The scheme would enable its own principles to be re-applied when further unions were planned—a practice which is almost inconceivable on the present basis.

(v) The scheme would avoid all the disciplinary and psychological problems of the 'unreconciled' ministers.

(vi) The scheme would make the doctrines of the church, the sacraments, and the ministry interdependent, instead of making the two former hang upon the last one, as the present scheme seems to do.

(vii) The scheme would undoubtedly hold the Methodist Church together, and prevent it disintegrating in a flurry of bitterness.

(viii) The scheme would do justice to the present state of affairs in the Church of England.

Such would be the gains that one would wish to see aired before Convocation. However, it still leaves untackled the other, bigger, question, would it work? The answer to this is, assuredly it would. There is in fact only one point which has ever been alleged as to why such a scheme would not work—the cry, often repeated parrot-fashion, that 'the "Pledge" would be invoked in every deanery'. This point is sometimes reinforced with an insistence that the vast spaces of South India are different from the close-packed conditions of the English deanery, and that in South India the practice of comity of missions meant that the different denominations did not co-exist in the same places to the extent that they do in England. But this supposed reinforcement is a two-edged weapon, and properly handled is fatal to the original point. For there is another difference between England and South India—in England the numbers of episcopal ministers vastly exceed those of non-episcopal ones, which was not the case in India. In India there could have been difficulty at times in supplying ministrations to congregations invoking the 'Pledge', but in England there never could be. And if the two-stage scheme remains, then no question of non-episcopal ministers being presented to catholic livings would presumably ever arise. At Stage One, such ministers would minister in the Church of England only as guests, or conceivably in joint churches as partners in a team ministry. Now,

the 'Pledge' can by definition only be invoked where an unwelcome appointment has been threatened by some third party (e.g., bishop or patron), against the congregation's wishes. Equally, invitations to minister as guests would come only in accord with a congregation's wishes, and team ministries would either have to be constituted so as to take such wishes into account also, or at worst would have to provide for the episcopally ordained members of the ministry team to celebrate Holy Communion, if the congregation or parts of it were opposed to non-episcopal ministers celebrating.

But in any case there remains the critical point of difference between England and South India to consider. The average Anglican deanery would have four or five times as many Anglican ministers as Methodist ones. It would be almost physically impossible for any one Methodist minister to celebrate Communion in every local Anglican parish, whilst still superintending a circuit of several chapels. If he did so celebrate, he would have done something that probably few if any of the Anglican ministers themselves would have done. Thus if he were not invited to celebrate in every parish, it would not mean that the 'Pledge' was being invoked against him. It would merely mean that there was no great shortage of celebrants in the area. Methodist ministers should have no reason to feel that they were being treated as second class ministers in such a case—they would merely be entering into the pattern of interchange of ministers (already restricted through factors of supply of curates, variations of churchmanship, and mutual likes and dislikes) which betokens existing life in an Anglican deanery. Indeed if the Methodist were to *preach* (over which question no 'Pledge' would exist) in half the local pulpits, he might well tell himself that he was receiving VIP treatment from his Anglican brethren, compared with their treatment of each other.

If we move on to Stage Two (or to a one-stage scheme) then it is slightly more arguable that the 'Pledge' might be invoked. But even this sort of occurrence would be rare. The 'Pledge' would still only be operative where the patron (be he bishop or committee or trust) was threatening a congregation with a ministry they did not want. He would naturally therefore have to be sensitive to their needs—but once again this is really saying little more than that congregations should have ministers who command their confidence. Every patron of any sort ought to be aware of this, and the 'Pledge' is merely a longstop in case any emergency occurs. It is impossible to foresee its constant use. The evangelical would go further and say he hopes in the coming years to convince at least some of those churchmen who might feel it necessary to rely on the 'Pledge' that they need not in conscience do so. But yet, suppose all these ifs and buts went the wrong way. Suppose that Stage Two or a one-stage scheme was in operation soon. Suppose again that large numbers of catholic congregations were being 'threatened' with ex-Methodist ministers. Suppose further that they were unconvinced by evangelical arguments and were resorting to the 'Pledge'. To cap it all, suppose that the ex-Methodist ministers concerned felt slighted or scorned. Then, in this fantastically unlikely combination of unfortunate circumstances, a clear solution exists. Provision ought to be made for such luckless

ex-Methodist ministers to seek a conditional ordination from a bishop, and the 'Pledge' could never then be invoked against them again. This provision would have several clear advantages over the Service of Reconciliation, and they may be listed as follows:

(i) The ambiguity in it exactly meets the situation, and does so nakedly and honestly. Some men have doubted the credentials of a particular man's ministry, and *for their sakes* he goes through a ceremony in which he explicitly retains the right to maintain that he is not being ordained.

(ii) The concept of ordination once-for-life as the proper basis for ministry is not imperilled.

(iii) The reconciliation of the two churches precedes this step, and is logically prior to it. The step is therefore seen as a tidying up, and not something integral to reconciliation.

(iv) The service, being voluntary, does not suggest that others (e.g. non-episcopal ministers in areas where the 'Pledge' is not invoked) lack anything from their ministry.

(v) The step has no implications such as to make further unions difficult on the same basis.

This conditional ordination would be provided purely for the sake of Methodists (presumably particularly for those who have no problems with the Service of Reconciliation). However, it would also be a valuable addition to the catholic features of the scheme—not only helping catholics to maintain the need for episcopal ordination, but also enabling them to invoke the 'Pledge' with a clear conscience. In such invoking they would not on this basis be so much preventing good men from exercising their ministry, as urging them to get their ministry regularised. This should be a real relief to catholic consciences, though it must again be emphasised that the actual occurrence of the 'Pledge', particularly in a two-stage scheme, would be almost nil.

Catholics would on a CSI scheme have to be in full sacramental communion with other episcopalians who themselves practised full communion with non-episcopalians, and thus would come into a sort of mediate full communion with non-episcopalians themselves. However, this is more or less inevitable in any scheme of reunion with non-episcopalians, and is already the case in the recognition given by catholics to the ex-Anglicans in CSI itself. It was at one time mooted by some zealots that not only should all Anglicans in CSI lose their relationship with the Church of England, but also that the whole Anglican Church of India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon would also condone heresy by allowing some of its dioceses to join CSI, and was therefore itself to be excommunicated in its entirety. This was so clearly abstract theorising that it never got taken very seriously, but it is the same principle which is involved in all catholic resistance to CSI and CSI-type schemes. The difficulty with this doctrine of guilt by association is that once invoked it cannot be quietly dropped. Its logical conclusion is so horrific (a form of Christian solipsism) that invoking it is self-evidently ridiculous. Anglicans who are realists about the people with whom they already practise full communion should never resort to this counsel of despair. One dares to hope that schemes of the future will be delivered from empty posturing.

In conclusion it may be helpful to point up some attitudes which could arise from the arguments of this essay. To catholics the writer would say, please look at this closely. Dare you ask for more without relying upon steamrollering tactics and hurting consciences as you go? Please realise that a CSI scheme is a *ne plus ultra* for evangelicals; could it not be for you also? Please realise also that this essay predicts the *outcome* of two positions talking together to find a scheme. It is *not* an evangelical position laid down to be set over against a catholic position, until a compromise between them is found. CSI is itself the compromise. The writer has tried to free himself from negotiating postures, and risk reaching the conclusion without going through the wearying stages of the argument. He hopes that no sign of posturing remains—and apologises for any that does.

To evangelicals he would say, no doubt this form of argument would make CSI appear less attractive than it ever has before. But it is a call to become involved in theological dialogue, and if we believe we are basically on the right theological lines then we need not fear about the outcome. A serious commitment to theology (and thus to God), and to seeking visible unity, and to living with catholics, will demand that we accept some such scheme one day.

To Methodist dissentients he would say, can you go this far? If so, let it be known and known unmistakably and it will happen. If you cannot go this far, is it because you fear that your theological position would be swamped in a united church? If so, think again. Would it, if it is strong in its own right?

To the politicians he would say, this is the way forward, as far as the evidence is available. Do not, because your own conscience can accept it, push through the present scheme regardless of the cost. The sheer facts of the opposition in both churches should make you pause. Is not the CSI way a better hope of carrying all with you? Then can we not all say together, this we must do?