

Editorial

THE Church of England and the Methodist Church are now entering on the decisive stage of the original 1963 Anglican-Methodist union scheme. The final proposals were published earlier this year, and if the authorities adhere to the present timetable, a final decision to go ahead or otherwise will be made by next summer. There will of course be a great deal of detailed work to do thereafter especially in the field of legislation, but the main decision—the decisive yea or nay—is to be taken by next summer. As the scheme only concerns England (Scotland was excluded in the final report, and separate discussions are going on in Wales), it might be thought rather narrowly domestic for an international journal like *The Churchman* to pay too much attention to this issue. And yet the issues involved are in a very sense real global, though their particular application is, in this case, English. It is no secret that Anglicans round the world are looking to see whether the Church of England will accept this scheme, whether the unification of ministries type of scheme which has been tried in various forms since Lambeth 1948 threw its douche of cold water on the South India approach (most regrettably in our view) can succeed. It has been tried, with variations on the major theme, in Ceylon, in North India, in Nigeria, but so far none of them has succeeded. That in itself may be significant, but meanwhile the South India union which was brought to a successful conclusion after thirty years of discussion and negotiation stands somewhat under a cloud as a scheme that worked but is not now officially approved by Lambeth (at least at the time of writing; we may hope for better things from Lambeth 1968). Moreover, others than Anglicans are looking at the current Anglican-Methodist scheme to see if the Church of England is capable of carrying both its wings with it in a union scheme, and to see how that Church as a whole will regard what many Protestants privately consider to be a thinly disguised episcopalian take-over bid. The eyes of more than Englishmen are on the current Anglican-Methodist scheme, for the issues involved have implications far beyond the shores of Britain. It will be worthwhile, therefore, to take stock of the developments to date.

After the final report was published in April, the first reaction came

from the Evangelicals in *Fellowship in the Gospel* edited by J. I. Packer, the one member of the Anglican-Methodist Unity Commission who dissented, and published by the Marcham Manor Press.¹ Here Dr. Packer elaborated his reasons for dissent, the Rev. C. O. Buchanan examined the concept of full communion and its relationship to the historic episcopate, and I myself commented on the report *Intercommunion Today* to which I found it necessary to add a personal statement. Because this book contains ideas and suggestions as to the way forward by three Evangelicals who have been very much involved in official negotiations, it is important to know how far it carries Evangelicals generally with it, and indeed how other Anglicans react to its suggestions. Accordingly precise proposals based on the book's case were drawn up and sent to leading Evangelicals within the Church of England. In June they were published as an open letter to the Archbishops and Bishops of the Church of England. Fifty-two Evangelicals signed it, and more signatures would have been appended, had they arrived in time for the printer's deadline. Now there is to be a general enquiry to see how widely the views of the Open Letter are held by the Evangelical clergy as a whole. The Open Letter itself indicates that Dr. Packer has widespread support among Evangelical leaders; the enquiry will show the strength of support in the country as a whole. Among the leaders only one reply was received indicating strong disagreement with the Open Letter.

On a more popular level four Anglicans (Rev. Dr. J. I. Packer, Rev. C. O. Buchanan, Mr. O. R. Johnston, and myself) and four Methodists (Professor C. K. Barrett, Rev. Dr. O. A. Beckerlegge, Rev. Dr. F. Hildebrandt,² and Dr. T. E. Jessop) joined together to produce a simple booklet for use at parish and circuit level. This is an illustrated booklet entitled *Anglicans and Methodists* (Church Book Room Press, 3s.); apart from the articles containing the basic criticisms of the scheme, the booklet contains the text of the Open Letter and a statement from the *Methodist Liaison Committee*, the group coordinating Methodist opposition. The Open Letter itself is obtainable separately price 9d. from Church Book Room Press.

Evangelical Anglican opposition has centred round two points in the main, the service of reconciliation which is held to be unnecessary, and the terms of communion fellowship where Evangelicals are supporting the Methodist Conference request for an open table against the vacillation of the final report, which effectively ducks this issue, and against the current Anglican fashion in official circles for a closed circle of episcopal communion fellowship. Methodist opposition has tended to agree with the Evangelical Anglican criticism but in addition to be much more doubtful about the desirability of organic union as a goal, and to be critical of centralised bureaucratic take-overs, and some Methodists have made it plain that they do not want anything to do with the historic episcopate.

Opposition has also come from High Churchmen, who are by no means agreed that the scheme satisfies what they require for union. Prominent among them has been the Bishop of Willesden, who, when he expressed his concern at a press conference, stated his fear that opposition to the official proposals was not having a fair hearing. High Church opposition has centred round the service of reconciliation and the notion of ambiguity. Because we agree with the Bishop that critics of the scheme are in danger of not being heard, we are glad to welcome him to our columns. Readers will of course know that *The Churchman* stands in the Evangelical tradition, but when so major a decision for the Church of England as a whole is at stake, it is of vital importance for Evangelicals to know and understand what High Church critics are saying. As we go to press, a statement has come from the Church Union stating that it cannot recommend acceptance of the scheme as it stands, and the Bishop himself has published a pamphlet, *To Every Man's Conscience* . . ., 32 pp., 2s. 6d. from 2 Church Road, Highgate, London N.6. This is a booklet by a leading Anglo-Catholic critic of scheme, and as is to be expected, its theological premises are of that complexion. But all should read it. The first part concerns moral issues, the pressures on everyone to accept the scheme, and here the Bishop is excellent. The end does not justify the means for Christians, and if the means are morally dubious, that in itself is a very good reason for looking at the whole thing again. The second part is theological, and manifestly Tractarian. We cannot agree with the Bishop here but that does not prevent us commending the booklet. Evangelicals and Anglo-Catholics are brethren in the same church, and they need to understand one another's thought, and we can admire without hesitation the Bishop's concern not to compromise the principles for which he stands. The Bishop's courage in taking his stand should not be underestimated. The pressure on a church dignitary to toe the line or at least keep quiet is considerable.

There is one further group which has emerged and which should not be overlooked. A letter recently appeared in the church press from Professor G. W. H. Lampe and some Cambridge colleagues (Anglican and Free Church) in which they said that they much preferred the South India union method but that they would be prepared to accept the current scheme. It may well be that such a letter represents the mind of a substantial number of churchmen in all traditions who are at present rather uncomfortable supporters of the scheme. They do not much like the service of reconciliation, they know a good many people will not accept it at all, and yet these people are concerned for union in England, and fear that if this scheme does not work nothing will, and that this would be a tragic set back for reunion in this country and indeed for ecumenism generally. Many of these people would like to think that CSI would work in England, but they have been told that the Methodists will not have CSI because it would create two classes of ministers,

and (others add, though without any evidence, for no one knows this) that Anglo-Catholics would not contemplate it. What is clear above all else is that no one knows how wide support a CSI-type scheme would command in England. But I venture to think that signs are not lacking that it will soon have to be considered a lot more carefully. Bishop Hollis, who contributes to this issue, can write out of many years of experience in South India, and though he declares himself willing to support the current scheme, the first half of his article plainly shows some of the greater excellencies of the South India approach.

As to the official moves on the Anglican-Methodist report, the first debate was in the May Convocations, where attention was fastened almost exclusively on answering the High Church objectors. The second debate, with no vote taken, was at an informal gathering of the Church Assembly in June, where criticism was voiced from various quarters, where both Archbishops passionately defended the scheme (without very much effect on the debate) and were answered from the floor, and where considerably more attention was devoted this time to Evangelical objections. The report is now being debated in the dioceses and will come back to the central bodies next year.

Meanwhile two other reports appeared in 1968. The first, *Relations between the Church of England and the Presbyterian Church of England: a Report*, SPCK, 5s., has been considerably overshadowed by the Methodist report, which is sad, for it contains some very clear evidence that its thinking is proceeding in a different direction from that of the service of reconciliation and the whole unification of ministries approach. In the concluding section on p. 41-2, the conversationalists wish the Anglican-Methodist scheme well (ecumenical good manners in view of the next sentence!) and add 'Some of our members, however, especially the Presbyterians, have expressed some uneasiness about a two-stage approach to unity'. They go on to hope for multi- not merely bi-lateral conversations. They suggest that the two main groups of church conversations in England, Anglican-Methodist and Presbyterian-Congregationalist, should start *de novo* on multilateral conversations with any other churches who want to join, and that other schemes from overseas should be considered. It would of course have been dynamite if this report had appeared to criticise the Anglican-Methodist scheme, and yet who can doubt that it is really pointing South India-wards? One stage not two stage, as in CSI; multilateral not bilateral as in CSI; hints to look overseas, though CSI is not actually mentioned. Here is surely a more excellent way than in the other scheme, and a hint that CSI may be on the way back for consideration. If this report hints, *Intercommunion Today* is much more open with a majority recommending reconsideration of South India with a view to full communion. On a more local level we had a pleasant surprise the other day when at a conference we had to address, we were told by the chairman that the local deanery had resolved unanimously

to ask for CSI instead of the service of reconciliation method and that the proposer, a proctor in Convocation, had made it plain that he was proposing this as an Anglo-Catholic. Perhaps Anglo-Catholic objections to CSI are more illusory than real, and in any case much water has passed under the ecumenical bridge since Lambeth 1958, and it is surely time that the CSI principles had another consideration on their intrinsic merits, without being suspect as a delaying operation to postpone the Methodist decision.

It will be a test of our ecumenical integrity in the forthcoming debates whether the critics of the scheme get a proper hearing or not, whether diocesan conferences can discuss the scheme on its merits or whether official spokesmen simply steer the proposals through. If the latter happens, it will be further proof that Ian Henderson's accusations about ecumenical power politics are true. And yet it would be lacking in realism if we did not consider now what to do should the scheme fail to achieve a substantial majority (the Bishop of London mentioned at least 80% in Convocation, and we should regard that as minimal), for unless the advocates of the scheme can do something spectacular, it seems the scheme will fail to get such a large majority. Ecumenism in England could just grind to a halt, and that would be tragic. It would surely be wise to take the Anglican-Presbyterian hints seriously now, and start preparing the way for at least four-sided discussions. Such multilateral conversations could then consider a CSI scheme to see if it could carry more people with it. But perhaps the real breakthrough will come through *Intercommunion Today* and its majority recommendation for intercommunion in situations of ecumenical committal between churches. Our judgment is that if the Anglican-Methodist scheme breaks down, intercommunion will become the centre of attention, and that if the majority recommendations can be accepted, a real breakthrough will be achieved. Many Free Churchmen would look at episcopacy in a new light, if only they could be convinced that despite all the fine talk about the pastoral bishops, Anglicans were not really trying to sell them this exclusivist historic episcopate.

Finally, it is as well that those of us who are committed to a belief in the desirability of organic union as the goal for each locality should show our ecumenical seriousness by heeding what some Methodists are saying about the dangers of centralised bureaucracy. Whatever they think they are doing, Anglicans are busily building up a fearful centralised bureaucracy in measure after measure, the coping stone of which seems likely to be the Synodical Government measure. For this reason Robert Currie's *Methodism Divided*, Faber, 348 pp., 63s., is important. Its subtitle explains it—*A Study in the Sociology of Ecumenicalism*; and its conclusion is devastating:

Ecumenicalism is advocated as the solution of the churches' problems. Official interpretations of the movement suggest youthful enthusiasm and boundless prospects. But close examination of the process of reunion

shows that in advanced societies ecumenicalism is the product of an ageing religion. It arises out of decline and secularisation, but fails to deal with either. The strength of the ecumenical imperative can be seen in the apparent inability of denominational leadership to devise alternatives to already discredited policies that abolish crumbling convictions and leave little in their place. This inability is lamented by many Christian leaders. But it is lauded as the divine will by many more. A more critical appraisal is overdue, for the hope that ecumenicalism will be the salvation of Christianity seems illusory.

Such a warning is ignored at our peril, especially when it comes from a University don, after a detailed study of ecumenicalism within Methodism. Currie shows that dictatorial elements have been present in Methodism from the start in Wesley himself, and they certainly have not waned. But the warning, whilst arising out of a study of Methodism is for all, especially those engaged in ecumenical leadership within the denominations where the bureaucrats seem pathetically unable to believe that their schemes can be anything but the clear and unmistakable will of God. The complacency on these issues within a body like the British Council of Churches where ecumenical bureaucrats naturally predominate, has to be seen to be believed. (I can testify to it as a BCC Council member myself, and I can only say that I find the smug assumption that everyone who does not share the enthusiasm of these bureaucrats has not quite seen the great vision is extremely distasteful, though tragically common.)

All this does not mean that churchmen should abandon the ecumenical pursuit. We are committed to the goal of all in each place in one organic union, for it is biblical. What Robert Currie and Ian Henderson among others are telling us is to be more critical of ourselves, to be more biblically radical, not to make grandiloquent claims which are really debating points, and perhaps above all to get our priorities right. Organic union is clearly implied in the NT, but it is not the be all and end all of Christianity. There is a biblical case for independency, and the great commandment of our Lord was to go and preach the Gospel, not to go and seek organisational union. If we got our priorities right, the ecumenical quest might be easier, and certainly ecumenism would fall into a more correct perspective.

Rome's Intransigence

THE news of the Pope's statement of Roman intransigence coming as it did on the eve of Uppsala, is sad but not unexpected. It is always the way with Rome to let the far out Romans have their fling, and then when they have strayed a bit too far, down comes the authoritative

statement of the Roman curia. It happened with Döllinger over papal infallibility. It happened with Loisy over biblical modernism. It has happened now with a personal papal statement which in itself is a warning, and could, despite the mood of the times, yet develop into a formal Vatican pronouncement.

No doubt the Pope is concerned about the publicity given to way out Roman statements, especially from countries like Holland, and certainly a large number of traditional Romans are worried, from senior clergy to ordinary inarticulate laity. The Pope's recent statement reaffirmed virtually all that is most offensive to Protestants—papal infallibility, the immaculate conception, a literal transubstantiation, etc. What this means is that despite the very welcome cordial atmosphere that is developing with individual RCs and despite the real willingness of individual Roman scholars, especially in certain countries, to rethink their position with a genuine openness to the evidence, we should be unwise to conclude that Rome has changed officially. Rome is an authoritative and centralised church, and real change can only be accepted when it comes from that authoritative centre. Certainly Rome is in ferment, as are other churches. The ferment is not so new as some seem to imagine. It has always been there behind the scenes. What is new is the publicity which it has received. We can and should encourage the individual RC, but let us have no illusions that Rome is changing in any of her essentials. She is plainly *semper eadem* as far as these go today. The change at a doctrinal level is still confined to individuals and small groups encouraged here and there by an enlightened prelate, but probably discouraged by rather more such senior dignitaries (see, for example, E. de Mendieta's autobiography, *Rome and Canterbury*, to say nothing of Charles Davis).

Synodical Government

OUR forebodings over the revision stage of the Synodical Government measure were more than justified at the summer session of Church Assembly. Once again (it happened before with the Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction measure) the Assembly showed itself incapable of concentrating for long on a large and complex legal measure. For an hour or so amendments were taken seriously, and thereafter members seemed more anxious to drink tea or to dispose of clauses anyhow than to consider amendments on their merits. One important and far-reaching amendment was, however, made, though through the Chairman's oversight its defeat in the House of Bishops was not noticed (and thus the whole amendment was defeated—something significant about this!), was the decision to abolish residence as a qualification for the electoral

role, and make regular attendance at worship the test instead. This is a change fraught with immense significance as the Bishop of Leicester told the Assembly. It was made against some rather poorly presented advice from the members in charge, and it is in fact a threat to the whole concept of the parish system. One rather foolish clerical spokesman thought it worth glorying in the abolition of the parish system in favour of the congregational one. But one would have thought that the abolition of any geographical qualification also destroyed the whole basis for any true ecumenism of all in each place and for the avoidance of geographical overlap. Quite apart from the narrow ecclesiasticism that associates Christianity with churchgoing (have not Evangelicals long protested against that? and radicals too for that matter?), the Bishop of Leicester's words to the *Church Times* are a real warning:

I think it will be a profound shock to many ordinary members of the Church of England to discover that residing in their local parish gives them no more say in its management than that which belongs to any habitual worshipper from outside. They will note that residence still counts when financial support is being asked for.

We cannot escape the conclusion that this is one more example of the Church of the nation running itself into a highly centralised episcopal sect, run by the bishops and the bureaucrats with synods as advisory presenting a facade of democracy and general church decision.

G.E.D.

1. Available from Marcham Books, Appleford, Abingdon, Berks, at a direct sale discount of 11s. if remittance sent with order. Normal price 15s. 6d.

2. We have since heard that Dr. Hildebrandt has resigned his connexion with the Methodist Conference, but continues to work under the jurisdiction of the National Liaison Committee.

[Since Evangelical publications as mentioned above are readily accessible, we have deliberately asked writers from other Anglican traditions to contribute on Anglican-Methodist unity. We have asked three senior ecumenical statesmen of differing outlooks to evaluate and comment on the Evangelical statements. The first of these is Professor Anthony Hanson of Hull, who served as a missionary in CSI; his comments are included in this number. The comments of the Bishop of Bristol and Bishop Lesslie Newbiggin of CSI will appear later.]