

Editorial

THE ANGLICAN-UNITED CHURCH RECONCILIATION

AT AMSTERDAM, "our deepest difference" was declared to be between "protestant" and "catholic" types of churchmanship. The *Agreed Principles* of the Anglican and United Churches boldly attempt to bridge precisely this difference. We sincerely hope that what they have done so excellently on paper may turn out to be effective in practice. Among many points deserving comment, brevity compels us to fasten onto the most contentious one, the unification of the ministry.

Neither Scripture nor history offers any authoritative precedents or procedures for the reunification of divided churches. If, then, a historic ceremony such as the laying on of hands is used, it must not be interpreted only in its ancient contexts but filled with the meaning of a new act of the Spirit. Novel situations call for a bold faith that the Spirit really does make all things new.

One of the most appealing things in the *Agreed Principles* is the statement: "We are united in our intention to bring into being, not a merger of two existing ecclesiastical bodies, but rather a new embodiment of the One Church of God." In the paragraph that follows, proper respect is paid to the distinctive traditions of the reconciling bodies, but the forward look of the statement quoted, seeking the fulness of the Church in the days to come, opens up the right perspective. The Church is to be reordered in an unprecedented situation.

The rite of unification in this situation will be misunderstood if we approach it with an over-individualistic view of ordination, which produces too great a concern about previous ordinations. What is really at stake is the order of the "new" Church as a body, not the previous "orders" of individuals. Once it has been determined—and in the present instance it has been freely so determined—that the reconciled body is to be episcopally ordered (with, be it noted, a reformed or constitutional episcopacy) the uniting act can surely order the whole body in that way without calling into question the validity of orders previously enjoyed. The type of episcopacy that is envisaged—"constitutional" and not "monarchical"—introduces as much change into the Anglican system as it does into that of the United Church, and embodies as much New Testament precedent, if not more, than any other system. Why should not ministries, already "valid," be *reordered* in a new situation? If to reorder is to reordain, let it be acknowledged that this is so for all concerned, but it does not follow for either side that the former status is being nullified. It is only by virtue of the orders already possessed that there can be a reordering in this way.

An over-individualistic understanding is apparent if the ordination of a minister is viewed as only "recognition" by a church of a personal call given by Christ to a man in the secret places of his heart. Unfortunately, in many Protestant circles, despite the better views of the Reformers, the act of ordination has been reduced to this—no more than a public acknowledgment of an ordination already received invisibly. Under such a conception, a man is likely to think of his ordination as lying beyond and outside of all church authority, as a once-for-all act to which nothing can be added and from which nothing can be taken. He is likely to look with a jaundiced eye at any proposal of a further laying on of hands. But the individualism of this view condemns it. It cannot be squared with the laying on of hands and the solemn commissioning in which even Protestant bodies engage. A man must normally have a "secret call," but he is not *ordained*, that is, given a place in the Church's commissioned order, until this order installs him in it in Christ's name. He has no authority within the Church without this authorization, which he bears only *in collegio*. What is at stake is the ordering of the *Church* under Christ, not simply a man's private call. By the same token, if the act of authorization is not acknowledged throughout the Church Universal, it is in that respect defective, so that in our divided state all ministerial orders are in some degree defective. It is an error to assume that ordination comes from the empyrean in a perfect state to which nothing can be added, for ordination is always a matter of the ordering of the Church catholic and visible. Only as the Church achieves the fulness of visible unity will ordination also be whole and complete. As, therefore, Churches are reconciled, all "orders" need to be visibly "reordered" as a mark of their greater fulness. In a uniting act, a minister should not be concerned about his status in the past but about the ordering of the Church in which it is to be his privilege to serve.

The Gospel of Reconciliation lays upon sundered churches the primary duty of seeking reconciliation. Those of us who belong to neither the Anglican Church nor the United Church must wish them Godspeed in their daring endeavours. It is becoming in Canadian churches to look creatively towards the future, in defiance of much in our ecclesiastical pasts that might render us over-fearful and over-cautious.

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