

**ANGLICAN-METHODIST UNITY—1, THE ORDINAL (4s.); 2, THE SCHEME (10s.6d.). S.P.C.K. and Epworth Press.**

The importance of this Report need not be stressed. The care with which this Report has been written shows the sense of urgency with which it is given to the faithful of the Anglican and Methodist Churches.

We are all committed to work for unity. In the Introduction to the Scheme it shows how to Christian Mission is hampered by lack of unity; and disunity is cited as at least one cause of the continued decline in the influence and numerical strength of the Churches of this country.

Since unity and truth go together, and since both Churches feel very strong convictions on certain doctrinal questions, it was important first to remove the last-remaining scruples of both Methodists and Anglicans to full Communion between the two Churches. It appears evident that there exists sufficient doctrinal agreement between the two Churches already to warrant a union. In the case of the main doctrines, there exists an evangelical point of view and an Anglo-Catholic point of view in the Church of England, and there is usually a liberal point of view as well. And what differences of standards do exist very frequently cut across denominational differences.

So that the differences of eventual reunion with ourselves or any other Church are not made any more difficult than they were before this union.

It is to the Acts of Reconciliation therefore that we look, in which the two Churches seek to bring their members and ministers into full Communion. In sections 418-436, in considering the alternatives to these Acts, we see why only this type of service is satisfactory. Of the alternatives, one implies the submission to an absolute ordination of one or other party or both, which for obvious reasons is excluded. Mutual conditional ordination would be equally unreal. Another unsatisfactory solution would be for Methodist ministers to be episcopally ordained before being admitted to

the Anglican Church. There is finally the solution which many Methodists prefer of the mutual recognition of each other's orders. This last, however, would clearly not meet the scruples of many Anglicans.

In the service, there is first the Central Act of Reconciliation of which the purpose is to reunite the whole faithful of both Churches. This placing of the faithful before the ministry follows the same order as was eventually adopted in Vatican II, in the decree on the Church, where the membership of all the faithful is considered before the hierarchy. After declaring their intention to unite the two Churches, the service begins with an act of penitence for the sins against each other which have hindered reunion. There follows an act of thanksgiving.

Then the chief place is given to a feature taken over from Methodist devotion, the renewal of the Covenant by which each Church is pledged to work together for God. After this beautiful and impressive ceremony which ends with a dedication of each individual 'freely and heartily' to 'yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal', representatives from each Church solemnly welcome their opposite numbers, and the chief ministers of each Church greet one another in friendship.

This first part of the Acts ends with the recital of the Nicene Creed.

The way is now prepared for the integration of the ministries. First, the intention is expressed of a desire to reconcile the threefold ministry of the Church of England with the single ministry of the Methodist Church. The Methodists express as their first step towards this that they accept for themselves 'the historic episcopate'. In using the term 'historic episcopate' without any further explanation, they leave the way open for any interpretation, whether high or low, Catholic or Protestant. Some have objected to this deliberate ambiguity, but what else could they do? Even in the Church of England, every shade of interpretation is

allowed. Fortunately pragmatically the functions of bishops are not in doubt.

Then follows the prayer of the Methodists over the Anglican Archbishops and Bishops and the prayer of the Anglican Bishops over the Methodists, which ask that God will supply to the others anything that is lacking to either ordination. After each prayer there is a silent laying on of hands. The ceremony is concluded by a welcome to fellowship, and authority to preach and minister the sacraments in their respective churches.

Since there is, according to many Anglicans, an insufficiency in the ordination of Methodist ministers, owing to the lack of episcopal ordination, the important prayer in the minds of these Anglicans will be when the Anglicans ask God 'to send upon each of these thy servants according to his need thy Holy Spirit for the office and work of a presbyter in thy universal Church'. These words are the same as those of the new Ordinal for the ordination of a Presbyter.

This is clearly the equivalent of a conditional ordination to those who desire it, although it is strictly forbidden to call it an ordination for obvious reasons. The Report tries to meet this situation by the following declaration of the intention of the rite in No. 383. 'Some will believe that the grace of ordination is given also, others that it is not, and many will be agnostic on this point. The prayers are so worded as to leave the determination of that issue in God's hand; we pray that the Holy Spirit may be sent upon "each according to his need". But the intention of the rite is not in doubt.'

This intention is expressed three times during the ceremony, so that it will not be possible to say that lack of faith in many of the participants renders it invalid.

The new Ordinal is a model of clarity and beauty. From a Catholic point of view, I don't think it possible to find fault in it. In any case the presence of Roman Catholic observers in its composition would ensure that.

The reason for the new Ordinal is given that it is desirable to express the extent of agreement between the two Churches. The Scripture passages have been very carefully chosen. There is, as formerly, an examination of the candidates about to be ordained. The candidate is required to agree that he feels called to the office and work of a Presbyter, that he accepts the Scriptures as containing all things necessary for eternal salvation, that

he believes in the doctrines of the Christian faith as this Church has received them, that he accepts the discipline and will be diligent in prayer and study.

For the ordination the simplest and clearest of forms has been chosen, 'Send down thy Holy Spirit upon thy servant N. for the office and work of a Presbyter in thy Church', and it has been placed immediately after the laying on of hands. They have taken this from the Church of South India. It follows essentially the order of the Roman rite, but is much clearer in both its place and the wording.

It is good to see the tendency of Protestantism is today to unite instead of to produce further divisions. We hope this union of two great Churches, the largest of the Protestant Churches of this country, will succeed. There does not seem to be any compelling reason why it should not succeed. Many feel it is a sort of test-case, and, if it fails, it will deter all prospects of uniting Protestants in our country.

There remain certain questions which will have to be settled before Stage 2, notably the question of Intercommunion. It is agreed that each Church will still be able to invite to open Communion all Christians that they at present invite. With Methodists this includes all the Free Churches. And also the problem of the wine used at the Communion Service. These other questions are left to be solved by friendly discussion after Stage 1 has been entered upon, during the preparation for Stage 2.

For the practical carrying out of the plan, there will be first a central Service of Reconciliation. This will be followed by various local acts of reconciliation, which will be for the priests and ministers up and down the country. At some early stage Methodist Bishops will be consecrated according to the rite of the new Ordinal, and it is hoped that Methodist probationers will be ordained as Deacons in the new united Church.

A great deal of the Anglican-Methodist scheme refers to the relation of the Methodist Church to the state and various legal results, which will have to be submitted to Parliament. The established aspect of the Church of England creates a special problem for this country, which did not exist in the Church of South India. And part of the reluctance of some Methodists comes from their desire not to become in any sense part of the Establishment.

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